AI Contract Review Strategies

Insights from legal tech experts on how they use AI for faster contract review

EY Law

ASK Q

ODI Law

simonsen vogtwiig

Jurimesh

When I started Jurimesh, I had one clear observation: in M&A, legal teams sit on a wealth of knowledge that slips too often through the cracks. Senior lawyers leave, years of deal experience walk out the door, and every new team rebuilds the same wheel. Meanwhile, technology is advancing faster than most firms can keep up.

Playbooks are the bridge. They capture expertise, standardize review practices, and create a foundation for AI to deliver meaningful results. Without them, even the most advanced tech is just noise.

This paper explores how leading legal tech experts are rethinking contract review within legal due diligence, turning institutional knowledge into scalable assets. You will hear from pioneers like Ask Q, Simonsen Vogt Wiig, ODI Law, and EY Law Finland, each showing concrete ways to capture knowledge and make AI contract review work in practice.

Our mission at Jurimesh is to make legal due diligence smarter, faster, and more reliable. That requires two things: structured knowledge and technology that adapts to lawyers, not the other way around. The firms that invest in these foundations today will own the future of dealmaking.

Let’s dive in.

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CEO & Founder

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What's a playbook?

One More Thing...

If the term “contract playbook” is new to you, think of it as the written version of what you already do in every deal. When you review a shareholders’ agreement, you know which clauses always deserve a second look, what thresholds are acceptable, and what triggers a red flag. A playbook simply takes that judgment out of your head and puts it on paper.

It is a structured guide for reviewing a specific contract type. Instead of just saying “check termination rights” or “look at warranties,” it explains why those clauses matter, what the standard position is, and when to escalate. Because it captures real practice, a playbook becomes a living document that evolves with each transaction.

In short, a contract playbook is your deal experience made explicit. It allows anyone on the team, or even AI tools, to apply the same standards with consistency.

Now that you know what playbooks are, let’s hear from the people putting them to work.

Enjoy the read.

Rémy Bonnafé

CEO & Founder

At Ask Q, knowledge is seen as a legal team's most valuable asset, yet, as CEO Rémy points out, many teams are still losing it daily. "It's quite amazing when you think about it: knowledge is the main asset for legal teams, yet there are often very few processes or structures in place to capture and share it," he says. "When senior lawyers leave, years of expertise often walk out the door."

Ask Q was founded during the pandemic, with remote work as the norm. That reality shaped the company's culture. "From day one, we decided that documenting knowledge was not optional, it was part of our DNA," Rémy says. "We built everything into Notion: legal expertise, project and client-specific details, and even basic workflows like how to request holidays or understand our compensation structure. New colleagues can join and instantly see the full story of Ask Q since its creation."

This culture-first approach has given Ask Q a unique vantage point on one of today's hottest topics in legal services: playbooks for contract review and due diligence.

Why Playbooks Matter More Than Ever

Playbooks are structured manuals that guide legal teams through contract review, flagging critical clauses, standard comments, and deal-specific risks. They have existed for years, but until recently, they were often long, static Word documents used only for high-volume contract types.

With the arrival of large language models (LLMs) and generative AI, their relevance has skyrocketed.

"AI is powerful, but it's not magic."

Rémy says. "If you want consistent, high-quality contract reviews, you can't just throw a contract at ChatGPT. You need to 'teach' the AI what you expect. That's where playbooks come in."

When integrated with AI systems, playbooks create a scalable framework:

- Faster, more consistent reviews
- Reduced human error
- The ability to scale contract work across teams

Yet building an effective playbook is not simply a matter of uploading a contract template and letting AI learn. "That's a common misconception," Rémy explains. "Templates only show what you want to see, not what you want to avoid. If your NDA template doesn't include exclusivity clauses, an AI trained on it won't flag them. Human expertise is essential to define those guardrails."

Bridging Legal Expertise and Technology

Ask Q's strength lies in its dual focus: deep legal knowledge combined with a dedicated legal operations and technology team. "We're one of the few service providers that not only knows the law but also understands how to turn that expertise into scalable AI-driven workflows," Rémy says.

The Contracts Lab, a dedicated unit at Ask Q, works with clients to develop and implement these playbooks. "We're not just reviewing contracts for clients," Rémy adds. "We're helping them codify their expertise so their teams and AI systems can work faster and smarter. Leading general counsels and heads of legal now recognize that playbooks are the foundation of the next generation of legal service delivery."

Rémy Bonnafé CEO & Founder

AI's Role in M&A and Due Diligence

Reflecting on his time as an M&A lawyer, Rémy says technology is reshaping how deals are scoped and executed. "Traditionally, due diligence was a red-flag exercise focused only on material issues. Why? Because human labor is expensive. AI changes that equation. Suddenly, it's realistic to review far more data, flag subtle risks, and deliver more value."

This opens the door to structured, data-driven due diligence: findings could feed directly into a buyer's systems rather than remain trapped in static Word reports. "That's a game-changer," Rémy says. "But it requires more than just technology. Clients need to expect more from their law firms, and law firms need to rethink how they package and deliver services."

The Risks Behind the Opportunity

Rémy is quick to point out the risks. "AI is powerful, but it can be tricked. Imagine someone hiding text by making it white on a white background, an AI would read that, but a human wouldn't see it. These are new security challenges we must address as we embed AI in workflows."

There is also a cultural challenge. "Lawyers are trained for perfection and immediate results, which makes it hard to invest time in building something like a playbook that pays off later," Rémy notes. "But those who make the investment now will have a massive competitive advantage."

Practical Advice for Firms

For firms looking to get started, Rémy offers a pragmatic roadmap:

1. Don't outsource playbook creation entirely to AI, invest time and expertise.
2. Gather existing materials and involve senior lawyers to capture tacit knowledge.
3. Test playbooks on previous contracts, refine them, and keep them updated.
4. Use AI prompts carefully; they must reflect nuance and context.
5. Treat playbooks as living documents, not one-time projects.

Crucially, Rémy stresses leadership involvement. "If building playbooks is left to juniors or support lawyers, it won't gain traction. You need leadership buy-in. In a law firm, that means a partner leading the initiative; in-house, it's the GC or head of legal."

A Human-Centered Future

Despite AI's advances, Rémy is clear about one thing: "Technology will take over repetitive work, but high-stakes negotiations and client advisory will remain human.

> "The future lawyer isn't replaced by AI. They're augmented by it."

This vision aligns with Ask Q's ethos: knowledge captured, codified, and enhanced by technology, not lost in email threads or individual memory. As Rémy puts it: "We're building the foundations for a world where legal expertise is scalable, structured, and accessible, not just for AI, but for every lawyer who joins the team tomorrow."

EY Law

Piia Madissoo

Legal Transform & Operate Lead

The Foundation Problem: Why Legal Teams Must Build Before They Buy

Working at EY Law Finland, Piia Madissoo has witnessed the same pattern across countless organizations: legal teams feel the need to rush to implement cutting-edge AI solutions while their foundational knowledge management remains "underdeveloped." As Legal Transform & Operate Lead, Piia brings a unique dual perspective: eight years at a Finnish listed company, the last couple of which as one of Finland's first full-time in-house legal operations professionals, combined with her current role helping clients navigate digital transformation.

"I saw a Bill Gates quote recently that resonated deeply with my work," Piia reflects.

“Gates said, ‘Automation applied to an inefficient operation will magnify the inefficiency.’ In the era of AI this may not be entirely true anymore, but slapping tech on dysfunctional legal processes is still like putting a band-aid on a gaping wound.”

The Knowledge Crisis Hiding in Plain Sight

Piia's assessment of current knowledge documentation practices is stark. "Unfortunately, it's very underwhelming at this point," she says. "Many senior employees still harvest a huge chunk of their professional knowledge between their ears, which creates significant risk once that senior population starts exiting the workforce."

This risk is particularly acute in markets like Finland, where Piia observes that senior employees often build decades-long careers at single organizations. "They have decades of company knowledge and industry knowledge that they take completely for granted and might not even deem something that necessarily needs to be documented. But once they retire, they leave a huge hole behind."

The problem extends beyond individual knowledge loss. While some organizations maintain structured regulatory mapping or assignment tracking systems, the intricate decision-making frameworks that guide contract review and risk assessment often remain almost entirely undocumented.

Knowledge Transfer That Works

Drawing from her own career transition experience, Piia advocates for structured knowledge transfer processes. "A better approach might be to have a handoff period," she explains. "If you know someone will replace a departing expert, create an overlap of a month or even two. The person retiring gets to wind down while their replacement gets to ask all the questions."

When Piia transitioned from legal advisory to legal operations, her employer provided this luxury, rare in most organizations. "I got to book all the meetings with people my successor needed to know, explain all the documents and processes. No one can absorb that type of information in a week but having that time for questions and re-explanations made all the difference."

This approach leverages a critical insight: newcomers ask different questions than departing experts anticipate. "A person with fresh eyes is braver in asking questions, and that's when you realize things that seem self-evident actually aren't."

Building Systematic Knowledge

Individual handoffs address immediate knowledge transfer, but Piia emphasizes that systematic documentation requires organizational commitment. "That decision needs to come from higher up," she notes. "The information on what needs to be documented can come from frontline workers, but the commitment to document and follow through needs leadership backing."

This reflects Piia's expertise in change management theory, particularly what she calls the "transtheoretical model of behavior change." Knowledge documentation represents habit formation that requires not just initial commitment but ongoing reinforcement. "You not only need acknowledgment that this must be done, but also follow-up and encouragement. In the beginning especially, manage it like a project, not just a mandate."

The challenge is predictable: operational work always takes precedence. "Especially in the in-house world, teams are drowning in everyday operations. Everything that's not immediate operational work sinks to the back burner because operations are where the money comes from."

The AI Integration Reality

Piia's perspective on AI integration reflects both opportunity and pragmatism. Her team regularly uses AI in various parts of workflows and continues improving their implementation.

> "If you can leverage AI-based tools, especially in M&A, it increases efficiency hugely,"

she observes.

However, her experience consulting with organizations reveals a fundamental misunderstanding about AI requirements. The 2025 EY Law General Counsel Study, which surveyed 1,000 general counsels and chief legal officers globally, found that lack of structured data was one of the primary hindrances to AI adoption. "Playbooks represent structured data in the legal context," Piia explains. "With large language models able to process written information rather than requiring pure data formats, well-structured playbooks provide sufficient input for AI systems."

The key insight: AI tools require more than contract templates. For example, in the M&A context, playbooks could capture risk identification frameworks, materiality thresholds, and deal-specific considerations that enable AI systems to flag relevant issues rather than simply compare against ideal positions.

Practical Implementation Framework

Practical Implementation Framework
For organizations ready to begin, Piia offers pragmatic guidance rooted in her consulting experience:

- **Leadership Selection**: "It's more a personality thing than a role thing. Someone who feels they can tackle this and has the drive to do it." The role requires social skills to motivate participation and organizational abilities to manage complex information gathering.
- **Process Design**: Start with existing materials and senior expertise. External service providers can help explore what is possible but do recognize that external consultants have limitations. "Consultants don't have years of information within the organization. Sometimes insiders look at consultant work and see the fifteenth thing missing because context was lost – or never sufficiently provided."
- **Change Management**: Make knowledge capture a daily habit, not a one-time documentation push.

A Foundation-First Future

Despite AI's transformative potential, Piia maintains that technological success depends on fundamental preparation.

> "You need to have your fundamentals in place, and playbooks are one of them"

It's better to do them before you invest in technology because it saves money and increases your likelihood of implementation success."

This philosophy reflects her broader approach to legal transformation: technology amplifies existing capabilities rather than replacing foundational knowledge work. For legal teams, this means the choice isn't between human expertise and AI efficiency, it is between structured, scalable knowledge systems and continued reliance on undocumented individual expertise.

As Piia concludes, "Technology doesn't fix underlying issues. The organizations that succeed with AI will be those that built solid knowledge foundations first."

Gjorgji Georgievski

Partner

From Precedents to Playbooks: ODI Law's Vision for Smarter Due Diligence

At ODI Law, knowledge management has long been a cornerstone of M&A work. The firm maintains a robust Document Management System (DMS) housing due diligence reports, precedents, templates, and other transactional materials. "Our DMS ensures continuity and accessibility across teams," says Gjorgji, a senior member of ODI Law's corporate practice. "But it's more of a record of what we've done than a true knowledge base. Best practices remain embedded in individual matters rather than distilled into structured guidance."

That reliance on individual expertise becomes most visible when colleagues leave. "We reassign matters, conduct handovers, and ensure all documentation is saved, but the process is still heavily dependent on direct communication," Gjorgji admits. Consistency across teams is maintained through senior lawyer oversight and informal sharing of precedents, yet the system is resource-intensive. "Training juniors takes time, and even with AI tools, reviews often require heavy supervision. Scaling multiple due diligence reviews simultaneously is challenging."

The Promise of Playbooks

Playbooks, structured guides that capture risks, standard responses, and institutional knowledge, offer a way forward. "We already use playbooks for individual contract reviews, but not yet for due diligence," says Gjorgji. "An ideal playbook would combine clause guidance, negotiation strategy, sector-specific notes, and market-standard fallbacks. It would capture the insights that make reviews commercially relevant, not just technically correct."

The value of this approach is clear. Playbooks codify tacit expertise, providing junior lawyers with a framework for decision-making while reducing the need for constant oversight. "The most useful content to capture isn't just black-letter law; it's the patterns, risk triggers, and practical negotiating insights that we develop deal after deal," Gjorgji explains.

AI as a Partner, Not a Replacement

Like many leading firms, ODI Law sees AI as a game-changer for M&A work.

> "AI already performs a strong first-pass review"

says Gjorgji. "As the technology matures, its output will be nearly indistinguishable from a seasoned lawyer's initial review. That doesn't mean lawyers are obsolete; it means we get to focus on interpreting context, assessing materiality, and giving strategic advice."

However, AI's potential is only unlocked with structured data. "If you don't provide a clear risk framework, AI won't deliver consistent, reliable results," Gjorgji notes. Playbooks serve as that foundation, defining the standards and tolerances that AI systems need to mirror.

The opportunities are significant: faster reviews, greater consistency, and scalable training. But so are the risks. "There's the danger of over-reliance, the constant work required to keep playbooks market-relevant, and the risk of losing nuance in junior training if they rely too much on automation," Gjorgji warns.

Building a Culture of Standardization

Asked where ODI Law would start, Gjorgji points to high-volume, high-impact agreements. “NDAs, service agreements, and software licenses appear in nearly every deal. Standardizing their review first would deliver quick wins and a template for future playbooks.”

The real obstacle, however, is cultural. “Lawyers are used to working from personal experience. Getting them to invest time in building and maintaining playbooks requires buy-in from the top,” Gjorgji says. “It can’t be delegated away. Senior transactional lawyers need to champion this initiative, supported by innovation teams.”

Embedding playbooks into daily workflows is key. “If they exist as static documents, they’ll be ignored. We need integration into tools, processes, and deal teams so playbooks become part of how we work.”

A Strategic Imperative

For ODI Law, the playbook discussion isn’t just about efficiency. It’s about future-proofing. “The firms that succeed in this next phase of legal work will be those that

“treat knowledge as an asset, not an afterthought”

Gjorgji says. “AI will amplify what we already know, but only if we structure and share that knowledge first. Playbooks are the bridge between today’s deal practices and tomorrow’s AI-driven legal services.”

Peter van Dam

Chief Digital Officer

The CDO's Dilemma: Building Legal Playbooks That Lawyers Actually Use

For Chief Digital Officers at law firms, the potential of legal playbooks often clashes with a persistent challenge: lawyers don't always use the tools chosen for them. Peter, CDO at the Nordic firm Simonsen Vogt Wiig, has experienced this tension firsthand over years of trying to systematize lawyers' daily work and manage legal knowledge.

"We've made many attempts at knowledge management," Peter reflects. "We started with databases where documents were stored by practice area, then moved to document automation about six years ago. But the same core problem remains: you need lawyers willing to change their routines and quickly see efficiency gains. On the other end, you need resources to maintain the system, whether it's a knowledge database or a set of templates and automation rules."

From Automation to "Semi-Finished Products"

Peter's experience has shown that complex transactions rarely lend themselves to easy standardization. "Take M&A deals. SPAs or DD reports are simply too large and variable for standard playbooks," he notes. This realization has shaped his vision for AI-enhanced playbooks as "semi-finished products."

"You might get 50 to 70 percent of a document from your playbook, maybe 80 percent, and then refine it manually or, better, with AI tools to adjust clauses and text because each case is unique," he explains. "Our lawyers still need to apply their judgment and add their final touch."

The Integration Challenge

As CDO, Peter faces ongoing pressure to balance the use of specialized technology with the need for seamless platform integration. He uses an analogy: "Combining a washer and dryer works, but it falls apart when you try to combine a toaster, fondue set, and coffee machine into one device."

This challenge also extends to cost allocation. Large data rooms can cost tens of thousands of euros, depending on duration, number of users, documents, and storage size, requiring clear agreement about who pays. "When you open a data room, you must have a clear strategy around the pricing model. Fixed pricing for standard legal services also demands cost focus for digital tools," Peter says. "Agree on these things in advance, get that signature, because there's always haggling afterwards. Depreciation is not unheard of."

Coordination Over Automation

As AI tools lower the barriers to providing legal advice, coordinating expertise becomes more critical. "You don't want someone without the necessary legal expertise thinking: 'I can handle that myself; it's not that difficult'. That's the risk," Peter notes. "With well-tuned AI, knowledge databases, and playbooks, it becomes too easy to give advice without having consulted the right expert."

Peter emphasizes that consistency requires active coordination, not just standardized tools. "Every week, there is a meeting to discuss cross-border matters and collaboration across practice areas, and the same happens within teams."becomes too easy to give advice without having consulted the right expert."

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Implementation: The Make-or-Break Factor

For Peter, successful playbook adoption depends on understanding lawyers' real workflows. This realization is pushing him toward legal design thinking. "How do you ensure playbooks fit the way lawyers actually work? Often, we assume, 'It's simple; the lawyer will get it,' but the tool doesn't always match their actual process."

Small details make a big difference: "It could be as minor as the button being on the left instead of the right, or the menu not being integrated in Word or Teams. Some lawyers want to start with an example document, others with a blank one, and another group prefers a playbook that guides them to a draft."

> "If tools don't align with actual workflows, adoption rates suffer."

"This challenge has always existed; we've just called it different things: in the 90s, process; in the 2000s, knowledge management; in the 2010's workflows and document automation; and now in the 2020s we have gone to playbooks; and now, agents. If the tool doesn't fit, it doesn't matter what you call it. It won't be used, even if you buy firm-wide licenses."

The Competitive Paradox

Although Peter believes most firms will develop similar playbooks for standard documents, competition prevents real knowledge sharing. Even for routine processes, firms "reinvent the wheel" because optimizing internal processes is viewed as a key differentiator and driver of competitive advantage.

A Pragmatic Future

Peter's vision for legal playbooks is rooted in practicality: they should deliver a solid draft for lawyers to refine, not aim for full automation. For CDOs navigating legal technology, his message is clear: no tool matters if it's not adopted. Success depends on implementation and ensuring tools fit lawyers' workflows, delivering measurable value to both fee earners and clients.

Closing Thoughts

The conversations in this paper show a clear pattern: knowledge is the foundation of great legal work, but too often it stays locked in individual minds or static documents. Playbooks change that. They capture expertise, make expectations explicit, and create the structure AI needs to deliver real value.

Jurimesh exists to bring that vision to life. We help teams build playbooks that reflect their way of working and then give them the tools to apply those playbooks across every deal. The result is simple: create once, review infinite.

For law firms and deal teams, this isn't just about speed. It's about making expertise scalable, protecting institutional knowledge, and raising the quality of every review. The firms that take this step today will not just keep up with change, they will define how deals are done tomorrow.

Want to see how playbooks could work for your team?
Get in touch with us to explore the possibilities.

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