

# Key priorities for legal leaders

June 2026

We were delighted to be Gold Sponsors of the recent Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC) Europe Annual Conference, which brought together senior legal leaders from across the region to discuss the evolving role of the in-house function in an increasingly complex environment.

The opening keynote session was led by Jason L Brown, president and CEO of the global ACC, alongside Dave Hart, head of legal affairs for Europe and Latin America at Ericsson and president of the European chapter. Their discussion set the tone for the conference, focusing on the key priorities for general counsel (GCs) and chief legal officers (CLOs) today.

## Executive leadership in strategic decisions

GCs and CLOs are now part of core business decision-making. They are not only advisers but contributors to strategy, shaping direction at the highest level.

### 1. The key issues

#### Geopolitical risk is the primary concern

- Geopolitical risk has become the leading issue, especially in Europe, where it is seen as three times more important than in other regions.
- It is no longer a simple east versus west picture. The landscape is more complex and constantly shifting.
- Legal teams are now at the centre of organisational response during periods of instability.

#### Technology and AI cannot be ignored

- There is a clear risk of organisations falling behind if they do not keep pace with technology.
- AI is a critical area where GCs have an opportunity to adapt and lead change. This is not a future issue; it is current and evolving quickly.
- A recent CLO survey showed 63% reported no impact on staffing yet. This suggests change is coming, but many teams have not yet adjusted.

### 2. The pace of regulatory change

- Regulation is moving quickly and becoming more complex.
- GCs and CLOs must step up as trusted advisers to the C-suite, providing clear guidance and insight. This role is moving to the next level, beyond pure legal interpretation.

### 3. Crisis management (shaped by geopolitics)

Organisations need structured crisis management approaches for unforeseen events.

Key actions include:

- Developing a clear crisis playbook
- Defining how legal supports during a crisis
- Positioning legal at the centre as coordinator and project lead
- Regularly updating and refining the playbook

There is also value in practical testing:

- Bringing executive teams together
- Running scenario based exercises
- Learning from past events such as the COVID-19 period

### 4. The shift in the role of legal: From transactional to strategic

There is a move away from purely transactional relationships.

Legal teams are more effective when they:

- Engage early in business decisions
- Understand operations deeply
- Contribute to competitive advantage

GCs should be involved at the start of strategy, not only as a support function.

## 5. Rethinking risk

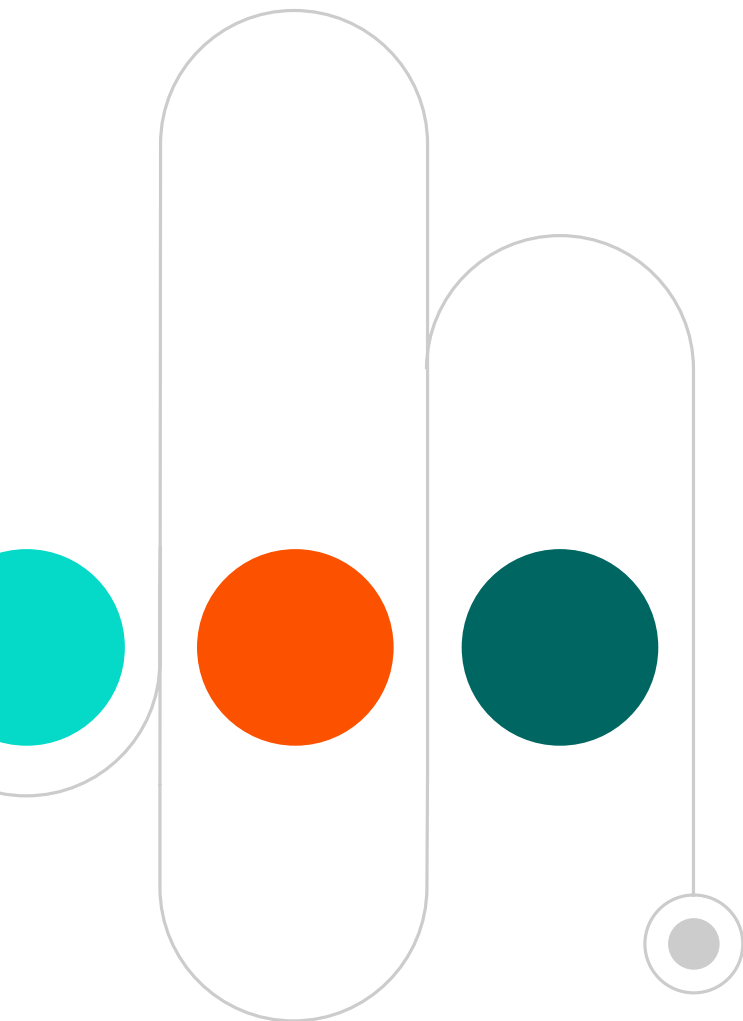
- Risk assessment must be more creative.
- It is not only about mitigation, but also about identifying opportunity and competitive advantage linked to risk decisions.

## 6. Addressing misconceptions

- The perception of legal as the function that says no must change.
- The GC should act as the conscience of the organisation, guiding decisions rather than blocking them.

## 7. Importance of peer networks

- The GC role can be a lonely one, particularly given the weight of geopolitical risk and executive responsibility.
- Building strong peer networks is essential. Sharing experience, learning from others and exchanging best practice helps to:
  - Drive innovation
  - Improve decision making
  - Strengthen resilience



## Summary

The role of the GC and CLO is expanding in both scope and influence.

Success will depend on the ability to:

- Navigate geopolitical complexity
- Lead on technology and AI
- Redefine partnerships with external counsel
- Act as a strategic voice at the centre of the business

Legal is no longer just there to protect the organisation. It is there to shape its future.

To find out how we can support you in navigating these evolving challenges, or to learn more about our global legal leadership programmes, events, and network, please do get in touch. We would welcome the opportunity to partner with you as you shape the future of your legal function and strengthen your impact within your business.

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