

Will lawyers be affected by Artificial Intelligence?

Imagine that you are stuck in a self-driving car, in unusual traffic. Let us imagine that there has been an accident. The car doesn't know what to do, since there are no saved patterns in the program that account for this scenario – so what happens?

In this case, the system will be automatically directed to the help center to ask for immediate help, thereby enabling the vehicle to decide on an alternative route or remedy. In other words, an unexpected, complex and obscure decision cannot be decided without human input. This scenario is likely whenever AI systems encounter unique situations that deviate from preexisting patterns. As legal work is highly individualized, AI solutions will never be universally applicable and will require some degree of input from a lawyer.

As the adoption of AI is accelerated by global events like the coronavirus pandemic, it will inevitably bring about seismic changes to all sectors. The legal profession will be no exception.

From procedural, administrative and collaborative roles to consultation, contract drafting, litigation and arbitration, lawyers perform numerous tasks in the delivery of legal services. Some of these are already subject to partial or complete automation by AIs, with machine-based systems fulfilling simple tasks, like typing or photocopying, and even more sophisticated tasks, like flagging essential documents or drafting contracts. Without lawyers to make a final assessment, however, outcome-critical insights can be missed.

While able to simultaneously perform multiple complex tasks and achieve intelligent outcomes, AI are machine-learning systems that do not have and are unlikely to develop real cognitive abilities or human perception. This means that total reliance on AI would equate to a hollow understanding of the open-ended nuances of law, acting solely based on pre-existing legal cases, without the sensitivity to facts within each unique context. These rigid and rote-based systems cannot provide accurate legal opinions or react to new details that may arise during the lifetime of a legal case. However, despite this inability, one must concede that AI can perform ordinary duties accurately and effectively, meaning that junior lawyers or paralegals who are performing such tasks should carefully consider how to ensure that they stay relevant in the legal field.

This should serve as a warning to the next generation of the legal profession – the path ahead leads only to the further integration of intelligent systems, so young lawyers must prepare their skills and expectations accordingly. Equally, law firms will have to adapt their business models to acclimate to the changing requirements of technology and the market.

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