Setting the Legal Ops Strategy

Law Department Management

The first two Legal Ops Brief columns answered: What is legal operations and who should be part of your ops team? Now it's time to dive into the legal ops team's guiding force: the legal strategic [roadmap](). This plan defines a goal or desired outcome and includes the major steps needed to reach it. It also serves as a communication tool — a high-level document that helps articulate the "why" behind both the goal and the plan for getting there.

A strategic roadmap is a valuable tool for communicating vision and facilitating growth. You can have the best human and financial resources in the world but if you do not have a clear vision and plan for achieving goals, your efforts will falter. There are two major aspects of your roadmap that should be considered: strategic direction and format.

An easy first step for defining your strategic direction is to start with the mission and goals for your department and your company. Consider what the mission and goals mean and what efforts can be conducted to help achieve them. Our legal department vision focuses on collaboration, accountability, and agility. Each of the initiatives on our strategic roadmap align with one of our vision objectives.

Next, benchmark your company against others to identify target areas for improvement. The [ACC Legal Operations Maturity Model]() is a helpful reference tool. It was developed to define leading operational disciplines, which are rooted in business fundamentals, processes, data, and technology. These disciplines are designed to build consistency, drive efficiency, and demonstrate value in a legal function's practice of law. Legal department leaders are encouraged to use it to benchmark maturity in any given area, bearing in mind that priorities and aspirational targets will vary based on department size, staffing, and budgets.

At my company, AEP, we use the Maturity Model to identify improvement areas and benchmark our

progress. I highlight where we are in each of the 14 function areas and review with legal management. It shows how we compare, what we are doing well, and where we could improve. The model helped highlight that we were behind in managing matter budgets with our firms. We already had an e-billing tool in place but had not implemented an enforceable budgeting process. We decided to move forward with process and technology changes — we now have budget forecast abilities and historic benchmarks. In these times of "doing more with less," having an industry benchmark provides decisionmakers with the confidence they need to justify the resource expenditure.

Knowing how to leverage this Maturity Model to support business cases for internal projects can be very powerful. Vanessa Lozzi, senior legal technology and litigation support administrator, and assistant vice president at Flagstar Bank, has used the model to support changes. "When you are looking at the Maturity Model, it can be intimidating," she admits. "Don't take on too much at once. Pick an area where you can get a quick benefit. After you prove your success, go back to the model and look for the next area of focus."

Lozzi used the Maturity Model to identify areas of improvement and present those gaps to her general counsel. "I used the Maturity Model to gauge what stage the department was in for the respective categories. Once completed, I compiled my observations in a short memo to the general counsel," she explains. The results showed that there was room for improvement in the financial management area. The focus was on establishing a process in the matter management platform for entering accruals and matter budgets. Moving the department from intermediate to advanced was not overly burdensome or time consuming. Having the processes in place provided great opportunities to report on metrics in the future — a small lift for a big gain.

The second areas that were identified were information governance and knowledge management. The solution was simple — purchase a document management system. However, this required a significant investment in both cost and time. The result from this project helped the department in several ways, including increased efficiency and risk reduction.

Another benefit of using the Maturity Model is it provides its own roadmap of improvement in each of the 14 functions. If you are in the early stage of a section the model has clear steps mapped out that help move companies from one stage to the next. Over half of the 316 legal departments that participated in a recent ACC benchmarking survey rated their strategic planning function as being "early stage" and 31 percent rated themselves as "intermediate" (In addition to the Maturity Model, ACC has partnered with leading legal service providers to produce the Foundational Toolkit to advance from early to intermediate stages in each of 14 law department management functions, presented in a series of [monthly webcasts](#)). It may take several projects and years to move from one end of the model to the next, but that is all part of your department's strategic roadmap.

Now that you know what your strategic goals are, you need to decide on the actual roadmap format. It can range from a single page of information to a PowerPoint presentation with data and graphics. Most strategic roadmaps cover three to five years and should be refreshed annually. Implementing this would already put you ahead of the curve with only 27 percent of legal departments having an annual legal operations planning process in place. Remember, transformational change takes time. Some complex goals may span years and include different phases to complete. The roadmap will help visually demonstrate that multi-year vision. Organizational culture and audience should determine the roadmap's presentation format. Some audiences only want a high-level visual and some will want supporting information for each item. You need to know your audience and tailor your roadmap accordingly. Check out roadmap templates online, such as [Roadmunk](#) or [ProductPlan](#), or reach out to peers to see what has worked well for them. After you have looked at some examples

and have an idea of what you want, you can also create your own in a tool like PowerPoint.

Also, leave "technology" out of the title and name of your legal roadmap. When you share this document with someone, you don't want them to think it is only focused on technology because of the title and document name. Legal Ops is naturally associated with technology, but you don't want your audience to think that is all your roadmap offers. Your roadmap is about what you are trying to improve or change, and technology is naturally going to be a part of solution.

Process and culture change are critical to any department's success and can be reflected independently on a roadmap with goals such as increased user adoption rates for application use or improve diversity representation from firms and improved customer survey results. Each of these objectives will most likely be supported by technology but the actual goal is not technical.

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