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Audit your approach: Best practice guide

A practical guide for assessing your metrics program and building a prioritized improvement roadmap

This guide walks you through conducting your audit using the Gap analysis worksheet as your central tool. We recommend starting with the Introduction to audit your approach for an overview of what an audit is, why it matters, and when to conduct one, then return here for the practical how-to guidance.

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Step 1: Getting ready

The following steps are important to ensure you have the right foundation in place for a smooth and productive audit process.

- **Build internal support.** Share your plans with your leadership team (deputies, practice leads, Legal Ops) to ensure they understand your goals and approach. Make it clear the audit will identify strengths as well as gaps and that their input is valuable.

- **Identify who to involve.** Decide which team members should participate in the audit. At minimum, include your Legal Operations lead (if you have one) and representatives from different practice areas who can provide diverse perspectives. Let them know what you're asking of them and roughly how much time it will take. Make it collaborative from the start.

- **Ensure access to information.** Review the information gathering checklist in Section 2 and make sure you'll be able to access what you need. This might mean asking your Legal Ops team to pull certain reports, locating strategic planning documents, or identifying who has information about stakeholder feedback. Don't gather everything yet, just confirm it's accessible when you need it.

- **Clarify your strategic priorities.** Before you can assess whether your metrics support your strategy, you need to be clear on what that strategy is. If your department's goals aren't formally documented, take time to articulate them clearly. Identify your key business stakeholders (Board, CEO, business unit leaders) and what you understand about their expectations of the legal department.

- **Decide on your approach.** Will this be a quick assessment over a few days, or a more comprehensive audit over a few weeks? Your choice should reflect your available time, resources, and how urgently you need findings. Either approach can be valuable; the key is being intentional about your choice.

Remember: You don't need everything to be perfect before starting. The goal is to be prepared enough to make the process valuable, not to wait for ideal conditions that may never arrive.

Step 2: Information gathering

This phase is about collecting the information you'll need to assess your current approach.

Use this checklist to gather materials systematically and check off items as you collect them. The list is comprehensive (not exhaustive) and it is not expected that you will have everything on the list. In fact, knowing where gaps in available information exist is also a helpful finding.

Department context	
	Strategy and goals: Current departmental goals; strategic planning approach; connection to business strategy
	Organizational structure: Org chart; roles and responsibilities; centralized vs. decentralized; reporting structure
	Workload: Number of matters by type (past 12 months); typical duration; staffing; costs
	External resources: Law firm panel structure and usage; rate negotiation; Outside Counsel Guidelines; other suppliers
	Legal operations: Whether formal Legal Ops exists; maturity level
	Technology: Current tools and systems; automation level; planned investments
	Budget: How budgets are set and monitored; budget sources; example budget structure
	Stakeholders: Key internal stakeholders and priorities; reporting relationships; expectations
	Business context: Company revenue and footprint; business priorities; growth or decline phase; major initiatives

Current measurement, data and reporting	
	Existing metrics: Complete list of metrics tracked (formal and informal); definitions; purpose; historical data
	Data collection methods: How data is captured; automated vs. manual; who's responsible; frequency; systems used
	Stakeholder feedback mechanisms: Formal (surveys, interviews) and informal approaches; all feedback types
	Current reporting: Examples of reports and dashboards; audiences; frequency and format; delivery method; ownership
	Challenges and pain points: Difficulties capturing data; data quality issues; resource constraints; team frustrations
	Communication and awareness: Whether metrics communicated throughout department; team understanding; engagement level
	Planned changes: Any planned improvements to measurement or reporting; technology implementations; stakeholder requests

Specific metrics by strategic priority	
	Effective metrics: Quality of advice/work product; service quality; team engagement; talent; response times
	Efficient metrics: Total cost and breakdown; year-over-year trends; automation %; technology ROI; resource utilization
	Protect metrics: Risk management activities; compliance monitoring; disputes (number, type, severity); risk value
	Enable metrics: Business support and relationships; creative solutions; new product support; strategic initiatives; commercial awareness

AI tip: Using AI to organize your information

AI can help you organize and synthesize the information you've gathered, saving you time and helping you see patterns.

Upload your documents and try using prompts like:

- "Review these documents and create a summary table showing: (1) what metrics we currently track, (2) how we collect data for each, (3) who the audience is, and (4) how frequently we report."
- "Analyze these reports and identify which of the four strategic priorities (Effective, Efficient, Protect, Enable) each metric addresses. Flag any priorities with no coverage."
- "Based on these documents, summarize our current approach to stakeholder feedback and engagement."

Remember: Check your company's AI policy before uploading data. Never put confidential information or personal data into public AI tools like ChatGPT. Use enterprise AI solutions if you have them or anonymize your data first.

Step 3: Gap analysis

This is where the Gap Analysis Worksheet becomes your primary tool. The worksheet guides you through a systematic comparison of your current approach against the Best Practice Metrics Framework, helping you see where you're doing well and where opportunities exist for improvement.

How to use the worksheet

The worksheet is designed to make this process as straightforward as possible. Here's how it works:

Review the Best Practice Metrics Framework	Before you begin scoring, familiarize yourself with the categories (Metrics Coverage, Data Collection, Engagement, Reporting, Review) and what best practice looks like for each sub-category. This gives you a clear benchmark to compare against.
Score each sub-category	For each of the 15 sub-categories in the worksheet, describe your current state based on the information you gathered in Section 2. Then rate yourself on the 1-5 scale. Be honest here: the aim is to identify opportunities for meaningful improvement.
Calculate dimension scores	Add up your three sub-category scores for each area. Each category's score will range from 3-15, giving you a clear picture of relative strengths and gaps across different areas of your program.
Calculate your total score	Add up all five category scores. Your total score will range from 15-75, providing an overall sense of your program's maturity.
Review the interpretation guidance	The worksheet provides detailed guidance on what your scores mean and how to decide which areas to prioritize for improvement. This guidance helps you make strategic choices rather than simply tackling the lowest score.
Complete the summary section	Document which areas you'll start with and why, noting additional areas to address and your areas of strength. This becomes your roadmap for improvement.

Example: Scoring one sub-category

Here's what a complete assessment might look like for a single sub-category. This example shows the level of specificity that's helpful:

Sub-category: Data quality

Current state: "Data quality varies significantly across our program. Our e-billing data is accurate and reliable because it's validated by Finance before reporting. However, matter data that we enter manually has inconsistencies as different people use different codes, matter descriptions vary in detail and format. We've had several instances where leadership questioned our numbers because of these data errors, which has undermined confidence. We don't currently have any formal validation process to check data quality before we report."

Score: 2 (Beginning to address)

Gap identified: "We lack standardized data entry processes and validation checks. We have no defined data quality standards or guidelines. This inconsistency is undermining confidence in our reporting. To reach best practice, we need: data entry standards and guidelines, validation checkpoints before reporting, a designated data quality owner, and a quarterly data quality audit process."

Priority: High (data quality issues are actively undermining stakeholder trust in all of our metrics)

AI tip: Using AI to support your gap analysis

AI can help you evaluate your current state and identify gaps that you can validate against your own experience. Try prompts like:

- "Here is the Best Practice Framework for Data Collection [paste framework text]. Here is my current approach: [describe your current state]. Rate my current state on a 1-5 scale for each sub-category (data sources, data quality, consistency) and explain the gaps between my approach and best practice."

- "I scored myself as follows for Engagement: Team engagement=2, Ownership=3, Stakeholder engagement=2. Based on these scores, what are the most likely root causes and what should I prioritize addressing first?"

- "Review my current state descriptions across all dimensions and identify common themes or patterns in my gaps."

Step 4: Synthesize findings

Once you've completed your Gap Analysis Worksheet, it's time to step back and look at what the scores and patterns are telling you. This synthesis helps you move from assessment to action.

Review your worksheet summary

Your completed worksheet summary provides valuable insights:

- **Where to start and why:** Your chosen starting areas, key strengths to build on, and the rationale behind those choices
- **What needs attention next:** High-priority gaps, additional areas to address, and their relative priority
- **What the patterns reveal:** Cross-cutting themes and dependencies that affect sequencing and impact

Identify improvement priorities

Once you have chosen your primary focus, you will be able to identify your specific actions. These questions are useful to help you decide on your final priorities and actions, whether as a group discussion or workshop:

- What are 2-3 specific actions that would most improve your priority dimension?
- What quick wins could you achieve in the next 1-3 months to build momentum?
- What requires 3-6 months of sustained effort but would deliver substantial value?
- What longer-term initiatives (6-12 months) should you begin planning for now?
- Who needs to be involved in each improvement area, and what resources are required?
- How will you know if your improvements are working? What will you measure?

AI tip: Using AI to identify patterns and develop recommendations
AI can help you synthesize findings and develop your action plan. Consider prompts like:

- "Here are my dimension scores: Metrics Coverage=7, Data Collection=5, Engagement=9, Reporting=6, Review=4. What patterns do you see? Which dimensions are likely related or dependent on each other?"
- "Based on my gap analysis [provide summary], draft 5 specific, actionable recommendations organized by priority: quick wins (1-3 months), foundation building (3-6 months), and strategic development (6-12 months)."
- "I've decided to start with Data Collection (score: 5/15). What are the typical first steps legal departments take to improve in this dimension? What quick wins might be available?"

Step 5: Communicating and next steps

Your audit findings are valuable, but they only create change if they lead to action. This final section helps you present your findings effectively and get the commitment you need to move forward.

Communicate your findings

Different stakeholders need different information. Tailor your message to each audience:

- **For executive leadership and the Board:** Focus on the strategic implications of your findings, resource requirements, and expected outcomes. Keep it high-level; they need to understand why this matters and what it will take, not necessarily all the technical details.
- **For your team:** Emphasize the collaborative next steps and how the improvements you're proposing will make their work easier, more visible, or more valued. Help them see how they'll benefit from the changes.
- **For business stakeholders:** Highlight how the improvements will give them better visibility into legal's value and support their decision-making. Connect your recommendations to their needs and priorities.

Structure your communication

- **Executive summary:** Your key findings and top 3-5 recommendations (keep this to one page)
- **Current state summary:** What you measure today and what your scores revealed
- **Gap analysis results:** Your dimension scores and what they mean in practical terms
- **Recommendations:** Organized by priority, with clear rationale for your choices
- **Next steps:** Proposed timeline, resource needs, and ownership for each priority area

Get commitment to action

How you present findings matters as much as what you present. These practices help build the commitment you need:

- Present findings in a collaborative session, not via email. This allows for discussion and builds shared ownership
- Frame findings as opportunities for improvement, not criticisms of current practices
- Start by acknowledging your strengths before discussing gaps to set a balanced and constructive tone
- Be clear and realistic about resource implications and timelines
- Get explicit agreement from your leadership team on which priorities to pursue first, second, and third
- Assign specific ownership for each priority area so accountability is clear
- Schedule a follow-up meeting now to maintain momentum and track progress

Take action

With your priorities set and ownership assigned, the real work begins to implement the improvements you've committed to and tracking whether they're delivering the value you expected. Your Gap Analysis Worksheet captures your baseline. Plan to revisit it in 6-12 months to measure your progress and identify your next areas of focus. This regular review keeps your metrics program evolving with your strategic priorities.

Remember: The audit is just the beginning, not the end. The real value comes from taking action on your findings. Start with your highest-priority improvements, focus on getting early wins that build momentum and credibility, and use this foundation to develop a metrics program that tells the complete story of your legal department's strategic value.