

The AI Adoption Domino Effect Series Part 2

Keeping the Dominoes Falling: Turning Pilot Wins into Department-Wide AI Success

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So, you've launched a successful AI pilot, your team is buzzing, and leadership is on board. Now what?

Momentum feels great, but sustaining it requires a strategic approach. In Part 2, we'll unpack the essential steps to keep your AI initiative moving forward: from navigating internal politics and securing buy-in to selecting scalable tools that grow with you. Because a true domino effect isn't about knocking down one or two tiles; it's about creating a lasting wave of innovation that reshapes your entire legal department.

Ready to turn momentum into meaningful change? Let's keep those dominoes falling.

How AI Enthusiasm Spreads

When AI adoption begins with a focused, supported pilot group, something remarkable often happens: Momentum builds on its own. What starts as a quiet experiment with a few users can turn into a department-wide shift and, eventually, an enterprise transformation. We've seen this exact sequence play out time and again with our clients, and it follows a very recognizable pattern:

- 1. Pilot users become visibly more productive and enthusiastic.**
The early adopters experience "quick wins" and immediately start seeing tangible results. Tasks that used to take hours now take minutes. Processes that once felt clunky and manual begin to flow more smoothly. They're getting more done and enjoying their work more, and that enthusiasm is hard to miss. They discuss their wins in meetings, showcase small automations, and build trust in the tools by using them effectively.
- 2. Colleagues grow curious and start asking to join.**
Legal teams are observant by nature. When someone consistently delivers faster, cleaner, or more creative work, others take notice. The questions start informally: "What did you use to write that so fast?" "How did you find that clause so quickly?" And then the real turning point: "Can I try that too?" This is where adoption starts to shift from a top-down directive to an internal pull. It becomes less about change management and more about invitation.
- 3. Use cases multiply: Teams shift from 'What can it do?' to 'Which of these 15 things should we prioritize?'**
Once people recognize that generative AI isn't just a one-trick pony, the ideas start flowing. One user is using it for drafting. Another is experimenting with redlining. Someone else has built a custom agent to respond to internal FAQs. The list grows quickly. Suddenly, instead of trying to prove the technology's usefulness, teams are trying to figure out how to triage the flood of use cases. This is a crucial phase, where leadership needs to step in to help prioritize and systematize what's working.
- 4. Productivity disparities become impossible to ignore, and leaders notice.**
Here's where the domino effect becomes a wake-up call. People inside the pilot group start dramatically outperforming their peers. Some clients have told us their AI-empowered team

members feel guilty for finishing tasks in minutes that used to take others full workdays. The efficiency gap is often discussed in 1:1s. Metrics begin to reveal it. Leaders begin to question why certain work is taking longer for some than others, forgetting, in many cases, that access to the tools isn't yet equal.

5. ROI data from small groups creates internal momentum.

Numbers don't lie. Even from a group of five or ten users, the impact is measurable and often stunning. Time saved. Costs reduced. Hours reallocated to higher-value tasks. Morale improved. When legal leaders see that kind of ROI from a sliver of the team, it's a powerful argument to scale. And when finance or operations gets wind of the results, they often want in too. What started as an internal tool becomes a cross-functional opportunity.

6. Expansion to the whole legal department, and beyond, becomes inevitable.

By this stage, the pilot group is no longer a side project. It's the blueprint. The tools have proven their value. The governance processes have been pressure-tested. The demand is clear. So, the legal ops team begins the process of rolling things out more broadly by training and onboarding. Often this momentum doesn't stop at legal. HR, compliance, procurement, and even sales begin to take notice. Suddenly, legal becomes the model for smart, scaled AI adoption across the business.

Why the Future of Legal Work Will Be Built Around the Base Model

One of the clearest trends emerging from successful AI adoption efforts is the shift toward what we've started calling the "AI command center." This is a centralized, customizable interface that allows each employee to interact with digital assistants tailored to their specific workflows, preferences, and pain points. This isn't just a nice-to-have vision for the future. It's already happening.

At UpLevel Ops, we help clients implement lightweight, chat-based environments where users can toggle between purpose-built agents that handle everything from summarizing regulatory updates to answering policy questions. These assistants are simple to create using today's base models, and they're already delivering measurable gains in speed and accuracy.

Building an effective AI command center doesn't start with code but with analysis. Specifically, workflow analysis. By mapping out how legal teams allocate their time, identifying bottlenecks, and pinpointing tasks that feel repetitive or manual, we can quickly determine the highest-value areas to deploy custom AI agents. It's not about boiling the ocean. It's about identifying three to five friction points and addressing them first. And because the tools are so flexible, this kind of deployment doesn't require an army of developers or a 12-month roadmap. We've stood up effective pilot agents in a matter of days.

Once those assistants are in place, the next leap is integration. We're increasingly connecting these AI agents directly to the apps people already use, such as matter management tools and workflow systems, so users don't have to toggle between tools or search for data across multiple platforms. Instead, they stay in the chat interface, and the AI does the hopping for them. That reduction in tool-switching alone can dramatically improve efficiency and user satisfaction.

And this is only the beginning. What's coming next, and likely sooner than most teams expect, is a shift from multiple task-specific assistants to a single, voice-enabled AI that can manage the entire spectrum of legal workflows in one cohesive experience. This won't be a suite of tools but instead one intelligent, persistent assistant that understands context, maintains continuity, and executes complex actions across platforms. It will function like a digital team member with access to the full operating environment of the legal department.

Which brings us to a critical point about strategy: if you want to be ready for that future, you need to be building close to the base model now.

The foundational AI systems, OpenAI's GPTs and Google's Gemini, are where the innovation is happening. These models are improving weekly, rolling out new capabilities faster than most platforms can keep up. They have the ecosystem support, the documentation, the compliance controls, and the user community to allow you to evolve with them instead of experiencing disruption.

In contrast, the so-called "overlay tools," apps that sit on top of the base models and attempt to replicate or abstract their functionality, are almost always too slow, too rigid, and too redundant. They promise simplification, but they usually end up adding complexity. They can't keep up with the release pace of the underlying models, and they rarely offer anything you couldn't configure directly with a little support and a clearer strategy.

That's why our strongest recommendation for all clients is to start building out your foundational AI programs now. Pick your base model and go all-in in that ecosystem. Whether it's ChatGPT or Gemini, what matters is proximity. The closer you are to the base, the more control, flexibility, and power you'll have as the tools evolve. And in this space, evolution is weekly. The future of legal work is already being shaped by these models.

That said, we're not suggesting there aren't other, more complex legal tech tools that may be worth investing in. Many of them are, and will continue to be, important parts of a mature legal tech stack. But those tools typically require longer implementation timelines, deeper integrations, and significant upfront effort. With AI evolving at its current pace, this is not the moment to lock yourself into months-long deployments or multi-quarter roadmaps as a first move. The smarter path is to get started with what's already working, gain traction quickly, and add complexity only when it's needed and strategic.

The real gift of a smart AI strategy isn't just technological but human. When legal teams roll out AI in a structured, collaborative, and supported way, they demonstrate trust and empower their people. They're enabling legal professionals to offload the grunt work, reclaim time, and focus on higher-value tasks. And most importantly, they're showing their teams that innovation doesn't have to feel like disruption. It can feel like progress. Starting with small, intentional pilots and building around a clear base model is the most effective and scalable way to foster adoption. Do it right, and the transformation doesn't need to be forced; it spreads on its own.

Start small, plan smart, scale fast.

Did you miss Part 1 of **The AI Adoption Domino Effect Series - *Tipping the First Tile: How Legal Teams Are Jumpstarting AI with Smart Pilots***, in the July issue of **Brainwave**? Catch up now!

Learn more about the **AI Advantage** from **UpLevel Ops** at UpLevelOps.com.