BLACKLINE CONSULTING

A HIGHER STANDARD

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

A market intelligence brief for insurance operations leaders

June 2026

THE BLACKLINE RADAR SERIES

The Radar series is a set of role-based briefings for insurance executives, designed to be read in minutes and discussed for longer. Each Radar takes a single seat at the executive table and asks one question: *what should this leader have on their screen for the year ahead?*

Every Radar is structured around five lenses:

- **THE BRIEF:** The mandate for the role this year, stated plainly. What the organisation is asking of this executive, and how that ask differs across General Insurance (UK retail and commercial) and the London Market and Specialty.
- **HEADWINDS:** The forces working against the role. Market conditions, cost pressures, regulatory constraints and structural shifts that make the mandate harder to deliver.
- **TAILWINDS:** The forces working in the role's favour. Capabilities, market dynamics and tools that, used well, give the executive room to move.
- **BLIND SPOTS:** The areas where visibility of risk is limited. Not the known problems, but the places where the data, the reporting or the operating model may be quietly masking an issue.
- **EXECUTIVE TENSIONS:** Where interests may align or diverge. The points of natural tension and natural partnership across the executive team, and where the COO's agenda intersects with that of the CFO, CUO and CEO. Knowing where interests align is often the difference between a mandate that gets delivered and one that stalls.

Throughout, we treat General Insurance and the London Market and Specialty as genuinely distinct markets. The pressures rhyme but they are not the same, and a Radar that blends them serves neither.

This edition focuses on the Chief Operating Officer: *Quietly driving transformation against a backdrop of cost, emerging technologies, and the new to maintain resilience .*

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THE BRIEF:

The quiet transformation runs through very different operating machines in retail GI and the London Market.

GENERAL INSURANCE:

In General Insurance, operations is a high-volume engine of policy administration, servicing and claims. The agenda is cost to serve, automation and AI, digital customer journeys, and integration after consolidation, all under retail margin pressure.

HEADWINDS

Cost to serve under margin pressure

→ Soft retail rates and claims inflation leave little room for operational waste in high volume processing.

The AI value gap at scale

→ Most AI pilots never reach production, and industrialising operational AI across volume processes is harder than it looks.

Integration overload

→ Continuous distribution and carrier M&A means repeated systems and process integration with the risk each carries.

TAILWINDS

Smaller, specialist delivery partners

→ Specialised change partners suit a COO needing delivery certainty over large programme risk.

AI & automation

→ Straight through processing and automation deliver real efficiency in volume servicing and claims.

Reusable data foundations

→ The firm's own data foundations support automation and AI across volume operations.

BLIND SPOTS

Whether efficiency is real or borrowed

→ Cost taken out of volume operations can reappear as risk, rework or service failure elsewhere.

Shadow AI & process drift

→ Teams adopt tools and work around official processes faster than operations can see.

Concentration in outsourcers & platforms

→ Dependence on a few platforms and outsourcers is often greater and less recoverable than reported.

THE BRIEF:

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

The quiet transformation runs through very different operating machines in retail GI and the London Market.

LONDON MARKET & SPECIALTY:

In London Market and Specialty, operations runs on the subscription market's shared infrastructure and processing. The agenda has been reset by the standing down of Blueprint II, leaving firms to own their own change while legacy market systems are committed to run for years yet.

HEADWINDS

The loss of the market modernisation safety net

→ With Blueprint II stood down and legacy systems expected to run for years, firms can no longer wait on the centre and must drive their own change.

Dependence on shared market infrastructure

→ London Market operations rely on shared bureau and processing whose modernisation timeline is now uncertain.

Delegated authority operations

→ Operating and overseeing a growing coverholder and binder estate adds real processing and data complexity.

TAILWINDS

Permission to own the agenda

→ The end of waiting on Blueprint II is a mandate to modernise on the firm's own terms and timeline.

Surviving data standards

→ Market data standards work that survived Blueprint II gives reusable building blocks for the London Market.

Resilience as a funded priority

→ Operational resilience has board and regulatory air cover, easing funding for modernisation framed as resilience.

BLIND SPOTS

Real resilience of shared infrastructure

→ Plans assume the shared market systems stay stable through a long, uncertain transition, and the firm's exposure if they wobble is poorly understood.

The full cost of the heritage estate

→ Keeping legacy market systems resilient for years has a real price in licences, scarce skills and deferred risk that is rarely fully owned.

Delegated operations control

→ Whether delegated and binder operations run to standard is hard to see in real time.

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The COO role is where transformation ambition meets operational reality. In a softening market, that tension sharpens.

Six relationships will define how well you deliver, three where change can be driven together, and three where the pressure to absorb more with less will be constant.

WHERE INTERESTS MAY ALIGN

The alignment here is natural - *invest, & build on it*

On Operating Model

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-→ The closest ally. Operating model and technology are one agenda in both subsectors, and modernisation, resilience and AI must be owned together.

On Shared Benefits

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-→ Claims and service are where the operating model meets the customer, so they share efficiency, automation and resilience goals.

On Investment

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-→ The COO needs the CFO to fund modernisation and resilience. Framing investment as cost-to-serve reduction and risk mitigation rather than open-ended transformation is what secures it.

WHERE INTERESTS MAY DIVERGE

These tensions are structural - *navigate them openly*

On Payback

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-→ The CFO wants near term savings, while much of what the COO must do pays back over a longer horizon and through avoided risk.

On Ownership

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-→ COO and CIO mandates overlap on who owns change delivery versus the operating model, and the line needs setting early.

On Cost-Cutting

BUSINESS UNIT LEADERS

-→ Underwriting, claims and distribution want stability and speed. The COO is asking them to absorb cross-cutting change that disrupts both, and that tension is constant.

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Founded in 2013, Blackline Consulting is a multidisciplinary boutique advisory and execution firm operating across the UK and North America. We help organisations define strategy, enhance operations, drive transformation, and manage change

A higher standard, delivered quietly by people who care

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