

Legal Ways of Working



Company Overview & The Issue at Hand

Legal departments focus on controlling costs, optimizing resources, and streamlining processes. In Rovensa Group's case, these goals were further complicated by rapid growth and a decentralized organization: 2,700 employees operating in over 90 countries, across 75 legal entities and 30 jurisdictions. Over the past six years, this sustainable agriculture firm has acquired 11 companies — each with its own methods, tools, and reliance on external counsel.

"Rovensa as it exists today, did not exist before 2017," explained General Counsel Sérgio Henriques. "It was a big company, but it grew a lot through acquisitions, and from 2017 to 2021, which is the start of the story, is when the legal team was created as such."

That said, when he joined the organization, the challenge was setting up a legal department for what he referred to as the "back-office team."

"The legal department should be for the entire organization," he explained, referencing the organization around 2021. "What we've called the award-winning project goes from, let's say, 2023 to 2025, and it's a mix of things."

Over those few short years, the 'things' referred to include the growth of a central legal team (reducing overall cost, an early win for the GC) and a collective drive toward understanding how the different parts of the business were working. According to Henriques, this fact — that businesses were divided into different business units — was the main point of focus for the team. "At some point, the group decided we'll have two business units, one, crop protection; another, BioSolutions," he said.

There were many ways of operating within the different businesses, and the company had engaged a large transformation team and consulting firms to address these challenges. "In that context, the project does not [yet] include legal," he said, noting that the team was a new function or operation within a new department, during a time when a common practice included outsourcing legal work. The question for Henriques then became can the legal team take on this opportunity and make one legal team a reality — because this massive task wasn't mandated by leadership. "The priority is always operations, sales."

That said, he charged ahead, considering the following:

"Can legal, one, entirely change the way it works and at the same time, address the needs of the business, as the business itself is also changing into one single way of, or close to one single way, of working?"

Understanding the challenges, the GC saw an opportunity for the team to become an active participant in the business. He continued, "this was the main challenge, but Legal had to make several decisions from the start — we had to concurrently address all of these different software projects, some with external providers, some with the internal IT team."



The Solution

Rovensa would go on to implement a lean, integrated legal operating model that centralized intake process, standardized workflows, and digitized document management and execution. The team, utilizing Jira Service Management, developed the Legal Support Hub.

"Jira Service Management is platform, a ticketing system, and it has its own workflows for each ticket," explained Henriques. "We had custom-made workflows and custom-made ways of interacting with internal clients within what was, at the time, the IT ticket system. We made it ours, so to say. Gave it a new coat of paint."

He continued, "At the same time, we also implemented the enterprise content management system," noting that his team now possessed a global tool which allowed them to manage documentation, and at the same time, it "implemented a connection of software that is very popular, DocuSign."

"At the end of the day, you had this very clear procedure where there is one intake point, which is the legal support hub, and then from there, either through procedure, or because we are telling you, you can do everything you need. So, we can either prepare you the document you need, review the document you need, answer your question, or put the document that has been prepared into the electronic signature — and it's already within the corporate database."

This added efficiency meant time and cost savings. Further, the legal team had its eye on outside counsel spend. "At the same time, we were very much focused on eliminating all the providers that we no longer needed," he said.

Outcomes



The in-house team, which grew from only Henriques in 2021 to include five lawyers and two legal specialists in 2024, now operates on common tools and rules, and this improved model has increased the team's ability to handle matters internally and reduced total legal spend despite FTE growth — improving speed, transparency, and compliance across regions.

That said, one of the most notable outcomes has been the increase in the volume and complexity of legal matters the team is now able to manage internally, without increasing total legal spend. By centralizing intake through the Legal Support Hub, integrating document management and electronic signature platforms and “right-sizing” external counsel, the legal team has been able to handle more work in-house, streamline processes, and reduce reliance on external providers. This has led to a reduction in duplicated effort, improved cycle times, and greater consistency in legal advice and document management across the group. Budget predictability has also improved substantially, and the implementation of group-wide recommended templates, clear signing authority rules, and robust knowledge management tools have ensured that legal documents are created, reviewed, signed, and archived in accordance with policy, improving overall compliance and governance.

The transformation has fostered collaboration within the organization and surprisingly encourage business units to engage with Legal sooner rather than later.

“What surprised me the most is how over the time, let’s say the project is completed and its ongoing, now a way of working,” began Henriques. “What happened, at the management level, is they started using Legal as a way of actually double-checking their own teams.” Calling it an additional check, the leaders who obviously know about the business, can now on their own evaluate whether or not a transaction makes sense, or if all the prerequisites have been met for their specific department, for example.

“Most of them have no conception of what legal is, what legal does, so it was an additional check that they could press onto their own teams — ‘what does Sergio say?’,” he said. “Before, that was only something they would use after disaster strikes — what has legal said and how did we mitigate this before?” More often than not, legal had weighed in, according to the GC, but now these types of questions are happening much earlier in the process. “That’s helpful for everyone.”

The GC shared another example involving a chief operating officer.

"He's the chief operating officer of one of the two business units of crop protection; he's always the good example of this. When I joined five years ago, my conversations with him always ended with a 'That's amazing, great, thank you for your time, always very helpful, now we will take it.' Meaning his legal team because at the time, he had his own legal team under his business unit, it was not a single, unified team yet, which again, created a lot of inconsistencies," explained Henriques. "Now he's the first one to push that burden, in a good sense, onto his own teams, actually making sure that the details and the legal specificities are addressed."



Departmental Success: Key Takeaways

The above amplifies the legal department's culture of collaboration. Providing legal training at a global scale, as well as tailored trainings for key points of contact in each region and function, has empowered business teams to engage with legal proactively and efficiently. This has not only increased the speed and quality of legal support but also reduced the workload for all involved.

Implementing a transformation like this one is bound to cause some discomfort to business units used to operating in a very different way.

"The whole concept of having a single, entry point for legal matters worried a lot of people," said Henriques, noting they were concerned with losing a personal connection, some feeling like Legal was adding an additional layer to the process. "They didn't understand that once you actually are within the platform, you know who is answering to you." That said, taking time to fully explain how the new system works, as well as the purpose behind the change to internal clients is critical.

"The keystone on our conversation with the business, was you need to understand that all that we're doing is making things more transparent, not the other way around," explained Henriques.



Advice & Demonstrating Value

For those looking to implement similar changes within their legal departments, perhaps adding more transparency to current ticketing processes, the GC advises a mix of soft and hard approaches.

"What I've learned, is we need to have a hard line in terms of procedures, but a very soft approach in terms of people," began Henriques. "Even if we might say, 'no, sorry, this needs to go according to the procedure,' finish that by saying, 'let me know if you want to talk to me for 10 minutes, for me to explain it to you.' Ease them in."

He went on to caution against being a hardline fundamental, advising to perhaps be a fundamentalist on the principles, but flexible with people and the business.

"In terms of your approach to the business, you need to be flexible," Henriques reiterated, acknowledging the fine line present as one can't bend procedures. That said, he advises helping them along the way. "Change is hard, so sometimes you have to give them your hand and go with them along the rules."

An Award-Winning Solution



When asked what made Rovensa Group's solution to managing the challenges facing its organization and legal team award-winning and to stand out, Henriques pointed to his team's focus on cost.

"We were always talking about cost. From day one, I knew exactly what's my budget, how much am I spending, how much do I expect to actually reduce it, and what are the strategies to do so. At the end of the day, we're talking about level of service; we're talking about mitigation of legal risk. But we were always able to translate it with estimates in terms of cost versus benefit," he continued. "And benefit for a legal department is 'okay, legal risk mitigation.' They [management] doesn't buy it, as such. You need to give them something else. You need to give them actual feedback from either internal clients, or you need to be able to summarize it in terms of something that they see as valuable — such as simplification or standardization over complex information and actions."

In other words, what made his teams efforts stand out was the way they communicated what was happening up and throughout the organization, focusing on efficiencies, cost savings, and the ability to report on data.

"Everything we wanted to do was quantifiable. We started in cost and level of service, and then we end in the facts that you can now do reports," he said. "After implementation, the flow of information that you can give upwards becomes more interesting, right? I think that's what has always made it stand out."