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Strategic Knowledge & Innovation Legal Leaders Summit

SKILLS 2025 Survey Results

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This report has nearly 500 responses to the survey conducted in preparation for the Strategic Knowledge and Innovation Legal Leaders' Summit ("SKILLS") 2025.

Executive Summary

The SKILLS 2025 Survey Report analyzes responses from 493 legal professionals focusing on knowledge management and innovation in large law firms. The respondent base comprised law firms (52%), vendors/suppliers (20%), and consulting firms (11%), providing comprehensive insights into the evolving legal technology landscape.

This report synthesizes survey data to understand how knowledge management, technology, and innovation are implemented and prioritized in legal practice.

Our companion report, "Analysis of AI Responses," provides a detailed analysis of AI adoption, deployment patterns, and emerging use cases across the sector, and can be found at https://skills.law/.

Key Takeaways:

1. **AI Maturation**: AI initiatives engaged 85% of respondents in 2024, with projected growth to 91% in 2025, marking the transition from experimental adoption to strategic implementation.
2. **Data-Driven Evolution**: Data analytics emerges as a key growth area, with planned work increasing to 53% (+10 ppt) by 2025. This reflects the growing emphasis on data-driven decision-making and underscores the need for more, better-structured data to support GenAI initiatives. As firms increasingly adopt AI-powered solutions, the quality and organization of data become critical enablers.
3. **Client-Centric Innovation**: Client-facing KM and innovation initiatives show substantial growth in planned work (a 9.6 percentage point increase), indicating a stronger focus on external service delivery.
4. **Balanced Transformation**: Two foundational activities remain central to operations: process improvement (54% of respondents) and internal KM/innovation (52%). These demonstrate how firms are maintaining essential functions while advancing technological capabilities.
5. **Traditional KM**: Forms and precedents work continues to be a significant operational focus, with 42% of respondents engaged in this area. While planned work remains substantial, there is notably less interest in discussing these established practices (-19% gap between planned work and discussion interest), suggesting they are increasingly being integrated with emerging technologies rather than viewed as standalone initiatives.

The SKILLS 2025 Survey underscores an industry balancing innovation with operational stability as organizations pursue strategic implementation of new technologies. While these often serve longstanding objectives, they also introduce new responsibilities and priorities, requiring firms to adapt while maintaining essential knowledge management functions.

Introduction

In preparation for the January 2025 Strategic Knowledge and Innovation Legal Leaders' Summit (SKILLS), we conducted our annual survey of knowledge management and innovation professionals across the legal profession. Now in its 21st year, this survey continues to serve as a crucial benchmarking tool for understanding the evolution of legal technology and innovation practices.

This year's survey garnered responses from 493 professionals representing diverse organizations across the legal sector, primarily in North America and the UK, with some representation from other jurisdictions. Law firms constituted the majority, at 52%, followed by vendors/suppliers (20%) and consulting firms (11%). The remaining participants represented various sectors, including corporate legal departments, academia, and alternative legal service providers.

The respondent profile encompasses a broad spectrum of roles, including Chief Innovation Officers, Knowledge Management Leaders, Legal Technology specialists, Practice Support professionals, IT professionals, and other key stakeholders in the legal profession. This diverse representation indicates how innovation and KM are embraced across a wide range of organizational functions.

Following our established methodology, the 2025 SKILLS Survey focused on three core areas:

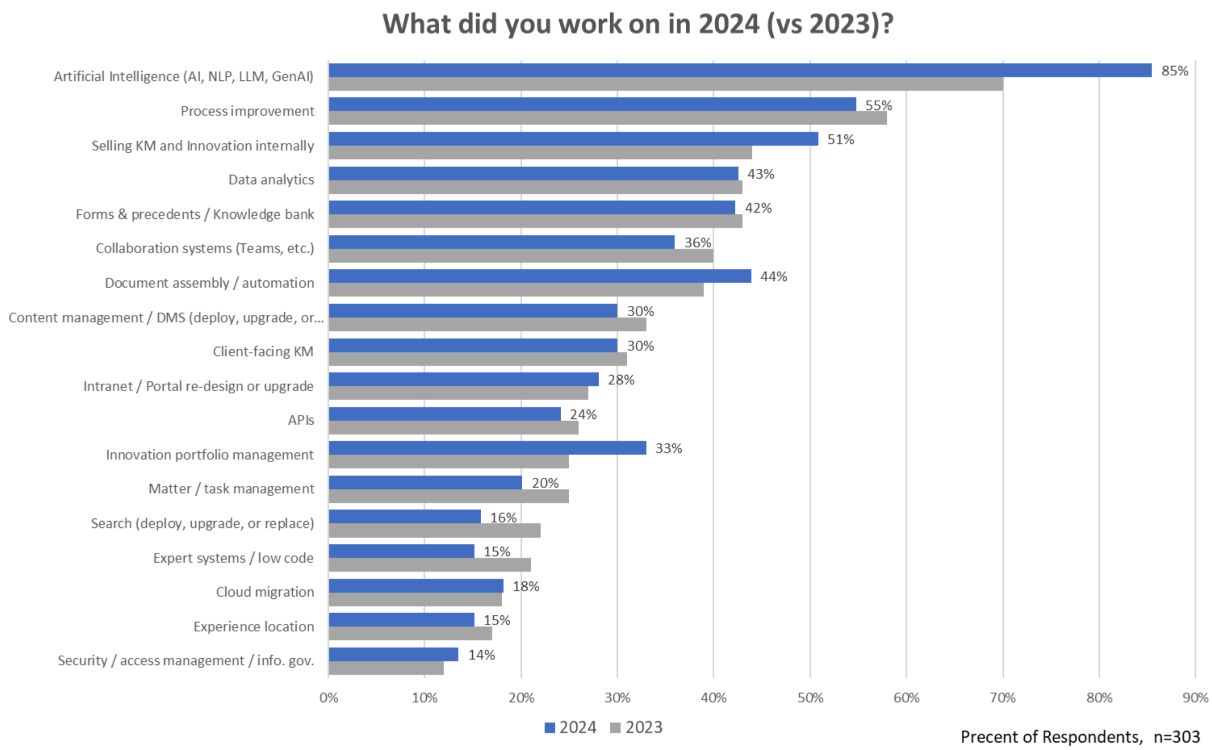
1. Work done in the past year ("Did")
2. Priorities for the upcoming year ("Should")
3. Topics of interest for discussion during the event ("Talk")

The survey was administered between September and November 2024, utilizing our proven approach of combining free-form text responses with structured tagging. Respondents tagged their answers using a defined vocabulary, which is the foundation for our quantitative analysis, and the axis labels in our subsequent charts.

This year's survey captures a pivotal moment in legal sector innovation, two years after the mainstream availability of large language models (LLMs). The legal sector has rapidly evolved from experimental AI adoption to strategic implementation of LLM-powered solutions, reshaping knowledge management, business operations, and legal service delivery.

Work done in 2024

The chart below shows what respondents worked on in 2024.



Commentary

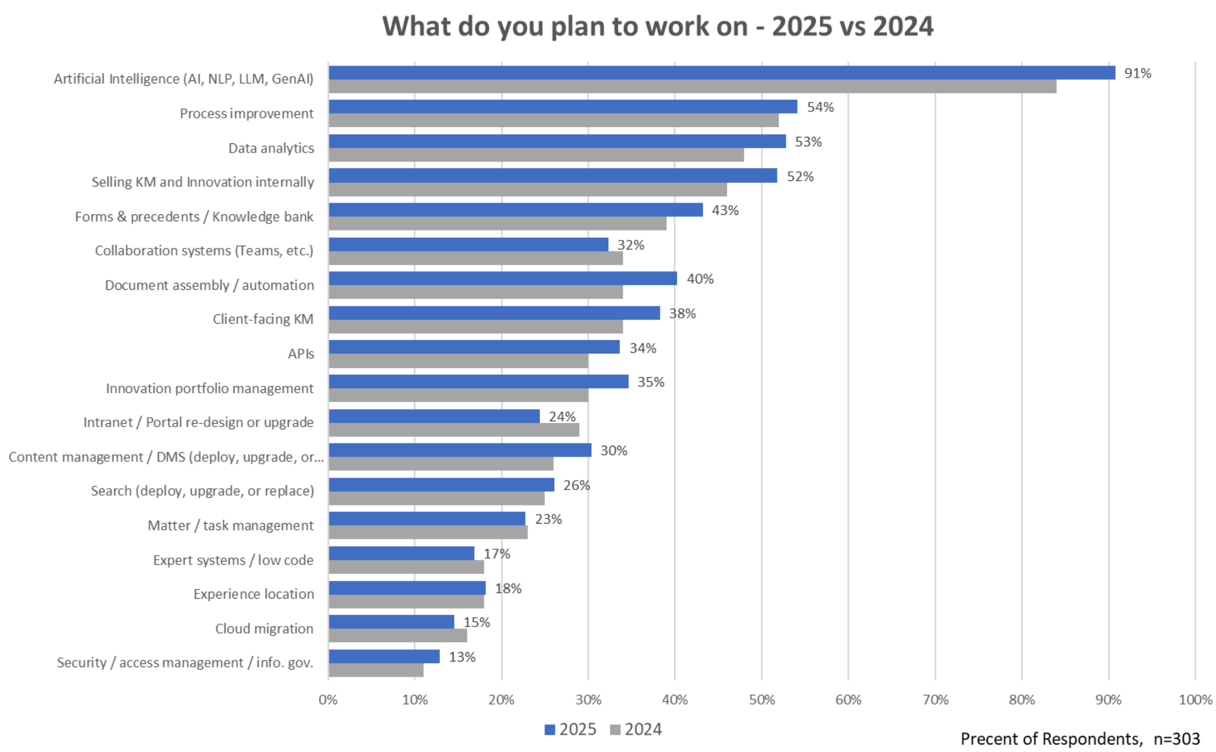
- AI solidified its position as the dominant focus area. In 2024, 85% of respondents worked on AI initiatives, up significantly from 70% in 2023. ***This 15-percentage-point increase represents the most substantial year-over-year change in any category.***
- Process improvement remained the second most common focus area, at 55%, slightly decreasing from 58% in 2023. This relative stability suggests that organizations continue to prioritize operational efficiency alongside technological advancement.
- Selling KM and Innovation internally saw notable growth from 43% to 51%, emerging as the third most common activity. This increase likely reflects the growing need to drive the adoption of new technologies and processes across organizations.
- Document assembly/automation rose from 39% to 44%, potentially reflecting increased integration with AI technologies and growing demand for automated solutions.
- Several areas showed modest changes of three percentage points or less, including:
    - Data analytics (stable at 43%)
    - Forms & precedents/Knowledge bank (42%, up from 40%)
    - Collaboration systems (36%, down from 39%)

○ Client-facing KM (30%, down from 33%)

The data reveals a profession where AI has become a clear priority while maintaining a commitment to core knowledge management and process improvement initiatives. Rather than displacing traditional activities, AI appears to be enhancing them, leading to more sophisticated approaches to legal service delivery.

Expected Work in 2025 and Changes from 2024

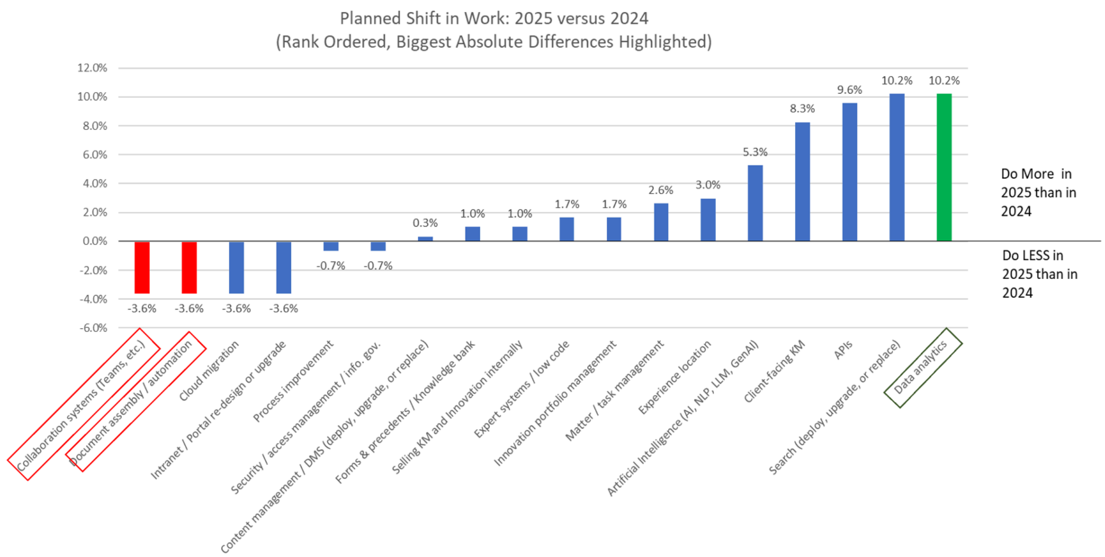
The chart below shows the work respondents expect to do in 2025. Non-blank responses only.



The survey results reveal compelling shifts in priorities for 2025. Data analytics and client-facing initiatives are gaining significant momentum alongside artificial intelligence's continued dominance. AI-related work (including NLP, LLM, and GenAI) is set to engage 91% of respondents in 2025, representing an 8.3% increase from 2024 and cementing its position as the cornerstone of knowledge management and innovation strategies.

Data analytics emerged as a key growth area, with ***the largest year-over-year increase of 10.2% to 53% of planned work.*** This substantial rise suggests that organizations increasingly recognize the value of data-driven decision-making and insights. Similarly, client-facing KM and APIs show notable increases of 9.6%, reflecting a growing emphasis on external service delivery and system integration.

Process improvement remains steady at 54%. This stability, combined with the consistent focus on selling KM and fostering internal innovation (52%, +1.0%), indicates these foundational activities continue to underpin organizational effectiveness. The rise of GenAI is further accelerating efforts to drive adoption and enhance these initiatives.

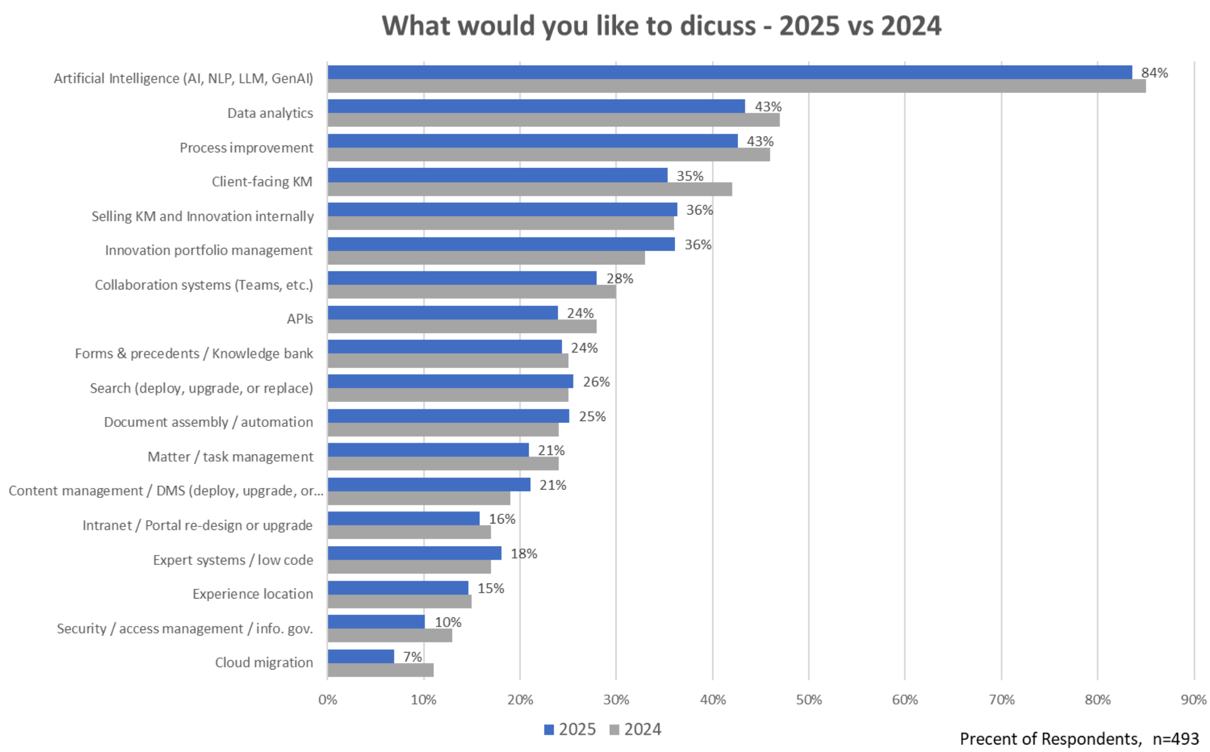


Traditional collaboration tools and document management show modest declines, with both collaboration systems and document assembly/automation decreasing by 3.6%. This shift might reflect these technologies' maturation or integration into broader AI and automation initiatives. Similar decreases in cloud migration and intranet/portal redesign suggest these areas are becoming routine operational concerns rather than strategic priorities.

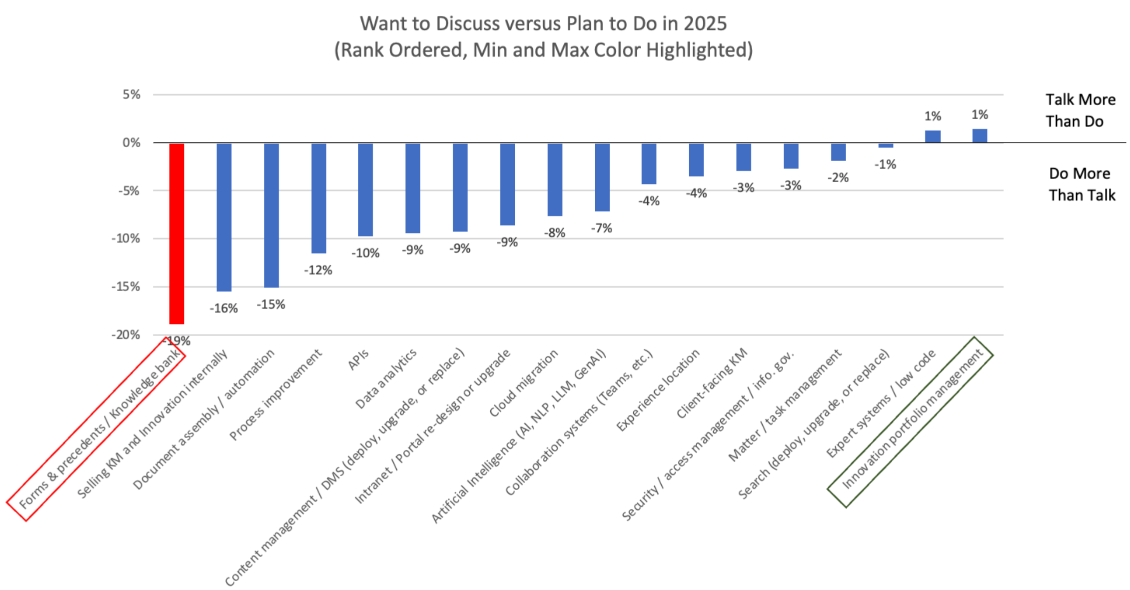
The overall pattern of changes reveals an industry carefully balancing innovation with stability. While organizations embrace new technologies and approaches, particularly in data analytics and client-facing services, they maintain their commitment to core internal knowledge management functions. This measured approach to change, with most areas showing variations of less than 4%, suggests a mature industry evolving deliberately rather than pursuing rapid transformation.

Discussion Interests versus 2024 Plans

The chart below shows what the respondents would like to discuss at SKILLS. Non-blank responses only.



We compare what respondents say they will work on with what they want to discuss:



The 2025 survey data reveals several clear patterns in the relationship between discussion interests and planned work. Artificial intelligence leads discussion interests at 84%, followed by data analytics and process improvement, which are tied at 43% each.

The largest gap between discussion interest and planned work appears in Forms & Precedents/Knowledge bank, with a -19% differential. This indicates significantly more planned work than interest in the discussion, suggesting that while these systems require substantial ongoing effort, there is comparatively less interest in discussing them at the conference.

Innovation portfolio management and Expert systems/low code are the only areas showing positive gaps (+1% each), where discussion interest slightly exceeds planned work. All other categories show negative gaps, meaning respondents plan to do more work in these areas than they wish to discuss.

Client-facing KM shows 35% interest in discussing this topic, with a -3 % gap between discussion and planned work. This indicates a close alignment between interest in discussing this topic and plans to work on it.

The data shows varying degrees of alignment between what respondents want to discuss and what they plan to work on, with most areas showing more planned work than discussion interest.

Conclusion

The 2025 SKILLS survey data presents a clear picture of a legal sector that has moved beyond the initial AI enthusiasm to a more nuanced, integrated approach to innovation. With AI work projected to engage 91% of professionals in 2025, the focus has shifted from exploration to strategic implementation and optimization. This maturation is evidenced by the significant growth in complementary areas, particularly data analytics, which saw the largest year-over-year increase of 10.2%.

The rise in client-facing initiatives highlights a focus on external value creation over and above legal services delivery. In parallel, the increased availability and use of API endpoints, some of which may impact the development of client-facing applications, has resulted in each category increasing by almost 10%.

Traditional knowledge management activities remain crucial, though their nature is evolving. The reduced discussion interest in areas like Forms & Precedents (19% gap between planned work and discussion interest) indicates these functions are becoming more integrated with emerging technologies rather than standalone initiatives.

Looking ahead, the data suggest the legal profession continues to favor incremental improvements over transformational initiatives. Most areas show less than 4% variation in planned work, reflecting an industry that values stability alongside innovation. This balanced evolution, driven by data and client needs, positions the sector well for sustainable advancement in legal service delivery.