



5 Legal Ops Trends Shaping 2026

Law Department Management



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Legal operations no longer works in a silo as a back-office function; as we enter 2026, the role now sits at the intersection of risk management, efficiency, and growth, driving companies forward while safeguarding trust.

I often say legal ops is not just a role, it's a mindset: a way of embedding operational discipline into a function tasked with judgment, governance, and resilience. The trends defining the year ahead are not about chasing novelty; they are about **integration, measurable impact, and elevating legal as a true business partner at the strategy table.**

Here are five trends that will matter most in 2026 and beyond.

1. Consolidation of providers into true partnerships

Legal leaders are reassessing their patchwork of providers. Instead of juggling multiple point solutions and vendors, departments are consolidating around fewer, more strategic partners. But this isn't only about streamlining contracts or saving money. It's about building relationships with providers who bring more to the table — from process design to change management support — and who act more like extensions of the team than suppliers.

This trend positions legal ops not just to optimize costs, but to align outside resources with broader business outcomes.

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2. Convergence of law, compliance, and risk

The days of siloed functions are behind us. Regulatory scrutiny, global complexity, and escalating cyber threats demand an integrated approach. Compliance and risk can no longer be “adjacent” to legal; they must be interconnected, with shared visibility into data, decisions, and accountability.

Forward-thinking legal departments are designing frameworks that integrate compliance monitoring, litigation strategy, and enterprise risk management to reinforce one another. The payoff? Faster decision-making, stronger controls, and greater resilience in a volatile environment.

3. Making change possible — and sustainable

Transformation isn’t just about choosing the right tools. It’s about equipping teams with the resources and support to embrace change. In 2026, legal ops leaders are prioritizing enablement: investing in training, benchmarking against peers, and leveraging external services to smooth transitions.

The focus is shifting from “why change” to “how to make change last.” That means embedding new ways of working into the culture so adoption doesn’t stall after implementation.

4. The strategic integration of AI

We’ve moved past experimentation. After years of pilots and proof-of-concepts, legal departments are deploying AI in ways that produce measurable results. Some of the most impactful developments include:

- **Purpose-built AI assistants** for contract review, research, and matter management.
- **Prompt engineering as a core skill**, ensuring professionals know how to get accurate, actionable output.
- **Predictive analytics** that forecast case outcomes and litigation timelines.
- **ROI as the benchmark**, with legal leaders expected to prove how AI directly reduces costs, accelerates processes, and creates business value.

The mandate for 2026 is clear: Integrate AI strategically, scale it responsibly, and communicate its value in the language of business.

[No matter where your company is on its AI journey, the ACC AI Center of Excellence for In-house Counsel has the resources you need.](#)

5. Evolving talent and security priorities

As technology reshapes legal operations, the skills required to thrive are evolving. Legal engineers, data scientists, and prompt specialists are becoming essential, while multidisciplinary teams are redefining what it means to be a “legal department.” At the same time, the rise of cyber threats and ever-changing privacy laws makes cybersecurity and compliance non-negotiable priorities.

Automated compliance monitoring, stronger protections for sensitive data, and performance tracking of outside counsel are all becoming part of the modern legal ops playbook. These investments are not just defensive — they build the trust that underpins legal’s influence in the boardroom.

The road ahead

Legal operations in 2026 is about convergence, credibility, and contribution.

By consolidating providers, bridging silos, scaling AI, and building future-ready teams, legal leaders are cementing their role as business enablers.

The legal function is no longer defined by what it prevents, but by what it makes possible. As legal operations professionals, we have the opportunity (and the responsibility) to architect solutions that balance efficiency with resilience, technology with human judgment, and compliance with innovation.

This moment demands that we lead with both foresight and pragmatism: foresight to anticipate the challenges shaping global business, and pragmatism to translate strategy into measurable outcomes. The departments that succeed will be those that treat legal ops not as a support role, but as a **strategic lever for growth, trust, and transformation**.

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[Liz Lugones](#)



Vice President of Corporate Legal and Claims Professional Services

Mitratesh

Liz Lugones has built and managed Legal Operations teams in various industries in both public and private companies over her 20+ year career. She is a strategic leader who excels in global project management and business reengineering, with particular expertise in process improvement, change management, cross-functional collaboration, and team building, but her true passion is helping others find their own strengths and talents and harness them for the value of all. Before joining Mitratesh, Lugones was COO & Senior Advisor at UpLevel Ops (boutique Legal Operations Consultancy). She served as the Senior Director of Legal Operations at WeWork. And Director of Legal Operations at a diverse range of companies, including UnitedLex, DXC Technology, Becton Dickinson, and MetLife. She also worked at Citigroup as Manager, Strategy and M&A. Lugones holds a BA in Political Science and Journalism from Rutgers University, is certified in Lean Six Sigma and fluent in Spanish. She is based in New Jersey.

