

# Briefing

SMARTER LEGAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT



# FRONTIERS 2024

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# The chances of change

If the first blossom graces the trees here in the UK, you know it can't be long before the last few pages of **Briefing** Frontiers must be finalised for another year. The big question – as so often – is how has the world of law firm willingness to invest in support for transformation itself changed in the past 12 months?

Well, 2024 is the first year that the phrase generative artificial intelligence has made it into this annual report on the tying of technology and strategy in the sector – although AI more generally has long been touted as the top lever of increased efficiency to watch. Do the largest, supposedly most forward-thinking, firms in the UK yet have something they could point to as a plan here? By that I don't just mean a policy for keeping eager lawyers in check today, but an understanding of what they should do – and when – to weave it into the business model of tomorrow?

I'm sure some will tell me it's still relatively early days – and such a strategy would need to be a pretty fluid one given the situation outside firms' walls. However, we can clearly see quite the range when it comes to the question of how quickly these leaders think they'll be able to set large language models to work for client-facing documents. Will the earliest movers be able to command any competitive advantage at all, or will it pay to take more time?

As I write, I see use cases pitted against one another in the engine rooms for innovation. But although we've seen fit to give AI its own chapter here, it's far from the only point on which we'd like some answers. How about a data strategy fit to feed AI ambitions with accurate information (commanding confidence) from across the firm? Is there still any argument about the value of cloud in the future ecosystem? And however advanced the AI of 2024, will the wheels of innovation keep turning as fast in the latest economic and political climate? Read on to see how your perspective sits next to those from leaders we've also taken very human time to interview. ▶

RICHARD BRENT, HEAD OF CONTENT, BRIEFING

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# A Briefing word of thanks...

We're committed to building regular insightful and reflective pictures of the changing UK legal business landscape — but we couldn't do it without the support of busy strategic leaders working at law firms across the market

Thank you for taking time to give considered answers to our wide-ranging questions about the intersection of strategy and technology investment for **Briefing** Frontiers 2024:

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### OBJECTION LESSON

The top three perceived barriers to change in 2024 (p14):

- Current volumes of change in the business
- Stakeholder buy-in to the benefits
- Cost/profitability pressure



### TECH STACK UP?

#### GOOD TO GO!

Tech categories where leaders are most likely to be satisfied with the status quo (p40):

- Remote/hybrid-working setup and kit
- Office app suite
- Collaboration (messaging and conferencing)



### SAY IT CLOUD?

# 24%

*Of leaders say their firm has already migrated all its core business systems to private or public cloud (p36). Another 13% expect to move this year!*

# Frontiers futures

### THE POWER OF 3

# 2/5

*of leaders expect people will spend a full three days a week in an office the firm pays for in 2025 (p18)*



### GOTTA GO ...

Areas of tech where leaders are most likely to believe a system needs replacing (p40):

- Marketing/BD systems
- Pricing
- Compliance (such as KYC/AML)

### AN IMPORTANT BIT OF DATA ... ABOUT DATA

# 32%

*Of law firm leaders say their firm does not have a 'business-wide data strategy' (p32)*

**Briefing** polled (online) 62 senior strategy/operations business leaders at law firms based in the UK with total headcounts of 250+. The survey ran from November 2023 until January 2024, and interviews took place in January.



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# Change agents

Four-fifths of law firm strategic leaders are seeing more calls on their innovation capability than in 2022 — with almost half increasing the funding to help them deliver it, as the outlook for hiring both legal and operational expertise also improves

**W**ith generative artificial intelligence (genAI) taking centre stage in lots of this year's talk, at least, of legal business transformation, 2023 may prove to have been a turning point for the profession in terms of unlocking productivity gains and more efficient resourcing in future.

At the same time, however, a run of increasing interest rates, salary spikes amid recruitment and retention challenges, and the return to a higher cost base after the Covid-19 years, has applied some pressure to profitability performance. In November 2023, PwC's annual survey of the sector found law firms optimistic about their growth prospects for the year ahead, but named 'macroeconomic volatility' the most significant threat to realising them.

Cyber risk comes second — ever more complex to manage with the embedding of new work life (and attack) patterns — followed by cost recovery through pricing. Respondents ranked these three threats higher than the talent shortages that topped the pile of perils a year earlier.

What, if anything, does this environment mean for law firm innovation? In our **Briefing** Frontiers research for 2023, almost two-thirds (64%) of strategic leaders disagreed with the notion that a world of higher interest rates would decrease appetite for innovation. On the contrary, there was a view they'd need to invest in the space not only to future-proof against the fast-changing risk and change landscape, but also indeed to compete and deliver effectively for those price-conscious

clients. "Pressure on price and margins means law firms simply have to keep innovating," suggested Foot Anstey director of change and innovation Jeff Wright.

Only one in 10 then expected to see less of a push for innovation. And, heading into 2024, an overwhelming 81% report an increase in demand across the previous 12 months (p11). For almost one-quarter (24%), moreover, that's a significant increase — and only 3% recognise a drop.

In 2022, when Catriona Wolfenden was promoted to product and innovation director at Weightmans, the firm also established a new group of product and innovation partners — expected to spend two-thirds of their time facilitating the flow of new ideas and opportunities for the firm in the context of

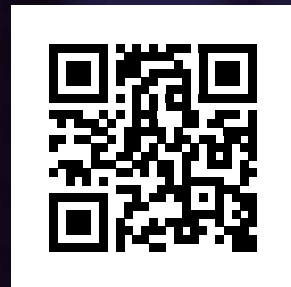
# Harness the Power of Automation with Aderant AI Technology

**Meet MADDI: The AI-Powered Virtual Associate Comes Pre-Trained to Accelerate Law Firm Productivity Through Automation and Insights.**

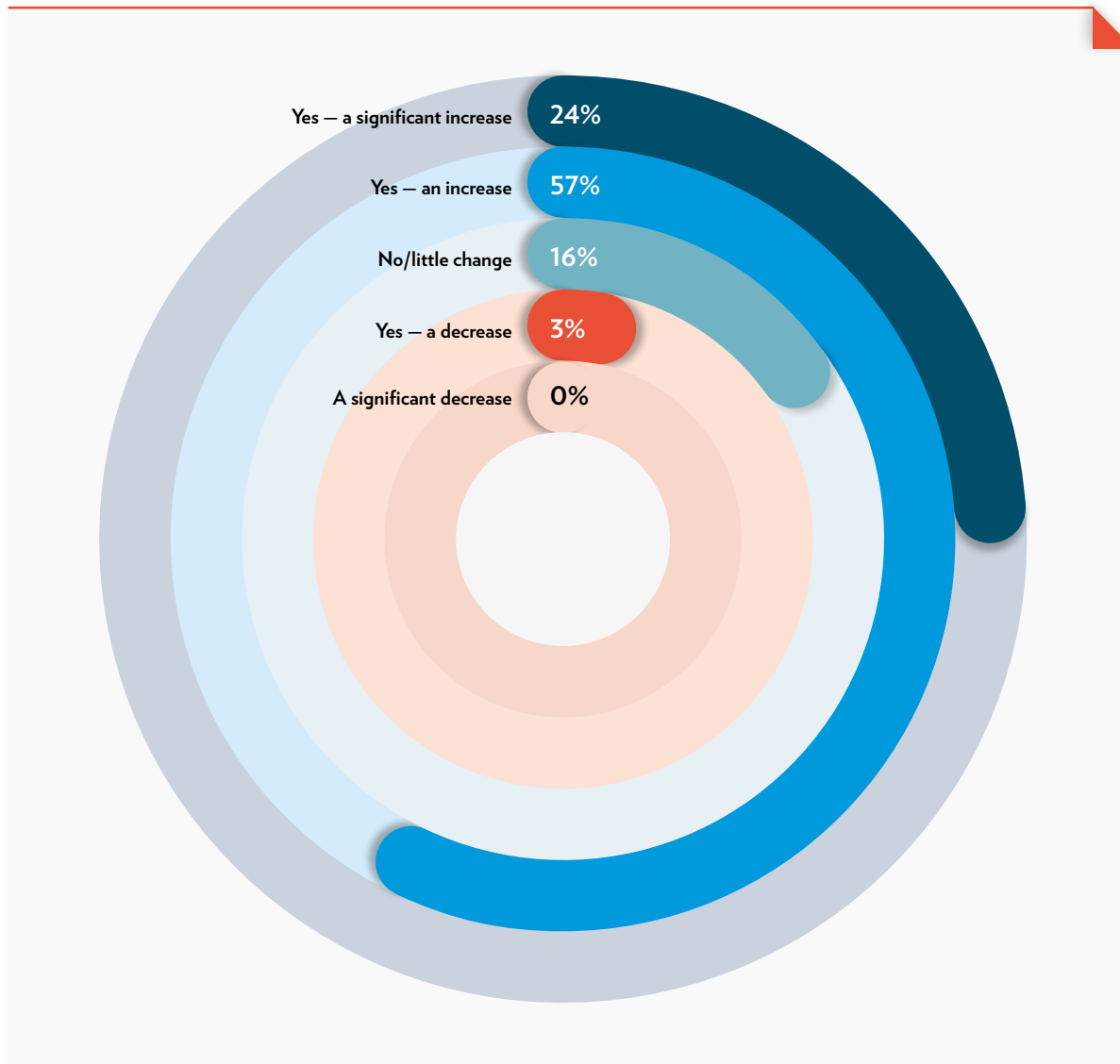
“Incorporating AI into Aderant’s solutions was a crucial next step in the evolution of our offerings. However, unlike other AI-enabled legal tech products, we have been actively pre-training MADDI to ensure our clients realise immediate value,” said *Andy Hoyt, Aderant’s Chief Technology Officer.*

“MADDI is inherently versatile, having a much broader impact, and will address more than one particular need to drive firm-wide growth, scalability, and optimisation from the insight it generates.”

**Meet MADDI**



**Have you seen any change in appetite for investment in business transformation/service innovation at the firm in the last 12 months?**



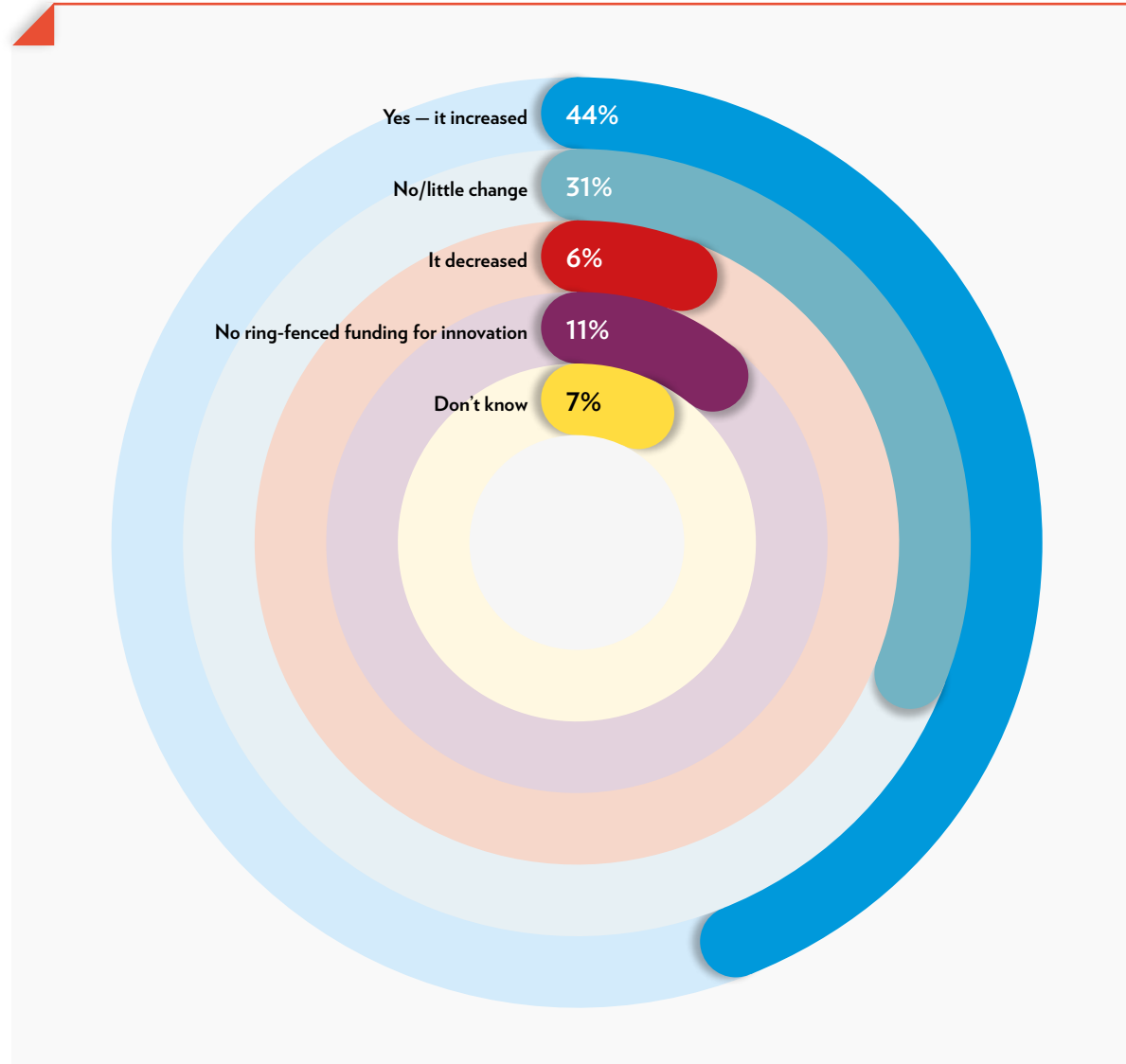
their sector and client knowledge: “They’re involved from the point of ideation and scoping right through to scaling up and selling the results of our innovation,” she says. “The biggest challenge to innovation for firms is still usually time, and this makes it a specific objective.” Weightmans also tracks the return on this investment. “There’s a revenue target for innovation, which includes our software-as-a-service sales and productised services, much as we’d see in fee earning.”

The latest **Briefing**/HSBC Law firm strategy and investment survey, published in September 2023, found a consistent median estimate of spend on all things technology (people included) as a percentage of firms’ revenue: it’s even now 5%. But almost three-quarters of leaders also said the amount had increased compared to 2021 (82% in the case of firms with revenues over £100m). Toolsets geared towards efficiency were seen as the top priority (77%), followed by collaboration (48%) and risk/compliance (p23).

This year’s **Frontiers** also establishes that over two-fifths (44%) of firms, according to their leaders, made more funding available in 2023 specifically for activity that would be classed as innovation (p12). In line with the question of appetite, just 6% report that an innovation budget or similar was reduced – although more than one in 10 don’t ring-fence such spend away from business as usual at all.

Graeme Trigg, head of client services at

Did the firm’s innovation budget (or equivalent dedicated spend) change in 2023?



**MONEY BUSINESS**

*Over two-fifths of law firm leaders say there was increased funding for innovation last year –but one in 10 don’t set anything aside just for the area*

healthcare-focused firm Hempsons, says it’s considering establishing an R&D budget for the first time. This will feed change in terms of both internal efficiency improvement – systems integration – and client service transformation, such as elements of self-service and greater transparency for clients in the form of dashboards. Protecting profitability is a particular pressure point in the health space, he highlights.

Of course, cost is but one potential obstacle to change that may need negotiation – albeit something 44% of leaders cite as one of the two most common (p14). More likely to be resisted is the volume of change the business is already busy with (53%) – complex to manage, and with a potential link to employee engagement – while almost half (46%) struggle to secure the buy-in of its key

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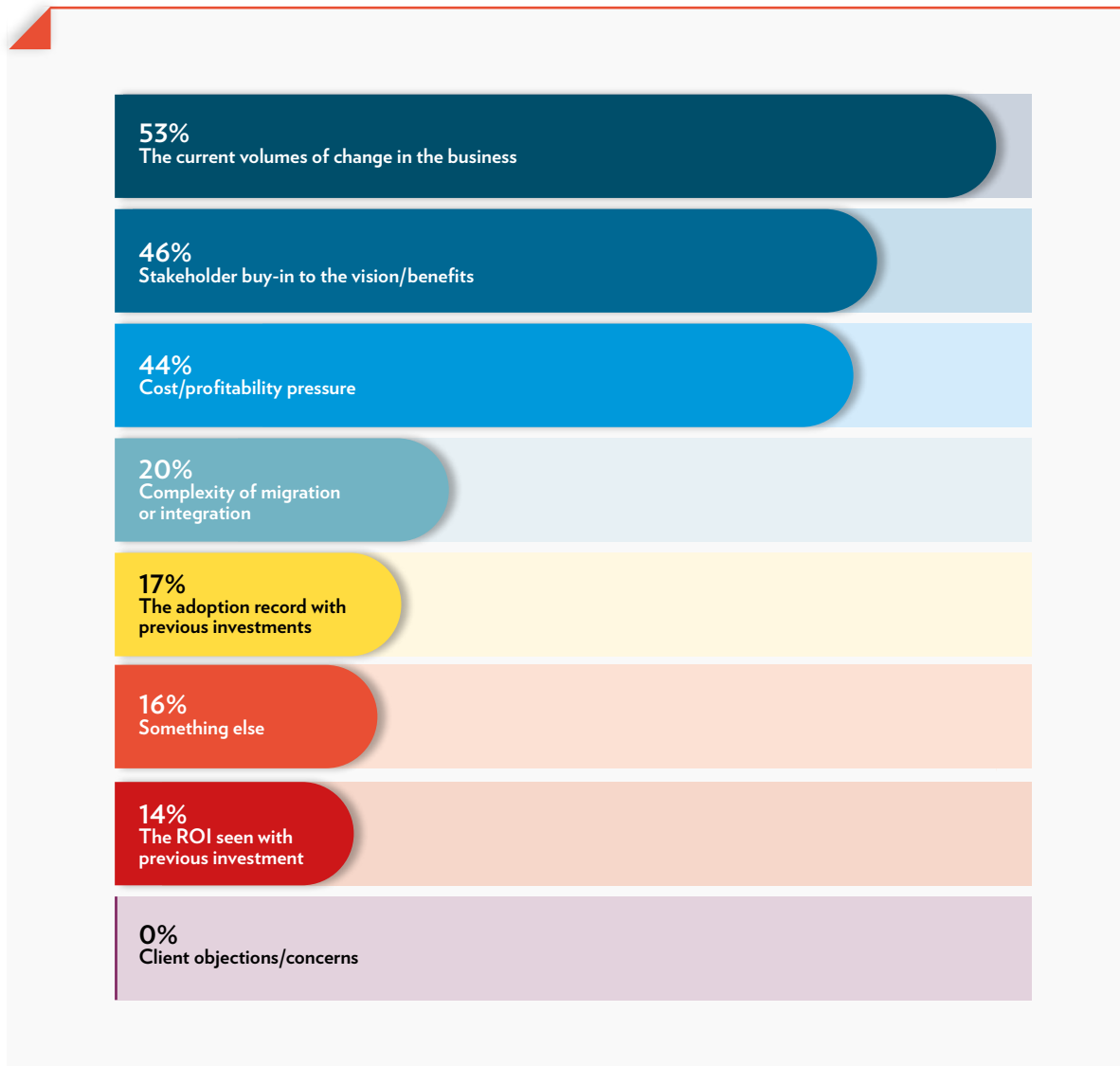
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## What are the two most common obstacles/objections to introducing more change at your firm? (pick only two factors)



stakeholders. It's perhaps surprising that the performance of previous investments isn't more likely to be raised as an objection. Only 17% and 14% of leaders single out the adoption pattern around the firm and the ultimate return on investment they see respectively (left). Of course, every transformation project won't necessarily be a tech-rooted one — but there are usually components.

Howard Kennedy director of IT and change Tony Mckenna says: "The legal profession still struggles with managing change effectively. This is because historically lawyers have often been asked to manage change across the firm. While they're rightly admired for their legal expertise, business and operational services need their own dedicated professionals to bring about real innovation. We're increasingly seeing firms investing in business services, which is leading to more efficient and cost-effective back-end offices." However, he notes that business services need the leeway to make decisions and to take accountability without asking for everyone's input, and another potential pitfall is pushing innovation across too many priorities — so losing focus. "Stability, reliability and security may well be the most critical things to focus on," he says.

Then, against the backdrop of talent attraction and retention remaining the most



PARTNER COMMENT

## Align appetite for AI-driven innovation with budget allocation

Kerri Dearing, VP, international business  
NetDocuments

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The results of the **Briefing** Frontiers research for 2024 show that over 80% of law firms' senior strategic leaders who responded to the survey say they've seen an increased appetite for investing in business transformation and service innovation. The inescapable daily news about generative AI (genAI) almost always includes how useful it will be for lawyers. Existing legal technology vendors have made major investments in their AI roadmaps, and venture capitalists are betting big on new contenders. But are law firms willing to make those same big bets?

Only 44% of respondents indicated their innovation budgets had increased, so while there seems to be huge enthusiasm, there may not be matching funds. It may be that senior leadership is forcing investment prioritisation or asking for quick returns from AI, as exploring genAI capabilities and the corresponding changes in processes and workflows is a big undertaking. It's going

to require the budget to support those efforts long-term. Perhaps current investments will allow teams to at least get started. However, the fact that over 10% of responding firms don't have a budget specifically set aside for innovation is concerning.

It may be that senior leadership is forcing investment prioritisation or asking for quick returns from AI

What things are keeping firms from pursuing innovation? The three most commonly identified obstacles are:

- Current volumes of change in the business – **53%**
- Stakeholder buy-in to benefits – **46%**
- Cost/profitability pressure – **44%**.

Despite traditional blockers to innovation, an overwhelming 78% already have a firm-wide strategy in place to use genAI with work processes and indicate they'll be using it across a wide range of business areas in the next 12-18 months, including over 60% for front-line legal service delivery.

But one standout statistic in the survey responses makes one wonder whether progress is going to move as rapidly as the other answers would indicate.

On a scale of 1-10, most gave their firms only a five for how well they're identifying opportunities to make work more efficient using legal/business process automation. Starting there can help them to better identify areas where genAI can make the most meaningful differences. ▶

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concerning organisational challenge for leaders as recently as summer 2023 (**Briefing**/HSBC law firm strategy and investment, p23), what do leaders expect to happen to their headcounts in 2024? Certainly, it seems unlikely that moves into establishing use cases for genAI will see displacement of human talent just yet. Frontiers finds almost half (46%) believe the latest economic outlook will mean little change for hiring plans this year – whether into legal practices or operational roles (p17). Last year, in contrast, half of respondents anticipated less hiring into the latter areas. The number who now expect their lawyer workforce to increase has increased from one-fifth to just under a third (29%) – and expected demand for more business services expertise holds steady at 22% (up from 12%). This is in line with the picture of improving business confidence or increased expectation to grow and invest, notwithstanding the associated cost and profitability pressures.

Wolfenden says Weightmans' innovation group expanded its capacity for new projects, products and pilots in 2023. "We have clear ambitions to grow, and that won't just be by hiring roomfuls of lawyers – particularly as we're now also selling clients annual subscriptions for software that solves specific problems for them," she says. "It needs investment in a different blend of resources to

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# 24 VOICES FOR 2024

*Legal Tech Trends in AI & Automation*



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## 24 VOICES for 2024

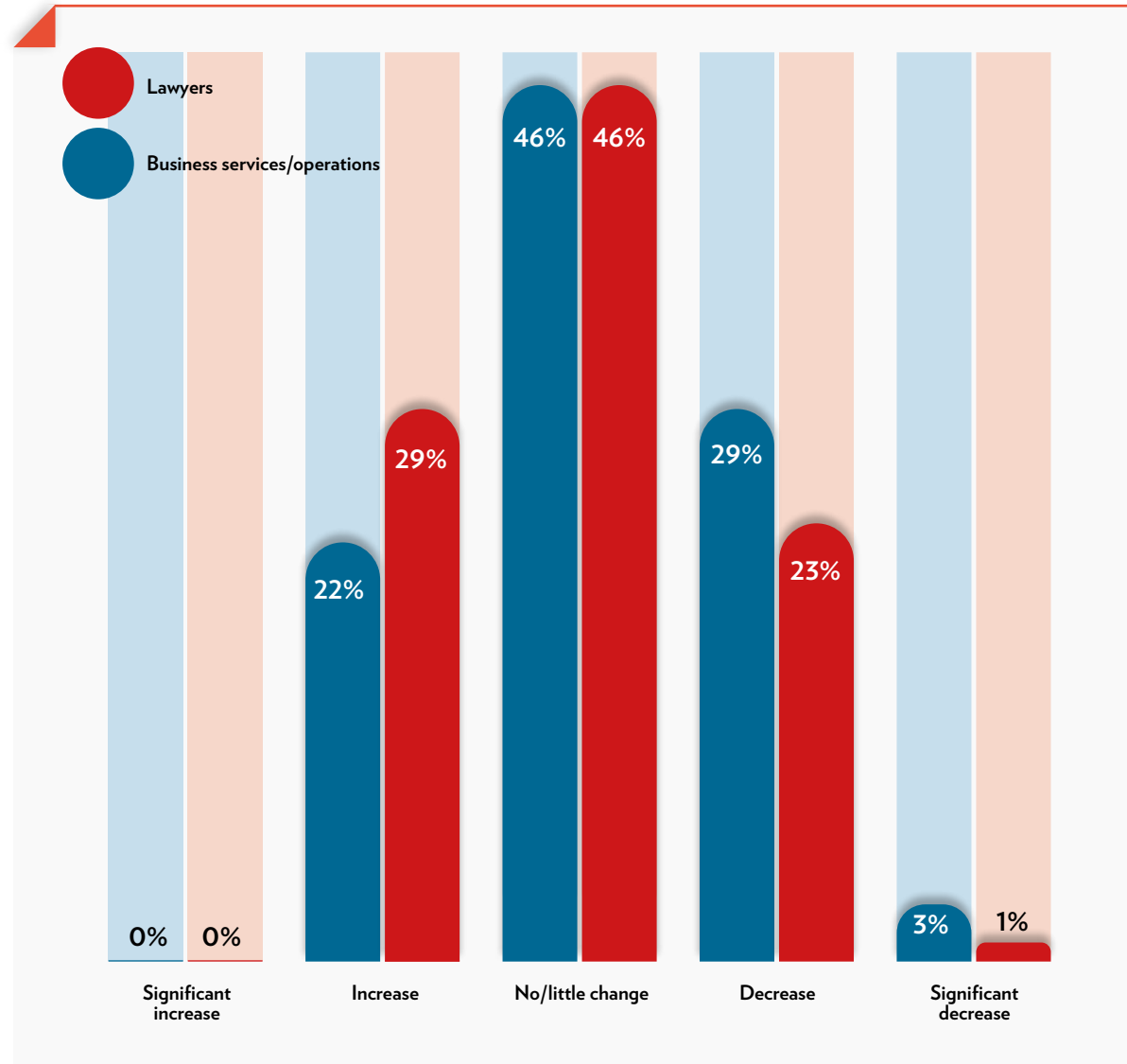
Legal Tech Trends  
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How do you think the economic outlook and/or profitability pressures will influence your firm's hiring strategy over the next 12 months?



**PEOPLE POSITIVE**

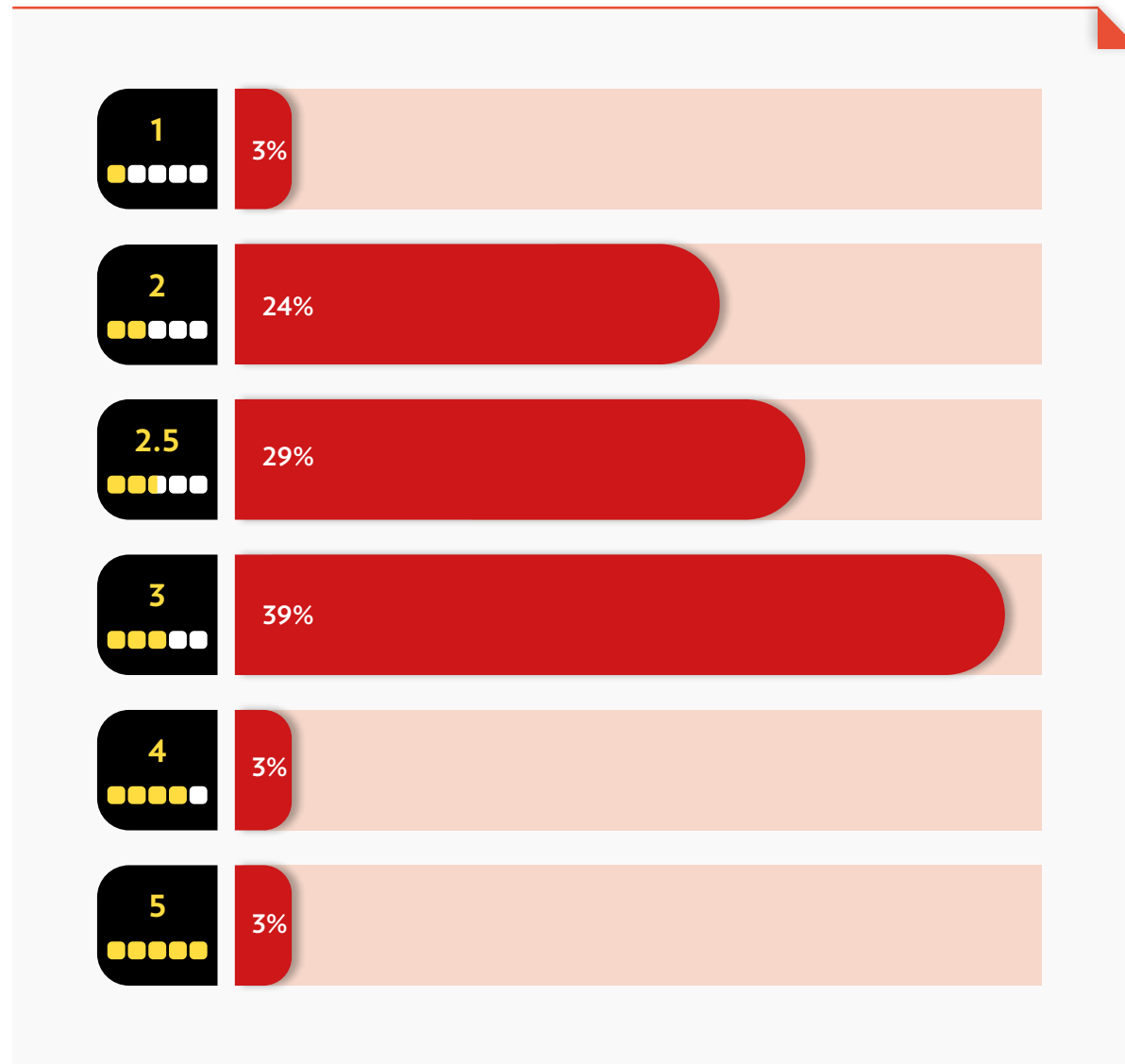
*More leaders expect the firm to increase hiring into operational roles in 2024 (22%) than in 2023 (12%) – and significantly fewer anticipate a decrease*

accelerate on the back of our success. More customer success and account management skillsets will start to filter through into the processes already in place.”

Catherine Jackson, head of knowledge insight at Clarke Willmott, recently undertook an engagement exercise to gauge feelings about an innovation agenda – and where it might lead – from across the firm. “It may sound exciting and cutting-edge, but inevitably there are also questions about how anything new will affect people’s teams or client relationships. We’re focusing on culture and people first when considering a programme of change, both understanding how they work and helping them to understand,” she says.

Meanwhile, a hybrid-working pattern of two or three days working from an office the

**In 2025, how many days a week do you think most of your firm's people will typically work in an office that the firm pays for?**



firm is paying for is firmly established as the sector norm (left). More than a fifth of leaders are confident their current approach to this question is ‘the future’ (p20). The others keep the matter under review, although there’s also recognition of room for improvement (and perhaps further investment).

One area where firms might manage some cost out is office space. Almost a third (30%) of leaders say they still plan to reduce the overall footprint, with only 7% intending to increase it (p22). And almost three-fifths (58%) are still in the process of reconfiguring/repurposing what they have. This could be for more productive collaboration and other group activity, efficient use of space to accommodate different task sets, to work towards sustainability goals, or indeed to produce a more pleasant and attractive work experience.

McKenna at Howard Kennedy believes

“We have clear ambitions to grow, and that won’t just be by hiring roomfuls of lawyers — particularly as we’re now also selling clients annual subscriptions for software. It needs investment in a different blend of resources.”

CATRIONA WOLFENDEN  
PRODUCT AND INNOVATION DIRECTOR, WEIGHTMANS



## PARTNER COMMENT

## Harnessing the power of AI for law firms

Andy Hoyt, chief technology officer,  
Aderant

Aderant

Using artificial intelligence (AI) involves exploring the realm of possibilities and determining potential and practical uses of the technology.

To foster innovation, Aderant has established an extensive process that ensures emerging AI capabilities undergo thorough testing that bolsters security and effectively solves challenges law firms are facing.

• **Experimentation:** Testing and experimenting with different AI technologies allows us to determine which tools are useful for our clients. This phase allows us to make scripts more performant, and to engage in creative problem-solving that extracts greater value.

• **Deploying for productivity, inside and out:** Aderant's goal in incorporating AI into our products is to make our teams and law firm clients both more productive and efficient. Aderant is leveraging AI technology not only in our product development, but also in our internal marketing, sales and other areas

to boost productivity and performance.

• **Transforming client experiences:** Aderant uses AI to deliver newly transformed client experiences for our existing suite of solutions. We aim to increase user satisfaction and achieve greater returns for clients on their investment in our products.

### UNDERSTANDING THE USE OF LANGUAGE MODELS

The number of AI tools on the market has increased exponentially and can mostly be divided into two groups. Closed source is AI trained on its own proprietary dataset to manage specific tasks. Open source means AI that allows you to train it with your own data.

Closed and open AI are more complementary than competitive so, rather than choosing between them, draw out the best from both for a comprehensive approach.

### IS AI TRUSTWORTHY?

Amid the interest that AI generates,

skepticism and trust issues also loom. AI has occasionally exhibited instances of 'hallucination' or delivered lengthy, inaccurate responses to queries.

Aderant recognises that enhancing the accuracy and relevance of AI responses relies on the volume of data fed into it. When hallucinations occur, we adjust our questioning approach and augment the data input to improve the AI's accuracy.

### A PATHWAY TO SUCCESS

Integrating AI into legal technology solutions unveils a transformative journey that can deliver substantial capabilities for firms. As the legal industry continues to explore AI and its practical uses, it's even more apparent that the synergy between human intellect and machine capabilities has the potential to propel law firms to new levels of success. ▶

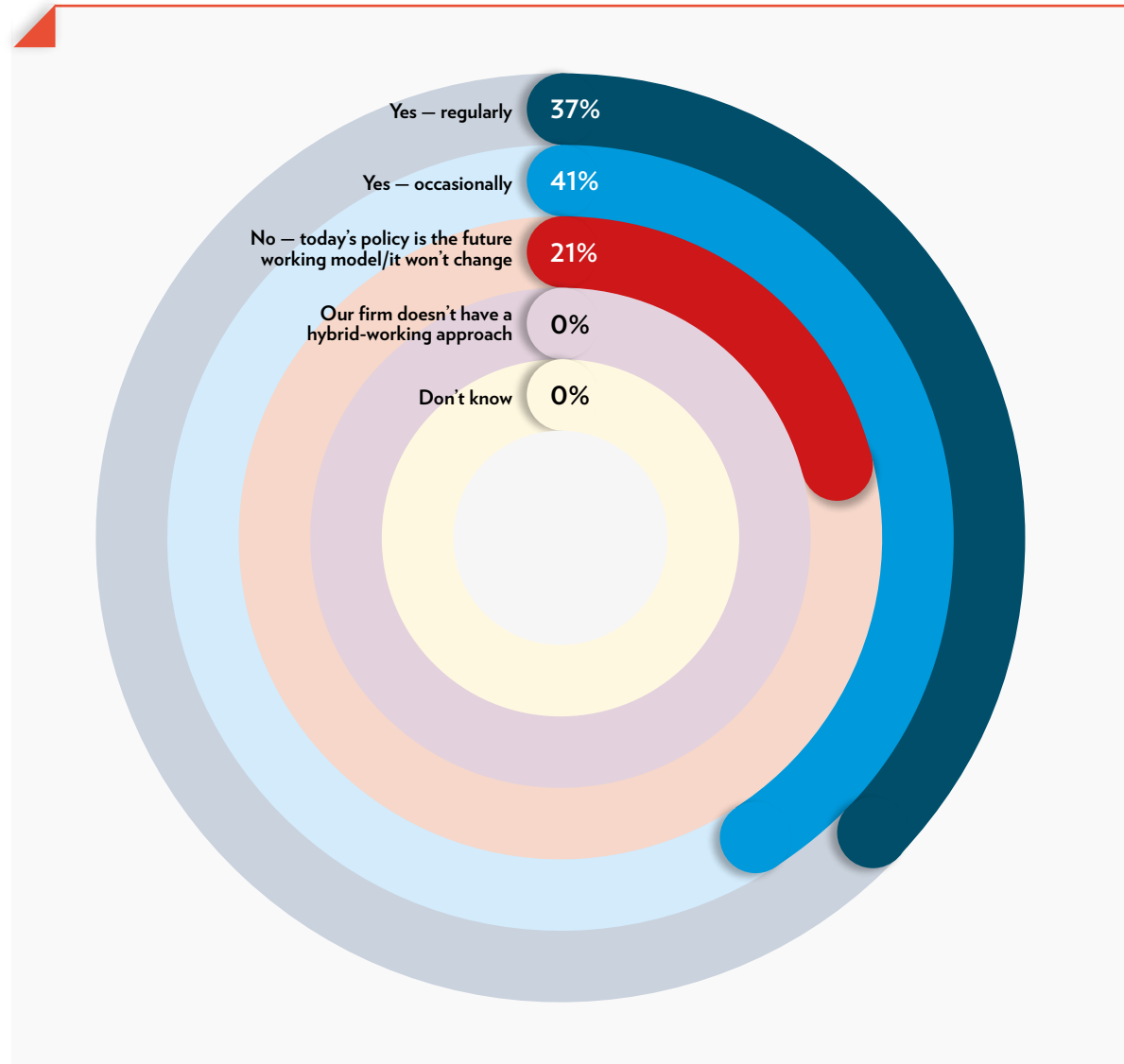
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firms will frankly need to get used to space planning as a much more fluid situation than in the past. "The long-term leases are a challenge, so they'll need the agility to move the pieces of the Rubik's Cube to meet changes in expectations and society thoughtfully — managed well, with the expertise available," he says.

Weightmans' offices have all already been reconfigured to an open-plan, hotdesking arrangement of different 'districts' and quieter spaces — plus an accessible 'innovation hub' of course. Wolfenden highlights that people are now more conscious of what a given interaction really requires in terms of space and time — and processes can be picked apart to improve the blend in various respects. Take innovation or other 'brainstorming' work on virtual boards, for example. Sharing and discussing online, even anonymously, may be a more welcome prospect for some people — allowing more considered engagement at a time that suits the participant, or encouraging more introverted personalities to contribute — and could also be configured as a 'warm up' to an in-person workshop, she says.

Clarke Willmott, which recently moved into a new office in Bristol, "empowers teams to manage their own balance of in-person and remote working to best support their clients and respond to colleagues' needs", says Jackson. "The office of 2024 needs to

Does the firm’s leadership review any hybrid-working policy or stance in place?



How well does your current approach to hybrid working – policy, processes and/or tech – enable the business to function productively?

7/10

Scale of 0-10: 10 = perfectly

accommodate this, as well as being a great working environment to inhabit.”

Meanwhile, Forsters has just moved in at 22 Baker Street – on a 15-year lease – driven by a desire to have people under one roof (it previously had up to four separate sites). Supporting a set of sustainability-focused goals, refurbishment and upgraded technology should also take hybrid working to another level using no more space overall, says chief information officer Anthony Stables. “It’s fully designed as a destination office – with more internal meeting space for collaboration, a dedicated client space and cafe complementing our roof terrace.” Prior



## PARTNER COMMENT

## More change, familiar challenges

Martin Telfer, SVP business development and delivery, international markets/EMEA, Fulcrum GT

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Fulcrum GT was delighted to be involved in the 2024 **Briefing** Frontiers survey, as it stands as a valuable weathervane for the legal profession as a whole.

If we pick out the high (and low!) lights from this survey we see many of the same problems still to be addressed, but it's fair to say there's improved awareness of newer issues. It's not that long ago the word 'cloud' mentioned inside a law firm's offices would have resulted in expulsion! Now, everyone wants only cloud solutions, mainly because they are perceived as more secure. Similarly, the disadvantages of a 'best of breed' approach to applications is being seen — the cost of the 'glue' to allow systems to intercommunicate can be very high.

We can see the appetite for investment in innovation, with genAI clearly in the lead, but this is tempered by the old chestnuts of cost, stakeholder buy-in and change fatigue. This last is often ignored, but the legal industry has indeed undergone significant changes in

its latest generation. Humans don't like change — change management is not about making people happy; it's about managing their anger.

The hiring outlook is split, except for a consistent reduction in business services roles. We might assume this is technology-driven as process automation and lawyers' ability to 'self-serve' grows, but later we see a pretty poor view of firms' ability to deliver on the former.

Hybrid working seems solidly entrenched and — if it is reviewed regularly, which seems to be the case — is well liked. Perhaps it might benefit from a little more granularity in application — one-size-fits-all may not be the best approach. The switch in working practices is also driving firms to review real-estate requirements, with much reconfiguring to suit less permanent occupation planned. We can probably assume a reduction in square footage is hidden in those responses, leases permitting, and a good number are planning to move.

GenAI is the topic of the moment and,

as with many technology innovations, firms are struggling a little to match their — and client — enthusiasm with balancing risk and commercial issues. We'll probably see adoption progress slowly as the wider industry — not least insurers — grapples with these thorny issues. Expect to see 'real' client use take longer to mature, excepting the leading-edge proponents. Will it persist? Who knows? One might argue the last tech revolution in the industry was email, and even that (I was there!) caused great debate. And what happened to blockchain?

The lack of process maturity in law firms also extends to data. The most valuable asset, if genAI is to be truly game-changing, is poorly managed. Pouring it all into a lake, which many firms have done, isn't the end of the story. But at least we are seeing strategies in place.

In summary, firms continue to navigate stormy seas as best they can, and we are certainly living in 'interesting times'. ▶

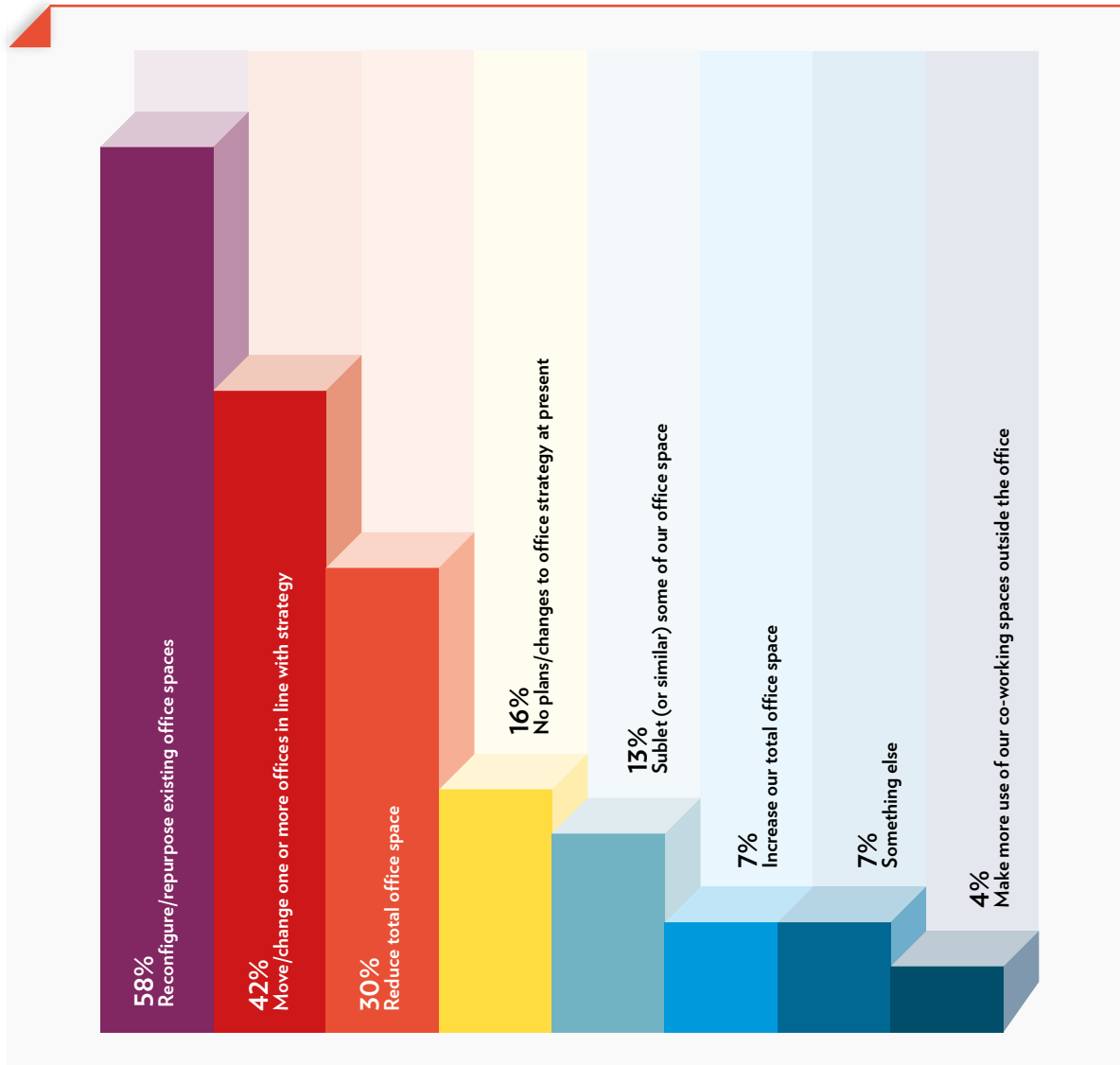
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to this client and internal meetings sometimes competed for private space. "All the rooms are set up for hybrid meetings, fully integrated with MS Teams — and the quality of the at-desk lighting is like I've never seen," he adds.

Carol Aldridge, head of knowledge management and information services at Burges Salmon, says the firm's operations teams are actively piloting new spaces — and counts motivating people to tacit knowledge-share while hybrid working among the drivers. "People need to work a bit harder to make the most of shared office time now — to capture lessons learned from work and enable ongoing learning by osmosis. You need to find those opportunities," she explains. Choices about space can support this — hosting Burges Salmon's 'knowledge cafes', for example, to swap departmental perspectives on hot topics in groups of different sizes. The firm also has light-touch guidance about proactively sharing space with others when possible, clarity about 'open doors' and team 'anchor days'. "At the same time, MS Teams should function as the virtual watercooler and keep people talking," says Aldridge.

Brian Aris, chief operating officer at Boodle Hatfield, adds: "The benefits of agile and hybrid working are immense, and we want to ensure we continue to embrace it in a way that works for people and clients. This might include making physical changes to our

Does the firm plan/intend to change the way it uses, or invests in, office space in the UK within three years? (pick any that apply)

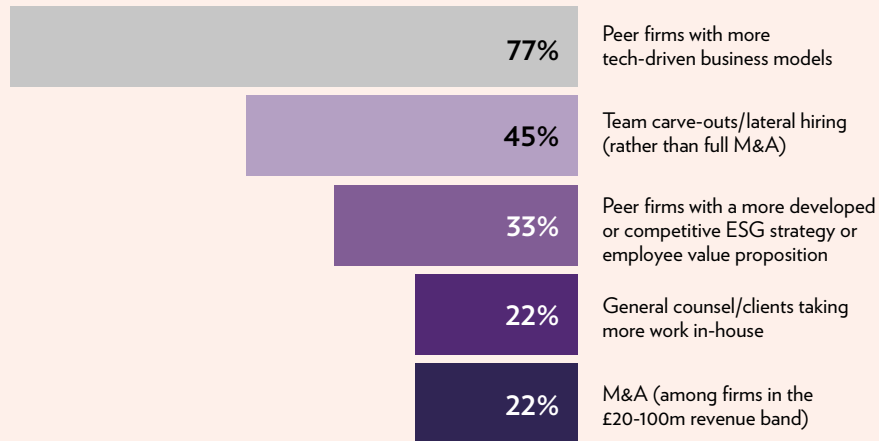


**PRODUCTIVITY PUSH**

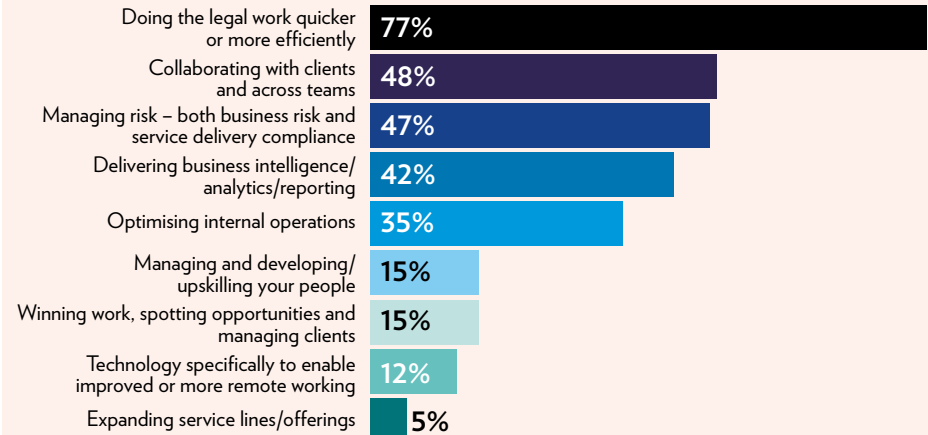
Highlighted on the next page, in September 2023 the Briefing/HSBC Law firm strategy and investment survey was published. One headline finding was that firm leaders today are most wary of others with ‘more tech-driven business models’ — a potential route, of course, to competing more cost-effectively and compellingly for clients. As a result, they’re clearly prioritising investment in new technology promising greater individual or team productivity — followed by more support for internal and client-focused collaboration.

office space and investing in the ever-evolving tech we use to make collaboration and communication in a hybrid world as effective as possible. Beyond the physical and practical elements, it’s also important we do what we can to make people want to spend time with each other and foster relationships that are key to the success of any business. This includes a focus on social activities, in-person learning opportunities and creating a cultural environment to recognise that importance.”

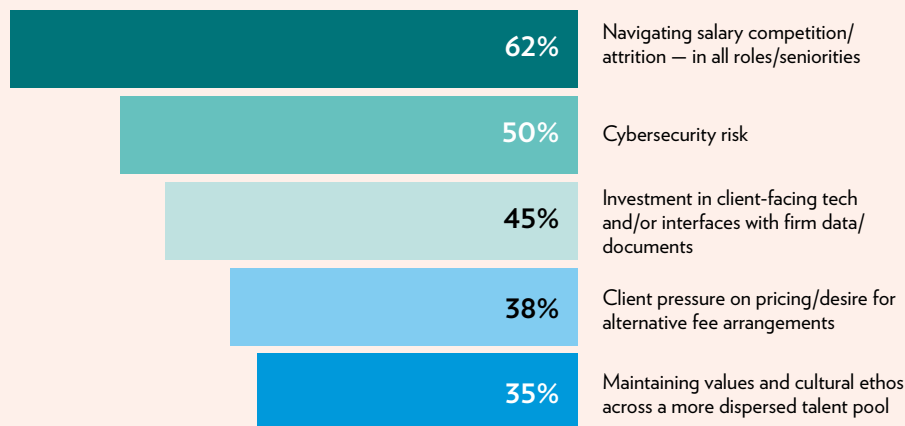
### Which three forces/drivers in the UK legal market present the most potential for disruption at your firm? Here's the top five:



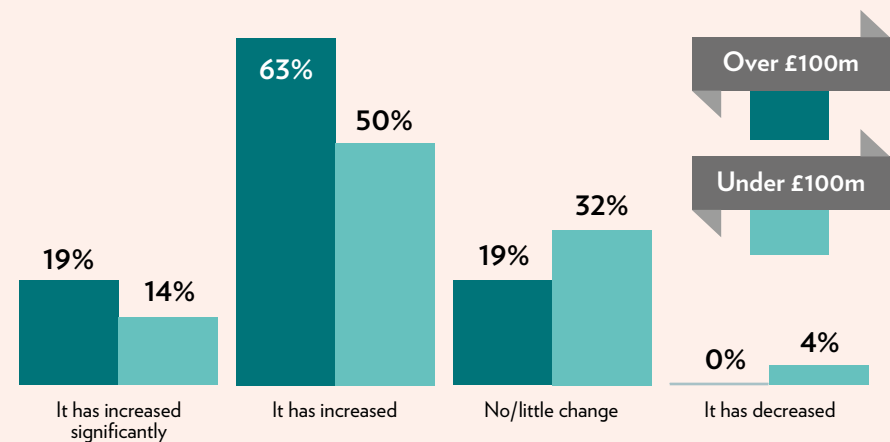
### In which areas is your firm prioritising investment in new technology over the next two to three years?



### Which organisational challenges have been most concerning for your firm through 2023? Here's the top five:



### How has the firm's spend on technology changed compared to its investment throughout 2021?



# Generating interest

Over three-quarters of leaders say there's a firm-wide plan for pointing generative artificial intelligence at some work processes — or identifying the best opportunities — but they have very different ideas about how long it will take to be confident passing the benefit to clients

**I**n terms of pointing genAI-infused tools at tasks specifically, over three-quarters (78%) of law firm leaders report their firm now has a 'strategy or plan' for this (p25). In fact, some of these were only just being finalised for internal view at the time of writing.

Moreover, two-thirds (64%) of leaders believe the technology will be used in aspects of legal service delivery itself within 12–18 months (p27).

But the business areas where most expect to see movement within this timeframe are knowledge management (79%) and business development (77%) — for example, managing the organisation and retrieval of firms' bulging banks of templates and other key content assets, and proposal-building, packaging, and

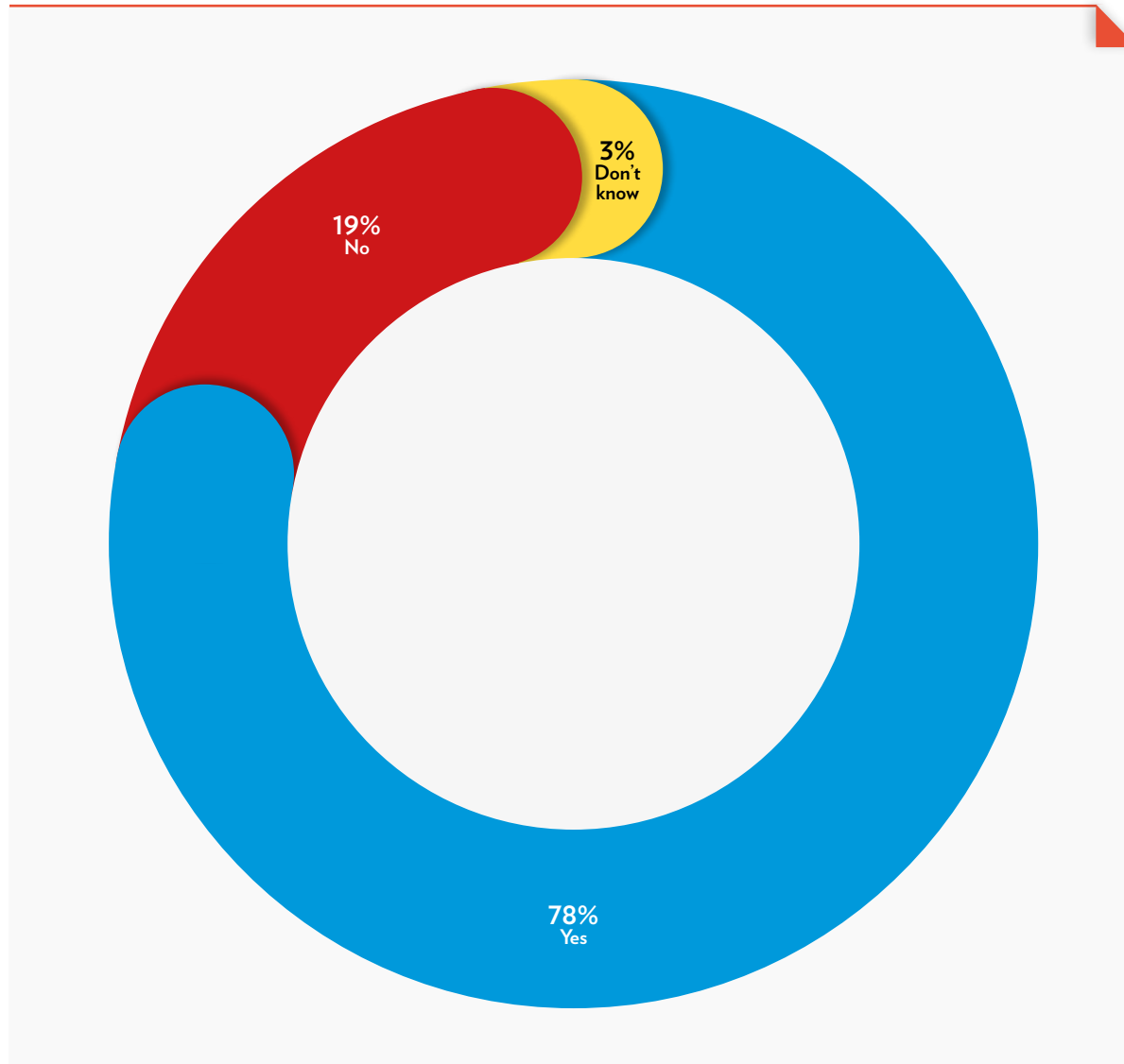
value-adding for time-poor clients.

On the other hand, they're significantly split on the question of when it'll be possible to use genAI to prepare entire drafts of legal documents for clients' eyes. It's a fast-changing field, of course — but while 7% say it's already happening, at the time of polling almost two-fifths (38%) suggested it could take between two and five years to involve genAI in this part of the process with confidence (p28).

Catriona Wolfenden at Weightmans says: "You certainly need to pick the right use cases — in marketing, for example, being able to rewrite material for a different audience or length could be a good time-saver. But we've spent a lot of time building people's understanding and trust in technology —



## Does your firm have a firm-wide strategy or plan to use generative artificial intelligence/large language models in any of its work processes?



explaining what it's good for, and when to use it. GenAI has the potential to undo some of that if it isn't used responsibly – by clearly putting people and the problem to be solved first." Weightmans has secured some funding to research the question of trust in the wider innovation ecosystem, she says – how best to avoid undermining it in the pilot process.

Graeme Trigg at Hempsons adds: "I don't see law firms jumping straight to frontline legal service use cases, but knowledge, bids and tenders are probably all good places to play. Lawyers will be able to see it at work generating content as it might also apply in their world, but in a relatively low-risk space." He also has a watchful eye on how client relationship management may evolve with AI capability embedded.



## PARTNER COMMENT

## Seize the data to deliver on AI promise

Andrew Lindsay, general manager  
LexisNexis Enterprise Solutions



This report clearly identifies that the hot topic for most respondents is generative AI (genAI), and that this will continue into 2024 — and probably beyond. Unsurprisingly, firms are seeking an opportunity to adopt genAI across all key business functions. The eagerness for this technology adoption is reflected throughout the report, with the data explicitly highlighting that although change is not a straightforward path, people are prepared to tread it.

Rising interest in investing in tech is perhaps coupled with an expectation of appropriate savings, with the report finding a decreasing appetite, from some respondents, for hiring additional business personnel. That said, there will also be client expectation of benefit from these advances while receiving quality customer experience at a better price point. For this to become a reality, and with a planned decline in human resource, the technology pursued by each firm needs to provide a strong foundation of process automation and flexibility, enabled via self-service tools,

to ensure the chosen solutions deliver, and meet market expectations.

We know reliable data sources are key to successful AI programmes. If there's no local data for AI to train on, there can be no firm-specific knowledge to exploit. A robust data strategy needs to be in place. Yet the report suggests misunderstanding of its importance. While over three-quarters of respondents have a plan for genAI, only 70% of those without a business-wide data strategy believe they need one. When it comes to data lakes, only 30% either have, or are building one, and 39% have no plans here at all (or just don't know!). This apparent separation of AI adoption and data strategy is puzzling to me unless firms are choosing to ignore their own corpus of data and knowledge, only intending to invest in off-the-shelf AI solutions with externally fed data? In today's world, a firm's data is considered its most valuable asset (alongside its people). Management of that asset should be prioritised.

Another challenge the report

highlights is the disparity between information flow and the connectedness of the firm's multiple systems. In most cases, the problem seems to lie in having no single centralised matter/knowledge system to manage data digitally. As we know, information can only be fully exploited if it exists in a digital format, and if that data isn't stored centrally it's difficult and expensive to mine. Without this, efficient data sharing across the organisation isn't possible — or not in a way that maximises value to the business.

Overall, respondents' enthusiasm for genAI is encouraging, and certainly not something to be ignored, yet the same thing cannot be said for their appetite for data strategy, connectivity of systems and internal knowledge flow. It seems counterproductive that some firms are happy to run down the path of genAI, while still taking baby steps in other key areas that are the foundations for its successful future adoption and optimum exploitation. ▶

▶ Visit: [lexisnexis-es.co.uk](https://lexisnexis-es.co.uk)

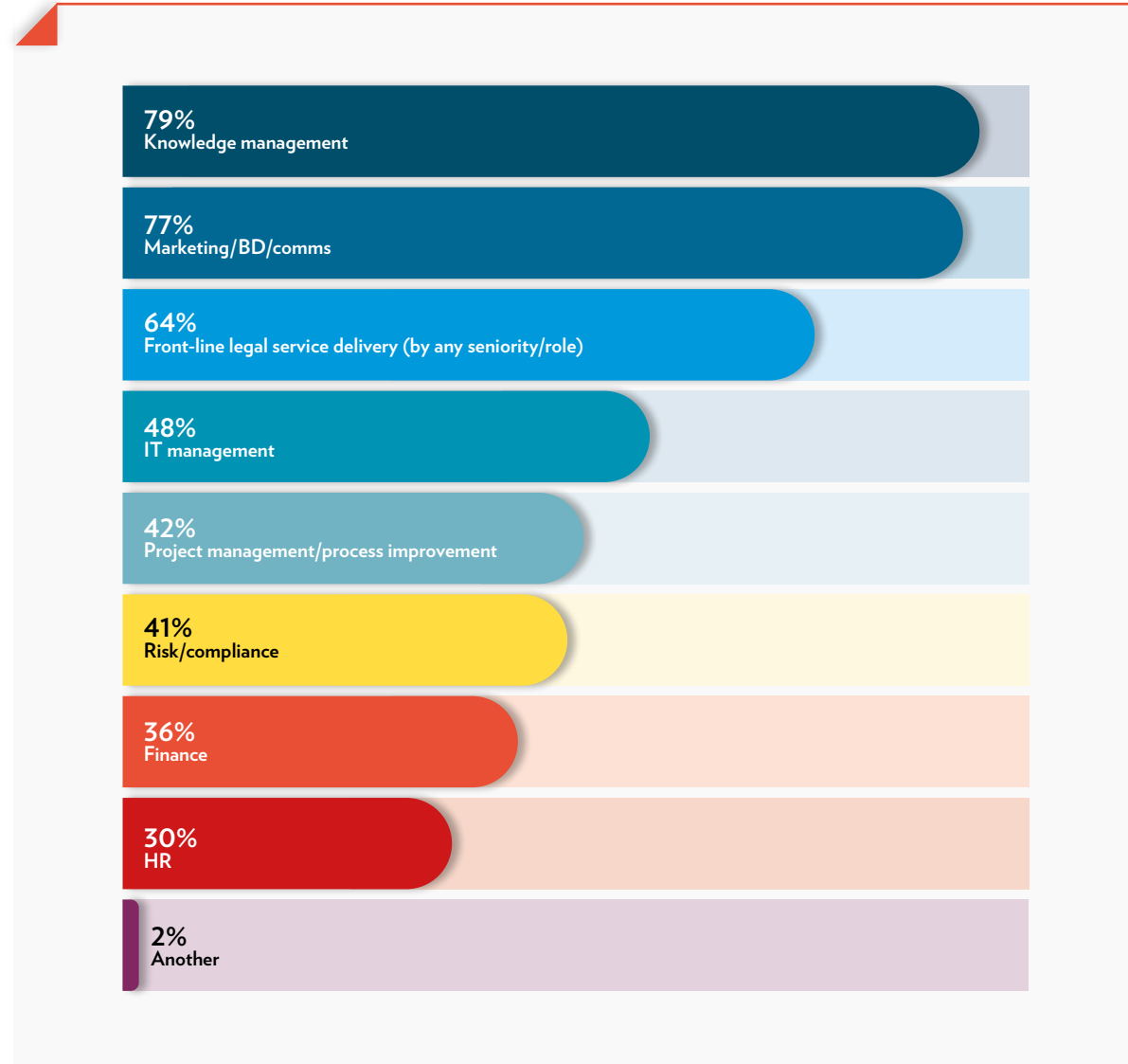
While 2024 should see some use cases crystallising, perhaps it's too early to say whether law firms will manage to differentiate based on how they move on genAI — and those that do will have to grapple with the impact on service pricing and client expectation. At present, over three-quarters (77%) of leaders say some clients are asking about their ability or intentions to use it in work for them — but only 9% see this 'a lot' (p29). Those clients may, of course, have business risks in mind as well as potential rewards.

Carol Aldridge at Burges Salmon says: "If we can reach 'vanilla' starting points much faster, for example through publishers' genAI enhancements, then our own knowledge

**"If we can reach 'vanilla' starting points much faster, for example through publishers' genAI enhancements, then our own knowledge collections, and the ability to analyse and use these more effectively, become differentiators in the offer to clients."**

CAROL ALDRIDGE  
HEAD OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND INFORMATION  
SERVICES, BURGESS SALMON

In which of the firm’s business areas do you think teams will be making use of genAI/LLMs for at least some aspects of work within 12-18 months?



**AI SPY OPPORTUNITY**

*Leaders see plenty of potential productivity for genAI to juice – with knowledge, marketing and legal services thought the most likely to be leveraging it by 2025*

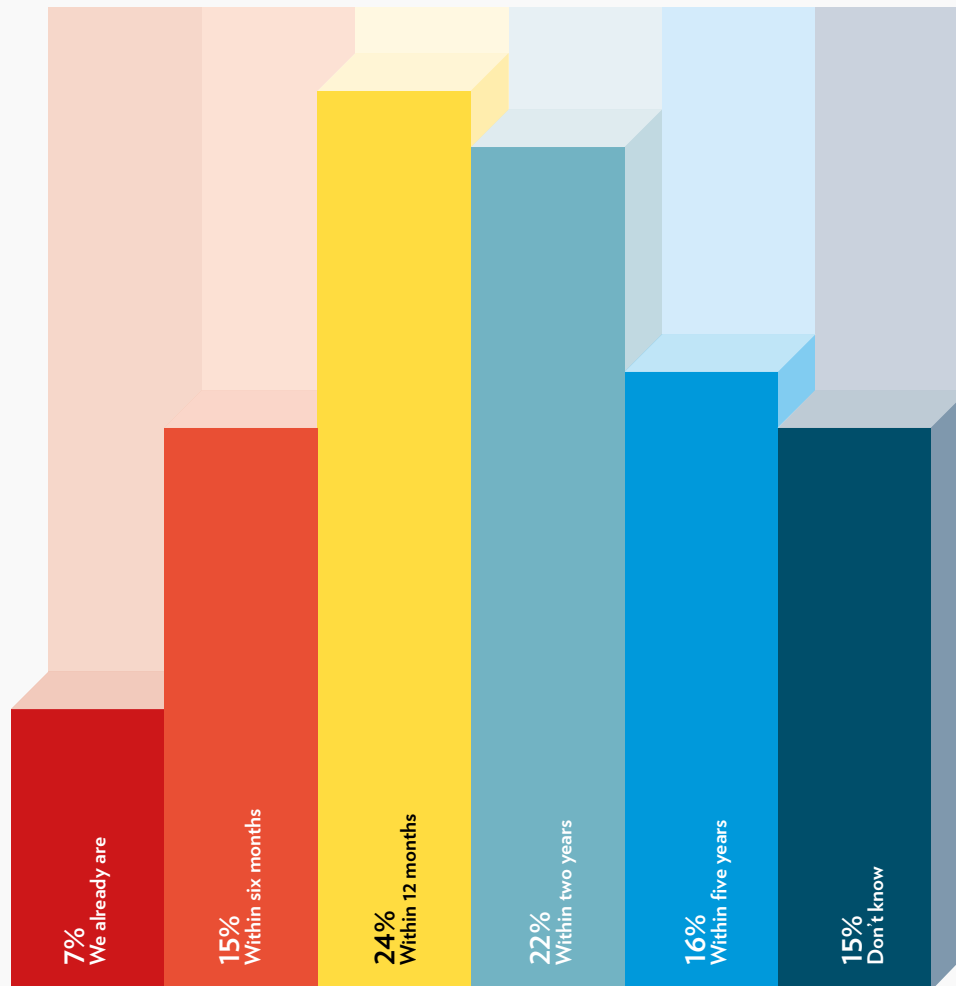
collections, and the ability to analyse and use these more effectively, become differentiators in the offer to clients.”

She’s also optimistic firms’ people will benefit from time unlocked to learn and absorb more about client businesses – and so to serve them more creatively.

“The internal knowledge management potential here is certainly huge – but our marketing and IT teams are also working closely on areas such as summaries of key content,” she adds. “Clients will naturally be very interested in genAI where there’s a possible financial upside. While summarising and extractive AI looks reasonably safe, however, they’re also rightly cautious about how their data may be used.”

Meanwhile, there’s one Frontiers 2024

## When do you think your firm will be using genAI/LLMs to produce drafts of some legal documents for clients?



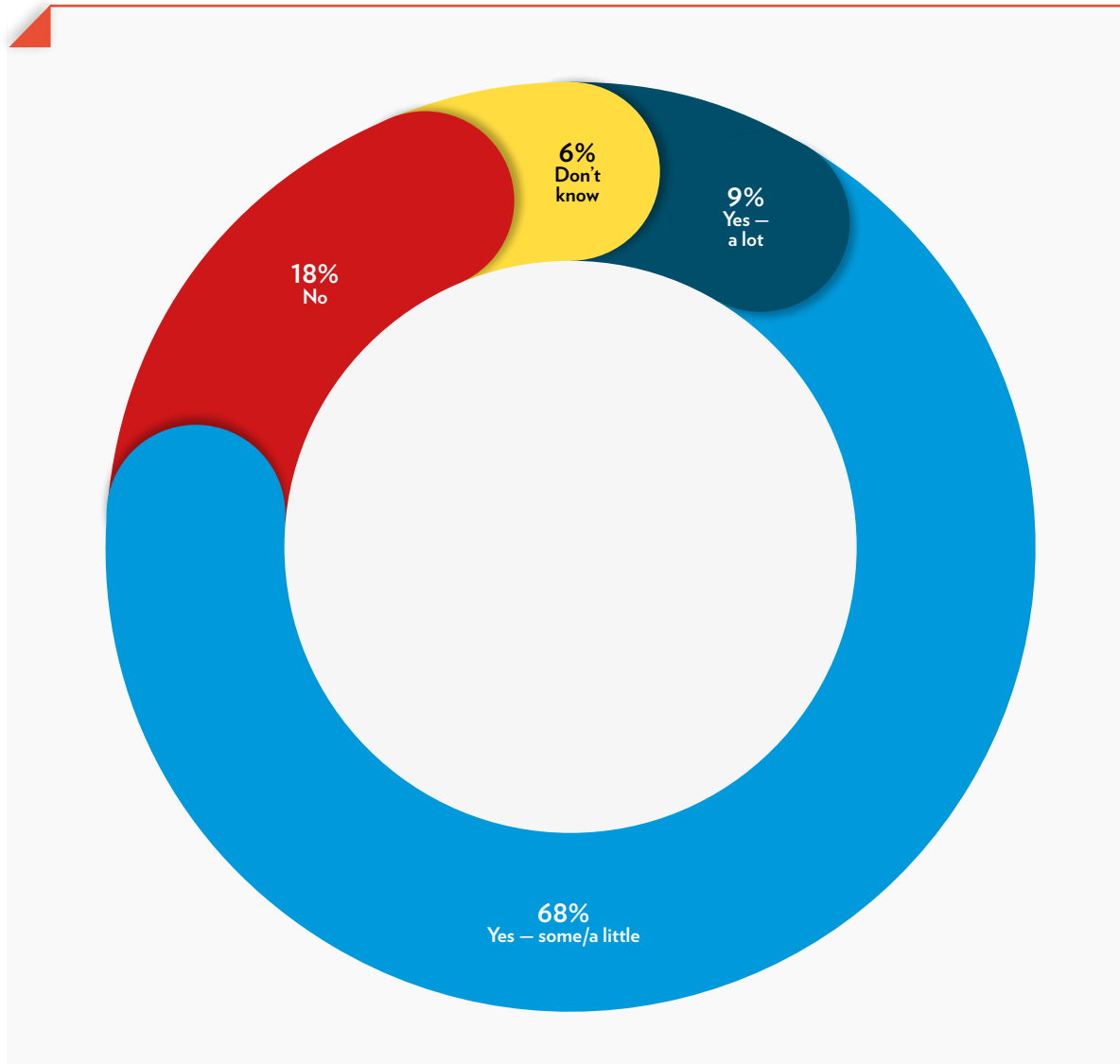
finding that may give leaders pause for thought about how well they introduce new technology into the management mix – they award themselves an average of just five out of 10 for effective identification of the best opportunities to streamline work with automation (p29).

Jon Beaumont, head of business technology at Shearman & Sterling, says his firm brought the project management and knowledge teams together to focus on precisely this last year – improved identification and adoption of existing tools to fill some efficiency gaps, with a support model to help the legal teams to act. “But it’s a real challenge,” he admits. “Certain processes are absolutely ripe for automation, but whether it’s the lack of client pressure or

“Certain processes are absolutely ripe for automation, but whether it’s the lack of client pressure or the work involved – even where the advantages are understood – it’s hard to maintain momentum beyond perhaps a beta product.”

JON BEAUMONT  
HEAD OF BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY, SHEARMAN & STERLING

Are your clients asking about the firm’s ability – or future plans – to use genAI within processes that lead to work for them?



How effectively do you think the firm as a whole identifies and delivers the best opportunities for making work more efficient or better using legal/business process automation?

5/10

Scale of 0-10: 10 = extremely well

the work involved – even where the advantages are understood – it’s hard to maintain momentum beyond perhaps a beta product.”

Forsters is in the process of changing practice management system, which Stables says will then be a platform for a significant push on process mapping and improvement. “It will be a proper SaaS solution with RESTful API, so lots of potential to explore across the whole Microsoft Power platform. We are already focusing on expanding Teams



## PARTNER COMMENT

## Firms must address structural challenges to capitalise on AI

Leigh Smith, managing director  
Intapp



In the ever-revolving legal technology landscape, rapid advancements in artificial intelligence, and particularly generative AI, have emerged as a pivotal force to drive operational efficiency for lawyers and business professionals. It's no surprise then that this year's **Briefing** Frontiers research reveals that law firms have an increased appetite for transforming their business operations through AI.

But what the survey respondents may not realise is that their ambitions for AI will be thwarted by something else the survey shows: they do not have the necessary structural conditions in place to use AI effectively.

**MIGRATION, INTEGRATION AND DATA STRUCTURING ESSENTIAL**  
To operate effectively, AI needs access to relevant firm data, including financial data, matter work data and client management data. To access these different datasets, all your systems must be connected in the cloud. In addition, AI can't operate

effectively if your data isn't structured.

Few firms, though, have established these necessary conditions for AI. For example, around three-quarters of firms haven't yet completed their migration to the cloud. Likewise, only 16% of survey respondents say their systems are effectively integrated or connected. And while 60% of respondents think the firm has a data strategy, a strategy/plan is not the same as creating structured data.

Structured data is data that has been tagged or otherwise identified in a way that helps AI to see the context of the data. For example, files relating to a matter must be tagged with a matter code for the AI to understand the files relate to the matter. Without these context signals, it's difficult for your AI to generate relevant results or exclude information that is behind ethical walls.

**PRIORITISE LAYING GROUNDWORK FOR LONG-TERM TRANSFORMATION**  
Without firms first achieving these

structural conditions, they run the risk of missing out on the value of AI — or even suffering harm from using it. Generative AI holds great potential for law firms, but generic AI solutions aren't built for the needs of today's partner-led firms.

While AI programmes can work on incomplete and unstructured data, the generative results you get from these conditions likely won't meet your client, ethical and regulatory obligations. Without the right controls in place, which only structured data can support, AI might surface sensitive information to the wrong parties.

Like our purpose-built software solutions, Intapp's AI capabilities are developed with compliance, privacy and security in mind. Trust and compliance are baked into our AI capabilities, enabling firms to harness AI while managing their client, ethical and regulatory obligations. ▴

▴ [Learn more at: intapp.com](https://intapp.com)

as a source of truth, including for matter management," he adds. More generally, "lawyers are often very time-poor and can struggle to relate technology to the processes they perform," he agrees. It takes persistence — and some coaching from the IT team.

Trigg adds: "Our firm is quite good at identifying the opportunities for business process automation, but that's because there are a lot of them! Law firms can have horrendously over-engineered, unnecessary processes — you may find you can cut a very large proportion of the tasks involved simply in closing a file."

However powerful the tool, for the time being other conditions are also still required to transform it into productivity gains or strategic advantage. ▴

"Law firms can have horrendously over-engineered, unnecessary processes — you may find you can cut a very large proportion of the tasks involved simply in closing a file."

GRAEME TRIGG  
HEAD OF CLIENT SERVICES, HEMPSONS

# Ingredients of success

Only three-fifths of leaders say there is a business-wide data strategy in place at their firm — no real change from 2023 — and under one-fifth can describe the state of flow between their systems as effective

**A**nother new area **Briefing** started to track in 2023 is how firms handle data as an organisational discipline. It's a long-term challenge, it seems, because of often siloed legacy systems, potentially a lack of accountability or effective prioritisation to drive change, or perhaps something even more fundamental frustrating progress towards the elusive 'single version of truth'. More firms are now establishing groups and appointing leaders with specific responsibility for data governance. But as Gareth Powell, group data officer at Irwin Mitchell, said in last year's report: "This has to begin with recognising that data has really tangible value — it is a strategic asset. To have a cultural impact you need to bring the benefits to life for all."

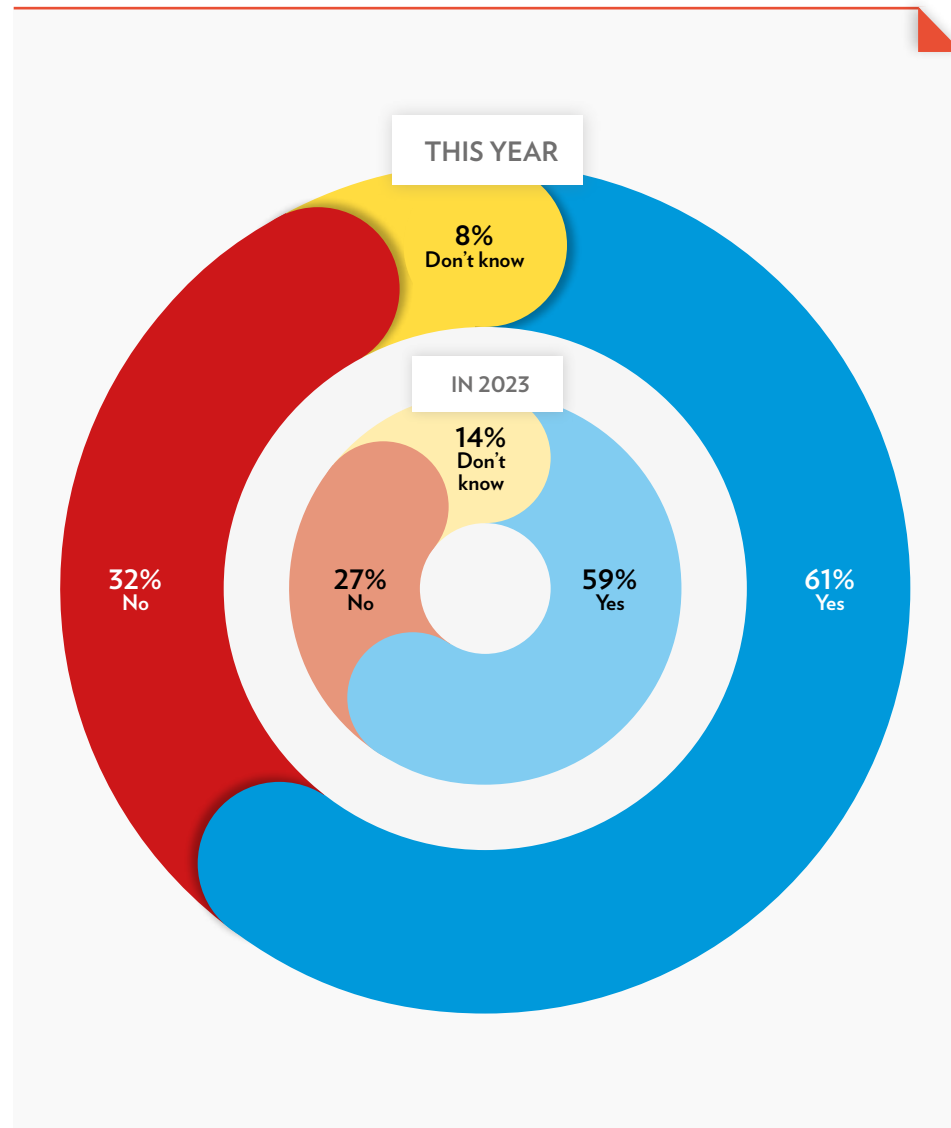
Going into 2024, 61% of leaders say their

firm has a 'business-wide data strategy' — little change on the 59% that said as much last year (p32). Arguably good news, fewer 'don't know' this year (8%) than then (14%). But the net result is almost one-third of strategic leaders at the largest law firms in the UK don't have such a strategy underpinning the strength of what proactive management and visualisation of data may be able to do for everything from expanding client relationships to resourcing and pricing work more profitably. It's also striking that almost a third (30%) of those saying they know there isn't a data strategy today couldn't say that the firm will need one in three years' time.

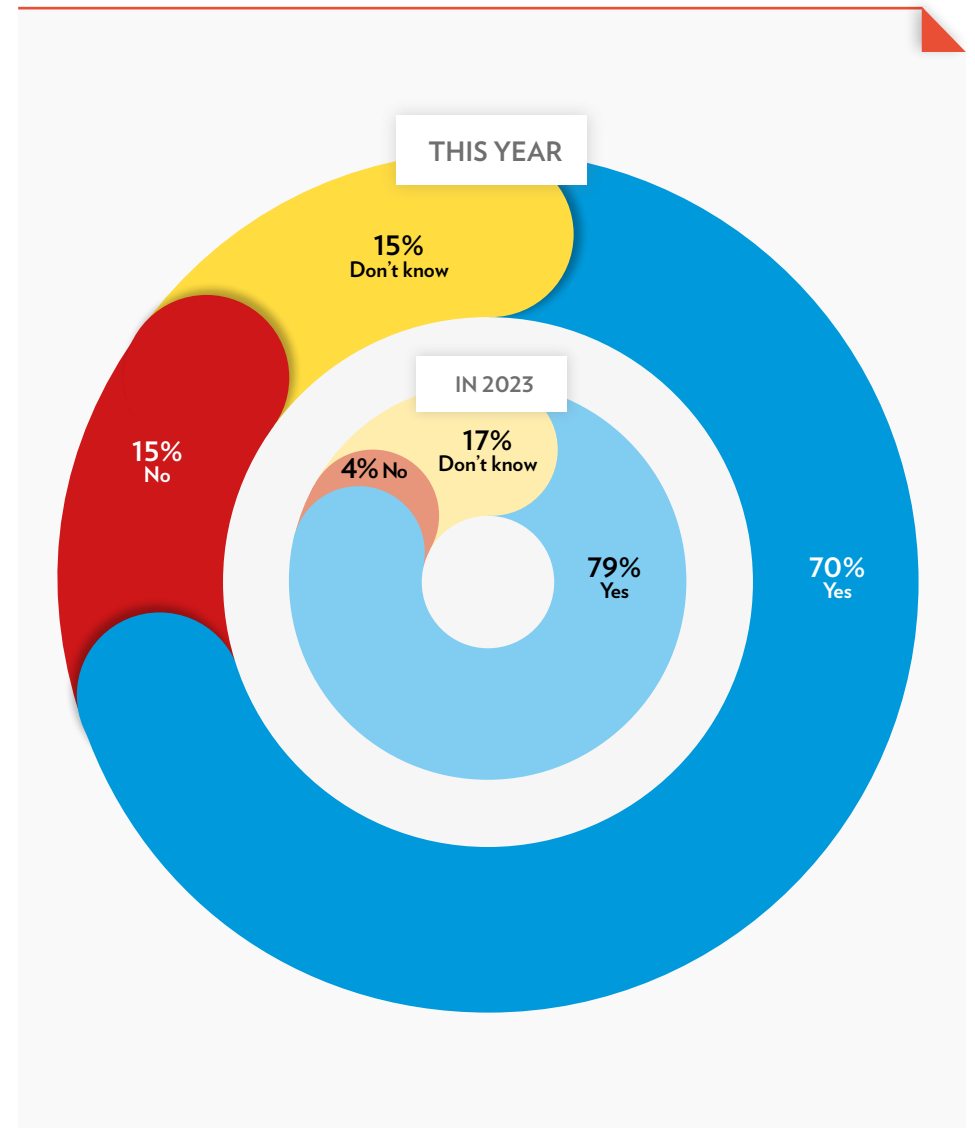
One option is to store structured, semi-structured and unstructured data in its various native raw formats in a data lake — images,

documents and video, alongside more structured sources. This is designed to combat the insight-frustrating situation of data silos, and potentially enables more advanced analytics about business improvements levers and needs to emerge into the light. Of course, a data lake stills requires a strong governance framework to safeguard quality of output — and, indeed, security. Three-fifths of respondents say their firm is either feeding a data lake already, it's under construction, or on the project list (p33) — but whatever their approach, a mere 16% would currently describe the flow of information between the firm's various business systems as at all 'effective' (p34). Just over a third say they still face 'significant challenges' in getting the business to that point.

Does your firm have a business-wide data strategy in 2024?

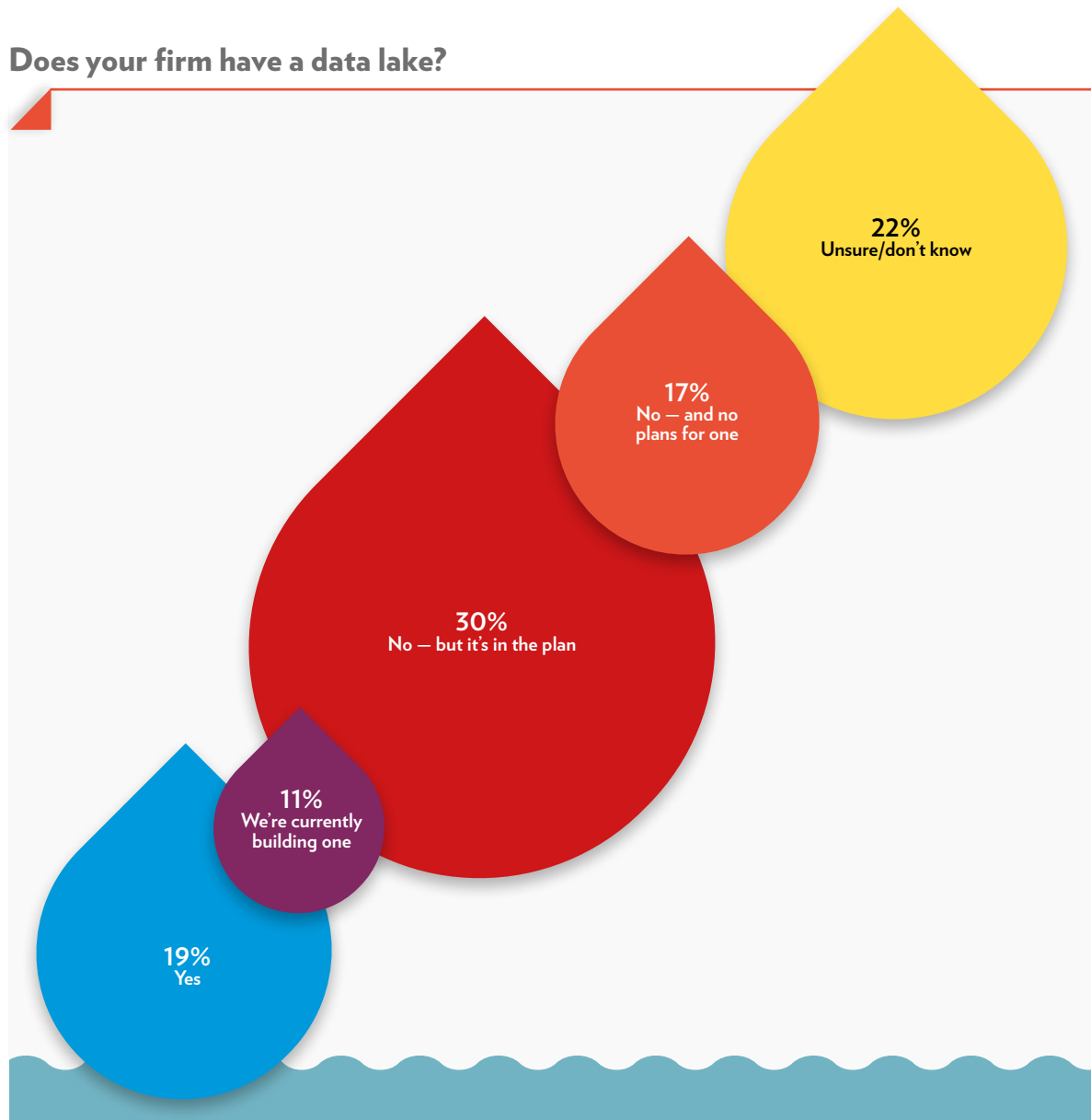


If not, will your firm need to have a business-wide data strategy in place within three years?





## Does your firm have a data lake?



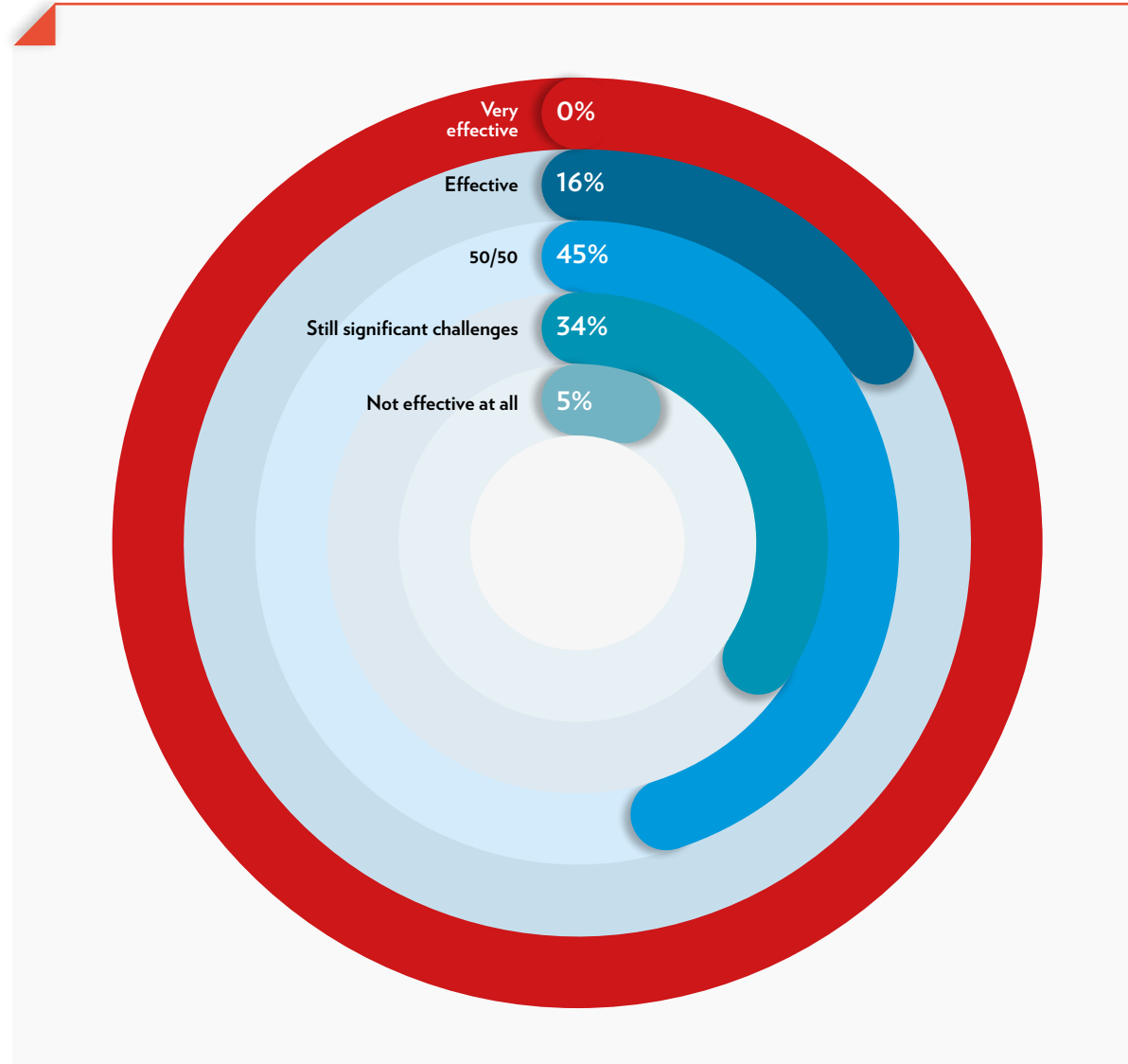
Howard Kennedy has a “connected firm” strategy that’s now starting to bear fruit, says Tony McKenna. “We’re visualising management information that really allows leaders out front and back to take better actions – about client experience, productivity and working with colleagues. There’s vastly improved collection and categorisation, and knowledge management is on the case of taxonomy to ensure we can interpret data commonly across the firm,” he says.

Where firms don’t have a strategy, however, he believes it’s for “business services leaders to have accountability and take responsibility”.

Shearman & Sterling has had an official director of data in place for around three years – and they introduced a client matter data hub, “like a data lake”, explains Jon Beaumont. “But the key is for all to think about impacts of actions handling data on the business beyond their immediate system and team,” he says. “You need the right thing to happen at source, rather than manipulate elsewhere, to achieve the single source of truth.” In the midst of merging with Allen & Overy, the platform of a strategic approach to data is certainly an advantage for the pairing’s consolidation.

Brian Aris at Boodle Hatfield says: “We all know how powerful data can be, but it can be unreliable if not managed correctly. Understanding where it comes from, and ensuring it’s accurate and consistent across

**How would you rate the information flow/connectedness between your firm's IT systems overall?**



**!**

**SILOS OF SHAME ...**

*No leaders believe that data flow through their various systems is 'very effective'. Over a third report they still have significant challenges in this respect*

different systems, can be a real challenge when it's used for different purposes and often managed by different people or teams.

“As well as ensuring investment in the systems to make sure these speak to each other in an efficient and effective way, it's important that the ‘owners’ of different data sources buy into the need for bringing it all together – the benefits to them and to the firm. This might sometimes mean losing a little of their own control but for the greater good.”

Wolfenden at Weightmans adds: “There's so much more that firms could do with today's computing power, particularly in terms of granularity – understanding more about the relationships between data points. The more granular, the more effective the algorithms.”

“Mandating that people collect data is also



## PARTNER COMMENT

## Security, trust and quality key to genAI and full cloud adoption

Duncan Hannigan, vice president, sales, EMEA and APAC, Elite

ELITE

**G**enerative AI was the hottest of topics last year, and law firms of all stripes are taking notice — especially since so many clients are starting to ask about it. While it's exciting to see such openness to the potential of genAI, the proof is still in the pudding and it's important to understand the potential legal use cases to get the most out of it, as with any automation tool. No wonder there's a sense in some quarters that it may take time to get right. Lessons will be learnt from early adopters, but firms will not want to fall too far behind.

One major issue to be thrashed out is how the value created via genAI should be monetised. When it takes less time to deliver work, but the standard stays the same or improves, there are commercial implications for both law firms and their clients. Increasingly, the quality of outputs is likely to become more important than the time spent producing them when it comes to perceived value.

Another key consideration is that accuracy, data protection, trust and oversight are always front of mind in the law. GenAI solutions must not only deliver the required functionality, but be designed with a responsible, ethical approach, and kept in check by human supervision, with robust safeguards in

With the advent of genAI and a continued push to cloud, the tide has truly turned when it comes to embracing what lies ahead

place to ensure sensitive information is only used securely, in compliance with regulations.

Security and data privacy issues also loom large when considering how far firms have come in moving all their core business IT systems to the cloud. While many firms have embraced the

cloud for non-core purposes, the question of whether it's a safe place for the confidential legal data in their client, document or practice management systems still seems to be giving some pause for thought.

The answer is that it most certainly is — particularly where cloud solutions are hosted by top-tier public cloud providers that invest heavily in cybersecurity, are built using modern 'cloud-native' architecture, deploy multi-layered security, and are continuously updated. The key is to conduct thorough due diligence on potential vendors to ensure their security provisions are watertight.

With the advent of genAI and a continued push to the cloud across the industry, the tide has truly turned when it comes to embracing what lies ahead. Now firms need to work out how to ride the crest of the wave. ▴

▴ To learn more, visit: [elite.com](https://elite.com)

time-consuming — and they need to do so accurately — so there's also a case for capturing management information more automatically and less onerously."

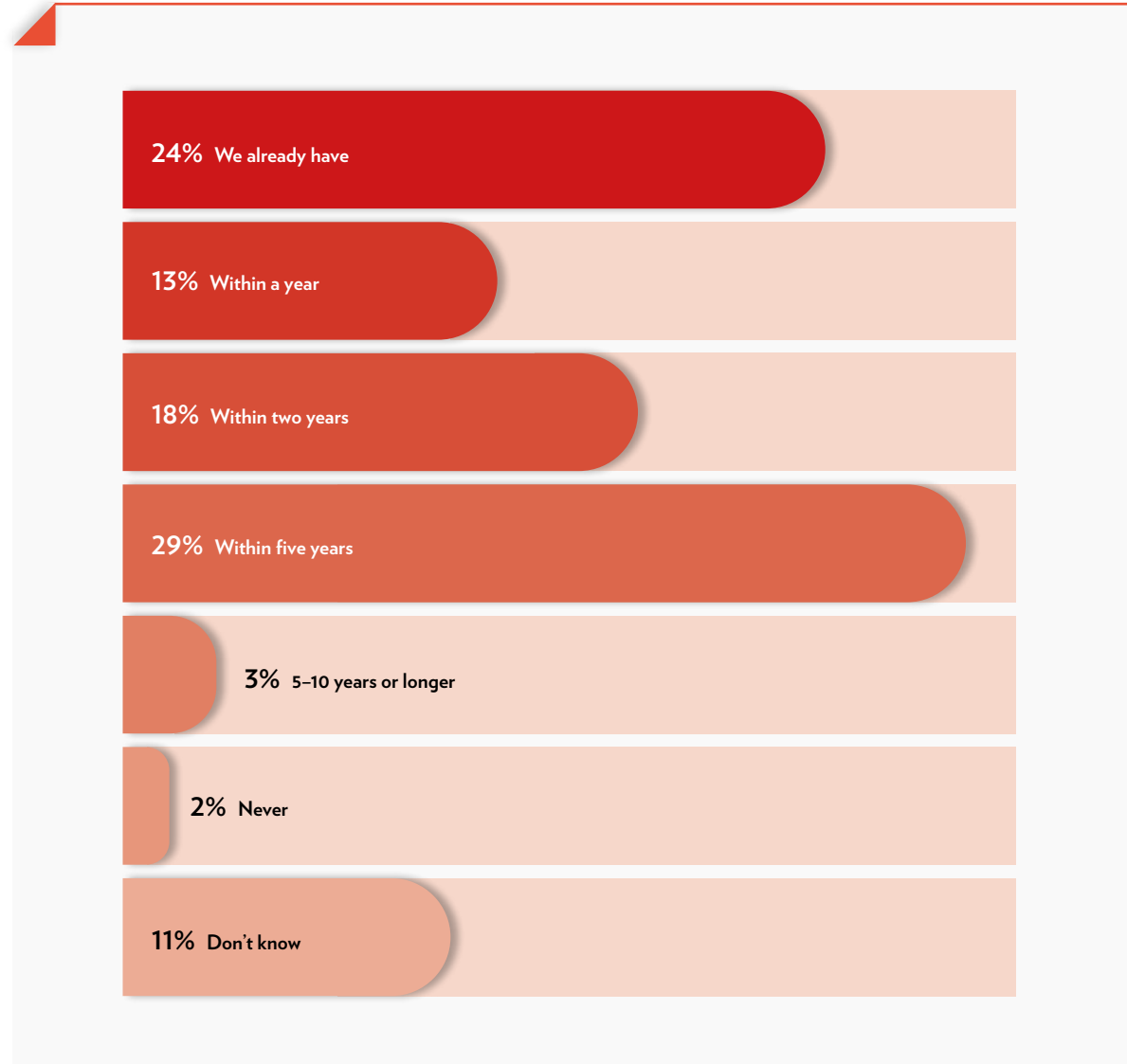
Carol Aldridge at Burges Salmon says she'd also advocate a firm starting with its relatively "low-hanging fruit" and build from there: "A strategy can be complicated — but perhaps ask where better collection or analysis is going to make the biggest difference to people. For example, we've spent a lot of time on the metadata in a new knowledge management system.

"Alongside the investments made by the content publishers, genAI could unlock some really useful insights from that, and demonstrate its value to the firm. You could also build an expertise locator, for example, to surface important experience based on searches." But she suggests firms should

"It's important that the 'owners' of different data sources buy into the need for bringing it all together — the benefits to them and to the firm. This might sometimes mean losing a little of their own control but for the greater good."

BRIAN ARIS  
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, BOODLE HATFIELD

**When do you think your firm will have moved all core business IT systems (for example, CMS, DMS and PMS) to either private or public cloud?**



**CLOUD VOICES**

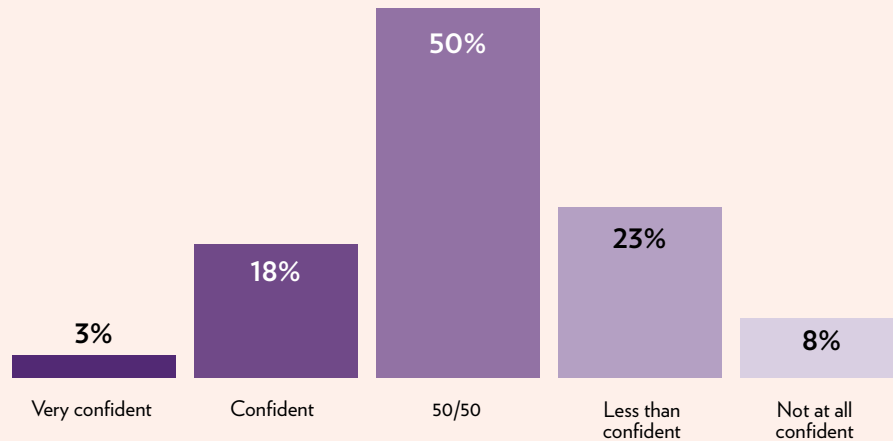
*Almost a quarter of leaders say the firm has now chosen a cloud course for all its core systems – and another third are set to move by the end of 2025*

never sideline the value of their undocumented tacit knowledge.

Mel Smith, chief information officer at Buckles, adds that it's a challenge for her firm to mine the data it wants to harness for improved process – management information from the finance system, for example: “We need to start using more of the power of Power BI, and finance would also like to explore genAI’s potential to improve the efficiency of reporting – streamline processes to strip out some of the more mundane work.”

Meanwhile, the number of leaders who see the future of all those systems migrated to the cloud is consistent with 2023 (left) – a clear direction of travel since the upheaval of the pandemic. Any lack of change likely speaks to the technical complexity of such projects, particularly in the case of the capabilities that

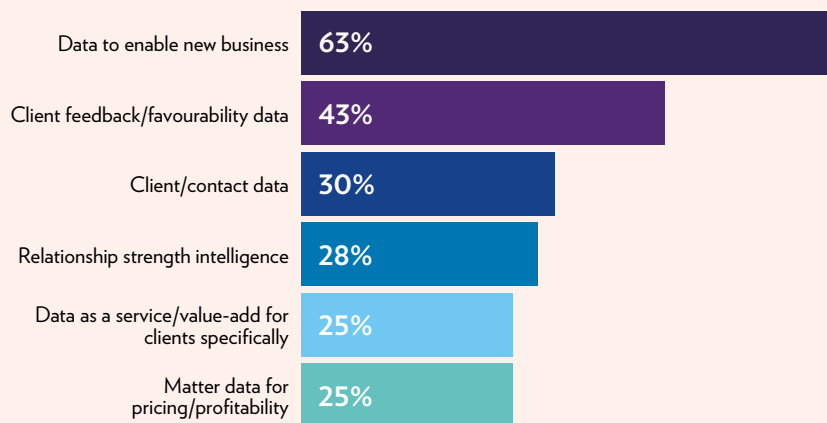
### How confident are you in your firm's current 'data maturity' to deliver MBD the insight needed to meet strategic objectives?



### THE VIEW FROM BD — COULD DO BETTER

In June 2023, **Briefing** heard that almost a third of firms' marketing and business development (MBD) leaders were 'less than confident' that their then approach to data could offer the intelligence needed to achieve strategic goals. Ed FitzGerald, director of brand, clients and markets at RPC, said: "Data can be an untapped opportunity, and you do need the links between different sources to create narratives that can lead to meaningful action." Data leading to new business and client insight emerged as particular priorities.

### Which three areas/types of data would you prioritise for more investment or improvement at your firm? Here's the top six



are often the last to move. Although one in 10 still say they 'don't know' whether this is the way forward for the firm, almost a quarter are already there (up from 20% in 2023), and 31% on track for the transformation within two years (2023: 34%).

Significantly, just 3% now cite client perception of the strategy as a decisive factor (p39). Clearly, most are concerned with the risk/security implications – which may well mean a view that major providers have more power/scale to ensure the necessary levels of updated protection than firms can realistically manage to resource themselves. The cost/benefit calculation, possibilities for dicing



## PARTNER COMMENT

## Mind the strategic investment gap

Paul Suffield, professional services director,  
Aiqos



**T**his report highlights a clear commitment from firms to increased investment, especially to innovate, while showing they're still facing common obstacles in securing stakeholder buy-in, cost and current volumes of change being managed. In the current economic environment, it's more critical than ever that this investment delivers value and is adopted successfully to gain competitive advantage.

Two areas outlined in the report for investment and change (hybrid working and genAI) need to be considered as part of a broader investment strategy, focused on the outcomes of investments for clients and broader stakeholders.

Our experience of delivering technology-enabled projects in the market is often confronted by a common theme — they are treated as an independent project. Our strong belief is that all investment projects should be viewed as pieces in a strategic programme, with the appropriate governance and oversight. A siloed

approach is often the key cause of the obstacles to investment that the report highlights.

Other key findings do highlight this importance of a strategic approach spanning investments in technology. Over three-quarters of leaders say their firms have a strategy/plan to use genAI. Many of those plans will be focused on client-facing solutions, which is understandable when coupled with client requests about that investment. However, this doesn't appear connected to the wider infrastructure investments needed to deliver the service scalability these technologies have the potential to drive. For example, only 16% of leaders view information flow across business management systems as effective, so how will firms with ineffective data integration investing in services enriched with genAI ever be able to successfully deliver this enabling technology? Unfortunately, this will only increase resistance to future investments as securing stakeholder buy-in will become

more challenging.

It is also very clear the issue carrying the most collective weight around cloud investment is the security/risk balance. Firms without a cloud-enabled, effectively integrated, business-wide data strategy in place will fail to unlock the benefits of enabling technologies such as genAI. Unfortunately, not having this core IT architecture in place will also exponentially increase risk of data breaches and the financial and reputational harm this would cause.

In summary, firms need to look at their investment decisions holistically, especially those that are technology-enabled. With underwhelming percentages of 'good' ratings for core systems, major misalignment of firms identifying investments in genAI with a connected data infrastructure and effective automation will ultimately see many invest poorly. ▶

▶ To learn more, visit: [aiqos.io](https://aiqos.io)

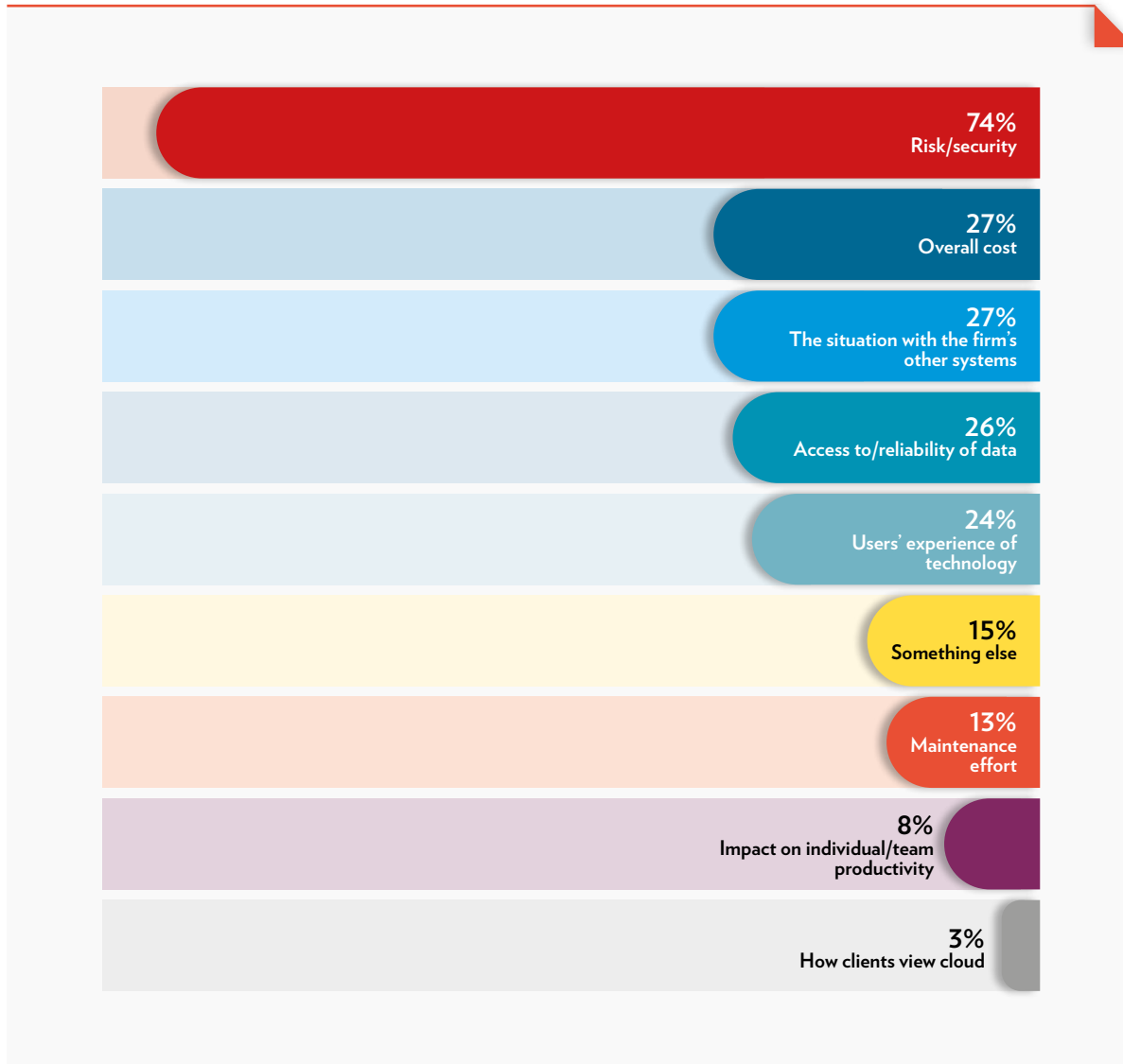
data, ability to integrate and user experience factor are all then weighted more or less equally in decision-making.

For Aldridge at Burges Salmon, the last of these is critical though — determining when the 'cloud-first' firm will migrate its KM system over. "Lawyers have handled an awful lot of change, and you need to be mindful of time spent on change management and training. For knowledge, it's all about presenting them with the best tools — like a landing page where they can both search and browse automatically authenticated links and guidance. It's important they can find things relatively instinctively," she says.

At Forsters the new PMS will be the final piece of this journey. "There will be absolutely no servers, not even in Azure — we do not need them. It's time to move on," says Stables. It's a strategy that also ties to the new office environment: "We don't need MPLS [multiprotocol label switching] — it's straight out to the internet."

Smaller firm Buckles had pushed all its systems to cloud even before the pandemic — initially entirely Microsoft Azure, and now with some in the hands of a managed service provider. "It was by no means an easy project but — aligned with our strategic goal of growing in other locations — it did not make sense to invest in new infrastructure," says Smith. "Security was another big factor — and

**Which two factors do you think carry most weight at your firm when deciding whether cloud is the most appropriate course? (Choose only two)**



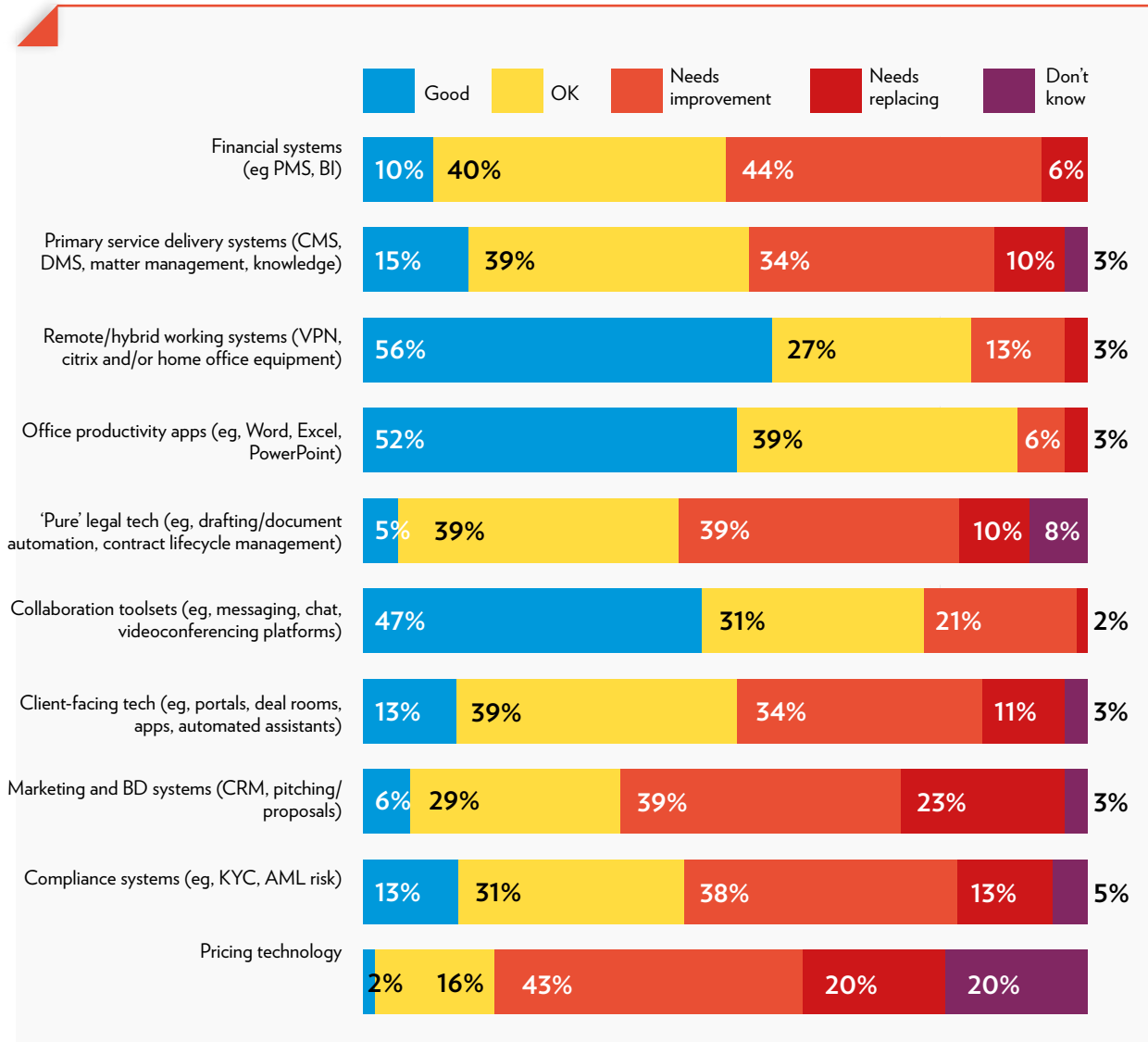
our staff can also work from anywhere, so we have the tech setup to support that.”

But finally, whether heading to a cloud platform or not, leaders still identify some significant categories of technology as less than ‘ok’ for delivering on priorities and ambitions (p40). As in 2023, pricing and marketing tools sadly emerge as the worst offenders (deemed to ‘need replacement’ by a fifth and almost a quarter of leaders respectively). The compliance toolset also looks to have grown more concerning – in part, perhaps, owing to evolving risk management requirements when it comes to the client base. Half (51%) now report these areas need to be either replaced or improved (2023: 28%). Hardly faring better are the core of finance systems (50%), document automation (49%), client collaboration, co-working and delivery options (45%), and knowledge systems/matter management (44%).

Catherine Jackson says Clarke Willmott has a project focused on finetuning client experience, from onboarding to the integration of touchpoints in delivery: “This shouldn’t be convoluted, and there’s a question about whether we could manage everything within one platform,” she says. But, as with mapping out possible internal change, it involves a lot of listening to perceived needs and priorities.

Aris adds: “We need to continue to offer the best legal advice to clients in the most efficient

## How satisfied are you with the following areas of technology at your firm?



ways to remain competitive. That could include simple things like data rooms and information-sharing platforms, where they have access to information on matters and documents, including financial information, at the press of a button – but also more advanced solutions to streamline legal processes and ensure lawyers can spend more time providing value-added legal advice.

“The next generation of clients coming through are more used to a paperless society and one where business and personal tech boundaries are very blurred – everyone wants their personal iPhone to do everything. Embracing tech for clients can both future-proof firms and cater to clients’ changing needs.”

PMS aside, the project list for Forsters also includes optimising a recently moved intranet – with a keen eye on what can be served up through Teams and mobile phones.

But with those hybrid-working practices the norm – no matter the number of days in an office in future – leaders overall are most likely to be bullish about their investments to support the business-as-usual collaboration and security levels it requires. The best ‘scores’ for system satisfaction go to home office setup (56%), apps (52%) and collaboration channels (47%). If they’re serious about extracting more insight and value from data, however, many may need to re-evaluate how effectively key systems support the changes they want to see.”