

Legal Ops Professionals:  
**2021 Demographic  
Study of Leading  
Legal Operations  
Teams**

# Introduction

The field of legal operations is rapidly gaining deep traction among corporate law departments. According to the 2021 ACC Chief Legal Officers Survey, 61% of legal departments now have at least one legal operations staff member, representing a nearly 40 point increase from 2015.<sup>1</sup>

Broadly speaking, legal operations professionals are known for bringing increased efficiency to law departments, often through financial management. With legal operations (also known as “legal ops”) becoming an integral part of many law departments, we wanted to gain a deeper understanding of who these skilled professionals are.

Using publicly available data, we reviewed information from 205 legal operations professionals at 34 major corporations, examining issues such as gender, educational background, professional attainment, and industry.

When deciding which professionals to review for this report, we opted to include those at companies that are well known for their legal operations leadership. Our sample set therefore includes legal operations personnel from such tech giants as Google, Facebook, Apple, and Microsoft, as well as other Fortune 500 companies like Berkshire Hathaway, JPMorgan Chase, and UnitedHealth Group, among many others.

This report offers a demographic snapshot of legal operations professionals at some of the top companies in the United States, shedding light on the backgrounds and career paths among people at the heart of this cutting-edge field.

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## Highlights

- The average legal operations team includes **six** personnel
- The companies with the largest legal ops teams are **Abbott Laboratories, Amazon, Google, Travelers, JPMorgan Chase, Netflix, and Facebook**
- Women represent **64%** of all professionals in our dataset
- However, **53%** of directors and department heads are men
- **Men** have a slightly longer median tenure than women
- The highest degree obtained by most legal ops professionals is a **bachelor's degree**
- Only **17%** of legal ops professionals hold JDs
- **76%** of male legal ops personnel have no legal education, compared to **61%** of women
- The most experienced legal ops professionals work in the **healthcare and life sciences/ pharmaceutical** industries
- Women dominate the technology industry, representing **74%** of legal ops professionals
- Men are well-represented in the insurance field, comprising **50%** of legal ops professionals in that industry

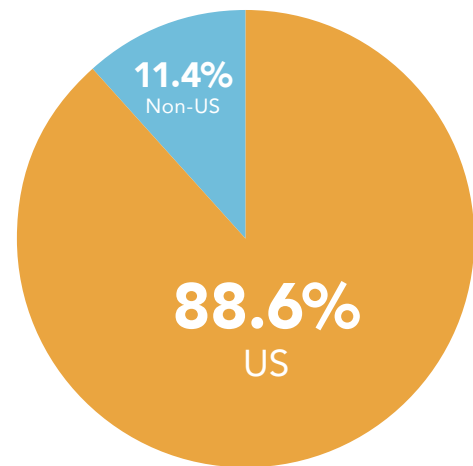
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.acc.com/clo2021>

# Key Research Findings

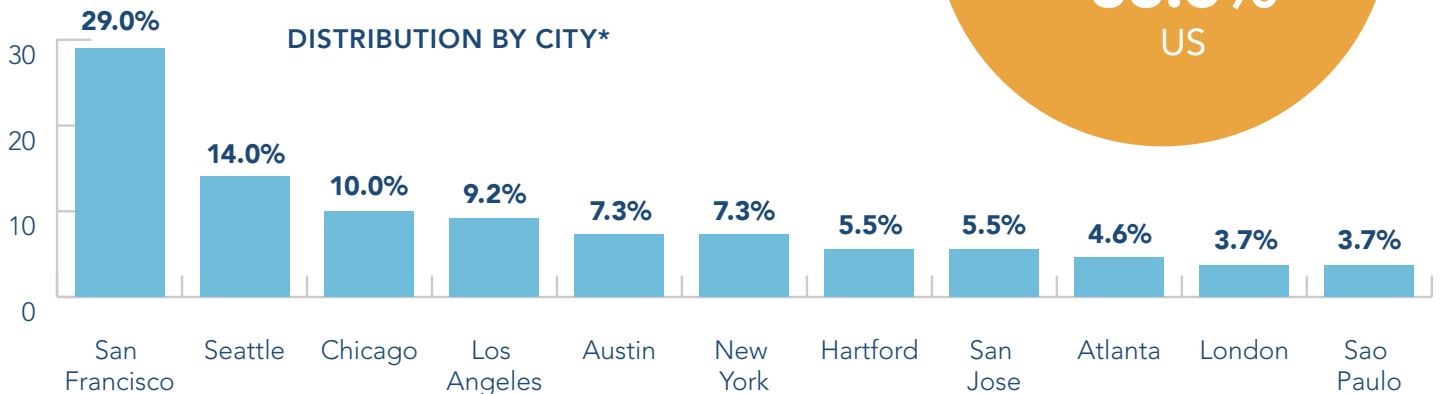
## Geography

Only 11% of legal ops personnel at these companies work in countries outside the United States. The personnel in our dataset are concentrated in major U.S. cities, including San Francisco, Seattle, Chicago, and Los Angeles. This suggests that companies are keeping their legal operations teams in urban centers, rather than in regions with a lower cost of living.

LOCATIONS OF LEGAL OPERATIONS PERSONNEL (US VS NON-US)



DISTRIBUTION BY CITY\*

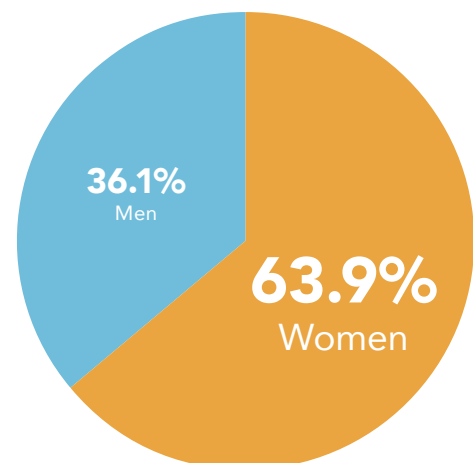


\*Includes only cities with at least 4 legal ops professionals.

## Gender

Women make up nearly 64% of the legal operations personnel we reviewed. This is almost precisely the inverse of the current gender split among lawyers, who are 63% male and 37% female, according to the American Bar Association.<sup>2</sup>

GENDER BREAKDOWN OF LEGAL OPS PROFESSIONALS



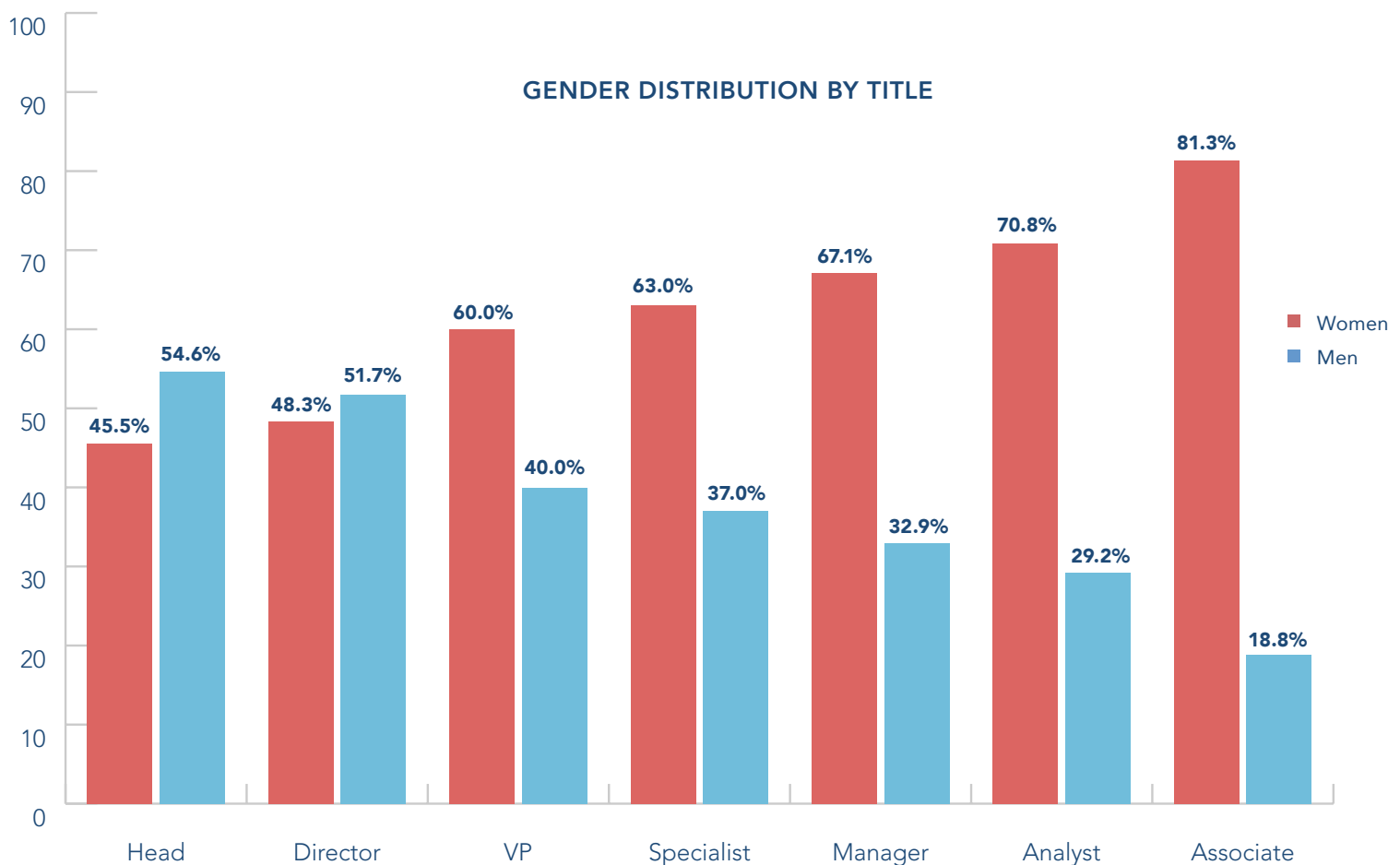
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/news/2021/0721/polp.pdf>

# Key Research Findings

Many of these women serve in management roles; for example, women represent 60% of VPs and 67% of managers. However, even though men represent just 36% of the personnel in our study, they make up 53% of the professionals serving as directors and department heads.

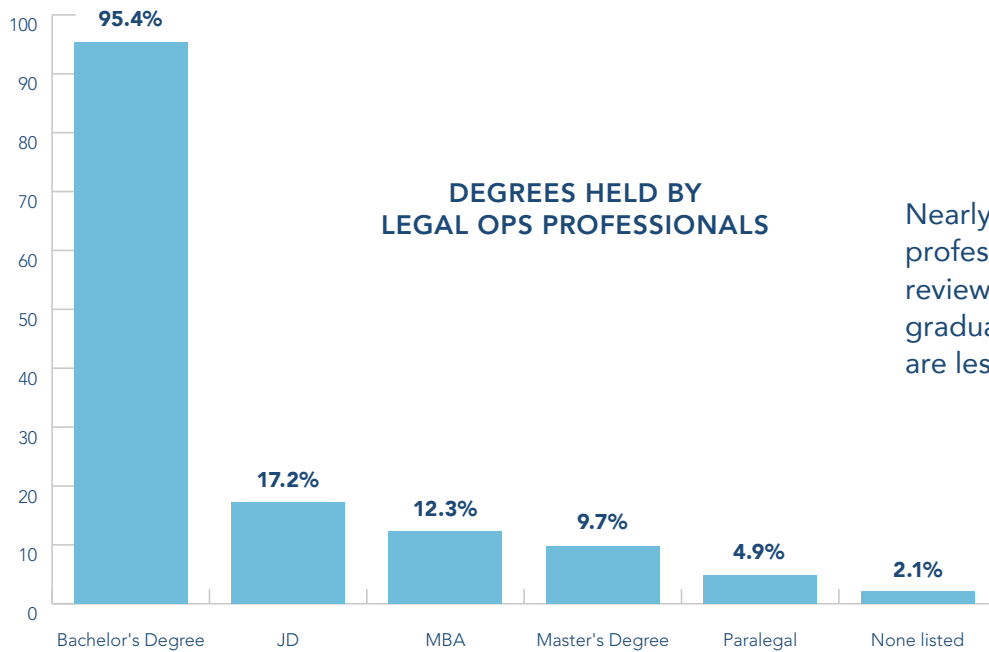
This suggests that the field of legal operations, like the legal industry and corporate America as a whole, has yet to reach gender parity when it comes to higher-ranking legal operations roles.

That said, this field is still young, and such disparities may be addressed as diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives move to the forefront of corporate agendas. In fact, the 2021 State of the Industry survey by the Corporate Legal Operations Consortium (CLOC) cited implementing a diversity and inclusion program as the top-ranked priority among legal departments.<sup>3</sup>



# Key Research Findings

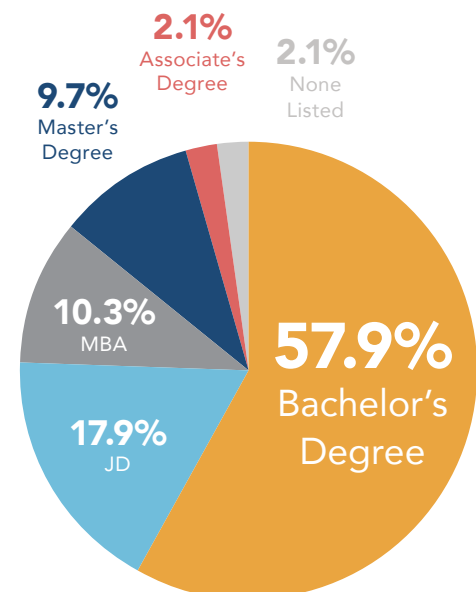
## Education



Nearly all (95%) of the legal operations professionals whose backgrounds we reviewed have a college degree, but post-graduate degrees, including law degrees, are less common.

Note: Numbers total more than 100% because individuals may hold more than one degree.

### HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION AMONG LEGAL OPS PROFESSIONALS



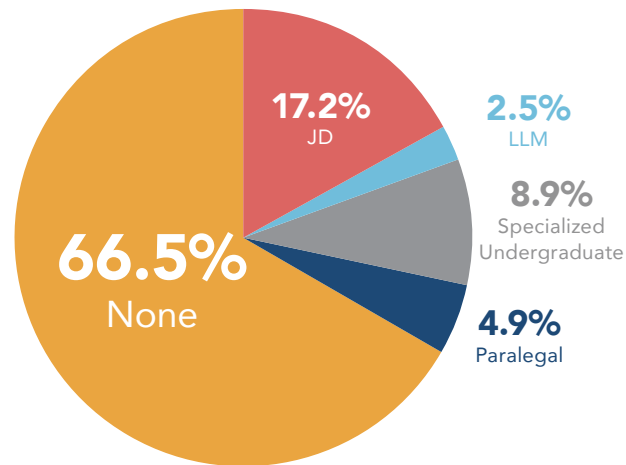
A bachelor's degree is the highest level of education obtained by 58% of legal ops professionals, while just 17% of professionals have JDs, 12% have MBAs, and 10% have other master's degrees.

# Key Research Findings

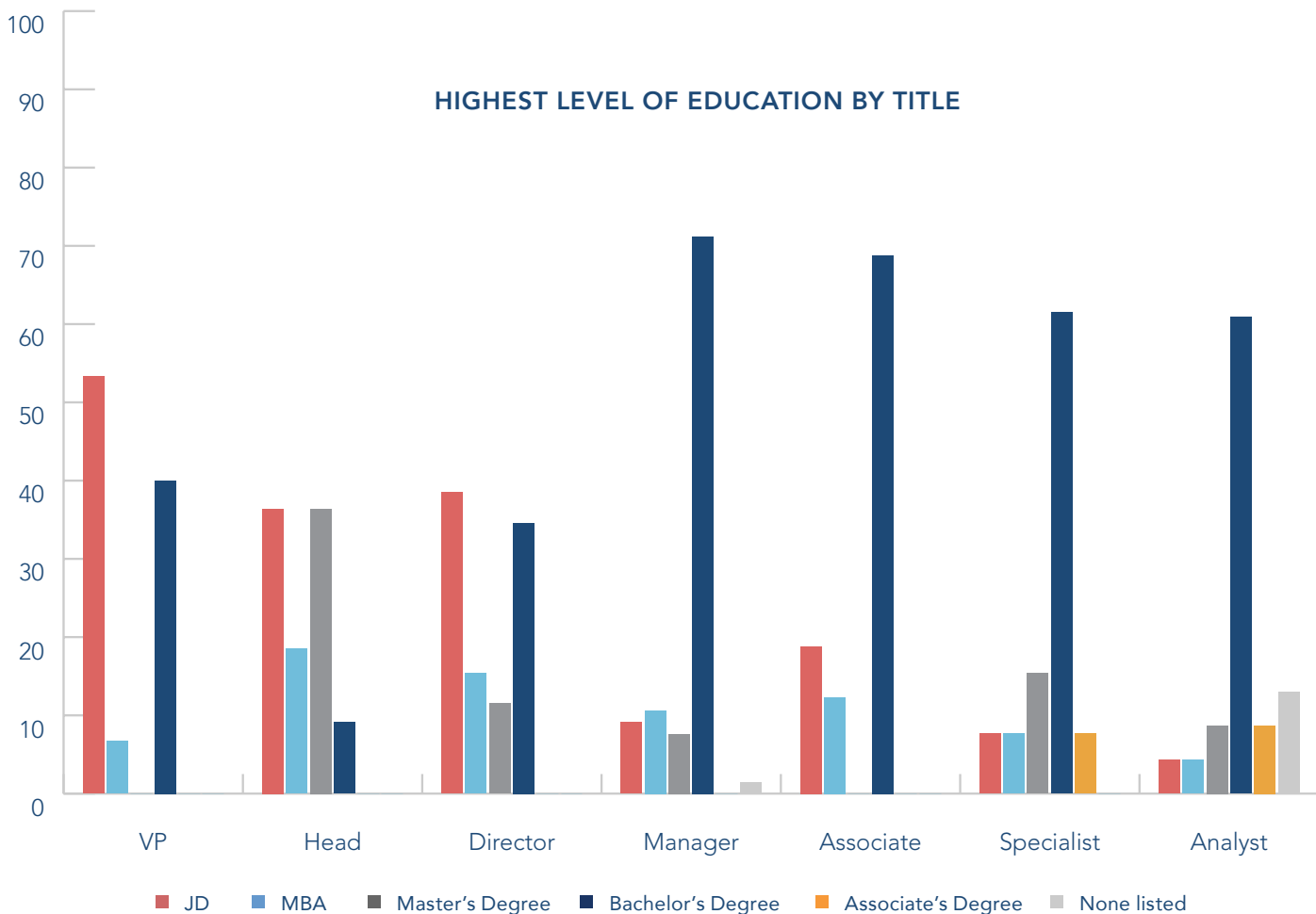
Overall, two-thirds (67%) of legal ops personnel don't have any legal education, indicating that a formal legal education is not a prerequisite for working in the legal operations field. For the purposes of this report, "legal education" refers to any type of education involving the law, including a JD, LLM, specialized undergraduate degree (e.g., B.A. in legal studies or pre-law), and paralegal certification.

Notably, however, department heads, directors, and VPs often hold JDs, suggesting that a legal degree is useful for obtaining higher-level legal ops positions.

HIGHEST LEVEL OF LEGAL EDUCATION



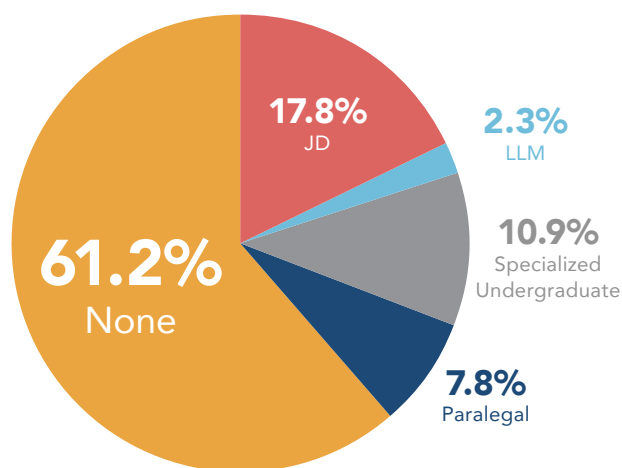
HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION BY TITLE



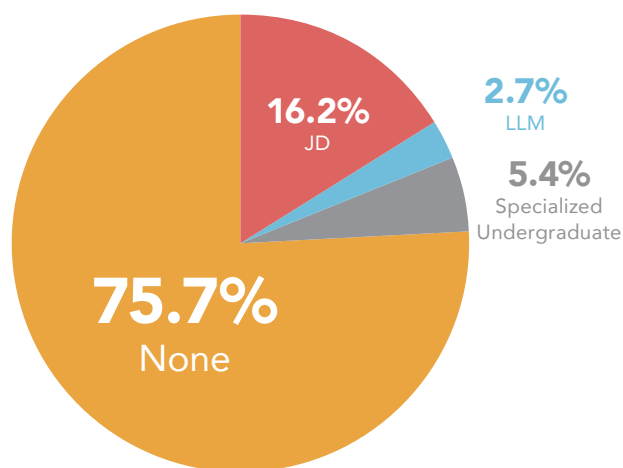
# Key Research Findings

According to our research, women in this field are more likely to have some kind of legal education than men: 76% of male legal ops personnel have no legal education, while only 61% of female legal ops personnel don't have any legal education. Although slightly more women than men have JDs (18% vs 16%), the biggest difference is in the proportion of women with a paralegal education or undergraduate degree in law.

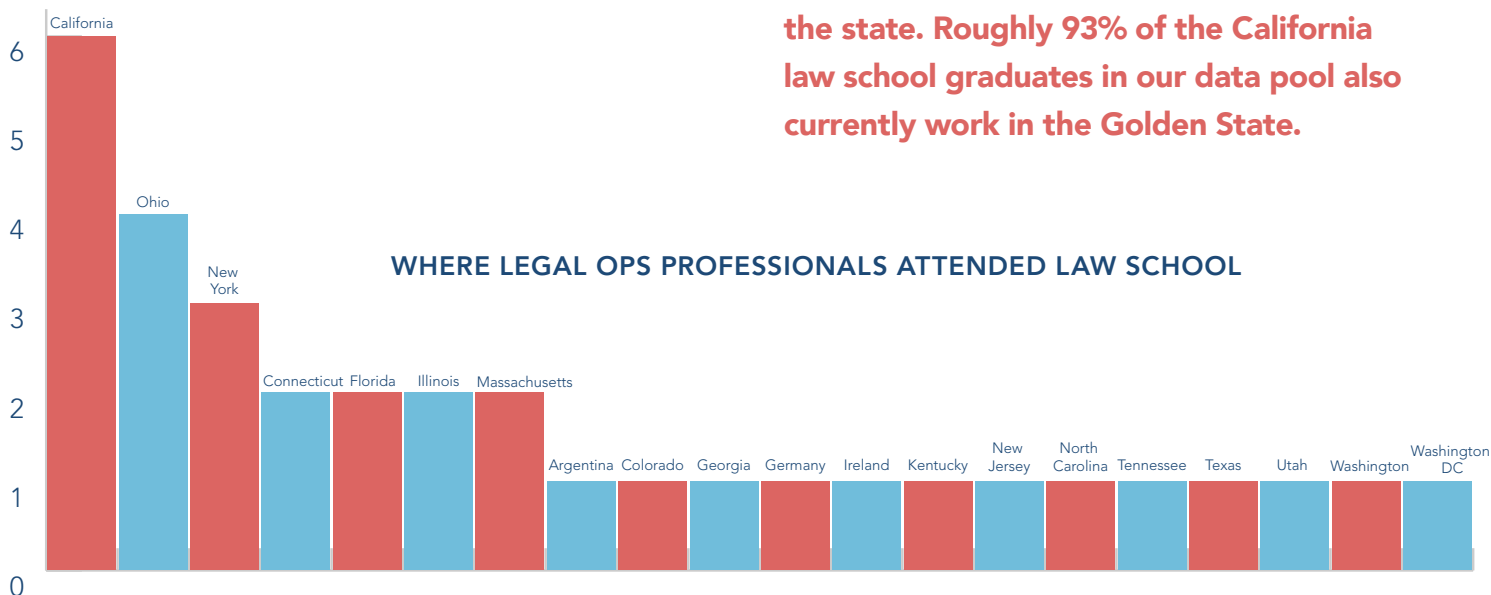
HIGHEST LEVEL OF LEGAL EDUCATION: WOMEN



HIGHEST LEVEL OF LEGAL EDUCATION: MEN



For legal ops professionals with JD degrees, California was the most common state for law school, followed by Ohio and New York.



Several of the companies we included in this report are based in California, which may account for the higher number of JDs from the state. Roughly 93% of the California law school graduates in our data pool also currently work in the Golden State.

# Key Research Findings

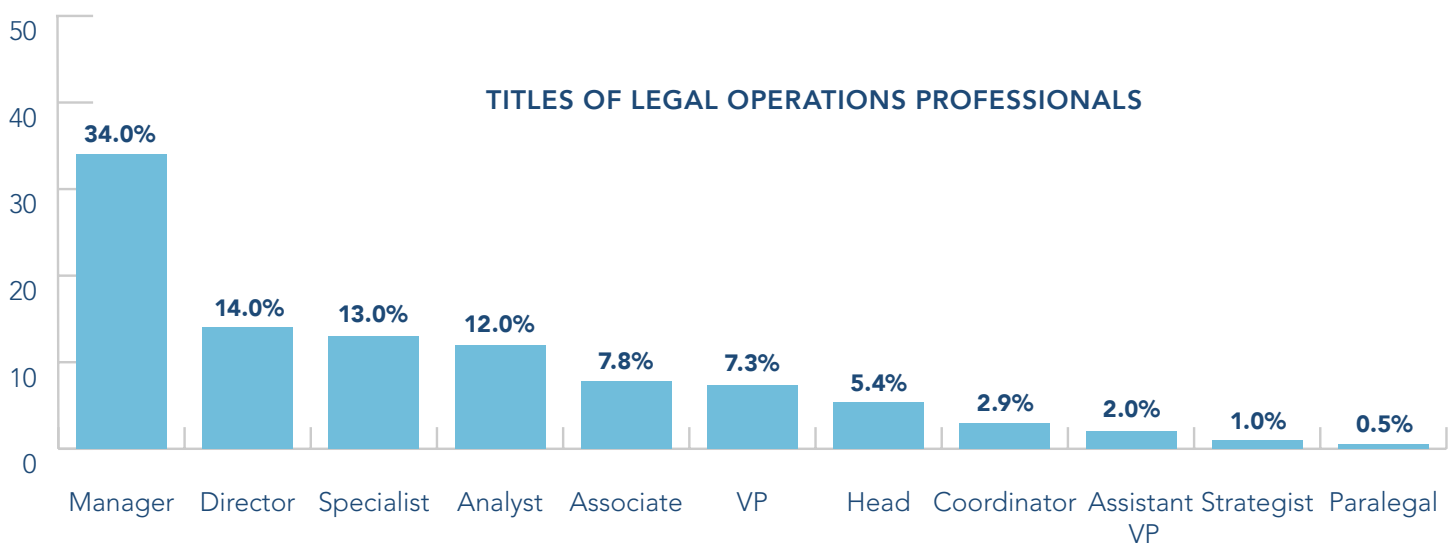
## Title and Tenure

By far, the most common legal ops title among the professionals reviewed is Manager at 34%. A legal operations manager handles a wide range of tasks for the legal team, such as dealing with vendors and outside counsel, managing the budget for the legal department, and assisting with staffing.<sup>4</sup>

One reason Manager may be the most common title is that it is the broadest in terms of responsibilities, and it may represent the department's first (or

only) hire for a legal operations role. But as a department grows and looks for ways to increase its effectiveness, additional, more specialized staff may be brought in.

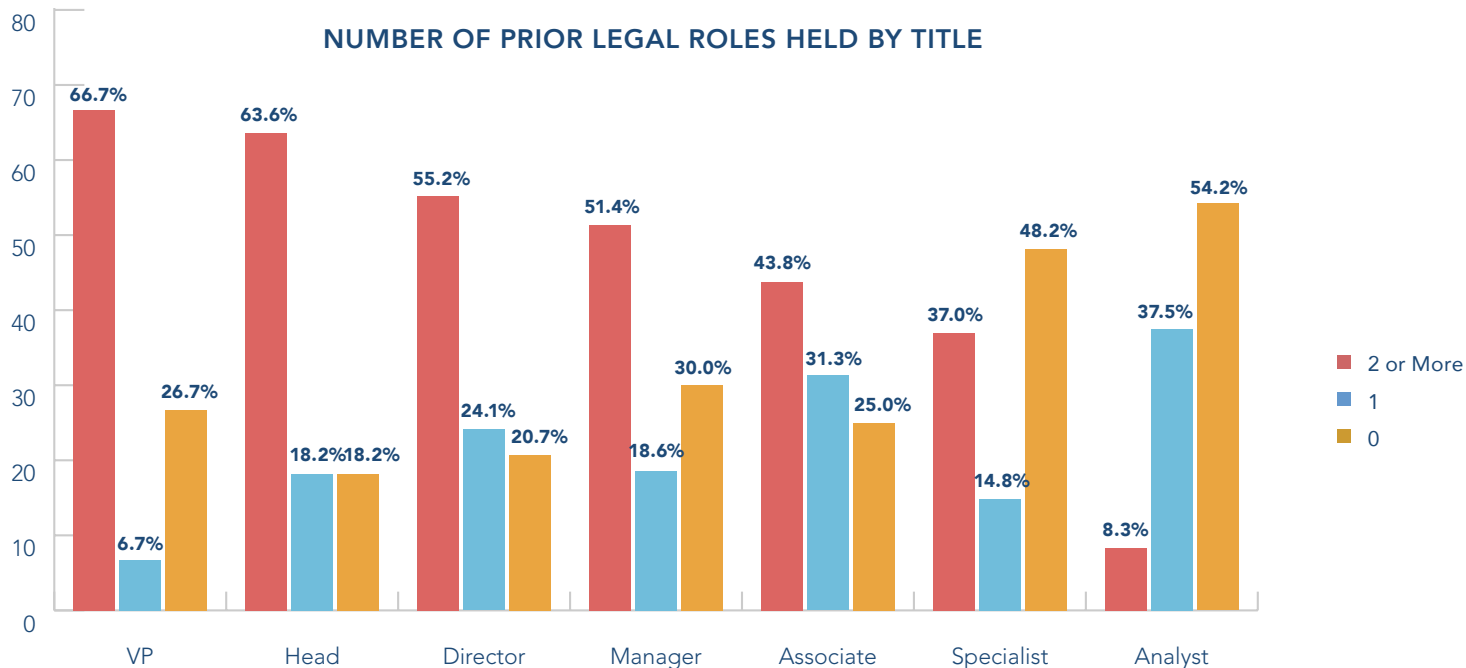
Other positions within legal operations teams include Specialist and Analyst, who typically report to the Manager, as well as Director, who oversees the entire legal operations team and generally reports directly to General Counsel.



<sup>4</sup> <https://www.simplelegal.com/blog/candidate-profile-for-legal-operations>

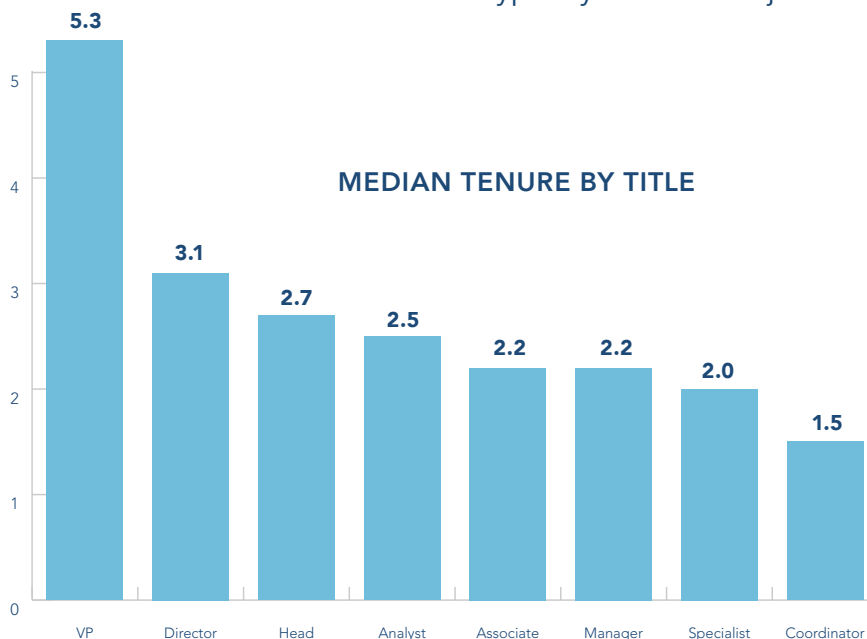


# Key Research Findings



When it comes to the length of time in their current legal ops role, those with more senior titles — such as Director, VP, or Department Head — have the longest median tenure.

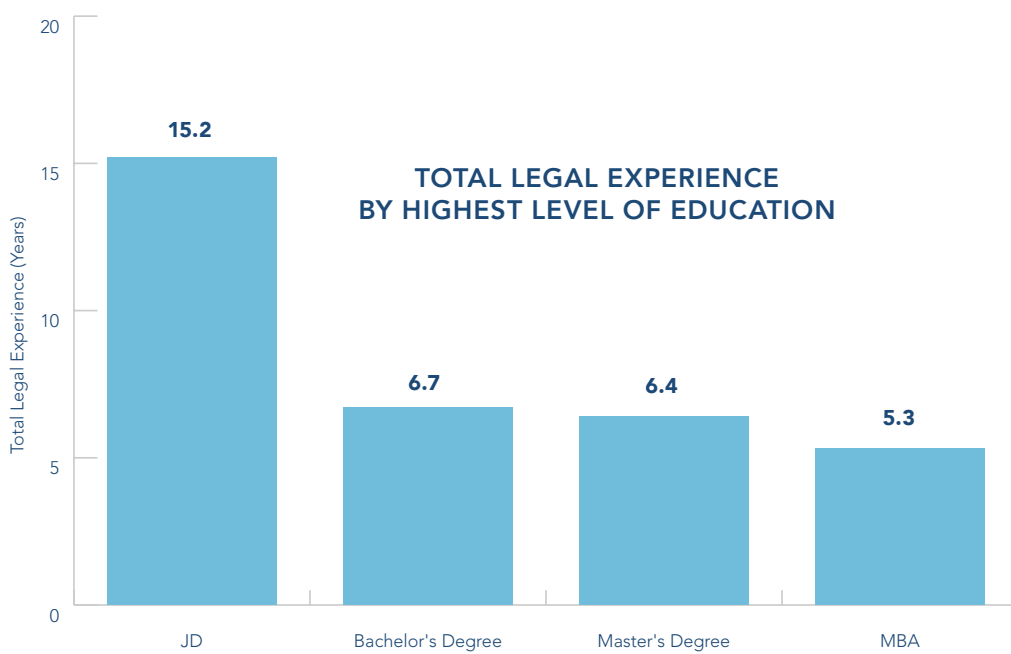
As one would expect, those in management positions are also likely to have more prior legal experience. Our research indicates that more than half of legal operations professionals who are Managers, Heads, Directors, and VPs had at least two prior legal roles, while Analysts and Specialists typically had at most just one prior legal position.



# Key Research Findings

Our data also reveals that legal operations professionals with MBAs or master's degrees often have less total legal experience than those with only bachelor's degrees. (For this report, we've defined an individual's "total legal experience" as the time spent in their current legal operations role, plus any previous experiences they've had handling legal responsibilities.)

This suggests that while some legal ops professionals may not have a legal education or other graduate degree, they have nonetheless accumulated legal experience. For professionals with MBAs, however, there may be less need for a legal background as they bring a different skillset to their roles.

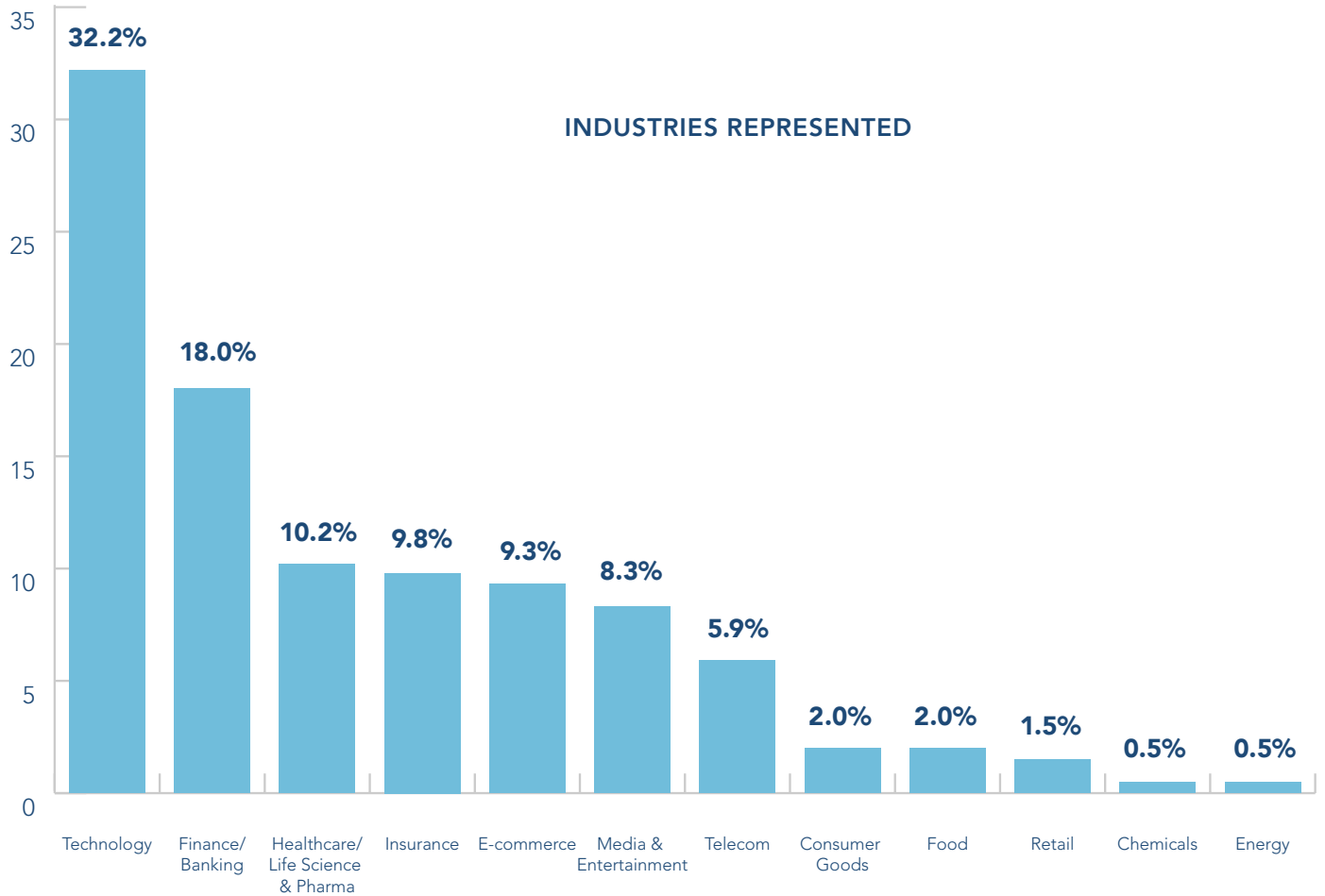


Our research shows relatively little variation in either years of experience or tenure by gender. Men in our study have slightly more legal experience than women, with a median of 7.8 years of total legal

experience, while the median among women is 7.1 years. Men also have slightly longer tenure in their current positions, with a median tenure of 2.5 years, compared to a median tenure of 2.3 years for women.

# Key Research Findings

## Industry

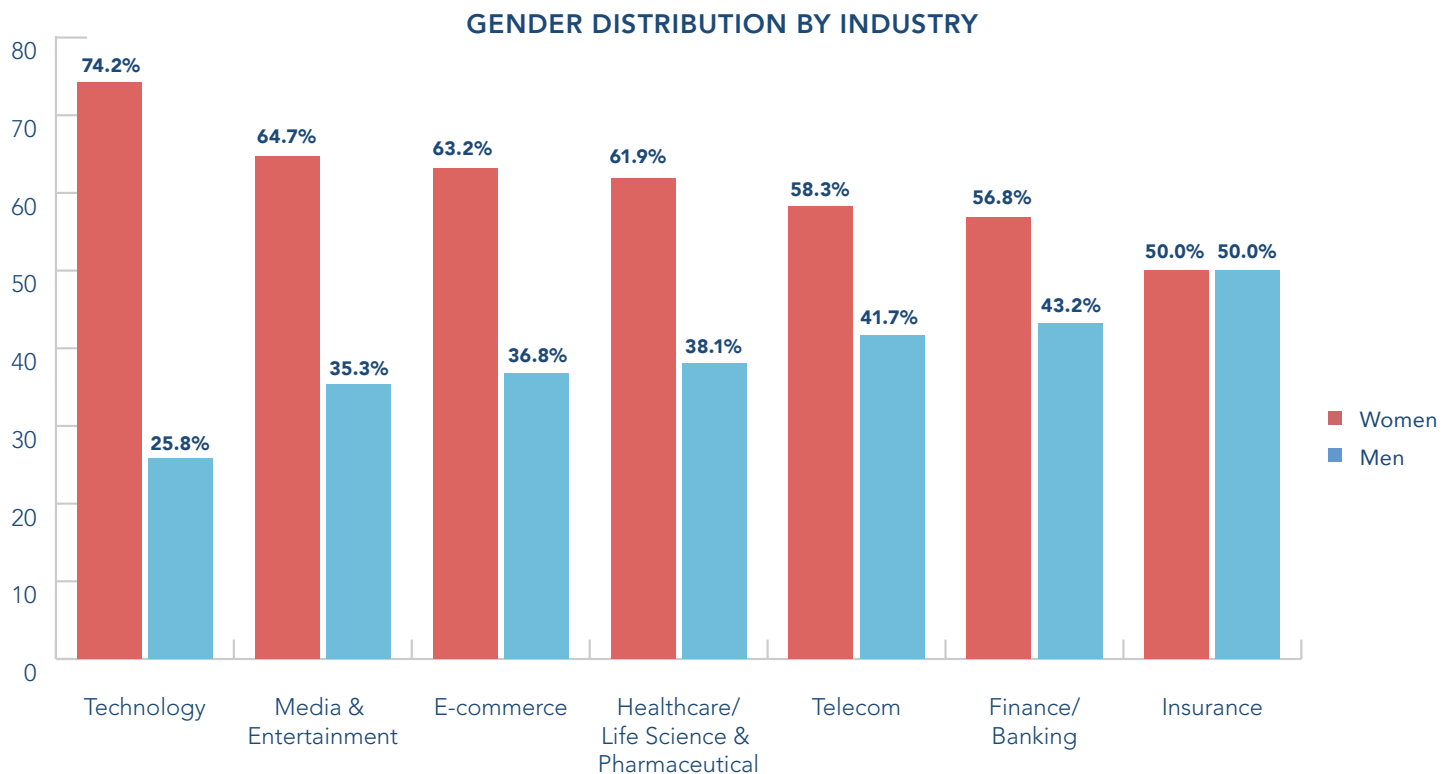


Among the companies we looked at, we found the highest number of legal operations professionals (by simple headcount, unadjusted for company size) in the technology sector, followed by the finance/banking industry.

# Key Research Findings

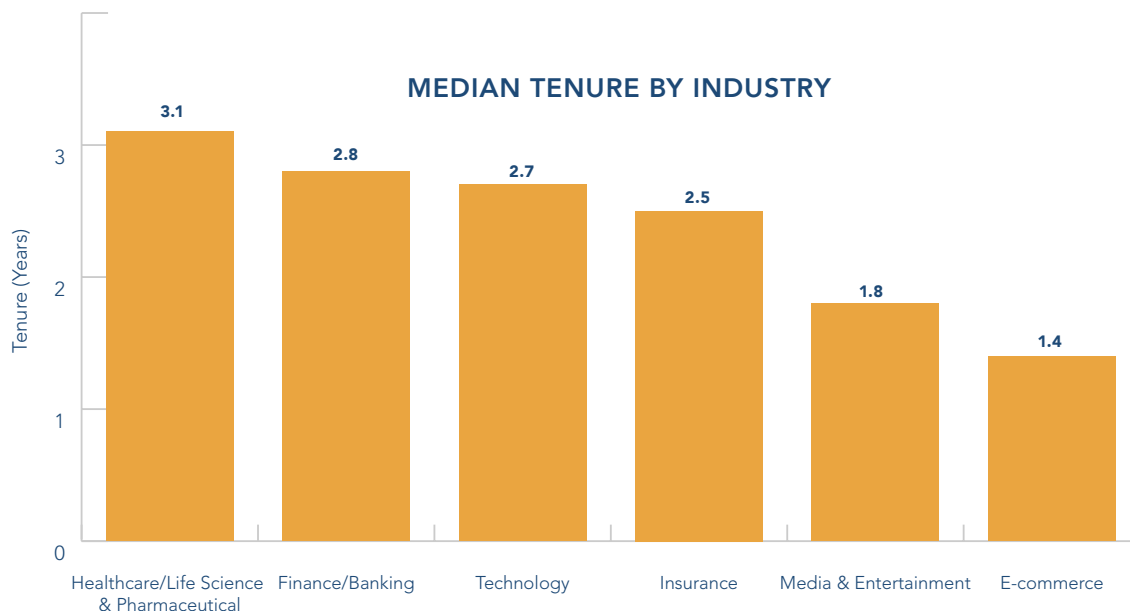
Within these industries, men have the highest representation in the insurance field, comprising 50% of legal operations professionals in that industry (compared to an expectation of 36%, based on the overall percentage of men in our dataset).

Women, however, dominate the technology industry at 74%, versus an expectation of 64%, based on gender distribution. Contrary to tech's reputation as a boys' club, this data suggests that women are making inroads in the field in this context.



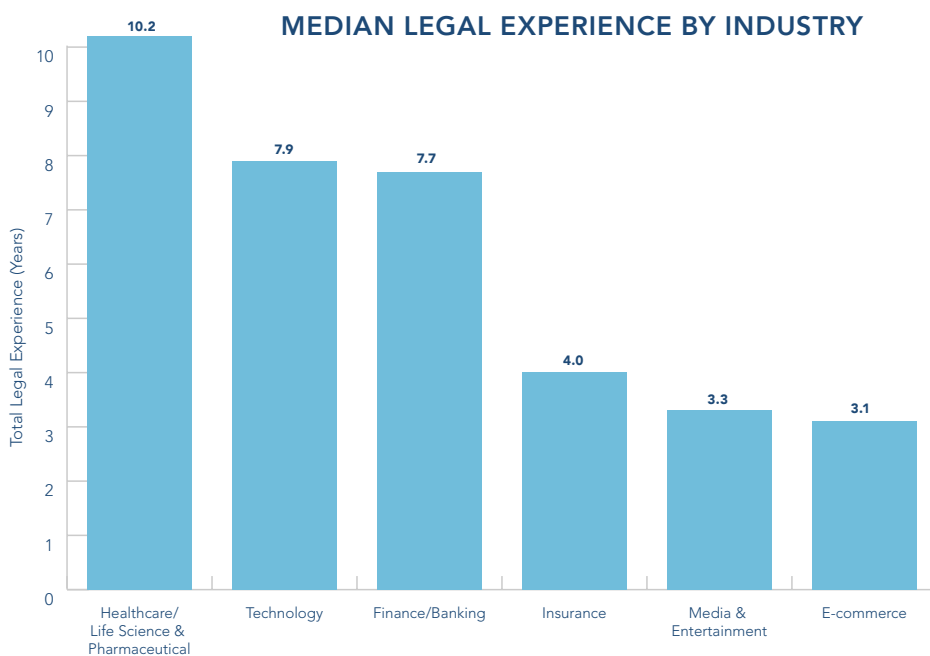
# Key Research Findings

When it comes to how long individuals have spent in their current roles, the longest tenured legal ops personnel work in the healthcare and life sciences/pharmaceutical industries, while the shortest tenured personnel work in e-commerce.



Legal operations professionals in the healthcare and life sciences pharmaceutical industries also dominate the field when it comes to total legal experience at 10.2 years, followed by the technology industry (7.9 years) and finance/banking industry (7.7 years).

The need for experienced legal ops professionals in these industries may be tied to their heavily regulated nature. It is also in line with data from CLOC, whose State of the Industry Survey found that companies in the biotech, pharmaceutical and life sciences sectors had the highest average legal department spend compared to other industries.<sup>5</sup>



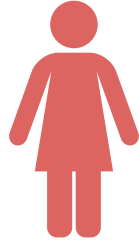
<sup>5</sup> <https://cloc.org/2021-state-of-industry-survey>

# Conclusion

Based on our research, the most typical legal operations professional is a female manager who lives in California, works in the technology industry, and has a bachelor's degree, but no legal education.



California



Female



Technology



Bachelor's

Our findings suggest that a legal education is not a prerequisite to work in this field but that a JD or MBA may be helpful for advancing to senior roles. The goal for a legal operations team is to streamline operations and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the legal department. Toward that end, it helps to be business-minded, data-driven, and have strong analytical and communication skills — qualities that don't necessarily require a legal background. For those in the most senior legal ops positions, working closely with general counsel and as strategic advisors, the additional knowledge and management skills that a law degree or MBA bring may prove valuable assets.

While women are well-represented on legal operations teams, men are more likely to hold certain leadership positions, perhaps reflecting some of the same gender gaps faced by the legal industry as a whole. As more corporate law departments prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, we may see these gaps diminish.

This report provides a look into the demographics of legal ops professionals at many of the companies leading the way on legal operations issues. As the world of legal ops continues to evolve and grow, we look forward to learning more about the dynamic professionals involved in this exciting new field.

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## Appendix

List of companies whose legal operations personal were reviewed for this report:

- Abbott Laboratories
- Adobe Inc
- Amazon
- Apple
- Archer Daniels Midland
- Bank of America
- Berkshire Hathaway
- Campbell Soup Co
- Cox
- Dow Chemical
- Duke Energy
- eBay
- Facebook
- Fidelity Investments
- Google
- Home Depot
- Intel
- Johnson & Johnson
- JPMorgan Chase
- LinkedIn
- Mastercard Inc
- Microsoft
- Netflix
- NVIDIA Corp
- Oracle
- PayPal
- Procter & Gamble
- Prudential
- T-Mobile
- Travelers
- UnitedHealth Group
- Visa Inc
- VMWare
- Walt Disney Co