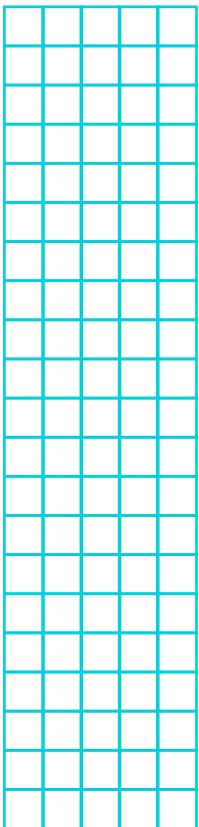


The AI mandate in legal: leadership, transformation, and what the data shows



Legal organizations are almost evenly split between leaders who are mandating AI change and those who are not. The Consilio 2026 Global Survey Report examines the real impact of the AI mandate on legal teams, proving that out of 678 legal professionals, 41% work in organizations where leadership vision is actively driving AI adoption and innovation. This represents a meaningful shift in how legal organizations approach technology changes. AI is no longer emerging from isolated innovation teams or grassroots experimentation alone. Increasingly, it is being pushed from the top.

AI adoption in legal is not simply a software implementation challenge. It represents a fundamental operational transformation in how legal work is performed, reviewed, managed, and measured. Legal teams are redesigning long-standing workflows around research, document review, drafting, compliance, knowledge management, and discovery. Professionals are learning new tools, adapting to new methods of working, and operating in environments where AI increasingly influences speed, productivity, and client expectations.

Technology change at this scale requires visible executive sponsorship, sustained investment, governance maturity, and meaningful enablement. Where those supporting structures are absent, the mandate produces motion without coordination and in some cases, weaker outcomes than organizations with no mandate at all.

This report also demonstrates what the AI mandate delivers in practice for legal teams, where it creates new challenges, and what separates organizations that are transforming from those that are just moving fast. Organizations with the AI mandate consistently outperform those without one across deployment, operational change, and business outcomes. But the size of that advantage, and whether it translates into genuine transformation, depends on what sits alongside the mandate.



Emerging technology

Emerging technology is no longer a future consideration for legal organizations and firms. Rather, it has become a primary driver of innovation. 51% of respondents identified emerging technology opportunities as the strongest driver of innovation, while leadership vision ranked closely second at 41%, proving there is an AI mandate driven largely in part by leadership. The data also underscores that it's not that organizations do not have emerging technology opportunities; rather, they are widely recognizing emerging technology as an opportunity to forge ahead. In turn, they are actively experimenting with new technologies, and so the challenge becomes ensuring that experimentation is coordinated and governed at scale.

FINDING ONE

The leadership-driven AI mandate accelerates full deployment across every use case

Organizations where leadership is actively driving the AI agenda show meaningfully higher rates of full AI deployment across every core legal use case. The strongest deployment gaps appear in the most operationally difficult use cases, which are the areas that require cross-functional coordination, workflow redesign, governance approval, and sustained organizational investment.

AI Deployment Rates by Organization Type

USE CASE	MANDATED N=279	NON-MANDATED N=399	MANDATED ADVANTAGE	LEADERSHIP + MANDATED EXPERIMENTERS N=173
Document review & analysis	17.5%	9.9%	1.8x	23.3%
Contract management	13.3%	5.3%	2.5x	20.5%
Legal research	13.3%	9.2%	1.4x	16.4%
Compliance & risk management	5.8%	1.5%	3.9x	8.2%
Low / no-code automation	6.7%	1.5%	4.5x	8.2%
Strategy & decision making	4.2%	1.5%	2.8x	5.5%
Knowledge integration	5.8%	2.3%	2.5x	8.2%

Figures show % of respondents reporting Fully Deployed. Leadership + Emerging Tech = leadership vision co-occurring with emerging technology opportunity (n=173). Source: Consilio 2026 Global Survey, n=678.

The pattern across the data is consistent. The leadership-driven AI mandate helps organizations overcome the organizational friction that often prevents AI initiatives from scaling into production. Contract management is fully deployed in 13.3% of mandated organizations versus 5.3% of non-mandated, a 2.5-fold difference. Low/no-code automation shows the largest gap in the survey at 4.5 times higher in mandated organizations.

When partial deployment is included alongside full deployment, the gaps narrow. In document review, the difference becomes 39% versus 32%. In contract management, 34% versus 25%.

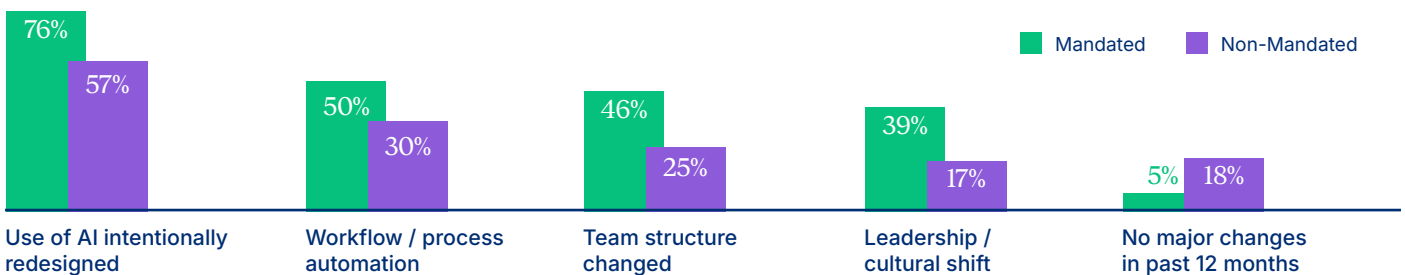
The true impact of leadership intervention is not necessarily getting organizations started; it is helping them progress from experimentation into enterprise-scale deployment.

The one exception is intake and triage, where non-mandated organizations report higher deployment rates. Intake and triage AI tends to be deployed in direct response to workload pressure rather than strategic direction. Operational necessity drives it more effectively than an executive mandate.

FINDING TWO

AI transformation is reshaping legal operations

The most striking pattern in the data is not deployment rates alone, but the broader organizational changes occurring around them. Mandated organizations have done more in the past twelve months than their peers across every measure of operational change, redesigning how they use AI, automating workflows, restructuring teams, introducing technology-focused roles, and shifting organizational culture. Only 5% report no major changes in the past year, compared to 18% of organizations where no such mandate from leadership exists. By every measure, these organizations are in motion. Compared to non-mandated organizations, those with an AI mandate are more active across every dimension of structural change:



The skills development data reinforces this. Organizations under a leadership-led AI mandate are investing significantly more in the capabilities required to make AI work at scale.

SKILL DEVELOPED IN PAST 12 MONTHS	ALL N=678	MANDATE N=279	NON-MANDATED N=399	MANDATE+ EMERGING TECH N=173	AI MANDATE ONLY N=34
AI evaluation / prompt engineering	65%	74%	57%	83%	68%
Process design	26%	35%	19%	38%	14%
Project management	34%	40%	29%	41%	21%
Data literacy	21%	26%	17%	30%	18%
Change management	20%	27%	15%	27%	21%

These findings reinforce that AI adoption is fundamentally a change management challenge rather than a standalone technology initiative. Mandated organizations report significantly higher rates of AI evaluation and prompt engineering training, project management development, process design, and change management capabilities than their peers. Among the highest-performing cohorts in the survey, organizations combining the leadership mandate with

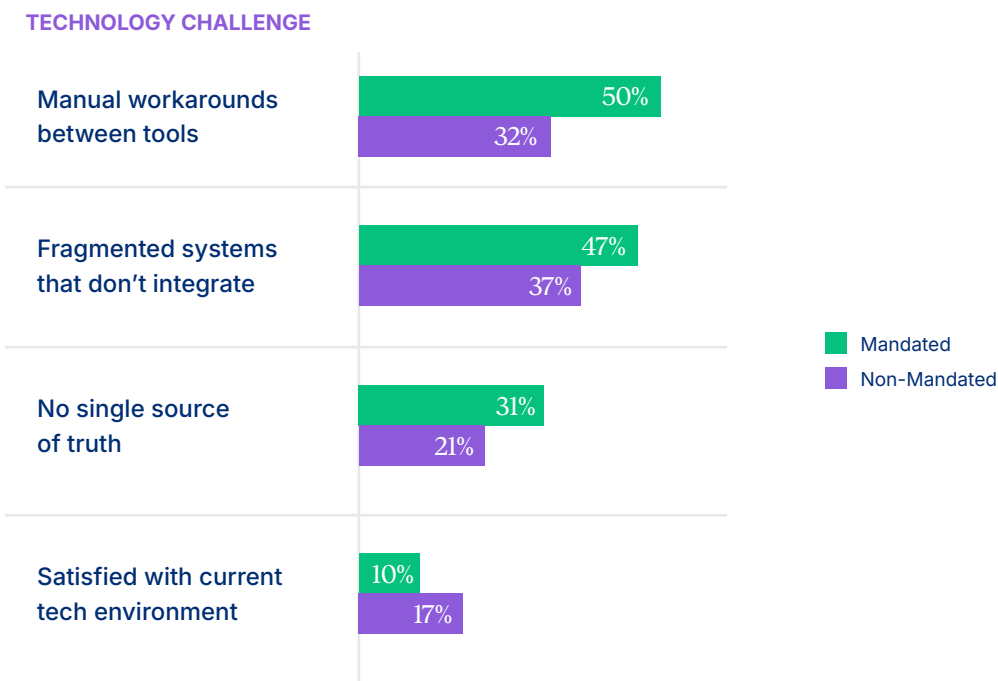
emerging technology opportunity, 83% report growth in AI evaluation and prompt engineering capability.

Legal professionals need time, training, operational support, and workflow integration to adapt successfully to AI-enabled environments. Leadership buy-in creates permission for change. Enablement creates the conditions for transformation.

FINDING THREE

Deployment is accelerating faster than organizations can integrate it

While AI-mandated organizations outperform their peers in many categories, the data also reveals significant risks associated with rapid AI transformation. The same organizations driving the greatest operational change also report substantially higher levels of technology fragmentation:



This suggests that many legal organizations are deploying AI faster than they are integrating it coherently into broader operational ecosystems. New tools, workflows, and automation systems are being introduced rapidly, but the infrastructure required to connect them effectively is lagging behind.



FINDING FOUR

Governance is emerging but maturity remains rare

One clear benefit of an AI mandate is that it gets governance structures in place. Only 6% of mandated organizations report having no formal AI governance structure, compared to 19% of non-mandated organizations. Cross-functional governance committees are also more common among mandated cohorts.

However, mature governance remains rare overall. Only 7% of mandated organizations report having documented governance frameworks that are actively followed in practice. Most governance remains informal, fragmented, or distributed across leadership and IT functions.

This is the gap that matters. AI deployment is accelerating under the mandate. The governance needed to support it is not keeping pace.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE	ALL N=678	MANDATE N=279	NON-MANDATED N=399	MANDATE+ EMERGING TECH N=173	AI MANDATE ONLY N=34
Cross-functional committee	32%	38%	28%	44%	19%
GC / Legal leadership decides	22%	24%	21%	25%	22%
Documented framework, actively followed	7%	7%	6%	8%	11%
Informal / ad hoc	3%	4%	3%	3%	11%
No formal governance in place	14%	6%	19%	3%	7%



Put a policy in place on how these technologies should be used and monitored

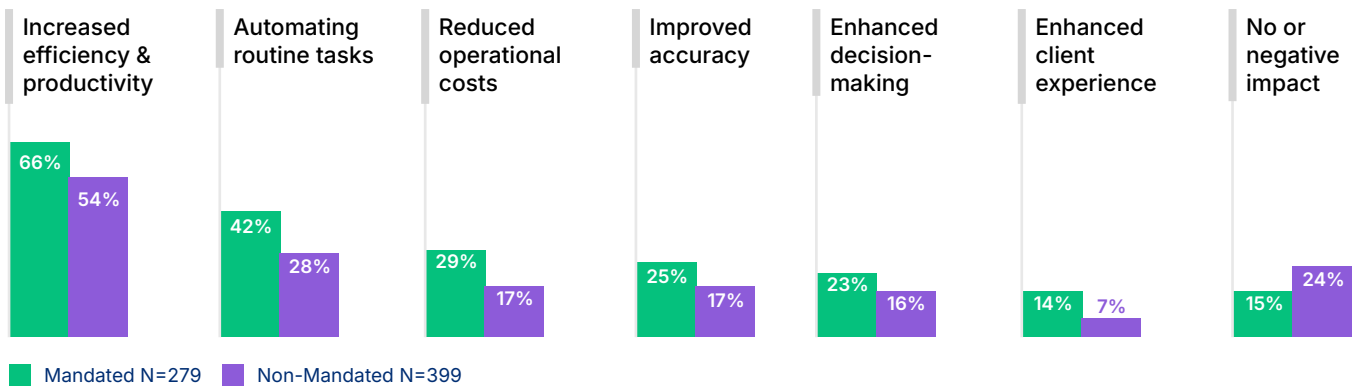
Lawyer, Law Firm, Australia — Consilio 2026 Global Survey

FINDING FIVE

Better outcomes, but trust remains a universal blocker

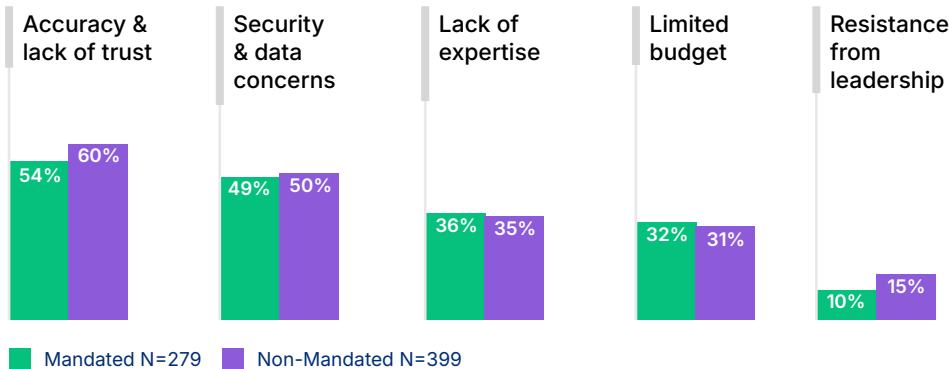
The AI-mandated cohort reports tangibly better AI outcomes across every benefit category. But accuracy and trust concerns are essentially identical across both cohorts. The mandate does not resolve the fundamental trust problem.

Benefits: leadership leads consistently



The AI mandate resolves exactly one blocker: resistance from leadership. Accuracy and trust, security, expertise, and budget persist at identical rates in both cohorts. The mandate creates permission and direction. It does not create safety, capability, or resources.

Blockers: trust belongs to everyone



Find the balance between urgent innovation and measured, cautious risk-aversion.

Lawyer, Law Firm, United Kingdom — Consilio 2026 Global Survey

FINDING SIX

What sits alongside the mandate determines the outcome

A leadership-driven AI mandate does not operate in isolation. The data shows that what accompanies the mandate, whether technology opportunity, operational pressure, or practitioner engagement, determines whether it produces genuine transformation or just organizational motion. The same mandate produces very different outcomes depending on what sits alongside it.

MANDATED + EMERGING TECH · N=173

The Coordinated Adopter

Mandate reinforced by genuine technology opportunities. Highest performers in the survey across every measure.

20%

Contract management fully deployed

74%

Efficiency gains

83%

AI skills developed

3%

No formal governance

MANDATED + CAPACITY CRISIS · N=54

The Pressured Adopter

Urgency-driven. High structural redesign but uneven deployment. Reorganizing without fully deploying.

65%

Team structure changed

47%

Limited budget cited

0%

Strategy fully deployed

MANDATED ONLY · N=34

Pure mandate, weakest outcomes

No technology pull, no capacity pressure, no client demand. Mandate exists in isolation.

0%

Legal research fully deployed

0%

Contract management fully deployed

19%

No AI impact reported

NON-MANDATED · N=399

Organically driven

Driven by emerging tech, client pressure, legal complexity, or nobody at all. Less motion but less fragmentation.

15%

Nobody driving change

17%

Satisfied with tech stack

10%

Document review fully deployed

The Mandated + Emerging Technology cohort consistently outperformed every other group across deployment, skills development, governance maturity, and operational impact. These organizations combined leadership vision with practitioner engagement, technology readiness, and sustained enablement. That combination, not the mandate alone, is what produced coordinated transformation.

Perhaps the most revealing finding in the dataset is the Mandated Only sub-cohort. These are organizations where the AI mandate exists without accompanying technology opportunity, operational urgency, or practitioner engagement, and they consistently underperform. Top-down pressure alone does not create successful transformation. Mandate without enablement, practitioner buy-in, or technology pull creates friction rather than momentum.

What the data means for organizations navigating the mandate

Organizations with executive sponsorship are moving faster, deploying more AI into live workflows, investing more heavily in operational redesign, and developing more AI-related capabilities than their peers. But the findings also make something equally evident: the AI mandate alone is not enough. Success depends not only on executive pressure to modernize, but on whether organizations create the infrastructure, workflows, governance structures, and cultural conditions necessary to support lasting change.

01 The AI mandate is driving results

AI mandate-driven organizations are deploying more AI, redesigning more workflows, and building more capability than their peers. But organizations under a leadership-led AI mandate also report significantly higher fragmentation, more manual workarounds, and lower satisfaction with their technology environments. The faster the mandate moves, the more deliberately organizations need to manage integration, coherence, and the connective tissue between tools.

02 Build governance alongside deployment

Only 7% of mandated organizations have a documented governance framework that is actively followed in practice. As AI moves into increasingly sensitive legal workflows, informal oversight is not sufficient. Governance needs to be built in parallel with deployment, not treated as something to formalize once the tools are in place.

03 Create technology pull alongside the mandate

The Mandated + Emerging Technology cohort outperforms every other group in the survey. The Mandated Only cohort underperforms even organizations with no mandate. The difference is practitioner engagement and genuine technology opportunity running alongside the directive. Leaders need to create conditions where practitioners want to adopt, not just where they are required to.

04 Invest in operational and skills changes

The mandate creates the conditions for better outcomes, but it does not deliver them automatically. Mandated organizations that see the strongest returns are those that have paired the mandate with genuine workflow redesign, team restructuring, and investment in AI-related skills. The deployment numbers follow the operational change. Organizations that treat the mandate as a directive without investing in enablement will see limited returns.

05 Use the mandate to build lasting organizational capacity

The mandate's greatest opportunity is not just faster deployment. It is building the skills, governance maturity, workflow integration, and cultural readiness that make AI transformation sustainable beyond the initial push. Organizations that use the mandate to build capacity will outperform those that use it only to drive adoption.

The legal industry is entering a period where AI adoption increasingly shapes competitiveness, efficiency, and client expectations. In that environment, organizations with no leadership direction risk stagnation. But organizations relying on the mandate alone risk fragmented transformation without the infrastructure to sustain it.

The challenge for legal leaders is therefore larger than driving adoption. It is building the organizational capacity to make transformation sustainable.

METHODOLOGY

Data drawn from the Consilio 2026 Global Survey, n=678 legal, risk, and compliance professionals across in-house legal teams and law firms globally. The AI mandate cohort (n=279, 41%) comprises respondents who selected Leadership vision as a driver of change and innovation in their legal function. The non-mandated cohort (n=399, 59%) comprises respondents who did not select this option. Sub-cohorts: Mandated Only (n=34) — leadership vision is the sole driver; Mandated + Emerging Tech (n=173) — co-occurs with emerging technology opportunities; Mandated+ Capacity Crisis (n=54) — co-occurs with capacity crisis. Multipliers reflect the ratio of fully deployed rates between cohorts; noted where base sizes are small. All percentages calculated against respondents with valid data for that question.



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