



2026 Predictions for Chief Legal Officers

1 **CLOs are likely to become more involved in leading and influencing enterprise growth and innovation initiatives**
The pace of regulatory change requires organizations to adapt with increasing speed. A CLO's ability to understand and interpret evolving regulations and provide strategic guidance in times of rapid change provides significant value to businesses by accelerating growth and driving innovation.

2 **AI adoption and implementation may look different in legal departments**
Unlike other business units that often use unified platforms, legal departments generally rely on a patchwork of tools and solutions. As a result, AI adoption and implementation playbooks that work well for other parts of the business may not be directly transferable or effective for legal teams. While implementing AI in legal departments requires a tailored approach, AI has the potential to provide significant value and transformative impact by dramatically decreasing the amount of effort to process and gather information, yielding more time for strategic legal insight. When data is better managed, more insights can be gleaned that can drive better decision-making for legal teams.

3 **Transformation is likely to change traditional organizational structures and the skills needed to be effective**
Generative AI (GenAI) is rapidly transforming legal work, accelerating skill expiration, and requiring legal professionals to be more agile and continually learn new skills.

1

Enterprise initiatives



AI, privacy, cyber

CLOs will likely continue to drive AI, privacy, and cyber policies, and real-time, business-embedded decision-making is also likely to increase. Legal departments should consider establishing frameworks, processes, guardrails, and escalation procedures for risk evaluations to happen closer to where business occurs, enabling faster, real-time responses and more agile adaptation as new risks and regulations emerge.



Cyber governance

With the escalating frequency and complexity of AI-enabled cyberthreats and breaches, boards and the C-suite are likely to engage with CLOs more frequently, seeking guidance on proactive governance and effective breach response strategies.



Sanctions, supply chain

CLOs are likely to use AI to review and analyze contracts within their supply chains to help them identify potential sanctions violation risks.



Data compliance

CLOs will also play a critical leadership role enabling their organizations to meet increasingly stringent data protection and breach disclosure requirements.

2

AI adoption



High impact AI

CLOs are projected to look for ways to demonstrate AI's value by targeting discrete, high-volume areas where AI solutions provide significant impact right in the near term. Examples of such areas include document review, contract drafting, regulation analysis, mergers and acquisitions, invoice review, investigations, and compliance monitoring.



Law firms

CLOs are expected to begin looking at the delivery of legal services through an ecosystem lens versus a purely outside versus inside lens and ask themselves, "How can my internal teams, law firms, service providers, and consultants utilize GenAI to deliver higher-quality legal services at a greater volume/speed to the enterprise without increasing costs?"



Centralized data

CLOs are expected to continue identifying how they want their legal teams to leverage AI in the future. They will begin to pursue strategies to establish centralized data repositories that can enable their organizations to extract enhanced data insights.



Smarter litigation

Legal teams are likely to have access to AI tools that can enable them to analyze vast data sets to make more informed decisions about the types of cases to pursue before incurring significant costs.

3

Talent transformation



CLO-CIO collaboration

In 2026, enhanced collaboration between CLOs and CIOs is expected to be crucial as enterprises confront increasing regulatory, technological, and risk management challenges.



Rapid skill shift

Skill expiration will likely take place more rapidly as business and legal departments transform.



Upskilling demand

Demands for upskilling and reskilling within legal and across disciplines are expected to continue to increase as CLOs and legal departments shift toward the AI-enabled practice of law.



New legal roles

Roles not traditionally found in corporate legal departments are expected to become more common. Examples include project managers, data scientists, and technology specialists.

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