



Survival of the efficient

Technology offers new ways to cut costs and is changing the role of the legal department operations executive

BY [CHRIS DIMARCO \(/AUTHOR/CHRIS-DIMARCO\)](#)

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Just because someone excels at doing the critical tasks of a department doesn't necessarily make him or her qualified to manage that department. In legal, that means advanced understanding of the law doesn't



always translate to Lisa Konie, director of legal operations counsel, Adobe Systems success

overseeing the minutia of the department, and that often star attorneys are best left to practicing law.

The ability to handle the selection of technology, management of processes, efficiencies, training and outside counsel has become key to the success of law departments. Increasingly, that has meant hiring a dedicated legal department operations (LDO) executive.

“The easiest way to explain the position to those that don't have intimate familiarity of what a legal operations executive does is, basically, anything that doesn't fall squarely on the shoulders of an attorney ends up coming our way,” says Lisa Konie, director of legal operations, Adobe Systems.

The responsibilities Konie lays out hold true for most large organizations, and due to the diversifying needs of modern legal departments, business acumen and adaptability are essential for LDOs.

Evolving needs and evolving roles

The development of this role has been accelerated by the requirements of today's legal department. Specifically, the splintering of technological solutions has meant that the role has evolved from classic operations needs like balancing the books and managing outside counsel to acting as a broker between departments, an advocate for the technology needs of legal and the champion of efficiency.

"When I started 15 years ago in a similar role at Hewlett-Packard, the name of my role was financial operations manager. I was really brought in to manage the finances, with a small technical aspect to that role. I had no technical experience at that time and I came from an economics and finance background," says Stephanie Corey, legal chief of staff at Flextronics. "The role has evolved very quickly. Right around the time I began, you started seeing more niche technologies for the legal environment popping up, things like matter management, the very beginnings of e-billing and contract management."

Similarly, Konie's path to legal operations executive grew from her oversight of projects designed to get more out of Adobe's attorneys and processes: "Originally I joined as an attorney; I was on our legal sales team supporting sales deals, which is the largest legal team at the company. My VP at the time was really focused on efficiencies. The role started by implementing those efficiencies, with projects like trying to consolidate the language in our sales contracts so they were all consistent, or coming up with playbooks so that people had the tools to make themselves more efficient and effective. I gravitated towards this role and ended up leading several projects that were efficiency related, driving the team to more output, since there wasn't always the money to hire more bodies."

Eventually, Adobe's GC realized that driving efficiencies was not just something that needed to happen in the legal sales team, but across all sections of the law department. At the same time, new technologies supporting the push for efficiency also required technological literacy and connections to other departments as part of the role.

"All of a sudden you had this groundswell of activity where people started to realize—contract management software for example—these are multiple cross company solutions. It isn't something that just lawyers use; tax, revenue and any other department commonly using contracts are also going to need it. Knowing that legal is the 'owner' of a tool like that, that has cross-departmental reach, I think more and more companies are starting to understand the need to have someone in a significant operational role that supports not only the inner workings of the department itself but also the tools being employed across the company," Konie says.

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