

# Understanding the Role of the Legal Department

Legal teams today wear many hats—balancing risk management, operational efficiency, and strategic leadership while delivering practical, reliable advice.

This resource provides an example framework, breaking down the roles legal departments play within an organization into four dimensions: Service Provider, Operator, Guardian, and Strategic Leader. For each, you'll find insights into aspirations, objectives, challenges, and success metrics.

Adapt and recreate this framework for your own legal department to effectively align legal priorities with business goals and demonstrate value across your enterprise.

**Effective**

**Role:** Service provider

**Aspiration**

- High performing team
- Practical, reliable advice
- Easy to work with

**Key objectives**


- Develop and retain a high performing team
- Deliver high quality advice to business in response to needs
- Speedy, accessible service to internal clients

**Challenges/ pressures**

- Talent: engagement, recruitment, hybrid working, well being
- Outside counsel performance
- Business restructuring
- Demands from business (high volume, high pressure)

**Core metrics**

- Employee engagement score (lead indicator)
- Matter success score (1-10 rating on how outcomes met business objectives)
- In-house team satisfaction with outside counsel

**Efficient**

**Role:** Operator

**Aspiration**

- Value creator
- Innovate how we work
- Make efficient use of resources

**Key objectives**


- Cost control
- Operate with a high level of efficiency
- Leverage technology and AI to improve process and quality

**Challenges/ pressures**

- Internal pressure to reduce cost
- Law firm cost and rate structure
- High volume work, manual process
- Technological advances

**Core metrics**

- Legal spend as % of revenue (benchmarked by sector/size/geography)
- Internal to external spend ratio
- Time saved through automation

**Enable**

**Role:** Strategic Leader

**Aspiration**

- Proactive, commercial
- Connected across the business
- The department of "how," be a partner. Say yes, find solutions

**Key objectives**

- Business aligned
- Commercial
- Support transformation

**Challenges/ pressures**

- Business growth (incl. M&A)
- New products and services
- International expansion

**Core metrics**

- % of legal team objectives aligned to company OKRs
- Number of new product pitches including legal cost and risk assessments
- Board meeting attendance and early involvement in strategic decisions

**Protect**

**Role:** Guardian

**Aspiration**

- Prevention of issues through proactive risk management

**Key objectives**

- Risk discovery
- Risk management
- Horizon scanning

**Challenges/ pressures**

- Complex, changing regulatory environment
- New and emerging risks (AI, ESG, Data)
- Litigious environment

**Core metrics**

- Number of risks mapped vs. critical incidents
- Fines, penalties, and payouts vs. industry peers
- Risk awareness and compliance training coverage across business

[Return to the Value Alignment Toolkit](#) to continue exploring insights that elevate your legal department’s impact.