

# Transforming the Legal Department into a Strategic Partner: Three Steps to Maximise Strategic Value

Legal departments today are under more pressure than ever to prove their worth, with 42% of Chief Legal Officers (CLOs) receiving cost-cutting directives in the past year alone. Demonstrating that legal is a true value centre – rather than just a cost centre destined for budget cuts – is no easy feat. Recasting legal as an indispensable strategic business partner requires coordinated change at multiple levels to identify, deliver, and measure the department’s strategic contribution.

This article outlines three actionable steps to help legal departments target and enhance their strategic value:


- 1. Build Cross-Functional Relationships:** build stronger relationships with internal clients to identify where legal can drive business impact.
- 2. Refine Delivery Processes:** optimise processes to embed strategic value in matter management.
- 3. Align KPIs with Business Objectives:** leverage metrics to demonstrate how legal contributes to the organisation’s goals.

By embracing these steps, legal departments can transform from a support function to a driving force, delivering measurable value and playing a pivotal role in helping to shape and deliver business strategy.

## Build Cross-Functional Relationships: Identify Strategic Value

Despite 70% of in-house legal professionals stating that better alignment with business units is their department’s top priority, only 52% of General Counsel report that the department’s day-to-day work is aligned with the broader business. The consequences of this misalignment are significant: Gartner reports that over-conservative guidance from the legal function leads to four times the standard number of projects being delayed.

To address this, lawyers need exposure to key corporate initiatives from an early stage. Currently, 47% of business leaders bring legal departments onto important corporate initiatives midway, after most strategic decisions have already been made. A potential solution is adopting a ‘champions’ model, where individual lawyers are embedded into assigned



business units, working closely with the unit to develop their partnership and gaining natural exposure to critical initiatives.

Through these partnerships, legal champions can identify key areas of strategic value within their assigned business units and use these insights to develop meaningful strategic objectives for the legal team. For instance, an R&D department might highlight the value of streamlining workflows for filing patents, trademarks, and copyrights, creating an opportunity for legal to deliver targeted process improvements.

Strategic value, however, extends beyond routine matters. As a strategic partner, the legal department can act as an enabler of growth. For example, when a Product team launches a new product, legal can provide strategic advice on navigating the launch whilst mitigating competition law concerns, ensuring the initiative's success. This kind of proactive, business-aligned advice shifts perceptions of legal from a back-office function to a strategic contributor.

By building cross-functional relationships, the legal department develops the insight and access needed to identify strategic opportunities and demonstrate its value as a trusted business partner.

## Ingrain Strategic Value: Optimising Processes

Beyond building relationships to enhance strategic value, legal departments must embed that value into their delivery processes – driving a long-term shift towards becoming a strategic partner.

The Legal Front Door (LFD) is a powerful solution for aligning legal services with business priorities. A LFD is a centralised digital platform that business units can use to refer work to the legal team. A standardised intake form within the LFD platform enables the legal team to capture valuable insights about the type, priority, and strategic value of incoming work. For example, for different types of legal matters (such as contract management) it could ask the following questions:

- 'How does this contract support your team's or the company's goals?'
- 'Is this tied to a high-priority or deliverable? If yes, explain briefly.'

— 'What is the value of the deal or project tied to this contract?'

By capturing critical business context through the right intake questions, the legal team can tailor its advice to help deliver strategic objectives, rather than addressing isolated legal queries. The LFD also helps effectively allocate legal work using automated triage rules, allowing high-priority requests to be automatically escalated to specialised teams and lower-value tasks to be handled via FAQs or playbooks hosted on the platform.

Insights into metrics like turnaround times, request volumes, and priority levels enable a centralised, data-driven approach to identifying high-impact areas. For example, if the LFD reveals an increase in environmental compliance requests from the Product Development team, this could signal an emerging sustainability initiative, constituting part of the business's broader strategy. Proactively addressing this, the legal department's senior team could discuss this initiative with the heads of Product Development to understand what it entails and strategically advise on the legal obstacles that need to be navigated, offering support on regulatory compliance, labelling requirements and IP protection for green-tech. Such proactive, data-driven engagement positions legal as a forward-thinking partner rather than a reactive function.

Whilst the LFD can enhance the efficiency of legal request handling, it also risks reducing the frequency of personal interactions that are valuable for uncovering broader insights and building stronger relationships. The optimal solution might be to blend a structured intake system for efficiency with opportunities for unstructured, traditional interactions, preserving a balance between streamlined processes and open communication. The LFD, for example, could be implemented only for certain workstreams, based on the needs of the legal team and business units.

By effectively leveraging the LFD, legal departments can uncover the underlying purpose behind each legal service request, positioning themselves as the 'department of how'— guiding business units through legal challenges to achieve strategic business objectives.

## Measure Value: Aligning KPIs with Strategic Objectives

Understanding which metrics legal teams should prioritise is reflected in the stark contrast between those that track strategic contributions and those that focus on costs. Only 41% of law departments tie legal metrics explicitly to business goals, compared to 87% that track total spend by law firm. This bias toward spend-based metrics overlooks opportunities to demonstrate legal's strategic value, with only 20% of departments tracking the quality of legal outcomes. By focusing primarily on costs, legal departments risk reinforcing the perception of being a cost centre rather than a strategic partner.

Metrics that demonstrate strategic value should align directly with the company's goals. For example, if expanding into new markets is a priority, legal could set a target to reduce time to compliance by 10% annually – both driving performance and linking legal's contributions to a critical business priority. Similarly, if the business aims to improve its industry ESG rating, a legal KPI target could be to ensure that 100% of supplier contracts include sustainability clauses by a specific deadline.

These examples highlight the broader challenge of selecting the right metrics: without a clear understanding of the company's priorities and how legal can support them, departments often default to metrics that are easy to track but which fail to demonstrate their value. To address this, legal teams can take a 'top-down' approach to designing legal metrics: identifying key business goals first, then legal's contribution to these, then the KPIs to quantify this contribution.

Other metrics for measuring value could include:

- The percentage of contracts aligned with strategic initiatives
- Risk mitigation metrics, such as the number of identified and resolved risks in major projects
- Percentage of deals or projects facilitated by legal, categorised by their contribution to business revenue

By aligning metrics with business objectives and focusing on strategic contributions rather than costs, legal departments can clearly demonstrate their value as proactive enablers of organisational success.

## Turning the Page on Legal as a Cost Centre – Redefining Legal Starts Here

With cost-cutting directives now hitting nearly half of all Chief Legal Officers, proving that legal drives value—not overhead—has become mission-critical. The three steps outlined here—building cross-functional relationships, refining delivery processes, and aligning KPIs with business objectives—form a clear roadmap to recast legal as a dynamic strategic partner rather than a department under constant budget threat. By embedding commercial context into every matter, forging closer ties with business units, and translating contributions into tangible, goal-aligned metrics, legal can unmistakably show its role in fueling growth, and accelerating critical business outcomes.

The message is clear: the legal department is not just a cost centre but a strategic force—one that can unlock opportunities, enable growth, and propel the organisation forward. Legal leaders who embrace this vision will redefine the role of legal as indispensable to the company's future.

To find out more about our In-House Essentials programme, please click [here](#)

### 1. Build Cross-Functional Relationships

#### Understand what 'strategic value' means to business units

- Embed lawyers in business units via a 'champions' model
- Increase exposure lawyers have to strategic initiatives
- Set objectives with business units to target strategic value

### 2. Optimise Processes

#### Integrate strategic value into the delivery process

- Tailor Legal Front Door to promote strategic value in service delivery
- Build self-service functionality to handle low value tasks
- Enable reporting and tracking through the software ecosystem

### 3. Measure Value

#### Design KPIs and metrics to measure strategic value

- Align metrics with business goals and shared objectives
- Expand metrics to be value-centric, rather than just cost-centric
- Harness metrics to demonstrate gains and continuous improvement



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