

Embedding AI Leadership, culture and capability in law firms

AI has moved rapidly from experimentation to expectation within law firms. Drawing on survey data and senior-leader interviews, this report explores how firms are embedding AI into strategy, operations, and culture. It examines leadership priorities, client expectations, governance, and readiness, revealing what separates early experimentation from sustainable, firm-wide capability.



Foreword

AI has moved quickly from the margins of legal innovation into the centre of firm strategy. Now firmly on the agenda of managing partners, boards, and executive committees, lawyers are engaging with AI in a way that ensures it strengthens quality, protects trust, and delivers lasting value for clients and for the profession.

At Legora, we work closely with law firms across the globe at every stage of this journey, from early experimentation to firm-wide deployment. What we see, consistently, is that the most meaningful progress with AI is rarely driven by technology alone. It comes from leadership intent, clear governance, strong data foundations, and a willingness to treat AI adoption as a programme of organisational change.

This report, produced in partnership with The Lawyer, captures that reality. Drawing on survey data and in-depth conversations with senior leaders across private practice, it reflects the diversity of approaches firms are taking, from cautious, use-case-led pilots to ambitious, enterprise-level transformation. It also surfaces the tensions that firms are navigating: varied client expectations, the challenge of measuring value beyond traditional ROI models, and the cultural work required to build confidence and trust in new tools.

One of the most striking themes in the research is the growing consensus that AI is no longer a differentiator in itself. Instead, it is becoming an essential part of how modern legal work is delivered. The firms making the greatest progress are those that combine top-down strategic direction with bottom-up engagement, empowering lawyers and business services teams to explore, share, and learn within clear and responsible guardrails.

Equally important is the report's emphasis on augmentation rather than replacement. AI's real value lies in enabling lawyers to focus more of their time and expertise on judgment, strategy, and client relationships, the most human parts of legal work that matter most. Used well, AI has the potential to raise standards, increase consistency, and unlock new ways of delivering legal services that were previously impractical or uneconomical.

We hope this report provides law firm leaders with both reassurance and challenge: reassurance that many of the questions they are grappling with are widely shared, and challenge to think more holistically about what AI readiness really means for their organisation. The AI journey is not linear, and it is far from complete. But the firms laying the right foundations today, in governance, data, culture, and skills, are positioning themselves to adapt and thrive as technology continues to evolve.

At Legora, we are proud to support this conversation and to work alongside firms as we shape the future of legal work, together.



Executive summary



AI strategy, organisational maturity and change management

- AI now sits firmly at leadership level, but the maturity of adoption varies widely across law firms. In many cases, this variation is deliberate. Some firms are pursuing broad, firm-wide strategies, while others are taking a more selective, use-case-driven approach. Even within the same firm, engagement can differ significantly, from lawyer super-users embedding AI into daily work, to others who have yet to meaningfully engage. What is becoming clear, however, is a growing expectation of AI usage, alongside a rising need for digital and AI literacy across the profession.
- AI is no longer a differentiator. It is becoming a core capability in the modern legal toolkit. Firms that recognise this are moving beyond experimentation, embedding AI into workflows and investing in the cultural foundations required to support it. Those that fail to engage meaningfully risk falling behind as AI becomes an assumed part of how legal work is delivered.
- Successful adoption is as much a cultural challenge as a technological one. Firms making real progress aren't treating AI as a technology rollout, but as an organisation-wide change programme. This requires leadership direction, clarity of purpose, and sustained cultural buy-in.
- Firms driving meaningful cultural change combine clear strategic intent from the top with bottom-up, peer-led engagement. Collaborative initiatives, including AI champions, sharing sessions, strong knowledge management support, and open forums for experimentation, are proving critical in building confidence and momentum.
- Across firms, AI is most often framed as an augmentative tool rather than a replacement for legal expertise. Positioning AI in this way has been central to building trust, reducing resistance, and demystifying its impact on the role of the lawyer.

AI STRATEGY

Treat AI as a firm-wide change programme, not a technology rollout. Firms making the greatest progress align leadership intent, governance, and culture, combining top-down direction with bottom-up engagement to embed AI sustainably into everyday legal work.



Client expectations and measuring value

- Client expectations remain a central factor in how firms approach AI, but they vary widely, from clients actively encouraging AI use, to those placing strict limitations or prohibitions on it. As a result, client centricity is acting both as a driver and a constraint, requiring firms to navigate a complex and sometimes conflicting set of expectations.
- Approaches to measuring the value of AI also remain mixed. Traditional ROI models are widely seen as ill-suited to capturing AI's impact. Instead, firms are increasingly focusing on broader indicators of value, including time saved, quality and consistency of output, client trust, and the ability to deliver work that was previously impractical or uneconomical. Where clients are pushing for fee reductions linked to AI efficiency, firms are working to demonstrate that AI enhances value rather than diminishes it.

AI STRATEGY

Shift the AI value conversation beyond traditional ROI. Firms need client-centric frameworks that demonstrate how AI improves quality, consistency, and scalability, while clearly articulating where human judgement remains essential to trust and value.

Governance, data, and infrastructure

- AI is placing renewed scrutiny on the state of firm data and underlying infrastructure. The quality, organisation, and governance of data are fundamental to the effectiveness of AI tools. Without strong data strategy and hygiene, even the most advanced technology will struggle, not only in output quality, but in earning user trust and organisational buy-in.
- Many firms are now moving beyond pilots and experimentation towards more structured, well-governed capability building. This includes establishing clear guardrails, governance frameworks, and processes as AI tools are rolled out more broadly.
- Firms that are progressing most quickly are often those that have prioritised governance early. Clear frameworks create confidence internally, support responsible adoption, and provide reassurance to clients as AI becomes more embedded in legal practice.

ROI STRATEGY

Strong data foundations and clear governance are prerequisites for scale. Firms that prioritise data hygiene, guardrails, and ethical frameworks early build internal confidence, mitigate risk, and accelerate responsible AI adoption.



Key reflections

- Long-term success with AI depends on strong foundations. Firms should prioritise a structured approach to data governance, data hygiene, and the de-siloing of information to enable AI to scale safely and effectively across the organisation.
- AI should be treated as a programme of organisational change, rather than another technology implementation. Firms that embed AI most successfully recognise the cultural, behavioural, and structural shifts required alongside the technology itself.
- Training and enablement are central to driving adoption. Firms are seeing the greatest engagement where they invest in practical training, empower AI champions, and actively share workflows, use cases, and learnings across teams.
- Cultural buy-in remains critical. As with other forms of technology adoption, this requires clear guardrails, strong governance, and explicit encouragement for responsible experimentation within defined boundaries.
- Client centricity must remain at the heart of AI strategy. Bringing clients along the journey, with transparency around how AI is used and the value it creates, is essential to ensuring that AI enhances, rather than complicates, client relationships.



Introduction, methodology and demographics



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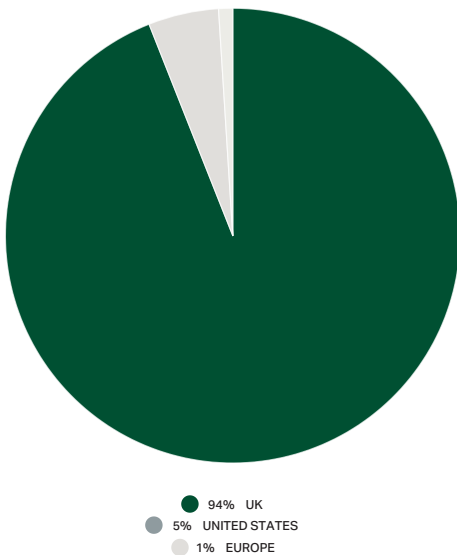
SURVEY RESPONSES

16

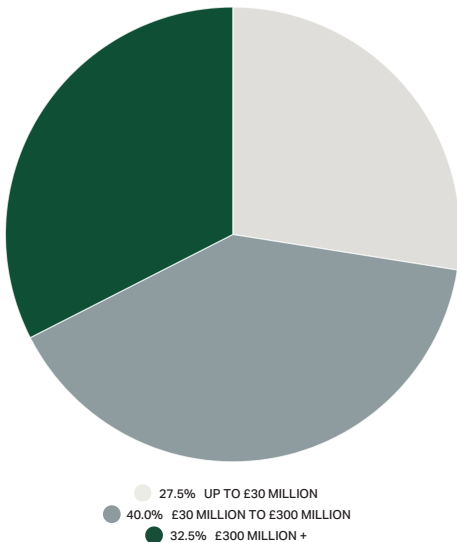
INTERVIEWS

SURVEY AND INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT ROLES INCLUDED: LAW FIRM MANAGING PARTNERS, SENIOR PARTNERS, C-SUITE, HEADS OF PRACTICE AND LEADERS RESPONSIBLE FOR AI, INNOVATION, AND TRANSFORMATION

LOCATIONS OF FIRM HEADQUARTERS



FIRM APPROXIMATE ANNUAL REVENUE (£)



Introduction

AI is reshaping how legal work is delivered, and the pace of change continues to accelerate. For many law firms, AI has moved from an emerging capability to a strategic consideration that cuts across operations, client service, and long-term competitiveness.

This report, produced in partnership with The Lawyer, examines how firms are responding in practice. It explores how client expectations, market dynamics, and internal priorities are influencing the role AI plays in firm strategy, and how approaches differ across the profession.

Drawing on survey data and in-depth conversations with senior legal leaders, the report looks at both the technical and cultural challenges firms are encountering as they adopt AI. It highlights the barriers that slow progress, the strategies firms are using to address them, and the factors that are enabling meaningful change.

Firms are at very different stages of maturity. Some are embedding AI deeply into workflows and decision-making, while others remain in earlier phases of experimentation. Rather than prescribing a single path, this report focuses on the common drivers shaping adoption today, what is working across different contexts, and what these early experiences suggest about the future role of AI in law firms.

Methodology / demographics

This report used a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative insights from a private-practice audience. Participants included C-suite leaders, managing partners, senior partners, practice leaders, and leaders responsible for AI, innovation, and transformation.

Respondents accessed the survey via an online portal, either through email invitation or engagement on TheLawyer.com. In total, 80 respondents participated across the listed audiences. The survey included both multiple-choice and single-choice questions, with opportunities for respondents to expand on their views through open-ended responses.

In addition, 16 qualitative interviews were conducted, exploring themes including AI perceptions, strategies, and future outlooks within law firms. Interview participants were given the option to remain anonymous or be attributed. All insights and survey data were aggregated to preserve anonymity.

The revenue size of respondent law firms ranged from "up to £10 million" to "£800 million+". Firms from the UK Top 200 and U.S. Top 50 contributed to the survey and interviews. Of these, 27.5% reported revenues of less than £30 million, 40% reported revenues between £30 million and £300 million, and 32.5% reported revenues of £300 million or more.

Respondent firms were predominantly UK-based, with 94% identifying the UK as their primary base of operations. The remaining 6% listed either Europe or the U.S. as the centre of their firm's operations.



Leadership and strategic priorities



Leadership and strategic priorities

“Positioning AI not just as doing things faster but using AI to trigger broader transformation across the firm and creating conversations on how we deliver work differently.”

JAMES TOUZEL, TLT

Insights from both interviews and survey data underscore how firmly AI now sits on the strategic agenda for law firms. For many, the priority is not only integrating AI operationally, but embedding it culturally as firms look ahead. While the pace and scale of rollout varies considerably, a consistent theme among firms driving progress is clear senior-leadership support, with AI viewed as a strategic issue rather than a purely technical one.

In conversation with Abby Ewen, COO of Browne Jacobson, Ewen describes how AI is now a standing item on monthly executive meetings, reflecting both a top-down and bottom-up approach to adoption across the firm. The importance of clear strategic direction from senior leadership emerged repeatedly in discussions with legal leaders, who cited it as essential to driving organisation-wide change.

Similarly, Alex Bazin, CTO and COO of Lewis Silkin, emphasises that AI is now deeply embedded within the firm. With a focus on being a “tech-enabled law firm”, AI sits at the heart of Lewis Silkin’s agenda. Bazin explains that this approach is driven both top-down and bottom-up, involving not only the CTO function but also managing partners, the board, and the chair. Across conversations, senior-leadership buy-in consistently emerges as a defining factor for firms seeking to drive meaningful change.

As interviews highlight, AI is now a common topic at partner conferences and leadership meetings, as firms consider how best to leverage these tools for operational gains and competitive advantage. A recurring theme among senior leaders is the framing of AI as an augmentation of lawyers’ capabilities rather than a replacement. Emphasis on keeping the “human in the loop” reflects a shared objective: using AI to enhance the quality and value of the work delivered to clients. James Touzel, Head of FutureLaw at TLT, frames this clearly, explaining the firm’s strategy as “positioning AI not just as doing things faster but using AI to trigger broader transformation across the firm and creating conversations on how we deliver work differently”. He characterises the firm’s AI approach as being “curious, creative and collaborative”, and frames AI clearly as an enabler to its people and client offerings.

Across the 16 interviews conducted as part of this study, the extent to which firms are embedding AI varies significantly. Firms range from those in early stages of experimentation to those integrating AI into processes, culture, and strategic direction. No two firms are following the same path, with differences in practice mix, client base, and organisational culture influencing both direction and pace. Leadership attitudes reflect a split between firms pursuing firm-wide rollouts and those adopting more cautious, use-case-led pilots. Tool selection follows a similarly mixed pattern. What is consistent, however, is that many firms are increasingly framing their AI journey as one of change management, where cultural alignment is as important as technical capability.

AI STRATEGY

AI adoption accelerates when it is owned by leadership, embedded into culture, and framed as an enabler of people rather than a purely technical initiative.



Drivers of investment

From our quantitative survey, when asked what motivates AI investment, respondents identified operational efficiency (70%), competitive positioning (60%), perception of being technologically advanced (44%), and client expectations (40%) as the primary drivers.

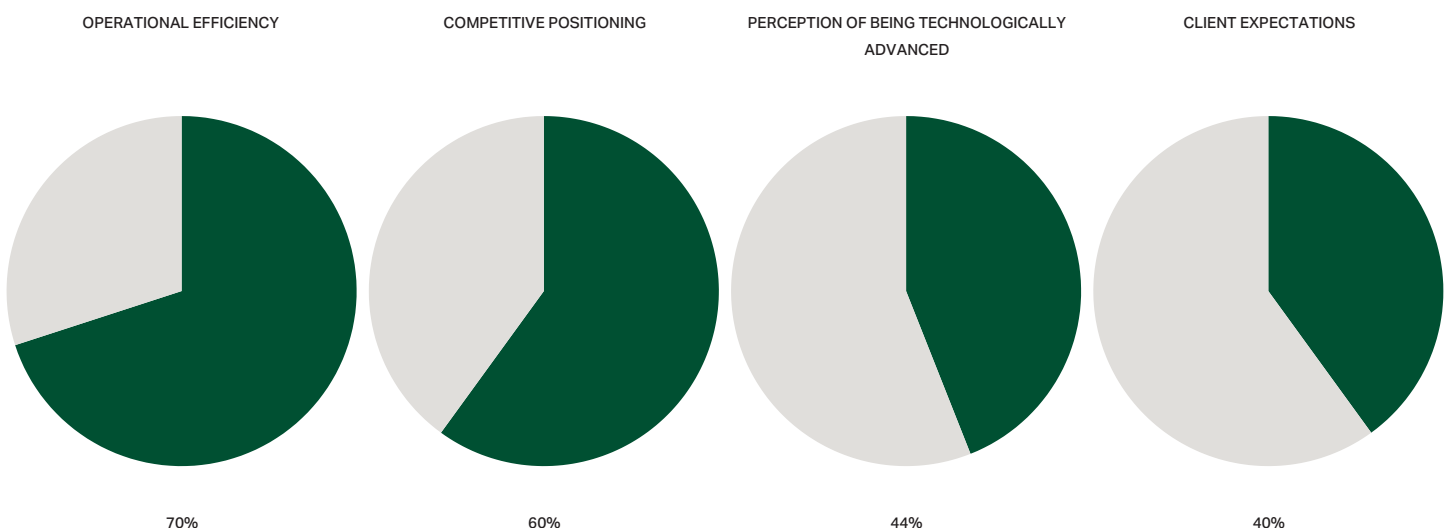
Operational efficiency, across both fee-earning and business-services functions, also featured prominently in interviews. Efficiency gains were most often associated with process-heavy tasks and areas already suited to automation. Importantly, these gains were not framed purely in terms of cost reduction. Legal leaders spoke about freeing lawyers from low-value work, improving consistency and standardisation of outputs, and enabling historically time-intensive processes to be handled at scale.

Several leaders noted a shift in focus, with firms that initially concentrated on fee-earning use cases now applying similar approaches across operational and support functions. As one UK Top 50 firm explained, progress made on the legal side has highlighted the need to address operational workflows with the same intent.

As firms move from experimentation to broader deployment, AI is increasingly viewed not as a differentiator but as essential to remaining competitive. Across conversations, there is strong consensus, including among firms earlier in their journey, that opting out of AI is not a viable strategy.

Competitive pressure, described by respondents as a risk of falling behind peers, is a significant driver of investment and is reflected in AI's growing prominence on leadership agendas. While the short-term impact of lagging adoption may be limited, leaders expressed concern about longer-term consequences for competitiveness, efficiency, and the sophistication of client offerings.

What do you think motivates your firms ongoing investment in AI initiatives?



Client expectations further reinforce this momentum. Legal leaders consistently highlighted client centricity as a crucial factor in both the development and use of AI tools, as with previous waves of legal technology. Client expectations are far from uniform, creating challenges as firms navigate differing preferences. Nonetheless, many firms report that clients increasingly expect their advisers to be using AI and want clarity on how that usage translates into additional value. AI usage is no longer widely perceived as a differentiator; it is becoming an expectation and, as reflected in survey responses, a material driver of investment decisions.

Client appetite for AI broadly falls into three groups: those opposed to its use, those neutral to it, and those actively encouraging their advisers to adopt it. Within this final group, motivations vary, from potential cost savings, to access to new capabilities that were previously too time- or resource-intensive. Interviews indicate that speed, price transparency, and scalability are common focal points in client discussions about AI. The increasing inclusion of AI-related questions in panel tenders further underscores the extent to which AI investment is now seen not as a value-add, but as a baseline expectation.

AI STRATEGY

AI investment is increasingly driven by competitive necessity rather than innovation alone. Operational efficiency, client expectations, and the risk of falling behind peers are pushing AI from optional enhancement to baseline capability.

Barriers, risks and ethical considerations:

35%

LISTED SECURITY, CONFIDENTIALITY OR REGULATORY CONCERNS AS THE PRIMARY CONSTRAINT TO AI PROGRESS AT THEIR FIRM

While AI is now firmly established on leadership agendas, firms are equally focused on the risks and barriers associated with effective implementation. Concerns around client confidentiality, output quality, and the perceived value of legal work remain central as AI is increasingly used in client-facing contexts. For clients that expect AI usage, expectations are clear, but they are often accompanied by scrutiny. As one general counsel noted, firms should be using AI to drive efficiency, while also having robust procedures in place to minimise the risks of hallucination and error.

From a strategic perspective, barriers extend beyond technology into regulatory and reputational risk. When asked which factors most limit AI progress, 35% of respondents cited security, confidentiality, or regulatory concerns as the primary constraint. Firm leaders are therefore navigating not only compliance and risk management, but also the cultural challenge of embedding AI across the organisation. This includes building the right skill sets, encouraging experimentation, and fostering openness to new ways of working. In a profession that is naturally risk-averse, many firms are addressing this challenge by establishing clear and well-defined guardrails.

AI policy and guidance on appropriate and ethical use featured prominently in conversations, alongside the importance of clarity for staff on which tools can and cannot be used. The risks associated with improper AI use are significant, ranging from regulatory penalties to reputational damage. As highlighted by Clare Francis, Head of the Commercial Team at Pinsent Masons, safeguarding client confidentiality and adherence to ethical principles are central to AI deployment, with clear expectations set for lawyers on acceptable use.

Establishing the right governance frameworks and deploying tools within defined boundaries is therefore critical. With clear strategic direction at leadership level, the research indicates that firms moving



What is the primary purpose driving your AI governance efforts?



fastest are those that have put governance in place early, creating confidence both internally and with clients.

When asked what drives AI governance efforts, 70% of respondents cited encouraging safe and responsible adoption as the primary factor. This was closely followed by the mitigation of legal, ethical, and reputational risk, identified by 66% of respondents. Only 6% stated that their firm had no AI governance efforts in place, indicating that even firms at an early stage of adoption are actively considering risk management.

Aligning AI usage with firm values and culture ranked third, selected by 59% of respondents. This reinforces the view that AI implementation is not simply about deploying technology, but about creating an environment in which lawyers are confident and willing to use these tools to their own benefit and that of the organisation.

AI STRATEGY

Risk management is now inseparable from AI strategy. Firms must balance innovation with confidentiality, regulatory compliance, and reputational risk, using clear policies and guardrails to enable safe, confident experimentation.

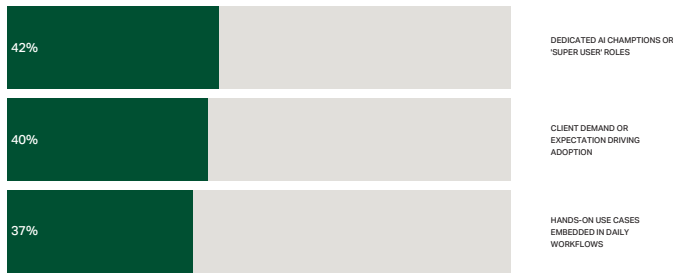


Implementation and day to day practice



Implementation and day to day practice

What approaches have proven most effective in driving your engagement and sustained use of AI tools?



Insights from both interviews and survey responses show that day-to-day use cases are delivering clear productivity gains. Document review, summarisation, drafting, and legal research were consistently cited as areas where AI is having the greatest impact. Firm leaders emphasise that AI is most effective when it integrates with existing workflows, augments established processes, and frees up fee-earner time for higher-value work.

A common theme across firms is the development of playbooks, prompt libraries, and practical guidance on effective use. Given the time pressures lawyers face, grounding AI in relevant, real-world use cases that map directly to day-to-day work is repeatedly highlighted as an effective way to drive engagement. Abby Ewen of Browne Jacobson explains how pilot programmes surfaced areas where lawyers were spending time on lower-value or non-legal tasks, with AI tools enabling that time to be redirected towards more client-centric activities. Freeing up lawyer capacity for higher-value work is seen not only as a core benefit of AI, but also as an important factor in building cultural buy-in. When lawyers can see clear personal value — whether through time saved or greater focus on substantive client work — their appetite to engage with AI tools increases.

When asked which approaches are driving effective and sustained engagement with AI, respondents most frequently pointed to dedicated AI champions (42%), hands-on use cases embedded in daily workflows (37%), and client expectations (40%). These findings suggest that firms providing clear structure and guidance around AI exploration are seeing stronger engagement. One head of practice described their firm's approach as combining "exec board sponsorship and training; segmentation of deployment team-by-team to ensure deep tailoring of adoption plans incorporating service-line-specific training and use cases."

The importance of creating space for experimentation also emerged as a consistent theme. Within the context of clearly defined guardrails, many firms are enabling lawyers to explore AI tools in relation to their own process pain points. This ability to test and iterate is helping move AI from a perceived "nice-to-have" to an integral part of how work is delivered.

That said, appetite for and perceptions of AI vary widely across firms. Both technical and cultural barriers remain persistent challenges. As with any large-scale technology rollout, implementation at an organisational level brings complexity. While many firms begin with pilots focused on specific use cases before expanding to enterprise-wide deployment, adoption itself remains a cultural hurdle. As legal leaders note, successful implementation depends as much on lawyer buy-in as on the functionality of the tools.

As one UK Top 50 firm leader explained, barriers often stem from perceptions about what AI means for individual lawyers, their teams, and evolving client expectations. In a risk-averse profession, encouraging adoption requires fostering a cultural willingness to experiment. One CIO described a broader shift underway — from a process-driven mindset to one where the full extent of AI-enabled transformation is still emerging. AI presents a blank canvas, with firms navigating their own paths to understanding what works and what does not within their specific processes. Building the appetite to engage with this uncertainty has become a key focus for many leaders shaping AI strategy.

Time constraints present an additional barrier. The process-driven nature of much legal work, combined with billable-hour targets and high workloads, often leaves limited capacity for experimentation. Firms



33%

NOTED TECHNICAL INTEGRATION
CHALLENGES AS A KEY LIMITER TO
AI PROGRESS AT THEIR FIRM

are addressing this challenge in different ways. Some have explicitly factored experimentation time into billable-hour expectations, while others have invested in comprehensive prompt libraries, predefined use cases, and training resources to lower the barrier to entry. What is clear is that without sufficient time to engage with the technology and see its value demonstrated, adoption remains uneven.

The extent of usage at an individual level is also a recurring challenge. From firms with deeply embedded AI to those still early in their journey, uneven adoption across users is common. Whether due to a lack of relevant use cases, limited time, or resistance to engaging with the tools, firms are working to build momentum by clearly demonstrating user-level value. Where gains in time, quality, and efficiency are visible, the case for adoption becomes more compelling.

As firms continue to experiment and expand AI usage, one unintended consequence has been increased visibility into data quality issues. While not a new challenge, AI's reliance on well-structured data has brought data hygiene into sharper focus. When asked about barriers limiting AI progress, technical integration challenges ranked third, cited by 33% of respondents. Poor data quality is not merely a technical issue; it directly affects output quality, user confidence, and overall adoption.

Our research highlights the need for a consistent, firm-wide approach to data management and structure. One UK Top 50 firm described siloed and poorly organised data as a persistent challenge limiting AI effectiveness. In addition to constraining output quality, poor data practices introduce risk, including the potential exposure of confidential client or personal information. A lack of clear data classification and consistent structuring was frequently cited as a blocker to scaling AI tools across organisations. While this challenge is not unique to legal services, the profession's emphasis on confidentiality, accuracy, and trust means AI has unintentionally pushed data hygiene to the forefront of implementation discussions.

AI STRATEGY

Adoption accelerates when AI is embedded into real workflows. Practical use cases, playbooks, and AI champions help move AI from curiosity to habit, unlocking time for higher-value legal and client-focused work.



Talent / tools and capabilities



Talent / tools and capabilities

As the use and integration of AI tools increase, so too do expectations of lawyers' ability not only to use these tools, but to leverage them effectively. This does not imply a need for deep technical expertise. Rather, it reflects the growing importance of AI literacy as part of a modern legal skill set. Capabilities such as effective prompting and critical evaluation when working with AI outputs are increasingly important.

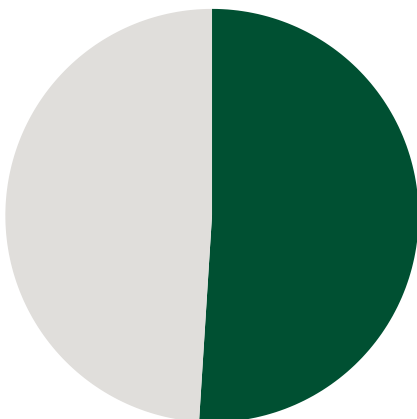
Correct and confident use of AI also depends on a clear understanding of its strengths and limitations. Knowing when a task can be augmented by AI to improve efficiency or quality, and when it requires significant human involvement, is essential to maximising value while ensuring tools are used within appropriate guardrails and safe use cases. Across conversations with firms, training and education consistently emerged as central to building lawyer confidence and mitigating the risk of improper use. Helping lawyers understand how generative AI tools and large language models operate has also played a role in demystifying both their capabilities and their risks.

Beyond enabling more effective task delivery, legal leaders also emphasise the importance of being purposeful about how efficiency gains from AI are used. Rather than treating time savings as an end in themselves, TLT's Head of FutureLaw James Touzel describes the firm's deliberate focus on reinvesting this time into the development of broader, higher-value skills. These include client development, people leadership, and wider professional growth, reflecting a view that AI should augment legal roles, supporting broader career development.

As expectations around AI-related skills evolve, the research shows that lawyers are seeking greater value from AI through better integration with existing systems (51%), more hands-on training (44%), and clearer guidance on use cases (43%). Where AI is effectively embedded into established processes, lawyers report clearer benefits, which in turn increases appetite for further training and capability development. Legal leaders interviewed emphasised the critical role of knowledge management teams in training and in organising AI use cases, prompt

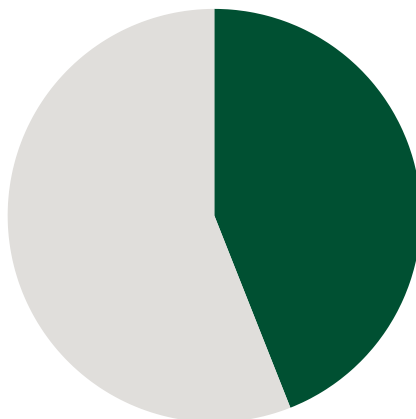
In your role, what would most help you get more value from AI tools?

BETTER TOOL INTEGRATION WITH EXISTING SYSTEMS



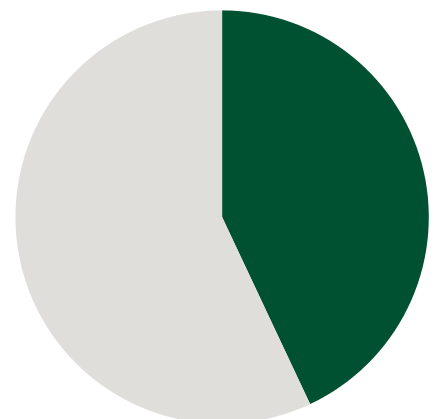
51%

MORE HANDS-ON TRAINING



44%

CLEARER USE-CASE GUIDANCE



43%



From a strategic perspective, what outcomes or capabilities do you most want AI to enable for your lawyers and legal teams?



libraries, and usage guidance. As one CTO noted, firms are increasingly relying on knowledge management functions to support a structured and consistent approach to sharing learnings across the organisation.

When asked what outcomes or capabilities they want AI to enable, respondents highlighted improved accuracy (63%), greater capacity for high-value strategic work (52%), and both greater innovation in service delivery and enhanced client experience (51% respectively). These priorities underscore the expectation that AI should further support legal teams, particularly in process-heavy areas that consume significant lawyer time. They also reinforce the continued importance of client centricity as firms consider more advanced and sophisticated applications of AI in legal practice.

AI STRATEGY

AI literacy is becoming a core professional skill. Firms that invest in training, knowledge management, and purposeful reinvestment of time saved are better positioned to turn efficiency gains into long-term capability and talent development.



Future readiness



Future readiness

AI readiness is ultimately about long-term organisational change, both operational and cultural, rather than a one-off technology shift.

Insights from firms participating in this study show that AI readiness is multi-dimensional. Firms of different sizes, practice areas, industry focus, and client profiles are at very different stages of maturity on their AI journeys. When asked what it means to be AI-ready, respondents pointed to several interconnected factors. The ability to scale and embed AI both operationally and strategically emerged as central, alongside the importance of strong data hygiene as a foundation for building long-term AI capabilities. As one legal leader noted, it is critical to “get your data right”, a view reinforced by the limitations poor data quality can place on the effectiveness of AI tools.

Discussions with legal leaders emphasise that AI readiness is ultimately about long-term organisational change, both operational and cultural. This requires having the right processes and structures in place to adapt as AI capabilities continue to evolve. James Touzel, Head of FutureLaw at TLT, describes AI’s role as likely to become “just the way we do work”, triggering a fundamental shift in how legal services are delivered. He highlights that the real opportunity lies not in incremental efficiency, but in enabling firms to deliver entirely new, higher-value work and reframe how value is created for clients. To realise this potential, firms must be organisationally prepared to evolve their delivery models in step with AI, rather than treating adoption as a one-off technology change. Firms driving progress are also clear about the importance of working closely with vendors to maximise the value of their tools, while simultaneously developing internal AI capability. The integration of AI considerations into legal training, career paths, and role design further highlights the need to embed AI culturally as well as operationally. Across interviews, firms consistently stressed the importance of clearly defining what AI should and should not be used for, and building comfort and confidence around its use. As firms explain, embedding AI is positioned as an advantage for lawyers, not something to fear, enabling greater focus on high-value work and opening up new capabilities and service lines. As Clare Francis of Pinsent Masons advises, “Invest in people as well as technology.” The emphasis is clear: AI is framed as a value enabler, with the potential to drive meaningful change when used within appropriate and well-governed parameters.

Respondents also highlighted the importance of client centricity, with AI strategies aligned closely to client service and delivery models. For some firms, AI adoption cannot be separated from client expectations, with the choice of tools and use cases driven directly by client needs. In some cases, firms are going further, working alongside clients in the development of AI-enabled solutions that deliver both operational value for the firm and improved quality for the client.

Interviews also make clear that sustained usage and engagement are built through peer-led success stories, supported by clear strategic direction from leadership. AI champions, sharing groups, and the development of use case and prompt libraries are among the mechanisms firms are using to drive adoption at the lawyer level. Creating psychological safety, and a culture that encourages responsible experimentation within defined guardrails, is widely seen as a critical component of effective change management.

AI STRATEGY

AI readiness is organisational, not technical. Firms must align data, governance, skills, and culture to evolve alongside rapidly advancing tools, embedding AI as “the way work gets done” rather than a stand-alone initiative.



The evolving shape of legal work



The evolving shape of legal work

When asked what the future holds for law in an AI-enabled world, legal leaders pointed to implications for service and delivery models, organisational structures, and the way firms interact with clients. While the impact on pricing remains an open question, there is increasing discussion around shifts away from traditional hourly billing towards alternative approaches such as value-based pricing. These conversations are often linked to AI's ability to unlock forms of client value that were previously too costly or impractical to deliver.

As one innovation leader explained, AI's capacity to analyse extensive volumes of documentation at scale, where the human cost would previously have been prohibitive, is opening new possibilities for how firms support their clients. The implications for organisational structure are also under active consideration. As AI automates and streamlines traditionally human-intensive processes, firms are reflecting on how this may affect the composition of their organisations across both fee-earning and business-services roles. What remains consistent across conversations is an emphasis on AI being seen as a value driver that enhances the work of lawyers and their teams.

Legal leaders also discussed AI's potential role in widening access to justice. Jevon's paradox, the idea that as a technology becomes more efficient and less costly, its use increases, was referenced in several conversations. This raises important questions about how more accessible and capable AI tools could affect access to legal information and services. While AI tools are not a substitute for legal professionals, they are already capable of generating comprehensive arguments and information. This does not remove concerns around quality, complexity, or the risks associated with more sophisticated legal reasoning, but it does suggest that AI has a distinct potential to contribute to a more level playing field in access to justice than previous technologies.

AI STRATEGY

AI is reshaping how value is created and delivered. As automation enables scale and new service models, firms are rethinking pricing, structures, and access to legal services—while reinforcing the central role of human judgement.



Future outlook from experimentation to embedded capability



Future outlook: from experimentation to embedded capability

Looking ahead, AI's impact on legal services will be shaped less by individual tools and more by how firms embed AI into their operating models. The next phase of adoption is expected to move decisively from experimentation towards execution — from pilots and point solutions to scalable, well-governed capabilities integrated into everyday practice.

As AI becomes more embedded, expectations of both lawyers and firms will continue to evolve. AI literacy is likely to become a more explicit component of professional skill sets, while workflows, training models, and career pathways adapt to new ways of working. Firms that invest early in data foundations, governance frameworks, and cultural alignment will be better placed to adapt as capabilities develop and use cases expand.

Client considerations will continue to shape how AI is embedded in practice. As firms scale usage, clarity around how AI is used, and where human judgement remains central, will be important in maintaining trust and confidence. At the same time, AI creates opportunities to rethink service delivery, enabling new forms of work, greater scalability, and capabilities that were previously impractical due to cost or complexity.

While uncertainty remains around pricing models, organisational structures, and the broader implications for the profession, a consistent theme emerges: AI is being treated as an augmentative capability, enhancing the work of lawyers and business-services teams rather than replacing expertise and professional judgement. Readiness will increasingly be judged not by tool adoption alone, but by a firm's ability to evolve alongside the technology, responsibly, collaboratively, and with a long-term focus on value.

AI STRATEGY

The next phase of AI adoption is execution at scale. Firms that embed AI into operating models, governance, and talent strategies will be best placed to adapt as expectations, workflows, and client demands continue to evolve.



Conclusion

This research shows that, across firms of all revenue sizes, AI has become a core capability rather than a differentiator. Differences in maturity reflect variations in risk appetite, strategic intent, and organisational readiness, rather than a lack of awareness. Firms making the greatest progress are those combining clear leadership-level direction with sustained, peer-led engagement across the organisation.

A defining factor in successful adoption is the treatment of AI as a change-management programme rather than a standalone technology deployment. Firms embedding AI most effectively are investing in governance, data foundations, and cultural alignment alongside technical capability.

Client centricity remains central to AI decision-making. Whether clients are actively encouraging AI usage or placing constraints on it, firms are navigating a complex landscape of expectations that directly influence investment decisions and adoption strategies.

Ultimately, the success of AI in law firms will depend on how effectively it is embedded across governance structures, organisational culture, workflows, and the value delivered to clients.

