

# The UK legal industry needs to evolve to survive

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The legal industry may be built on tradition and heritage, but it must be open to innovation to keep up in an ever-evolving world. It's no secret that the world of work is rapidly changing in the UK's wider cultural climate but, for a sector built with a strong focus on precedent and commitment to the way things have previously been done, this can present challenges.

Recent years have seen lawyers' expectations heighten and those who feel the industry isn't evolving fast enough to meet their needs are considering abandoning it altogether. Around one-in-five lawyers under the age of 40 admitted to thinking about leaving the legal profession between 2022-2027 citing factors like workload, their lack of work/life balance and the adverse impact those things have on their mental health.

At present, hopes of a more flexible work/life balance in the legal industry seem far-fetched. 71% of lawyers and law staff surveyed suffer with anxiety, 69% are exhausted and 65% have physical and mental overwhelm and fatigue. And the issue seems to be getting worse. LawCare, a mental health charity set up exclusively for the legal industry saw a "dramatic increase" in the number of people making contact for mental health support in 2023.

With 67% of respondents admitting their personal relationships have suffered as a result of being a member of the legal profession, it's clear that the current industry structure needs to evolve.

But where can changes be made?

The rapid transformation of the legal profession through quickly evolving technology will, understandably, be unsettling for a profession that takes its strength from long-standing working practices. Yet, as changing market dynamics – in addition to lawyers' dissatisfaction - puts unprecedented pressure on the current operational models, the adoption of lawtech needs to move faster than it has up to this point. This welcoming of innovative technologies needs to come from the top, and the law firms who do adapt and embrace the technology available will have the ability to turn the new market drivers into opportunities, rather than stumbling blocks. A recent report from the Law Society, concluded that 'a lack of understanding by, and encouragement from, management is proving a barrier to the uptake of technologies.' 56% of respondents said that lawtech increased their productivity, yet only 30% of respondents said the senior management of their organisation had been helpful in the use of technology.

AI and its technological advancements certainly have the potential to drive a shift in culture and redefine what success looks like to the legal profession. Hence, moving away from traditional metrics towards broader and more meaningful definitions of success such as client satisfaction, work/life balance or impact on community might be the answer to meeting the raised demands of both clients and lawyers.

In a major shift over the last 10 years, the historical reputation of a law firm is no longer enough to keep it top-of-mind in the market, let alone meet the growing expectations of its lawyers and clients. The fact that that a platform law firm recently beat all other UK law firms to the accolade of top hirer – including traditional law firms, is further evidence of significant structural change within the legal service market.

The platform law model is emerging as a true success story in fighting the legal crisis.

The platform law structure works efficiently with, potentially, hundreds of lawyers based across the UK, supported by a central team, which frees them up to work in a more effective way. Costs for the client are lower, and flexibility for lawyers is increased giving them more time with their families, time to rest and recuperate and more control of their workload.

To maintain the natural evolution of the industry, we need to look at more progressive business models that work better for both clients and legal professionals – new avenues of conversation, new definitions of success and the welcoming of emerging technologies.

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