

JUNE 2026

savills

The Future of Global Law Firms: Five Forces Redefining the Next Decade

The Moment of Inflection for Global Law Firms





Global law firms are entering a period of reinvention

Technology is no longer just an efficiency tool; it is a cultural and economic disruptor. Law firms are not simply purchasers of services but architects of how firms now operate. Leadership itself is being redefined, demanding a new fluency in data, technology, and human behavior.

The firms that succeed in this environment will be those that can translate complexity into clarity. They will adapt faster, think more globally, and build systems that connect people, knowledge, and culture. Many of the most profitable firms have achieved extraordinary results in both the United States and globally, but their next chapter depends on creating the same strength across their real estate portfolio. The question is not where growth happens, but how a firm evolves to support it.

Increasingly, **real estate is not a cost line but a performance lever**, tied directly to productivity, integration, and ultimately profit per partner. For leadership teams, this reframing elevates portfolio strategy into a core driver of financial competitiveness, not a support function.

The next decade will challenge law firm leaders to integrate technology, culture, talent, and real estate with a level of coordination never seen before. This paper outlines the forces reshaping that mandate.

By leveraging our alliance with global professional services organizations, and research by Savills' Legal Tenant Practice Group and our Workplace Studio, we have identified five forces that are redefining leadership, culture, and performance across the legal sector. **Together they represent both the challenge and the opportunity for firms preparing for the decade ahead.**

1 Intelligence as the New Infrastructure

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become the defining catalyst of transformation. Within law firms, it is reshaping the nature of legal work and the composition of teams. Routine tasks once central to junior roles, such as research and document review, are increasingly automated. At the same time, firms are expanding their hiring of software engineers and technical talent to build, integrate, and manage AI tools. The focus is shifting from efficiency to enablement: how to integrate AI to enhance human judgment, speed, and creativity, while elevating the human capabilities, consensus building, teamwork, emotional intelligence (EQ), that differentiate legal practice.

For leadership teams, the challenge is no longer whether to adopt AI, but how to govern it. The question is how to align a technology strategy with client trust, data privacy, and the craft of legal practice. According to McKinsey's 2025 Global Legal Transformation Outlook, firms that integrate AI into core workflows are achieving up to 20 percent faster transaction turnaround. **Savills' research across major law firm portfolios shows that many firms are selectively reconfiguring space to support AI collaboration, cybersecurity requirements, and tech-enabled litigation and advocacy environments, including mock trial-ready or war-room-style spaces used for trial preparation, coaching, and complex case strategy.**

This convergence of digital and physical transformation signals a new reality: **intelligence is now infrastructure.** Offices are no longer just places of work; they are platforms that enable human and digital systems to operate together in real time. In practice, firms are prioritizing adaptable, reconfigurable environments that can support multiple uses over time, rather than permanent, single-purpose rooms that risk becoming underutilized as practice needs evolve.

2 Globalization and the Balance of Scale and Agility

For many global law firms, scale has been a source of strength. Yet in an environment defined by speed and volatility, scale alone is not enough. The next frontier is agility — the ability to act globally, with the decisiveness of a single firm, driving consensus at every turn.

Firms are now rethinking how governance, data, and accountability flow across borders. **In Savills' global benchmarking study of more than forty multinational firms, those with unified governance models and centralized portfolio data achieved decision-making speeds nearly 20 percent faster than peers relying on regional autonomy.**

The strategic lesson is clear: the advantage will go to firms that pair global consistency with local adaptability. For leadership, that means investing in systems that deliver transparency across every market while empowering regional teams to respond to client and talent needs in real time. It also calls for a stronger, more intentional strategy function, including a defined SPOC model, to help organizations navigate growth and operational complexity. Much of this growth will come through M&A, requiring leaders who can manage cultural integration thoughtfully and create unified environments that reinforce connection, alignment, and a shared identity. Firms that get this balance right will look less like federations of offices and more like integrated global businesses that compete on speed, cohesion, data, and foresight.

As global law firms expand into new markets, their leadership teams face the same challenges multinational corporations encounter, ensuring consistency, cultural cohesion, and operational readiness across borders. Savills' global platform supports this evolution. Through offerings such as our Global Expansion Guidebooks, we help organizations anticipate the implications of growth, from mobility and talent deployment to market regulations, cultural dynamics, and workplace strategy.

As law firms increasingly operate like global enterprises, these insights become critical to scaling in a way that protects culture, accelerates integration, and ensures real estate decisions support the broader strategic agenda.



3 The Evolving Compact Between Talent and the Firm

The relationship between firms and their people has changed. Lawyers entering the profession today want flexibility, mentorship, and belonging. Partners want continuity, accountability, and a strong, durable culture. Bridging those expectations requires more than hybrid policies, it requires intentional design. Critically, for lateral hires, especially at the partner level, culture and connection matter most. Twenty-one percent of senior laterals leave within their first three months when integration is not an explicit priority, an extraordinarily costly outcome.

This is where space plays a far more strategic role than most leaders realize. When Savills advises firms on talent strategy, we often uncover cultural norms, rituals, and identity markers that leaders themselves may not articulate, but that laterals feel immediately. One firm's "prom dress room" or shared maternity closet, another's bocce tournaments carried across offices, these are the non-obvious cultural signatures that foster connection, continuity, and belonging. The right workplace strategy doesn't invent these elements; it amplifies them. It makes the firm's culture legible to a lateral from day one.

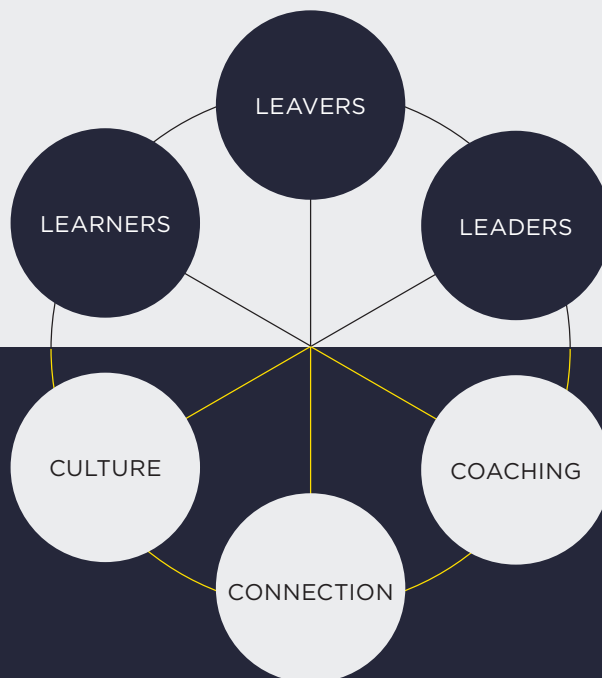
Workplace strategy has therefore become a leadership issue. Technology is also being applied pragmatically to improve both operational efficiency and the employee and client experience. App-based access to internal meeting rooms and flexible workspaces is now common, giving attorneys and staff greater visibility and control over how space is used. Client-facing spaces, however, remain more intentionally managed by front-of-house and events teams, reflecting the importance of judgment, hospitality, and experience in allocating premium rooms and hosting client engagements. **According to Savills' 2024 Law Firm Benchmarking Report, firms that invested in upgraded, amenity-rich environments to enhance employee experience saw a 14% increase in both satisfaction and retention, even with hybrid schedules.**

For lateral recruiting, the implications are direct: A thoughtfully designed workplace becomes a tool for integration, a space that demonstrates how mentorship happens, how partners collaborate, how cross-office relationships form, and what the firm truly values. Laterals rarely ask about space, not because it is unimportant, but because they have not yet connected it to the two things they care about most: integration and practice growth.

The takeaway: the environment drives engagement. When firms align their people, culture, and experience, and create spaces where mentorship and collaboration happen naturally, the office becomes an engine for connection and success; not just a cost center. It becomes a physical representation of the firm's brand and values, and an essential part of attracting, integrating, and retaining the talent that drives long-term growth.

WORKFORCE

Workers may now fall into three categories. Firms need to support all three.



WORKPLACE

The role of the office is shifting. Can the office support all three?

4 Clients as Catalysts for Change

Clients are now influencing law firm strategy more directly than ever. They expect transparency, technology fluency, and measurable commitment to environmental and social goals. Real estate has become part of that conversation because clients increasingly view the physical office as a proxy for how a firm operates and is perceived by its peers.

Savills' Legal Tenant ESG Index found that more than 70 percent of new law firm leases now include sustainability provisions or performance targets. Firms are also rethinking how to create spaces that communicate innovation, accessibility, and inclusivity to visiting clients. These choices shape perception as much as they shape operations.

For CEOs, chairs and managing partners, this represents a shift in how brand and performance intersect. The office has become a strategic stage — one that reflects the firm's values, technological readiness, and commitment to excellence. Those that align client experience, ESG strategy, and workplace design will strengthen both trust and reputation in the marketplace.



70%

of law firm leases include sustainability provisions or performance targets



5 The Economics of Agility

Rising construction costs, volatile interest rates, and evolving work patterns have forced leadership teams to rethink what financial resilience looks like. Agility is becoming a financial strategy in its own right.

The most progressive firms are treating their real estate portfolios as active instruments of performance, not fixed overhead. Scenario planning, flexible lease terms, and capital modeling are replacing static budgeting. Global firms are increasingly turning to agile space planning to diversify their footprints, protect against market volatility, and maintain long-term optionality. This approach also enables law firms to rethink the purpose of space, shifting from uniform, legacy layouts to a more portfolio-based model that balances talent needs, client engagement, and cost discipline.

Savills' analysis of global occupiers shows that firms using structured portfolio reviews and lease laddering reduced risk exposure by an average of 18 percent while freeing capital to reinvest in technology and client innovation. For firm leadership, these gains tie directly to the metric that matters most: strengthening profit per partner.

The principle is simple: flexibility is value. Firms that institutionalize agility — in their portfolios, their governance, and their decision-making — are positioning themselves for sustained advantage in a market where change is the only constant.

For most firms, this shift is unfolding through staged conversion — targeted reinvestment in high-impact locations and practices, rather than uniform transformation across the entire portfolio.

A modern office interior with glass walls and wooden floors. The office is empty, with several white chairs and a wooden table visible. The lighting is soft and even.

The Next Era of Leadership

Leadership in the legal industry has always required judgment, integrity, and resilience. Today it also requires an understanding of systems — digital, cultural, and spatial. The convergence of AI, globalization, talent transformation, client influence, and financial agility demands a more integrated and flexible approach to strategy and execution.

As firms expand across regions, many are establishing global partnership boards to govern capital allocation and approve real estate initiatives. This shift elevates the need for a single point of contact who can translate local needs into global context. A strategic SPOC should be armed with holistic insight into how the firm operates across markets, helps reconcile regional differences, ensures fairness and transparency in decision-making, and preserves the influence of local leadership while advancing firmwide objectives. In practice, this role becomes a connector: aligning people with place, business strategy with investment, and global governance with local execution.

The firms that thrive will be those that **think across boundaries, connecting technology with culture, real estate with brand, and governance with growth**. They will view transformation not as disruption but as design.

The next decade will not be defined by which firms grow fastest, but by which adapt most effectively. As these forces evolve, the opportunity for dialogue and collaboration across industries has never been greater.



Contact Us

Matt Brainard

Senior Managing Director
+1 310 444-1026
mbrainard@savills.us

Katrina Kostic Samen

Vice Chair, Head of North American
Workplace Strategy & Design
+1 212 588 3490
kkosticsamen@savills.us

John Rissmiller

Associate Director
Savills Workplace Studio
+1 508 414 3157
jrissmiller@savills.us

savills.us

The information in this publication is gathered from multiple sources deemed to be reliable at the date of publication, however Savills has not verified such information. The information contained herein may contain errors or omissions and is presented without any warranty or representation as to its accuracy. No material may be used in whole or in part without prior permission of Savills.

© 2026 Savills. All rights reserved.