The Evolution of Legal Teams: Looking to the Future
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Introduction

Over the years, legal work has changed. But those changes are accelerating in today’s environment. What once was a clearly defined role is now spread across multiple teams—and sometimes multiple departments. In the past, legal work simply required an attorney and a paralegal (and sometimes an office support staff member). Today, legal work has expanded to include specialists in specific areas (e.g. real estate healthcare, or finance) and team members with technical expertise.

The challenges and responsibilities these legal teams face are growing, too. And they’re becoming more critical to solve.

Nearly 60% of legal teams say that business process improvements are a top challenge, while at least 35% say that staying ahead of law department technology/managing and handling IT issues is also a top challenge.¹

Interacting with IT, marketing, and other departments has accelerated the need to improve communication and finally nail down better processes and tools for legal work management.

In this eBook, we’ll uncover the new nuances of what a legal team looks like today, see how the tools for legal work have evolved, and find out how the decisions legal teams make today are shaping their tomorrow.
Chapter 1

Legal Teams Have Changed

The legal team looks different today than it did just a few short years ago. The people who do the work are changing and the roles are shifting. With those shifts, more and more experts and specialists are adding value to legal work, helping move projects and processes along with more accurate subject matter expertise.

→ New experts offer incredible value to legal teams in today’s world. Good examples include experts in property development, real estate, finance, and healthcare. These subject matter experts bring years of valuable, hands-on experience in their fields, helping legal teams get more granular in the ways they can do legal work in the same industries.

Because the legal team doesn’t just include an assistant, lawyer, and a paralegal anymore, these outside experts offer a new way to do legal work. In many cases, these Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) take on contract and outsourced work. In fact, many LDOs (Legal Department Operations) have increased their efforts to seek legal services and deliver that expertise. Outsourcing has increased from just 16% in 2020 to 41% in 2021.²

But outsourced work isn’t the only option for these alternate service legal providers. The legal industry is recognizing the benefits of effective collaboration between in-house counsel teams and alternative legal service providers. This collaboration is helping teams spend more time solving client challenges. In 2021, law departments’ reliance on contractors or flexible legal talent increased by 19% over 2020 to 74%.³

→ Legal teams are increasing their Investments in legal project managers (58%) and data scientists (up 30%). Because of these shifts, Gartner predicts that by 2024, 20% of generalist lawyers will be replaced by nonlawyer staff.⁴
Chapter 2

The Rise of Legal Operations

With all of these changes to the way legal teams do their work and communicate with other experts in different fields, the need for a legal operations team is becoming more and more apparent. More than 50% of attorneys whose organizations don’t currently have a legal operations team or team member are seriously considering adding one to improve efficiency, enhance data reporting, and drive cost savings. These benefits could also help these firms meet demanding revenue goals, retain clients, and improve their client experience.

According to the 2021 Chief Legal Officer Survey, legal operations is the “most strategic initiative.” At least 38% of respondents agreed saying that legal operation teams help with insourcing, litigation defensibility, and data security.

Legal operations teams are growing in popularity, even though they aren’t the industry norm yet. At least 60% of organizations that have a legal operations team in place have had that team for at least three years. Plus, nearly two-thirds of those organizations have seen their legal operations team grow in those three years.

Legal operations teams are typically comprised of seven people and are highly tenured. At least 50% of legal teams say their legal operations professionals have more than 10 years of experience and 18% say their teams have 6-10 years of experience.

The Connection Between IT and Legal Teams

Experts predict that by 2025, legal departments will seriously increase their legal technology spend to solve some of the work chaos that plagues their teams today. Spending is expected to increase by at least 3x. With this increase in spending and recognition that technology can solve some of legal’s biggest issues (e.g. client communication, document management, workflow processes, etc.), legal teams can see how imperative it is
that they are in sync with their IT teams. Vetting and purchasing technology that can help them get more work done will only help the broader business, whether they are in-house or a standalone firm.

Legal operations teams can help bridge that gap. And, they can ensure compliance and efficiency for both sides.

Legal operations teams are created to solve the pressing issues of efficiency and technology problems. With this task, they need to understand those operational and management pieces as well as the nuances of legal work.

But legal operations teams are as much about people management as they are about legal management. Putting the right technology solutions or processes in place won’t matter if those solutions can’t be effectively distributed to and adopted by users throughout the company. Because of this, legal operations teams have the difficult job of not only choosing (or building) the right solutions but also getting the necessary buy-in from leaders to create adoption of those processes and solutions. It’s a heavy lift and makes choosing the right solutions even more important.

➔ 46% of legal operations teams say they don’t have the right tools to do their jobs.¹¹

What Do These Changes in Legal Work Mean for Your Team?

With all of this change in the legal landscape, it’s critical for legal teams to get into the mindset that legal work is changing. And it’s not going to shift backward.

Instead of resisting this shift in legal work, it’s time to elevate and appreciate the skills required for the new phase of legal work. Just as paralegals have been critical to the team function of the past, the new shape of the legal team requires new skills and new people.

What do those new skills look like? These skills include enhanced abilities to learn and share new skills (especially from other industries as experts in those fields join legal teams). Of course, the more legal teams can broaden their reach within the organization, the more they can help provide value and find the right people to hire for the legal team.
Chapter 3

The Tools for Legal Work Have Evolved

There’s good news for legal teams and legal operations teams. Digital tools have evolved to meet legal teams’ needs. What once was a retrofitting experience (retrofitting technology created for other industries into what legal teams needed) is now a marketplace for legal work tools. And for legal teams in the market for new solutions, it’s imperative that you select the tools that work for you now so you can get ahead of the curve and offer an improved client experience (tools that improve efficiency, data security, and communication are all important starting points). The shift from a lawyer-focused legal world to a client experience legal world should inform digital tool needs.

And the appetite for these new tools has increased in recent years. In fact, 72% of legal teams say they are ready for technology modernization. Many teams are ready to move on from the ways of the past — attempting to build their own tech stack with a set of different tools. This isn’t a winning strategy for various reasons, but the most important reason is that adoption is slow. Traditionally, adoption of new technology and new procedures for legal teams is slower than any other industry (outside of healthcare or medicine), requiring three to five years for adoption change management.

Instead, legal teams would benefit by bundling investments into a single system or a platform of tools. This way, the investment of time and money can be spent at one time to learn and specialize in a new tool rather than adding a new solution every year or 18 months. This strategy also puts more power into the users’ hands (especially considering how fast legal teams are growing).

What does this mean for your legal team? It’s time to look for the tools that are built for the specifics of legal work. Using generic tools and applying them to legal work offers a suboptimal experience compared to adopting legal-first or legal-native tools.
Chapter 4

Decisions That Will Shape Your Future

Many legal operations teams are stuck in the cycle of waiting for clients to request or force a change or a shift — often in the form of a new tool to improve communication or document delivery, etc. But forward-thinking teams, those that are proactive, will assess their current needs and present those changes to their clients before they ask for them.

To be a leader in the legal space, you must be ready to think about efficiency in adoption. Let’s look at the cost of waiting and adding tools one-by-one vs. the ROI of purchasing tools to increase efficiency in one bundle (i.e. tools that connect):

**Calculate the Cost of Multiple Tools for Your Legal Team**

With the average legal operations and legal teams taking two to three years to adopt a single tool and an average legal operations salary in the U.S. coming in at $97,097, the following table represents the cost of adding tools every two to three years over the course of 12+ years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Year Purchased</th>
<th>Year Fully Adopted</th>
<th>Team Members Involved</th>
<th>Average Time Allotted to New Solution Per Employee</th>
<th>Total Cost of Adoption Each Year per Team Member</th>
<th>Total Cost of Adoption for the Business</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tool A</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>2024</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10 hours/week (520 hours/year)</td>
<td>$72,822</td>
<td>$145,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool B</td>
<td>2024</td>
<td>2026</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10 hours/week (520 hours/year)</td>
<td>$121,370</td>
<td>$242,740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool C</td>
<td>2026</td>
<td>2028</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Tool 10 hours/week (520 hours/year)</td>
<td>$169,918</td>
<td>$339,836</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Cost: $728,220**
Here’s a worksheet to estimate your cost:

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<th>Tool</th>
<th>Year Purchased</th>
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**Total Cost:** ________________

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Resources

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