

Workplace Research

# The Emerged Law Practice

Traits of the Modern Law Practice

**Knoll**

# The Emerged Law Practice

## Traits of the Modern Law Office

.....

A hierarchical culture steeped in tradition and mystique, hefty hourly fees and operating standards that generated huge file rooms of paper are on the way out. In their place, law firms are introducing standardized offices, digital files, fixed fees and greater transparency in both their procedures and environments.

At the same time, a confluence of disruptors, ranging from artificial intelligence to outsourcing, vastly lowers the cost of delivering legal services, changing the paradigm of law firm operations.

Firm leadership, now often in the hands of business executives instead of managing partners, is under pressure to deliver profits in a highly competitive, greatly accelerated business environment that commands deep industry expertise. Mergers and acquisitions can help firms not only expand geographic and/or practice reach, but also secure an industry niche distinct enough to sustain a practice.

In the meantime, law firms' top two expenses – people and real estate—keep rising. To gain efficiency, firms seek alternative ways to deliver services and cut fixed costs. Lowering the cost of occupancy presents an opportunity to not only improve the bottom line, but also to create a modern work environment for the future workforce.

To create that optimal workplace, three things must be in balance: people, process and place. Knoll conducted research and spoke to more than a dozen leaders who plan and design law firm offices to learn about challenges and planning strategies for balancing these three elements in the future workplace.

### People

#### Shifting Demographics

Despite a robust economy and record low levels of unemployment, the legal industry is experiencing a shortage of young associates as tech and financial services vie for the same talent. At the same time, baby boomers have been retiring from the workforce.

Firms are under increased pressure to evolve as a new generation enters the workforce seeking a company culture that aligns with their personal goals and beliefs. Millennials and Generation Z are looking for increased transparency, access to partners, and a culture that values and promotes sustainable practices.

#### Key Takeaways

Despite technological advances that have eliminated labor-intensive tasks and digitized entire file rooms, the practice of law remains tradition-bound.

However, firms are gradually adopting more progressive, efficient designs that offset the cost of renovation and higher real estate costs, and better serve a cohort with different values and work preferences than its predecessors. Also, of note:

- 1 Competition for talent is high. Law firms compete not only with each other, but also with the technology and financial services sectors for a smaller pool of talent (law school enrollment is down nearly 25 percent since 2010).
- 2 The practice of law is mentoring-intensive and office environments must support the face-to-face interaction required to groom the next generation of talent.
- 3 Legal work is increasingly collaborative and team-based (though automation has reduced the size and make-up of teams) and requires an environment with choices, including options for privacy, which is integral in the legal sector.
- 4 Power has shifted from lawyers to their clients, putting downward pressure on fees and forcing firms to seek greater efficiencies in their practice and real estate.
- 5 Many law firms plan to maintain private offices and prestige locations. However, offices are becoming smaller in size and modular in format, with space savings allocated to a greater number and variety of shared amenity spaces.
- 6 Re-imagined public areas serve multiple functions and audiences throughout the day and evening as firms focus on the experience factor for both clients and employees. Décor leans toward subtly elegant expressions of the firm's brand and values.



## Changing Support Ratios

As technology streamlines work processes, allowing attorneys to become more self-sufficient, support staff has been reduced and new models have emerged. Resource centers are consolidated areas within working “neighborhoods” that flexibly house support staff ranging from secretaries to paralegals and project specialists.<sup>1</sup> The shift has also led to more specialization at the staff level, often resulting in higher numbers of technology professionals and fewer administrators. Firms are reducing lower level staff while recruiting staff with more sophisticated skills who are being paid higher salaries. While 62% of firms decreased legal support staff levels, 47% increased their spending on staff.<sup>2</sup>

***“We’re here for one reason only: to service lawyers so they never have to take their eyes off the client.”***

OFFICE SERVICES AND FACILITIES DIRECTOR

Legal librarians are now highly trained researchers who can conduct more sophisticated searches and generate analytics on a wide range of non-legal issues to support both the business and practice of law.

### Distributed Work

While many law offices will continue to locate in prestigious downtown buildings in the nation’s largest cities, there is also a growing trend toward decentralization and satellite offices. Mega-firms leverage size and international scope by providing market-specific expertise in geographic regions while distributing support functions.

Many larger firms are relocating administrative staff and shifting or outsourcing operations such as accounting, HR, information technology and legal support staff into lower cost locations.

Some firms centralize document processing in a headquarters location with multiple shifts. Others take a decentralized approach and take advantage of support staff in different time zones to achieve a highly efficient 24-hour work cycle.

### New Team Members

Increasing emphasis on team-based work impacts the scale, size and intensity of the office as team communication is more diverse, social and technology-dependent. As the role of specialized skills grows, firms must bring disparate contributors together in a cohesive manner. In addition to partners and associates, teams may also be comprised of contract attorneys, outside content experts and even artificial intelligence.

The contract attorney can be particularly valuable for a firm as they provide staffing flexibility, absorbing work from paralegals up to partners, and making up for a shrinking pool of summer associates. They also provide another option for the growing numbers of attorneys who choose a non-partner track.

## The Legal Workplace

LEGACY	EMERGING
<b>PEOPLE</b>	
Partner-track	Contract, part-time attorneys Equity vs. Income partnerships
Lawyer leaders (Managing Partner)	Business leaders (Chief Operating Officer)
Small in-house teams	Large, distributed teams
Secretaries and paralegals	Specialists in information technology, research
<b>PROCESS</b>	
Practice of law	Business of law
Paper intensive	E-documentation, technology
Protocol driven	Process driven
Hourly billing	Flat fees
Broad practice	Niche
<b>PLACE</b>	
Large, private partner offices with meeting tables and chairs	Smaller offices with separate touchdown spaces
Private associate offices	Shared associate offices in locations with high real estate costs
Custom, built-in décor	Kit-of-parts, modular furniture
Ceremonial public spaces	Well-designed lobbies with subtle branding
Opulent reception areas	Welcoming, multipurpose meeting centers
Privacy, aura of mystery, importance	Hospitable, open, transparent
Sprawling corner offices	Corner meeting rooms and lounges
Private lunch rooms and partner lounges	Open coffee bars and cafés

Technology has had a large impact on the composition of teams. In 1999, considered the peak of “the old way of lawyering,” a large patent case might require the labor of three partners, five associates and four paralegals. Today, with greater scrutiny on legal spending, combined with digital technology that automates some tasks, a comparable case would take one partner, two associates and one paralegal.<sup>3</sup>

## Process

### Shift of Power

One of the most significant changes in law is the shift of power from lawyers to clients. In the past, legal professionals had knowledge and skills that laymen did not understand. But in recent years, law has been demystified and legal consumers have become savvy.

Today, the legal industry has shifted into a buyer's market and clients control the relationship. Additionally, the growth of legal service providers who do high level work at low rates has put downward pressure on fees. Client tolerance is waning for paying high hourly rates for junior associates to do routine work that can be done cheaper, more accurately and efficiently by automated technology, in-house counsel, or outsourced to contract attorneys or offshore resources.

Alternative providers can effectively level the playing field, allowing smaller firms who outsource talent and automate processes to compete against larger ones.

Clients are also avoiding litigation and its associated legal fees by opting for less costly resolution such as arbitration and mediation. They have begun pushing back on fees, often asking for fixed fee arrangements, pressuring law firms to be more efficient and forcing them to be more innovative and progressive.

### Changing Workstyles

Time and technology have reshaped the practice of law, lessening physical space requirements, compressing the business cycle and linking intellectual expertise around the globe.

In more progressive firms, hierarchies have flattened and technology has further streamlined the work flow, minimizing the human labor expended in many processes.

The flatter a firm's hierarchy, the more work attorneys do themselves, absorbing tasks such as answering their own phones, managing their own correspondence and doing their own proofreading. One constant in law: focus time. Attorneys spend about twice as much time as other professionals doing reading, writing and other activities that require concentration.

### Labor-Saving Technology

Legal processes that have been computerized and automated reduce errors and free up attorneys and paralegals to do higher level work. Software-as-a-service is increasingly employed for practice management, client intake and document management, and artificial intelligence software used for document review, saving time, boosting bottom lines and meeting client objectives for reducing expenses for lower level work.

In the process, support staff is reduced and/or deployed to other tasks and responsibilities, many of which were formerly the provenance of paralegals and legal assistants.

Not only has technology connected lawyers in multiple locations, potentially lowering space needs, it has also dramatically reduced client-facing meetings. For example, a typical real estate closing used to be a very physical event, with stacks of documents lined up, requiring signature upon signature. Today that can all happen through electronic document signing.

## New Support Ratios Emerge

The role of dedicated legal secretaries is declining as teams of attorneys shared administrative support.<sup>4</sup>



## Alternative Staffing Strategies

Is your firm currently pursuing any of the following alternative staffing strategies?

	UNDER 250 LAWYERS	250 LAWYERS OR MORE
Using part-time lawyers	55%	77%
Using contract lawyers	47%	79%
Using staff lawyers	32%	72%
Shifting work from lawyers to paraprofessionals	42%	34%
Outsourcing non-lawyer functions	16%	28%
Creating a low-cost service center for back office	10%	30%
Outsourcing legal work	5%	5%
None of the above	14%	8%

Source: Altman Weil "2018 Law Firms in Transition"

Depositions, which can be done by video conference, may be on the rise for litigation groups. Yet, since more and more litigation matters are being settled before trial, or via arbitration or mediation, less trial prep space is required.

### Increased Collaborative Work

The practice of law is independent in nature, but often collaborative in social, learning, entertaining and client work modes. It is also a highly personal, relationship-based business involving frequent meetings and strategy sessions held in-person, by phone and/or video conference.

Team collaboration on complex legal matters can span across practice floors and/or global offices. In-person meetings might be one-on-one with a partner mentoring an associate or a small-group practice session. Larger groups may convene in a war room, analyzing discovery, planning litigation strategy or consulting with subject matter experts via video conference.

## *“It’s hard to mentor over a PC screen.”*

MARTY FESTENSTEIN, PRACTICE AREA LEADER  
NELSON, CHICAGO

Newer generations tend to be visual learners, mapping out strategy and diagramming anything from intellectual property cases to molecular structure for a bioscience case on walls. Thus, in addition to excellent audio and video, a whiteboard is a necessity in most any legal conference room.

### New-found Mobility

An in-office presence is often the norm in a law firm. However, with the improved security of cloud computing and encryption confidence, mobility is an increasingly available option, freeing attorneys to occasionally work remotely or from home, a policy appreciated by young associates who prioritize personal and family time.

### Proximity for Teams

In the legal world, well-functioning teams are crucial to the success of casework and help build morale across the office. Clients realize the added value and impact a collective legal team has over an individual.

Offering commoditized services such as healthcare, immigration and insurance defense work is an important growth vehicle for some firms. Such practices utilize large teams (project/case managers, interns, clerks and docket staff) and generate demand for settings that facilitate teamwork, collaboration and efficiency in service delivery.<sup>5</sup>

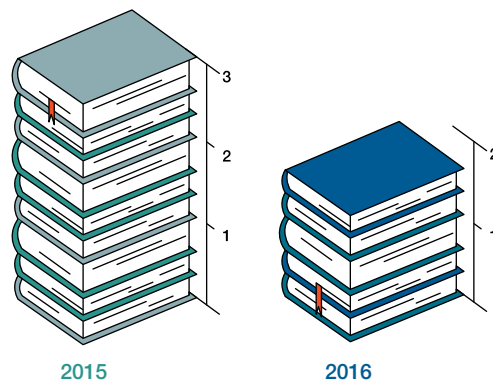
The significance of physical proximity has grown as attorneys desire peer-to-peer collaboration and mentoring. Since 70% of learning is informal, it can be more efficient to double up associates or place them in an open plan setting to learn from each other, planners say. The challenge is finding a balance between two competing interests: the desire for mobility and flexibility and the desire to be mentored and to collaborate.



Corner offices are being replaced with team areas well-equipped with both technology and white boards preferred by young attorneys for planning and strategy sessions.

### Law Libraries

Between 2015 and 2016 alone, the median number of linear feet of books kept in a law firm's physical space fell by half—from 3,000 feet in 2015 to 1,650 feet in 2016.



Source: 2016 Law Librarian Survey, ALM Legal Intelligence

### “Paper-light” Offices

While digitization has essentially eliminated file rooms and libraries, paper is not going away entirely, particularly in litigation-focused firms, say designers who consider the trend closer to “paper-light” than paperless. For example, not all lawyers find working on multiple screens productive for certain cognitive functions. “Flag and tag” is very different on a screen,” said Deanna Hoyko of iN STUDIO in Toronto. “It’s not just old school. Not everybody learns the same way.”



***“Spaces need to meet an expectation of current and potential clientele. A firm with a heavy celebrity client base might look different than a firm that deals in the tech sector.”***

DEANNA HOYKO  
INSTUDIO, TORONTO

*Rich and refined materials in subtle colors can convey subtle understated elegance in client-facing areas. Rooms bathed in daylight and accented with plants deliver a sustainability message in a quiet, understated way.*

## Place

### Changing Mindset

As their corporate clients and professional service peers have transitioned to the open layouts and less formal offices pioneered in the tech industry, many U.S. lawyers have been reluctant to embrace these workplace design strategies, despite the potential to achieve flexibility, agility and cost savings.

Much of the resistance to change is culture-based. From the “golden era” of law up through recent years, space represented status; and office location and size were highly symbolic. In many regions with modest real estate prices, as well as select practice types, such standards remain the norm.

But inspired by modern approaches already in place in the United Kingdom and Australia, many Big Law firms with offices in high rent markets are making the move to more progressive workplaces.

### Shedding Floorspace

Law firms are big users of top tier office space in prime city locations, occupying two or three times as much space per employee as banking, insurance or technology firms. With digitization reducing the need for libraries and record storage, and shrinking private offices, many firms find themselves with more office space than needed and acknowledge it is no longer fiscally prudent to maintain such excessive, expensive assets.

“No matter what the size of the firm, from boutique to AM LAW 100, we are seeing between 12-15% on the low end to 25-30% on the high end in reduction of square feet,” said Marty Festenstein, Practice Leader, Legal, Nelson, Chicago. Larger firms (leasing more than 50,000 square feet or with more than 250 attorneys) are more likely to reduce space than smaller ones.<sup>6</sup>

In areas with lower real estate costs, office size may be intact, but overall volume of space decreases with the elimination of palatial libraries, file rooms, generous hallways, expansive reception areas and future expansion space.

As a result, firms have been shedding space in record numbers. A meaningful reduction in square footage more than offsets the capital expense of building out new space with higher caliber amenities and technology. Regardless of size, spaces must support focused work, teamwork, mentorship and continuous learning in an environment that allows attorneys to thrive when they are expected to bill 1,600 to 2,200 hours a year, far exceeding a standard 40-hour workweek.

### Reframing Public Spaces Branded Environments

With a penchant for Class A, trophy buildings with the finest space and views in town, law firms historically used their prestigious location as a branding tool, conveying status, power, success and authority to clients.

“The public face is to reinforce the brand, experience, expertise and depth of reputation,” said Gensler’s Jim Prendergast, Principal, Gensler, Chicago. “The quality of the materials, the rigor of their detailing, innovative use of finishes and timeless quality of design speaks about the level of service clients will get from the firm.”

Law firms still value the message their space sends and use their space for marketing purposes, but in much broader terms than in the past, according to Prendergast. “They’re connecting with the community and conveying a bigger, more outward-focused mission.”



## Lobby Areas

The “front of house” encompasses reception areas and high-profile public spaces where more resources are spent per square foot on furnishings than the practice area, or “back of house” where access is restricted to staff.

As the front-facing client-centered space, it carries a profound brand message. However, under increased client scrutiny, public spaces in the modern law firm are decidedly less grand, luxurious and ceremonial than in the past. Instead, a clean, modern aesthetic prevails, communicating success in a subtly understated manner. Toning down luxe level does not necessarily mean spaces are not well-appointed. Oftentimes, with a focus on function, the same amount of money is spent on furniture and finishes, but on less opulent or luxurious looking materials, designers say.

## Multi-purpose Spaces

Expansive and well-equipped with client-centered amenities, concierge services and a decided hospitality bent, the front of house serves multiple roles and audiences.

Areas are often a larger suite of public rooms grouped in the central core where they can all be controlled by a receptionist and facility manager. Reception areas feature appropriate technology, Wi-Fi and power, as well as low tables, soft seating and visitor storage.

The suite might also include hoteling workspaces for clients, visiting attorneys or contract workers intentionally located “where they might feel the firm buzz,” as well as have easy access to snacks and beverages. Designed to be highly versatile, spaces may function as informal meeting and gathering places during the day and event venues in the evening. Movable elements, flip-top tables, sound systems for music and presentations, and furnishings that serve dual purposes enable the space to morph multiple times during the day. Adjacent kitchen and catering service areas can support a large, open coffee bar, café and/or dining area and conference center.

Firms may also showcase their space to present client seminars and other events that build social capital and show thought leadership, as well as host programs and events for alumni, professional associations and the local community.

## Streamlining Individual Workspaces

### Private Offices

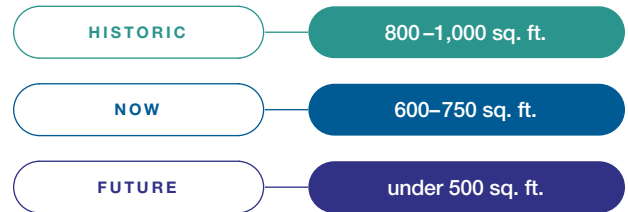
Attorneys are among the highest users of space on a per person basis, which is why in the legal sector private offices are more the rule rather than the exception. Attorneys spend about 70% of their time in their individual office,<sup>7</sup> valuing the quiet that allows them to focus amidst growing numbers of collaborative spaces.

While many professional service companies have moved away from the traditional enclosed office model, concerns about privacy, confidentiality and employee retention/recruitment mean the private office is here to stay for the majority of American law firms. Most firms prefer to gain efficiency and lower expenses via smaller offices and multiuse spaces rather than implement an open office environment. Extensive hoteling and benching are more the exception than the norm.

## Changing Metrics of the Legal Offices

The metrics of legal workplaces has shifted. Many designers use a ratio of 1 to 1 for conference seats to attorneys, with conference seating including open lounge, standup spaces and lounges that can be separated with partitions. Likewise, the 1 to 1 ratio of office to person is shifting as technology enables remote working.

### Square foot per attorney (office + common space)



Private attorney offices are becoming smaller, but more effective in design through the use of height-adjustable tables, monitor arms and open storage.

Shared offices are being rolled out in some firms, most typically by housing two associates together, possibly who are working on similar projects. Partners sharing an office with an associate or each other is still unlikely in the U.S.

### Modular Furniture

While providing offices for lawyers may still be the norm, firms realize the fast pace of business is best accommodated with flexible furniture both in the office and in support spaces to allow for agility and technology support.

Modularity and standardized furnishings allow a firm to remain nimble by streamlining future ordering and lowering transition costs.

---

### Small Meeting Rooms

Small meeting or huddle room that hosts day-to-day meetings.

#### Size

3-4 people

#### Preferences

- + Closed door for privacy
- + Best and easiest technology

---

### Project Rooms (also called Case or War Rooms)

Active working space where attorneys can hash out ideas in confidence. A room that can be dedicated to a single case and team for an extended period—sometimes a year or two. Upon conclusion, the space may adapt back to an office, small meeting room or other flexible conference room based on the universal metric.

#### Size

4-6 people+

#### Preferences

- + Lockable room
- + High quality, ease-to-use technology
- + Adjustable-height table/s
- + Whiteboards to record notes
- + Display area to pin up supporting materials
- + Multiple large monitors for document review, editing, indexing
- + Shelving or other space to organize and store discovery and other materials
- + Tables on casters that can be ganged to create an extra-long surface to lay out papers in the order of how the case will be presented
- + Scanner located inside room or in adjacent copy center area

---

### Quick Prep Rooms

Small work rooms that can be reserved for a couple days or spontaneously. They serve as a more convenient alternative to conference rooms for trial prep, closings and other transactions.

#### Size

Varies based on firm team sizes

#### Preferences

- + Lockable room
- + Storage to allow attorneys pick up where they left off the next day
- + Reservation system for advance scheduling
- + Finest and simplest technology
- + Height-adjustable tables

---

### Multipurpose Space/Hospitality Center

A venue for meetings and events that may also include hoteling areas and spaces that flex to offices to accommodate visiting lawyers and clients.

#### Size

2 to 80 or more; 60 to 80 in auditorium, classroom or event setup

#### Preferences

- + Auditorium
- + Hoteling, free address or benching area with power and connectivity
- + 3 to 4 small office-like spaces
- + Adjacent to amenities
- + Convenient lockers

---

### Cafés and Coffee Bars

Designed to function as an all-day drop in destination, alternative workspace, group lunch room, place to socialize during the work day and after hours with coworkers or clients. Often situated prominently along a window line, they may be the largest meeting space in the office.

#### Size

2 to 20 or more

#### Preferences

- + Bar-height tables with power
- + Soft seating, ottomans
- + Lightweight occasional tables

---

### Wellness Room

Retreat space to get away for meditation, headaches, napping or provide accommodations for new mothers.

#### Size

1 person

#### Preferences

- + Soft seating, ottoman
- + Occasional table
- + Work area with Wi-Fi, power and a landline
- + Do not disturb sign
- + Lockable door
- + Sink and small refrigerator (inside or nearby)
- + Height-adjustable work tables



They can easily accommodate internal change and rapidly deploy space based upon unforeseen needs, while minimizing expense, time, effort, disruption and the need for additional specialists such as electricians.

### Transparent Designs

Extensive use of glass in the modern law office expresses a shift toward physical transparency and openness and the more connected, collaborative environment desired by many firms. It signals traits modern firms desire such as democracy, teamwork and the well-being attributes shared daylight brings to all occupants.

By eliminating visual barriers, it makes knowledge sharing, mentoring and communication easier, fostering collaboration and team engagement. And with varying opacities of film available, glass can still provide the visual privacy attorneys crave.

***“Part of flexibility is an eye to the future. We’re not building anything that mires us in technology or physical structure.”***

LAW FIRM FACILITIES DIRECTOR

## Leveraging Shared Spaces

### Amenity Spaces

In such a mentoring-intensive industry with an increasingly mobile workforce, legal firms encourage attorneys to come in as often and as regularly as possible by making the office an amenity-rich destination. Amenity spaces are designed to lure lawyers away from their desks, eliminating the need to go outside for a cup of coffee and encouraging opportunities for interaction with colleagues, whether it’s to discuss a deal or the latest news.

Additionally, to encourage casual collisions that spark collaboration, law firms are designing purpose-built common spaces such as widened corridors and pathways and open stairways. “We’re designing circumstances that present a greater opportunity to strike up a conversation,” noted David Lawrance of Norton Rose Fulbright, Toronto.

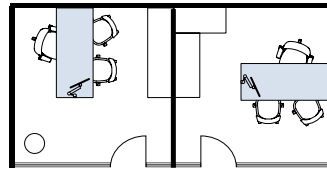
### Meeting Rooms

In a meeting-heavy profession such as law, a wide variety of group spaces are needed, each equipped with easy-to-use media so users can seamlessly share content and screens with clients or colleagues around a table or around the world.

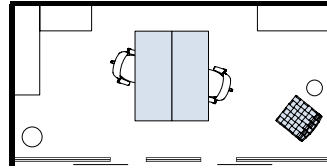
With its strong desire for privacy and confidentiality, the legal sector tends to favor meeting spaces with closed doors, particularly when located near cafés, lounge areas and other open, collaborative spaces. Beyond that, room requirements vary depending on the task at hand. In many cases, modular spaces with movable walls and furniture allow spaces to flex from one use to another. Built-in

## Rearranging Space

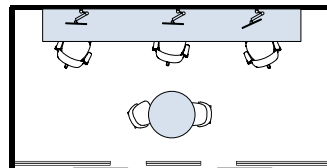
One space (200 sq. ft.), two (10x10) rooms, shown in five different design layouts.



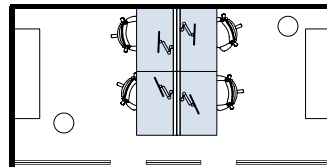
**Traditional**  
Two 10x10 offices



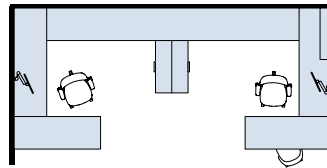
**Mobile Studio**  
Center wall is removed and sliding doors are added to maximize square footage



**Shared Workspaces**  
Center wall is removed, a large worksurface and shared meeting table is added to accommodate 3 people



**Benching Studio**  
Center wall is removed and a benching station is added to accommodate 4 people



**Benching Studio**  
Center and front walls are removed to accommodate administrative stations

technology is a given; long tables, whiteboards and open storage cubbies are often well-utilized. One type of meeting space on the way out: the rarely-used large, formal conference room. In its place, firms are increasingly opting to locate in a serviced office building where a landlord provides a suite of large meeting rooms and other shared amenities which might include full-service cafes, coffee bars, lounge space, roof deck and/or fitness center with onsite showers.

## Looking Ahead

By 2030, Millennials will comprise 75% of the workforce. As partners from the “golden age” of law retire, firms have a major opportunity to design and create innovative spaces for a new generation of lawyers with a new way working.

Unlike some other industries shifting to short leases, law firm leases tend to be longer because of a relatively expensive buildout. With




*With improved data security, attorneys are working and meeting remotely more than previous days. Soft seating, a mix of bar-height, seated and coffee tables, and movable storage support varied work modes and locations.*

32% of equity partners at or approaching retirement age, lease decisions for 10 or 15 years out are not being made for current partners, but for Millennials and Generation Z.

“To attract young attorneys, you have to give them spaces they want to use,” emphasizes Brad Krause, principal of Krause Interior Architecture in Phoenix. “They don’t want to go behind closed doors. They want to walk and talk, socialize, collaborate. A lot will change in the next five to 10 years.”

Continued changes in legal practice drive the need for efficient and agile workplace solutions to support changing workstyles. Increased automation and artificial intelligence is already impacting many aspects of law, greatly reducing the need for manpower, and in turn, reducing physical space requirements. A growing emphasis on wellness is likely to continue as law firms acknowledge the toll long hours, demanding clients and the pressure of highly skilled knowledge work can take on mental health, happiness and work-life integration.

Currently mobility within or outside the office is generally limited to attorneys only and not typically extended to support staff. While most don’t expect that to change in the near future, there will likely be some shifts in how and where non-attorneys work. “At the end of the day, a class of employees that look a lot like paralegals will be doing a broad range of work. Those people may be given more freedom to work at home,” predicted Doug Domenick, director of office services/facilities management at Chapman and Cutler, Chicago. 

## CASE STUDY

# Nixon Peabody

A global law practice with locations in 16 major cities sought to design a space that expressed its values and goals in a new, smaller office.

Washington, D.C.  
65,565 sq. ft. / 160 people  
Designed by Perkins + Will

### Drivers

- + Reduce footprint by 30% while increasing functionality and staff visibility
- + Create physical environment that visually aligns with corporate rebranding initiative and expresses firm values of transparency and equality
- + Design for the future (Nixon Peabody's home for the next 15 years) with flexibility to grow
- + Flatten hierarchy and encourage innovation, collaboration and connection across practices
- + Make visible statement of firmwide commitment to environment, sustainability and social responsibility

### Tactics

- + Community-building design inspiration from town halls, piazzas and gathering spaces
- + Frameless glass throughout to enhance openness, bring in light and allow views and universal visibility
- + Connection to nature through daylight, exterior views and use of materials such as crafted oak floors and walnut panels
- + Space savings from downsized modular offices used to create expansive, bright community spaces that are open and connected
- + Corner team rooms that democratize space and provide transparency from one end of office to other
- + Active design elements draw people from their desks
- + Conference room flexes to seat 140, host events or divide into quadrants
- + Numerous pantries consolidated into café that serves as hub for attorneys, staff and clients
- + Messaging expressed via 16-screen video wall, bright brand colors integrated in architectural finishes and upholstery, and material palette focused on authenticity and craft
- + Open stair connects three floors, promoting movement, interaction and informal exchanges
- + Triple-height living wall irrigated by HVAC condensation brings nature indoors, enhances air quality and articulates firm's commitment to environment and sustainability
- + LED lights conserve energy and automated window shades minimize heat gain and glare of shared daylight
- + Mechanical systems improve air quality and offer zoned temperature controls

### Outcomes

- + Spending one-third less on real estate and lighting and using one-third fewer natural resources
- + Flexible team rooms and case rooms improve space utilization and efficiency
- + Café utilized all day long by staff, attorneys and clients
- + Communal spaces get people moving and interacting and connecting much more frequently with coworkers previously separated by enclosed spaces
- + Improved work outcomes due to vastly improved communication and collaboration
- + Enhanced visibility has positively impacted how people approach their work
- + Employees report improved wellbeing thanks to greater movement and nature-filled environment
- + Firmwide enthusiasm for positive effects of design on life and work
- + Physical space reflects firm's innovative, entrepreneurial culture and aligns with Nixon Peabody brand
- + Expresses the firm's connection to the community through location, physical design and space to host area organizations
- + Demonstrates the firm's commitment to pushing the limits of sustainable workplaces



*After the transformation, there has been a firmwide enthusiasm for the positive effects of design on life and work.*

PHOTOS BY ERIC LAIGNEL



.....

**References and Further Reading**

- <sup>1</sup> Hodgetts, Eric. (2017, November 7). Change is In the Wind for Law Firm Offices. dIAmeter, Interior Architects blog.
- <sup>2</sup> ALM Legal Intelligence and The National Law Journal (2015). Survey of Law Firm Economics, 2015 Edition
- <sup>3</sup> Lohr, Steve. (2017, March 19). A.I. Is Doing Legal Work. But It Won't Replace Lawyers, Yet. New York Times.
- <sup>4</sup> Hodgetts, Eric. (2017, November 7). Change is In the Wind for Law Firm Offices. dIAmeter, Interior Architects blog.
- <sup>5</sup> Festenstein, Marty. (2016). The Case for Open Office Environments in the Legal Workplace. Nelson Worldwide.
- <sup>6</sup> Fung, Esther. (2018, October 24). Big Law Firms Look to Shrink Their Office Space Use. Wall Street Journal.
- <sup>7</sup> Knoll Legal Roundtable, San Francisco

ALM Legal Intelligence (2016). 2016 Law Librarian Survey.

Clay, Thomas S., & Seeger, Eric (2018) "2018 Law Firms in Transition: An Altman Weil Flash Survey"

Cushman & Wakefield. (2018). Bright Insight 2018: The National Legal Sector Benchmark Survey Results.

Festenstein, Marty. (2016). The Case for Open Office Environments in the Legal Workplace. Nelson Worldwide.

Festenstein, Marty, Cerutti, Kristin, Keeler, Nicole, Merlo, Oriana. (2018). Well-Being in the Workplace: Design Strategies for the Legal Industry. Nelson Worldwide.

Fung, Esther. (2018, October 24). Big Law Firms Look to Shrink Their Office Space Use. Wall Street Journal.

Hodgetts, Eric. (2017, November 7). Change is In the Wind for Law Firm Offices. dIAmeter, Interior Architects blog.

JLL. (2018). Law Firm Perspective, JLL Research Report.

Knoll. (2013). The Emerged Law Practice: Progressive Traits of the Modern Law Office.

Littman, Julie. (2016, November 2). San Francisco Law Firms Reinventing Law Offices. Bisnow.

Lohr, Steve. (2017, March 19). A.I. Is Doing Legal Work. But It Won't Replace Lawyers, Yet. New York Times.

Primary Research (2018). Survey of Law Library Plans for the Print Materials Collection, 2018 Edition. (ISBN No:978-157440-498-2)

Smith, Jennifer. (2012, July 5). Law Firms Say Good-Bye Office, Hello Cubicle. Wall Street Journal.

.....

*Through research, Knoll explores the connection between workspace design and human behavior, health and performance, and the quality of the user experience. We share and apply what we learn to inform product development and help our customers shape their work environments.*

*To learn more about this topic or other research resources Knoll can provide, visit [www.knoll.com/research](http://www.knoll.com/research).*

.....

**A special thanks to the following individuals:**

Tracie Crook  
Chief Operating Officer  
McCarthy Tétrault LLP  
Toronto, ON

Douglas Domenick  
Director of Office Services/Facilities Management Chapman and Cutler LLP  
Chicago, IL

Sherry A. Cushman  
Executive Managing Director  
Leader, Legal Sector Advisory Group  
Cushman & Wakefield  
Washington, DC

Martin A. Festenstein  
Practice Leader, Legal  
Nelson  
Chicago, IL

Deanna Hayko, ARIDO, IDC, IIDA, LEED AP (ID&C)  
Partner  
iN Studio  
Toronto, ON

David Hobart Jr., NCIDQ  
Principal  
McCarthy Nordburg  
Phoenix, AZ

Gillian Johnson  
Principal  
EUA  
Denver, CO

Brad Krause, AIA, IIDA, ASID,  
Principal/Owner  
Krause Interior Architects  
Phoenix, AZ

David Lawrance  
National Director  
Office Services & Facilities  
Norton Rose Fulbright Canada LLP  
Toronto, ON

Dorothy Montgomery  
Regional Administrator  
Nixon Peabody  
New York, NY

Howard L. Mudrick  
Executive Director  
Winstead PC  
Dallas, TX

Cynthia Gibson Murphy, AIA NCARB  
Senior Project Manager/Associate Partner  
Margulies Perruzzi Architects  
Boston, MA

Keith Murray  
Partner  
Mathews, Dinsdale & Clark LLP  
Vancouver, BC

Jim Prendergast, FAIA IIDA  
Principal  
Gensler  
Chicago, IL

Melissa Ulen  
Senior Manager of Operations  
Ropes & Gray LLP  
Boston, MA