

Legal Operations at a Crossroads

Understanding How Corporate Legal Teams
are Driving Innovation and Navigating Digital
Transformation in Unique Ways

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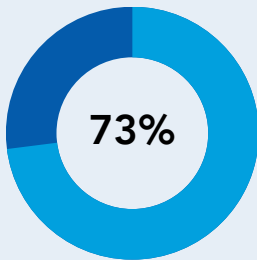
Introduction

A consortium of leaders consisting of iManage, LegalMation, and Neota Logic engaged Ari Kaplan Advisors to survey legal operations leaders about the discipline's maturity and how their teams are driving change in corporate law departments. The conversations focused on topics ranging from strategies for measuring the success of legal operations and overcoming innovation challenges to using AI, including generative AI, in the legal department and establishing new priorities for automation and contract management.

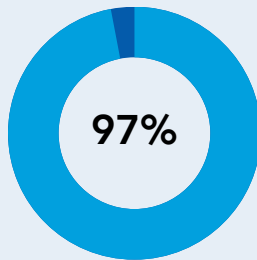


Research Background

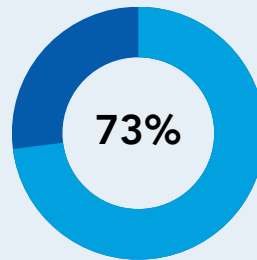
Legal industry analyst Ari Kaplan, principal of Ari Kaplan Advisors, interviewed 30 legal operations leaders in large corporations between April 16, 2024, and April 29, 2024.



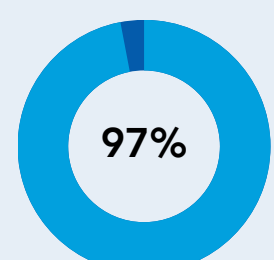
Over \$10 Billion in Annual Revenue



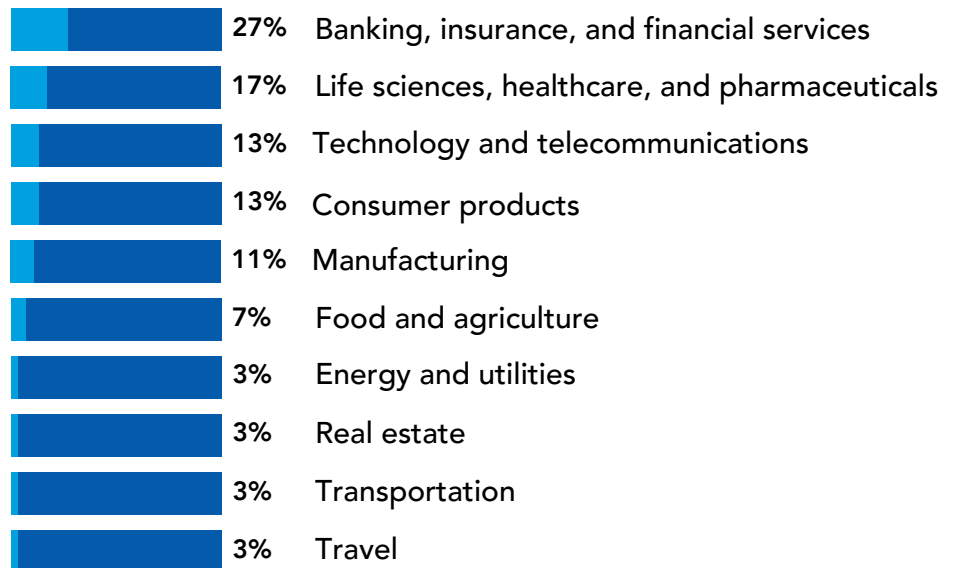
Over \$1 Billion in Annual Revenue



Over 10,000 Employees



Over 1,000 Employees



Executive Summary

Legal Operations is Expanding its Influence and Value

Ninety-three percent reported that the role of the legal operations professional has changed and expanded. Several participants described an evolution from administrator to chief of staff and narrowly focused legal support to enterprise-wide innovation executive. Forty-seven percent noted that their teams have grown within the past 12-18 months, with the majority (57%) managing teams of five more professionals responsible for legal operations.

93%

Report that the role of the legal operations professional has expanded.

57%

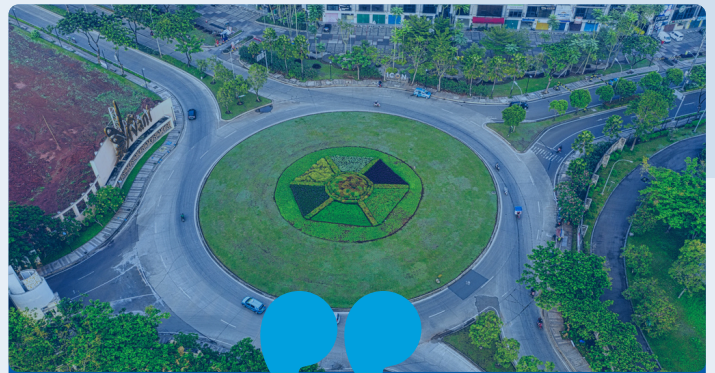
Manage teams of five or more.

47%

Work on teams that have grown in the past 12-18 months.

Technology Talent is Fueling the Transformation of Legal Operations

Seventy percent of the respondents advised that new technology applications raise the profile of the legal department. All participants want to automate more tasks, and 83% make accessing legal services easier for their business units. In-house teams are increasingly benefiting from legal front-door applications, process improvements, and low-complexity guidance to remove friction from the provision of legal services within their law departments. Despite this digital transformation, they are also dedicated to maintaining the personal service that builds trust among their clients. A majority (53%) report that they provide self-serve applications and are building cross-departmental apps or solutions to help them automate broader workflows.

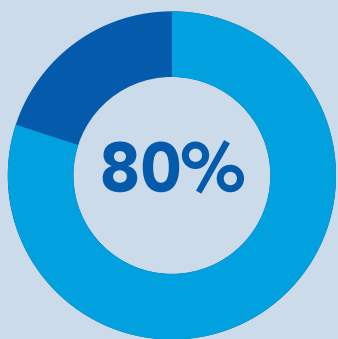


The technology does not necessarily raise the profile of legal, but the capabilities it allows and the empowerment it provides to users elevates the visibility of legal.

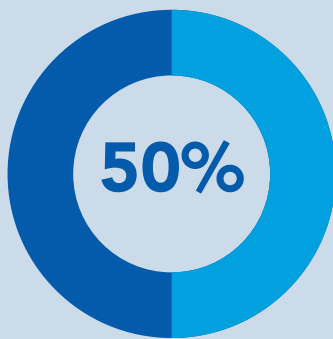
Director, Financial Services

Corporate Law Departments Offer Measured Optimism About AI

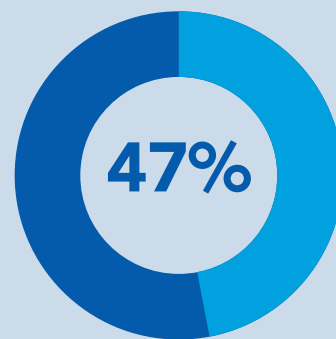
In-house teams are enthusiastic and optimistic about artificial intelligence, with 80% reporting that their legal departments are using AI. 50% claimed to be specifically deploying generative AI, and 47% acknowledged that there is a fear of generative AI in their legal department. On a scale of 1-5, with five being the highest, half of the participants rated the level of familiarity that legal operations professionals have with AI tools and best practices at a one or a two. None suggested that it is a five. 90% also integrate their technology systems, which is especially important as they continue to deploy generative AI. Almost a third (30%) conveyed that specific AI companies like LegalMation have provided meaningful ROI by enhancing their workflows. 60% have a timeline for wanting to use AI, and 97% continue to evaluate areas to automate and future-proof their organization.



Use AI.



Are deploying generative AI.



Fear generative AI.

Contract Management and CLM are Established Legal Operations Functions

63% of the respondents are responsible for contracts, and 67% believe that legal should, in whole or in part, own the management of these agreements. The two most common candidates cited to own contracts were legal and procurement, with several suggestions that finance, IT, or the business units should have sole or joint control. In addition, 77% have a CLM platform, 87% anticipate a rise in the use of CLM in the legal department, and 43% expect their spending on CLM to increase.

87% Anticipate a rise in the use of CLM.

77% Have a CLM platform.

43% Expect their spending on CLM to increase.

Full Report

Legal Operations is Expanding its Influence and Value



The field of legal operations has achieved widespread maturity as a unique professional discipline. Ninety-three percent of the 2024 participants reported that the role of the legal operations professional has changed and expanded. By comparison, in a 2023 survey of 50 legal operations leaders, 86% confirmed that the role had shifted.

Several of this year's participants described an evolution from administrator to chief of staff and narrowly focused legal support staff member to enterprise-wide innovation executive. Forty-seven percent noted that their teams have grown within the past 12-18 months, compared to 56% a year earlier, and the majority (57%) of this year's respondents manage a team of five individuals or more.



"It has evolved into more of a leadership role; everyone's vision of legal operations is so different, but I am more of a de facto chief of staff helping the general counsel execute her vision."

-Director, Consumer Products



"We keep taking on more, such as generative AI, because legal operations sets the roadmap, coordinates with teams, and validates that our actions are effective and ready to be deployed enterprise-wide."

-Director, Life Sciences



"It was once more administrative and operational, but as we have gotten involved in technology, it has become increasingly strategic, and legal operations professionals are now working on larger projects with bigger budgets."

-Director, Banking

Measuring Success Remains a Challenge



A majority (60%) also use metrics to show the utility of a technology platform, among other reasons. “When we implement technology, we make a strong business case and track the return,” said one leader in insurance. “We have an embedded data analytics function because whenever we launch a new platform, we want to ensure we serve our stakeholders' needs,” added a colleague in technology.

Metrics also help gauge productivity, which is crucial in a resource-constrained environment. “A tool's utility provides context and details on the legal department’s work,” explained a director in the energy sector.

“For LegalMation, we calculated how many hours it helped us reduce, so it was an easy comparison, and for case management, we look at the benefits of the ease of communication,” offered another in insurance. “We do this with iManage, studying who uses it and how they file emails with it,” said a peer, also in insurance.

In general, legal operations teams are using metrics for:

- Legal spend
- Intake
- Third-party subpoenas
- Contracts
- KPIs
- Budgets
- Matter management
- Invoice payment
- Law firm usage

“We use metrics to justify the business case; tying anything to revenue is preferred, followed by savings, and then risk mitigation.”

-Director, Technology

“Since you cannot provide too much data, savvy legal operations leaders share the appropriate metrics to address specific challenges.”

-Director, Energy

“You can only improve what you measure.”

-Director, Banking

More than half of the participants who measure success apply generic standards rather than specific and quantifiable objectives. “We have a strategic plan with goals,” said one respondent. “By how efficiently we deliver legal services,” noted another. “Direct feedback from attorneys and the general counsel,” offered a third.

Others are more methodical in their approach. “We measure performance against preset KPIs and provide quarterly reports on savings versus key initiatives,” explained a director in media. “We use a PowerBI dashboard with KPIs and share metrics at board meetings to show how we navigate and mitigate risks; we also conduct a quarterly survey of business stakeholders and ask for their feedback about legal services to secure non-metrics-specific perspectives,” said a peer in transportation.

Technology Is Central to Legal Operations Leadership

With 93% of participants reporting responsibility for selecting technology for their legal departments, it is an essential element of the role of a legal operations leader, depending on the budgetary constraints and decision-making structure of the organization.

Some have full oversight of the process. “We are responsible for selecting, evaluating, purchasing, and implementing technology,” said one director in healthcare. “My team selects, designs, implements, and integrates legal technology,” added a manager in insurance.



Others collaborate with complementary teams to facilitate these upgrades. “Legal operations partners with IT to select legal technology,” advised a respondent in life sciences. “Legal operations is responsible for or coordinates the discussions [and] has a more influential voice for tools that come across legal,” offered a colleague in telecommunications. “Someone else approves, but legal operations make the recommendations,” noted a manager in the food and agriculture sector.

Technology Talent is Fueling the Transformation of Legal Operations

Legal is becoming a substantial research and development hub in some organizations as its various teams apply their talent and experience to solve complex problems by testing emerging technology in real-time.

“Everyone is interested in innovation and technology, especially with the emergence of generative AI, and legal has become a thought leader in this area, helping us gain trust and earn further investments,” noted a director in transportation.

In addition to AI, all participants are focused on automating more tasks, and 83% make accessing legal services easier for their business units. In-house teams are increasingly benefiting from legal front-door applications, process improvements, and low-complexity guidance to remove friction from the provision of legal services within their law departments.

Despite this digital transformation, they are also dedicated to maintaining the personal service that builds trust among their clients. "Email is a prevalent way to engage with legal, but it is inefficient and ineffective if you do not know who to contact in the department, while an intake system with auto-routing provides a much faster response," explained a director in manufacturing. "We give the business units the tools and framework to act independently and to approach legal or legal operations in a few instances, empowering them to make their own decisions and define the need for legal more clearly," another in consumer products said. "Our business units know who to call and want a human connection to legal without the interference of technology," countered a peer in manufacturing.

A majority (53%) provide self-serve applications and are building cross-departmental apps or solutions to help them automate broader workflows.

The use cases for these tools vary, but they often focus on providing a threshold level of automated support while balancing that offering with dedicated service. "We have self-service NDAs, and legal has established guardrails or a clause library for procurement to negotiate low-value, low-risk agreements, which are routed to a lawyer if they do not fit within preset restrictions," advised a leader with an energy company. "We provide a self-service template repository, which facilitates transactions and reduces outside counsel spending," added another in banking. "We are investigating using chatbots, but there is a balance between streamlining the process and eliminating personal support, as lawyers are all about high-touch service and value their relationships with their business stakeholders," acknowledged a participant in healthcare.

Law Departments are Facing a Self-Service Conundrum

Most of the participants emphasized the value of empowering their professionals to do more of the work themselves. In fact, 90% prefer technology solutions allowing business units to engage in self-service activities. "There is so much opportunity to automate workflow, such as a repeat request for an NDA, which involves similar questions and documents, so an automated intake process will help gather information and complete work; the last thing a lawyer wants is to increase their workload with manual tasks," said one in healthcare. "I want to automate everything and am interested in activities that support the legal department's goals, such as invoice reviews, outside counsel interactions, status updates, and processes that involve communications," added a peer in life sciences.



"We have Neota applications covering document automation, workflow approval, and legal intake; I really like Neota, it is a great partner, and we have loved working with Neota."

-Director, Insurance



Yet many also questioned crossing a threshold of automation because of the potential to dilute the personal service their legal professionals offer to their internal clients. “Unfortunately, the business units think that if you put a barrier between them and the lawyers through some technology or process, it is less personal and can be a detriment to the relationship,” acknowledged a legal operations leader in the energy sector. “We have provided intake applications, but there has been resistance from users who prefer to email individuals directly,” echoed a peer in banking. “Our business units know who to call and want a human connection to legal without the interference of technology,” said a third in manufacturing.

This is the legal operations watershed. The discipline is defined by its unique ability to streamline workflow, enhance efficiency, and drive change, but there are inherent limitations to that mission as people prefer to engage with people in substantive legal matters.

As a result, the appetite for an entirely automated digital experience seems limited. Still, 83% of legal operations teams report making it easier for the business units to access legal services. On a scale of 1 to 5, with five being the highest, 47% rated their interest in being more responsive to the company’s business units at a four or a five. A third placed it at a five. In contrast, 80% would like to be more-responsive to the legal department's needs, with 67% rating that goal at a five.

Most of those who did not offer a five already satisfy the legal team’s needs as much as possible. For example, the size and breadth of a department could influence this assessment. “I would like to understand the legal department's needs better globally because, as a multinational company, driving change at scale, whether through automation or technology introduction, is the biggest challenge to execute across the enterprise,” said a leader in consumer products.

90%

Prefer technology solutions that empower self-service.

83%

Make it easier for the business units to access legal services.

53%

Provide self-service applications.

Also, the pace of change can impede optimizing responsiveness. “We are forward-thinking, but our challenge is encouraging the others in the law department to move as quickly as we would like; I love technology, but it is not as easy to navigate because it moves so fast, and the change management aspects of responding to the dynamic needs of the law department become more difficult,” noted a peer in manufacturing. Ultimately, “We are not executing our vision if we cannot free the lawyers to focus on more strategic, high-value work,” concluded another in transportation.

Buy-In and ROI are the Bookends of Legal Operations Success



Experienced legal operations teams recognize the importance and value of securing buy-in and consistently demonstrating ROI to fuel the progress of their initiatives. On a scale of 1-5, with five being the highest, 87% rated the likelihood of earning buy-in for new projects at a four or a five. When seeking that support, 93% quantify the likely return in time and cost savings. As to the weight of that ROI projection in the decision to adopt new technology or a larger initiative, 77% of the participants placed its importance at a four or five out of five.

Trust is vital to securing buy-in. “I talk directly to the leadership team and chief legal officer and have built a strong level of trust; we also validate the business case with proof points, so we have an excellent track record for buy-in,” said a director in consumer products. “If I am asking, I already know we need it, and they trust my assessment of our needs, so I am just seeking formal approval,” added a peer in the same sector.

And for many, there is an advanced campaign to promote interest before submitting a request. “I would not propose something new unless we can get it done, and we also limit the number of requests and perform extensive due diligence to make the strongest possible case,” advised one leader. “We engage in an extensive socialization process, so most of our recommendations are adopted,” said another.

For that reason, 90% of the participants market new technology applications to the law department to encourage adoption, 73% demonstrate ROI for new tools, and 80% measure their effectiveness. “We engage users and prospective users, so it is less marketing and more about training and deployment because we don't want to sell something they don't want,” explained a participant in transportation. “Marketing new applications is one of the hardest tasks because it is so time-intensive, but we still engage in this process by attending department meetings and sharing best practices in our internal newsletters,” added a peer in banking.

90% Market new technology applications.

80% Measure the effectiveness of new tools.

73% Demonstrate the ROI for new tools.

Those who promote their initiatives:

- Have a change management process, which includes global communications and training.
- Meet people where they are through “cool videos.”
- Offer digital tips and tricks and engage in roadshows to highlight how the legal operations team can support them.
- Populate the video screens on the organization’s coffee machines with training content.
- Produce explanatory webinars.
- Create a technology roadmap.

“We want to market systems and value-adds that the legal operations team brings to legal.”

-Director, Consumer Products

Law Departments are Balancing Patience and Enthusiasm in Discussions of Artificial Intelligence

In-house teams are enthusiastic and optimistic about artificial intelligence, with 80% reporting that their legal departments are using AI. “We are testing it on low-risk systems where we can avoid using proprietary or confidential information,” explained a leader in the travel sector. “We use it for billing compliance with a natural language processing engine that reviews and grades invoices,” offered a colleague in banking. “We use AI to summarize commercial contracts and identify clauses, but it does not generate anything new; it uses algorithms to search and find and a chatbot to answer basic questions about company policies,” noted a third in transportation.



Fifty percent claimed to be specifically deploying generative AI. “We are using generative AI for large document summarization and review projects,” explained one leader in technology. “We are also evaluating the AI tools in our CLM,” said another in manufacturing. “There is a range of use cases, but at a minimum, it is a great starting point for tasks,” offered a third in the food industry, using it to draft policies.

Forty-seven percent acknowledged that there is a fear of generative AI in their legal department, and on a scale of 1-5, with five being the highest, half of the participants rated the level of familiarity that legal operations professionals have with AI tools and best practices at a one or a two. None suggested that it is a five.

Along with its deployment, many participants describe the cultural changes required to facilitate the usage of these advancements. "We have rewritten our billing guidelines to include generative AI; we want to ensure that our outside counsel uses it appropriately and discloses it promptly," remarked another in the food and agriculture sector.

"We are trying to get our legal professionals comfortable with it, but we have real privacy and compliance issues that have not been solved," admitted a peer in insurance.

Ninety percent also integrate their technology systems, which is especially important as they continue to deploy generative AI. "It all comes down to data, so if you are working in siloed systems without integrated or quality data, AI has little utility; it is not magic," an experienced operations professional in consumer products highlighted. "We use generative AI in IP because it has the cleanest data; otherwise, the implications are substantial," noted a peer in the same industry.

Almost a third (30%) conveyed that specific AI companies like LegalMation have provided meaningful ROI by enhancing their workflows.

LEGALMATION™

"When you use LegalMation, you realize it does what it says it will do by eliminating time and cost but also standardizing documents and processes; LegalMation has all the right stuff, which makes it so special,"

-Director, Food and Agriculture



AI Timelines Are Fungible



Although 60% of the participants reported that they have a timeline for wanting to use AI, and 97% continue to evaluate areas to automate and future-proof their organization, the parameters were generally vague. "As soon as possible," said one. "Yesterday because we cannot get to it fast enough," added a colleague. "The imperative now is that we do not want to be caught without having investigated all of the opportunities from a competitive standpoint, but in the organization's context, what legal wants to do with generative AI is very low on the priority list compared to what the business wants to do," acknowledged a third.

Forty percent said they expect to implement AI in their legal department in the next 18 months or sooner. They suggested this could be AI-enabled knowledge management or AI-powered CLM, among other opportunities.

Delays in standards or rules are preventing some teams from moving forward. “We are still waiting for enterprise-level guidelines and have been asked not to engage in anything until we receive them later this year when we might start evaluating use cases,” noted a leader in insurance.

Others are being cautious until there is some clarity into which vendors will likely become the market leaders. “We are seeing rapid changes and are not sure what purpose some startups or service providers will offer in the future, so we are waiting before making major investments,” added a peer in insurance. For example, “LegalMation is among the first companies to leverage AI when we have large-scale litigation tasks; they are very good at supporting our organization in those tasks,” said a leader who was a customer in a prior role.

Contract Management and CLM are Established Legal Operations Functions

Over 100 interviews with legal operations leaders during the past three years have revealed that contract management has become increasingly important and more closely connected to the discipline. Sixty-three percent of the 2024 participants are responsible for contracts, and 67% believe that legal should, in whole or in part, own the management of these agreements.

In 2023, 56% of the responding legal operations leaders reported having responsibility for contracts, and again, many distinguished between varying levels of accountability. Consistent with this year, 68% of the 2023 respondents specified that legal should own contracts. One 2023 participant described it as a “hot potato.”

The two most common candidates cited to own contracts this year were legal and procurement, with suggestions that finance, IT, or the business units should have sole or joint control. Several participants indicated that law departments could minimize risk with a division of responsibility for contracts and may benefit from establishing thresholds for involvement with one team handling them and only involving another if they need additional support.



“It makes sense to have legal control contracts, but there needs to be joint ownership with other departments, like procurement.”

-Director, Consumer Products



“It should be the business unit, but legal needs complete visibility.”

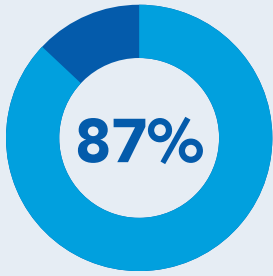
-Director, Real Estate



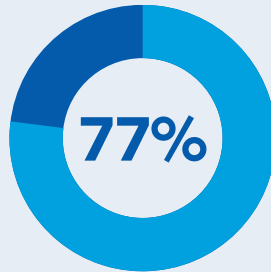
“I understand why we need lawyers involved in the contracting process, but it is becoming so operational, and it will be interesting to see how AI continues to automate the process.”

-Director, Technology

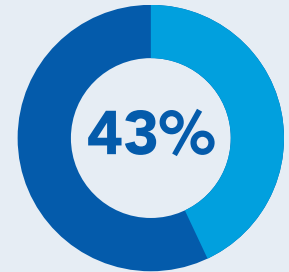
In addition, 77% have a CLM platform, reflecting a slight uptick from the 74% who reported using one in 2023. 87% anticipate a rise in the use of CLM in the legal department, and 43% expect their spending on CLM to increase. This represents a material change from 2022 when 68% expected a spending increase on CLM, and 2023 when 56% projected a surge.



Anticipate a rise in the use of CLM.



Have a CLM platform.



Expect their spending on CLM to increase.

Wider adoption is the likely reason, with many law departments already investing in this technology. As their connection to the documents grows, so does their familiarity with them. A majority (53%) rated the extent of their visibility into the contract portfolio of their organizations at a four or five, out of five. 36% did so in 2023, likely signifying greater penetration in the area. "Since we are preparing to implement a new CLM tool, the legal operations team has gained a significant level of transparency into the company's contracts portfolio," said a director in manufacturing. "We are in a migration period and also changing tools, so we have high visibility," added another in consumer products.



"iManage will help centralize our agreements and increase our visibility into the company's contract portfolio,"

Director, Real Estate



Artificial Intelligence in CLM is Underutilized

Despite the excitement surrounding AI in legal, the use of the application in contract management remains limited; 43% of the participants have a CLM platform that incorporates artificial intelligence. "The demo for our new CLM highlighted AI for first-pass intake and workflow," said one in consumer products. "We use AI for data extraction and analysis in our contracts," offered a peer in financial services.

But only 20% use the artificial intelligence that is available in their CLM platform. "I don't think the technology they claim to be AI is really artificial intelligence," explained one leader in technology. There are also practical reasons beyond the capability of the tool. "We do not use it because our team has not found a need to use AI to manage our contracts; it is also an additional expense for which we have not budgeted," noted a colleague in consumer products.

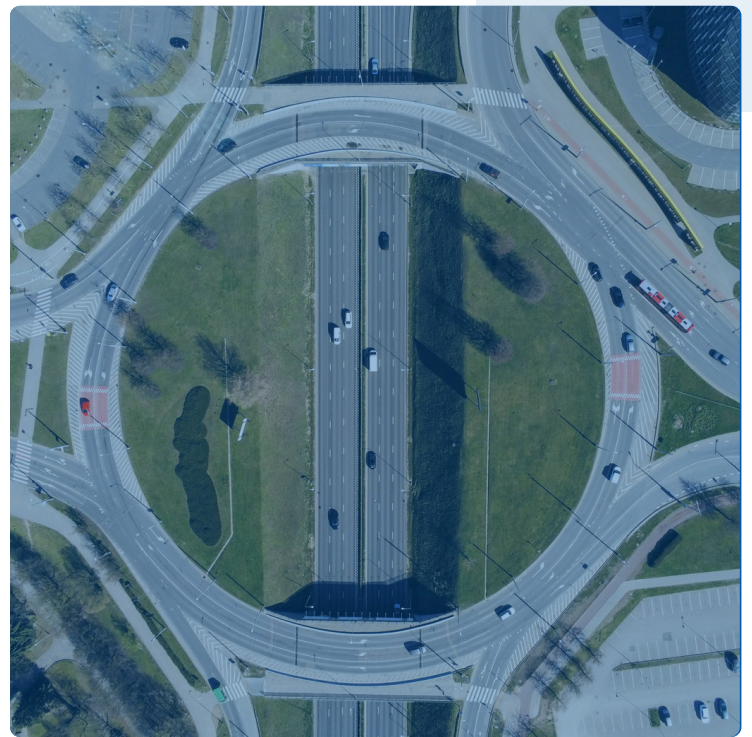
"We are still implementing the CLM tool," added another in the food sector. As a result, it is likely that as the deployment and adoption of CLM expands in the next year, the use of their AI capabilities will grow if they truly help users expedite their work.

This is an important caveat because only 13% reported that the AI functionality in their CLM meets their expectations. "I think the platform has the potential to be one of the best if it can deliver on its plans, but it is not yet one of the best," said one in financial services. "It meets my expectations because I have measured expectations and do not have particularly high hopes," noted another with a food company. "I think many vendors jumped into offering AI without being able to guarantee that our usage will not benefit other customers of the technology," cautioned a peer in travel.

Conclusion

This research aims to better understand how corporate legal teams are driving innovation and promoting digital transformation, with a particular focus on the influence of generative AI, automation, and document management. This is an important goal because legal operations teams continue to expand their influence to support more of the enterprise, apply their talent in technology, and future-proof their organization.

Although there is enthusiasm for artificial intelligence, law department leaders are implementing it with measured optimism. 80% are using it, while almost half still maintain a fear of generative AI despite companies like LegalMation providing a meaningful ROI by enhancing their workflows.



The legal department is also streamlining operations by combining direct support with self-service options, which a majority are offering, such as applications covering document automation, workflow approval, and legal intake built with Neota.

And document and contract management remain top priorities with a strong foundation given that more than three-quarters of the participants have a CLM platform and almost two-thirds are responsible for contracts, using a range of tools, including iManage, to centralize their agreements and raise their visibility into a company's document portfolio.

As the legal operations discipline matures, it is becoming a ubiquitous field that supports an organization's macro growth and client service goals beyond legal, elevating the entire team and spotlighting the evolution of the corporate law department.

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