

THE CHANGING ROLE OF GENERAL COUNSEL IN THE FINANCIAL SERVICES INDUSTRY

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The following article is based on findings from "[Financial Services at the Crossroads of Digital Transformation](#)," our collaborative report with Forbes Insights.

With stringent regulations, big data, emerging technology, and change at a breakneck pace becoming the new normal, the role of general counsel in the financial services industry has evolved in kind. Now even broader and more demanding, the job has gained in significance and positioned general counsel as an essential player in virtually all aspects of an organization. In a recent survey of legal executives in the financial services industry, nearly all respondents — 93% expect to have to deal with issues that will be new to them over the next three years.

Most believe that knowledge of regulatory compliance, data protection, and privacy expertise will be the most valued skills needed over the next three years, with knowledge of payment systems ranking alongside more traditional areas such as consumer class actions and fraud prevention. In addition to legal issues, general counsel must also be well versed in industry knowledge, predictive thinking, and an understanding of the disruptive forces affecting the financial services industry.

Unsurprisingly, the role of general counsel is not impervious to the tidal wave of emerging technology. Tech savviness is now viewed as a must-have skill, with more than three-quarters of respondents saying their legal function uses digital technologies to a significant or very significant degree.

Despite the difficulty of staying competitive in an age of disruption, new challenges in financial services overall have placed a greater focus on legal issues, elevating the role of general counsel. With some of the industry's most transformative trends posing serious legal questions and risks — particularly those related to regulatory compliance — top executives will need general counsel seated at the decision-making table and fully aligned with all areas of the organization.

K&L Gates has partnered with Forbes Insights again to conduct an in-depth study on how technological disruption and an ever-changing regulatory environment are impacting executives in the financial services industry, and what challenges and opportunities those trends present. Drawn from a detailed survey of 200 financial and legal executives, the report addresses topics including the impact of digital transformation, competition from non-traditional companies like FinTechs, forces of risk, and future outlooks on the industry.

[Download the report >](#)

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