

# Eight areas where Kenyan advocates are bleeding time, money, and compliance — and how to close the gaps

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*An 8-point audit that helps Kenyan advocates identify where their firm is bleeding time, money, and compliance risk — and why SISU by Lenhac is the system built to fix all of it.*

I have spent fifteen years in finance, compliance, and systems design. Before co-founding Lenhac, I worked across sectors where numbers had to be right, audits had to pass, and regulators did not accept excuses. Today I spend most of my time inside law firms, understanding how they operate.

What I see, consistently, is a profession that has digitised the ecosystem around it — e-filing, KRA, M-Pesa, online land and company searches — while the firm itself still runs on paper files, WhatsApp threads, Excel spreadsheets, and the memory of whoever happens to be in the office that day.

This article is a diagnostic. I want to give you a framework you can use this week to audit your own firm's operations

and identify where you are most exposed. The problems below are real, they are costing you money, and most of them are fixable once you see them clearly.

## The Context: Why This Matters Right Now

In January 2026, the Law Society of Kenya elected Senior Counsel Charles Kanjama as President. Within days, he made technology and innovation a centrepiece of his first 100 days in office. In his public remarks (*available on video from the 4:45 mark of his address on his first 100 days*), he declared a critical need for lawyers to upskill in legal technology and announced plans to bring technology companies to the table for collaboration. Earlier in the same interview, at the 1:35 mark, he stated plainly that embracing technology is essential for the profession's future.

This matters not because one president's statements change everything overnight, but because they signal a direction the profession's leadership is now actively pushing. When regulatory expectations, continuing professional development requirements, or compliance standards begin to tighten around technology use, the firms that have already organised their operations will adapt easily. The firms that have not will scramble.

The question is not whether your firm will adopt technology. The question is whether you will do it on your terms, with time to learn and implement properly, or whether you will be forced into it reactively.

## The Eight-Point Operational Audit

**Walk through each of the following areas honestly. If you can answer every question confidently, your firm is in strong shape. Most firms cannot.**

### 1. Client Intake and Onboarding

Every matter begins with a client walking through your door or, increasingly, filling out an enquiry form, sending a WhatsApp message, or calling your office. What happens next determines whether that person becomes a paying client or falls through the cracks.

In most firms, intake is informal. A phone call is taken, some notes are scribbled, maybe an email is sent. There is no structured process for capturing the prospective client's details, the nature of their matter, their contact information, their budget expectations, or the conflict check that should happen before you agree to act. Follow-ups happen when someone remembers. Many do not happen at all.

The cost is invisible but real: prospective clients who were never called back, consultations that were never invoiced, matters that were opened without proper conflict checks, and no data on how many enquiries your firm receives versus how many convert into paying work.

**Test yourself:** Do you have a defined intake process that captures every prospective client's details in one place? Can you see how many enquiries came in last month, how many converted, and how many were never followed up? When a new client engages your firm, is there a structured onboarding process — engagement letter, KYC documentation, conflict check — or does it depend on which advocate handles the file?

**What good looks like:** A centralised intake system where every enquiry is logged, tracked, and followed up. Consultations are scheduled and billed. New clients are onboarded with a consistent process — engagement letters, KYC, conflict checks — before any substantive work begins.

## 2. Trust Account Traceability

Trust accounts are the single most common area of regulatory trouble for Kenyan law firms. The question is simple: can you, right now, produce a full transaction history for every client trust account in your firm?

Every deposit, every withdrawal, every application to an invoice — traced to the specific client and matter it belongs to, with supporting documentation. If your answer involves opening Excel, calling the accounts person, or checking a physical ledger, you have a traceability gap. That gap is a regulatory risk and, in a worst-case scenario, a professional conduct issue.

Now consider how much more complex this becomes in practice. In conveyancing matters, purchase prices are frequently paid in instalments a deposit, then a second tranche, then a final payment, sometimes spread over months. Your firm receives these funds on behalf of the client, holds them in trust, and disburses them at completion. Each instalment must be traced to the specific transaction, and the running balance must be accurate at every stage. If a dispute arises about how much has been received or when, you need a clear, auditable record — not a reconstructed one.

The same applies to Road Traffic Accident matters and other personal injury or civil litigation where compensation is paid in structured settlements or staged payments. An insurer pays a lump sum or a series of payments into your client account. You deduct your fees, disburse the balance to the client, and account for every shilling. In contingency matters, the stakes are even higher: your fee depends on the outcome, and when the award or settlement arrives, the split between what belongs to the firm and what belongs to the client must be calculated, documented, and disbursed correctly. Any ambiguity in that process is a professional conduct complaint waiting to happen.

Across all of these scenarios, conveyancing, RTA, civil litigation, and contingency work, the pattern is the same. Money that belongs to clients passes through your firm. It arrives in instalments. It sits in trust for varying periods. It must be applied to the right matter, the right client, and the right purpose. And at any point, you must be able to show exactly where every shilling is, where it came from, and where it went.

**Test yourself:** Pick any conveyancing file where the purchase price was paid in instalments. Can you immediately show every payment received, when it arrived, the running trust balance at each stage, and how funds were eventually disbursed? For any RTA or civil matter where compensation was received on behalf of a client, can you produce a clear breakdown of what was received, what was deducted as fees, and what was paid to the client — with supporting documentation for each movement?

**What good looks like:** A system where every trust movement — deposits, withdrawals, applications to invoices, disbursements to clients — is automatically logged against the right client and matter, with a full audit trail accessible on demand. Instalment payments tracked with running balances. Fee deductions documented. Client disbursements recorded. No manual reconciliation required, and no ambiguity about whose money is where.

## 3. Billing Speed and Tax Compliance

How long does it take your firm to generate an invoice after work is completed? In many firms I have worked with, the answer is days or even weeks. Someone has to manually calculate VAT at 16 per cent and withholding tax at 5 or 10 per cent on professional fees, format a document, get it reviewed, and send it out.

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Every day an invoice is delayed is a day your cash flow is deferred. And every manual tax calculation is an opportunity for an error that KRA will not overlook.

**Test yourself:** Can you generate a fully tax-compliant invoice in under five minutes? Can you produce a tax ledger showing all VAT and WHT entries linked to their source documents? If KRA sends a query tomorrow, how many hours — or days — would it take you to respond?

**What good looks like:** Invoices generated instantly with tax calculated automatically. Every tax entry linked to the original invoice or payment. A tax report available at the click of a button.

#### 4. Payment Reconciliation and Visibility

Clients pay law firms in many ways: bank transfers, M-Pesa, cheques, and sometimes cash. Each channel creates its own reconciliation challenge, but the most common — and the most dangerous — is the bank transfer.

Here is the reality in many Kenyan law firms: the bank statement is accessible only to the managing partner or a single signatory. When a client pays via bank transfer, the accounts team may not know about it until the partner checks the statement — which might happen days later, or not at all until month-end. In the meantime, the firm has no visibility on whether a payment has been received.

This creates serious problems. A client who has paid may be chased for payment they have already made — damaging the relationship. A client who has not paid may be recorded as having paid — because someone assumed the transfer came through without verifying. Invoices sit in limbo. Client balances are inaccurate. And when a dispute arises about whether payment was made, there is no single source of truth.

M-Pesa payments have their own version of this problem. Payments arrive on a phone or till and sit in a transaction log that nobody reconciles to the actual invoices. Money comes in, but it is not matched to the right client, the right matter, or the right invoice until someone sits down to do it manually — if they do it at all.

The cumulative effect is an accounts function that is always running behind, always uncertain, and always vulnerable to errors that neither the firm nor the client may discover until it is too late.

**Test yourself:** Pick any payment received last month — bank transfer or M-Pesa. Can you immediately identify which invoice it was paying, which client sent it, and which matter it relates to? If a client calls right now to confirm whether their bank transfer was received, can you answer without calling the partner or checking a physical statement? Do you know, today, your firm's total outstanding receivables with confidence?

**What good looks like:** Every payment — whether by bank transfer, M-Pesa, cheque, or cash — is recorded and matched to the correct invoice, client, and matter as soon as it is received. The entire team has visibility on payment status. No one has to call the partner to check the bank statement. No client is chased for a payment they have already made.

#### 5. Court Diary Management

Missed hearings are among the most serious operational failures a law firm can suffer. They carry malpractice risk, damage client relationships, and can result in adverse orders.

If your court diary is a physical book, a shared Google Calendar, or a spreadsheet maintained by one person, you

are one sick day, one miscommunication, or one illegible entry away from a missed hearing.

**Test yourself:** Can you see, right now, every hearing your firm has scheduled for the next 30 days — with the specific court, judge, matter, and assigned advocate for each one? Is that information accessible to every lawyer who needs it, or does it live in one person's diary?

**What good looks like:** A central diary where every court session is linked to its matter, court, and judge, with automatic calendar events for assigned advocates. Visibility across the entire firm.

## 6. Financial Reporting

Here is a question that should be easy to answer: what was your firm's revenue last quarter? What about your net profit? Your outstanding receivables?

If answering any of those questions requires more than a few minutes, your firm does not have a functioning financial reporting system. It has a collection of records that can, with significant manual effort, be turned into reports. That is not the same thing.

**Test yourself:** Can you produce a trial balance, income statement, and balance sheet on demand? Or would it take your team several days of reconciliation work?

**What good looks like:** Full double-entry bookkeeping running in the background, with journal entries created automatically when you invoice, receive a payment, record an expense, or process payroll. Financial statements available on demand, audit-ready every single day.

## 7. Document Management

Every law firm has experienced the moment: a critical document is needed urgently and nobody can find it. It might be on someone's desktop, in an email attachment, in a physical file, or — the dreaded phrase — “check with Susan, she had the hard copy.”

Disorganised documents slow down your work, increase the risk of errors, and make transitions (when staff leave, when matters are reassigned) painful and risky.

**Test yourself:** Pick any active matter. Can you pull up every document associated with it — filings, correspondence, contracts, court orders — within sixty seconds? Is every document linked to the correct client, matter, and transaction?

**What good looks like:** Cloud-based document storage where every document is linked to its matter, client, court session, or transaction. Searchable, accessible, and secure.

## 8. People Management and Workflow

A law firm is its people. But most firms manage their people the same way they manage their files — informally, reactively, and with far too much depending on memory.

Start with the basics. Do you know, right now, who is on leave this week? Not from a WhatsApp message someone sent last Friday, but from a system that tracks leave balances, approvals, and coverage? When an advocate is

away, is there a clear record of who is covering their matters and court dates, or does everyone simply hope nothing falls through?

Now consider payroll. Many firms still process payroll manually — calculating PAYE, NHIF, NSSF, and housing levy on a spreadsheet, preparing bank instructions by hand, and filing statutory returns separately. Every manual payroll run is an opportunity for errors that affect your staff's pay and your firm's compliance.

Then there is the broader people lifecycle. When you hire a new advocate, is there a structured onboarding process — system access, matter assignments, introductions to key clients, compliance documentation — or does the new hire spend their first weeks figuring things out by asking around? When a staff contract is approaching renewal, does someone flag it in advance, or does it expire while you are in court and nobody notices until the employee raises it?

And at the daily level: as a managing partner or senior advocate, do you know what every member of your team is working on today? Which matters are active, which tasks are overdue, which clients have not heard from you in too long? Most firms manage workflow through verbal instructions and informal check-ins. This works when a firm is very small, but it breaks down as you grow. And it leaves no record, which means no accountability.

**Test yourself:** Can you see a dashboard of your firm's active matters, pending tasks, upcoming deadlines, and staff allocation without asking anyone to compile it? Do you know who is on leave this week and who is covering their work? Can you run payroll in under an hour, with statutory deductions calculated automatically? Do you have visibility on upcoming contract renewals for your staff?

**What good looks like:** A centralised system that handles matter tracking, task assignment, and deadlines alongside HR functions: leave management with balances and approvals, payroll processing with automatic statutory deductions, staff onboarding workflows, and contract renewal alerts. Visible to leadership without requiring manual reporting.

## What to Do About It

If you scored well on all eight areas, your firm is ahead of most of the profession. If you found gaps — and most firms will — the next step is not to panic. It is to decide, deliberately, to close them.

You have three broad options.

Option one: improve your manual systems. Better spreadsheets, stricter processes, more disciplined record-keeping. This is the cheapest option and it works for very small firms with low transaction volumes — but it does not scale, it depends on individual diligence, and it will not satisfy an auditor or regulator who expects systematic controls.

Option two: adopt generic business software. QuickBooks for accounting, Google Calendar for court dates, Google Drive for documents, a separate HR tool for payroll. This gives you digital records, but it creates silos. Your accounting system does not know what a matter is. Your calendar does not link to a file. Your documents are not connected to invoices. Your payroll does not connect to your matters or your leave tracker. You end up maintaining multiple systems and a parallel set of manual records to bridge the gaps between them.

Option three: adopt a purpose-built law firm management system. A single platform designed specifically for how

law firms operate — where client intake, matters, court sessions, documents, invoices, payments, trust accounts, tasks, payroll, HR, and reporting are all connected.

## **This Is What We Built SISU to Do**

I am not a neutral voice on option three. I built SISU by Lenhac precisely because I saw that nothing in the market addressed the specific, interconnected realities of running a law firm in Kenya.

Every one of the eight areas in this audit is a module in SISU — not as eight separate tools bolted together, but as one integrated system where everything connects to everything.

Client intake is captured and tracked from the first enquiry through to engagement. Matters, court sessions, documents, tasks, and deadlines are linked and visible across the firm. Invoices are generated with VAT and withholding tax calculated automatically. Payments — whether by bank transfer, M-Pesa, cheque, or cash — are recorded against the right invoice, the right client, and the right matter, giving your entire team visibility without needing to call the partner for the bank statement. Trust accounts carry a full transaction history with every movement traced — including instalment payments in conveyancing, structured settlements in RTA and civil matters, contingency fee splits, and client disbursements, all with running balances and a complete audit trail. Payroll runs with PAYE, NHIF, NSSF, and housing levy computed automatically. Leave is tracked with balances and approvals. Staff contracts flag when they are approaching renewal. Financial statements — trial balance, income statement, balance sheet — are available on demand, audit-ready every day.

The international platforms — Clio, PracticePanther, MyCase — are excellent for the jurisdictions they were built for. But they charge in dollars, their support teams do not know Milimani from Mombasa, and they do not handle VAT at 16 per cent, WHT on professional fees, M-Pesa reconciliation, or the Kenyan court hierarchy. The generic business tools — QuickBooks, Odoo, assorted ERPs — do not know what a matter is, what a court session is, or how a trust account works. You would spend more time adapting them than using them.

SISU was built from the first line of code for Kenyan advocates. Every feature exists because a real law firm needed it.

## **The Window Is Now**

President Kanjama's technology agenda is building momentum. The infrastructure for a technology-first legal sector is being laid. When the profession moves — and it will — the firms that already have their data organised, their accounts reconciled, their court diaries integrated, their people managed properly, and their client records centralised will be the ones that thrive.

You do not need to have everything figured out today. But you do need to start. Take this audit, share it with your partners, and have an honest conversation about where your firm stands.

And when you are ready, we would welcome the chance to show you what SISU can do. Your firm deserves a system that was built for it — not adapted, not imported, not patched together. Built.

**SISU by Lenhac. It is time.**

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