ACC DOCKET
INFORMED. INDISPENSABLE. IN-HOUSE.

Maximizing Adoption of New In-house Processes in 3...2…1

Law Department Management



As attorneys, we are naturally risk-averse and resistant to change. But with the vast changes in the legal landscape and the development of new legal tech programs, systems, and processes in the last five to seven years, in-house departments have had to embrace change like never before. With the amount of time and money spent on these new programs, processes, and systems, maximizing adoption is critical to ensure that the cultural shift will be lasting and will provide a return on investment in terms of productivity, reduced costs, information accessibility for both in-house teams and clients, better client service, and more. So, what are companies — and their in-house counsel — to do?

"Change can be daunting, particularly in the legal profession, where lawyers may be resistant to change and innovation," says Stephanie Corey, the co-founder of both UpLevel Ops and the Corporate Legal Operations Consortium (CLOC). "Lawyers come from a culture of following tradition and valuing precedents, and are trained to view everything with a challenging and skeptical eye. This often makes change very difficult for them, no matter how essential it is for the department," she adds.

In today's environment, however, change is essential because sticking with the status quo means being left in the dust as the rest of the world evolves. Although every company culture is different, there are several overarching factors that must occur to ensure implementation and adoption success for any new initiative. Corey recommends three steps:

Consistent tone from the top

Leadership must set the tone for change throughout the organization. "The tone from the top not only has to communicate that change should be expected at all times, but it also determines how

successful any specific project or initiative will be," Corey says.

She adds, "Absolute clarity of the project vision, roles, responsibilities, and end goals demonstrates conviction and helps align the law department around the common cause." Therefore, the leadership must be on the same page about the purpose for change and the plan for achieving it.

Corey explains that to make change a worthwhile undertaking, the general counsel and their deputies should communicate the project goals to the entire department, stay abreast of milestones, and publicly celebrate wins along the way. "The GC helps tremendously by rallying the troops and communicating value to the end-users," she notes.

Ensure early user buy-in

Early user buy-in is essential to ensure successful adoption. "Those who are truly bought-in more likely will feel a sense of ownership and work towards the success of the program," Corey says. This requires careful planning to make sure that the right stakeholders are involved. She continues:

> "The project lead should go to as many layers down as needed to involve as many stakeholders as possible during the requirements gathering and process definition stages. It is best to get as much information as possible during these two stages, which is the opportunity to involve the majority of users and make them feel like they contributed."

After this stage, Corey recommends a pivot in strategy. "The team that makes decisions around the actual design of the program or system should be much smaller, including project 'champions' from each group. But because the initial team input was robust, the outcome should be acceptable by most," she says.

Because every stage is an opportunity to communicate, she further advises that once the design is complete, the project lead should communicate back to the team why certain aspects of design were included, while others were not.

Understanding and changing the culture

The culture of every legal department is different and should be considered when determining how best to implement any new program or technology, who to make responsible for the program, how to communicate about it, and what timeline to use. Corey explains:

> "Taking culture into account will help people be more receptive to the changes the program will bring. For example, company cultures that are very conservative may require a longer timeline to implement new programs. More work will need to be done upfront to socialize concepts, more communications will need to be done, and someone very senior and well-respected will need to lead the project."

The legal department should also heavily consider culture when they communicate about the changes. "Communications should include the goals and benefits of the change and the positive impacts it will have on the team, the department, and the organization," says Corey. "Cultures that are more adept at change can often move faster with less socialization."

Change is a difficult but necessary part of in-house legal practice. With attention to consistent tone, early user buy-in, and company culture, in-house attorneys can ensure that their new initiatives, technology, and culture shifts are successfully implemented and adopted. This means a brighter future for their organizations and the legal industry as a whole.

Olga V. Mack



Fellow

Olga V. Mack is a fellow at CodeX, The Stanford Center for Legal Informatics, and a Generative AI Editor at law.MIT. Mack shares her views in her columns on ACC Docket, Newsweek, Bloomberg, VentureBeat, Above the Law, and many other publications.

Mack is also an award-winning (such as the prestigious ACC 2018 Top 10 30-Somethings and ABA 2022 Women of Legal Tech) general counsel, operations professional, startup advisor, public speaker, adjunct professor, and entrepreneur. She co-founded SunLaw, an organization dedicated to preparing women in-house attorneys to become general counsels and legal leaders, and WISE to help female law firm partners become rainmakers.

She has authored numerous books, including Get on Board: Earning Your Ticket to a Corporate Board Seat, Fundamentals of Smart Contract Security and Blockchain Value: Transforming Business Models, Society, and Communities. She is working on her next books: Visual IQ for Lawyers (ABA 2024), The Rise of Product Lawyers: An Analytical Framework to Systematically Advise Your Clients Throughout the Product Lifecycle (Globe Law and Business 2024), and Legal Operations in the Age of AI and Data (Globe Law and Business 2024).