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# IBA Law Firm Management Committee CEO Subcommittee Survey 2025

## Inside law firm operations: Insights and trends 2025 – analysis and discussion

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# Summary

This document reports on the findings of a survey on law firm business services and operations, run by the IBA Law Firm Management Committee (LFMC) CEO Subcommittee in July 2025 and completed by 46 participants.

**Key findings include:**

- Business services represent around one-third of total headcount on average (30 per cent), with modest variation by firm size but wide differences between individual firms.
- Outsourcing is highest in the smallest firms, lowest in mid-sized firms and rises slightly again in the largest firms, suggesting it substitutes for capacity at one end and complements in-house teams at the other.
- In-house coverage scales with size: larger firms maintain nearly all support functions internally, while smaller firms focus on core areas such as finance, HR and marketing.
- Centralisation is the dominant organisational model, especially in small firms, while larger firms more often combine firm-wide oversight with practice-group autonomy.
- Efficiency is rated as moderate overall, with only 30 per cent of firms reporting high efficiency. Mid-sized firms are the most critical of their support functions.
- Challenges mirror efficiency issues: integration with legal teams, resistance from lawyers and difficulty measuring return on investment (ROI) are common. Larger firms in particular emphasise ROI measurement.
- Maturity increases with firm size, but most firms remain in mid-level stages, rarely achieving full strategic integration of business services.
- Value and challenge often overlap: business development (BD), IT and HR are both highly valued and widely cited as problem areas. Finance stands out as a value driver with fewer associated challenges.
- AI and innovation capture attention in headlines, but as value drivers they remain behind traditional functions such as finance, BD, HR and IT.
- Perceptions of the ‘right size’ of business services differ from today’s reality: some firms see the optimal proportion as leaner, others as larger – but across all firm sizes, there is a sense that change is needed.
- Future priorities are dominated by legal technology and AI, followed by client and growth functions in smaller firms, and process improvement and data analytics in larger firms. Regionally, Europe appears more measured than other regions.

# Introduction

The IBA LFMC CEO Subcommittee was formed in 2024 to provide a dedicated forum for exploring the perspectives of law firm chief executives, and to shape the dialogue on the evolving management of professional services in law firms.

In July 2025, the Subcommittee launched its first survey, which remained open until early September 2025. The survey was circulated to a few IBA Committees and networks.

This short survey was designed to gain deeper insight into the structure, maturity and challenges of business services functions within law firms across different regions. Its purpose is to help identify key focus areas, emerging trends and strategic priorities, ensuring that the Subcommittee's agenda is aligned with the most relevant and meaningful topics for law firm leaders globally.

Beyond informing the Subcommittee's work, the findings will also contribute to broader research on the development of business services functions in the legal profession, supporting a better understanding of how law firms are evolving in response to shifting client demands, operational complexity and technological change.

# Methodology

The survey was circulated in July 2025 to a few IBA committees and remained open until early September 2025. A total of 46 participants completed the survey.

The respondent pool reflected a diverse cross-section of law firms.

## Geographical presence

A majority of respondents (56.5 per cent) were based in Europe, while the remainder were spread across Latin America and the Caribbean (17.4 per cent), East Asia and Pacific (6.5 per cent), North America (4.3 per cent), Sub-Saharan Africa (4.3 per cent), South Asia (4.3 per cent), Middle East and North Africa (2.2 per cent), and global firms operating across multiple continents (4.3 per cent). As a result, findings from other regions are presented with caution: the sample sizes outside Europe were too limited to form reliable standalone conclusions. Regional variances are therefore only lightly referenced where they provide additional context.

## Firm profile

Most respondents (67.4 per cent) identified their organisations as full-service law firms, typically covering a broad range of practice areas. Among those who did not identify as full-service, all reported having at least two or more primary practice areas, including combinations of corporate/M&A, litigation and dispute resolution, banking and finance, intellectual property, employment and labour, real estate and tax. For the purposes of this analysis, results are not separated by firm type, as the functional focus of business services was broadly comparable across respondents.

## Firm size (by number of lawyers)

- One–50 lawyers: 39.1 per cent
- 51–200 lawyers: 23.9 per cent
- 201–500 lawyers: 23.9 per cent
- 501+ lawyers: 13.0 per cent

By contrast, firm size categories were well represented across the sample, and most of the analysis is presented along firm size dimensions. This approach allows us to explore how the structure, role and impact of business professionals evolve as firms scale.

The survey instrument was structured into five sections, combining quantitative and qualitative questions:

**Section one – Respondent profile:** firm size, geographical presence and firm type (full service versus practice-specific).

**Section two – Business professional functions and structure:** questions on the scale of in-house functions, outsourcing levels, range of business services covered and degree of centralisation within the firm.

**Section three – Efficiency and maturity of business services:** questions on efficiency ratings, key challenges in leveraging business professionals and overall maturity (using a 1–5 scale from 'ad hoc' to 'highly mature').

**Section four – Value and impact**: assessment of which functions add the most value, how success is measured, perceived contribution to profitability and representation in firm leadership.

**Section five – Future trends and priorities**: questions on expected areas of growth over the next three to five years, alongside open-ended opportunities for respondents to provide additional comments.

Questions were designed to capture both quantitative data (eg, sliding scales, rating scales and multiple-choice selections) and qualitative insights (via open-ended responses). This combination allows for both statistical comparison across regions and firm types, and a richer understanding of the underlying perceptions, challenges and opportunities relating to business professionals in law firms.

## Comparative analysis

The analysis in this report focuses on Sections two–five of the survey, which address the core themes of business professional functions and structure, efficiency and maturity, value and impact, and future priorities.

Section one of the survey was designed to capture respondent characteristics – such as firm size and geographical presence – and has therefore been presented in the Methodology chapter rather than analysed separately.

The following sections present a comparative overview of the survey findings, highlighting key patterns, differences across regions and firm sizes, and emerging themes relevant to the development of business services in law firms globally.

# Section two – Business professional functions and structure

Respondents were asked to estimate the share of business professionals within their firms as a percentage of total headcount. Across all responses, the average proportion of business services staff was 30.2 per cent.

When broken down by firm size, reported levels ranged from 27.7 per cent to 35 per cent. Smaller firms (one–50 lawyers) reported 29.8 per cent, mid-sized firms (51–200 and 201–500 lawyers) were close to the average at 27.7 per cent and 30.7 per cent respectively, while the largest firms (501+ lawyers) reported 35 per cent.

Although averages are consistent across firm categories, there is significant variation between individual firms. While the typical benchmark is around one-third, approaches to resourcing business services differ widely.

An additional review by geographical region did not reveal any systematic correlation between location and the relative size of business services functions.

Alongside the question of how many business professionals firms employ, respondents were also asked about the extent to which functions are outsourced. Across all responses, the average level of outsourcing was 16.5 per cent.

When considered by firm size, the data shows a clear pattern:

- Firms with one–50 lawyers outsource the most, at 23.7 per cent.
- Mid-sized firms report lower levels: 17.5 per cent for 51–200 lawyers, and just 7.8 per cent for 201–500 lawyers.
- Among the largest firms (501+ lawyers), outsourcing rises slightly again to 10.5 per cent, though still well below the levels reported by the smallest firms.

This suggests that smaller firms rely more heavily on outsourcing, likely due to limited in-house capacity, while mid-sized firms increasingly build internal functions. At the largest scale, outsourcing plays a modest but renewed role, potentially to complement sophisticated in-house teams with specialist external providers.

Beyond the level of outsourcing, the survey also explored which specific functions firms maintain in-house. The survey results indicate that law firms typically retain a broad mix of business support functions internally, though coverage varies by function and firm size.

- Office administration (87 per cent), compliance, legal and risk management (80 per cent), and finance and accounting (78 per cent) are the most common in-house functions.
- Other widely present areas include business development (74 per cent), human resources and talent management (72 per cent), and marketing, events and communications (70 per cent).
- Functions such as knowledge management (50 per cent), pricing and business analytics (50 per cent), and legal project management and process improvement (54 per cent) are present in about half of the firms.
- More specialised functions, including innovation, AI and legal technology (54 per cent), show developing but not yet universal adoption.
- The lowest reported category was practice group coordinators and assistants (41 per cent). This may reflect interpretation: legal assistants are a well-established function in most firms, but titles and organisational placement vary significantly across regions and structures.

When viewed by firm size, a clear scaling effect emerges:

- Smaller firms (one–50 lawyers) report significantly lower levels of in-house coverage across almost all functions.
- Mid-sized firms (51–200 lawyers) show stronger adoption in core areas but remain less likely to have dedicated functions in knowledge management, pricing or innovation.

- Larger firms (201–500 lawyers and 501+ lawyers) report near-universal coverage across nearly all categories, particularly in IT and digital services, HR and knowledge management.

Overall, the data suggests that while core support functions are widely established across firms, more advanced or specialised functions such as innovation, pricing and project management are much more prevalent in larger firms, indicating a maturity gap linked to firm scale.

| | Finance & Accounting | Marketing, Events & Communications | Business Development | IT & Digital Services | Human Resources & Talent Management | Knowledge Management | Innovation, AI & Legal Technology | Legal project Management & Process Improvement | Pricing & Business Analytics | Compliance, Legal & Risk Management | Practice group coordinators & Assistants | Office Adminstration |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1–50 | 61 % | 44 % | 56 % | 39 % | 44 % | 33 % | 33 % | 44 % | 39 % | 72 % | 28 % | 78 % |
| 51–200 | 82 % | 82 % | 73 % | 45 % | 73 % | 27 % | 45 % | 36 % | 36 % | 64 % | 27 % | 91 % |
| 201-501+ | 94 % | 88 % | 94 % | 94 % | 100 % | 82 % | 82 % | 76 % | 71 % | 100 % | 65 % | 94 % |
| **Total Average** | **78 %** | **70 %** | **74 %** | **61 %** | **72 %** | **50 %** | **54 %** | **54 %** | **50 %** | **80 %** | **41 %** | **87 %** |

Respondents also described how business services are organised within their firms. Overall, 59 per cent reported a fully centralised structure, where all business functions report to a COO, managing partner or equivalent. 26 per cent indicated a partially centralised model, while 9 per cent reported a decentralised approach and 7 per cent selected ‘other’, describing variations or hybrids.

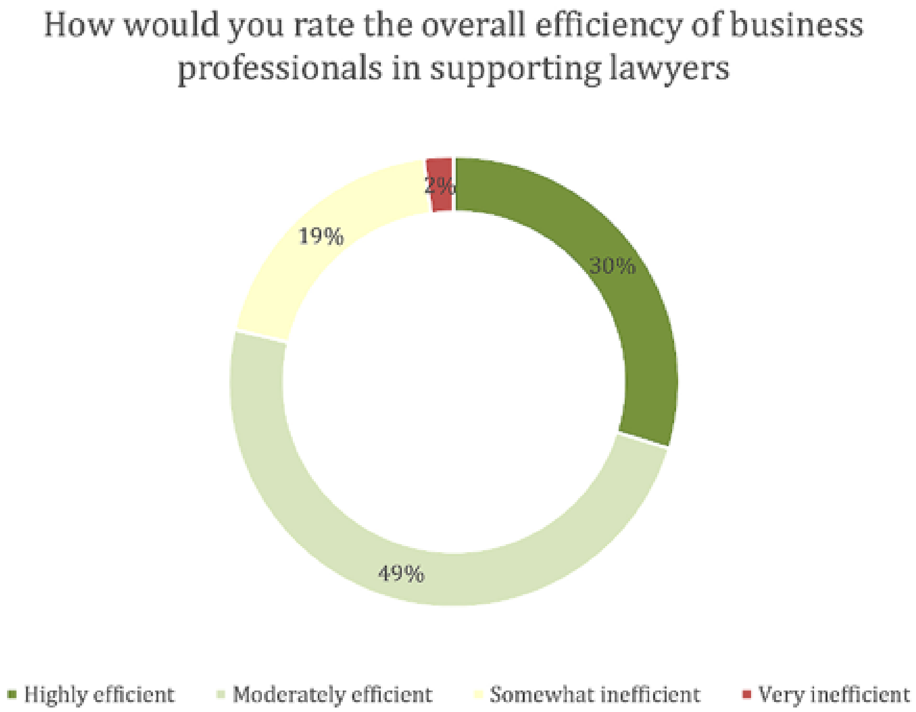
When analysed by firm size, some clear differences emerge:

- Among the smallest firms (one–50 lawyers), centralisation dominates (83 per cent), with only a few reporting decentralised or other structures.
- Mid-sized firms (51–200 lawyers) are more diverse: 36 per cent fully centralised, 45 per cent partially centralised, and 18 per cent decentralised.
- For firms with 201–500 lawyers, the picture is split between centralised (55 per cent) and partially centralised (36 per cent), with some hybrid structures.
- In the largest firms (501+ lawyers), the majority (50 per cent) reported partial centralisation, while only one-third reported full centralisation.

These results suggest that smaller firms tend to centralise out of necessity, with business services grouped under a single leader. As firms grow, partial centralisation becomes more common, reflecting the complexity of balancing firm-wide consistency with practice group autonomy.

## Section three: Efficiency and maturity of business services

Respondents were asked to rate the overall efficiency of business professionals in supporting lawyers. Results show room for improvement: only 30 per cent rated them as highly efficient, while nearly half (49 per cent) selected them moderately efficient. A further 21 per cent described them as somewhat or very inefficient.




When viewed by region, most areas reported moderate or high efficiency, but Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean stood out with higher shares of respondents describing business professionals as somewhat inefficient (26 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively). By contrast, regions such as North America, Sub-Saharan Africa and global/multi-continent firms leaned more positively, with no respondents rating efficiency as 'very inefficient'.

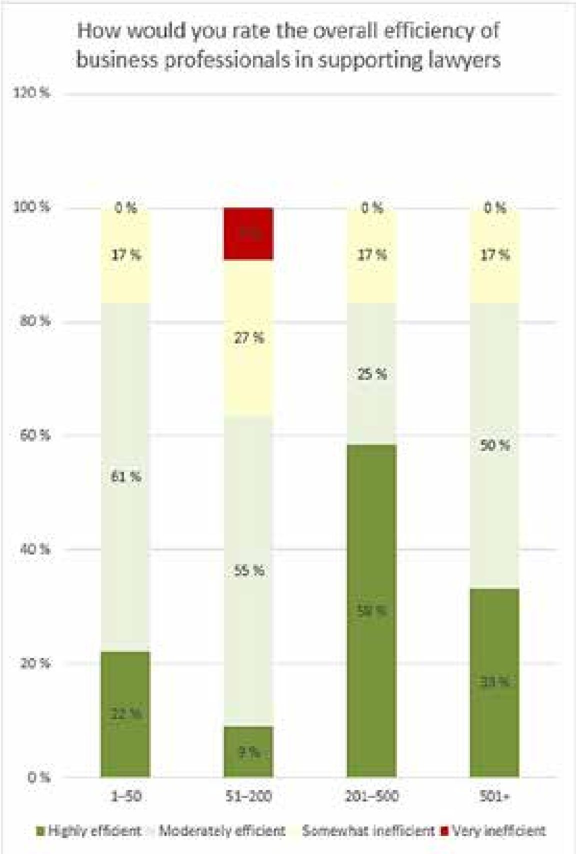
The firm size analysis reveals a sharper contrast. Mid-sized firms (51–200 lawyers) were the most critical: only nine per cent considered their business services highly efficient, and 36 per cent rated them as somewhat or very inefficient. Smaller firms (one–50 lawyers) were somewhat more positive, while firms in the 201–500 lawyer range were the most positive group, with 58 per cent reporting high efficiency. The largest firms (501+ lawyers) fell in between, with one-third rating efficiency as high.

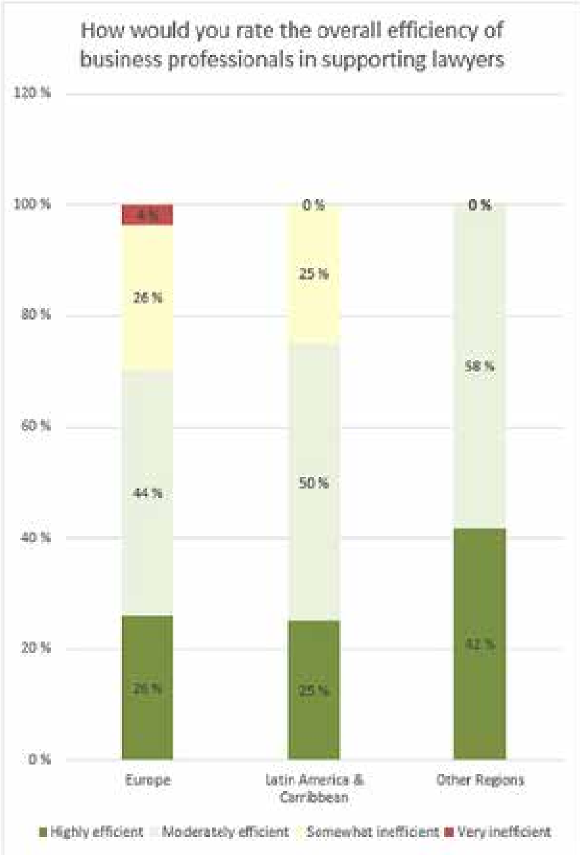
A third perspective comes from organisational structure. Here, the differences are even clearer:

- Fully centralised models (all business functions reporting to a COO or equivalent) performed best, with 85 per cent describing them as efficient and only 15 per cent as inefficient.
- Partially centralised models (some functions centralised, others within practice groups) were more divided: 69 per cent rated them efficient, but 31 per cent found them inefficient.
- Decentralised structures (functions operating independently within offices or practice areas) showed the weakest results, with only half describing efficiency as positive and the other half calling it inefficient.

Together, these findings suggest that firm size and especially centralisation play a decisive role in how effective business services are perceived to be.

Overall, the data suggests that while most firms view their business professionals as moderately effective, relatively few perceive high efficiency and mid-sized firms in particular face significant challenges in maximising the impact of business services.




These mixed efficiency ratings are reflected in the challenges firms face when seeking to leverage business professionals effectively. Respondents highlighted several recurring obstacles.

The most common issue is lack of integration with legal teams (47 per cent), indicating that business services are often still seen as parallel functions rather than fully embedded in legal work.

Inability to measure impact and ROI (return on investment) was the second most frequently cited challenge (43 per cent), pointing to difficulties in quantifying the value business professionals bring.

Resistance from lawyers to non-legal professionals was reported by 36 per cent, underlining cultural barriers that remain in many firms.

Other significant factors included lack of clear roles and responsibilities (34 per cent), insufficient budget or resources (28 per cent), and lack of competencies and skills (26 per cent).

Only 17 per cent cited technology-related issues, suggesting that integration and perception challenges outweigh purely technical barriers.

Differences by firm size are notable. Among the smallest firms (one–50 lawyers), integration and lawyer resistance feature strongly (44 per cent and 39 per cent). In mid-sized firms (51–200 lawyers), unclear roles and lawyer resistance are most common. Firms with 201–500 lawyers cite both integration (50 per cent) and lawyer resistance (50 per cent), alongside measurement challenges (50 per cent). In the largest firms (501+ lawyers), the emphasis shifts: two-thirds reported integration as a barrier, and a striking 83 per cent pointed to difficulties measuring ROI.

Taken together, these results suggest that while integration and cultural acceptance remain universal challenges, the measurement of value and ROI grow in importance as firms scale, becoming the dominant concern at the largest end of the market.

These challenges appear to be linked with the broader maturity of business services within firms, which was assessed separately. Respondents were asked to assess the overall maturity of their firms' business services on a five-point scale, ranging from 'immature/ad hoc' (1) to 'highly mature/strategically integrated' (5).

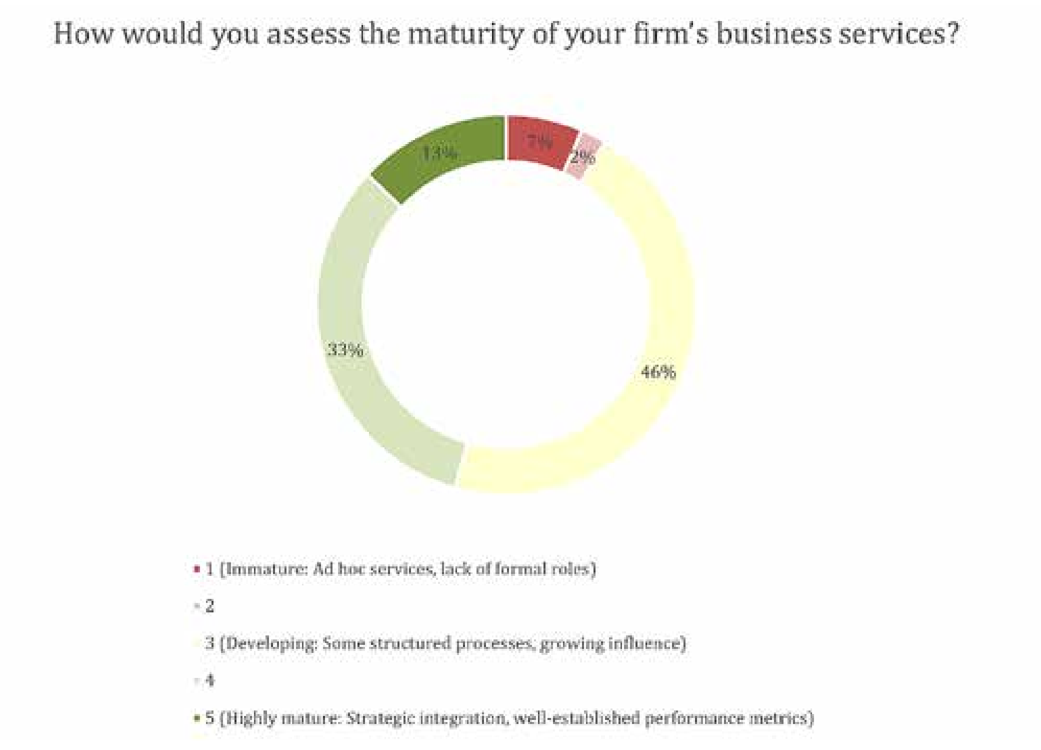
Across all firms, the distribution shows a concentration in the middle:

46 per cent rated their firms at level 3 (developing), indicating some structured processes and growing influence.

33 per cent placed their firms at level 4, suggesting more advanced integration.

Only 13 per cent reported level 5 (highly mature), with strategic integration and well-established performance metrics.

At the other end, seven per cent rated their firms at level 1 and two per cent at level 2, reflecting more ad hoc, less structured services.




By firm size, a clear pattern emerges. Smaller firms (one–50 lawyers) were most likely to rate themselves as immature, with nearly one in four at levels 1 or 2. Mid-sized firms (51–200 lawyers) clustered around level

3 (64 per cent), showing gradual development. Firms with 201–500 lawyers were the most confident group, with nearly three-quarters (73 per cent) selecting level 4. The largest firms (501+ lawyers) leaned towards levels 3 and 4, with only a small share (17 per cent) at the highly mature level 5.

While earlier questions showed Europe and Latin America as more critical on efficiency, the maturity results are more nuanced. Europe clustered at levels 3 and 4 but rarely (four per cent) at level 5, suggesting a cautious self-assessment: processes may be established, but firms are reluctant to describe themselves as fully mature. By contrast, the strongest explanation for maturity differences overall appears to be firm size rather than geography, with scale enabling greater structure, integration and strategic capability.

## Section four: Value and impact of business services

Respondents were asked to select up to three business functions that present the greatest challenges for their firms. The responses show how challenge areas shift with firm size.

- In the smallest firms (one–50 lawyers), the most frequently cited challenges are business development (56 per cent) and marketing and communications (44 per cent). This reflects the difficulty of building revenue and market visibility with limited resources.
- Among mid-sized firms (51–200 lawyers), the challenge profile broadens. Along with business development, HR, IT, knowledge management and project management each stand out (36 per cent), suggesting increasing complexity in managing people, processes and systems.
- Firms with 201–500 lawyers report their highest challenges in HR (45 per cent) and IT (45 per cent).
- In the largest firms (501+ lawyers), operational support becomes most pressing:
    - practice group coordinators and assistants (67 per cent) are the top challenge. At the same time, IT (50 per cent) remains a major challenge, alongside innovation (33 per cent).

Looking across all responses, the most common challenge areas overall were business development (41 per cent), HR (35 per cent) and IT (33 per cent). Emerging areas such as innovation, AI and legal technology (30 per cent) and project management (26 per cent) also feature prominently.

Taken together, the findings suggest a clear pattern:

- Smaller firms struggle with growth functions (business development, marketing).
- Mid-sized firms struggle with integration and systems (HR, IT, project management, etc).
- Larger firms struggle with coordination and operations, but IT remains a consistently high challenge as firms scale, reflecting the complexity of managing technology in larger organisations.

While the previous question highlighted where firms face the greatest challenges, respondents were also asked to select up to three business functions that add the most value to their firms.

Across all firms, the leading value drivers were finance and accounting (57 per cent), business development (43 per cent), and IT and digital services (43 per cent). Marketing and communications (39 per cent) and human resources and talent management (37 per cent) also feature prominently, reflecting the dual importance of brand and people. More specialised functions such as innovation, AI and legal technology (30 per cent) and legal project management and process improvement (24 per cent) are emerging but less frequently chosen. Pricing and business analytics (9 per cent), compliance (17 per cent), and practice group coordinators and assistants (9 per cent) were least often seen as high value.

When broken down by firm size, distinct priorities appear:

- Smaller firms (one–50 lawyers): business development (50 per cent), finance (44 per cent) and marketing (44 per cent) dominate, highlighting the centrality of revenue and visibility.
- Mid-sized firms (51–200 lawyers): finance (55 per cent), IT (45 per cent) and marketing (45 per cent) emerge, showing a gradual shift toward building internal systems.
- Firms with 201–500 lawyers: value is spread broadly, with IT (82 per cent), finance (73 per cent), HR (64 per cent) and BD (55 per cent) all seen as critical.
- Largest firms (501+ lawyers): finance remains strong (67 per cent), but innovation (50 per cent) and project management (50 per cent) appear as distinctive value drivers, signalling a focus on strategic enablers at scale.

Taken together, the findings show that while smaller firms see value mainly in external growth drivers, larger firms increasingly identify advanced functions such as innovation and project management as central to value creation.

When looking at the combination of the two datasets – the functions firms see as adding the most value and those that present the greatest challenges – some clear patterns emerge.

BD and IT stand out as mirror images across firm sizes: for smaller firms, BD is seen as the main value driver but also the hardest to get right, while in larger firms the same applies to IT.

Finance is the most stable area: it is consistently viewed as a core source of value and generates relatively few pain points, suggesting it is a well-established backbone across all firm sizes.

HR follows a dual pattern similar to BD and IT: widely recognised as valuable, but also a frequent source of challenges, particularly in mid-sized firms where managing people and processes becomes more complex.

Traditional support and coordination roles, such as practice group assistants, are not seen as major value drivers. Yet in the largest firms they suddenly emerge as significant pain points, reflecting the operational strain of coordinating large-scale practices.

Innovation and project management remain developing areas: they are increasingly valued in larger firms but also appear among the challenges, signalling both their potential and the difficulty of embedding them effectively.

| | Which business functions present the greatest challenges? (Please select the three that are most relevant) | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Finance & Accounting | Marketing, Events & Communications | Business Development | IT & Digital Services | Human Resources & Talent Management | Knowledge Management | Innovation, AI & Legal Technology | Legal project Management & Process Improvement | Pricing & Business Analytics | Compliance, Legal & Risk Management | Practice group coordinators & Assistants |
| 1–50 | 33 % | 44 % | 56 % | 17 % | 33 % | 17 % | 28 % | 11 % | 17 % | 11 % | 6 % |
| 51–200 | 27 % | 36 % | 36 % | 36 % | 36 % | 18 % | 27 % | 36 % | 18 % | 0 % | 27 % |
| 201–500 | 18 % | 0 % | 36 % | 45 % | 45 % | 9 % | 36 % | 36 % | 27 % | 0 % | 18 % |
| 501+ | 33 % | 17 % | 17 % | 50 % | 17 % | 0 % | 33 % | 33 % | 17 % | 17 % | 67 % |
| **Total** | **28 %** | **28 %** | **41 %** | **33 %** | **35 %** | **13 %** | **30 %** | **26 %** | **20 %** | **7 %** | **22 %** |

| | Which business functions add the most value to your firm? (Select three that apply the most) | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Finance & Accounting | Marketing, Events & Communications | Business Development | IT & Digital Services | Human Resources & Talent Management | Knowledge Management | Innovation, AI & Legal Technology | Legal project Management & Process Improvement | Pricing & Business Analytics | Compliance, Legal & Risk Management | Practice group coordinators & Assistants |
| 1–50 | 44 % | 44 % | 50 % | 33 % | 28 % | 17 % | 28 % | 22 % | 6 % | 17 % | 17 % |
| 51–200 | 55 % | 45 % | 36 % | 45 % | 27 % | 0 % | 18 % | 18 % | 0 % | 9 % | 0 % |
| 201–500 | 73 % | 36 % | 55 % | 82 % | 64 % | 18 % | 36 % | 18 % | 9 % | 27 % | 9 % |
| 501+ | 67 % | 17 % | 17 % | 0 % | 33 % | 33 % | 50 % | 50 % | 33 % | 17 % | 0 % |
| **Total** | **57 %** | **39 %** | **43 %** | **43 %** | **37 %** | **15 %** | **30 %** | **24 %** | **9 %** | **17 %** | **9 %** |

After highlighting the areas where business services add value and where they present challenges, respondents were also asked how success is measured in practice. The results show a strong reliance on financial and efficiency-based indicators, while more strategic measures remain secondary.

The most common yardstick is revenue growth and profitability, followed by lawyer productivity and efficiency, client satisfaction and operational cost reduction.

Talent attraction and innovation appear less often seen as measurement of success, showing that while they are recognised in principle, they are not yet widely embedded in success measurement.

Looking at firm sizes, smaller and mid-sized firms tend to apply a relatively narrower set of measures, with an average of around 40–45 per cent of the possible key performance indicators (KPIs) selected. In contrast, the largest firms (501+ lawyers) report a much broader measurement approach, applying on average 64 per cent of the possible KPIs.

This suggests that smaller firms focus on a handful of core outcomes whereas larger firms track success across multiple dimensions, reflecting the greater complexity of managing business services at scale.

After identifying where business services add value and where they create challenges, respondents were also asked what proportion of total headcount represents the ‘right size’ for business professionals. Here the picture is less clear: 32 per cent of respondents said there is no single ‘right size’, echoing the familiar lawyer’s answer of ‘it depends’.

Among those who did provide a figure, responses clustered at the lower end of the scale: nearly half selected 15–25 per cent of headcount, smaller groups chose less than 15 per cent or 25–35 per cent, and very few saw business services exceeding 45 per cent.

On average, respondents placed the ‘right size’ at 25.8 per cent of headcount – around five percentage points lower than the current observed average of around 30 per cent. Looking at firm size, a clear trend emerges: the larger the firm, the smaller the expected share. Smaller firms (one–50 lawyers) suggested a ‘right size’ above 33 per cent, but expectations fall steadily to about 23 per cent in mid-sized firms and under 19 per cent in the largest firms.

Interestingly, the survey responses suggest expectations move in the opposite direction from current practice:

- Smaller firms reported having fewer business professionals today, yet indicated that the ‘right size’ would be somewhat higher.
- Larger firms reported the highest current share, yet many respondents felt the ‘right size’ should be leaner.

This suggests that firms of all sizes are seeking a different balance to today’s reality, with smaller firms aspiring to more support and larger firms expecting efficiency gains to reduce headcount share.

Respondents also provided open-ended suggestions on what would enhance the impact of business professionals in their firms. The comments vary slightly by firm size but show five recurring themes:

## 1. Alignment with strategy and lawyers' needs

Many highlighted the importance of better integration with lawyers and practice groups, clearer task allocation, and aligning business professionals with the strategic goals of the firm.

Several noted that professionals need a stronger understanding of the business of law and the mindset of lawyers to be fully effective.

## 2. Skills and seniority

A recurring theme was the need for more senior, skilled and commercially oriented professionals, who can act proactively rather than only in support roles.

Business development skills and structured procedures/KPIs were mentioned as specific areas of need.

## 3. Technology and innovation

Respondents from mid-sized firms (51–200) particularly emphasised AI adoption and digital tools as levers to increase efficiency and support lawyers' work.

Process improvement and automation were also noted by larger firms.

## 4. Structures and governance

Some respondents called for stronger governance, such as a professional board of directors or advisory board rather than purely partner-led management.

Better coordination, communication and regular measurement of success were also highlighted.

## 5. Resources and capacity

Several firms pointed out a lack of resources, with calls for dedicated, career-oriented business professionals rather than temporary or secondary roles.

## By firm size

- Small firms (one–50): Focused on professionalism, structured procedures and stronger alignment with firm strategy.
- Mid-sized firms (51–200): Emphasised AI, efficiency gains and better understanding of lawyers' needs.

- Larger firms 201+: Called for stronger governance, commercial mindset, process improvement, and simply underlined the importance of working directly with lawyers and practice groups.

Respondents were asked which business professional functions are represented in their firm's management team. The results show a clear difference by firm size.

**COO (or equivalent):** Representation grows steadily with firm size – from less than half of small firms (44 per cent) to over 80 per cent in firms with more than 200 lawyers.

**Finance and HR:** Included in just over half of firms overall, but more likely to be represented in larger firms (64–67 per cent).

**Marketing and BD:** Around half of firms include these functions at the management level, though mid-sized firms (51–200) are most likely to do so (55 per cent).

**IT and Digital Services:** Present in half of small firms, dipping in mid-sized, then rising again to two-thirds in the largest firms.

**Knowledge Management and Innovation:** Still the least frequently represented overall (28 per cent) but included in nearly 40 per cent of small firms and half of the largest firms — suggesting emerging recognition in certain contexts.

**Other roles:** Rare (seven per cent). In smaller firms, 'other' typically referred to billing/finance administration, while in slightly larger firms it was linked to compliance.

| | What kind of "Business Professional" functions are represented in management team? (select all that apply) | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | COO (or equivalent) | Finance | HR | IT & Digital Services | Marketing, Events & Communications | Business Development | Knowledge Management & Innovation | Other (please specify) |
| 1–50 | 44 % | 50 % | 56 % | 50 % | 50 % | 56 % | 39 % | 11 % |
| 51–200 | 73 % | 36 % | 45 % | 45 % | 55 % | 36 % | 9 % | 0 % |
| 201–500 | 82 % | 64 % | 45 % | 36 % | 45 % | 36 % | 18 % | 9 % |
| 501+ | 83 % | 67 % | 67 % | 67 % | 50 % | 67 % | 50 % | 0 % |
| **Total** | 65 % | 52 % | 52 % | 48 % | 50 % | 48 % | 28 % | 7 % |

## Overall pattern

As firms grow, their management teams broaden to include more functions. Small firms typically include only one or two roles (often finance, HR or BD), whereas the largest firms are much more likely to have a COO plus multiple functional heads (finance, HR, IT, BD and increasingly knowledge/innovation).

This suggests that the role of business professionals in governance matures with scale, with larger firms embedding a wider set of perspectives at the decision-making table.

# Section five: Future trends and priorities

Finally, the survey looked forward, asking which areas of business services are expected to grow in importance over the next three to five years. The answers point clearly towards a future shaped by technology, data and operational excellence – though the emphasis differs by firm size and region.

## Overall trends

Across all respondents, legal technology and AI dominates expectations, with 80 per cent selecting it as a top growth area. BD and revenue growth (54 per cent), and client experience and service excellence (52 per cent) follow closely, while data and analytics (39 per cent) and process improvement and project management (39 per cent) are also widely mentioned. Cybersecurity and risk management (28 per cent) remains a secondary but notable concern.

## Firm size patterns

A strong pattern emerges around process improvement and data and analytics: the larger the firm, the more likely these areas are seen as growth priorities. In the biggest firms (501+), data analytics (83 per cent) and process improvement (50 per cent) are almost on par with legal technology. Smaller firms, by contrast, place greater emphasis on BD and revenue growth alongside technology.

| | Legal Technology & AI | Client Experience & Service Excellence | Business Development & Revenue Growth | Process Improvement & Project Management | Data & Analytics for Decision-Making | Cybersecurity & Risk Management |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1–50 | 67 % | 44 % | 61 % | 33 % | 28 % | 17 % |
| 51–200 | 100 % | 64 % | 45 % | 36 % | 18 % | 36 % |
| 201–500 | 73 % | 45 % | 45 % | 45 % | 55 % | 27 % |
| 501+ | 100 % | 67 % | 67 % | 50 % | 83 % | 50 % |
| **Total** | 80 % | 52 % | 54 % | 39 % | 39 % | 28 % |

## Regional contrasts

While Europe is aligned with the global trend on legal technology (81 per cent), it is more cautious in almost every other area. Compared to the rest of the world, European respondents are less likely to expect growth in business development (42 per cent vs 70 per cent), client experience (46 per cent vs 60 per cent), process improvement (31 per cent vs 50 per cent) and data analytics (27 per cent vs 55 per cent). On cybersecurity, the difference is marginal (27 per cent vs 30 per cent).

## Overall insight

The findings suggest that legal technology and AI are universally expected to expand in importance, but priorities diverge after that. Smaller firms lean towards growth functions, while larger firms increasingly prioritise process improvement and data-driven decision-making. Regionally, Europe appears more measured, while firms elsewhere anticipate broader growth across client, revenue, and data-focused areas – a difference that may reflect not only firm-level priorities but also the wider regional context, where Europe's more modest economic growth could shape how confidently business development and expansion are assumed.

## Discussion

The survey results show that business services are now firmly embedded within law firms, making up around one-third of headcount on average. Yet when asked about the 'right size', responses were divided: a third said there is no single answer, another group leaned towards a leaner proportion, and some, especially smaller firms, saw a need for more support. Larger firms, by contrast, tended to expect efficiency gains to reduce the share. These mixed views underline that there is no clear consensus on the right balance, only that firms of all sizes are searching for something different from today's reality.

Efficiency and maturity remain central concerns. Operational efficiency varies across firms and is often influenced by their maturity level, how centralised their support functions are, the clarity of role definitions, and the extent of integration between business professionals and legal teams. Only a minority of firms described their business services as highly efficient or fully mature, with most placing themselves somewhere in the middle. This suggests that many firms still wrestle with integration, role clarity and ROI measurement. Those who do manage to reach higher efficiency and maturity may turn what is often seen as a supportive function into a genuine competitive advantage.

The functions seen as most valuable also tend to be those that create the most challenges: business development, IT and HR. Finance, in contrast, is viewed as a stable backbone, delivering value with fewer pain points. Innovation and AI attract attention in headlines and are recognised as important, yet their role inside firms remains uneven and often difficult to implement. Traditional support roles, meanwhile, become more challenging as firms grow, reflecting the complexity of coordination at scale.

Looking ahead, firms expect growth in areas tied to technology, data and client experience. Legal technology and AI dominate expectations across all sizes, while larger firms especially emphasise process improvement and data analytics. Smaller firms remain more focused on revenue growth and business development.

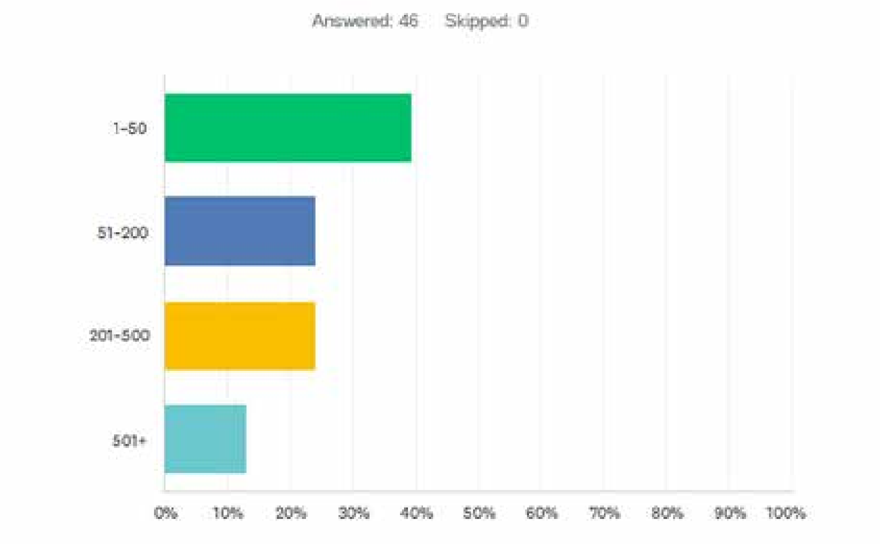
This pattern suggests that, if the future of business services does play out through more technology-driven methods, the emphasis placed by larger firms on AI, data and pricing could further widen the gap with smaller firms. The overall trend points towards business services becoming more technology-enabled, data-driven and client-oriented in the coming years.

The survey is best read as a call to discussion. Benchmarks are useful, but the real value lies in comparing with peers of similar size, or in looking to larger firms to see the challenges that may lie ahead. Business services are in transition, moving from quantity to quality, and the firms that succeed in this shift may find themselves with a new source of competitive advantage.

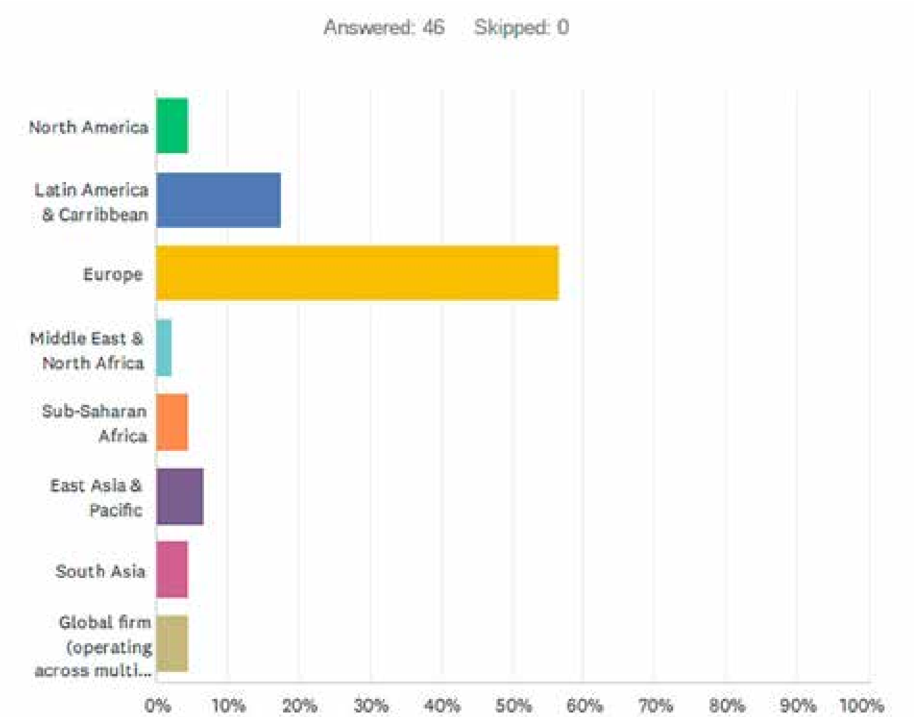
# Appendix: Visual representation of responses

This appendix provides detailed charts, graphs, and tables underlying the survey analysis. The main report text does not reproduce all base visuals but draws on them selectively. Where sub-category findings are especially relevant for interpretation, they are either described in the text and/or illustrated in the text. The full datasets are included here for completeness.

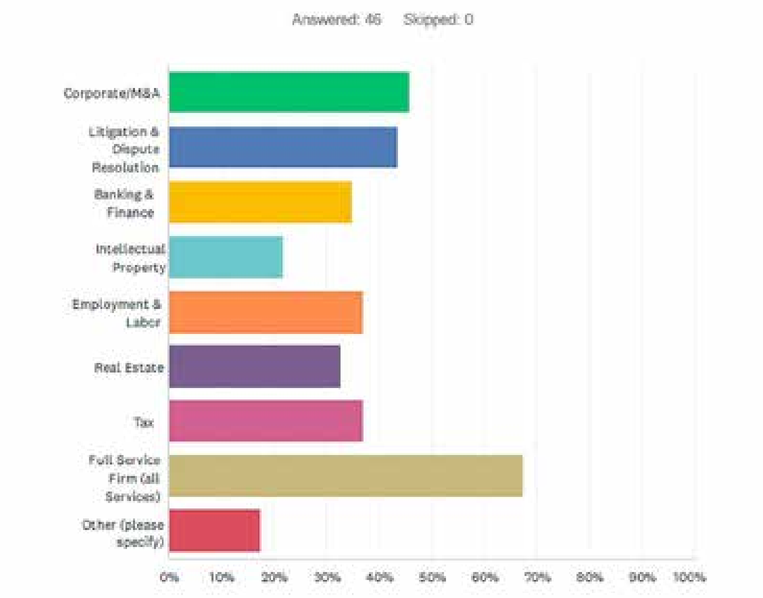
## Q2: Firm size (by number of lawyers)



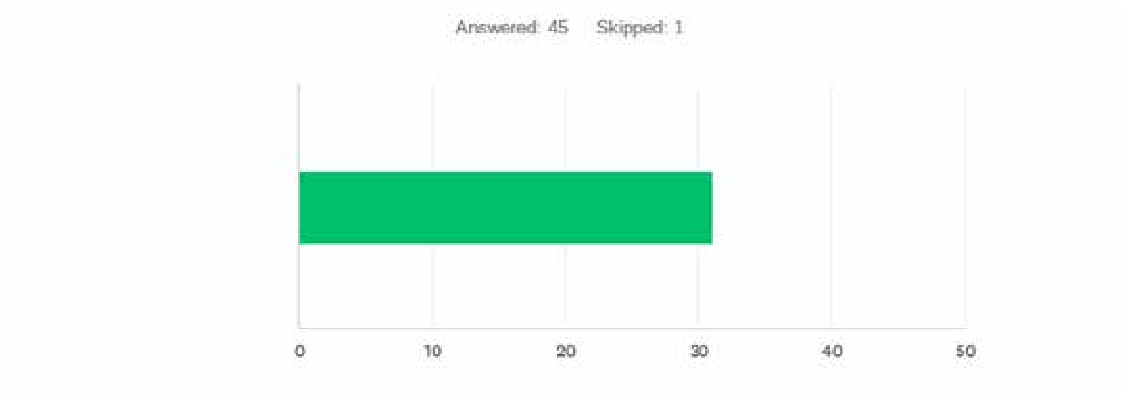

## Q3: Geographical presence



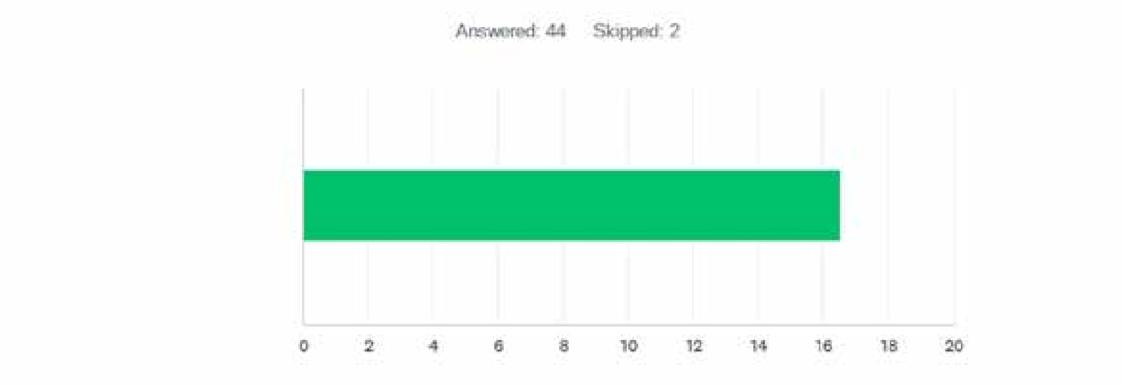

## Q4: Primary legal practice areas. Select all that apply:




## Q5: Section 2: Business professional functions and structure. What is the firm's business services size in-house as a percentage of total headcount?

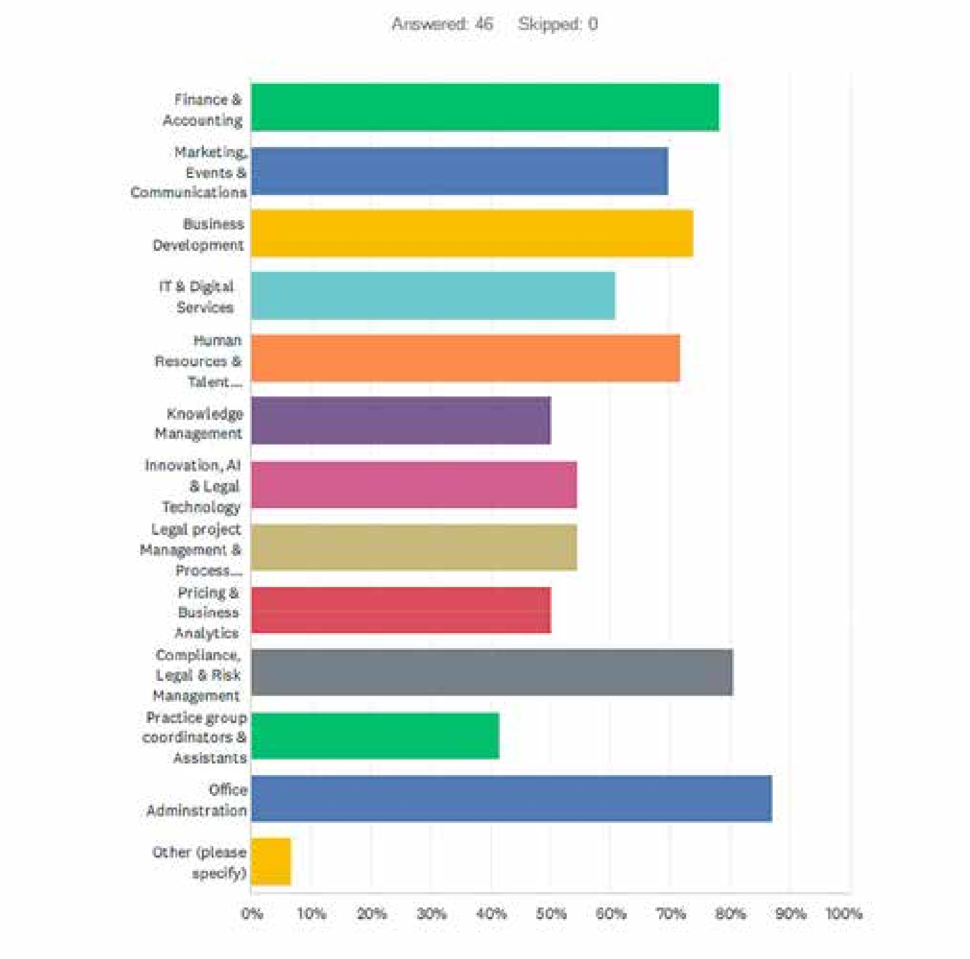



## Q6: How many business services tasks do you outsource as a percentage of all business services functions?

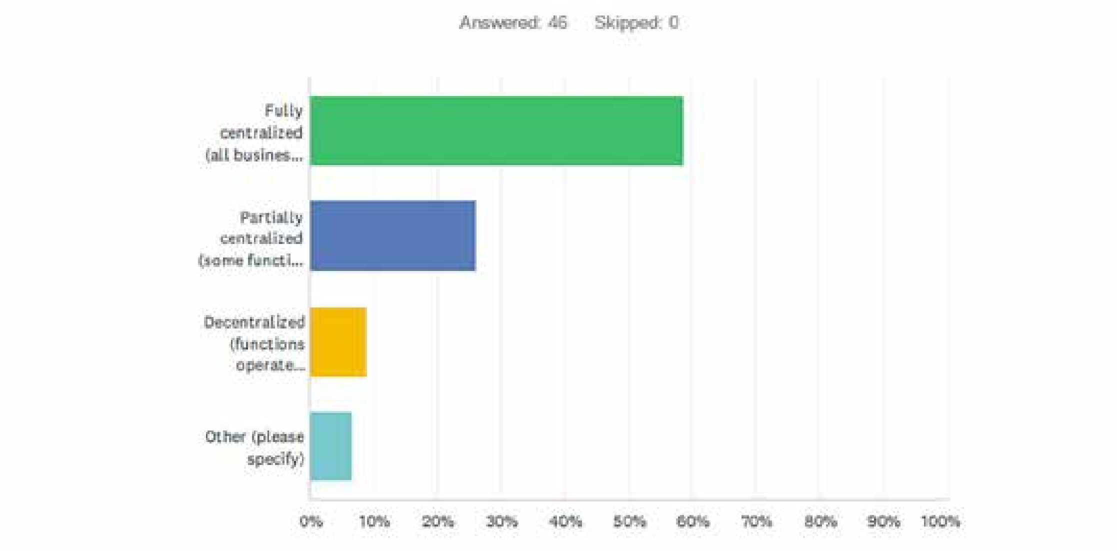



## Q7: Which business support functions does your firm have in-house?

## Select all that apply:

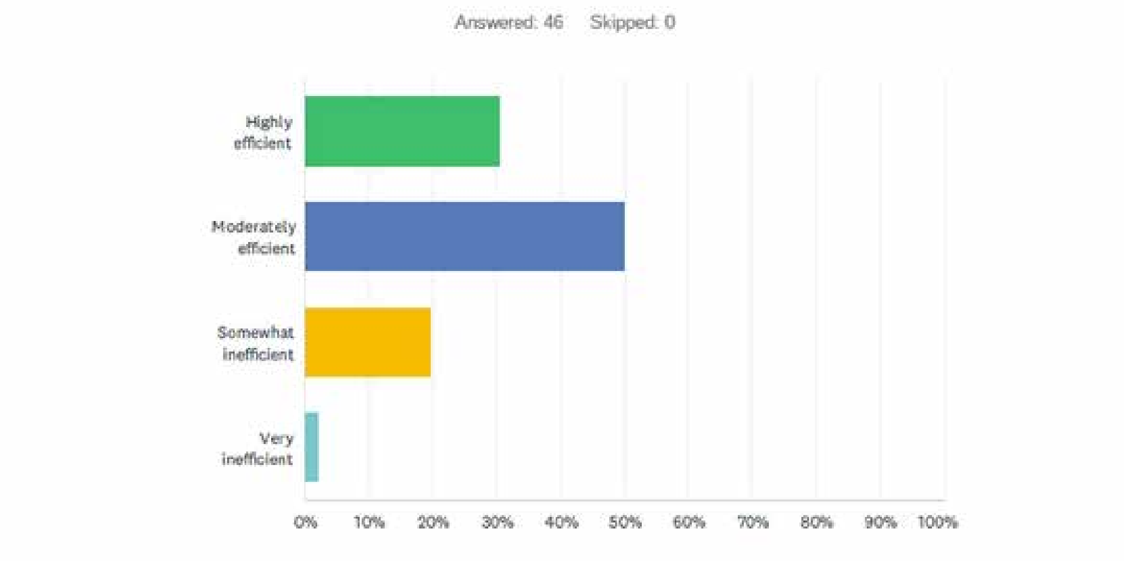



## Q8: How are business professionals integrated into your firm's structure?

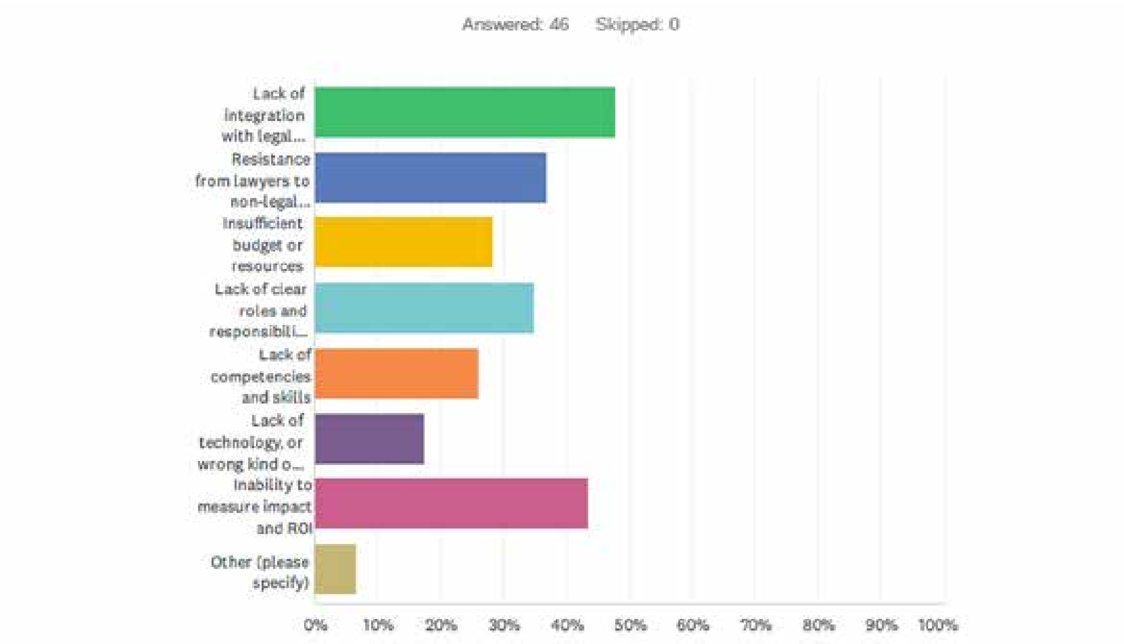



## Q9: Section 3: Efficiency and maturity of business services. How would you

## rate the overall efficiency of business professionals in supporting lawyers?

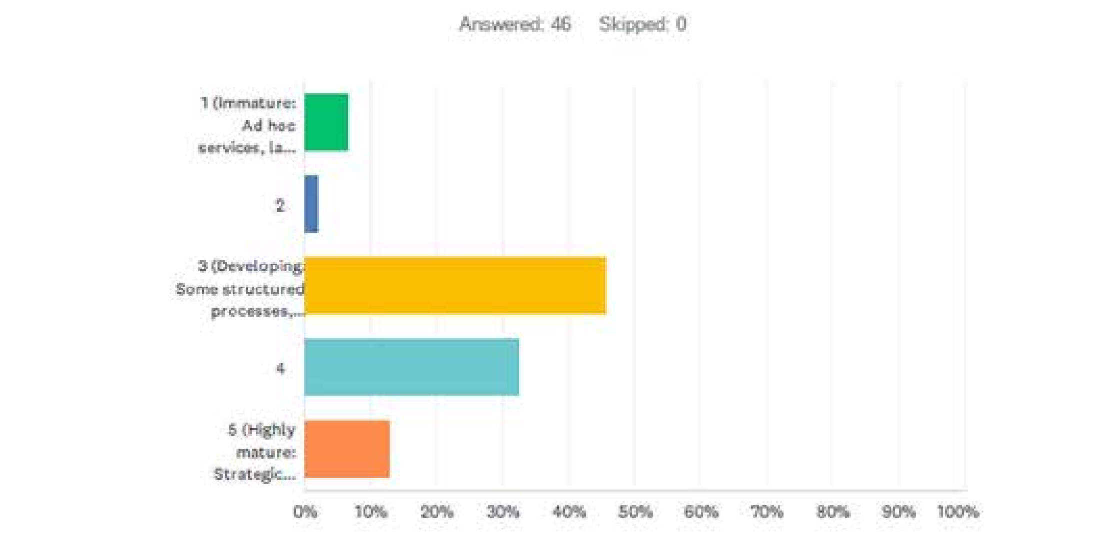



## Q10: What are the biggest challenges in leveraging business professionals effectively? Select up to three:

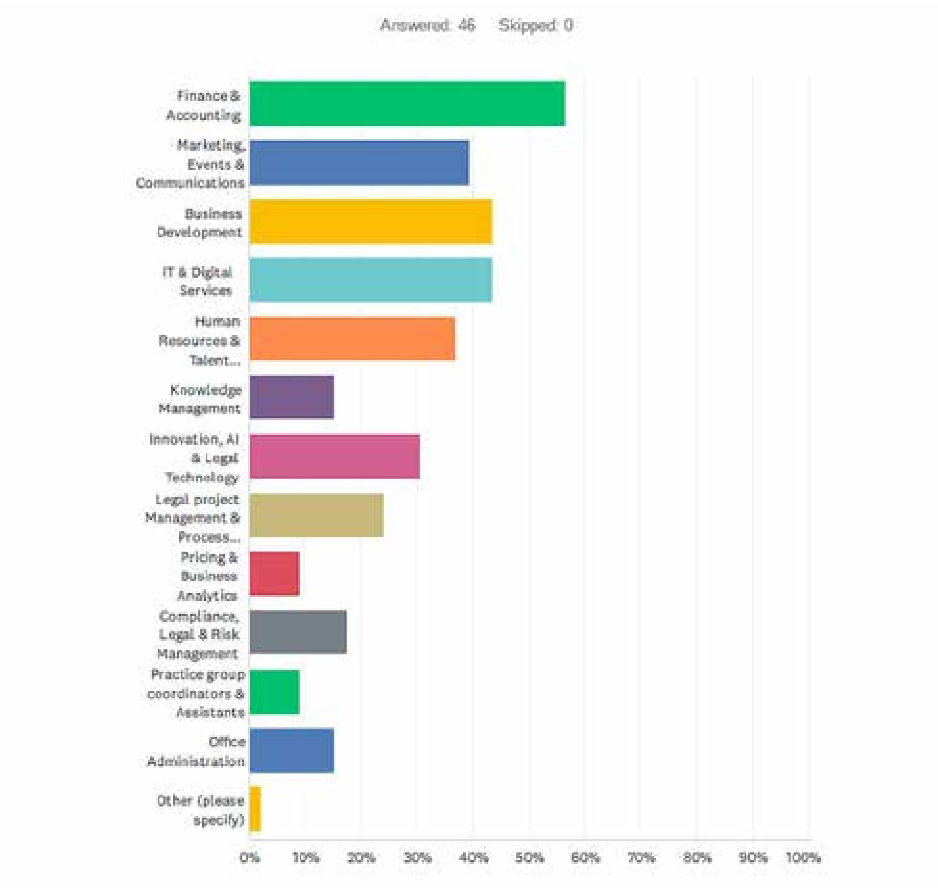



## Q11: How would you assess the maturity of your firm's business services on

## a scale of 1 (immature) to 5 (highly mature)?

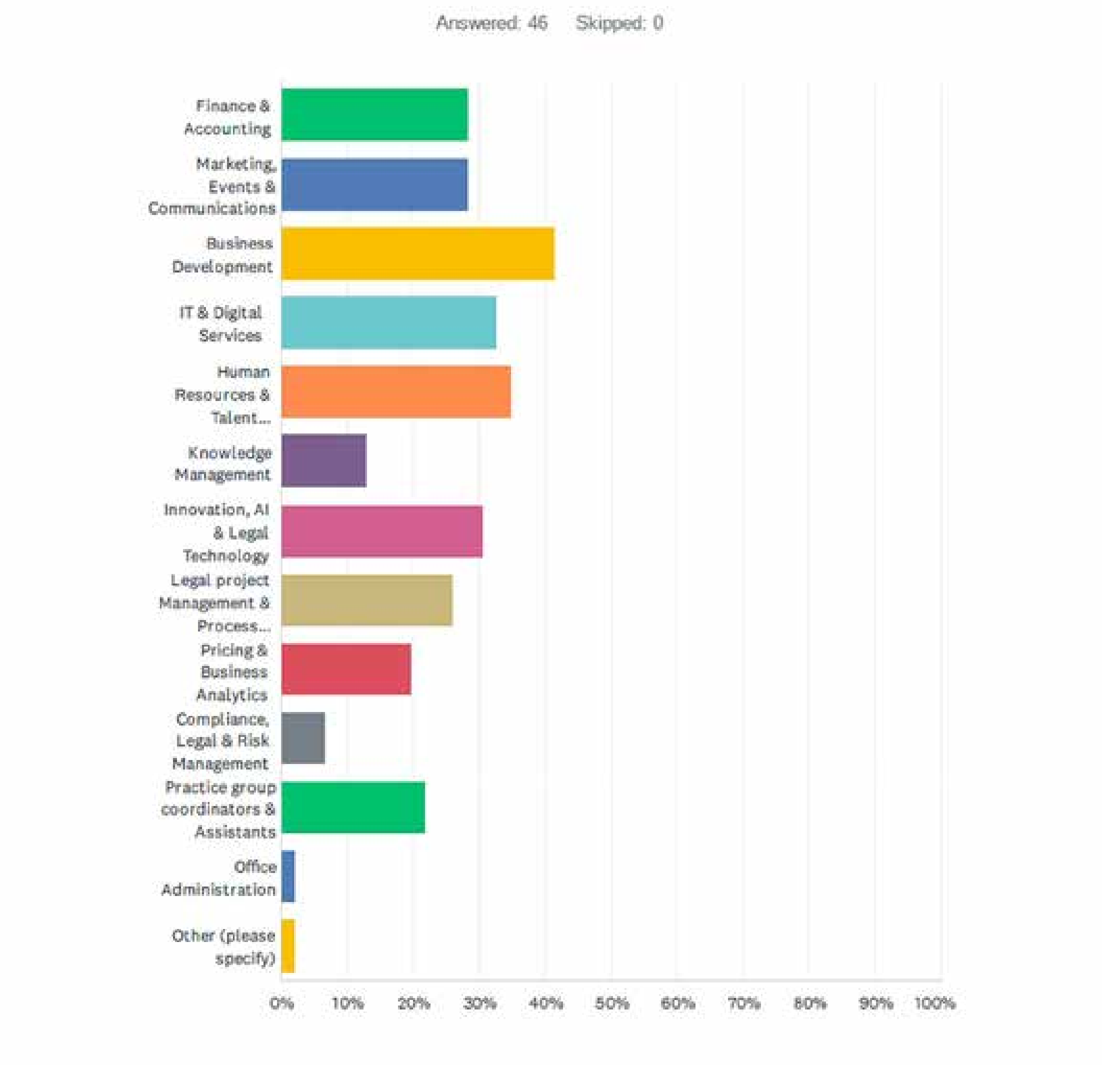



## Q12: Section 4: Value and impact of business services. Which business functions add the most value to your firm? Select the three that appl the most:

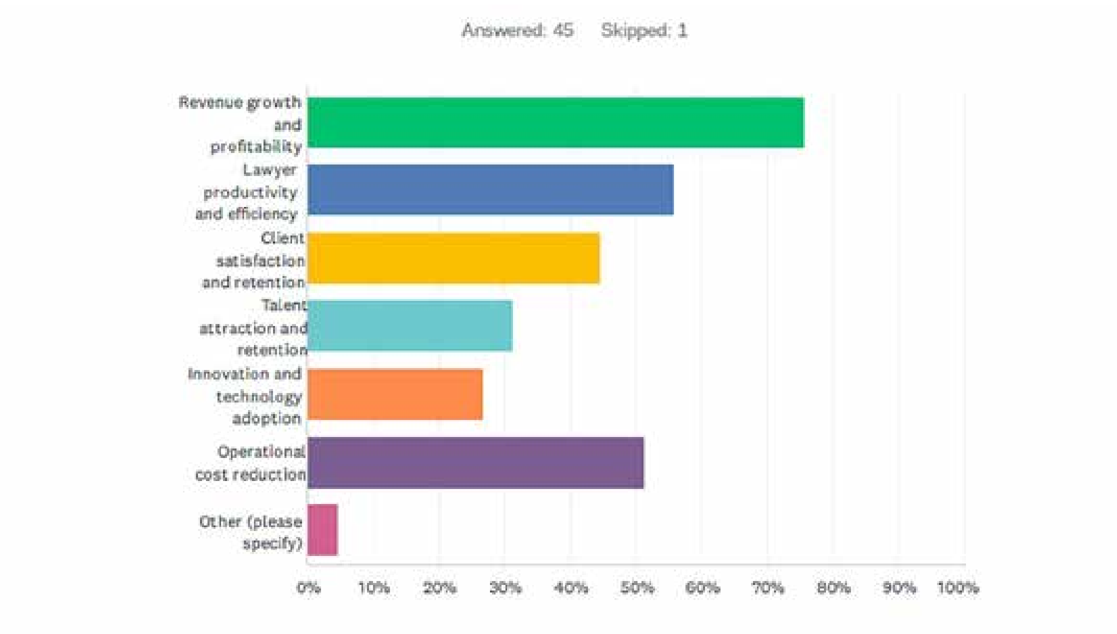



## Q13: Which business functions present the greatest challenges? Please select

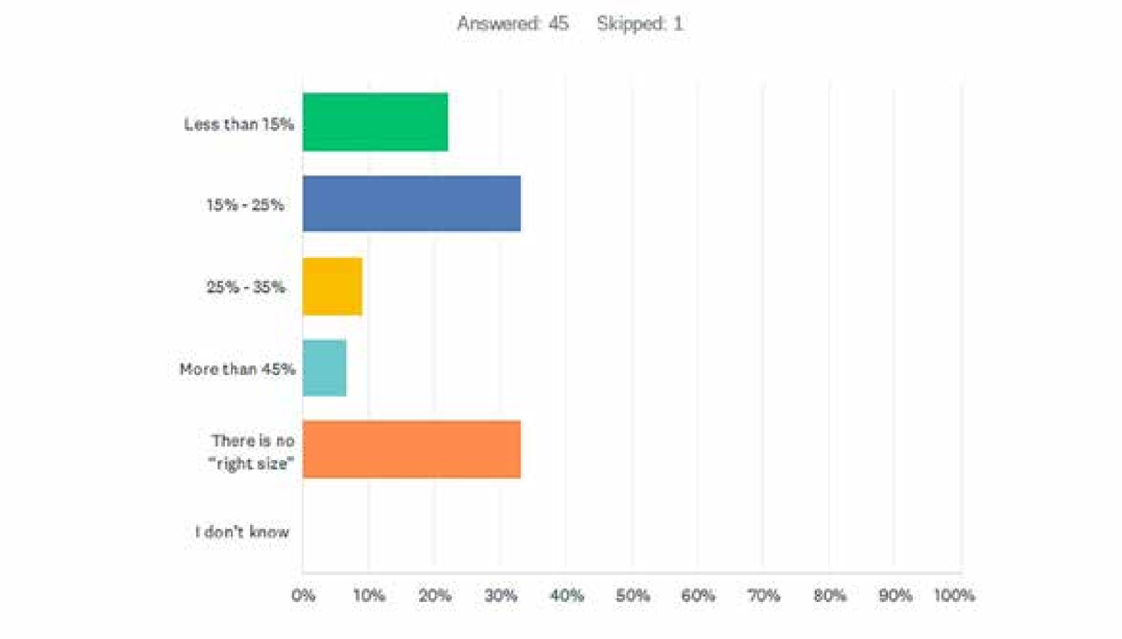
## the three that are the most relevant:



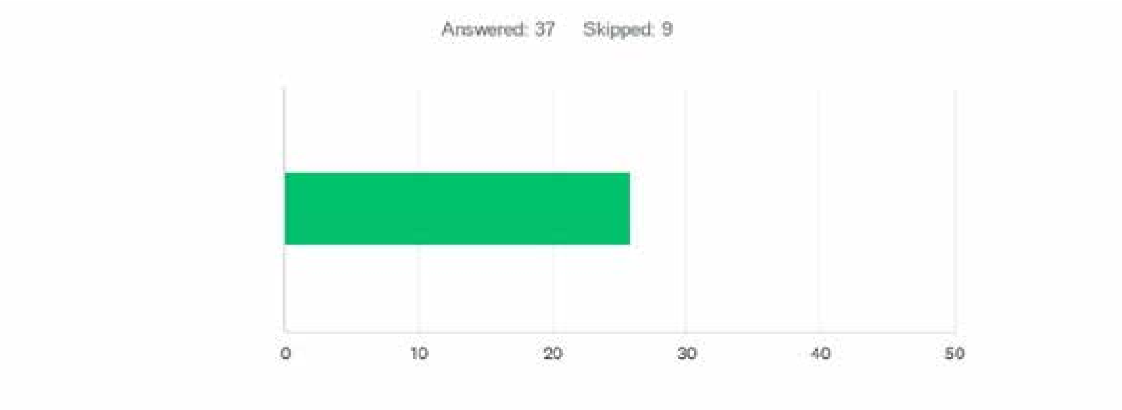

## Q14: How do you measure the success of business services? Select all that apply:



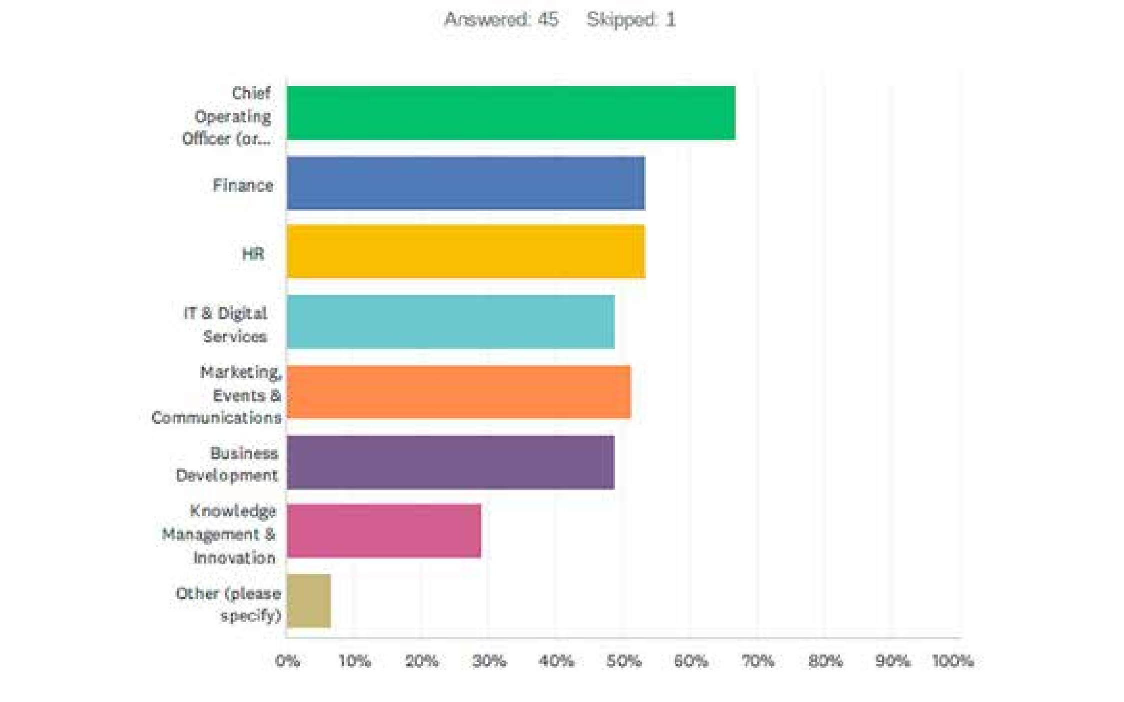
## Q15: What is the right size of business services as a percentage of total headcount?



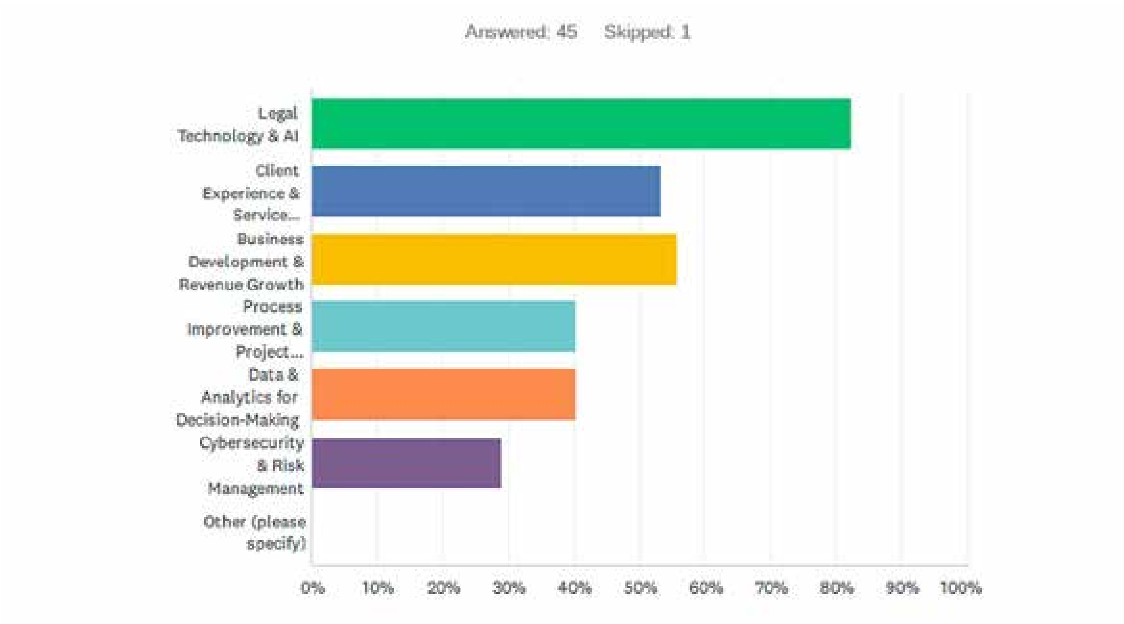

## Q16: What is the right size of business services (percentage from total headcount?)



**Q18: What kind of 'Business Professional' functions are represented in management team? (select all that apply)**




**Q19 Section 5: Future Trends and Priorities. What areas of buisness services do you expect to grow in importance over the next 3 – 5 years? (select up to three**



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