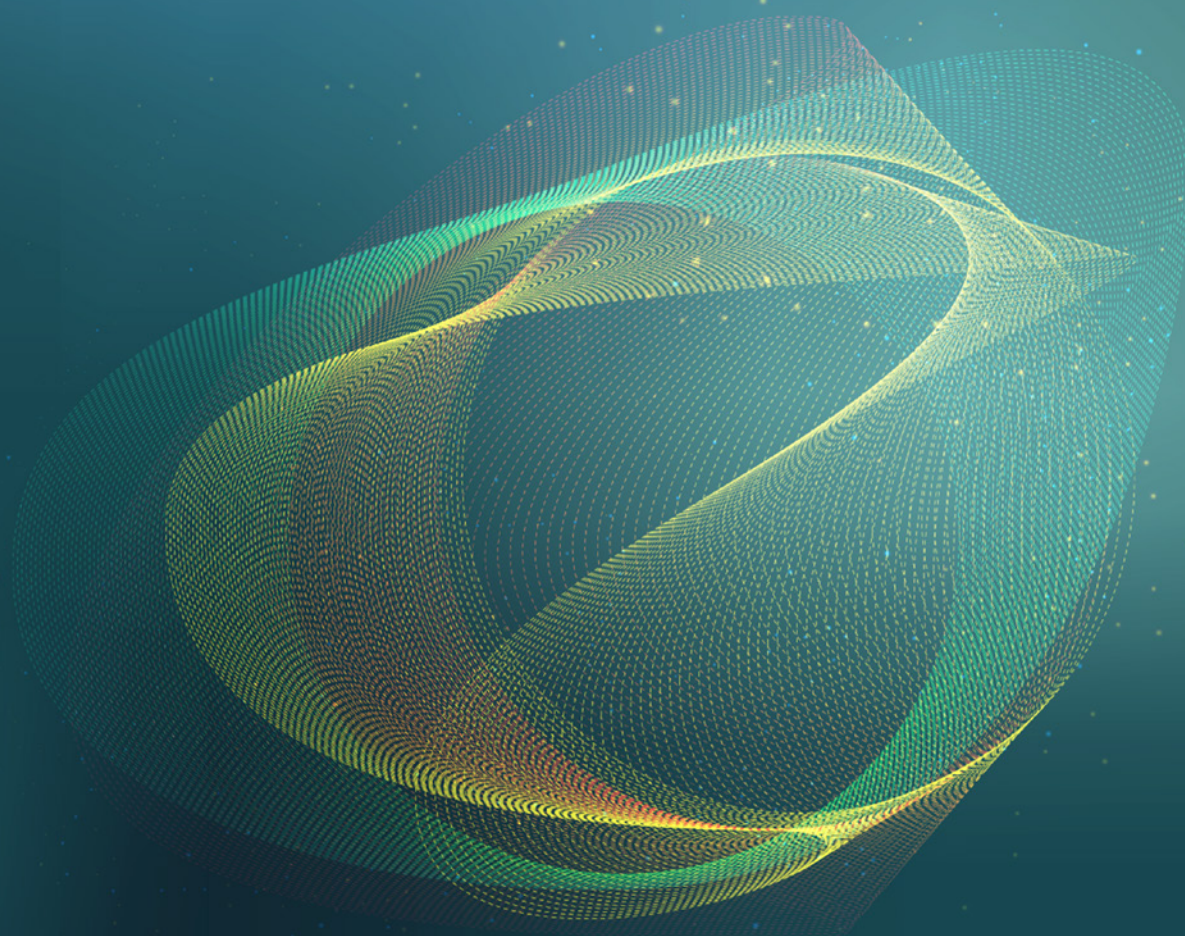


Briefing

SMARTER LEGAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

EYES ON THE
ROADMAP

Strategic business leaders
at top UK law firms discuss
a wide range of recent
transformations at work –
and what may be to follow



A NEW CHAPTER OF CHANGE?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How have a broad range of legal businesses in the mid-market handled the increased pace of change, and all the pressures that brings, rapidly introduced and building steam since the early days of a global pandemic?

Which changes would they now especially like to retain in the next phase of their growth plans, and where would further supportive change be of benefit to tomorrow's business and workforce models?

These are the questions that we've put to business leaders at a sample of those firms. With future conditions still far from certain, some are now planning their strategic courses further into the future to remain more flexible to respond to circumstances. Others talk of potentially repositioning certain change projects within the overall pipeline in a bid to head off any concerning 'change fatigue' that could cost employee engagement. But although a more widespread 'change mindset' may be in greater evidence in the corridors and collaboration channels of law firms than was once the case, one thing about which the majority of leaders are clear is that they can't take their people's acceptance of a firm's position on anything for granted. Buy-in to change itself requires investment.

Areas of activity that have been particularly positively influenced in 2020-2021 include the exploration of alternative client delivery models, as well as the 'reimagination' of internal processes (and some office premises of course), with a focus on working from more locations more flexibly, while streamlining workflow to new norms that need fewer bundles of paper.

If other stakeholders are also bought in, plenty of recent changes could be here to stay – their productivity-enhancing credentials now well tested and stamped with the seal of strategic approval. However, the reality of the virtual/hybrid communication and collaboration experience is a key operational area that firms are now focused on fine-tuning further. This is alongside optimising efficient working within a working day of any pattern, and managing to grow greater adoption of efficiency-building investments that have already been made. ▴

BRIEFING PEOPLE



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changing perception from within

PARTNER COMMENT



Matthew Stringer
Chief experience officer
Stridon

The pandemic has fast-forwarded the technology revolution in the legal sector – in fact, digital transformation has become a top priority for law firm leaders, with 51% saying the pandemic has fuelled plans to invest in even more technology.

Law firms are thinking differently about technology. They have seen it is capable of fundamentally transforming the delivery of legal services, of the day-to-day experience of lawyers, and through streamlining internal operations to significantly increase efficiencies.

Now, quite rightly – as this latest research confirms – law firm leaders are pausing, taking stock of what's worked over the past 18 months, prioritising projects and building longer-term strategic plans.

And strategic planning is crucial, because without this long-term transformation vision, implementing digital change can become a piecemeal endeavour that misses the mark when it comes to improving alignment between lawyers and business operations.

Rethinking the future law firm – why it pays to put people first

For a digital change programme to be effective and truly transformative, people have to be at the centre of everything. Working with internal teams across different practice areas ensures an

environment is built that seeks to engage with individuals more deeply, so they buy into what the firm is trying to achieve.

Getting everyone – from administrative teams to senior lawyers – to contribute their insights into how working differently would benefit clients, has the potential to boost fee-earning capacity, and make people happier and more motivated in their roles. This will enable law firms to gain new insights as to where the opportunities lie to leverage technology and differentiate themselves in the market.

Rather than being an end in itself, every technology investment also needs to be made with an outcome in mind. This could be enabling enhanced client interactions, improved team collaboration, increased accuracy and speed of processes, or a complete transformation of the day-to-day responsibilities of staff.

Ultimately, the aim is to offer faster and better legal services at competitive prices – freeing lawyers to conduct their work more efficiently, and with greater independence.

But there are even greater opportunities on the horizon for those law firms that truly want to think outside the box.

What defines the future law firm really?

Automation has been a hot topic for some years now, as law firms look to speed up internal and client-facing transactions and eliminate time and cost overheads by digitally enabling processes. In other words, they are streamlining administrative processes to deliver back time.

This is critical for law firms that effectively trade their people's time to deliver outcomes that are billable to clients. However, it's also important for

giving employees an enhanced life/work experience.

Using technology to give back time represents a win-win outcome for everyone. On the one hand, it enables firms to improve the health and wellbeing of the workforce, which in turn reduces the risk of burnout or high staff turnover rates. On the other, teams and individuals can now use this freed-up time in the workplace to engage in some truly creative thinking.

At a local level, this can mean members within a practice group now have time to understand what clients really want – and which innovations would resonate with them in the long term. Or it could be that practice groups use this time to brainstorm business development opportunities that will add value, engaging in conversations with other practice groups about how they could collaborate to develop new rich opportunities or go after new sectors.

This means that, alongside investing in technology, law firms must address how they incentivise and compensate teams, to encourage people to drive some of that time efficiency back into innovation and critical thinking. Rather than focusing solely on billable hours, law firms will need to give individuals the opportunity to showcase their ideas – creating a game-changing innovation culture that leads to long-term value and new business models that add up to sustainable competitive advantage.

Law firms that focus on long-term opportunities will be best prepared for the challenges to come. Ultimately, technology is the means to an end – it should never be the end in itself. ▴



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01 Changing ambitions?

Strategy, transformation and innovation leaders at six growing law firms in the **Briefing** market discuss their business drivers against the backdrop of the increased pace of change, the recent transformations in the workplace that have seen most promising traction, and the operational areas now set for further exploration of just what's possible in future

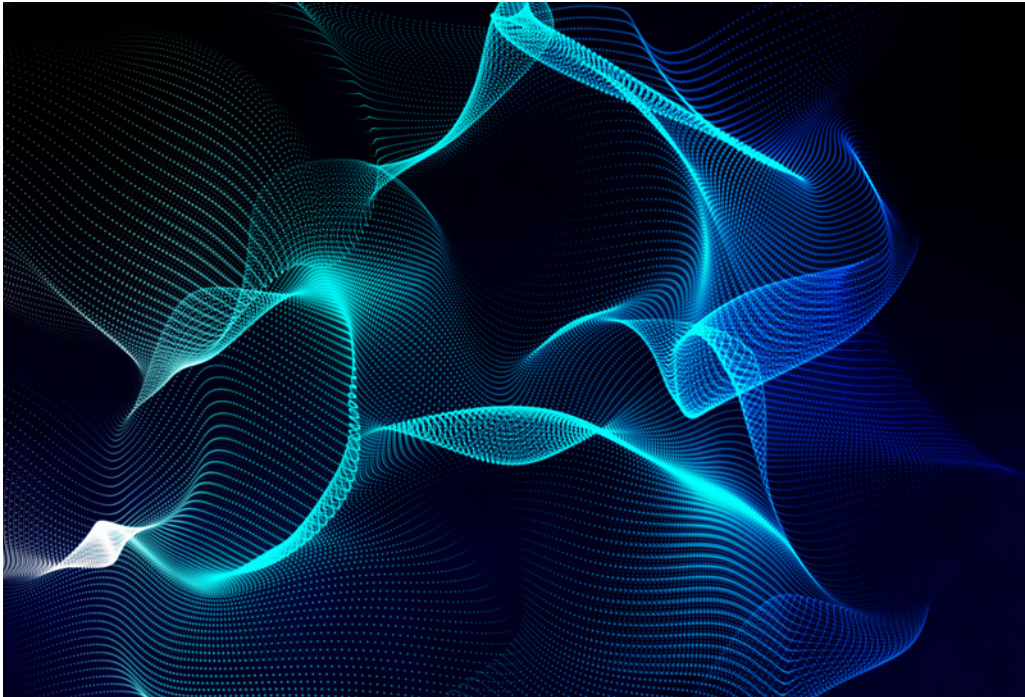
It's quite clear that the push to homeworking in 2020 has been a catalyst for at least some deeper change at the UK's leading law firms. The rapid switch inevitably significantly fast-tracked the rollout of devices, screens and other equipment for the home office – and capability and security needs were reassessed as priorities. Long lockdowns also bolstered the case for digitalisation of many processes as leaders, managers and their teams soon needed to find new ways to communicate, to access, share and act productively on information, and to progress tasks as efficiently as possible, without the infrastructure and informal channels of shared office space. More than that, many firms have been on a journey of questioning whether their office space could in future function rather differently – and more cost-effectively, how their clients' preferences and expectations may have

changed; and whether talent can be attracted to the organisation as competition heats up based on adjusted equations of expectations.

But how much more change do firms now expect in the months and years that lie ahead, and as critically, can they expect their people to adopt it? Anecdotally, while painful and problematic, the extreme uncertainty of working through the pandemic has offered up at least one potential positive – an uptick in 'change mindset'. This means less resistance to considering alternatives, and a willingness to embrace them more fully and faster if found to work. This publication's **Briefing** Frontiers (Legal IT landscapes) research – published in February 2021 – also found 51% of law firm management leaders reporting they had plans to invest more in technology through the pandemic period – and because of its pressures. But what has transpired in practice? We have spoken to individuals in a

Research and words
Richard Brent,
Head of content,
Burlington
Media Group

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range of strategic leadership roles at top UK law firms about the most significant changes already introduced within their organisations, those that really need to bed in and remain, and for their thoughts surrounding the highest-priority directions of travel for the future.

Louise Thomas, head of transformation and project management at **Burges Salmon**, says her firm has just embarked on a new five-year strategy – a change in itself from the relatively well-trodden path of planning out for up to three years. Among much else, Burges Salmon has been busy during the pandemic growing its first office in Scotland – by around 50% in terms of people, she says – and the firm has also opened in Dublin to support its trademark work post-Brexit. The rationale for taking in the next wave of strategic transformation over five years is twofold, she says: “There is the fact it’s an ambitious strategy, but there’s also an element of waiting to respond to what’s emerging from a period of uncertainty – the settling of markets, identifying what clients are most valuing, and acclimatising to working in a hybrid world.” Five years will enable the firm to commit to delivering some larger projects within that time and those parameters, its leaders feel.

Underpinning this, however, is the final stage of

commitment to a change for the business that’s likely to be on many other firms’ radars now (if they hadn’t pinged before the pandemic). Burges Salmon is in the process of migrating its entire IT architecture and application portfolio to a cloud platform in time for 2022 – in fact, a combination of SaaS and cloud – and decommissioning all physical architecture and data centres. In **Briefing Frontiers 2021**, the firm explained that this wouldn’t just enable more flexibility within change programmes. It will also see a greater proportion of resource directed into the development of client-facing tools and information management efforts in future.

Jeff Wright, transformation and change director at the law firm **TLT**, says his firm has also just embarked on a new strategy for the next stage of its growth. And client base development, followed by strength of service delivery to those clients, are the understandable cornerstones. For example, TLT recently established a new consortium called Artis, with the US firm McDermott Will & Emery and Canadian law firm Borden Ladner Gervais, to help it broaden its ability to advise governments on international trade law and a multitude of UK and EU legal matters – a key work area of growth for the business through the pandemic. This consortium

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is also supported by a network of international firms in 11 other jurisdictions. As a result, Wright explains, the firm and consortium partners have secured a place on the government's newly established trade law panel to advise on international negotiations and disputes. "There's a real push in terms of developing relationships, collaboration and services, to demonstrate the expertise and deliver the value that clients need," he says. "That requires people to invest the time when there isn't necessarily an immediate or obvious benefit for them."

Connected to this, the careful prioritisation of coming change projects is also very high on Wright's agenda – particularly after the experience of pandemic working, where some sense of 'change fatigue' hitting the workforce would hardly be out of the question. "The frequency of adapting to change has of course increased, but so has the speed of adoption required," says Wright. Indeed, he has recently been overseeing a piece of work to improve the understanding of overlapping change portfolios across the business, and to identify whether some previously planned changes may need to be staggered or staged differently to make the overall volume more manageable. "It isn't about slowing things down so much as subtle adoption of the right changes in the right places – the areas you're most concerned about," he says.

The perception of overwhelming people with change perhaps ought to be a consideration at any time of course. Significantly, says Wright, TLT has also placed its own people front and centre of its strategy now stretching out to 2025. "We've reset our values – what we stand for as an employer as well as for our clients – and we've invested a lot of money and energy into foregrounding wellbeing. As with sustainability and social mobility, there's a commitment to raising the volume, as well as supporting line managers to step up and do things differently."

This focus also extends to the future shape of hybrid-working arrangements, he adds. "Some firms may have gone for quite a fixed message, but we've realised that one size doesn't fit all here.

Some parts of the business can operate remotely for a lot of the time." TLT has undertaken several iterations of 'employee listening' over the last 18 months, and this has produced a policy of allowing discretion to decide office-working patterns within different teams and based on assessment of client need.

Meanwhile, Colum Smith, chief vision officer of the law firm **Taylor Rose MW** and CEO of RCP Digital Ltd, is laser-focused on continuing to introduce measurable process efficiencies that make as significant an impact on the bottom line as possible, as quickly as possible. Taylor Rose and RCP, along with FDR Solicitors, are members of the AllC Group – RCP is the innovation arm, and the work it produces influences how the law firm will change. "With separate boards, budgets, P&L and reporting, you can go much faster – a process change in three weeks rather than three months," Smith explains. "We're empowered to make data-based decisions about change." The group employs business analysts whose sole job is to process and define data, which in turn drives marketing, investment and other key decision-making activity.

While acknowledging its weight, Dr Catriona Wolfenden, innovation manager and partner at **Weightmans**, then has another perspective on the repercussions of a greater level of change

"The frequency of adapting to change has of course increased, but so has the speed of adoption required. It isn't about slowing things down so much as subtle adoption of the right changes in the right places – the areas you're most concerned about."

Jeff Wright, transformation and change director, TLT

pushing through the business. “You always have some more natural champions of innovation, but we’ve now found that people who were perhaps historically more hesitant have also been looking and asking for useful change themselves,” she says. “They can see advantages for their clients, and the ‘fear of failure’ that can accompany innovation has shifted into something seen as more socially acceptable.” Not only have people grown more accustomed to managing transitions in the context of the uncertainty surrounding Covid-19, they’re also increasingly familiar with technology options for making progress, and can often adopt them relatively intuitively.

“There’s a different mindset,” she says – adding that this may also contain implications for talent management as a result. “It’s a growing trend that people joining a law firm no longer see the partnership ladder as the be-all and end-all. They tend to be much more conscious of choosing a culture, client type and work, and work-life balance. That can bring challenges in terms of meeting what the workforce wants.”

Darryl Cooke, co-founder of **gunnercooke**, says he has already found such a dynamic – greater flexibility wanted from people in various forms – working in favour of a ‘challenger’ firm like his. The business model is based on all

partners having at least 10,000 hours of practice experience as a minimum (that’s based on an observation about the time it takes for anyone to grow into an expert). However, those partners have no mandated hourly billing targets to meet. They’re encouraged to fix fees with clients at the outset of a piece of a work, and they all share in the revenue – with all project management in the cloud for ‘anywhere’ working. “The pandemic hasn’t changed our strategy,” Cooke is clear. But he is seeing even more traction for messaging such as around profit sharing and “people realising they just don’t necessarily have to be in a traditional firm to progress as they want.”

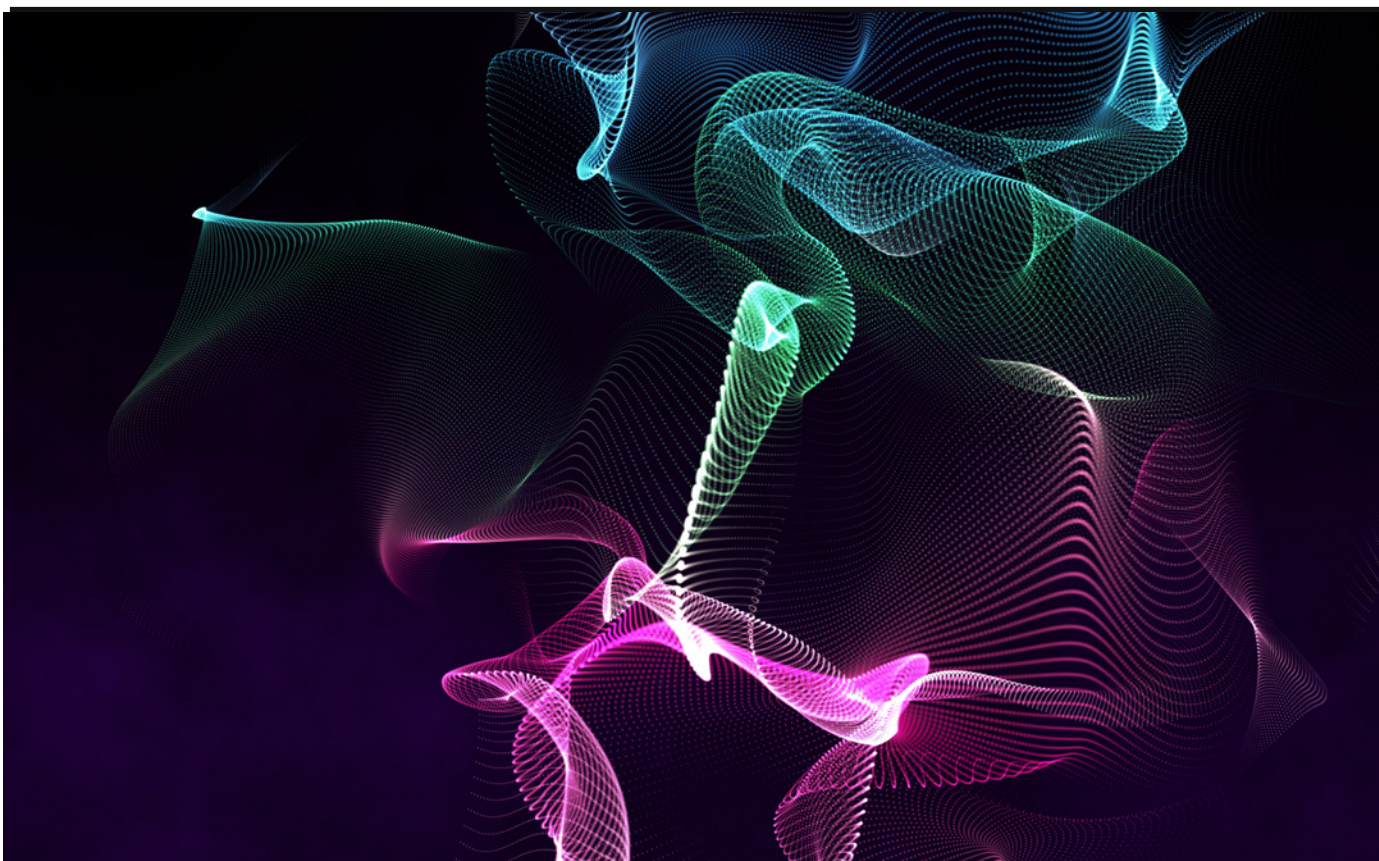
With 40% growth in the past year, he explains: “I think the success lies in how we remunerate people – the fee-sharing. Lawyers are quicker to become businesspeople – they get closer to their clients because they need to do so.”

The unchanged strategy is to be one of two or three global leaders with a model along these lines. Indeed, gunnercooke is busy expanding internationally – Berlin is open, with China on the cards – through careful assessment of the best location for specific services it’s launching. Hungary, for example, is under consideration as a home for the firm’s legal technology development. “We’re always looking at how best to develop new specialisms,” says Cooke.

There are a set of associated firms and not-for-profits within the gunnercooke group – covering consulting and training, for example, and one being the gunnercooke foundation. Here Cooke is also focused on further service diversification that resonates with the idea of holding to a strong people-based purpose. “We’re currently looking at opening bookshops around the UK focused specifically on alleviating loneliness,” he says. “We have gone in with some fantastic booksellers and charities, but the firm is taking all the risk – initially in places where we also have offices. The shops will have to make a profit, but that profit will be channelled back into the bookshops and loneliness project.” ▲

“There’s a different mindset. It’s a growing trend that people joining a law firm no longer see the partnership ladder as the be-all and end-all. They tend to be much more conscious of choosing a culture.”

Dr Catriona Wolfenden, innovation manager, Weightmans



02 Adaptation and expectation of change

One thing that a global pandemic hasn't changed, says Jeff Wright at TLT, is the notion that technology can somehow simply be parachuted in to fix any problem for any client. "Let's not shoehorn in solutions. Many of a legal team's day-to-day challenges are more fundamental than implementing new technology can necessarily solve, and you always need to start with the problem." TLT has a 'FutureLaw' team and fund to focus its innovation agenda, which even directly invests in legal technology development, but Wright says it's the "client listening" aspect that has been one of the biggest drivers of change – and looks set to remain so.

He explains: "There's a pace of change around the ways that our clients need access to a broader range of services, and in that context also around how we collaborate with them. The place we've found real traction is by knitting together already well-understood tech with perhaps some novel

processes to focus on a particular problem. That's where you really start to see value adding up." A recent example, he says, is the creation of a 'legal front door' between an in-house legal team and the team's internal clients in that business. "We've operated that door with a blend of a helpline format and some chatbot technology to streamline responses to the most common queries, while channelling more complicated matters through the more traditional routes – whether that's back to the client or outsourced.

"But the really novel part is then collecting data about the day-to-day work that would otherwise be likely to go unnoticed – providing deeper insight into some of the challenges." This model can be applied just as well to the relationship between law firm and client, he explains. Under a more traditional delivery model, such data is more likely to be missed – and it's information that can be used to direct training and development,

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to address process inefficiencies or act on relationship weaknesses – in short, enhancing service. This approach to process understanding and segmented delivery has particularly spun out in the pandemic period, Wright says.

Louise Thomas says Burges Salmon is currently in a “reimagination” phase that’s touching multiple aspects of how it works, including innovation and delivery (her team comprises business analysts, project managers – including legal project managers – change managers and innovation specialists).

“It’s of course about what the ‘next normal’ looks like,” she says. “Out of adversity comes some opportunity, and we also need to make sure that we don’t take some steps backward as certain aspects of pre-Covid working perhaps return.”

Dr Wolfenden at Weightmans says: “With technology where it is today, the days of forever dragging lots of different people between different offices are probably gone. There is so much that can be done digitally – we’ve all seen that now – and there’s a clear fit with both the sustainability and efficiency agendas, reducing paper and business travel time and costs.”

For her part, Thomas stresses though that some things that will or won’t happen as a rule under hybrid-working will involve others’

preferences and needs, which aren’t necessarily all yet known. That means clients of course, but also other key players such as the courts, and indeed the firm’s own people. “We’d hope they will recognise some of the advantages and efficiencies in the changes made and want to continue,” she says.

“We have introduced e-signatures for contracts and e-bundling for virtual hearings to support our clients there. Clearly it has also been possible to reduce a lot of printing and business travel, supporting our sustainability goals and commitment to become net-zero for emissions by 2026, and we’re now introducing a new travel policy through our sustainability committee.”

But this change too will incorporate a level of client demand. People will be encouraged to be thoughtful, but some types of work or client may favour an in-person meeting, and norms are expected to settle around what is appropriate in the circumstances over time.

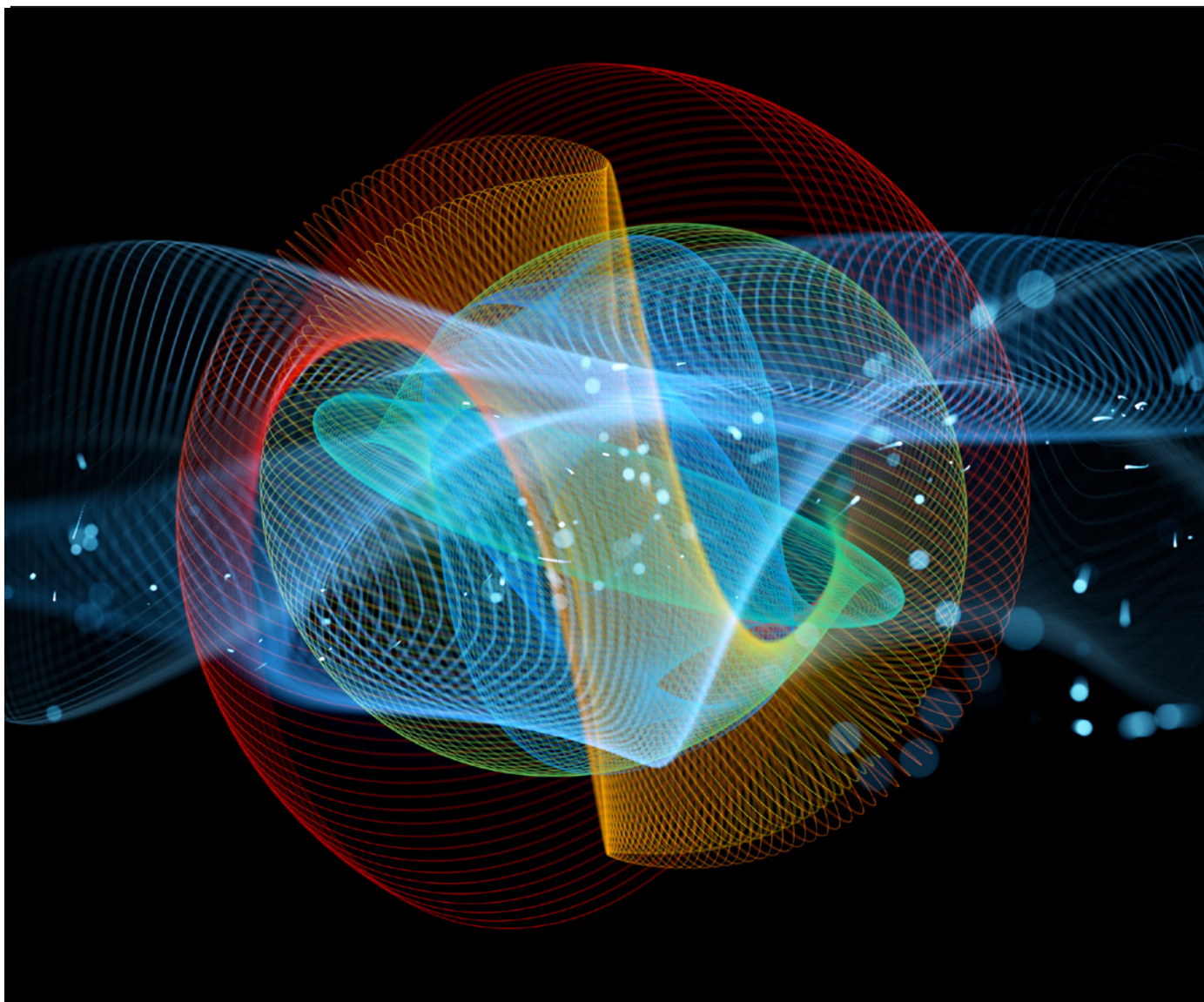
“We’ve found that you really do need to be in the same room as a client for some formats, and we wouldn’t want to move to a fully virtual situation,” she adds. However, time-saving virtual pitches, increased video communications from leadership to boost personalisation of messaging and buy-in, and the wider reach of online events, are all advantages likely to remain, she says.

In terms of client communication and delivery, Burges Salmon has also recently ramped up investment in the development of apps for particularly in-demand client processes – to help those clients to navigate the potential termination of commercial contracts as a result of the pandemic, for example. “We developed that from an idea into being ready to send it out of the door in two weeks,” says Thomas.

Another new platform just launched, BScale, is offering a package to address the full legal lifecycle of startup businesses, including both free automation of certain documents – such as employment contracts, website policies and shareholder agreements – and the opportunity to nurture and deepen relationships. ▲

“We have introduced e-signatures for contracts and e-bundling for virtual hearings. Clearly it has also been possible to reduce a lot of printing and business travel, supporting our sustainability goals and commitment to become net-zero for emissions by 2026.”

Louise Thomas, head of transformation and project management, Burges Salmon



03 Charting future change

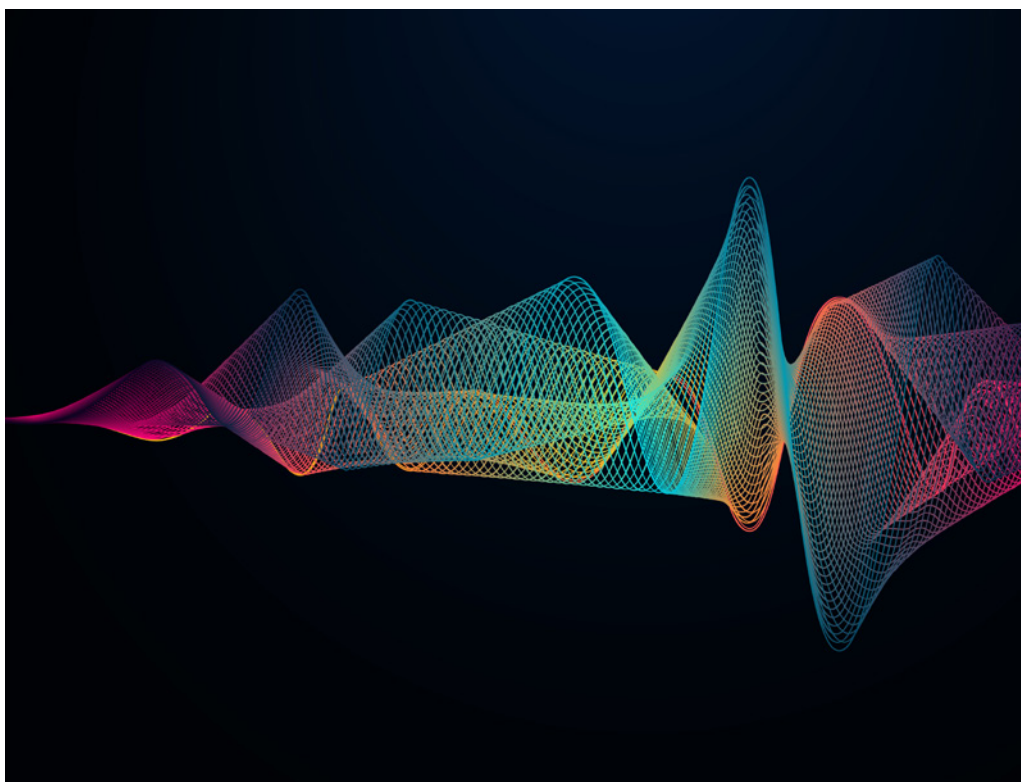
But if firms' collective appetite for change has indeed healthily increased, to what extent can today's leaders anticipate any of the next rounds of transformations in store? This includes not only changes to enhance the firm's service delivery, the output from innovation and relationships, but also to build a more productive – and ultimately enjoyable – working day for people.

Having taken advice from some of the other service areas in the gunnercooke group, Darryl Cooke is clear that his firm will now usually look for a 'best of breed' option when buying new technology. "Law firms are sometimes too

easily convinced that one partner can supply them almost everything. You really do have to understand each business need, but we've developed an IT team that is very forward-focused and bringing a lot of new products and ideas through." On the other hand, user-friendliness and transparency have been among the most recent priorities to address, he says: "If fee earners are opening their files on the train, they want to press one button – that's where it's going."

Louise Thomas at Burges Salmon says that the design and use of collaboration platforms is something that will certainly need to keep

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evolving – and a concern common to many is the future shape of hybrid meetings. “The presence of some people in the office, and some at home or a client site, poses quite a shift,” she says. “It isn’t that the technology isn’t available necessarily, more a matter of how people can use it most effectively, for example to facilitate or chair discussions. How do you navigate that experience with flipcharts and enable the full gathering of input and ideas?”

There’s a direct link here to firm values and wellbeing as well, as it’s on leaders to ensure that those working all the permitted patterns feel – and indeed are – included. Organisations have of course experimented with various formal and informal meeting formats, including through the lens of providing the right level of support, oversight and involvement; neither too little nor too much.

“We introduced a buddy system as well, to help keep our people connected remotely, and there’s a great deal of investment currently going into meeting rooms and AV so that people are able to join a call at just one touch,” says Thomas.

Jeff Wright adds that TLT has been busy trialling some camera devices that can easily plug into laptops and provide different views

of an ‘office’ meeting room simultaneously – a panorama shot of the room, while also picking up on any face that is speaking. “We’ve then experimented by sitting some screens at meeting tables showing people working from home, and the picture hangs a little on the person who has just stopped talking,” he says. As they have the device, the idea is that their experience is as close as it can be to their being present in the room – also experienced by those who are in that day.

Wolfenden at Weightmans adds that innovation activity can also be more challenging to manage through everyone’s screens. “We have our online whiteboard, but you do run the risk of people talking over the top of one another. It’s hard to replicate clustering around the board together to map out ideas virtually.

“In the office you also have the impact of the serendipitous conversations – the ‘watercooler moments’, which we’ve all missed. People would often mention a call about a client problem in passing. They can be less willing to share that electronically. Explaining things to new people is also often easier in person – and before the pandemic you used to learn by listening to others on the phone.”

She is in planning for her own team to have

some in-person time that isn't about sitting and working at desks or formal meetings, but "real conversation", she says – and agrees that online meeting systems and processes need to be mindful of barriers to inclusion.

Alex Hatchman, CEO at **Fletchers Solicitors**, agrees with Wright at TLT. There is no one-size-fits-all set out for future working patterns at her firm either. This fact could also make a case for some future technological support in the form of ready and reliable data on people as individuals and their preferences, she says.

"We want people to be productive and to be happy. So you need to ask, where does that happen?" Part of it, and perhaps the pattern that likely ensues, will hinge on the requirements of a given role. "Some activities are also perhaps best achieved at home, before bringing results back to share with a team more collaboratively, such as in a workshop format." However, there are also differences between personality types that affect preferences and performance. "Employers need to see the workforce not just as an entity, but every employee as an individual," says Hatchman. "In retail, the management of loyalty schemes involves a customer-insight database. There's no shortcutting the value of floor-walking or importance of relationships. However, businesses might benefit from an employee-insight database – something that helps to really understand your people so you can optimise and make sound decisions about technology infrastructure and office space, for example. There is a supply and demand aspect, which can be optimised with a tool."

And at the same time as continuing to support client journeys through its app-development capability, Burges Salmon also has the working journeys of its own people in mind – in an often still remote, and certainly increasingly technology-saturated world. "We've started on a new programme to give everybody the same level of understanding about the technology available to them, including innovation, legal

project management and the more day-to-day," explains Thomas. The idea is they'll become both more confident in themselves and more confident to communicate possibilities to clients. There is also significant investment going into the firm's digital-learning programme to provide a range of 'just in time' information and training solutions, she says.

Jeff Wright says TLT is another firm applying thought to how remote workers can more conveniently access the information they need to work. "We're building helpdesks for each core business service, with a self-serve enabling chatbot in the case of IT that may well be extended to other functions as part of the change programme in future," he says. "People want to work much more flexibly, and that includes during different hours. They need to be able to get a quick response and be less reliant on others at the end of the phone to answer a query."

The same applies to clients' working patterns of course. Catriona Wolfenden at Weightmans says her firm was nicely on its way to paper-light with client communications already. "But I think there will continue to be growing client demand for visibility of information at the time of their choosing." Using a portal – not new in itself –

"There's no shortcutting the value of floor-walking or importance of relationships. However, businesses might benefit from an employee-insight database – something that helps to really understand your people so you can optimise and make sound decisions about technology."

Alex Hatchman, CEO, Fletchers Solicitors

they can see the volume and progress of ongoing instructions at any time – and hopefully a glance.

Overall, there's a clear emphasis on managing to change more workflow with the technology firms have already implemented – rather than necessarily finding something entirely new. And this is particularly so when it comes to productivity, project management and personal satisfaction within a future working day. Wright highlights how Microsoft Office 365, for example, is on a journey of serving up ever more contextual information about work in progress to aid near-term decision-making about best use of time. "You can also potentially build more of a framework for managing matter lifecycle with very well-understood technology – pre-populating some document content and automating some of the assembly as part of a framework where the next steps are within easier reach for people." These frameworks can be crafted for some individual work types, he adds.

But Colum Smith at RCP/Taylor Rose MW also emphasises the level of risk in freedom surrounding systems. His team will certainly continue trying to streamline its way to ever more predictable profitability by incremental improvement – and he'd also be in favour of fewer clicks to generate reporting out of his case

management system. He's also highly focused on preventing people from working around any new and/or improved systems to reduce risk, while deriving long-term value creation "that is not merely created from legal product but achieved during each stage of the consumer journey", he says. "Consumers want more from their journey. Focusing on the entire experience helps them to feel like they are valued members of the process." This is a process he wants as efficient and smooth as possible.

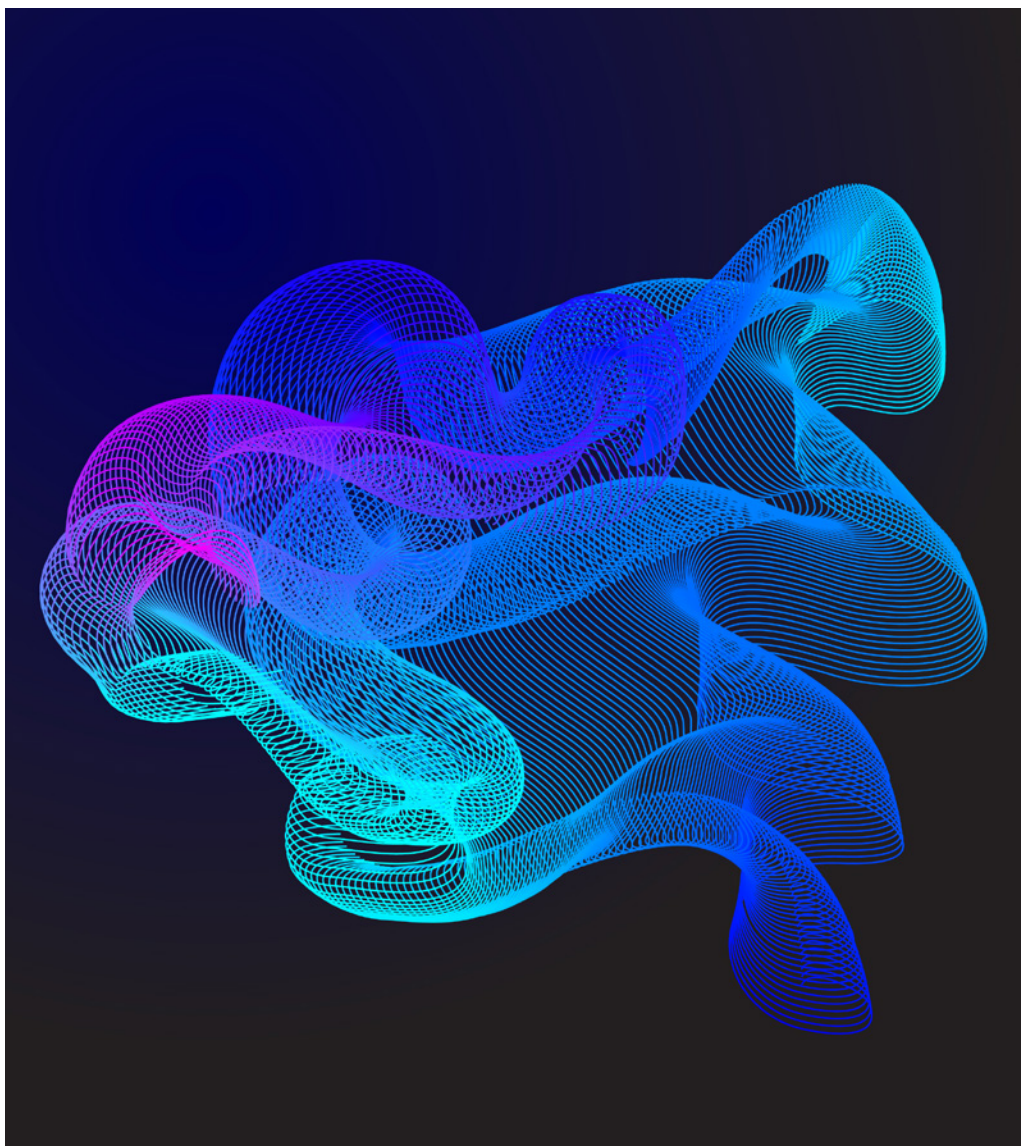
Having improved profitability substantially over the last 12 months and driven the group up into the top 60 law firms by revenue, there's now investment of another £6m in IT for 2022 to further enhance this customer journey. The plan is to continue with a "hybrid-flexible" working model, and location has simply become secondary to the process – "how much does each individual unit of work cost, what can it be charged for, and can something be done more consistently or differently?" is the mantra, he says. "As long as it's combined with risk management, we will look at the process." He uses anti-fraud systems as a series of doors that people need to be pushed through but sets this within a wider business investment programme of educating people about risk.

Weightmans, meanwhile, had already applied automation to filing emails against case management records for efficiency/productivity gains. Catriona Wolfenden now anticipates increased uptake of machine-learning capability – already available – as lawyers who have worked from home become more comfortable working without printing paper. "Why wouldn't you use a tool to help you read contracts and leases and generate more outcomes in that environment? People are now reading longer documents online, through multiple tabs, on multiple screens, where previously they may well have clung firmly to that paper file," she says.

Hatchman is another focused on any potential

"People are now reading longer documents online, through multiple tabs, on multiple screens, where previously they may well have clung firmly to that paper file."

Dr Catriona Wolfenden, innovation manager, Weightmans




for greater automation, as Fletchers now “doubles down” on its core areas of continuously increasing both volume and value in medical negligence work, establishing long-term contracts in the personal injury space, and investigating the available routes to securing new business. Within that strategy, a big factor is the commercial model of any particular revenue stream, she says.

“There is the fixed-fee model, and there is the cost-plus model. Are there things that we do frequently and repeatedly, which we can fully automate, and so be free to be more future-looking? With the cost-plus model, however, you also need to be cautious about automating in a space where you’re actually generating revenue. Overall, I’d say there’s an efficiency drive in the high-volume, lower-value work, and an

effectiveness drive in the low-volume, higher-value work.”

Leaders at **Briefing** firms clearly see plenty of ways that another change or two, existing process or new, may help them to become more successful within their next strategic periods. Much will hinge on the priorities of the firm – which of course ties to the nature of the client work. But at least one common factor is the engagement of those who’ll need to use the new way of working – and ought to see how they can clearly benefit from it. Interest in process change, and willingness to see it through, may well have been galvanised during a difficult period where people truly needed the new to stay resilient – but naturally it can’t be assumed that a change in dynamic will simply continue unchanged. ▴



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