

5 Visions of Legal Services 5 to 10 Years in the Future

Part 1

E. Leigh Dance, Corporate Counsel

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Five diverse players in the global legal services industry, from Brussels, Chicago, Greensboro, San Francisco and Shanghai, got together in New York in June to discuss the future of legal services. A relatively unclear vision of the future and an expectation of multiple changes (with cost and technology at the forefront) marks the view of most of the 110+ corporate counsel from around the world who were polled at the discussion's start. What follows are summaries of five distinct perspectives of the next 5-10 years in global legal services, from a legal start-up CEO, a European multinational company (MNC) group general counsel, the leader of an 850-lawyer firm, a former Asia regional GC for MNCs and current legal advisor, and a global legal services management consultant.

Part 2 of this article will provide 3-4 additional perspectives, provided by readers. We invite you to send your vision (max 250 words) to the author at eldance@ELDInternational.com.

Here are the visions of the future, according to these knowledgeable professionals in their own words:

Catherine Hammack, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Jurispect

Data science, machine learning and natural language processing have been powering some of our most relied-upon, everyday tools, such as the Google search engine. Tried and true data science techniques will be successfully applied to industry-specific use to create even more valuable and transformative practice tools. This also will happen in legal services. In the business world, any decision must have the data to back it up; subjectivity alone is now considered unsophisticated and can increase risk. “Where is the data to support your decision?” will be heard more and more by corporate legal teams and their outside counsel. In the future, companies that require services and tools will co-exist with the firms and technology vendors that supply them, in an online ecosystem where personalized data, analytics and expertise are immediately available.

Alexia Henriksen, Senior Vice President and Global General Counsel, Volvo Financial Services

I predict more and more in-house legal teams and external legal advisers will use IT solutions to assist in three areas:

1. Law Department Management
2. Communication/Collaboration
3. Admin/Process

We need to harness technology and systems available to us to move our people from a reactive/survival state to one of proactivity, efficiency and business alignment.

In the business world, we look for productive, sustainable, mutually beneficial business relationships. We should do the same in the legal function, between internal and external counsel. We demand more from our

external counsel, but we should also learn to be better clients—by helping them understand our business and needs better.

We will see a shift away from “service provider and client” toward a “collaborative business partner,” like our commercial counterparts. GCs are increasingly seen as “leading a business,” (as I am at VFS), and our external counsel will be partners in support of business objectives. Dealing with ambiguity and risk will be increasingly important for outside counsel to understand, as it will help them change the way they deliver advice. The future will be more evolution than revolution. We will see more success if we focus on collaboration and consolidation. We should stop trying to “get more for less” and focus on “getting more from what we have and working in different but more productive ways,” including the use of IT solutions.

J. Stephen Poor, Chairman, Seyfarth Shaw

Globalization, risk diversification, changing demographics, statistical modeling and measuring—these trends are driving changes in legal services, yet mindsets and resources are still barriers. We need new skill sets, including being able to comprehend the overall context of the client’s needs and integrate various aspects of producing and delivering legal services. This role has been referred to as the “legal integrator.”

We can’t look at people, process and technology as separate elements; we must integrate them to work effectively for the client. Technology and process can be combined with people’s needs to provide new components in the value chain.

Legal service delivery will become an end-to-end value chain, breaking down the various elements of effective legal counsel into component pieces, and then reassembling the pieces into an efficient service delivery model tailored to the growth strategy and demands of the “client” organization. To do this there must be clarity about the roles of inside counsel, the resources that the company is willing to devote, and the personal goals of the general counsel and legal team.

We will move from a cost-based approach to a strategic value-based approach to legal services by using all the tools available to both the users and providers of those services. The vision is to combine in a strategic, efficient way all of the tactics we see deployed: “more for less,” convergence, unbundling, make vs. buy, etc. When combined seamlessly, the value of the services can better match the needs of the business. If the external advisor lacks these abilities, the advisor will more likely become a commodity vendor—a link in the chain. If the external advisor has these skills, the advisor can more readily function as a business partner, helping the client design the chain rather than simply being a link. To succeed in a multidisciplinary world, people also need to add value without qualified lawyers always in the mix.

Kenneth Tung, General Counsel, Lex Sigma, Shanghai

While technology is a major, and perhaps disruptive, driving force in the legal space, I believe how legal services providers can operate closer to business and other clients is the key driver of and opportunity for the changes ahead.

Artificial intelligence isn't about human versus computers. Legal professionals working with artificial intelligence need to develop expert systems to produce solutions that were once considered only “bespoke.” Data science is relevant for risk management, but is nothing new for litigators who need to work with the facts. We need to pivot to preventative law while still delivering remedial solutions, and we need to overcome any bias to practicing law for the sake of doing so.

Possible longer-term players in the legal services market may arrive from the adjacent spaces, such as accountancies, publishing and other content providers, financiers of dispute resolution, process management and software providers, and platform players like LegalZoom.

In the age of the Internet, we need to interact with the elements of risks in real time and refine administration to preventative measures, as we do in operations.

E. Leigh Dance, President, ELD International

A Global Counsel Leaders Circle survey in 2015 of prominent general counsel revealed that they can [readily identify expectations of their executives](#). They also are clear about the coverage and competency gaps of their teams. The study shows that they are less organized and logical in moving forward to resolve the operational issues they face, and have generally not been good at adopting technology tools to handle rising workloads and continued budget pressures. The future will bring more progress in the ways legal and compliance teams work to provide more efficient and cost-effective advice.

Corporate legal chiefs need a range of new competencies, which will go far beyond legal expertise, to fulfill their stakeholders' expectations—including project management, financial acumen, communications skills and negotiation skills, to name a few. In the next five years these competencies will become part of the expected skill set of legal leaders. We will need to learn how to better prepare legal professionals to be able to rise to evolving challenges.

Cultural differences and region or country-specific business practices will become more important and have an increasing impact on legal services as business operations and ownership becomes more multipolar. Many corporate counsel have gained their experience at the head office in one country, and more need to gain cross-border experience to understand and address cultural differences and business practices that can create new risks. Future legal professionals must better adapt legal risk management and legal services to assist 21st century enterprises with hundreds or thousands of business partner relationships (JVs and strategic partnerships, suppliers, distributors, licensees, advisors, etc.) around the world.

Do you have a distinct view of the next 5-10 years in global legal services? Send it to me to be considered for Part 2 of this article: