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## A new sheriff in legal services town

BY [AVA CHISLING](#) SUMMER 2017



They go by many names: Chief of staff; chief of legal operations, director of legal ops. Their tasks range from strategic planning and team building to litigation support, communications and financial management.

They're legal ops professionals. Still largely unknown in Canada, this new breed is shaking up how legal services are delivered to everyone from small business to Fortune 500 companies in the United States. And when it comes to organizational leadership, they're starting to elbow general counsel aside.

"General counsel do not have the training, skill sets, or time to manage complex organizations and perform the other tasks charged to them," says professor, author and legal future evangelist Kenneth Grady.

“The legal op brings new levels of experience, skills, training, and discipline to law organizations and their relationships with outside service providers. They do more than handle administrative tasks, like making sure the bills get paid on time. They are leaders in the law organizations. They have significant responsibilities.”

Consider what’s happening at Google. Mary O’Carroll, head of legal operations, has seen her department grow by more than ten-fold since 2008. Driven by maximizing value for their departments, clients are looking for quality, speed and price more than ever and asking themselves: Who should perform the work – lawyers or legal business professionals? Inside or external counsel? A law firm or alternative service provider?

“We have a lot more options to choose from today and we are increasing the demand for those alternatives,” she said by email. “In addition, our focus on efficiency is driving the market for legal technology. We are looking for more data, more transparency and more automation both internally and with the law firms or services providers we are working with.”

Legal ops professionals can play a significant role in helping companies sort through their options, Grady points out. “They have become the day-to-day point of contact for law firms. They play leading roles in the evaluation and selection of law firms. They develop and run requests for proposals. If there are business disputes between a law firm and law department, the legal op may handle the discussions with the general counsel stepping in only as a last resort,” he said by email. “It is not unusual for law firms to meet with a law department where the legal op runs the meeting and not general counsel.”