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# *An Opportunity for In-House to Reimagine and Reshape the Future of Work*

By [Suzanne Horne](#)

We share the [findings of our research](#), conducted in collaboration with *The Lawyer*, into the challenges faced by in-house teams as they help their businesses respond to the coronavirus pandemic, and the opportunities to embed some of the resulting best practices into the future of work.

Our [study](#) looks at the concerns and challenges resulting from the disruption, and the acceleration of existing trends at a pace that was unimaginable six months ago. It includes analysis of over 120 survey responses collected from U.K.-based General Counsel, Heads of Legal, and Chief Legal Officers, as well as interviews with senior lawyers at major organisations such as BT, Barclays, GSK, and Vodafone to name a few.

## **In-House Lawyers Play A Critical Strategic Role**

With governments continuing to introduce new measures to combat the virus, uncertainties around who works, how we work, and where we work are as prevalent as ever. In-house lawyers continue to be at the epicentre of the corporate reaction to new developments, announcements, and regulation.

Our research revealed that 71% of in-house lawyers have had greater involvement in strategic decision-making at board level due to the pandemic. This change may well become a permanent feature for businesses, with over half (54%) of respondents believing that they will continue to see greater involvement in board-level decision making, in the long term.

However, not all the findings were positive. Despite some respondents believing in-house legal teams will remain involved in strategic decisions (71%), there are also fears amongst over half (53%) that long-term remote working will make it harder for senior legal teams and the board to build a trusted relationship, with 37% believing it will be harder for legal teams to keep informed of all decisions.

## **Agile Business Strategies**

Two thirds (66%) of businesses accelerated or significantly altered their business strategy as a result of the crisis, with 42% accelerating plans that were already in place, 12% rethinking their strategy, and a further 12% gearing their strategy towards keeping the business alive. And we are not out of the woods yet—when asked what poses the biggest threat to their business over the next year, 77% of our respondents believe it will be the financial/economic downturn.

When looking at further changes the pandemic has triggered within businesses, 30% of respondents say that it has accelerated their businesses' plans to invest in technology, and 61% say it has changed their long-term approach to AI. In itself, this may result in more work to do for legal

professionals within the realm of cybersecurity and compliance, as automation becomes more prevalent throughout organisations.

### **Upsizing, Downsizing and Rebalancing**

Positively for legal teams, the study found that over a third (38%) of FTSE 250 in-house lawyers think that their team size will increase as a result of the pandemic, with the same number feeling that there will be no change. However, this is in contrast to their expectations for the broader business. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of respondents anticipated that the configuration of their business workforce would change—68% expect a decrease in total staff headcount, while 30% believe that automation will replace existing roles where possible.

There is good news relating to the diversity of teams—two thirds (64%) of our survey participants believe that remote working will present greater opportunities for women and people from diverse backgrounds in the legal profession. It is felt that the mass shift to remote working would help relieve childcare pressures, as well as make it more accessible to those with disability or mobility issues, and therefore help level the playing field in the industry.

### **The Future of Work is Now**

The future of work is upon us and in-house has the opportunity now to influence what it looks like for them. What practices implemented during the pandemic can be refined and retained? What outdated norms can we leave behind, and what new approaches to teaming, lawyering, and business partnering are on our wish list? This is a genuine opportunity to reimagine and reshape.

Our [report](#) on the findings serves as a roadmap to guide a discussion in your organisation or in-house team on these issues as we all navigate these turbulent waters. We hope you find it of interest.

Please do let us have your feedback—what resonates with you and your team? What appears to be counter-intuitive? What opportunities with you take to reimagine and reshape the future of work for your team? We'd love to hear from you—email [suzannehorne@paulhastings.com](mailto:suzannehorne@paulhastings.com)



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