AI is making lawyers faster. Is it making firms better?

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AI is speeding up legal work in increasingly visible and practical ways. Drafting cycles are compressing. Legal research that once took hours now takes minutes. And, law firms and in-house teams are incrementally realising efficiency gains across an expanding range of practice areas that span the transactional and litigation divide.

Work is getting done faster. But speed alone does not equate to progress.

AI is exposing a challenge that law firms, particularly large and global firms, have grappled with for years: most of the work to drive matters and deals is still conducted across disconnected systems. These systems store documents, handle matter inception and track time, but none of them individually hold the full context of a matter (the facts, the law, economics, history, and client intent) in one place. To date, AI has merely served to expose this dislocation of systems rather than curing it. The generation of work-product may be accelerating, but the system around it is struggling to keep up.

In large firms, matter teams still need to reconstruct context before making decisions, pulling financial, staffing, and procedural information from different systems. New tools reduce drafting time, but they increase the amount of work required to verify and coordinate. Lawyers move faster, but they spend more time making sure everything lines up. The issue isn't speed, it's where the effort ends up. Drafting time goes down, but review and coordination time go up. Individual fee earners may be moving faster on *some* activities, but organisations do not necessarily cross the finish line sooner. When organisations accelerate work on a fragmented foundation of systems, the strain doesn't disappear. It just moves.

Coherence is the missing ingredient

It is trite to say that legal work is document-centric. We all know that. But, the obviousness of this obscures the reality: any legal matter, no matter how simple it may be, is a living swarm of connections between facts, issues, law, procedure, stakeholders (and their objectives), all being shaped and mastered by the strategic and tactical judgement of the matter team. With that state distributed across disconnected systems, lawyers need to compensate with experience and memory. Teams synchronise through meetings, email threads, and informal handoffs. It works, but operationally it's far from ideal.

If coherence and cohesion between dislocated systems is the constraint, the answer is platform-thinking. The tooling is advancing rapidly, and the productivity gains they yield are real: lawyers using a single integrated platform report a 25% decrease in cognitive load, according to Clio's 2025 neuroanalytics research with Neuro-Insight.

We've seen this pattern before. Early cloud adoption digitised workflows. The real transformation came when organisations stopped stitching tools together and built coherent operating platforms instead. A platform isn't just 'integrated software'. It's an environment where information, workflow, and decision-making state are connected enough that the organisation can operate with clarity under pressure, retain institutional memory through change, and scale without amplifying friction.

To realise the full benefit of AI tools and transform business outcomes, firms must situate those tools in a coherent, integrated platform.

That means building environments where the state of a matter is visible in the present, carries forward over time, and can be governed as work evolves. When a lawyer opens a matter, they should see the full context and dive into their tasks, not waste time trying to reconstruct it. When teams change, knowledge should persist, not walk out the door. When AI is deployed, it should operate inside real guardrails informed by the actual state of the work, not generate fluent output in isolation.

Context that travels with the work

Whatever the scale, the requirement is the same: information should travel with the matter, not be reconstructed around it each time it changes hands. In practice, that means client onboarding, matter management, billing, and intelligence working together in one environment, not connected through manual exports and status meetings that themselves consume the time the tools were meant to save.

It means a lawyer opening a matter and seeing its financial position, procedural history, and prior work product without switching systems. It means AI that operates with real matter context, not generating output in isolation from the governance and history that surrounds the work. It means guardrails embedded in the architecture, not dependent on individuals being careful at every step.

Clio is built around exactly this connection. Clio Operate structures how legal work is managed: matter workflows, financial visibility, and operational reporting across offices and practice groups. Vincent brings AI to the practice of law within that same environment, working from real matter context rather than in isolation from it. Together they represent what the business and practice of law look like on a shared foundation: one where operational data and legal intelligence inform each other, and where AI output can be verified quickly because the surrounding state of the matter is already visible. For large firms navigating complex, multi-jurisdictional work, that's the architecture that makes AI reliable at scale, not just fast.

The question isn't whether everything lives in one piece of software. It's whether the overall environment behaves like one.

The firms thinking in years, not pilots

Whether a firm has 10 lawyers or 10,000, the structural question is the same: does the operating environment preserve context as work accelerates, or does it force lawyers to rebuild it every time? That answer will determine whether intelligence compounds into advantage or fragments into friction, and it will dictate which firms leverage AI tools for revenue growth and efficiency gains over the next two, five and ten years.

Firms that move in this direction begin to experience different internal dynamics. Decision-making becomes faster, but also more grounded. Onboarding improves because context lives in the environment, not in a handful of individuals. Growth creates less operational drag because institutional learning compounds rather than resets.

Firms that do not strengthen the architecture beneath their tools will still benefit from AI. They will move faster than they did five years ago. But they will also face rising verification burdens, higher oversight complexity, and fragile institutional memory. Speed will increase. Structural strain will increase with it.

Over the next decade, every serious firm will deploy AI in some form. That will not be the dividing line. The divide will emerge between firms with individual parts that move faster and firms that become structurally better at scale.

That's the next stage of maturity for the profession. AI is accelerating the work. The more enduring transformation will come from strengthening the operating environment beneath it, so that speed translates into clarity, resilience, and compounding institutional strength.

Faster is not the same as better. The firms that understand that now will be the ones that pull ahead.

As featured in Artificial Lawyer.

About Clio

Clio is the global leader in legal AI, powering legal work across the profession, from law firms of every size to corporate legal teams, government agencies, and courts. Its Intelligent Legal Work Platform unites the business and practice of law, connecting the people, information, and processes behind legal work. Clio's AI brings the context

together with legal sources drawn from Clio Library, a growing collection of more than one billion legal documents. Over 400,000 legal professionals in more than 130 countries rely on Clio to run their legal world. Learn more at www.clio.com.