

GCO 2030: The Future Legal Department

Reimagine your future legal function

A leadership team exercise

About this exercise

The legal function is at an inflection point. AI is not simply automating routine tasks; it's beginning to change the nature of legal work itself: how advice is prepared, how risk is assessed, how legal teams partner with the business, and what it means to deliver strategic counsel.

The question for legal departments isn't whether to respond to this shift, but how to lead it deliberately. That requires stepping back from day-to-day pressures to think clearly about where you want your function to be in five years, and what it will take to get there.

This exercise is designed to support that conversation. It draws on a framework developed by the Thomson Reuters Institute, grounded in research with senior in-house legal leaders, that identifies five capability models for the future legal function. Use it with your leadership team to define a shared vision, assess your current reality honestly, and map the path forward.

How to use this exercise

This activity is designed for a two-to-three hour leadership team session and it is best completed in sequence. It can also be completed individually as preparation for a broader discussion.

Be especially honest in Section 2. The gap between aspiration and reality is where the most useful planning happens. In Sections 3 and 4, push beyond incremental improvement. The question is not how to do what you do today slightly better, but what your function looks like when AI is fully embedded in how you work.

There are no right answers. The goal is a shared starting point for action.

The five future archetypes

Thomson Reuters Institute research has identified five ways in which leading legal functions are reimagining their work in an AI-enabled future. Most functions will pursue elements of several models. Use them as a reference point as you develop your own vision.

As you work through this exercise, consider: which of these capability models resonates most strongly with your function's strategic priorities? Which represents the biggest gap from where you are today?

Scaled Enablement	Advisory plus	Empowering peer	Seamless integrator	Global leverage
High-volume automation	Strategic counsel unlocked	Supercharge corporate functions	Effortless external support	No language or geography barrier

Section 1: Your 2030 Vision

Answer these questions at a high level. The goal is an aspirational picture of your function in five years, not a detailed plan. You will get to the 'how' in later sections.

1. What is your aspirational vision for your legal function by 2030?

- What is materially different from today in how your team works, the value it delivers, and how it is experienced by the business?
- What are you most proud of having achieved?
- Which of the five capability models above best captures the direction you are heading?

2. What external and internal trends are most influential?

- Regulatory, business, or industry developments shaping your priorities
- AI and technology developments that change what is possible
- Expectations from the business, board, or executive team

3. How is your team experimenting today?

- What AI tools or use cases are you currently testing or implementing?
- What process or workflow changes are already underway?
- Where are you seeing early results and where have experiments stalled?

4. By 2030, how is work divided between people and technology?

- What work is primarily human-led?
- What work is AI-augmented, humans and AI working together?
- What work is fully automated?

Section 2: Current Reality

Be honest. This section is not about assigning blame, it's about understanding the distance between where you are and where you want to be. The gap is where the plan lives.

1. Where are you today relative to your 2030 vision?

- What is working well that you can build on?
- Where are the biggest gaps in capability, technology, data, or culture?
- What structural or operational constraints are holding you back?

2. What are your three biggest pain points today?

List the three most significant challenges in how your function operates today.

3. How will stakeholders experience your function differently?

- What new value will you deliver to business leaders, executives, and internal clients?
- What frustrations will you eliminate?
- What does 'legal as a strategic partner' actually look like in practice for your organization?

Section 3: Phased Roadmap

Think in phases. Early work builds foundations and credibility. Mid-term is where meaningful change becomes visible. The final horizon is where transformation is complete. Push beyond incremental improvement. The question in each phase is what genuine transformation looks like, not just what is slightly better.

	Year 1	Year 2	Years 3 to 5
What does your legal function look like at the end of this phase, and what has meaningfully changed?			
What outcomes define success? (e.g. speed, quality, cost, AI adoption, risk reduction)			
How does the work itself change? What is reduced, shifted, or eliminated?			
What role does AI play: automated, augmented, or human-led?			
What risks or dependencies need to be managed?			

Section 4: Enablers of Transformation

For each phase of your roadmap, identify the foundational changes required across four dimensions. Be specific. The most common point of failure in transformation planning is ambition at the vision stage without concrete enablers.

	Year 1	Year 2	Years 3 to 5
Phase			
Process			
Data			
Technology			
People & Roles			

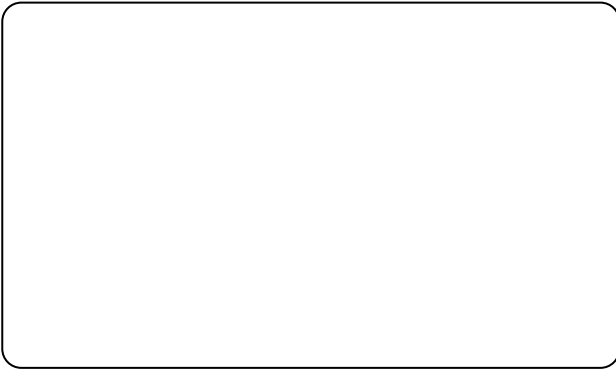
Note: Our research shows that data limitations are an organizational issue, not a team-level one. If data quality or availability is a constraint, surface it here and identify the cross-functional partners (Procurement, HR, Finance, etc.) that may need to be part of the solution.

Section 5: Organization and Capability

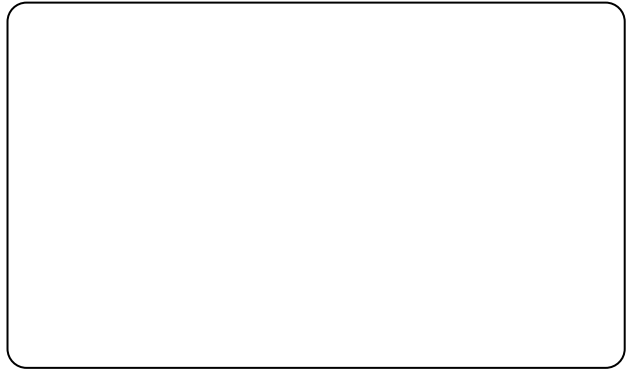
Use this section if you want to go deeper into how roles and capabilities need to evolve. For each phase, consider what changes in how the team is structured, what skills must be built, and what behaviors need to shift.

Year 1

Key structural or role changes:



Skills and capabilities to build:



Year 2

Key structural or role changes:



Skills and capabilities to build:



Years 3 to 5

Key structural or role changes:



Skills and capabilities to build:



Closing Commitment

What is the one action you will take in the next 90 days that most clearly moves your legal function toward this future?

This is a commitment, not a homework question. Be specific: a decision to be made, a conversation to be had, a pilot to be launched, a capability to be built. Name the action and who will own it.

Next steps

Remember: This exercise is a starting point. Revisit it as your priorities and AI capabilities evolve. The most effective legal function leaders we have spoken with treat transformation planning as a living process, returning to these questions regularly.



Value Alignment Toolkit

Access toolkit

