INNOVATION BEYOND TECHNOLOGY

The Crucial Role of Skills in Driving Change in the Legal Profession: **Perspectives from Lawyers at Major Firms in Spain**

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The Crucial Role of Skills in Driving Change in the Legal Profession: **Perspectives from Lawyers at Major Firms in Spain**

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About LawAhead

The evolving dynamics of society are presenting new challenges for law firms and companies alike. These include the fierce impact of technology, increasing difficulties in attracting and retaining talent, ongoing regulatory changes, the growing importance of ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) standards, growing concerns around data protection and cybersecurity, as well as the need for robust crisis management and reputational risk strategies.

In response, the LawAhead Center works in close collaboration with legal professionals and businesses to tackle these challenges effectively. It provides a neutral space where sector stakeholders can come together to collaborate, co-create solutions, and share the knowledge they generate for the benefit of society at large.

The Center's mission is to serve as a hub for research and dissemination focused on the relevance and evolution of the legal sector. It aims to unite legal professionals to make a meaningful, long-term impact on society, while championing the essential values of the legal profession.

Its objectives are to become a reference point for research, development, and innovation in law—not only in Spain, but also globally through connections with other centers across Europe, the United States, and Latin America. The Center aspires to mark a lasting societal impact through several initiatives, to act as a transformative player in collaboration with other organizations and influence decision-making, and to contribute to promoting Spain's global reputation. Moreover, it seeks to become a convergence point for multiple disciplines of knowledge and to serve as an inspirational meeting place for academia, the professional and business worlds, and institutions.

The LawAhead Center structures its activities around three main pillars: seminars and events, the publication of outreach reports, and the development of applied research projects.

Executive summary

This study examines the interplay among technology, innovation, and interpersonal skills in the context of the Spanish legal profession's ecosystem, focusing on how lawyers and law firms navigate related dynamics in an era characterized by rapid technological advancements. The analysis is built on a robust empirical foundation, including a survey of 460 legal professionals from leading firms with offices in Madrid. This is one of the first studies to specifically target this population and region, offering a novel contribution to the broader discourse on the transformation of legal practice and legal innovation.

The central issue addressed in this study is the changing definition and practical implications of "innovation" within the legal profession. While popular narratives frequently equate innovation with technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies, the present study challenges that reductionist view. Indeed, it hypothesizes that innovation is a multidimensional concept encompassing not only technology adoption but also the reorganization of work structures and the cultivation of essential interpersonal skills, including communication, negotiation, leadership, and management skills.

The methodology applied in this study involves a mixed-methods approach, combining a comprehensive review of the scholarly literature with quantitative and qualitative analyses of survey data. The survey was carefully designed and piloted to capture lawyers' perspectives on technology integration, innovation, and the skills deemed critical for success in contemporary legal practice. The respondents represent diverse roles—from junior associates to managing partners—and practice areas, including mergers and acquisitions, tax, and litigation. The data collection process is marked by high validity and reliability, and the findings are contextualized within existing academic frameworks.

The present study also explores the role of AI in legal practice, noting that its integration has primarily centered on enhancing efficiency and automating routine tasks. The survey results reveal that lawyers generally view AI as a valuable complement to their work, particularly in areas such as contract management and legal research. However, they remain cautious as to its limitations, especially regarding accuracy, confidentiality, and ethical considerations. Interestingly, while most respondents acknowledge the potential of AI to streamline operations, there is widespread recognition that technology alone cannot replace the uniquely human skills required to perform complex, high-stakes legal work.

Another notable contribution is this study's critique of the "technology equals innovation" narrative. By highlighting the importance of both interpersonal skills and ethical decision-making, this study broadens the conceptual framework concerning innovation in the legal profession. Moreover, it argues that true innovation requires an integrative approach that leverages technology while preserving and enhancing the human elements and "soft skills" of legal practice. This perspective challenges conventional wisdom and opens up new avenues for research and policy development in terms of legal training and practice.

The original contributions of this study also include the introduction of the TIE Lawyering model, which encompasses the three dimensions that, alongside expertise, are critical for 21st century legal professionals: mastery of technology (T), interpersonal skills (I), and robust ethical standards (E). Broadening the picture to include legal education, the model advocates a systematic approach to legal training and professional development, emphasizing the need to balance technological proficiency with interpersonal and ethical competencies.

In addition, the findings provide actionable insights for educational institutions, suggesting that law schools integrate interpersonal skills training into their curricula from the outset, fostering a culture that values such competencies alongside technical expertise. Finally, the findings open up new lines of research and suggest key questions that must be answered. What competencies are required in an age driven by AI and other technologies? How can law students and practicing lawyers cultivate interpersonal skills, such as communication, negotiation, leadership, and management skills, without losing sight of the core concerns of their practice?

In conclusion, this study offers a systematic understanding of innovation in the legal profession, demonstrating that it extends beyond technology adoption to include interpersonal and organizational dimensions. The survey findings reveal both opportunities and challenges in aligning the individual and institutional perspectives on innovation. As the legal profession continues to evolve, the insights provided here suggest a promising roadmap for fostering meaningful and sustainable innovation, ensuring that lawyers are "future-proof."

1. Introduction

This study presents an in-depth theoretical and empirical exploration of the rapid shifts taking place within the legal profession, focusing on the interconnected aspects of innovation, technology, and interpersonal skills. More specifically, it explores how lawyers and law firms understand and uphold the digital transition in their practice.

Innovation encompasses not only the adoption of technology but also the reorganization of work structures and, importantly, the cultivation of interpersonal skills, such as communication, negotiation, leadership, and management skills, as well as AI literacy, which are integral to driving meaningful progress and ensuring adaptability

With the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI), large language models (LLMs), and other technological developments, prior studies have linked innovation *predominantly*, if not *exclusively*, to the development and implementation of technology in terms of work methods.[4] However, our initial hypothesis is that innovation encompasses not only the adoption of technology but also the reorganization of work structures and, importantly, the cultivation of interpersonal skills, such as communication, negotiation, leadership, and management skills, as well as AI literacy, which are integral to driving meaningful progress and ensuring adaptability.

Lawyers generally exhibit a high level of awareness regarding the potentials and limitations of technologies. For instance, a survey conducted in the United States in early 2023 among 4180 respondents—including 1176 lawyers, 1239 law students, and 1765 consumers—found that 86% of the lawyers were aware of these issues.[5] In a nutshell, they recognized the benefits of AI in boosting both efficiency and productivity, while also acknowledging its limitations. The literature also highlights the increasing integration of AI and machine learning (ML) into legal services,[6] particularly for automating tasks such as searching, reviewing, and mining—that is, high-volume, low-margin tasks. This points to the use of innovations such as technology-assisted review for discovery, due diligence, and contract drafting, as well as to the application of natural language processing for rudimentary legal research.[7]

To better understand how lawyers and law firms perceive innovation in their practice, we conducted novel empirical research, gathering data from a survey of 460 legal professionals in Spain. The respondents, spanning roles from junior associates to managing partners, represent diverse practice areas, including tax, mergers and acquisitions (M&A), and litigation. They were drawn from leading law firms with offices in Spain,

[4]Richard Susskind, Tomorrow's Lawyers: An Introduction to Your Future (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

[5]LexisNexis, Generative AI & the Legal Profession: 2023 Survey Report (London: LexisNexis, 2023).

[6]Michael Legg and Felicity Bell, Artificial Intelligence and the Legal Profession: A Primer (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2019).

[7]Dan Hunter, "The Death of the Legal Profession and the Future of Law," UNSW Law Journal 43, no. 4 (2020): 1199–1225.

making this one of the first studies to specifically target this population and geographic region.

Aside from this introduction, the present report is divided into five substantive sections. The second section examines the impacts of technology and automation on the legal profession. We review the relevant scholarly literature, analyze the broader discourse on how automation is reshaping the labor market, and provide an overview of digital advancements in the practices of law firms. In the third section, we set the stage for a comprehensive analysis of the critical factors shaping innovative practices in the legal industry, considering both the technological and non-technological levels. In this section, we explore previous studies on innovation in the legal profession and problematize the theoretical and practical assumptions within the emerging field of law and innovation, situating technology as the only or best path to innovation. In the fourth section, we delve into the concept of interpersonal skills and explore such skills' distinction from communicative competencies, emphasizing their critical importance to the legal profession.

In the fifth section, drawing on the data collected, we identify trends in the legal profession in Spain, particularly regarding whether and, if so, to what extent technology is influencing the concept of innovation in terms of legal practice. More specifically, we question the dichotomous view that innovation is either solely achievable through technological means or unable to occur without some level of technological advancement within law firms and legal organizations.[8] Our findings suggest that the scope of innovation extends beyond technological advances to include the development of interpersonal skills, such as communication, active listening, negotiation, collaborative decision-making, and leadership skills. When discussing the results concerning the interpersonal skills associated with innovation, we delve into three key categories that the surveyed lawyers identified as the most innovative legal skills for the 21st century: communication skills (e.g., persuasion, public speaking, effective communication), collaborative decision-making skills (e.g., facilitation, negotiation, alternative dispute resolution methods), and emotional intelligence skills (e.g., empathy).

Based on this analysis, in the sixth section, we suggest a path not taken in terms of legal education grounded in the development of a model that encompasses technological advancement, interpersonal skills, and ethical decision-making, combined with in-depth knowledge and a proficient command of the law. We conclude this report by highlighting the importance of expanding the definition of innovation to include interpersonal skills and cultivating ethical traits in the legal profession that are responsive to a technology-driven world and its challenges.

[8] "Black's Law Dictionary, a go-to source, does not include the word 'innovation'... Here's my simple equation... Innovation: new idea + hands-on implementation = a better way of doing something... Technology might be one path to innovation but it's not the only one." Dyane O'Leary, Legal Innovation & Technology: A Practical Skills Guide for the Modern Lawyer (St. Paul, MN: West Academic, 2023): 16–17.

2. More than meets the AI: Untangling the impacts of digital transformation on the legal profession

In the face of yet another wave of disruptive technologies, the debate on the future of work is divided between optimism and pessimism. On the one hand, there are those heralding an AI revolution that is poised to reshape the world of work like never before through unprecedented enhancements to efficiency and significant cost savings.[9] On the other hand, there are those with a sense of uneasiness about the potential job losses, reduction of self-determination, expansion of technocratic authority, erosion of critical skills, and decline in job quality.[10]

Looking back, this situation is not entirely unlike the reactions to technological tools that have now been integrated into professional environments.[11] Perhaps the key difference lies in the class of workers currently in focus: this time, it is all about educated, white-collar workers among the high professional ranks who work in well-compensated areas.[12] Indeed, the rapid popularization of AI, ML, and LLMs over the past few years has highlighted the vulnerability of professions once considered safe from automation.[13] Cognitive, intellectual, and creative tasks are gradually yet steadily being undertaken by machines. To date, the results have typically been clumsy and easily criticized.[14] However, experiments with chatbots,[15] agentic AI, smart dashboards, and similar tools still leaves many professionals in the legal world with a sense of disorientation.[16]

This section discusses the implications of automation in the labor market. Given the specific scope of this research, the present report focuses on the impacts of transformative technologies on the legal profession.[17] Readers will have no difficulty seeing how this profession is uniquely sensitive due to its reliance on human judgment,[18]

[9]Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee, *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014); Martin Ford, *Rise of the Robots: Technology and the Threat of a Jobless Future* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2015); Paul R. Daugherty and H. James Wilson, *Human + Machine: Reimagining Work in the Age of AI* (Brighton, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2018).

[10]Darrell M. West, *The Future of Work: Robots, AI, and Automation* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2018); Phoebe V. Moore, *The Quantified Self in Precarity: Work, Technology, and What Counts* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2017); Brishen Rogers, *Data and Democracy at Work: Advanced Information Technologies, Labor Law, and the New Working Class* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2023).

[11]Daniel Susskind, *A World Without Work: Technology, Automation and How We Should Respond* (London: Penguin, 2020).

[12]Edward W. Felten, Manav Raj and Robert Seamans, "Occupational Heterogeneity in Exposure to Generative AI," SSRN, 2023, https://ssrn.com/abstract=4414065; American Bar Association, "7 Ways Artificial Intelligence Can Benefit Your Law Firm," Your ABA, September, 2017, https://www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/publications/youraba/2017/september-2017/7-ways-artificial-intelligence-can-benefit-your-law-firm/. See also Daniel Martin Katz, "Quantitative Legal Prediction – or – How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Start Preparing for the Data Driven Future of the Legal Services Industry," *Emory Law Journal* 62 (2013): 1969.

[13]AI is an umbrella term covering several applications, whether standalone or embedded in everyday instruments, that mimic capabilities associated with humans when properly trained using a large set of readable information. High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence, *A Definition of AI: Main Capabilities and Scientific Disciplines* (Luxembourg: European Commission, 2019). As a subspecies of AI, ML can autonomously develop capabilities "by example and by doing" and redesign procedures to pursue implied objectives in an astoundingly cost-effective and adaptive fashion. LLMs are advanced AI systems designed to process and generate human-like text based on vast amounts of data.

[14]Some notable exceptions are worth mentioning. For instance, generative AI has co-written law review papers that have been accepted for publication. See Andrew Perlman, "The Implications of ChatGPT for Legal Services and Society," *Michigan Technology Law Review* 30, no. 19 (2024) ("Write the conclusion of an academic paper describing the use cases of ChatGPT in the legal field"). Additionally, generative AI models, such as CoCounsel (formerly Casetext), have passed the Uniform Bar Exam. See Pablo Arredondo, "GPT-4 Passes the Bar Exam: What That Means for Artificial Intelligence Tools in the Legal Profession," *SLS Blogs / Legal Aggregate* (blog), December 1, 2024, https://law.stanford.edu/2023/04/19/gpt-4-passes-the-bar-exam-what-that-means-for-artificial-intelligence-tools-in-the-legal-industry/; Arvind Narayanan and Sayash Kapoor, *AI Snake Oil: What Artificial Intelligence Can Do, What It Can't, and How to Tell the Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2024).

[15]Haimantika Chakraborty, "Revolutionizing the Legal Landscape: How AI is Transforming the Legal Industry," *International Journal of Law Management and Humanities* 6, no. 2 (2023): 3161–3167.

[16]For a detailed account of what this disorientation might produce existentially, see Amy Harbin, *Disorientation and Moral Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[17]Larry A. Dimatteo et al., eds., *The Cambridge Handbook of Lawyering in the Digital Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[18]Jeffrey M. Lipshaw, "Lawyering Somewhere Between Computation and the Will to Act: A Digital Age Reflection," *Suffolk University Law School*, August 5, 2019, https://dc.suffolk.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1186&context=suls-faculty.

deontological responsibilities, and the need for supervision concerning high-stakes issues. Simply put, lawyers are entrusted with upholding (the administration of) justice and ensuring compliance with intricate multi-layered legal frameworks wherein precision, discretion, flexibility, and trust are all indispensable.[19]

Lawyers operate in a realm defined by ideas, words, and documents—precisely the areas where generative artificial intelligence (GAI) demonstrates one of its greatest strengths. According to its proponents, GAI could well provide a range of legal services at lower cost and with greater efficiency. Still, radical digital transformation in this domain must be approached thoughtfully to ensure that the technologies bolster rather than curtail the interpersonal skills that define the legal profession, including creativity, communication, and persuasion in complex and polarizing contexts; negotiation and other methods of dispute resolution to meet the client's needs in an efficient, less expensive, or less emotionally draining way; and leadership to manage disequilibrium in law firms and mobilize individuals to work collectively and cooperatively for common purposes as they address adaptive and technical challenges.[20]

In the scholarly literature, there is a consensus that LLMs can perform basic tasks at the lower end of the service pyramid with a reasonable level of quality.[21] Yet problems can arise in the sense that legal work frequently involves handling confidential information, managing sensitive client relationships, and making difficult decisions with far-reaching personal, corporate, and societal consequences.[22] Moreover, AI-assisted content creation can intensify competition and drive down fees by offering easily accessible and low-cost alternatives to well-established service providers.[23] In addition, concerns remain that in the near future, only a select few well-resourced entities will have access to the most advanced and best-functioning AI tools,[24] potentially deepening the market polarization[25] and leading to a "two-tier" society.[26]

Broadening the picture, it has now been a decade since the publication of the landmark study, *The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerization?*,[27] which prophesied the potential disappearance of nearly half of all jobs in the United States. The echoes of such narrative are pervasive.[28] The authors—drawing on insights from AI experts—estimated the likelihood that over 700 occupations would be impacted and eventually replaced by advanced technologies, including AI-driven applications. They concluded that approximately 47% of all jobs, particularly in logistics, production, and administrative support, were highly susceptible to "computerization." In hindsight, this prediction was inaccurate. The authors overestimated the speed and intensity with which machines will replace human workers.

When certain tedious, mind-numbing tasks are automated, the capacity that is freed up can be redirected toward completing other quotidian or unusual tasks more efficiently, leading to a positive ripple effect on productivity

[19]Frank Pasquale, "A Rule of Persons, Not Machines: The Limits of Legal Automation," *George Washington Law Review* 87, no. 1 (2019); Christopher Markou and Simon Deakin, "Ex Machina Lex: Exploring the Limits of Legal Computability," in *Is Law Computable?: Critical Perspectives on Law and Artificial Intelligence*, ed. Christopher Markou and Simon Deakin (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2020); Mireille Hildebrandt, "Law as Computation in the Era of Artificial Legal Intelligence: Speaking Law to the Power of Statistics," *University of Toronto Law Journal* 68, no. 1 (2018): 12–35.

[20]The leadership style implied here is adaptive leadership, as developed by Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky. See Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Brighton, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2009). In legal scholarship, this approach has been adopted in some law schools (e.g., Harvard Law School) and its general guidelines have been promoted as relevant to the legal education of the future. See Scott A. Westfahl and David B. Wilkins, "The Leadership Imperative: A Collaborative Approach to Professional Development in the Global Age of More for Less," *Stanford Law Review* 69, no. 6 (2017): 1707.

[21]Jeff Neal, "The Legal Profession in 2024: AI, Harvard Law School's David Wilkins Says That Generative Artificial Intelligence Has the Potential to Transform the Practice of Law," Harvard Law Today, February 14, 2024, https://hls.harvard.edu/today/harvard-law-expert-explains-how-ai-may-transform-the-legal-profession-in-2024/.

[22]International Bar Association (IBA) and Center for AI and Digital Policy (CAIDP), *The Future Is Now: Artificial Intelligence and the Legal Profession* (London: International Bar Association, 2024), https://www.ibanet.org/document?id=The-future-is%20now-AI-and-the-legal-profession-report.

[23]Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael Osborne, "Generative AI and the Future of Work: A Reappraisal," *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2023): 161.

[24]Ashwin Telang, "The Promise and Peril of AI Legal Services to Equalize Justice," *JOLT Digest*, March 14, 2023, https://jolt.law.harvard.edu/digest/the-promise-and-peril-of-ai-legal-services-to-equalize-justice.

[25]Neal, "The Legal Profession in 2024."

[26]Simon Johnson and Daron Acemoglu, *Power and Progress: Our Thousand-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity* (London: Hachette UK, 2023), 336.

[27]Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael A. Osborne, "The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerisation?," *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 114 (2017): 254–280.

[28]World Economic Forum and Accenture, *Jobs of Tomorrow: Large Language Models and Jobs,* WEF White Paper, September 18, 2023, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Jobs_of_Tomorrow_Generative_AI_2023.pdf.

However, one might argue that the study inadvertently shaped a new scholarly and public perspective on the impacts of automation. Its primary flaw was the failure to view jobs as bundles of tasks, only some of which can be automated. When certain tedious, mind-numbing tasks are automated, the capacity that is freed up can be redirected toward completing other quotidian or unusual tasks more efficiently, leading to a positive ripple effect on productivity. Applying the trends observed in one group to entirely different groups ignores both the principle of comparative advantage and the social organization of the production process. This suggests that the ongoing transformation is better understood in terms of the changes to the structure, organization, and content of work relationships rather than the direct impacts on the total number of jobs.

Those who can make their presence felt, build meaningful relationships, inspire others, and persuade with confidence are those poised to thrive in the age of AI

Building on the inaccurate prophecy mentioned earlier, it appears that much of the current debate leans toward oversimplification and lacks nuance. GAI has undeniable potential to extend automation beyond repetitive manual tasks to more complex roles requiring expertise and creativity. This introduces uncertainty for many occupations, which may either benefit from AI-driven augmentation or face obsolescence due to increased automation and eventual replacement.[29] Researchers contend that GAI can also streamline tasks for less-skilled workers in contexts in which roles requiring in-person communication will gain value. As Arthur Glenberg and Cameron Robert Jones argue, those who can make their presence felt, build meaningful relationships, inspire others, and persuade with confidence are those poised to thrive in the age of AI.[30] This characterization perfectly encapsulates the core attributes of what it means to be a lawyer both today and in the long run.

There are also two unspoken truths. Research increasingly highlights how most occupations are being "augmented"[31] rather than fully automated,[32] suggesting productivity gains from automating specific tasks while continuing to rely on human involvement. As Ethan Mollick explains in *Co-intelligence: Living and Working with AI*,[33] tools such as calculators free their users from basic or mundane tasks, allowing them to focus on higher-order problem-solving. In this regard, high-discretion augmentation can enhance autonomy and creativity, whereas low-discretion augmentation can erode skills and agency.[34] Moreover, the risk of job displacement is mitigated by the fact that companies will probably maintain human oversight to mitigate and prevent AI errors, while the use of GAI will likely be restricted in high-stakes situations.[35]

The adoption of AI at work raises a range of complex questions regarding the impacts of such systems on productivity. While surveys provide mixed results, early indications show that 77% of employees who use GAI report decreased productivity and an increased workload[36]—a finding that has prompted varied reactions. For those familiar with the realities of workplace automation, however, this outcome is unsurprising. According to 2024 Nobel laureate Daron Acemoglu, "[GenAI] will prove to be just 'so-so automation' of the type that displaces workers but fails to deliver huge productivity improvements,"[37] as in the example of self-service checkout kiosks "that do not work well and do

[29]Matteo Adamoli et al., *Policy Brief: Generative AI, Jobs, and Policy Response* (Montreal: GPAI, 2023).

[30]Arthur Glenberg and Cameron Robert Jones, "It Takes a Body to Understand the World – Why ChatGPT and Other Language AIs Don't Know What They're Saying," *The Conversation*, April 6, 2023, https://theconversation.com/it-takes-a-body-to-understand-the-world-why-chatgpt-and-other-language-ais-dont-know-what-theyre-saying-201280.

[31]Sebastian Raisch and Sebastian Krakowski, "Artificial Intelligence and Management: The Automation–Augmentation Paradox," *Academy of Management Review* 46 (2021): 192.

[32]Pawel Gmyrek, Janine Berg and David Bescond, *Generative AI and Jobs: A Global Analysis of Potential Effects on Job Quantity and Quality*, ILO Working Paper No. 96 (Geneva: ILO, 2023).

[33]Ethan Mollick, *Co-Intelligence: Living and Working with AI* (New York, NY: Portfolio/Penguin, 2024).

[34]Arisa Shollo et al., "Shifting ML Value Creation Mechanisms: A Process Model of ML Value Creation," *Journal of Strategic Information Systems* 31 (2022): 101734.

[35]Frey and Osborne, "Generative AI and the Future of Work," 161.

[36]Kelly Monahan and Gabby Burlacu, "From Burnout to Balance: AI-Enhanced Work Models," Upwork, July 23, 2024, https://www.upwork.com/research/ai-enhanced-work-models.

[37]Daron Acemoglu, "Get Ready for the Great AI Disappointment," *Wired*, January 10, 2024, https://www.wired.com/story/get-ready-for-the-great-ai-

Increasing instances of AI hallucinations—LLMs fabricating non-existent precedents, providing phony information, and going off the rails—have helped the legal industry recognize the primarily supportive or complementary role these tools can play rather than serving as a replacement for human professionals.

not improve service quality for customers."[38] In short, the rose-tinted predictions concerning AI's grand achievements face the risk of being swept aside by the technology's underwhelming performance and dangerous results.[39]

Moreover, the initial reactions of bewilderment and excitement have given way to a more balanced assessment. While advancements continue to unfold, events have overtaken the most apocalyptic predictions,[40] with those foreseeing the mass extinction of the legal profession having spoken too hastily.[41] Increasing instances of AI hallucinations—LLMs fabricating non-existent precedents,[42] providing phony information, and going off the rails—have helped the legal industry recognize the primarily supportive or complementary role these tools can play rather than serving as a replacement for human professionals.[43]

This reinforces the argument that any technological artifact must be viewed through an organizational lens. The focus is on how a digital solution is integrated into existing structures, received by both workers and clients, and strategically employed to deliver better outcomes.

Ultimately, progress relies on human ingenuity in restructuring work dynamics, flows, and roles to facilitate effective automation.[44] The success of digital advancements heavily depends on how work processes and organizational structures are designed to integrate such advancements effectively.[45] In some cases, outdated managerial practices and poor applications of digital tools lead to negative outcomes, both for individuals—who may experience frustration—and for companies, given that these practices increase friction and create bottlenecks. Following a critical evaluation, scholars argue that there has been insufficient consideration of whether the tasks that can be automated align with the core values and the challenges of the legal profession.[46]

Having addressed the role of technology and its integration within organizational structures, we will now turn to the concept of innovation. More specifically, we will explore what is meant when we talk about innovation and how it can reshape the legal profession, driving change and redefining practices.

[38]Johnson and Acemoglu, *Power and Progress*, 312.

[39]Daron Acemoglu and Pascual Restrepo, "Automation and New Tasks: How Technology Displaces and Reinstates Labor," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33, no. 2 (2019): 3–30.

[40]Harry Booth, "Has AI Progress Really Slowed Down?," *Time*, November 21, 2024, https://time.com/7178328/is-ai-progress-slowing-down/.

[41]Ken Crutchfield, "AI Won't Replace Lawyers—But It Will Change How They Work," *Above the Law*, March 26, 2024, https://abovethelaw.com/2024/03/ai-wont-replace-lawyers-but-it-will-change-how-they-work/.

[42]Benjamin Wiser, "Here's What Happens When Your Lawyer Uses ChatGPT," *New York Times*, May 27, 2023.

[43]Notably, LexisNexis and Westlaw have adopted GAI technologies—namely, Lexis + AI Legal Assistant and CoCounsel 2.0, respectively. Their research capabilities and document drafting options, and their summarization potential, are impressive considering the current stage of GAI.

[44]Frey and Osborne, "Generative AI and the Future of Work," 161.

[45]Aiha Nguyen and Alexandra Mateescu, *Generative AI and Labor: Power, Hype, and Value at Work* (New York, NY: Data & Society, 2024), https://datasociety.net/library/generative-ai-and-labor/.

[46]Dana Remus and Frank Levy, "Can Robots Be Lawyers? Computers, Lawyers, and the Practice of Law," *Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics* 30 (2017): 501.

3. Innovation in legal practice

Exploring technological developments in terms of legal practice is often framed as introducing innovation into the legal profession. The link between technology and innovation is, however, not to be taken for granted. In this section, we will analyze what is meant when we talk about innovation. We will also suggest that innovation is a rich and capacious concept that cannot be reduced to technological advances in how lawyers provide services.

Innovation is a contested concept or "hot topic buzzword."[47] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), the term was introduced around the mid-16th century and refers to "the alteration of what is established by the introduction of new elements or forms."[48] In another connotation, innovation is defined as "a change in the nature or fashion of anything."[49] In both senses, innovation gravitates toward concepts such as newness, change, and the alteration of something existing. Unsurprisingly, it evokes disruption, transformation, and revolution.[50] In short, innovation transforms what already exists, turning it into something new or different.

[47] O'Leary, *Legal Innovation & Technology*, 15.

[48] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "innovation (n.), sense 1.a," June 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4455287620.

[49] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "innovation (n.), sense 1.a."

[50] The term "disruptive innovation" was coined in 1995 in the *Harvard Business Review* in the context of business competition. Disruption is described as a process in which a smaller business with fewer resources and less participation in the market can challenge an incumbent business. Importantly, disruption is a process focused initially on small-scale experiments. See Clayton M. Christensen, Michael E. Raynor and Rory McDonald, "What Is Disruptive Innovation?," *Harvard Business Review* 93 (2015): 44–53, https://www.hbs.edu/ris/Publication%20Files/McDonald_Rory_A04_What%20is%20Disruptive%20Innovation_182498a6-5391-4916-a38b-d14932db41a6.pdf.

Figure 1. Temporal evolution of Google search interest in "innovation" and "artificial intelligence"

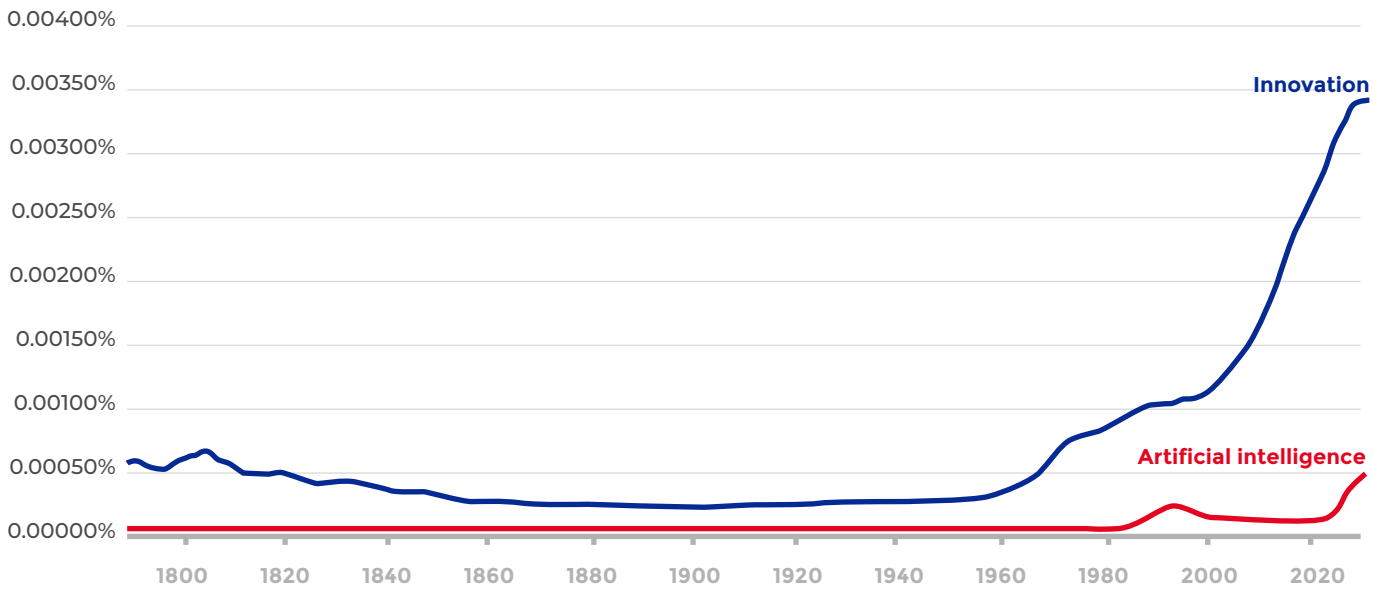


Illustration: Google Ngram (innovation, artificial intelligence).

According to the Google Ngram, usage of the word "innovation" in Google's search engine has increased dramatically since the start of the new millennium. Today, its usage is more than seven times greater than that of "artificial intelligence." This highlights the pervasive nature of innovation and underscores why it is not overstating things to describe it as one of the words capturing the ethos of this century. After all, as mentioned above, innovation transforms what exists into something new or different, and our ever-changing world, our human dynamics, and our ecosystem's alteration have forced us to think anew and develop novel categories and ways of doing things to adapt to our surroundings.

If we extend the concept of innovation to the realm of legal practice, it transforms into a tool for reshaping or redefining the very essence of the profession. The legal industry is typically associated with precedent, tradition, authority, predictability, and continuity, concepts that are not generally found in the vicinity of innovation. As David Wilkins, the Lester Kissel Professor of Law at Harvard Law School and Faculty Director of the Center on the Legal Profession, put it, "Law is a lagging—not a leading—indicator of change. After all, in the common-law world, you can't say anything new unless you have proven definitively that someone else already said it. That's called precedent!"[51] This raises a few critical questions. Is the legal profession currently undergoing a period of significant innovation? If so, what elements are driving the change or redefining the existing practices?

Imagine working at a law firm 50 years ago, tasked with gathering and analyzing information for a new case. As Dyane O'Leary highlights in *Legal Innovation & Technology: A Practical Skills Guide for the Modern Lawyer* (2022), legal work was quite different back then than it is today. For instance, you would have needed to sift through hard-copy documents stored in brown boxes to locate relevant information, marking important pages and covering privileged information with white tape as necessary. Nowadays, you can use e-discovery software or GAI tools to swiftly identify relevant documents and automatically redact privileged information.[52]

[51]Center on the Legal Profession at Harvard Law School, "Marketplace of Ideas: What Innovation Is – and Isn't," *The Practice*, January, 2019, https://clp.law.harvard.edu/knowledge-hub/magazine/issues/adaptive-innovation/marketplace-of-ideas/.

[52]O'Leary, *Legal Innovation & Technology*.

Additionally, 50 years ago, if you wanted to communicate with a client, you might have had to book a flight or send a letter, whereas now you can meet virtually via Zoom or even provide a case portal for clients to access information and updates. For research and writing purposes, you would have relied on physical books or dictated notes to an assistant. Now, you can use jurisdictional analytics to predict a particular judge's likelihood of granting a motion based on data or generate documents by providing prompts to chatbots.[53]

Lawyers are still required to master the same skills, but their methods of applying those skills have evolved. Tasks such as document review, information collection, legal research, analysis, writing, and client communication were essential in the past and remain so today, which reflects what we call the "technological continuity thesis" in terms of innovation. Indeed, while innovation has not changed the fundamental tasks lawyers perform, it has transformed the tools and mediums used to carry out those tasks. This indicates that legal tasks remain the same, giving rise to the continuity thesis. By contrast, the "technological discontinuity thesis," as we term it, adopts the view that innovation has changed and will continue to fundamentally change the nature of legal work and lawyers' core tasks. For example, instead of writing memos, lawyers may draft legal prompts for GAI, while instead of directly communicating with clients, they may develop chatbots that are capable of answering clients' queries about their cases. In the future, law students who score highly in exams may have better tools for designing powerful GAI instead of more knowledge about the law or how to perform a fine-tuned legal analysis. This highlights a profound discontinuity in lawyers' tasks.[54]

Beyond the continuity and discontinuity theses, there are two perspectives on whether innovation, which is typically associated with technology, necessarily involves using, accessing, and implementing technological tools or whether it can occur independently of technology, even if it is often linked to it. The first view is that technology is just one path among many (or a tool) for achieving innovation. In this sense, what matters most is whether technology is useful for solving a specific problem in the legal profession. As Jodi Goldstein, former Executive Director of Harvard Innovation Labs, notes, "[a] tool, process, or system is innovative if it is more useful—viz more cost-effective, more time-efficient, simpler and/or easier for users to navigate, or otherwise able to produce better results—than what people were using before."[55] It is not the technological dimension itself that makes something innovative; rather, it is what the technology enables—that is, making work processes and tasks easier and more efficient for those addressing problems in legal practice.

The second view is that technology is a typical path toward achieving innovation and progress. As O'Leary states,

> Innovation and technology often go hand in hand, but they need not. Typing on a keyboard uses technology but it's not innovative (at least not today—it was a different story decades ago). Restructuring a case management workflow in a corporate legal department might be innovative but it need not require technology. Technology might be one path to innovation but it's not the only one… Paired together, though, innovation and technology can create forward-looking improvements, whether by creating efficiencies that affect the bottom line or by improving processes that affect lawyer well-being. It's the mindset not to be satisfied with the status quo where greater opportunities lie.[56]

[53]Among the providers of jurisdictional analytics are LexisNexis, Premonition Analytics, and Bloomberg Litigation Analytics, to name a few. On jurisdictional use of predictive analytics, see Ashley Hallene and Jeffrey M. Allen, "Using AI for Predictive Analytics in Litigation," American Bar Association, September 16, 2023,https://www.americanbar.org/groups/senior_lawyers/resources/voice-of-experience/2024-october/using-ai-for-predictive-analytics-in-litigation/. One of the main criticisms leveled against jurisdictional predictive analytics is the shift from reason to statistics when making legal decisions, which will likely have an impact on clients, corporations, and society at large. Additionally, the role of lawyers will be transformed from decision-making and relying on practical wisdom when navigating legal materials to serving as statisticians analyzing data trends. See Kelly Choo, Deaundre Espejo and Duranka Jayasinghe, "Predictive Judicial Analytics: Implications for Rule of Law and the Legal Profession," *Sydney University Law and Society* (blog), September 25, 2020, https://www.suls.org.au/citations-blog/2020/9/25/predictive-judicial-analytics-implications-for-rule-of-law-and-the-legal-profession; Varun Magesh et al., "Hallucination-Free? Assessing the Reliability of Leading AI Legal Research Tools," Preprint, arXiv, 2024-06-06, https://dho.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/Legal_RAG_Hallucinations.pdf.

[54] The technological discontinuity thesis even extends to legal education. A recent pedagogical example presented by John Bliss, an expert in AI and a professor at Denver Law School, illustrates how his students created a custom-made GAI for presenting law school exams and conducting legal analysis. While the results were mixed, the tailor-made GAI honed its legal analysis and legal writing skills to the point that in a civil procedure exam, the bot's exam ranked fourth best in a class of 70 students. In future years, students will be more knowledgeable about designing bots to perform high-quality legal analysis and honing exam-taking skills. "While law schools today may house only a handful of experienced AI users," concludes Bliss, "tomorrow's cohort—composed of current college and high-school students notoriously well-versed in generative AI—could arrive as full-fledged Jedis." John Bliss, "The Rise of the AI Jedis: Student Innovations in Legal AI Testing," *Empirical Studies of AI Lawyering* (blog), August 28, 2024, https://ai-lawyering.blog/2024/08/28/the-rise-of-the-ai-jedis-student-innovations-in-legal-ai-testing/.

[55]Center on the Legal Profession at Harvard Law School, "Marketplace of Ideas: What Innovations Is—and Isn´t"

[56]O'Leary, *Legal Innovation & Technology*, 16.

According to this perspective, technology is one route to innovation—not the only one and certainly not a necessary one. However, this view does lean toward coupling technology with innovation, given that it can improve efficiency (leading to more profit or to the same profit with less work) and enhance lawyers' well-being by saving time, improving work quality, and delegating undesirable or menial tasks to technology. Innovation is not solely reliant on technology; it encompasses other means. In this sense, innovation emerges during the creation of new norms, legal concepts, procedures, and methods of dispute resolution. For instance, innovation occurred when lawyers adopted arbitration, mediation, or med–arb as an alternative to courtroom litigation, even if the technological infrastructure remained the same. Moreover, innovation was evident when the legal concepts of a corporation, a trust, and human rights developed, to name just a few. Furthermore, innovation also bubbles within legal fields, such as the transformations seen in family law through public litigation and reproductive technology. As Haim Sandberg ponders, "Can anyone minimize the innovative value of ideas such as the Ten Commandments?"[57]

In line with the first view, innovation arises as a response to the need for solutions to cope with and adapt to challenging environments. However, such solutions—which do not necessarily have to be technological in nature—often face backlash, either from individuals who are resistant to change or from those who benefit from maintaining the status quo. Others instrumentalize the discourse on innovation as a disguise for promoting market concentration, limiting competition, or eroding practical wisdom.[58]

By contrast, O'Leary argues that while innovation is not solely concerned with technology, technology can, and typically does, drive "forward-looking improvements" and push beyond the status quo of legal practice. Indeed, she suggests that technology may be the most effective way to achieve "forward-looking improvements" in the legal domain, enhancing the quality of work and its efficiency in terms of the time and cost. In other words even if technology is not considered the necessary means of achieving innovation, it is deeply rooted in our professional imagination as what counts as an innovative practice and a tool for achieving efficiency, quality, and well-being in the profession.[59]

Innovation emerges during the creation of new norms, legal concepts, procedures, and methods of dispute resolution. For instance, innovation occurred when lawyers adopted arbitration, mediation, or med–arb as an alternative to courtroom litigation, even if the technological infrastructure remained the same

Following the emergence of GAI, innovation in legal practice is increasingly associated with the use of GAI tools. In a LexisNexis survey on GAI in the legal profession, lawyers primarily report using GAI to enhance efficiency (61%) and streamlining work (46%). If GAI is viewed as among the latest innovations in legal practice, such findings suggest that efficiency and legal research are vital areas in which lawyers seek to implement innovative technological tools. Yet most respondents express concerns about the ethical implications of GAI as an innovative legal practice (87% of lawyers and 91% of law students).[60] Notably, the survey highlights that according to the technological approach to innovation, GAI is widely used for efficiency and research enhancement despite concerns about its ethical risks. These survey results exemplify O'Leary's view that technology and innovation tend to go together even if they do not have to despite the ethical concerns of lawyers and law school students. Other approaches to legal innovation focus more on cultivating a mindset than on introducing new tools and technologies. For example, Vishal Agnihotri, Chief Knowledge Officer at the law firm Hinshaw & Culbertson

[57]Haim Sandberg, "What is Legal Innovation?," *University of Illinois Law Review* (2021): 63, 68, https://illinoislawrev.web.illinois.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Sandberg.pdf

[58]For an account of how innovations in the form of GAI affect practical wisdom and the capacity to sharpen human judgment, see Nir Eisiovits and Dan Feldman, "AI and Phronesis," *Moral Philosophy and Politics* 9 (2022): 181.

[59]O'Leary, *Legal Innovation & Technology*, 17.

[60]LexisNexis, Generative AI & the Legal Profession Survey Report, 7-8 (2023).

LLP, argues that innovation requires recognition that long-standing practices may not be effective in addressing today's challenges of business acceleration and fierce competition. Agnihotri explains that law firms, which have traditionally been reliant on the billable hour model, often view non-billable activities as unproductive.[61] However, some firms have begun to innovate by dedicating substantial time and resources to management, organization, and technology, despite these hours not being considered productive. Gunderson Dettmer, a Silicon Valley-based law firm, exemplifies the implementation of this innovative mindset. This firm became one of the first U.S. law firms to develop an internal GAI model—conveniently called ChatGD. Joe Green, Chief Innovation Officer at Gunderson Dettmer, explains that the need to counsel clients in the AI world nudged the firm to get its hands "dirty" by developing a proprietary GAI system, which was trained on years of the firm's own documents and templates to ensure privacy, accuracy, and relevance. ChatGD enables lawyers to upload documents, ask complex questions, and adjust legal clauses automatically, such as contract risk reallocation or fine-tuning the duties between contractual parties.[62]

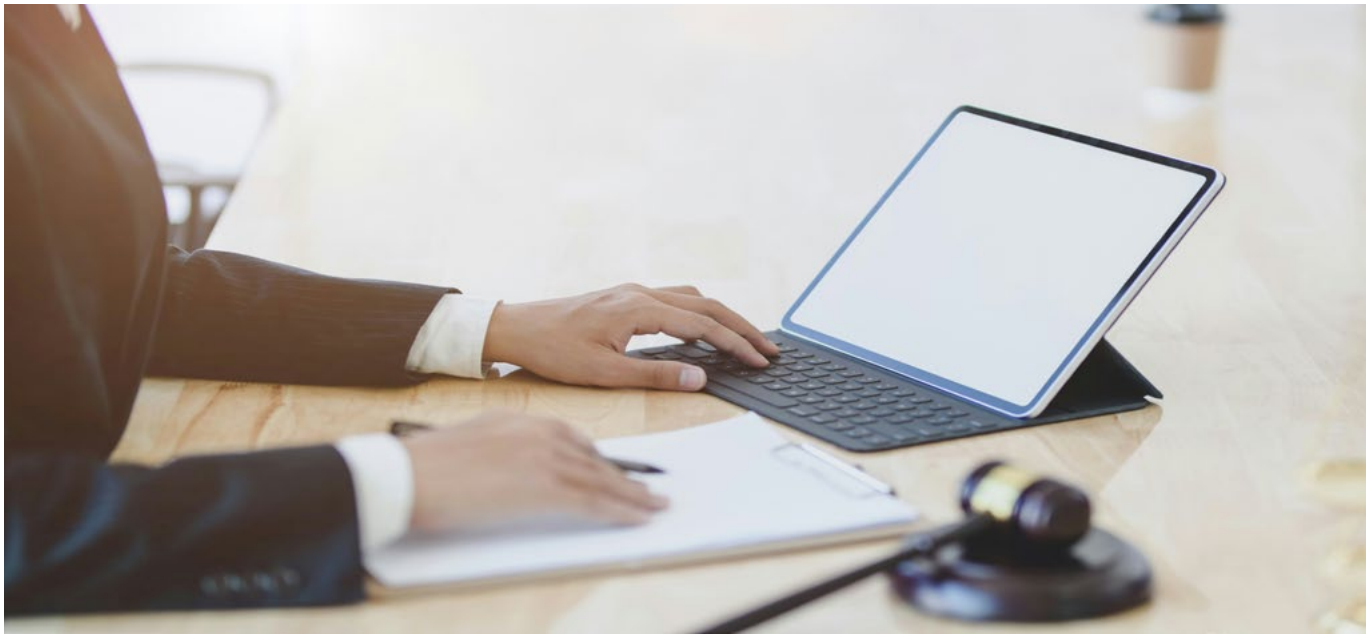
Unlike ChatGPT and other GAI models, wherein hallucinations are common due to unknown or unreliable information sources, ChatGD is built on a foundation of verifiable and largely accurate data. This represents a breakthrough in innovation.[63] Rather than using technology to merely replicate existing processes, ChatGD demonstrates adaptability to the evolving demands of legal practice. Furthermore, it invites a re-evaluation of organizational practices, such as the billable hour model, which may inhibit innovation in the profession. Ultimately, with this approach, innovation is not just about improving efficiency but also about redefining how law firms can think outside the box by creating tailored tools for meeting specific needs and rethinking management and organizational practices to foster more innovation. Together, organizational culture and opportunity cultivate an innovative mindset. To change technology, people's minds must first be changed. Innovation starts in the mind and heart, and only later does it reach technology.

Michele DeStefano champions yet another prominent perspective in legal innovation studies. We will refer to her approach as the "upheaval innovation approach," following the title of her book, *Legal upheaval: A guide to creativity, collaboration, and innovation* (2018). DeStefano maintains that lawyers should adapt and develop their mindset, skill set, and behavior

[61]Vishal Agnihotri, "Cultivating an innovation mindset," in Alex Davis, *The Future of Legal Innovation* (United Kingdom: Globe Law and Business Ltd, 2021), 35-41.

[62]Bob Ambrogi, "Gunderson Dettmer Launches ChatGD; First U.S.-Based Firm to Develop Proprietary Internal Generative AI App," *LawSites* (blog), August 9, 2023, https://www.lawnext.com/2023/08/gunderson-dettmer-launches-chatgd-first-u-s-based-firm-to-develop-proprietary-internal-generative-ai-app.html.

[63]Agnihotri, "Cultivating an innovation mindset," 35.



to respond to challenges in the professional setting, the market environment, and the client's desires. Innovation operates on two levels: the services lawyers provide and the methods they use to deliver those services. Innovating the *how* requires transforming lawyers' mindsets, skills, and behaviors—not just their end products. This means, for DeStefano, that three transformations need to take place—namely, a shift from lawyers as expert advisors to lawyers as innovation advisors; a shift from providing services to clients to providing experiences; and a shift from traditional notions of leadership, often associated with authority and vertical relationships, to adaptive leadership coupled with technological awareness.[64] Ultimately, the upheaval innovation approach entails changing not just what lawyers do but also how they do it in terms of client relationships, internal teamwork, and organizational and leadership dynamics.

Additionally, DeStefano approaches innovation as more than a conceptual problem and legal practice enhancement. She also explores *who* the innovators are. Hence, she outlines a typology of innovators based on the scale of their disruption and the level where they operate vis-a-vis the legal domain:

- **Intrapreneur**: Someone who creates innovation within an organization or law firm (e.g., Gunderson Dettmer).
- **Entrepreneur**: Someone who "forges a solo path to build something new"[65] (e.g., new law firm models such as Riverview Law, Modria Technologies, or Fondia, or legal start-ups such as Neota Logic).
- **Extrapreneur**: Someone who chooses to apply their talents for innovation both within an organization and externally to effect change in the wider profession (e.g., Fuse, which is Allen & Overy's incubator, or LawWithoutWalls[66]).[67]

This typology is helpful because it indicates the locus where an innovator aims to create change. However, additional frameworks are required to understand the types of innovations being sought. Thus, DeStefano complements her typology with the "Lawyer Skills Delta" model, which is illustrated as a three-layer pyramid. The pyramid's base is legal expertise, which consists of core skills such as research, writing, and analysis, paired with legal knowledge. The next level includes concrete, organizational, service, and technology-related (COST) skills. To be effective, lawyers need to master managing projects, communicating effectively, mentoring subordinates, and providing feedback to colleagues.[68] Such skills allow lawyers to deliver legal services, adapting their tone and approach to their client's needs as required. The second level focuses on the so-called (and misnamed) "soft" skills, which would be better termed "hard" or "core" skills due to the difficulty of mastering them and the focus on communication and emotional dynamics. These "hard or core skills" include problem-solving, empathy, a growth mindset, diversity, intellectual humility, trust, cultural competency, self-awareness, and collaboration.[69] DeStefano notes that clients increasingly expect lawyers to work across disciplines and to collaborate with other firms to identify not only risks but also opportunities.[70] Finally, the top level of the pyramid is what she calls "innovation," which involves the skills required for collaborative problem-solving and advancing work beyond traditional practices.

> The word innovation may conjure up images of the scientist alone in his/her lab when along comes a Eureka moment. But these ahas are rare; instead, innovation is far more likely to come from collaborative, creative problem solving where one person's ideas impact another person's ideas that impact another person's ideas…Many clients ask for innovation indirectly: they may simply ask for what they call the "soft skills" that enable innovation and hope to catch lightning in a bottle.[71]

[64]Michele DeStefano, *Legal Upheaval: A Guide to Creativity, Collaboration, and Innovation in Law* (Chicago, IL: American Bar Association, 2018), 20.

[65]DeStefano, *Legal Upheaval*, 25.

[66]LawWithoutWalls is DeStefano's innovative intervention in the legal profession, bringing human-centered design into law.

[67]DeStefano, *Legal Upheaval*, 25.

[68]DeStefano, *Legal Upheaval*, 37. On feedback, see Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen, *Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback-Well* (New York, NY: Penguin USA, 2014). On communication, see Philip Meyer, *Storytelling for Lawyers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Antonin Scalia and Bryan Garner, *Making Your Case: The Art of Persuading Judges* (Eagan, MN: West Publishing, 2008).

[69]Carrie Menkel-Meadow, "Toward Another View of Legal Negotiation: The Structure of Problem Solving," *UCLA Law Review* 31 (1984): 754; Robert H. Mnookin, Scott Peppet and Andrew Tulumello, *Beyond Winning: Negotiating to Create Value in Deals and Disputes* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2000).

[70]DeStefano, *Legal Upheaval*, 39.

[71]DeStefano, *Legal Upheaval*, 39.

Clients are increasingly seeking law firms that are client-centered, experience-oriented, and capable of fostering an innovation-driven mindset and culture throughout their interactions. According to this model of innovation, what clients value most is personalized advice that is intricately linked to a culture and organization of innovation. Thus, innovation is closely associated with the second layer of collaborative problem-solving, suggesting that without this layer, innovation cannot occur. However, the concept of innovation in this context still appears vague. Aside from its collaborative and inventive traits, it remains unclear *how* innovation happens and how we can tell *when* it happens.

Law and innovation studies can be separated into two distinct epistemological fields—that is, the legal architecture required to foster innovation in society, economy, and politics and the skills and infrastructure required to enhance and innovate in terms of legal service

Lastly, another approach to legal innovation is outlined in the preface to Antoine Masson and Gavin Robinson's book, *Mapping Legal Innovation* (2021), where Christopher Katz, a legal futurist, distinguishes the law for innovation (LFI), which is a branch of legal innovation devoted to the study of legal rules and their effect on innovation itself, and innovation for law (IFL), which is concerned with enhancing the delivery of legal services and products.[72] This distinction highlights how law and innovation studies can be separated into two distinct epistemological fields—that is, the legal architecture required to foster innovation in society, economy, and politics and the skills and infrastructure required to enhance and innovate in terms of legal service.

Innovation can be predicated on the creation of new roles that lawyers will adopt in the near future, distinct from litigators, transactional lawyers, and legal academics. According to Richard Susskind, technology will bring about (and actually has brought) new roles for lawyers, such as legal data scientists, online dispute resolution practitioners, legal risk managers, and legal technologists, to name a few.[73] These new roles will foster and complement experimentation in some law firms, creating innovation hubs and incubators of ideas concerning legal practice (e.g., NextLaw Labs, Allen & Overy's Fuse). Therefore, new roles will likely cultivate an innovative culture and innovative organizational dynamics, which will, in turn, develop new spaces within firms to promote brainstorming and novel interactions, generating new ideas for providing legal services and addressing legal problems.

These different approaches to innovation highlight the fact that legal innovation is a diverse and fragmentary field, which is currently developing in many directions simultaneously. The table below summarizes some of the approaches to legal innovation.

Our initial hypothesis, however, takes into account these common approaches to innovation and also partially challenges them. Our study is targeted toward thinking about the development of a new set of skills, practices, and technological inputs to deliver efficient and legally oriented solutions to address clients' challenges. In short, innovation includes both technological tools and interpersonal competences. Innovation entails adapting, refining, and creating new technological tools to render legal practice more efficient or provide a better quality of life for legal professionals. It also means adapting, refining, and developing new interpersonal competences to improve lawyers' communicational skills (e.g., persuasion, active listening, empathy); dispute resolution, negotiation, and facilitation skills; and ethical and leadership skills.

[72]Antoine Masson and Gavin Robinson, eds., *Mapping Legal Innovation: Trends and Perspectives* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2021).

[73]Susskind, *Tomorrow's Lawyers*. For a detailed account of what an online dispute resolution (ODR) practitioner and program does in one of the first U.S. states to implement ODR in courts, see Deno Himonas, "Utah's Online Dispute Resolution Program," *Dickinson Law Review* 122 (2018): 875.

Table 1. Comparative overview of innovation approaches in legal practice

Approach	Description	Goal
Discontinuity thesis	Technology is one path among many toward achieving innovation.	Cost efficiency and work quality improvement through technological and non-technological means.
Continuity thesis	Technology is a necessary means for innovation.	Cost efficiency and work quality improvement.
Innovative mindset	Innovation is rooted in the mindset, not in whether technology is used or not.	Cultivating a mindset that perceives services as ideas for creating value through creating new and adaptable solutions to address human needs.
Upheaval innovation approach	Innovation is a combination of identities (e.g., innovators) and skills (e.g., innovation pyramid). **Innovators**: • *Intrapreneur:* Someone who creates innovation within the organization or law firm. • *Entrepreneur:* Someone who "forges a solo path to build something new."[74] • *Extrapreneur:* Someone who chooses to apply their talents for innovation within an organization and also beyond it to the whole practice. **Innovation pyramid:** • Legal expertise (legal writing, research, and analysis). • Organizational, communication, and technology-related skills (managing projects, communicating effectively, mentoring, and giving feedback). • Innovation (collaborative problem-solving).	Developing an adaptive mindset in the legal profession involves building and integrating expertise, organizational and communication skills, technological proficiency, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities.
Law for innovation and innovation for law approach	Law for innovation studies rules and principles to understand the effects of law on innovation. Innovation for law means enhancing the delivery of legal services and products.	Diagnose the normative drivers of and obstacles to the promotion of innovation. Develop the tools and infrastructure necessary to deliver enhanced legal service to clients.
Legal innovation as new legal roles	Innovation is the emergence of new roles within legal organizations and firms.	Develop new positions or roles to respond to changes in the legal profession, society, and the economy.

[74]DeStefano, Legal Upheaval, 25.

4. Interpersonal skills or competencies for lawyers?

Innovation is a broader concept that encompasses not only technological advancements, such as GAI, blockchain, and information systems, but also competencies, which involve refining essential skills for 21st-century lawyers, including communication skills (e.g., oral expression, active listening, persuasion), dispute resolution and facilitation skills (e.g., negotiation, consensus building, mediation), and leadership and ethical-decision making skills (e.g., weighing moral risks in legal decision-making, calibrating emotions for sound decision-making, mobilizing organizations toward shared goals, addressing problems through multi-perspective approaches). We term this approach "innovation as competencies."

The focus on expanding skills in the legal profession is not entirely new. Since the 1990s, the legal profession has been re-evaluating the essential competencies that lawyers should master in practice. The MacCrate Commission Report,[75] for example, identifies 10 fundamental skills for legal professionals.[76] Some of these skills are unique to the legal field (e.g., legal analysis, legal research, alternative dispute resolution), whereas others, such as communication, counseling, negotiation, and ethical decision-making, are also applicable to other disciplines. This shift reflects an expansion—or innovation—in legal practice, including competencies beyond traditional legal skills. Notably, the MacCrate Commission Report offers detailed guidance on skills such as problem-solving, communication, negotiation, and ethical decision-making. For example, problem-solving includes refining the diagnostic lens to spot specific issues, generating alternative strategies, and creating actionable plans.[77] Moreover, communication involves understanding the message recipient's perspective and employing effective communication methods to influence and persuade the recipient's behaviors and modulate their beliefs. Additionally, the MacCrate Commission Report aims to transform both legal practice and legal education by broadening and teaching the skills and values required for the profession in the 21st century. This call for innovation is not about introducing new technologies; rather, it is about expanding lawyers' competencies. Innovation, therefore, is also an expansion of soft and core skills. As some scholars argue, "[t]he twenty-first-century lawyer must not only encompass a mastery of the law but build competency in the areas of technology and emotional intelligence as well."[78]

The development of new technologies and the adoption of innovative approaches necessitate the acquisition of new skills and the definition

[75]American Bar Association, *Task Force on Law Schools and the Profession: Narrowing the Gap. Legal Education and Professional Development – An Educational Continuum* (Chicago, IL: American Bar Association, 1992), 135. This report, better known as "the MacCrate Commission Report," was an ambitious attempt to reform legal education in the U.S., emphasizing skills and values relevant to the profession. In some ways, the report was successful on the first front, but not on the second.

[76]The skills identified in the MacCrate Commission Report were the following: problem-solving, legal analysis and reasoning, legal research, factual investigation, communication, counseling, negotiation, litigation and alternative dispute resolution procedures, organization and management of legal work, and recognizing and resolving ethical dilemmas. See American Bar Association, *Task Force on Law Schools and the Profession*, 140.

[77]American Bar Association, *Task Force on Law Schools and the Profession*, 138. For a detailed description of what problem-solving means for lawyers, see Paul Brest and Linda Hamilton Krieger, "Lawyers as Problem Solvers," *Temple Law Review* 72 (1999): 811.

[78]Alyson Carrel, "Legal Intelligence through Artificial Intelligence Requires Emotional Intelligence: A New Competency Model for the 21st Century Legal Professional," Georgia State University Law Review 35 (2019): 1153.

of new roles. Building such skills and roles for lawyers pave the way for innovative legal practices, more effective client services, and an environment where an innovation mindset can thrive. This mindset, grounded in collaboration, emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making, and problem-solving, can grow and expand both internally within the law firm and externally with stakeholders.

This mindset, grounded in collaboration, emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making, and problem-solving, can grow and expand both internally within the law firm and externally with stakeholders

Interpersonal skills have traditionally been understood as those skills that enable us to produce effects and impacts on other people in order to achieve individual or shared objectives.[79] For instance, according to the American Bar Association (ABA), interpersonal skills include communication, social and presentation skills, emotional intelligence, and people skills.[80] Effective communication skills are essential for addressing the challenges that lawyers are likely to encounter in their professional lives, such as translating complex legal concepts into simple language; managing client expectations in cases where the likelihood of a favorable outcome is low; navigating the termination of client relationships; and persuading clients, stakeholders, and legal officials to interpret the law in a particular way. Another interpersonal skill that is helpful in legal practice is emotional intelligence—that is, the capacity to manage, understand, and recognize one's emotions in emotionally charged situations. Lawyers with training in handling emotions, according to the ABA, "not only for themselves but for others, are more likely to succeed in persuading, building stronger relationships, and achieving career and personal goals."[81] Thus, interpersonal skills make lawyers more effective when they try to persuade their clients, legal officials, and stakeholders that their view of a dispute, deal, or state of affairs is both reasonable and accurate according to the law.

At this stage, it is important to make a key distinction: When we refer to "skills," a question may arise regarding the differentiation of that term from "competencies." In this context, we define "skills" as the capacity to acquire and apply knowledge and abilities effectively, enabling individuals to adeptly respond to challenges and demands within a specific environment—particularly, in this case, the workplace.[82] By contrast, the term "competencies"[83] refers to the application of skills in a manner that is both efficient and effective in terms of successfully completing a task. While possessing a skill is foundational, enhancing and applying that skill effectively are what transforms it into a competency. In this context, use of the term "skills" is appropriate, given that it reflects the foundational knowledge and abilities that lawyers should possess. However, for lawyers to be deemed competent, they must not only possess these skills but also apply them proficiently and regularly in a manner that aligns with the evolving demands of the profession. This presents a critical challenge—namely, what should legal educators do to foster the development of potential skills in order to elevate lawyers into competent professionals who are able to innovate within their domain? Competence, therefore, represents a superior level of performance in the legal profession, one that can only be achieved through both innovation and adaptation. Without these, a lawyer may find themselves working in an environment that has significantly evolved, rendering them unable to meet the demands of the associated changes despite possessing certain skills.

[79]See, among others, Brian Spitzberg and William Cupah, "Interpersonal Skills," in *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication*, ed. Mark L. Knapp and John A. Daly (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE, 2011), 481–507.

[80]Joseph Barrientos et al., "Incorporating Interpersonal Skills in Everyday Law Practice," American Bar Association, February 3, 2023, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/young_lawyers/resources/tyl/professional-development/incorporating-interpersonal-skills-everyday-law-practice/.

[81]Barrientos et al., *Incorporating Interpersonal Skills in Everyday Law Practice*.

[82]In this sense, regarding the differences among these terms, see Rabindra N. Kanungo and Sasi Misra, "Managerial Resourcefulness: A Reconceptualization of Management Skills," *Human Relations* 45, no. 12 (1992); Marvin D. Dunnette, "Aptitudes, Abilities and Skills," in *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, ed. Leaetta M. Hough and Marvin D. Dunnette (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1976), 473–520.

[83]Kanungo and Misra, "Managerial Resourcefulness." See also Claude Levy-Leboyer, *Gestión de las competencias*, (Capellades: Gestión 2000, 1997); Lyle M. Spencer and Signe M. Spencer, *Competence at Work. Models for Superior Performance* (New York, NY: Wiley & Sons, 1993).

5. Our survey

5.1. Summary and mechanics

The survey, which was conducted between April and August 2024, targeted lawyers from seven private law firms in Spain. To ensure voluntary participation, the survey was a self-administered online questionnaire distributed through a third-party unaffiliated with the researchers. After providing informed consent, respondents had the option to respond to each of the 30 questions individually or to exit the survey before completion.

The survey was organized into the following four question blocks: personal information, use of technology in law firms, innovation, and competencies and skills. A pilot survey was conducted between February and March 2024 to test the coherence and validity of the questions and answers, collecting information from 61 respondents. Due to low level of changes required (only in four questions), the pilot survey's observations were kept in the final sample to avoid the loss of observations. These observations represent 13% of the final analyzed sample (N = 460).

A data-cleaning process excluded responses with less than 25% completion or a duration of under 85 seconds, resulting in a final sample of 460 respondents who answered all or a subset of the questions.

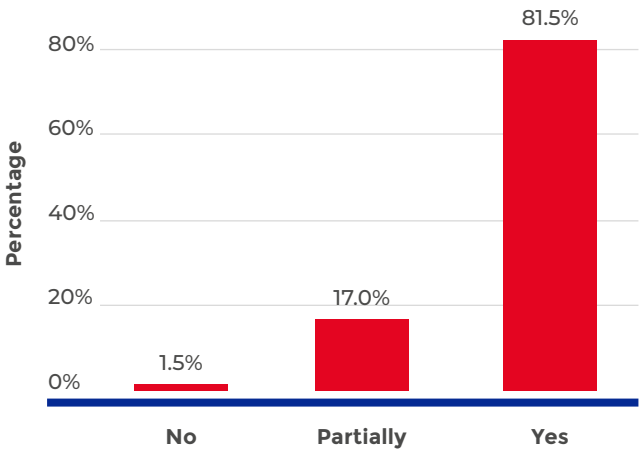
The final sample represents approximately 13% of all the lawyers (N = 3539) at the participating firms. It includes respondents from all levels within each firm, from junior associates to counsel to partners, with experience ranging from under 5 to over 20 years. Most respondents (72.5%) work in the corporate, finance, and M&A practice areas, followed by tax law.[84]

5.2. Results

5.2.1. Technology

After the survey had gathered information about the respondents, the second set of questions explored the role of technology in the legal profession, shedding light on both its potential and its limitations. We will delve into key areas, including the perceived impact of technology, the benefits and challenges of AI integration, and the new dynamics of client relationships.

Q6. Has technology enhanced the tasks lawyers do in your law firm, according to your experience?



N=459
Percentage in (1-100%) scale

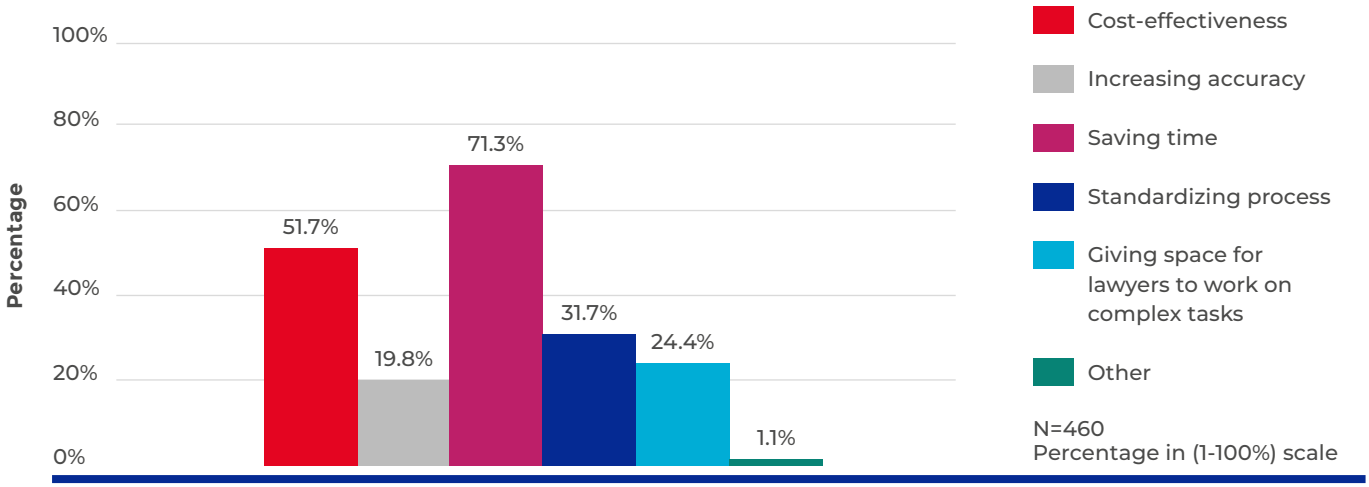
[84]As the sample is limited to specific firms and does not cover the broader spectrum of private law firms across Spain, it is not statistically representative of the country's population of lawyers in 2024. Indeed, official statistics on lawyers in Spain indicate a diverse distribution across various firm sizes, regions, and practice areas, which this survey may not fully reflect. Therefore, caution is advised when generalizing these findings to the entire sector.

The results reveal a positive outlook concerning the role of technology in law firms, potentially representing a significant discontinuity, as suggested by Susskind,[85] with some interesting insights. A significant majority (81.5%) of respondents feel that technology has enhanced the tasks that lawyers perform, acknowledging the value it can bring to legal work. This indicates that, in practice, technology is a fundamental support for modern legal workflows, enabling lawyers to shift their focus to bespoke legal work that requires nuanced judgment, creativity, and client-tailored solutions. The 17% who report a "partial" impact may be experiencing benefits limited to certain tasks or contexts, implying that while technology has advantages, it may not yet fully address all areas of legal work. Overall, these responses indicate broad recognition of the positive role technology plays in legal tasks, although there may be room for further improvement or tailored solutions to meet specific needs within the profession. These findings align with those of other surveys[86] and the arguments presented in the introduction to this work, which emphasize the potential of technology to complement[87] rather than replace human expertise.

The responses regarding what "enhancement" means provide a clear picture of the benefits respondents perceive for the legal profession:

- **Saving time (71%) and cost-effectiveness (52%):** These top selections show that lawyers highly value technology for its ability to streamline operations, reduce time spent on routine tasks, and potentially cut costs. This focus on efficiency is crucial in a profession where billable hours and operational expenses are central concerns. The time freed up by technology can be redirected toward more value-added initiatives, allowing legal professionals to focus on complex, strategic tasks that enhance client service and drive firm growth.
- **Standardizing processes (32%):** A fair number of respondents see value in technology's ability to standardize workflows, which can help ensure consistency and quality in terms of at least some legal services. This is particularly beneficial for large firms that manage extensive caseloads and require uniformity across tasks.
- **Giving space for lawyers to work on complex tasks (24%):** While fewer respondents favor this option, it remains an important consideration. This choice highlights an appreciation for technology's potential to reduce the time spent on low-value tasks, allowing lawyers to focus on more strategic, high-stakes work that requires human skills.

Q7. In your view, enhancement means____? Please choose two.



[85] Susskind, *Tomorrow's Lawyers*.

[86] Bloomberg Law, "2023 State of Practice: Practice in the New Era," Bloomberg Law, 2023, https://pro.bloomberglaw.com/insights/technology/2023-state-of-practice-practice-in-the-new-era/?trackingcode-cta=BLAW24112597.

[87] Thomson Reuters, *Future of Professionals Report 2024* (Toronto: Thomson Reuters, 2024), https://www.thomsonreuters.com/content/dam/ewp-m/documents/thomsonreuters/en/pdf/reports/future-of-professionals-report-2024.pdf.

- **Increasing accuracy (20%):** Not surprisingly, accuracy ranks lower in importance, which may suggest that lawyers view technology more as a tool for efficiency than for ensuring precision. This may also reflect a degree of skepticism regarding technology's reliability in relation to legal matters—an opinion consistently reinforced by news reports highlighting cases of significant errors and hallucinations in LLMs. In addition, there is a real risk that the internet will become flooded with low-quality AI-generated content. Indeed, there are signs that the content used to train algorithms is showing an increasing level of monotony.

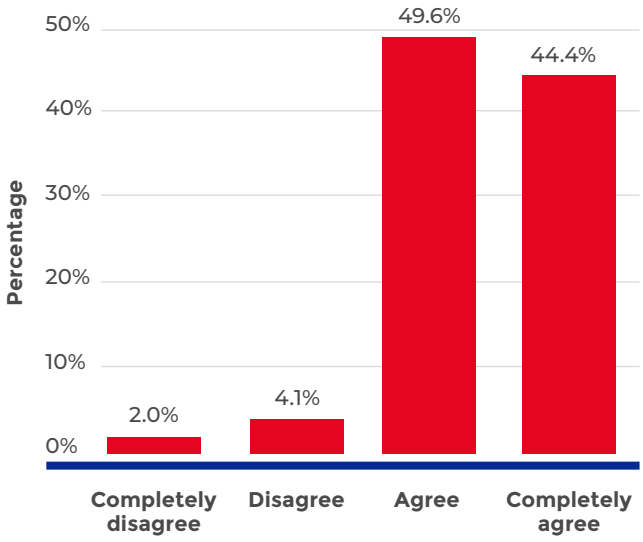
These results suggest that the surveyed lawyers recognize technology to be a valuable aid that primarily improves efficiency and cost-effectiveness. However, they exhibit a moderate view regarding technology's role in augmenting complex, judgment-based tasks, which remain a core domain for human expertise. While digital tools are largely embraced, the limited emphasis on accuracy reflects lingering concerns about technological errors and the limitations of AI in handling intricate legal matters. This distinction between efficiency-focused tasks and those requiring human insight could inform future technology adoption strategies in law firms, ensuring that technology supports rather than attempts to replace the unique capabilities of legal professionals.

Novel technologies are well suited to handling administrative or process-based tasks requiring "more process than judgment."[88] Yet, legal services are not a monolithic entity but rather a collection of processes and components, many of which can be effectively delegated to semi- or fully automated systems,[89] which do not have the flexibility and discernment to move beyond merely replicating past outcomes.[90] In the words of Jeffrey Lipshaw, AI technologies

> work poorly, or not at all, in areas that are conceptual, abstract, value-laden, open-ended, policy- or judgment-oriented; require common sense or intuition; involve persuasion or arbitrary conversation; or involve engagement with the meaning of real-world humanistic concepts, such as societal norms, social constructs, or social institutions.[91]

Nonetheless, ML systems are recognized for their ability to identify patterns in large volumes of data.[92] For example, ML systems trained on large datasets of contracts can automatically identify key clauses and information in new agreements, eliminating the need for lawyers to conduct initial manual reviews. They can also flag contracts set to expire within a certain time frame or identify agreements containing specific clauses, streamlining routine legal tasks. However, scholars highlight the limitations of AI in replicating the sophisticated human skills and judgment crucial in legal practice. Similarly, there are inherent limits to the computability of legal reasoning, and consequently, to the application of AI in replicating fundamental legal processes.[93]

Q8. Technology will enhance the tasks undertaken by your lawyers in the next 5/10 years. Indicate the extent to which you agree with such a statement.



N=460
Percentage in (1-100%) scale

[88]Susskind, *Tomorrow's Lawyers*.

[89]Richard Susskind, *The End of Lawyers? Rethinking the Nature of Legal Services* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[90]Mireille Hildebrandt, "Code-Driven Law: Freezing the Future and Scaling the Past," in *Is Law Computable? Critical Perspectives on Law and Artificial Intelligence*, ed. Simon Deakin and Christopher Markou (London: Hart Publishing, 2020), 67–84

[91]Jeffrey M. Lipshaw, "Lawyering Somewhere Between Computation and the Will to Act: A Digital Age Reflection," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Lawyering in the Digital Age*, ed. Larry A. DiMatteo et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 333.

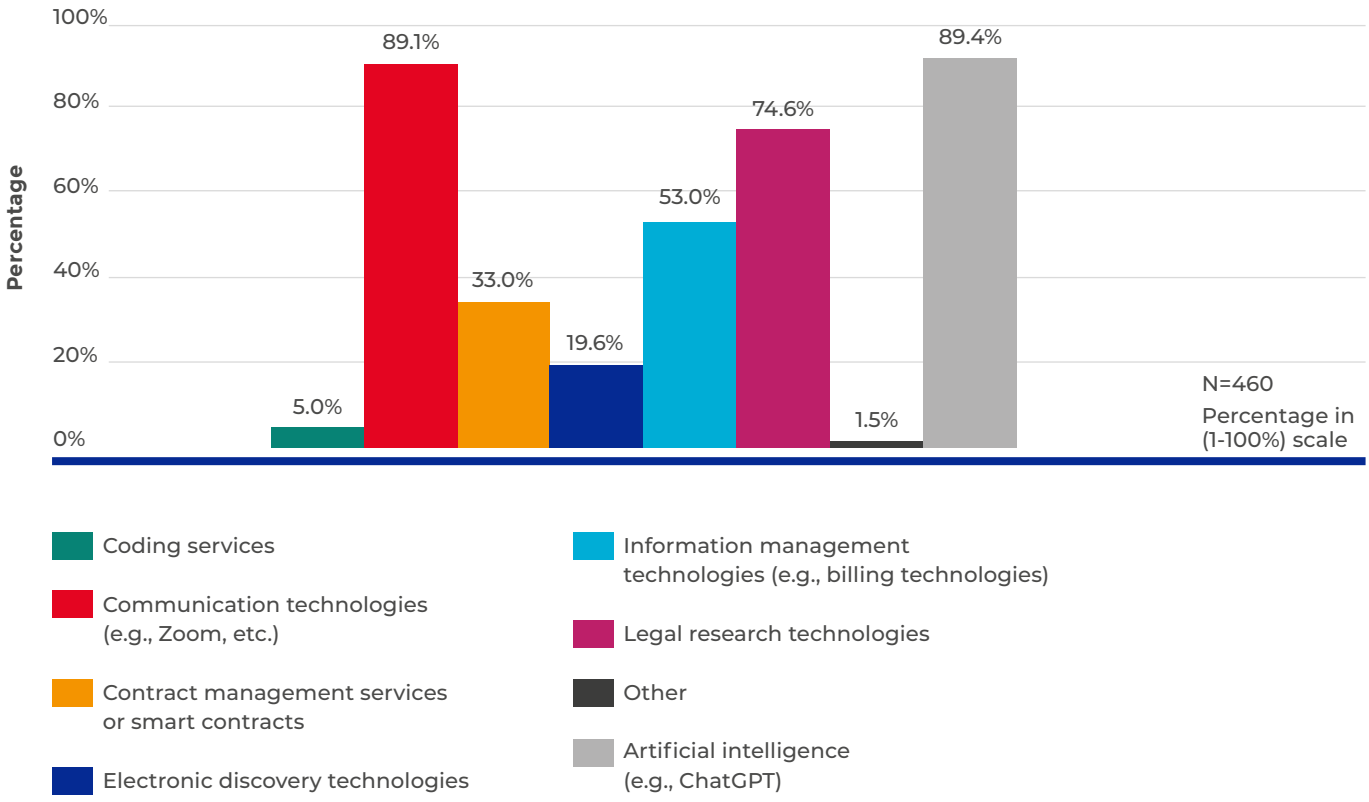
[92]Dena Dervanović, "I, Inhuman Lawyer: Developing Artificial Intelligence in the Legal Profession," in *Robotics, AI and the Future of Law*, ed. Marcelo Corrales, Mark Fenwick and Nikolaus Forgó (New York, NY: Springer, 2018), 209–234.

[93]Markou and Deakin, "Ex Machina Lex," 31–66.

In response to the statement about technology enhancing legal tasks over the next 5–10 years, an overwhelming 93.9% of respondents express some level of agreement, with nearly half fully endorsing this view by selecting "completely agree." This strong consensus indicates that lawyers from the firms participating in the 2024 LawAhead survey are generally optimistic about technology's potential to improve workflows, streamline processes, and potentially increase both productivity and effectiveness. This enthusiasm aligns with broader trends in professional services, with technology increasingly seen as the predominant driver of transformation.

An optimistic perspective emerges from the survey, with most respondents anticipating that technology will play an increasingly supportive role in enhancing efficiency and effectiveness in terms of legal tasks. This may also reflect the growing acceptance of technology in the legal field and of its potential to streamline processes and improve client services. As with other precedent cases of automated document assembly or scrutiny, lawyers working in large law firms do not perceive a serious threat from such advancements, largely because they have continuously adapted and innovated their practices to address the complexities of modern business and evolving client demands. Moreover, clients who have experimented with AI for basic consultations are well aware that true legal sophistication, requiring deep expertise and strategic insight, can rarely be outsourced to a machine.

Q9. What technology does your law firm use? Select the most relevant ones.



The technology adoption patterns demonstrate clear preferences:

- **Artificial Intelligence (89%) and Communication Technologies (89%):** These two categories dominate, indicating a strong reliance on tools that enhance both productivity and connectivity. The near-universal uptake of AI tools—such as ChatGPT—suggests growing comfort with automation for drafting, summarizing, and content generation. At the same time, the widespread use of communication platforms reflects the normalization of hybrid work environments and the need for seamless virtual collaboration with clients and colleagues.

• **Legal Research Technologies (74%) and Information Management Tools (53%):** These figures confirm the centrality of research and data organization in legal practice. Such tools support lawyers in navigating complex, document-heavy environments with greater speed and consistency, helping ensure accuracy and compliance in their work. Their sustained popularity underscores the legal profession's ongoing dependence on technologies that streamline foundational tasks.

• **Contract Management Technologies (33%) and Electronic Discovery Tools (19%):** These tools appear to be more role- or practice-specific. While contract management services are gaining traction—likely due to increasing automation in transactional workflows—e-discovery remains more specialized, often used in litigation-heavy practices. This gap may be attributed to factors such as unfamiliarity with the technology, resistance to change, or a continued preference for manual workflows. Among those who have adopted contract management systems, the primary benefits likely include enhanced collaboration and faster drafting and review processes.[94]

• **Coding Services (5%) and Other Technologies (1.5%):** The relatively low uptake of coding tools suggests that programming is not yet seen as a core competency in most firms. These functions may be outsourced or deemed outside the traditional scope of legal expertise.

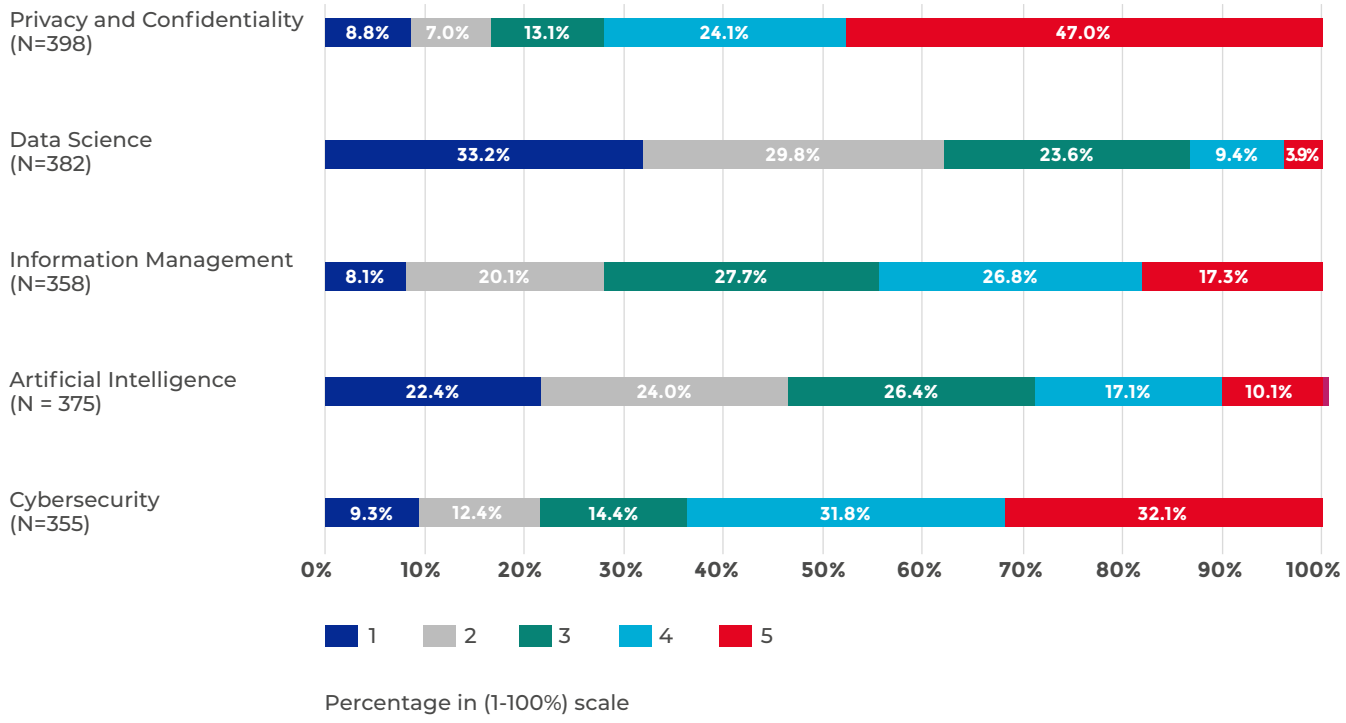
[94]Elizabeth C. Tippett et al., "Does Lawyering Matter? Predicting Judicial Decisions from Legal Briefs, and What That Means for Access to Justice," *Texas Law Review* 100 (2022): 1157–1197.

These findings suggest a pragmatic approach among legal professionals. Lawyers view technology as a valuable means of support that can enhance their work, although they are selective in choosing tools that directly address the specific demands of legal practice. The high value placed on communication (admin work, drafting notes, summarizing documents, proofreading emails), AI, and contract management tools points to the strategic integration of technology in areas that reduce the manual workload, improve efficiency, and facilitate collaboration. In this regard, AI can serve as a "basic starting point," as found in a similar survey on the state of AI in the legal profession.[95]

The time spent engaging with such technology also highlights the critical distinction between human and machine-generated writing and decision-making. The work of lawyers extends far beyond writing or speaking; it involves exercising judgement in complex matters, providing guidance, and building trusting relationships.[96] Here, technology lags behind the curve. Historically, tasks characterized by a high degree of repetitiveness and limited discretion have been prime candidates for automation.[97] Examples include discovery involving voluminous materials, document review, and to some extent, due diligence and back-office functions. Conversely, tasks such as document drafting, litigation, and negotiation are less prone to automation, partly due to clients' lack of trust in fully automated solutions.

While there is enthusiasm for technology, the responses also reflect recognition that not all tasks are suitable for automation and that technology's role should be complementary rather than substitutive. This highlights how technology is seen as a powerful tool for enhancing, but not replacing, the human expertise and judgment that are central to legal practice.

Q10. What technological services do your client need the most? Grade each of them of relevance (5 = most relevant and 1 = least relevant).



[95]Thomson Reuters, *Future of Professionals Report 2024*.

[96]Steve Lohr, "A.I. Is Coming for Lawyers, Again," *New York Times*, April 10, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/10/technology/ai-is-coming-for-lawyers-again.html.

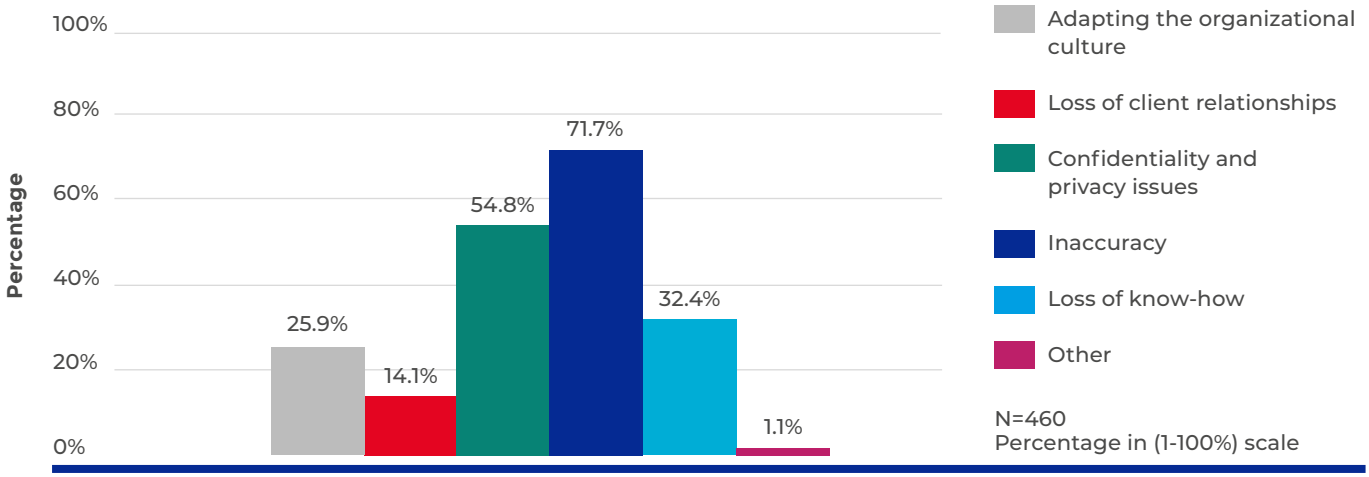
[97]Laura Nurski, "AI at work," CEPS, July 3, 2024, https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/ai-at-work/.

The responses provide insight into the technological services that clients consider most relevant in the legal sector:

- **Privacy and confidentiality** are ranked highest, reflecting the critical importance of safeguarding sensitive client information. This finding aligns with the growing regulatory focus on data protection and the need to protect confidential information concerning legal matters.
- Closely following privacy, **cybersecurity** is viewed as a key service. This highlights the legal industry's awareness of cyber threats and the need for robust security measures to prevent data breaches and maintain client trust.
- **Information management** services are moderately prioritized, likely because efficient data handling and retrieval are essential for managing cases and ensuring compliance.
- **Artificial intelligence** services rank lower, which may reflect a cautious approach to adopting AI for the purpose of legal work. Although AI has potential to enhance efficiency, clients may have reservations about its reliability or application in relation to complex legal matters.
- **Data science** is seen as the least relevant technology, suggesting that it is less commonly applied in day-to-day legal tasks. This may indicate that data analytics are used more selectively, possibly just for specialized cases or firms focused on data-driven insights.

These results indicate that clients prioritize services directly related to data security and efficient information management. Hence, privacy, confidentiality, and cybersecurity top the list, underscoring the importance of protecting sensitive data and maintaining secure communication. AI and data science, while recognized, are less central to client needs, possibly due to concerns about their reliability or their limited applicability in some legal contexts.

Q11. What are the main challenges of using artificial intelligence to provide legal services? Select the two most relevant ones for you.



The responses to this question highlight the primary challenges that legal professionals associate with the use of AI in terms of legal services:

- **Inaccuracy**: The greatest concern is inaccuracy, with 72% of respondents selecting it as a key challenge. This reflects a cautious attitude toward AI's reliability, given that even minor errors in legal work can have serious consequences. This concern regarding AI's accuracy is linked to its potential to misinterpret sophisticated legal information or generate incorrect outputs, which could undermine trust.
- **Confidentiality and privacy issues** represent the second most significant challenges, selected by 55% of respondents. This aligns with the sensitive nature of legal work, where safeguarding client information is paramount.

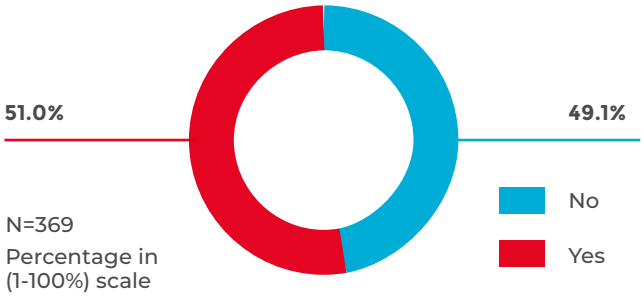
AI may introduce risks related to security, especially when handling sensitive or private information or special categories of personal data.

- **Loss of know-how:** This concern, indicated by 32% of respondents, suggests apprehension that reliance on AI could erode lawyers' interpersonal skills and expertise over time, particularly in terms of routine tasks that AI might be able to handle.
- **Adapting the organizational culture:** Adapting an organizational culture to integrate AI is a concern for 26% of respondents, indicating that firms may face resistance or require substantial changes to effectively incorporate AI into their operations. This may involve retraining staff, shifting traditional practices, and uplifting organizational schemes.
- **Loss of client relationships:** The lower concern regarding the loss of client relationships (14%) suggests that respondents believe AI is less likely to impact the personal client–lawyer relationship, which remains central to legal work. However, some respondents worry that over-reliance on AI could make client interactions less personal and/or diminish trust.

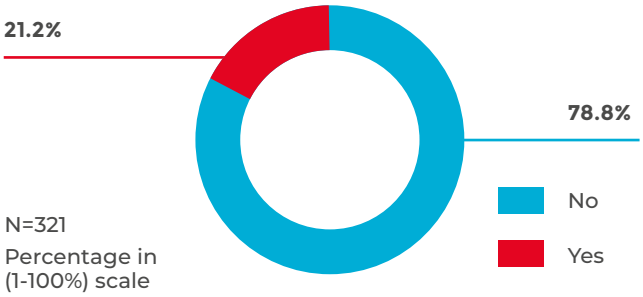
Overall, these findings show that lawyers are most concerned about confidentiality and privacy risks, as well as about accuracy issues, when integrating AI into legal work. Other surveys highlight a reticence among professionals to fully embrace AI, primarily driven by concerns over accuracy and cybersecurity vulnerabilities, a sentiment that also emerges in our survey.[98] Additionally, the concerns about organizational adaptation and skill erosion reflect the complexities of incorporating AI without compromising traditional legal expertise or the legal profession's core values.

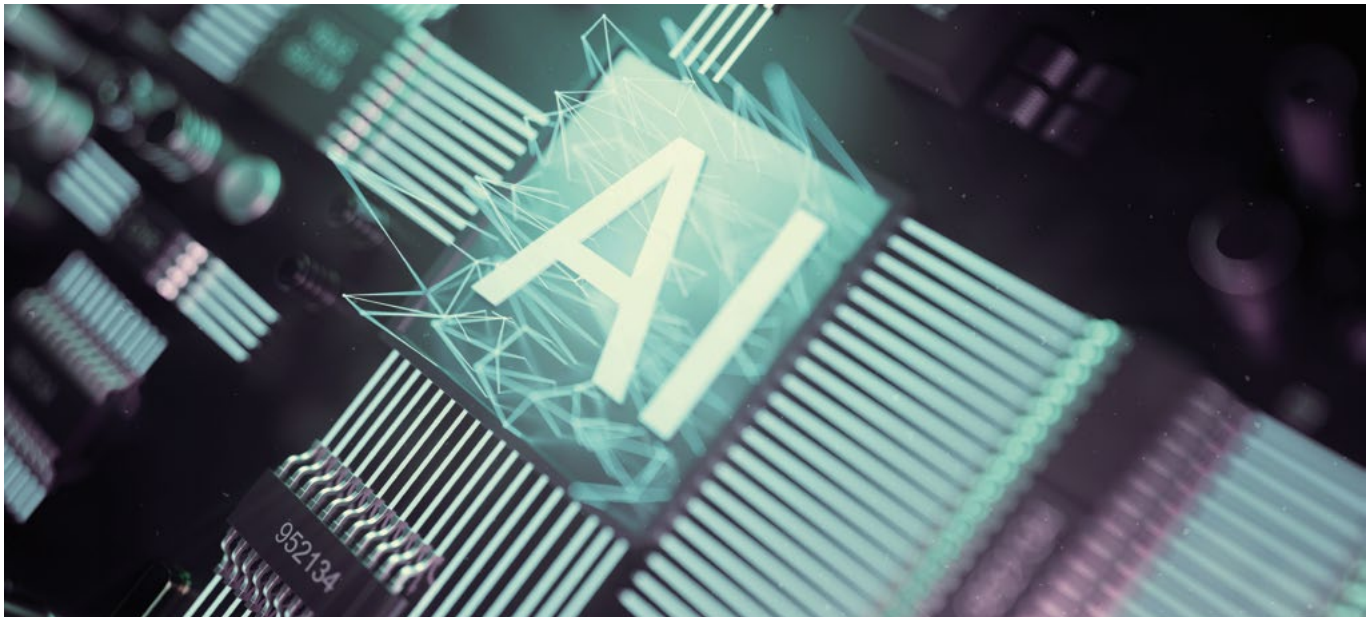
[98]Thomson Reuters, *Future of Professionals Report 2024*.

Q12. Do you think that, in the future, your clients may obtain legal services from non-legal service providers?



Q13. Is your firm already competing with non-legal services providers for a market share?





The responses to this question are nearly equally split, with 50.9% answering "Yes" and 49.1% answering "No." This close result suggests that there is significant uncertainty within the legal profession about whether clients will turn to non-legal providers for certain services. While half of respondents foresee this shift, possibly influenced by the rise of technology-driven solutions and alternative legal services, the other half believe that traditional services will maintain their relevance and client loyalty.

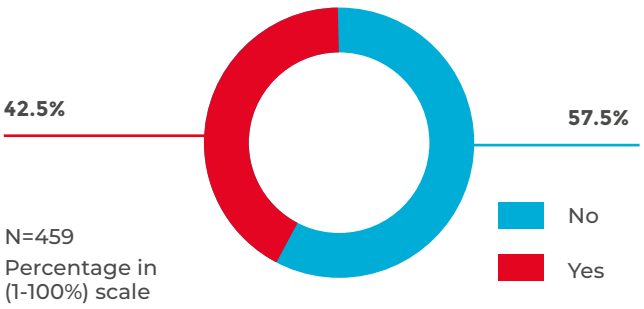
In terms of the competition with non-legal service providers for a market share, a larger majority of 78.8% responded "No." This indicates that most firms currently do not perceive themselves to be directly competing with non-legal providers. Indeed, only 21.2% feel that they are already in competition with non-legal entities for a market share, which suggests that, while some firms are feeling the pressure, the majority still see their market as distinct from alternative service providers. This may be because legal services often require specialized expertise and a level of trust that non-legal providers may struggle to establish.

Together, these results indicate a degree of ambivalence regarding the potential competition from non-legal service providers. While a small but notable number of firms already feel the impact of this, most legal professionals do not see these alternative providers as a significant threat. However, the nearly even split in responses concerning future competition suggests that many are aware of the possibility that non-legal providers may eventually encroach on their market, particularly in terms of more commoditized or technology-enabled legal tasks.

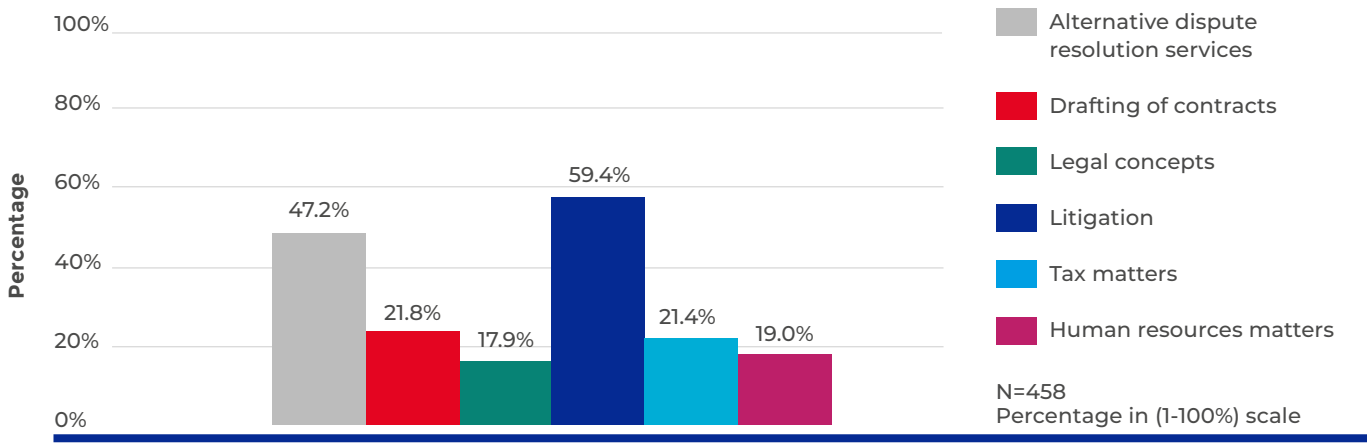
This may prompt firms to reflect on how they can differentiate their services and leverage technology to retain client loyalty in the marketplace.

These two questions more directly capture legal professionals' attitudes toward outsourcing certain legal tasks to tech companies, as well as the type of work they are most reluctant to outsource. A majority of respondents (57.5%) indicate that they do not intend to outsource any legal work to tech companies. This reflects a cautious approach to delegating legal tasks to third-party technology providers, possibly due to concerns about confidentiality, control, or quality. However, a substantial minority (42.5%) reveal a willingness to do so, suggesting that a large number of lawyers are open to this possibility.

Q14. Would you outsource some of your legal work to tech companies?



Q15. What type of legal work would you be less inclined to outsource to tech companies? Please choose only two of these.

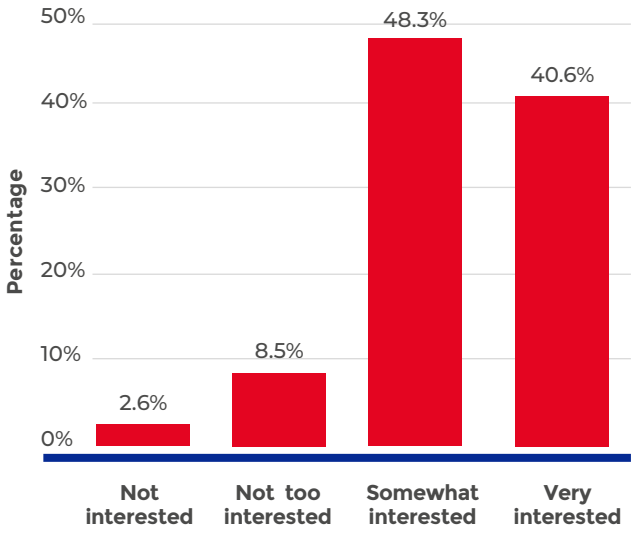


In terms of the legal work that lawyers would be less inclined to outsource to tech companies:

- **Litigation (59%)** is the most selected option, corroborating the strong reluctance to outsource this area of work. Litigation requires in-depth legal expertise, strategic thinking, and direct client–lawyer interactions, which may not be suitable for technology-driven outsourcing.
- **Alternative dispute resolution services (47%)** are also a high priority for retention within the firm. As with litigation, this area often involves sensitive negotiation and client relationships that benefit from a personal, hands-on approach.
- **Drafting of contracts (21%) and tax matters (21%)** were selected by a smaller proportion, although they still represent areas that many professionals are hesitant to delegate. Contract drafting and tax-related tasks require precision and are closely tied to regulatory standards, rendering them potentially risky to outsource.
- **Human resources matters (19%) and legal concepts (17%)** were the least selected, suggesting that these areas are seen as more suitable for outsourcing. This may be because these areas involve more standardized or less specialized tasks that could be efficiently handled by tech solutions.

Legal professionals are open to outsourcing certain tasks to tech companies, although they remain cautious about delegating high-stakes, complex areas such as litigation and dispute resolution. According to some authors,[99] new business models will emerge that differ from the traditional legal advisory framework due to relying heavily on technological assets and multidisciplinary human inputs. That said, such a shift appears to be taking place at a reduced pace. The reluctance to outsource these areas underscores the importance of retaining control over tasks that require substantial expertise, strategic insight, and client interaction. However, areas that involve more routine, standardized work, such as human resources or general legal concepts, are seen as more suitable for outsourcing to tech companies, potentially allowing firms to streamline their operations without compromising on quality in terms of core service areas.

Q16. Are you considering adopting automation in your law firm?



N=458
Percentage in (1-100%) scale

The responses to this question provide insight into the level of interest within the legal profession in adopting automation technologies:

- **Somewhat interested (48.3%)**: Nearly 50% of respondents express a moderate interest in adopting automation in their firm, suggesting an openness to exploring its potential benefits. This group may be cautiously optimistic, recognizing the value of automation but wanting to understand its implications more fully before committing to it.
- **Very interested (40.6%)**: A substantial portion of respondents are highly interested in automation. This indicates strong motivation among some firms to integrate automation into their operations, likely with the goal of improving efficiency, reducing costs, or optimizing workflows.

[99] John Armour and Mari Sako, "AI-Enabled Business Models in Legal Se vices: From Traditional Law Firms to Next-Generation Law Companies?," Journal of Professions and Organization 7, no. 1 (2020).

- **Not too interested (8.5%)** and **not interested (2.6%)**: Only a small percentage of respondents show little to no interest in introducing automation, reflecting a minority of lawyers who may be doubtful about its relevance or utility in their specific practice areas. This reluctance could stem from concerns about potential downsides of automation, such as the impact on job roles, or a belief that legal work requires a human touch that technology cannot replicate.

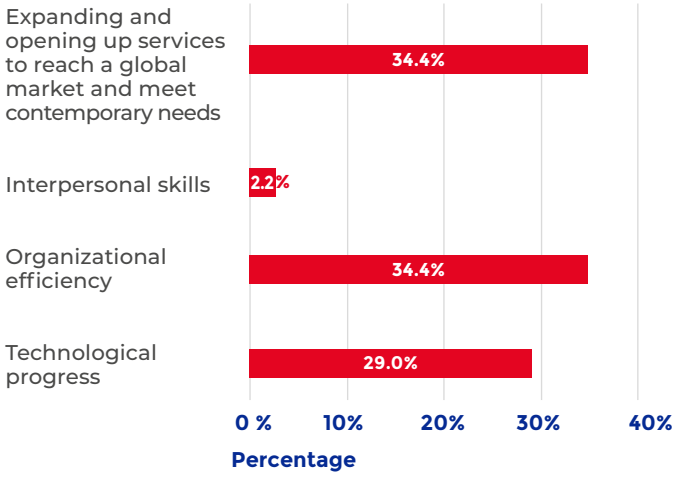
There is a robust inclination toward exploring automation, with almost 90% of respondents expressing at least some level of interest in it. This underscores the legal industry's recognition of automation as a potentially valuable tool for enhancing productivity and adapting to modern demands, which is consistent with the findings from a Boston Consulting Group (BCG) survey[100] showing that AI adoption across industries has grown significantly, with the reported usage rising from 22% in 2018 to 50% in 2023. Nearly 46% of respondents to the BCG survey have experimented with GAI, and 27% use it regularly. A key factor driving this interest is the ability to disaggregate or decompose legal work into tasks that are unavoidably human—that is, requiring judgment, emotional or relational intelligence,[101] and ethical considerations[102]—and those that are more routine and automatable. The same approach can be applied to critical tasks across various domains, from transactional work to litigation, enabling firms to strategically integrate automation where it will add the most value. This division allows legal professionals to focus their expertise on complex, high-value activities while leveraging automation to efficiently handle repetitive or process-driven tasks. Still, many legal professionals are likely weighing the pros and cons of automation before fully committing to it, seeking to ensure it complements rather than disrupts their core work.

5.2.2. Innovation

The innovation section of the survey consisted of seven questions aimed at understanding *how lawyers think about* and *perceive* innovation, both individually and through the lens of their law firms.

The first question in this section ("What does innovation mean for your law firm?") sought to assess how lawyers view innovation from an institutional perspective. The results reveal that most lawyers consider innovation to be a tool for improving organizational efficiency (34.4%) or expanding and opening up services in a global market (34.4%). In other words, lawyers view innovation as helping law firms broaden their market reach and increase their efficiency. Here, the nature of the efficiency is not specified. It could refer to either cost efficiency (e.g., achieving the same outcomes using fewer human and financial resources) or time efficiency (e.g., accomplishing tasks in less time). Additionally, 29% of respondents view innovation as a technological process. Innovation is perceived as a tool for market expansion, improvement of internal efficiency, and advancement of technological progress within law firms.

Q17. What does innovation mean for your law firm?



N=372
Percentage in (1-100%) scale

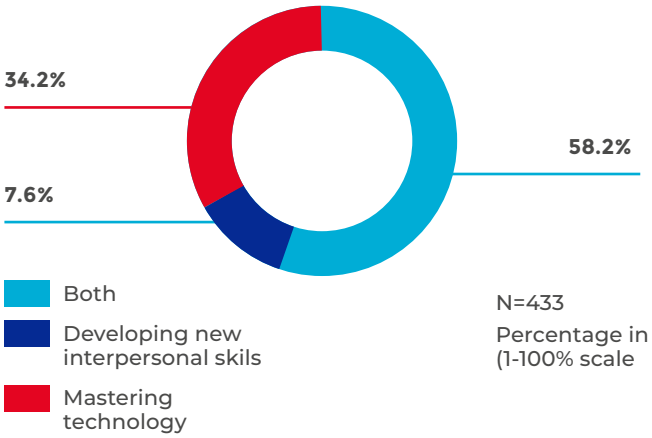
[100]Thomson Reuters, *Future of Professionals Report 2024*.

[101]John Armour and Mari Sako, "AI-Enabled Business Models in Legal Services: From Traditional Law Firms to Next-Generation Law Companies?," Journal of Professions and Organization 7, no. 1 (2020).

[102]Nicolas Parra-Herrera, "Being a Competent Lawyer in the Age of Generative Artificial Intelligence," *Center on the Legal Profession* (blog), November 6, 2024, https://clp.law.harvard.edu/knowledge-hub/insights/being-a-competent-lawyer-in-the-age-of-generative-artificial-intelligence/.

Notably, only 2.2% of surveyed lawyers associate innovation with interpersonal skills. This result is surprising when viewed in the context of the entire survey. In response to the next question (Q18), for instance, most respondents link innovation to mastering technology and developing interpersonal skills. Moreover, when we combine this result with the percentage of respondents who believe innovation to involve "developing new interpersonal skills," we find that 65% associate innovation with developing interpersonal skills.

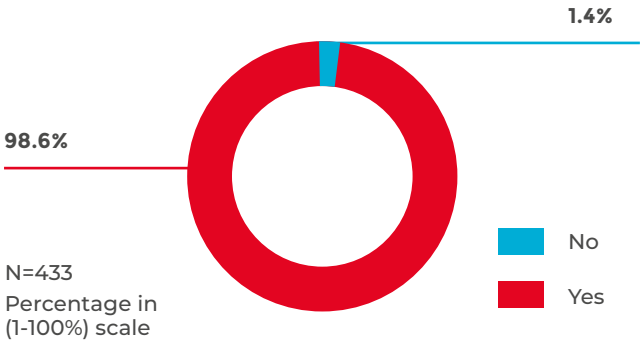
Q18. Do you associate innovation more with____?



Why, then, do only 2.2% feel that innovation means something related to interpersonal skills, and in the next question, do 65% associate innovation with such skills? How can we make sense of this apparent incoherence? The first question (Q17) in this section asked about what they thought innovation meant *for their law firms*, whereas the following question (Q18) emphasized what they, *individually*, associate innovation with. The individual perspective highly values the cultivation and development of interpersonal skills as an aspect of legal innovation. The law firm perspective, however, separates interpersonal skills from innovation.

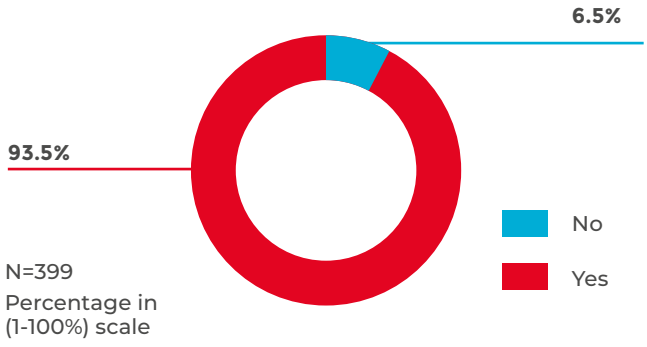
In Q19, we asked whether respondents think lawyers should be mandated to develop their relational skills (e.g., client dynamics, negotiation, leadership). Nearly all the respondents believe that lawyers should be mandated to develop such skills (98.6%). Individually, innovation is linked to interpersonal skills, and interpersonal skills should be mandated for all lawyers.

Q19. Do you think lawyers should be mandated to develop their relational skills (client dynamics, negotiation, leadership) as part of their skills?



The responses to this question (Q19) should be analyzed in tandem with those concerning Q26, where 93.5% of respondents consider developing interpersonal skills to be part of innovation in legal practice.

Q26. Do you consider developing interpersonal skills to be part of innovation in legal practice?



Based on the responses to these two questions, lawyers consider interpersonal skills to be part of legal innovation. Innovation in terms of legal practice can also be achieved through honing skills such as negotiation, communication, and leadership. In fact, the respondents unanimously believe that lawyers should be *mandated* to develop relational skills. A question remains whether this should imply modifications to legal curricula and/or continuing education for lawyers.

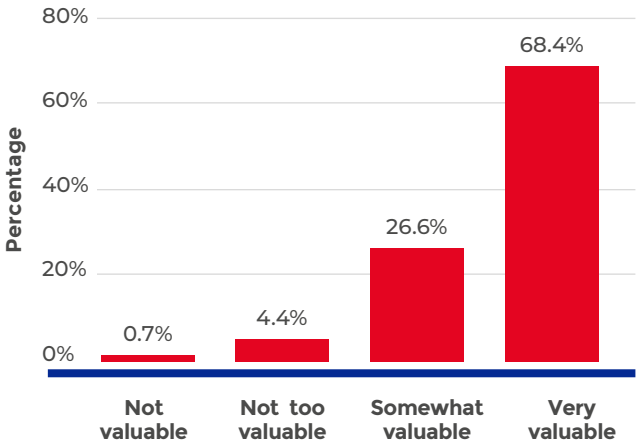
Skills development is something that also resonates in the U.S. context. The NextGen Bar Exam will transform legal practice law in the U.S. It will make its debut in 2026, although some states will not implement the exam until 2028. This modified exam will test lawyers on their foundational lawyering skills, including legal research, legal writing, issue spotting and analysis, investigation and evaluation, client counseling and advise, negotiation and dispute resolution, client relationships, and management. The aim of the exam is to place greater emphasis on the assessment of lawyering skills in order to better reflect real-world practice.[103]

Our survey results, which emphasize linking the cultivation of lawyering skills such as negotiation, communication, and leadership to innovation, reflect an ongoing trend toward viewing legal practice holistically and recognizing legal innovation as a broad, inclusive concept that cannot be reduced to technological progress.

Another set of questions in the innovation section were related to work automation practices in the surveyed law firms. According to the *continuity thesis approach*, where technology is seen as a necessary means of achieving innovation, some scholars posit that work automation is the area where innovation will have a substantial impact. Lawyers have sought opportunities for automation since the 1950s, starting with the Dictaphone, a voice-recording device that helped lawyers' secretaries type up lawyers' thoughts. More recently, through case management and workflow automation systems, lawyers have been able to access and upload case materials quickly and from anywhere. Additionally, GAI in the forms of contract drafting, legal research assistance, and specialized chatbots are some recent developments in work automation in legal practice.[104]

Our survey assessed the perceived value of work automation across various areas, including litigation, contract drafting, firm management, and legal research. According to the respondents, law firms view legal research as the most valuable area for automation.

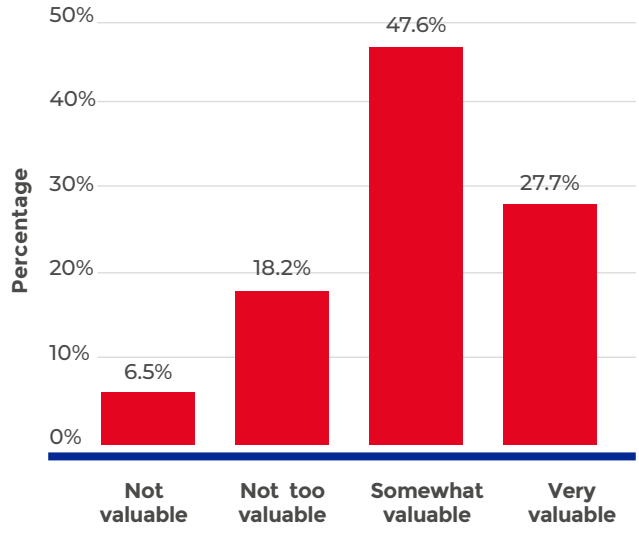
Q23. Is legal research automation valuable for your firm?



N=433
Percentage in (1-100%) scale

By contrast, litigation is seen as the least valuable area for implementing automation. However, being rated as the least valuable area does not imply that it lacks value for law firms—47.6% of respondents consider litigation automation somewhat valuable, while 27.7% view it as very valuable. Still, 24.7% of respondents believe it is not valuable or is only slightly valuable.

Q20. Is litigation automation valuable for your firm?



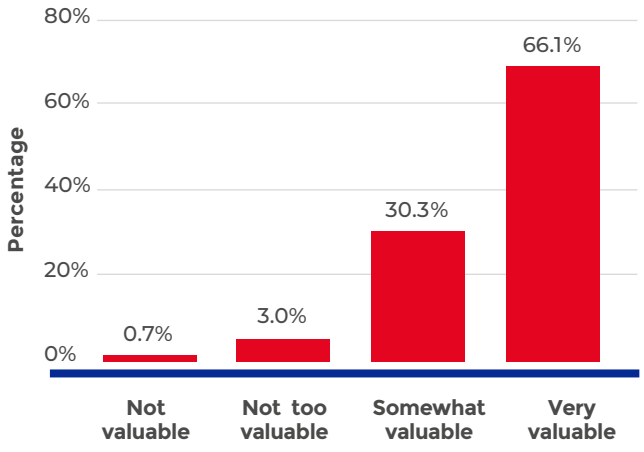
N=458
Percentage in (1-100%) scale

[103]Testing Task Force, *Overview of Recommendations for the Next Generation of Bar Examination* (Madison, WI: National Conference of Bar Examiners, 2021), https://nextgenbarexam.ncbex.org/themencode-pdf-viewer/?file=https://nextgenbarexam.ncbex.org/wp-content/uploads/TTF-Next-Gen-Bar-Exam-Recommendations.pdf#zoom=auto&pagemode=thumbs.

[104]See Lauren Colbeck, "The History of Law Firm Automation," The Law Society, January 26, 2024, https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/ai-and-lawtech/the-history-of-law-firm-automation.

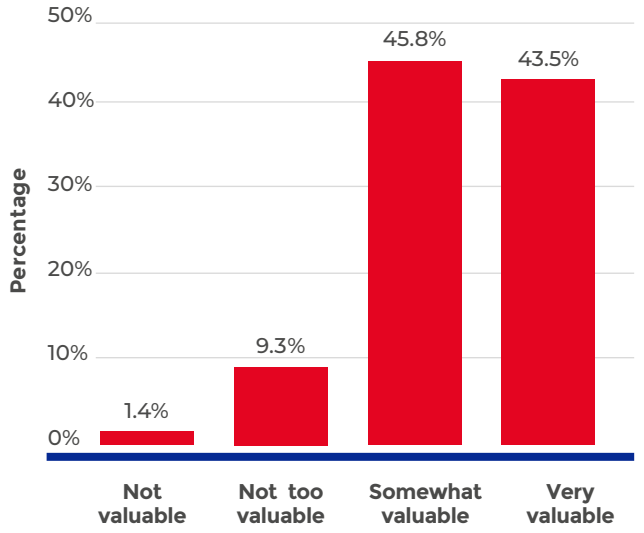
Both automated contract drafting and law firm management automation are considered valuable by the majority of respondents. More specifically, 96.4% of respondents view contract-drafting automation as somewhat or very valuable, while 89.3% see law firm management automation as somewhat valuable. It is important to note that the questions were designed to assess lawyers' perception of what their law firm values, not if they individually value such an application of legal automation.

Q21. Is automated-contract drafting valuable for your firm?



N=433
Percentage in (1-100%) scale

Q22. Is firm management automation valuable for your firm?



N=432
Percentage in (1-100%) scale

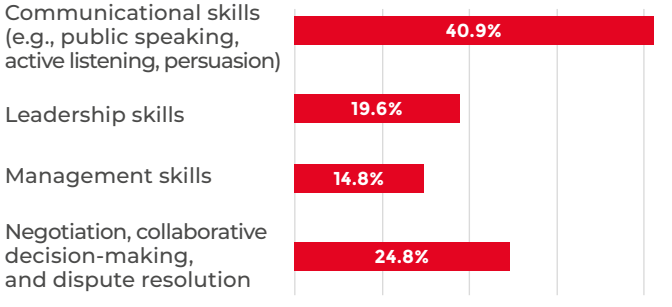
In summary, the responses to the questions in this section of the survey reveal a sharp division between the individual approach (what innovation means for the individual respondent) and the organizational approach (what innovation means for the law firm that the respondent works for). The stark divide rests on the fact that, according to the collective approach, only 2.2% think interpersonal skills are associated with innovation. Conversely, individually, 98.6% of respondents believe lawyers should be mandated to develop their relational skills. Crucially, based on the individual approach, the majority of respondents (58.2%) associate innovation with both mastering technology and developing new skills. The respondents are divided in terms of what law firms mean by innovation. In short, the survey responses suggest that law firms' views on innovation, according to the respondents, and lawyers' views on innovation diverge. Based on the data collected, we argue that innovation is an umbrella concept that includes technological developments and skills competence.

5.2.3. Skills

We will now analyze the interpersonal skills section of the survey. First, an overwhelming 93.5% of surveyed lawyers consider the development of interpersonal skills to be a part of innovation in the legal sector, a finding totally in line with the results presented above.

The survey results reveal that, in terms of inter-personal skills, 40.9% of respondents consider communication skills (public speaking, active listening, persuasion), 24.8% consider negotiation, collaborative decision-making, and dispute resolution, 19.6% consider leadership skills, and 14.8% consider management skills.

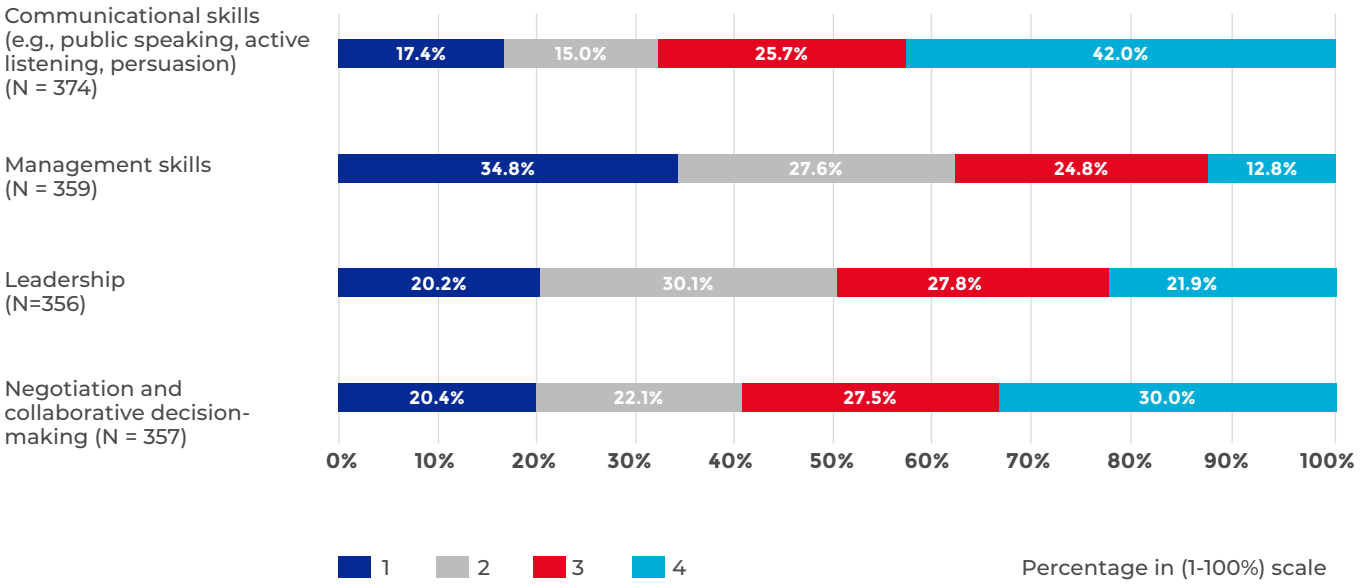
Q24. What do interpersonal skills mean for your law firm?



N=399 · Percentage in (1-100%) scale

Moreover, the interpersonal skills lawyers consider most useful for their law firms are primarily skills related to communication (42%), followed by negotiation and decision-making (30%), while closely behind is leadership (21.9%) as well as management skills in general (12.8%).

Q27. What interpersonal skills are, for you, most useful for your law firm? Grade each of them in terms of their relevance (4 = most relevance and 1 = least relevance).



We understand these percentages to indicate the following:

- **Communicational skills:** The majority (42%) graded this as "4" (most relevant), indicating that it is considered highly relevant. Combined with 25.7% grading it as "3," it is very critical according to the surveyed lawyers.
- **Management skills**: This received mixed ratings, with the highest percentage (34.8%) rating it as "1" (least relevant). Only 12.8% consider it to be most relevant ("4"). This shows that management skills are perceived as less important than other skills, such as leadership, negotiation, and communicational skills.
- **Leadership:** Approximately 30.1% rated it as "2," while 27.8% graded it as "3." In other words, lawyers are quite divided regarding leadership skills. Nearly half of the surveyed lawyers regard leadership skills as relevant or very relevant, while the others perceive them as irrelevant or less relevant. This might be due to leadership still being a vague notion in legal scholarship. Despite efforts to develop a comprehensive framework of leadership for lawyers or to approach lawyers as leaders,[105] law schools have been reluctant to include leadership courses in their curricula, indicating this field to be something foreign to legal practice.
- **Negotiation and collaborative decision-making**: For these skills, 30% of lawyers assign the highest relevance and 22.1% rate them as "2." Since the 1980s, legal scholarship has witnessed a strong influx of negotiation studies, starting with the best-selling book *Getting to Yes* (1981), which has intensified the link between the legal profession and negotiation practice.[106]

[105] "It is ironic that the occupation most responsible for producing America's leaders has focused so little attention on that role... Although leadership development is now a forty-five billion dollar industry, and an Amazon search reveals close to 88,000 leadership books in print, the topic is largely missing in legal education." Deborah Rhode, *Lawyers as Leaders* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.

[106] See Roger Fisher and William Ury, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Without Giving In* (London: Penguin Books, 1981); Robert Mnookin, Andrew Tulumello, and Scott Peppet, *Beyond Winning: Negotiating to Create Value in Deals and Disputes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Carrie Menkel-Meadow, "Toward Another View of Legal Negotiations: The Structure of Problem Solving," *UCLA Law Review* 31 (1984).

While there are a broad spectrum of interpersonal skills, lawyers highlight those related to communication as being the most important. This emphasis is unsurprising, given that the goal of communication in any human interaction is to influence, persuade, and create meaningful effects—all tasks that lie at the very heart of a lawyer's daily practice. In relationships within the firm or external interactions with clients or colleagues from other firms, communication remains the cornerstone of effective lawyering. Moreover, communicating entails not only the skill to effectively manage verbal and non-verbal language but also the ability to navigate empathy, assertiveness, and emotional control.

We understand empathy as the capacity to put ourselves in another's shoes, something essential for legal practitioners. Lawyers must understand their client, their team, the judge, and any other possible interlocutors involved in the case in question. Also related to empathy is assertiveness[107]—that is, the aptitude a person has to make their position or perspective known to another through a communicative act.

This is why communication is so complex: it is necessary to master a set of interpersonal dimensions.[108] If we consider the day-to-day work of lawyers during their interactions with other agents (e.g., partners, colleagues, clients) in communicative situations, the most important aspect concerns the decision-making and negotiating processes. In this vein, a lawyer must not only be skillful, they must also be competent, since only a competent lawyer is capable of reaching an efficient agreement with the other side, which contributes to the relationship established, the corporate brand of their law firm, as well as the lawyer's own personal brand.

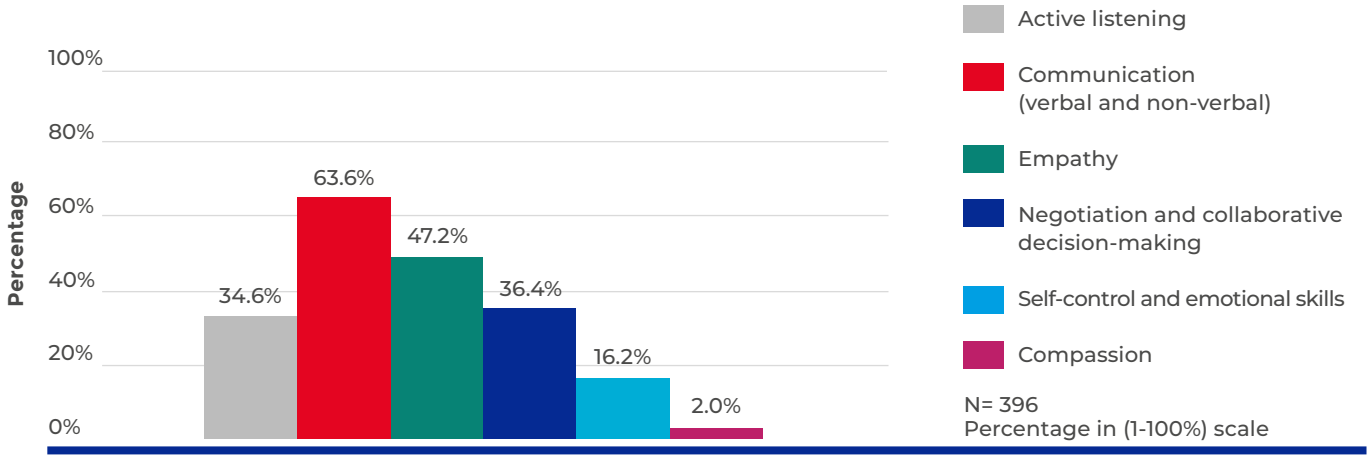
Given that lawyers operate in a rapidly changing environment shaped by technology and the rise of AI, such developments will inevitably affect key interpersonal skills essential to the legal profession. Hence, it is crucial to explore and understand the nature of these impacts.

[107]See, among others, Ivelina Peneva and Stoil Mavrodiev, "A Historical Approach to Assertiveness," *Psychological Thought* 6, no. 1 (2013): 3–26, https://doi.org/10.5964/psyct.v6i1.14; Steve Winer et al., "Resolving Conflict in Interpersonal Relationships Using Passive, Aggressive, and Assertive Verbal Statements," *International Journal of Conflict Management* 35, no. 2 (2024): 334–359, https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCMA-03-2023-0048; Brett Laursen, Benjamin D. Finkelstein and Noel Townsend Betts, "A Developmental Meta-Analysis of Peer Conflict Resolution," *Developmental Review* 21 (2001).

[108]See Spitzberg and Cupah, "Interpersonal Skills," 481–483.

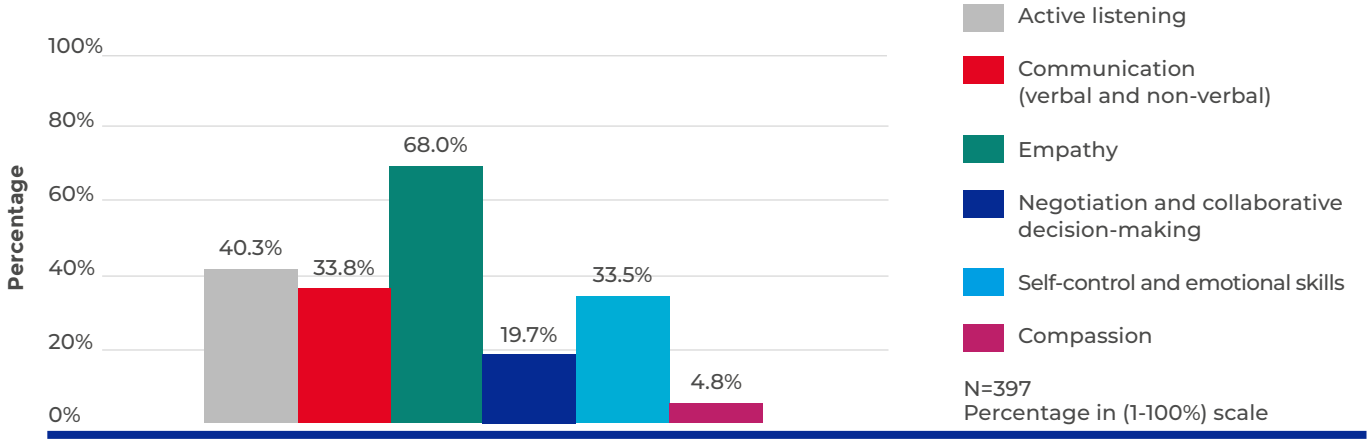
To explore the impact of technology on lawyers' skills, respondents were asked about which skill they thought would be most affected by the use of technology, with their responses limited to choosing only two of the following: active listening, communication, empathy, negotiation and collaborative decision-making, self-control and emotional skills, and compassion. Their responses were as follows: communication (verbal and non-verbal) 63.6%, empathy 47.2%, negotiation and collaborative decision-making 36.4%, and active listening 34.6%, and lastly, self-control and emotional skills 16.2%. These results should be understood as showing that the majority consider communication and empathy to be the two interpersonal skills most affected by technology, while the second most affected block of skills would be negotiation and decision-making as well as active listening, and finally, the least affected would be self-control and other emotional skills. The question did not specify whether "affected" implied a positive or negative impact on the skills. Thus, the results simply state that, according to those surveyed, these skills will likely be transformed by the use of technology. This might mean that lawyers need to rethink their scope or applicability.

Q28. Given the importance of technology today in law firms, which interpersonal skill do you consider will be most affected by the use of technology? Please choose only two of these.



At the same time, when asked which of the interpersonal skills they currently consider to be most pressing, given that they could only choose two options, the lawyers' responses were as follows: empathy 68%, active listening 40.3%, communication (verbal and non-verbal) 33.8%, self-control and emotional skills 33.5%, and negotiation and collaborative decision- making 19.7%

Q29. What are the shortcomings you consider the most lacking in law firms today in terms of interpersonal skills? Please choose two.



Hence, the survey results indicate that technologies, such as GAI, are anticipated to have an impact in relation to empathy, active listening, and communication. This is because, on the one hand, AI is going to perform many tasks that were previously performed by individuals or legal teams, and on the other hand, managing technology and AI will mean that lawyers need to be highly competent in interpersonal skills that enable them to decide (i) if the information they have is sufficient or not; (ii) if it meets ethical standard or not; and (iii) how to design the most effective way to communicate the information internally with the team and to the other side.

AI influences lawyers in the development of internal and external relationships. Here, we can see the link with interpersonal skills and where enhancing and cultivating interpersonal skills enables lawyers to adapt to changing environments, technologically speaking. Along these lines, it should not go unnoticed that the ultimate objective of interpersonal skills is to foster effective relationships.[109] For this reason, during the 21st century, AI and technology will be widely accessible to all lawyers, although mastery of interpersonal skills will not. Only those lawyers who actively cultivate and refine related skills will distinguish themselves from the rest.

The integration of technology into legal practice is not merely a matter of efficiency—it will fundamentally shape the ethical framework in which lawyers operate. More than ever before, ethical considerations will be central to legal practice, requiring legal professionals to exercise critical judgment and discernment when navigating complex moral and professional dilemmas. Interpersonal skills represent the strongest safeguard to ensure that lawyers leverage technological tools responsibly, striking a balance between innovation and ethical integrity. The sheer volume of information now available—far beyond what was conceivable in the past—combined with the growing capabilities of GAI, will offer previously unimaginable solutions. Yet, these advancements will only be as effective as the human communication that accompanies them. Active listening, empathy, assertiveness, and persuasive ability will all prove indispensable in ensuring that technology is used judiciously and ethically.

All in all, the lawyer of the 21st century will not be defined merely by their ability to harness technology but also by their capacity to integrate it with sound judgment, ethical responsibility, and refined interpersonal skills. The evolving legal environment calls for a new model of legal professionalism—one that embraces both technological fluency and human-centered competencies essential for navigating the legal and ethical complexities of the digital era.

The integration of technology into legal practice is not merely a matter of efficiency—it will fundamentally shape the ethical framework in which lawyers operate. Interpersonal skills represent the strongest safeguard to ensure that lawyers leverage technological tools responsibly, striking a balance between innovation and ethical integrity

Along these lines, we can recall how, in 2014, the T-shaped lawyer model[110] began to be discussed, wherein a lawyer had to be an expert in all the technical aspects of the corresponding practice area, in addition to possessing a set of tangential competencies that often involved contacting other professionals, such as engineers, human resources experts, and economists. However, this model did not emphasize something that was soon demonstrated to be key—namely, the importance of decision-making and problem-solving for the lawyer.

Other models, such as "the leadership imperative,"[111] highlight interpersonal skills but focus on the role of the lawyer-leader, stressing that

> the lawyers of the future will need to be technically capable; professionally nimble; and able to use broad, interdisciplinary networks to solve problems... To be effective, this

[109]With respect to a literature review, see Spitzberg and Cupah, "Interpersonal Skills," 486–487.

[110]Regarding the T-shaped lawyer, see R. Amani Smathers, "The 21st Century T-Shaped Lawyer," *ABA Law Practice Magazine*, July/August 2014.

[111]Westfahl and Wilkins, "The Leadership Imperative," 1672–1673.

collaboration must concentrate on helping lawyers build three critical capacities: technical legal skills and expertise, professional skills that are adaptable to any professional context, and opportunity-generating networks of relationships.[112]

Later, the Delta model referred to the fact that a lawyer not only needs to have technical knowledge and skills, along with the ability to use technology, but also the emotional intelligence necessary to appropriately make decisions and solve problems.[113]

5.3. Discussion and conclusions

In summary, the survey responses reveal a generally positive outlook among legal professionals concerning the integration of technology into legal practice, although they express the need for a cautious and selective approach tailored to specific needs within the profession. The vast majority (81.5%) of respondents recognize the value of technology in enhancing the performance of legal tasks, particularly through increased efficiency and cost-effectiveness, but they also highlight the need for careful implementation to avoid pitfalls such as low-quality outputs and inaccuracies in complex legal work.

Lawyers prioritize technologies that streamline operations, exhibiting strong support for communication tools and the use of AI for routine tasks, while specialized tools for contract management and legal research are widely used to improve productivity. However, a significant number of respondents acknowledge that the success of technology adoption will depend on its strategic application over the next 5–10 years, indicating optimism tempered by realistic expectations. Confidentiality and privacy concerns remain a prominent issue, underscoring the importance of trust in a technology's reliability and accountability, while other risks, such as the loss of know-how and the potential erosion of client relationships, are also noted as challenges in terms of adopting AI. Additionally, while most lawyers are hesitant to outsource legal work to tech companies, there is some degree of openness to outsourcing specific tasks where technology may offer efficiency gains. The reluctance to do so remains strongest for high-stakes work such as litigation and dispute resolution, while more standardized tasks are seen as potentially suitable for outsourcing. Finally, interest in automation is high, with nearly 90% of respondents expressing some level of interest, which reflects the legal industry's recognition of automation as a valuable tool for promoting future growth, although most legal professionals remain cautious about the implications of its adoption.

Lawyers prioritize technologies that streamline operations, exhibiting strong support for communication tools and the use of AI for routine tasks, while specialized tools for contract management and legal research are widely used to improve productivity

Machines and algorithms do not inherently take legal jobs, but they undoubtedly transform them. While automation has an impact on the time lawyers spend on specific tasks, its overall effect is far less dramatic than suggested in popular narratives. Automation enhances the efficiency of routine or process-driven activities, but it falls short of fundamentally altering the demand for human expertise in relation to complex, high-stakes legal work.[114]

The legal profession undeniably encompasses a wide range of roles and responsibilities—that is, the tasks assigned to trainees and junior lawyers differ from those of junior associates, which, in turn, differ from the responsibilities of senior associates and partners. AI is increasingly being utilized for certain peripheral or preparatory tasks, including routine legal service functions.[115] It is thus likely that firms will primarily use AI for "transactional activities" that do not rely on building long-term customer relationships and

[112] Westfahl and Wilkins, "The Leadership Imperative," 1672–1673.

[113] Regarding the Delta model, see Carrel, "Legal Intelligence Through Artificial Intelligence Requires Emotional Intelligence."

[114] Remus and Levy, "Can Robots Be Lawyers?," 501.

[115] Jan L. Jacobowitz, *Chaos or Continuity? The Legal Profession: From Antiquity to the Digital Age, the Pandemic, and Beyond,* SSRN Scholarly Paper, June 30, 2020, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3647471.

where in-person interactions remain essential for establishing trust. More importantly, any meaningful exploration of the impacts of novel technologies on the legal profession must focus on the complementary relationship between workers and cutting-edge technologies, given that the adoption and deployment of technology is fundamentally an organizational choice.[116]

In the legal world, the digital transformation has already delivered significant advantages. For instance, it has streamlined workflows, optimized production cycles, restructured organizational systems, and enhanced the abstract components of many tasks. Additionally, it has encouraged the development of new skills and the emergence of entirely new tasks within existing professions. In countless cases, both tangible and intangible infrastructures have accelerated processes, cut costs, expanded client bases, optimized resource utilization, and improved profitability. Lawyers can now benefit from cost-effective management support services and expansive data collection and storage capabilities. These benefits underline why technology is often seen as a "valuable ally."[117] By leveraging technology to perform routine and process-driven tasks, lawyers can better understand their comparative advantages in areas such as abstract thinking, problem-solving, advocacy, client counseling, human emotional intelligence, policy analysis, and big-picture strategy, allowing them to elevate these uniquely human skills to new levels of professional excellence.[118]

Our survey results challenge two widely held assumptions concerning innovation and technology. The first is that technology and innovation are inherently intertwined, while the second is that law firms and the lawyers working in them share a common understanding of innovation. Our results reveal that a majority of lawyers associate innovation primarily with the development of new interpersonal skills. Furthermore, an overwhelming 98.6% of them believe that fostering such skills should be a mandatory requirement for lawyers. However, only a small percentage believe that innovation at the firm level involves honing and developing interpersonal skills. In short, our survey shows that innovation also relates interpersonal skills and that it can be seen differently by lawyers and law firms.

By challenging the first assumption (i.e., that technology equals innovation), our survey demonstrates that innovation is not solely tied to technology but also involves cultivating interpersonal skills, such as negotiation, leadership, and organizational dynamics. By challenging the second assumption (i.e., that innovation's meaning is monolithic), our findings highlight a potential divergence—namely, lawyers and law firms often have differing views on what innovation means.

More specifically, the majority of lawyers perceive innovation to involve developing new interpersonal skills, while law firms foreground other aspects of innovation, such as organizational efficiency and global market expansion. This divergence leaves us with a paradox: either law firms fail to recognize the potential of interpersonal skills as a means of innovating in terms of their service provision or lawyers misunderstand how their organizations define innovation. Addressing this paradox is an important direction for future research.

Any meaningful exploration of the impacts of novel technologies on the legal profession must focus on the complementary relationship between workers and cutting-edge technologies, given that the adoption and deployment of technology is fundamentally an organizational choice

For now, our survey results highlight that innovation holds different meanings for various stakeholders and shed light on how these varied interpretations shape the discourse concerning innovation in the legal sector. Predominantly,

[116] Antonio Aloisi and Valerio De Stefano, *Your Boss is an Algorithm: Artificial Intelligence, Platform Work and Labour* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022).

[117] Aloisi and De Stefano, *Your Boss is an Algorithm*.

[118] Surden, *Artificial Intelligence and Law: An Overview*, 1305–1338.

lawyers associate innovation with efficiency—specifically, with saving costs and reducing time in relation to service provision. Interestingly, fewer than one-third of respondents identify technology as the primary means of enhancing efficiency. While the survey underscores the strong link between innovation and efficiency, it also reveals a subtler, albeit still significant, connection between innovation and interpersonal skills.

A key question emerges: Why do only 2.2% of lawyers associate innovation with interpersonal skills at the firm level, whereas 65% make this connection when questioned individually? While some disparity between the individual and organizational perspectives is expected, this sharp division warrants further investigation. Is it because firms foster a culture that primarily views innovators as technologists? Do technologists contribute more visibly than lawyers to improving efficiency? Or does equating innovation with efficiency lead to an overemphasis on technology, overshadowing the other dimensions of innovation? These questions remain unanswered but merit closer scrutiny.

Our findings suggest that innovation in legal practice goes beyond the adoption of technology. A key component of innovation, according to the respondents, is the cultivation of interpersonal skills as a pathway to innovative practices within law firms. More specifically, lawyers identify interpersonal skills as those related to communication—such as public speaking and active listening—management, leadership, negotiation, and collaborative decision-making. Such skills are recognized as critical, particularly in today's technology-driven environment, highlighting the need for human wisdom so that algorithmic certainty is mitigated by human reasonableness and sound judgement.

This perspective on innovation, which emphasizes the cultivation and application of interpersonal skills, expands traditional models and views regarding law and innovation. It challenges the continuity and discontinuity theses by asserting that innovation is not solely related to technology, nor is it divorced from it. From the data collected through the survey, we infer that innovation involves leveraging, adapting, and integrating technological advancements while fostering an innovative mindset. It requires identifying solutions, creating value, and adapting to new professional and social environments.

Innovation is, therefore, not merely about adopting new roles but also about embracing new ways of working, thinking, and collaborating. It calls for lawyers to integrate their legal expertise with client needs, technological tools, and interpersonal skills, fostering both collaboration and shared decision-making.

Innovation is not merely about adopting new roles but also about embracing new ways of working, thinking, and collaborating. It calls for lawyers to integrate their legal expertise with client needs, technological tools, and interpersonal skills, fostering both collaboration and shared decision-making

6. One step further: The TIE Lawyering model

Building on our analysis of the prior literature and the results of our survey, we propose the need for a new model that addresses the key dimensions in which modern lawyers must operate and engage. This framework, which we term the **TIE Lawyering model**, encompasses the following dimensions, in addition to deep legal expertise: (i) technological mastery and digital skills (T), recognizing the growing role of technology in the legal profession; (ii) interpersonal skills (I), essential for effective collaboration and client engagement; and (iii) ethics and professional standards (E), ensuring integrity and accountability in practice.

Among these dimensions, we wish to emphasize the relationship between legal expertise and technological proficiency, particularly regarding advancements in AI, as both pertain to technical competencies. However, it is interpersonal skills that truly hold the key to achieving the desired outcomes—whether finding the best solution for the client or fostering a positive impact within the team. Moreover, these skills are essential to ensuring that all actions remain within ethical boundaries. It is widely recognized that failing to respect boundaries in terms of communication can lead to harmful practices, such as emotional manipulation, deceit, or coercion. Therefore, those who can communicate effectively while respecting others' boundaries are not only more likely to succeed professionally but also to act ethically, safeguarding the integrity of their work and relationships.

The significance of interpersonal skills for lawyers cannot be overstated. Hence, these skills should no longer be labeled as "soft" skills but rather recognized as "core" skills, given that they are fundamental to ensuring the entire legal system functions effectively. In our model, we propose a framework for professional development and training that focuses on two levels of interpersonal skills. The first level encompasses "basic interpersonal skills", including oral and written communication, empathy, assertiveness, active listening, and emotional intelligence or control. The second level consists of "advanced interpersonal skills", which build on the foundational skills and include negotiating, complex decision-making, and persuasion. A lawyer who is proficient in both the basic and advanced skills will possess the attributes essential to becoming a leader within the profession—someone who drives innovation and, most importantly, practices law with integrity, being distinguished by their ethical conduct.

The TIE Lawyering model underscores that the most sought-after lawyers in the future will be those who seamlessly integrate mastery of advanced technologies with proficiency in the interpersonal skills essential for personal and professional maturity. These lawyers will stand out not only for their expertise but also for their unwavering commitment to ethical behavior. Training in interpersonal skills helps guarantee respect for others—whether colleagues, clients, or stakeholders—and establishes a foundation for equitable and productive professional interactions. By contrast, the crude exercise of power for its own sake—whether derived from financial leverage, influence, or unscrupulous behavior—inevitably transgresses both legal norms and ethical boundaries.

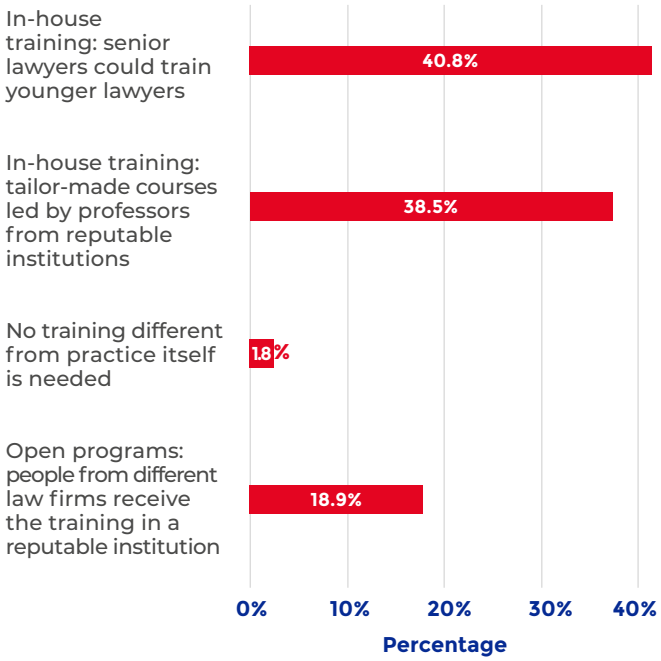
The cultivation of interpersonal skills equips lawyers with a versatile set of tools that empower them to navigate complex situations

while respecting the dignity and boundaries of all involved. A lawyer's true strength lies in their ability to engage effectively and ethically with others, adapting their approach to suit the particular context and interlocutor. By fostering these skills, lawyers can enhance both their firm's reputation and their personal brand, thereby proving that true professionalism entails balance—between authority and empathy, expertise and ethical conduct.

This highlights the dual advantage of interpersonal skills for lawyers. First, in the short term, such skills make reaching agreements significantly easier by enabling stronger connections with interlocutors. Second, in the long term, they help secure lasting relationships, enhance the firm's reputation, and promote ethical behavior. All this is achieved through the professional maturity that comes from consistently respecting others' boundaries.

For lawyers, reflecting the dimensions of the TIE Lawyering model is not merely the result of years of experience and career progression. It also requires a strong commitment to professional training and development, which form the basis for cultivating these essential skills and values. Along these lines, when the surveyed lawyers were asked about this type of training, they thought the most suitable way to improve interpersonal skills and become competent in them, and thus to be innovators, is in-house training, applied and adapted to lawyers themselves, led by senior lawyers and partners and also by professors from reputable institutions (40.8% and 38.5%).

Q30. If there is a lack of training in interpersonal skills among lawyers, what do you consider would be the most effective solution?



N=397
Percentage in (1-100%) scale

Learning from the example of others remains an invaluable means of professional development. However, training offered by lawyers themselves can be equally effective, provided they possess expertise not only in the subject matter at hand but also in teaching related skills. The pedagogy and methodology employed during such training are critical. It is essential to recognize that theoretical examples are often insufficient; instead, practical, hands-on training is required. Immersive scenarios that remove lawyers from their routine practice and place them in diverse, non-legal contexts can be particularly impactful. Such exercises shift the focus to developing the targeted skill rather than emphasizing legal content, which becomes secondary in these instances.

Moreover, expertise in a particular area does not automatically translate into the ability to effectively teach it. Knowing something and being able to impart that knowledge to others are distinct skills. Therefore, we advocate for entrusting the teaching of these complex abilities to trained professionals who can help lawyers recognize their importance while ensuring that the process upholds ethical principles.

In this regard, when a lawyer joins a firm, they can begin developing these skills through targeted training programs. However, ideally, the foundation for such training will be laid during law school, starting from the first year.[119] Introducing these skills at the earliest stages of legal education not only ensures that students acquire them but also fosters a culture that underscores their importance to the legal profession. Embedding these competencies into law school curricula from the outset would signal their critical role in shaping the future of legal practice and equip aspiring lawyers with the tools necessary to thrive in a rapidly evolving professional landscape.

Much has been said about the importance of being a lawyer who is trained in leadership.[120] If we consider our model, a lawyer who receives professional training in basic and advanced interpersonal skills will be better prepared to assume leadership positions,[121] whether consciously so or not. If we regard leadership as one person influencing another or influencing a situation to produce specific effects, a lawyer who practices their profession effectively must exercise leadership.[122] As Deborah Rhode argues, some of the traits that characterize a leader or the activity of exercising leadership include (i) values, (ii) personal skills (self-control, self-affirmation, etc.), (iii) interpersonal skills, (iv) vision, and (v) technical competencies. A lawyer-leader should practice their profession ethically.[123] Without an ethical attitude and vision, leaders and the exercise of leadership will not suffice to motivate other lawyers in the organization to work effectively and become adaptive to the challenges that will surface in a technology-driven world.

[119] Soledad Atienza, "AI Transformation in the Legal Sector Begins in Law Schools," *The Conversation*, March 25, 2025. https://theconversation.com/ai-transformation-in-the-legal-sector-begins-in-law-schools-252007.

[120] In this sense, see Randall Kiser, *Soft Skills for the Effective Lawyer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 249–262, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108238816.007.

[121] Scott A. Westfahl, "Learning to Lead: Perspective on Bridging the Lawyer Leadership Gap," in *Leadership for Lawyers*, ed. Rebecca Normand-Hochman (Surrey: Globe Law and Business Ltd., 2015).

[122] Donald J. Polden, "Leadership Matters: Lawyers' Leadership Skills and Competencies," *Santa Clara Law Review* 52 (2012): 899; Israr Ahmad, Yongqiang Gao and Shafei Moiz Hali, "A Review of Ethical Leadership and Other Ethics-Related Leadership Theories," *European Scientific Journal* 13 (2017): 29.

[123] Rhode, *Lawyers as Leaders*; Kiser, *Soft Skills for the Effective Lawyer*, 231.

Here, technology plays a complementary role by augmenting, rather than replacing, these essential human-centered tasks. By leveraging technological tools effectively, lawyers can amplify their ability to practice and refine their interpersonal and professional skills. This approach aligns with the broader, truer meaning of innovation—not merely the introduction of new tools but also the transformation and enhancement of existing practices to address evolving demands while preserving the foundational elements of the legal profession.

The lawyer-leaders of the 21st century are not defined solely by traditional titles such as partner or area director. Instead, modern lawyers must be prepared from the very moment they enter the legal profession to embody leadership through their actions and how they perform their work. A lawyer should lead not only from above—that is, from a position of authority or high status—but also from the middle—that is, from any position where people have to manage both bosses and subordinates.[124]

What distinguishes one leader from another is the "how"—the approach and principles they apply—rather than simply the "what" or the tasks they perform. For this reason, the TIE Lawyering model emphasizes the ethical dimension as an essential component of leadership. In the 21st century, the "how" must always be guided by an ethical vision, given that it lies at the core of effective leadership. Leadership today demands more than competence or merely the "correct" execution of professional duties. The better leader is not simply the one who performs their role "correctly" but the one who does it "well," with integrity and ethical consideration. This indicates the need to critically reflect on what "well" or "good" means in the context of leadership, particularly in terms of the legal profession, where the interplay between ethics and professional practice is of paramount importance.

The phrase encompasses two key dimensions. First, that the task is executed accurately and effectively, and second, that the process aligns with the established ethical standards. It is here that the concept of "moral luck"[125] comes into play, indicating the luck one can have after doing things appropriately and obtaining good results, meaning that the person who acts in a good way does not necessarily achieve good results and does not have that type of moral luck. Leadership will be ethical as long as the process itself is, and when we refer to the process, we are referring to interactions with contexts and with others, showing respect for the boundaries, values, and overarching principles.

We would also like to make an important addition to this point. Even though interpersonal skills are necessary to exhibit ethical behaviors and performances, so too is having sufficient knowledge and education in environments wherein values, standards, and moral principles are a guarantee that interpersonal skills are always applied within the boundaries of the respect for others and the circumstances. Therefore, much like an architect learns how to balance structural integrity with aesthetic vision from the very first blueprint, a law student should be trained to develop interpersonal skills alongside legal expertise. Just as a well-designed foundation ensures a building's longevity, instilling ethical values and professional principles from the outset equips future lawyers with the tools required to navigate complex legal and human landscapes, shaping them into not only skilled practitioners but also responsible change-makers in society.

[124]Carolyn Kelley, "Klinsky Professor Mandy DeFilippo On Leading 'from the Middle'," Harvard Law Today, April 29, 2019, https://hls.harvard.edu/today/klinsky-professor-mandy-defilippo-on-leading-from-the-middle/.

[125]Joanne B. Ciulla, "Ethics and Leadership Effectiveness," in *The Nature of Leadership*, vol. 11, no. 26 (2004): 302–327.

7. Final remarks

"Lawyers serve as society's general problem solvers, skilled in avoiding as well as resolving disputes and in facilitating public and private ordering."[126] For lawyers to continue refining their skills, practices, and organizations, they must adapt to the challenges and opportunities presented by their evolving environment. To thrive in the face of both adaptive and technical challenges, lawyers need a clear understanding of who they are and what they must become to fulfill their roles effectively.

The emergence of new technologies brings with it a range of new challenges—some linked to increased uncertainty concerning harms and liabilities, others to regulatory activism aimed at governing (and employing) such tools effectively.[127] Legal professionals play a crucial role in relation to companies, institutions, and individuals. This perspective should encourage practitioners and educators alike to view the impact of GAI not as amp zero-sum game but as an opportunity to extend legal expertise into new domains while strengthening current human capabilities with the support of a well-functioning digital infrastructure.

If lawyers are to be problem solvers—capable of diagnosing and addressing clients' issues, and when necessary, managing or avoiding disputes—they require guidelines that enable them to address problems efficiently and effectively. The TIE Lawyering model of legal expertise introduces the "innovation triad"—technology, interpersonal skills, and ethics—as a framework to help lawyers navigate the complexities of their dynamic and often unpredictable working environments.

This is where technology, which is often perceived as a threat to the legal profession, can serve as an ally. Utilizing technology is not about replacing human ingenuity or judgment; rather, it is about amplifying it. True innovation in legal practice is not just about adopting the latest tools but also about using those tools to elevate the human side of lawyering. This may serve as a timely reminder that, even in an era of radical transformation of markets and societies, it is the lawyer's voice, presence, and ability to connect that will ultimately drive the profession forward. In a world that is ever more shaped by technology, the most enduring innovations will be those that help lawyers be more human, not less.

We hope that this study contributes to the debate on legal innovation, the future of legal education, and legal automation, as well as providing a new paradigm for thinking about the law and innovation in a world where both technology and human judgement will be determinants of legal practice's ability to thrive in a constantly changing environment.

[126] Brest and Hamilton Krieger, *Lawyers as Problem Solvers*, 811.

[127] "Policy makers have two options to intervene in AI governance: using traditional regulatory tools to constrain private entities and adapting to the reality of industry-driven AI development." Maroussia Lévesque, *Scoping AI Governance: A Smarter Tool Kit for Beneficial Applications,* Center for International Governance Innovation, CIGI Papers No. 260, December, 2021, https://www.cigionline.org/static/documents/no.260_2kwJVNT.pdf. See also Maroussia Lévesque, "Smoke and Mirrors? AI Regulation and Corporate Power," *University of Illinois Journal of Law, Technology, and Policy*, in press, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4736131.

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