

How Legal Ops Leaders Are Driving AI-powered Legal Departments

Law Department Management

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce



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Corporate legal teams worldwide are in a period of rapid transformation. The rise of generative AI, increasing demands from CFOs and CEOs, and pressure to show business value are reshaping expectations for the in-house function.

Yet one insight from ACC's latest report, The Role of Generative AI in Proving Corporate Law Department Value, produced in partnership with Everlaw, stands out: Legal operations leaders are the ones driving this transformation more aggressively than any other segment of the legal department.

Legal ops is no longer a support function. It is the innovation engine — the group most focused on using technology, data, and processes to modernize legal and position it as a strategic partner to the business.

ACC Members: Download the full report.

Legal ops leaders are more optimistic about GenAI's strategic impact

Across every major question in the survey, legal operations professionals demonstrate stronger belief in GenAI's ability to improve performance, reduce costs, and generate meaningful insights.

Consider these differences:

window.addEventListener("message",function(a){if(void 0!==a.data["datawrapper-height"]){var e=document.querySelectorAll("iframe");for(var t in a.data["datawrapper-height"])for(var r,i=0;r=e[i];i++)if(r.contentWindow===a.source){var d=a.data["datawrapper-height"][t]+"px";r.style.height=d}}});

Legal ops professionals see what many CLOs are just beginning to recognize: GenAI is not simply a tool for drafting or review. It is the foundation for value-based reporting, business alignment, and predictive analysis.

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Why legal ops holds the strategic advantage

Legal operations sits at the intersection of data, technology, process, and change management. That vantage point gives ops leaders a clearer view of where legal innovation is stalling and where AI can create breakthrough value.

The survey data reinforces this uniquely operational lens:

- Fifty percent of legal ops professionals cite fragmented data systems as a primary barrier (compared to 44 percent of CLOs).
- Fifty percent also cite limited tools and automation (compared to 41 percent of CLOs).
- Legal ops professionals are more likely to adopt strategic use cases such as litigation outcome forecasting, contract analytics, and performance-tracking automation.

Legal ops leaders understand the work beneath the work. They know where the data lives, how workflows truly operate, and which metrics executives actually want. That makes them best positioned to convert GenAI's potential into measurable outputs.

Legal ops is already modernizing the legal function

The research highlights several emerging AI-driven practices initiated or led by legal ops teams:

- **Contract and document automation**, the most common use case driven by ops to improve turnaround time and consistency.
- **Analytics for outside counsel management**, including side-by-side performance comparisons and billing pattern analysis.
- **AI-enabled litigation insights** that support forecasting and strategic decision-making.
- **Development of internal AI services**, such as custom GPTs for procurement playbooks or

automated ticketing systems for routine requests.

These are not hypothetical examples. They represent the early stages of a new operational model for legal — one where ops builds the internal “AI layer” that improves throughput, reporting, and strategic alignment.

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The shift from efficiency to intelligence

Historically, legal ops has been associated with process improvement, technology implementation, and cost management. GenAI expands the remit dramatically.

Legal ops leaders now play a central role in:

- Data governance and system integration
- Defining legal performance metrics
- Orchestrating AI workflows across matter types
- Building AI-ready processes and taxonomies
- Ensuring safe and responsible AI use
- Translating outputs into executive-level reporting

This evolution is already underway. When asked where GenAI will have the greatest long-term impact, three-fourths (76 percent) of all legal leaders pointed to internal team efficiency, but legal ops leaders increasingly see efficiency as just the beginning.

The real opportunity is intelligence: using GenAI to draw insights from large data sets, automate performance reporting, and quantify legal’s contribution to business outcomes.

What in-house counsel should do now

1. Position legal ops as your AI transformation partner

GenAI will not succeed without strong operational governance. Involve legal ops early in strategy, resource planning, and vendor selection.

2. Give ops ownership of legal data readiness

In-house counsel should formally empower ops to lead system integration, data taxonomy development, and cross-platform alignment. These are the prerequisites for high-quality AI outputs.

3. Prioritize performance metrics that matter to the business

Partner with ops to track value-based indicators such as time to resolution, forecasting accuracy,

outside counsel performance, and cycle-time acceleration.

4. Invest in AI training, infrastructure, and governance

Legal ops teams need the budget and authority to build scalable processes, upskill staff on prompting, and develop responsible AI protocols.

ACC Members: Download the Artificial Intelligence Toolkit for In-house Lawyers.

Legal ops as the engine to power legal's AI future

The ACC–Everlaw research makes this clear: Legal ops is leading the profession's next major transformation. As GenAI moves deeper into legal workflows, the role of ops will only grow — from process optimizer to architect of AI-enabled legal strategy.

Legal departments that elevate and empower their ops function will accelerate their AI maturity, strengthen performance measurement, and redefine legal's strategic value across the enterprise.

Those that don't may find themselves limited to surface-level automation, missing the opportunity to build a smarter, more predictive, better business-aligned legal function.

Join ACC for more AI trends and insights!

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Dr. Blake Garcia is the Senior Director of Research and Business Intelligence at the Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC), where he spearheads the growth and management of ACC's research department. Over the past 10 years, Dr. Garcia has transformed ACC's research capabilities from a limited member surveying unit into a multifaceted, full-service data hub that empowers the in-house legal community. He has led numerous high-impact international surveys and developed data-driven resources, products, and services that equip in-house counsel and legal operations professionals with the insights they need to make strategic business decisions.

Dr. Garcia has published several peer-reviewed articles in scientific journals applying statistical and experimental methodologies and has taught several college courses on quantitative research in the social sciences. He has a Ph.D. in political science from Texas A&M University and a B.A. in international politics from The Pennsylvania State University.

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Mauro began his journalism career at Atlantic Media's political magazine, National Journal, and covered two presidential election cycles at The Hill newspaper, where he helped launch Hill.TV. His

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