Lessons from Implementing a Shared Services Team

Law Department Management

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Cheat Sheet

- **Efficiency is critical.** Shared services can reduce costs and administrative work.
- **Success at Zendesk and Crowdstrike.** These organizations have implemented shared services, facing initial resistance and fears about job security.
- **Strategize and investigate.** Utilize a phased, metrics-based approach before transitioning to shared services.
- **People, integration, and location.** Prioritize skilled talent, collaborative culture, and strategic geographies.

Several years ago, at both Zendesk and CrowdStrike, we looked at how to best utilize legal resources through establishing a shared legal services model – an efficient means of triaging legal work. For years, companies have used shared services models in other departments. Think about the human resources function and how onboarding, payroll, and benefits administration issues are consolidated into a platform like ADP. But few companies have tried this in the legal department.

The shared services model allows for scaling up and down as well as maximizing when other groups are out of the office. On the other hand, it can be difficult for the shared services group to take over some areas because it is harder to evaluate risk without contextual knowledge. If not done carefully, it can also create an added layer between the business and their main business partner.

Zendesk, a customer-support software company, we had already built out shared services units in other departments, so it made sense to do this internally. At CrowdStrike, a cloud-native cybersecurity provider, we decided to begin our shared services journey by leveraging a third-party provider.

Using a third-party provider allowed us to quickly establish a team by leveraging the provider's resources and expertise in playbook and workflow development, without committed costs. Second, an indirect model gave us the flexibility to try different geographies and time zones. Regardless of which model you choose, an important tenet to follow is that the Legal Shared Services (LSS) team is part of the larger legal team. There is no "us and them;" we are all in this together. This mindset helps establish and maintain a collaborative team.

Strategy

At both Zendesk and CrowdStrike, the legal teams started with some basic ideas, such as removing repetitive, administrative, and low-risk tasks from lawyers and support staff. For example, most filing and mail sorting can be moved to the LSS team. Tickets that come into the legal team through a service such as the Zendesk ticketing system could be reviewed and sorted by LSS. Beyond that, you may not know what opportunities you have on your team without doing further investigation.

At both Zendesk and CrowdStrike, we prioritized leveraging the LSS team for work that would relieve major pain points and would have a tangible impact on our lawyers, customer-facing business units, and the company's customers.

Start with each legal vertical

After initiating a strategy, schedule meetings with the heads of your various verticals — such as litigation, employment law, and corporate — and engage with team members to identify recurring issues for which you can develop a playbook. Once you have compiled a list and identified different items, look at each one in more detail. For example, say your team decided it makes sense to move the subpoena process to the shared services team. Before making the move, you would want to ensure you understand the business needs of the team.

> You certainly don't want to move the work all at once, so if you do a phased approach, it will be easy to review how it is going and to make tweaks along the way.

Connect with all of your team members to strategically collaborate, pinpoint, and refine any ongoing issues. GoodStudio / *Shutterstock.com*

There are some basic questions you should ask every time you look at moving work to a shared services team:

- How long does the process take today, and who are the key stakeholders in the process?
- What happens if you need to move faster for certain requests? How would those be handled?
- Are there language issues you need to worry about?
- Does the work or process involved discrete repeatable or recurring tasks or activities?
- Can the process be replicated in another geographic location?

Don’t skimp on this part of the process, which may take more time than you expect. The good news is that you can do some of this work in phases. You certainly don’t want to move the work all at once, so if you do a phased approach, it will be easy to review how it is going and to make tweaks along the way.

Once you have thought through these questions, you can communicate the rationale for moving the work to the shared services team and gain buy-in from the team members who would be affected. Usually, you can’t just move the work and that’s the end of the story, so you should create a series of milestones to check in on how the work is doing once it has been moved and refine the plan as needed.

SIDE BAR: Break down each step in the process and then see what could be done by someone else in a shared services team instead. As an example, look at some of the tasks done by your commercial team:

- How does the team receive their work?
- Who touches each part of the process?
- Which tools does the team use to do the work and respond to requests?
- Who responds to requests?
- Which metrics are kept on the request and work?
- What kind of quality control is performed?
- Where does the team file the work?
- Who on the team does that today?

Build your team for the future

Now that you have a plan, you need to find your most critical asset: your people. That is true whether they will be employed directly by your company or augment your team from an outsourced provider. Beyond that, you have a few things to decide on before you can start your hiring:

1. Location

Decide on where to locate the pioneer members of your LSS team. This may be one or more geographic locations, depending on your needs and goals. Cost is obviously a key driver so ideally, your pilot hires would be located and paid competitively in their local, cost-effective markets. The location should also have a sizable talent pool, with the right skills for the work you envision the LSS team to do, as expansion, attrition and ramp time are key considerations to a successful coverage model.

If yours is a global or regional company, you may already have a centralized global shared services center and/or strategically located regional hubs like the Philippines, India, and others where multinational companies have set up hubs for IT, accounting, finance, or HR. If so, check those locations first because you can rely on existing technology, telecoms, workplace, recruitment, and other operational support.

Consider locating members based on specific needs and skills you require to ensure your LSS team is successful. FGC / *Shutterstock.com*

Consider these when choosing where to set up your LSS team:

- Is there a sizable pipeline of skilled talent in legal and business service-related fields?
- Are skilled legal and business professionals typically proficient in English or other languages that are relevant to your legal department and business?
- Are there legal professionals employed outside of the traditional careers in law firms, corporate in-house departments, and government service roles, such as with legal service providers (outsourced or other models)? Is there a potential to tap skilled personnel in global in-house centers (“captive” shared services) or do you need to resort to hiring those with work experience in mainstream fields such as accounting or finance?
- Will you operate within normal business hours in that market or do you need certain services all the time? Define turnaround times for time-sensitive work streams. Find out if potential hires can mirror your current legal team’s critical hours.

2. Hire at the right level

Identify the day-to-day tasks and the skills needed to accomplish them. If you are considering requiring a law degree or legal qualification for a particular role, ask yourself again: Do you really need a lawyer for those activities and responsibilities? Is specialized knowledge or expertise in your industry essential or indispensable? Industry-specific experience may be highly desirable but not a critical qualification, particularly for someone starting in the role.

Both companies used a tiered model as a framework. Initially, this included Tier 1 tasks such as filing and tagging documents, managing and assigning work from the legal ticketing queue, maintaining a contract database, and finalizing contract documentation. We also identified certain Tier 2 responsibilities such as coordinating contributions from within and outside legal, shepherding NDA reviews towards execution, and reviewing routine third-party compliance screenings.

While working to meet current business demands, we positioned the LSS team for a more diversified portfolio of services and projects in the near future.

- Simpler, administrative and transactional-type support services to junior team members (Tier 1)
- Work involving more matter management skills, research, analysis, and the exercise of judgment to mid-level roles (Tier 2)
- Legal review, contract redlining, research and response drafting to senior roles, regulatory compliance which require more experienced legal professionals or lawyers (Tier 3).

3. Integration – Gradually moving work to legal shared services

Remember that, whether you are using a direct or indirect model, you are engaging people to work closely with your legal department and company. This means that your pioneer team members should have a high potential to work well with your current lawyers and other legal professionals as well as non-legal teams. All members of your new LSS team should embrace your company’s core values, and thrive in your department and company culture while they innovate ways of working.

Your team should be agile and quick to learn new legal processes, technology tools, and even laws, regulations, and legal concepts beyond what they had formally studied or trained for. Think about what skills or knowledge they actually need and which ones they can learn on the job. For example: you might need someone experienced in contract redlining and review, as opposed to someone who has technology industry experience but relatively limited hands-on contract review work. It would then make sense to hire a contract reviewer or manager who has the potential to understand your industry, business, products, and commercial transactions.

Your LSS team should be open to learning and adapting to new skills and innovative ways of working. VECTOR FUN / *Shutterstock.com*

For more process-focused roles, take time to train the team before handling specific activities or responsibilities. Involve key lawyer contacts or even practice leaders in technical training and shadowing, so you can spot and resolve any issues or challenges together.

As with any framework, you should review and iterate on it on an ongoing basis. Use automation and legal technology tools to enable the team to handle work at greater scale and higher levels of complexity.

4. Metrics of optics of success

How do you measure the success of your team? How can you convince potential stakeholders to work with the team?

Decide on the metrics that matter the most to your legal team members and stakeholders, such as:

- Volume and level of complexity of work handled over time.
- Cost savings, which may arise from increased process efficiency or termination of third-party services.
- Faster response, turn-around and resolution times.

It is important to spend time early on deciding what metrics you want to establish because it is easy to build metrics into a new workflow but much harder to retrofit a workflow to collect new metrics.

Encourage the team to automate data generation and reporting as much as possible. In a ticketing system, for example, you may set up tailored fields and use custom-built dashboards so you can view data and trends in real time. Gather feedback regularly through practice reviews. Be data-driven and actively seek out substantive, qualitative feedback.

Encourage the team's leaders to have regular check-ins with key movers in the legal department. Set up quarterly or semi-annual reviews to gather feedback and suggestions directly from attorney subject matter experts.

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Empowering and championing your teams

Lastly, be an active sponsor and champion of your LSS team. Make them part of the broader legal team by including them in the department's communication channels, giving them a front seat to what's happening across the practice teams. Have leaders and members present at department meetings, host business reviews, run workshops, and lead cross-functional projects.

> Happy and fulfilled teams are more likely to sustain high levels of performance and take on larger-scale or more complex work.

Empower, challenge, and engage your teams. Happy and fulfilled teams are more likely to sustain high levels of performance and take on larger-scale or more complex work. Encourage them to be fearless in challenging and innovating their own content and processes.

Be certain to create a happy working environment to assure higher engagement, increased productivity, and motivation amongst your team. Gvardgraph / *Shutterstock.com*

Leveraging the shared service center model for your legal department could spell the difference between your company's success or failure in a volatile business environment.

Resources

- [“From Cost Center to Value Creator: The Digitally Fit-for-Purpose Legal Function”, Mark A. Cohen, Forbes (Sept. 8, 2021)]
- [“Legal Shared Services” by EY Law (April 7, 2022)]

Join ACC

Shanti Ariker

Chief Legal Officer

JFrog

Shanti Ariker is the chief legal officer of JFrog, a sofrware supply chain platform.

Cathleen Anderson

Chief Legal Officer

CrowdStrike

Cathleen Anderson serves as chief legal officer of CrowdStrike, bringing more than a decade of wide-ranging legal experience to find creative solutions to support her rapidly growing organization. She spearheaded the legal efforts supporting CrowdStrike's successful IPO. Anderson leads a team responsible for commercial, compliance, corporate, employment, insurance, intellectual property, and litigation. She is passionate about supporting CrowdStrike's employees in their mission to stop breaches. Prior to joining CrowdStrike, Anderson served as director of legal for MobileIron, following her seven years as an intellectual property lawyer.

Ron Wills

VP of Legal

Crowdstrike

Ron Wills is VP of legal at Crowdstrike, with responsibility for legal operations, litigation, compliance, and risk management. The Crowdstrike Legal Ops team was recognized as a Value Champion by ACC in 2021 and 2022 for their efforts in workflow automation and analytics. Prior to joining Crowdstrike, he served as chief of staff for the president and CRO of McAfee, in addition to over 15 years of experience in various in-house legal leadership roles in the cybersecurity field.

[Marian Coquia-Regidor](#)

Director of Legal Shared Services

Zendesk

Marian Coquia-Regidor is director of Legal Shared Services and established the Philippine-based global legal shared services team at Zendesk. She also leads key transformation and innovation programs and projects for the legal department, and sits on the Legal Operations Steering Committee.

She was a former practitioner and has over 17 years experience at various practice operations and knowledge leadership roles with a global law firm and in-house teams. She was recognized in the pioneer Legal 500 GC Powerlist for the Philippines in 2023.