European Journal of Legal Education
Vol. 7, No. 2, 2026, 297–355

Rethinking legal innovation: why skills matter more than digital tools – perspectives from lawyers at major firms in Spain

Antonio Aloisi,[*] Pilar Galeote,[†] and Nicolas Parra-Herrera[‡]

Abstract

This paper reconceptualises legal innovation by moving beyond the dominant focus on technology. Although the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping legal practice, the study demonstrates that innovation also depends on work reorganisation, interpersonal skills and ethical judgment. Drawing on a survey of 460 legal professionals in Spain, the research uncovers a striking disconnect: whereas law firms tend to equate innovation with efficiency gains and market expansion, most individual lawyers associate it with the cultivation of relational capacities such as communication, negotiation, and leadership.

Moreover, the impact of automation proves far less dramatic than popular narratives suggest. Digital tools enhance efficiency in routine and process-driven tasks, yet they do not fundamentally diminish the need for human expertise in complex, high-stakes legal work. Digital transformation, therefore, cannot be reduced to the implementation of new technologies; it also requires rethinking how lawyers work, interact, and exercise leadership. To capture this broader understanding, the paper introduces the "TIE Lawyering model", structured around three interdependent pillars: Technology, Interpersonal skills and Ethics. Under this framework, the most effective lawyers are those who combine technical and legal competence with

[*] IE University Law School.
[†] IE University Law School.
[‡] S.J. Quinney College of Law, University of Utah.
This work was supported by the LawAhead Center on the Legal Profession at IE University Law School. Special thanks are offered to David Zegarra and Sara Kabiri for their invaluable research assistance, and to the anonymous reviewers and journal editors.

ISSN 1684-1360 print/ISSN 1750-4686 online
© 2026 European Law Faculties Association

mental dexterity, emotional intelligence and a sustained commitment to professional integrity.

Ultimately, the paper contends that meaningful innovation in the legal sector must remain human-centred. While AI can streamline processes, it cannot substitute for the distinctly human capacities that define legal practice. Genuine progress lies in leveraging technology to reinforce, rather than displace, the core elements of lawyering—empathy, trust, ethical judgment and effective communication—within a profession grounded in service and discretion.

Keywords: Innovation, skills, AI, legal profession, ethics, automation, Spain

Introduction

With the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) and large language models (LLMs), several studies have linked innovation *predominantly*, if not *exclusively*, to the deployment of technology in working practices.[1] However, our hypothesis is that innovation encompasses not only the adoption of novel technology but also the reorganisation of work structures and, importantly, the cultivation of interpersonal skills, such as communication, negotiation and leadership, as well as AI literacy.

Lawyers generally exhibit a high level of awareness regarding the potential and limitations of technologies. For instance, a survey conducted in the United States in early 2023 among 4180 respondents found that 86% of the lawyers were aware of these issues.[2] They recognised the benefits of AI in boosting efficiency while also acknowledging its drawbacks. The literature also highlights the increasing integration of AI into legal services,[3] particularly for automating tasks such as review for discovery, due diligence

[1] Richard Susskind, *Tomorrow's Lawyers: An Introduction to Your Future* (3rd edn, Oxford University Press, 2023).
[2] LexisNexis, Generative AI & the Legal Profession: 2023 Survey Report (LexisNexis, 2023).
[3] Michael Legg and Felicity Bell, *Artificial Intelligence and the Legal Profession: A Primer* (Hart Publishing, 2019).

and contract drafting, as well as its application for rudimentary legal research.[4]

In 2023, the Legal Service Board in the U.K. surveyed 1310 firms providing legal services in England and Wales to assess their attitudes toward adopting new technologies and service innovation, as well as the perceived benefits of these changes. The study found that 61% of the respondents had introduced new technologies into their practice, whereas only 21% reported innovating their service offerings. The study concludes that the COVID-19 pandemic was a primary, yet not exclusive, driver of this shift in attitudes toward technology adoption, as it improved trust in digital tools in legal services.[5]

That same year, the Law Society, in collaboration with the University of Manchester and University College London, published an empirical study drawing on a sample of 656 participants to explore legal professionals' orientations toward technological innovation and its integration into practice, including chatbots, predictive AI and software and databases designed to improve workplace productivity.[6] The study reported that technology adoption was primarily driven by the goal of improving the quality and efficiency of legal services. While legal professionals recognised the potential of technology to increase productivity, they were less convinced of its benefits, particularly with respect to individual economic advantages and career development. As the report observed, "[t]he general picture emerging from these findings is one of mistrust and indifference, suggesting an uphill struggle for organiations planning to introduce significant technological change."[7] This study showed that the adoption of technology in law firms requires not only structural and technical adjustments but also psychological adaptation. More importantly, it started from the assumption that technology and innovation are closely intertwined.[8] An association we explore and challenge in our study.

---

[4] Dan Hunter, 'The Death of the Legal Profession and the Future of Law,' (2020) 43(4) *UNSW Law Journal* 1199.
[5] Legal Service Board, *Technology and Innovation in Legal Services: An Analysis of a 2022 survey of legal service providers* (2023).
[6] Gerard Hodgkinson et al. Attitudes Towards Lawtech Adoption: Findings from a Survey of Solicitors in England and Wales, London: The Law Society (2023).
[7] Hodgkinson (n 6) 12.
[8] Hodgkinson (n 6) 6.

Another study on technology and innovation in legal services was commissioned by the Solicitors Regulation Authority—the independent regulatory body for solicitors and law firms in England and Wales. It aimed to provide an overview of the state of the art from the perspective of legal service providers, including law firms.[9] The findings indicate a substantial increase in the use of technology in legal practice, with 55% of respondents reporting that they improved or increased the use of technology in 2020, again, likely in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. But two-thirds of respondents report that the introduction of new services—defined by the study as innovation—is related to the adoption of new technology. The study ends with a nuanced conclusion: while innovation is often associated with adopting new technologies, there are other pathways to developing new services that do not necessarily require new technology.[10]

The *2024 Legal Technology Survey Report*, published by the American Bar Association in 2025, provides a comprehensive overview of technology use within the legal profession, but offers limited analysis of the relationship between AI adoption in legal services and innovation. Notably, the survey found that 30% of law firms had adopted AI-driven technology tools in their workflows. Among large law firms (with more than 100 attorneys), 46% reported using AI tools to improve cost and time efficiency, despite concerns regarding data accuracy, privacy and implementation costs.[11] This illustrates how the emergence of AI has changed the profession's receptivity to technologies. Yet the primary motive remains the same: to improve efficiency and reduce costs.

In 2025, LexisNexis released the *2024 Investing in Legal Innovation Survey*, which highlights the growing connection between technology and innovation in legal services. The study found that 54% of Am Law 200 firms and 38% of other large firms are exploring new lines of business and transforming their billing models after adopting generative AI (GAI). In addition, 53% of Am

[9] Mari Sako and Richard Parnham, Technology and Innovation in Legal Services: Final Report for the Solicitors Regulation Authority, University of Oxford (2021).
[10] Id, at 5.
[11] American Bar Association, 2024 ABA Legal Technology Survey Report: Combined (2024). *See also* Pamela Langham, *ABA's 2024 Legal Technology Survey Report: Trends in Online Research*, Maryland State Bar Association (April 9, 2025).

Law firms and 20% of other large firms reported having purchased proprietary legal AI models.[12]

Unlike earlier surveys in which the COVID-19 pandemic was a primary driver of technology adoption—and, in some cases, the expansion of legal service offerings—the post-AI landscape reflects a different ecosystem. In this context, technology adoption is more directly linked to innovation, with its expansion signalling broader changes in law firm operations, including hiring technologists, allocating dedicated budgets for GAI initiatives, changing billing models and integrating GAI into legal workflows.

Is this what innovation in the legal profession looks like today?

To better understand how lawyers and law firms perceive innovation in their practice, we conducted a novel empirical study using a survey of 460 legal professionals in Spain. The respondents, spanning roles from junior associates to managing partners, represent various practice areas, including tax, mergers and acquisitions (M&A) and litigation. They were drawn from leading law firms with offices in Spain, making this one of the first studies to specifically target this population and region.

The paper, which presents an in-depth theoretical and empirical exploration of the shifts taking place within the legal profession, is organised as follows. The second section examines the impacts of technology and automation on the legal profession. In the third section, we set the stage for a comprehensive analysis of the critical factors shaping innovative practices in the legal industry. In the fourth section, we delve into the concept of interpersonal skills and delve into its 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. 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 by highlighting the importance of expanding the definition of innovation to encompass interpersonal skills, such as communication, active listening,

[12] LexisNexis, *2024 Investing in Legal Innovation Survey: The Rise of GenAI at Top Firms & Corporations* (2024).

negotiation, collaborative decision-making, leadership and the cultivation of ethical traits and practices.

More than meets the AI: the impacts of digital transformation

The debate on the future of work is divided between optimism and pessimism. On the one hand, there are those heralding an AI revolution poised to reshape the world of work through unprecedented enhancements to efficiency and cost savings.[13] On the other hand, there are those concerned about the potential job losses, reduction of self-determination, expansion of technocratic authority, erosion of critical skills and decline in job quality.[14]

Looking back, this situation is not entirely unlike the reactions to technological tools that have now been integrated into professional environments.[15] 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.[16] Indeed, the rapid popularisation of AI and LLMs over the past few years has highlighted the vulnerability of professions once considered safe from automation. Cognitive, intellectual and creative tasks are gradually yet steadily being undertaken by machines. To date, the results have typically been clumsy and easily criticised.[17] However, experiments with chatbots, agents, smart dashboards and similar tools still leave many professionals in the legal world with a sense of disorientation.

---

[13] Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee, The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies (W.W. Norton & Company 2014); Paul R. Daugherty and H. James Wilson, Human + Machine: Reimagining Work in the Age of AI (Harvard Business Press 2018).

[14] Darrell M. West, *The Future of Work: Robots, AI, and Automation* (Brookings Institution Press, 2018).

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

[16] Bar Association, '7 Ways Artificial Intelligence Can Benefit Your Law Firm,' (Your ABA 19 September 2017) accessed 27 June 2025. 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,' *(2013) 62 Emory Law Journal 823.*

[17] But see Andrew Perlman, 'The Implications of ChatGPT for Legal Services and Society,' *(2024) 30 Michigan Technology Law Review 19*. 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,' (*Legal Aggregate*, 19 April 2023)

This section focuses on the impacts of technologies on the legal profession,[18] which is uniquely sensitive due to its reliance on human judgment,[19] professional 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 frameworks wherein precision, discretion, flexibility and trust are all indispensable.[20] Lawyers operate in a realm defined by words and documents—precisely the areas where GAI demonstrates one of its greatest strengths. 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, as 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 adoption can intensify competition and drive down fees by offering low-cost alternatives to well-established service providers.[23] In addition, concerns remain that soon, only a select few well-resourced entities will have access to the most advanced and best-functioning AI systems,[24] potentially deepening the market polarisation[25] and leading to a "two-tier" society.[26]

Much of the current debate leans toward oversimplification. GAI has the potential to extend automation beyond repetitive manual tasks to more

---

[18] Larry A DiMatteo and others (eds), *The Cambridge Handbook of Lawyering in the Digital Age* (Cambridge University Press 2021).
[19] Jeffrey M Lipshaw, 'Lawyering Somewhere Between Computation and the Will to Act: A Digital Age Reflection' (Suffolk University Law School, 5 August 2019).
[20] Frank Pasquale, 'A Rule of Persons, Not Machines: The Limits of Legal Automation,' (2019) 87 *George Washington Law Review* 1; Christopher Markou and Simon Deakin, 'Ex Machina Lex: Exploring the Limits of Legal Computability' in Christopher Markou and Simon Deakin (eds), *Is Law Computable?: Critical Perspectives on Law and Artificial Intelligence* (Hart Publishing, 2020).
[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, 14 February 2024).
[22] International Bar Association (IBA) and Center for AI and Digital Policy (CAIDP), *The Future Is Now: Artificial Intelligence and the Legal Profession* (IBA 2024).
[23] Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael Osborne, 'Generative AI and the Future of Work: A Reappraisal' (2023) 30(1) *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 161.
[24] Ashwin Telang, 'The Promise and Peril of AI Legal Services to Equalize Justice' (JOLT Digest, 14 March 2023).
[25] Neal (n 21).
[26] Simon Johnson and Daron Acemoglu, Power and Progress: Our Thousand-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity (Hachette UK, 2023) 336.

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.[27] GAI could also streamline tasks for less-skilled workers in contexts in which roles requiring in-person communication will gain value.[28]

There are also two unspoken truths. Research increasingly highlights how most occupations are being "augmented"[29] rather than fully automated,[30] suggesting productivity gains from automating specific tasks while continuing to rely on human involvement.[31] High-discretion augmentation can enhance autonomy and creativity, whereas low-discretion augmentation can erode skills and agency. Moreover, the risk of job displacement is mitigated by the fact that companies will probably maintain human oversight to mitigate and prevent errors, while the use of GAI will likely be restricted in high-stakes situations.[32] Instances of AI hallucinations—LLMs fabricating non-existent precedents,[33] providing phony information and going off the rails—have helped the legal industry recognise the primarily supportive or complementary role these tools can play rather than serving as a replacement for human professionals.[34]

The adoption of AI also raises a range of complex questions regarding the impact on productivity. While surveys provide mixed results, according to Nobel laureate Daron Acemoglu, "[GenAI] will prove to be just "so-so automation" of the type that displaces workers but fails to deliver huge

---

[27] Matteo Adamoli and others, Policy Brief: Generative AI, Jobs, and Policy Response (GPAI 2023).
[28] 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*, 6 April 2023).
[29] Sebastian Raisch and Sebastian Krakowski, 'Artificial Intelligence and Management: The Automation–Augmentation Paradox' (2021) 46(1) *Academy of Management Review* 192.
[30] 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, ILO 2023).
[31] Ethan Mollick, *Co-Intelligence: Living and Working with AI* (Portfolio/Penguin 2024).
[32] Frey and Osborne (n 23) 161.
[33] Benjamin Weiser, 'Here's What Happens When Your Lawyer Uses ChatGPT' *The New York Times* (New York, 27 May 2023).
[34] LexisNexis and Westlaw have adopted GAI technologies—namely, Lexis + AI Legal Assistant and CoCounsel 2.0, respectively. See LexisNexis, 'Lexis+ AI Legal Assistant'; Westlaw, 'CoCounsel 2.0'.

productivity improvements",[35] as in the case of self-service kiosks "that do not work well and do not improve service quality for customers".[36]

This reinforces the argument that any technological artifact must be viewed through an organisational lens. The focus is on how a digital tool is integrated into existing structures, received by workers and clients and employed to deliver better outcomes. Ultimately, progress relies on human ingenuity in restructuring work dynamics, flows and roles to deliver quality. The success of digital advancements heavily depends on how processes and organisational structures are designed to integrate such advancements effectively.[37]

Innovation in legal practice

Technological advancements in legal practice are often conceptualised as catalysts of innovation poised to reconfigure the profession's norms and methods. The link between technology and innovation is, however, not to be taken for granted. In this section, we will 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".[38] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 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".[39] Innovation gravitates toward concepts such as newness and the alteration of something existing. Unsurprisingly, it evokes disruption, transformation and revolution.[40]

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 or, as Deborah Rhode puts it, innovation is the "adaptation of an

---

[35] Daron Acemoglu, 'Get Ready for the Great AI Disappointment' *Wired* (10 January 2024).
[36] Johnson and Acemoglu (n 26) 312.
[37] Aiha Nguyen and Alexandra Mateescu, *Generative AI and Labor: Power, Hype, and Value at Work* (Data & Society 2024).
[38] Dyane O'Leary, *Legal Innovation & Technology* (Routledge 2023) 15.
[39] 'innovation, n' Oxford English Dictionary (online edn, June 2024) sv sense 1 a <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4455287620>.
[40] Clayton M. Christensen, Michael E. Raynor and Rory McDonald, 'What Is Disruptive Innovation?' (2015) 93 *Harvard Business Review* 44.

idea [or practice] to a new setting".[41] The legal industry is typically associated with precedent, tradition, authority and predictability, concepts that are not generally found in the vicinity of innovation.[42] This raises some critical questions. Is the legal profession 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 analysing information for a new case. As Dyane O'Leary highlights, 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.[43] Additionally, 50 years ago, 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.[44]

Lawyers are still expected 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 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 adopts the view that innovation has changed and will continue to fundamentally change the nature

[41] Deborah L Rhode, *Lawyers as Leaders* (Oxford University Press 2013) 56.
[42] Center on the Legal Profession, 'Marketplace of Ideas: What Innovation Is – and Isn't' *The Practice* (January 2019).
[43] O'Leary (n 38).
[44] Ashley Hallene and Jeffrey M. Allen, "Using AI for Predictive Analytics in Litigation," American Bar Association, September 16, 2023.

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 answer clients' queries about their cases.[45]

There are two perspectives on whether innovation 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 for achieving innovation. It might enable the conditions to progress either by freeing time, generating new needs, or shaping how tasks and processes are carried out. In this sense, what matters most is whether technology is useful for solving a specific problem in the legal profession. It is not the technological dimension itself that renders something innovative; rather, it is what it enables—that is, making work processes and tasks easier and more efficient for those addressing problems in legal practice.

The second view holds that technology is a common path toward achieving innovation and progress. From this perspective, innovation is a constitutive force that reshapes legal services. Technology is one of the routes to innovation, though not the only one and certainly not a necessary one. This view nevertheless tends to closely link technology with innovation, given that it can improve efficiency and enhance lawyers' well-being by saving time, improving work quality and automating menial tasks. Hence, technology does not merely create conditions that enable innovation. Rather, the adoption of technology itself within legal practice is understood as a manifestation of innovation.

Beyond these perspectives, innovation is not solely reliant on technology; it encompasses other means. In this sense, innovation emerges during the creation of new norms, concepts, procedures, leadership models and methods of dispute resolution. For instance, it occurred when lawyers adopted arbitration, mediation or med–arb as an alternative to courtroom litigation, even if the technical infrastructure remained the same. Moreover, innovation was evident when the legal concepts of a corporation, a trust and human

[45] John Bliss, "The Rise of the AI Jedis: Student Innovations in Legal AI Testing," *Empirical Studies of AI Lawyering*, August 28, 2024.

rights developed, to name just a few.[46] These conceptual articulations transformed legal services without any visible technological changes.

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, often face backlash, either from individuals who are resistant to change or from those who benefit from maintaining the status quo.

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. 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 time and costs. 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.[47]

Today, 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 it to enhance efficiency (61%) and support legal research (59%). Yet most respondents express concerns about the ethical implications of GAI as an innovative legal practice (87% of lawyers and 91% of law students).[48] 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.

Other approaches to legal innovation focus more on cultivating a mindset than on introducing new tools and technologies. Some firms have begun to innovate by dedicating substantial time and resources to management, organisation and technology, despite these hours not being considered productive. Gunderson Dettmer, a Silicon Valley-based law firm, can serve as

[46] Haim Sandberg, "What is Legal Innovation?," *University of Illinois Law Review* (2021): 63, 68.
[47] O'Leary (n 38) 17.
[48] O'Leary (n 38) 17.

an example. This firm became one of the first U.S. law firms to develop an internal GAI model—conveniently called ChatGD. It enables lawyers to upload documents, ask questions and adjust legal clauses automatically, such as contract risk reallocation or fine-tuning the duties between contractual parties.[49] 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.[50] ChatGD demonstrates adaptability to the evolving demands of legal practice. Furthermore, it invites a re-evaluation of internal practices as legal services are a collection of processes. Ultimately, innovation is also about redefining how law firms can think outside the box by creating tailored tools for specific needs and rethinking organisational patterns.

Michele DeStefano champions yet another prominent perspective in legal innovation studies. She maintains that lawyers should adapt and develop their mindset, skill set and behaviour 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 behaviours. This means 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, to adaptive leadership coupled with technological awareness.[51]

Additionally, DeStefano approaches innovation as more than a conceptual problem. She also explores *who* the innovators are. Hence, she outlines a

---

[49] Bob Ambrogi, "Gunderson Dettmer Launches ChatGD; First U.S.-Based Firm to Develop Proprietary Internal Generative AI App," *LawSites* (blog), August 9, 2023.
[50] Agnihotri, "Cultivating an innovation mindset," 35. However, despite ChatGD and similar built-in GAI models for law firms being used to reduce hallucination risk and enhance reliability, in contrast to open-access GAI models, they are not risk-free. The closed nature of these systems does not guarantee hallucination-free output. A study found that models such as Lexis+AI, Westlaw AI-Assisted Research, and Ask Practical Law AI hallucinate between 17% and 33% of the time. These statistics should heighten the supervision of these models by the legal profession, even if they have been trained on accurate data from law firm archives and other trusted sources. Varun Magesh et al., "Hallucination-Free? Assessing the Reliability of Leading AI Legal Research Tools," *Journal of Empirical Studies* (2025), 25
[51] Michele DeStefano, Legal Upheaval: A Guide to Creativity, Collaboration, and Innovation in Law (Chicago, IL: American Bar Association, 2018), 20.

typology of innovators based on the scale of their disruption and the level where they operate vis-à-vis the legal domain:

- **Intrapreneur**: Someone who creates innovation within an organisation or law firm (e.g., Gunderson Dettmer).

- **Entrepreneur**: Someone who "forges a solo path to build something new"[52] (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 applies their talents for innovation both within an organisation and externally to effect change in the wider profession (e.g., Fuse, which is Allen & Overy's incubator).[53]

This typology indicates the locus where an innovator aims to create change. 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 what DeStefano labels core skills such as research, writing and analysis, paired with legal knowledge. The next level includes concrete, organisational, service and technology-related (COST) skills. To be effective, lawyers need to master managing projects, communicating effectively, mentoring subordinates and providing feedback to colleagues.[54] Such skills allow lawyers to deliver legal services, adapting their approach to their clients' needs. The next level focuses on the so-called "soft" skills.[55] These include problem-solving, empathy, a growth mindset, diversity, trust, cultural competency, self-awareness and collaboration.[56] DeStefano notes that clients increasingly expect lawyers to work across disciplines and to collaborate with other firms.[57] Finally, the top level of the

[52] DeStefano (n 51) 25.
[53] DeStefano (n 51) 25.
[54] DeStefano, (n 51) 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).
[55] In this paper, we use the term "core skills" rather than "soft skills" because it more accurately reflects both the difficulty of mastering these skills and their fundamental importance to problem-solving, negotiation, leadership, and other lawyering competencies. *See infra*, section 4.
[56] Carrie Menkel-Meadow, "Toward Another View of Legal Negotiation: The Structure of Problem Solving," *UCLA Law Review* 31 (1984), 754.
[57] DeStefano (n 51) 39.

pyramid is what she calls "innovation", which involves the skills required for collaborative problem-solving and advancing work beyond traditional practices.

Clients are increasingly seeking law firms that are client-centred, 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 personalised advice that is linked to an innovative culture and organisation. Yet, the concept of innovation in this context still appears vague. Aside from its collaborative and inventive traits, it is unclear *how* innovation happens and how we can tell *when* it happens. Additionally, DeStefano's model emphasises the psychological and individual dimensions of innovation by highlighting who the innovators are and the type of mindset they must cultivate. However, innovation can also be conceptualised beyond the individual level by focusing on interactions among individual professionals, groups and the legal domain—an ecosystem shaped by the ongoing interplay of technology, governance structures and market pressures.

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 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.[58] 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 and the skills and infrastructure required to enhance legal service.

Innovation can be predicated on the creation of new roles that lawyers will soon adopt, distinct from those of litigators, transactional lawyers, and academics. According to Richard Susskind, technology will bring about (and 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.[59] These new roles will foster experimentation in law firms, creating innovation hubs and incubators of ideas. Therefore, new roles will

[58] Antoine Masson and Gavin Robinson, eds., *Mapping Legal Innovation: Trends and Perspectives* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2021).
[59] Susskind (n 1).

likely cultivate an innovative culture and organisational dynamics, which will, in turn, develop new spaces within firms to promote brainstorming and novel interactions.

Overall, legal innovation is a diverse and fragmented field that is developing in many directions simultaneously. Our initial hypothesis, however, considers these common approaches to innovation and 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 and needs. In short, innovation includes both technological tools and interpersonal competencies. Innovation entails adapting, refining and creating new technological tools to render legal practice more efficient or provide a better quality of life for professionals. It also means adapting, refining and developing new interpersonal competencies to update the profession to what the contemporary world demands.

Interpersonal skills or competencies for lawyers?

Undeniably, technology is often part of the innovation narrative or seen as one path among many toward innovation. Yet, innovation is a broader concept that encompasses refining essential skills for twenty-first century lawyers, including communication (e.g., oral expression, active listening, persuasion), dispute resolution and facilitation (e.g., negotiation, consensus building, mediation) and leadership and ethical decision-making skills (e.g., weighing moral risks, calibrating emotions for sound decision-making, mobilising organisations toward shared goals, addressing problems through multi-perspective approaches). We term this approach "innovation as competencies".

Communication skills have been a central component of both legal education and legal practice. Lawyers often perceive themselves as masters of the spoken and written word and skilled rhetoricians, capable of persuading others through a toolkit that includes logical analysis of arguments, identifying fallacies, refining oral expression and reframing arguments and

counterclaims to advance and protect clients' interests.[60] This set of skills has always been part of the lawyer's DNA.

Dispute resolution and facilitation skills emerged later in the development of the legal profession. With the rise of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and collaborative forms of lawyering, lawyers began to develop the skills and capacities necessary to facilitate negotiations and manage interactions among clients and counterparties (or their agents), between clients and governmental or judicial officials and, in some cases, among multiple agents representing a single client, such as a corporation or other collective entity. Facilitation, for instance, requires lawyers to understand not only their clients' legal rights, but also their underlying needs and interests.[61] Mediation, in turn, demands that lawyers tailor their interventions using a less legalistic language and seeks a harmonious relationship between disputing parties.[62] Although mediation often takes place in "the shadow of the law,"[63] emotions, interests and relationship-building play roles that are at least as important as—if not more important than—determining who is legally right or holds the stronger legal claim. Finally, consensus building draws on negotiation, facilitation, mediation and other collaborative skills to clarify what is at stake, identify relevant stakeholders and their interests and design processes in which all voices are heard and meaningfully considered in resolving multi-party disputes. What is particularly salient about these skills is that lawyers need them not only in their interactions with clients, but also within their own law firms—to manage teams, coordinate across practice areas and facilitate internal negotiations.[64]

Leadership and ethical decision-making encompass a constellation of skills that, at least in some contexts, have largely been absent from both legal

---

[60] See Joel P. Trachtman, The Tools of Argument: How Best Lawyers Think, Argue, and Win (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, South Carolina, 2013) and Ross Guberman, Point Made: How to Write Like the Nation's Top Advocate (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[61] See Carrie Menkel-Meadow, Toward Another View of Legal Negotiation: The Structure of Problem Solving, 31 UCLA Law Review, 758.

[62] Lon Fuller, "Mediation--Its Forms and Functions," 44 *Southern California Law Review* (1971).

[63] Robert Mnookin and Lewis Kornhauser, *Bargaining in the Shadow of the Law: The Case of Divorce*, 88 The Yale Law Journal (1979).

[64] Lawrence E. Susskind & Jeffrey L. Cruikshank, Breaking Robert's Rules: The New Way to Run Your Meeting, Build Consensus, and Get Results (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

education and legal practice. In the area of leadership, for instance, it was not until 2017 that the American Association of Law Schools established a dedicated section to promote research and teaching on leadership in the legal profession. Deborah Rhode, one of the pioneers in the field of law and leadership and author of one of the few textbooks on this topic, highlighted the irony of a society in which lawyers routinely occupy leadership positions—from the presidency to governorships, legislatures, corporate executive offices and the heads of nonprofit organisations—while the legal profession itself provides little to no formal training for leadership responsibilities.

Harvard Law School Professors Scott Westfahl and David Wilkins have promoted what they label as the "leadership imperative," an intervention directed at law schools and law firms that calls for equipping lawyers with technical expertise, interpersonal skills and network opportunities to meet the challenges facing the profession. In their words, "the most critical component of the new model of lawyer development is the building of leadership and other important professional skills that can be applied in any professional, public sector, or even academic career setting."[65] Although Westfahl and Wilkins do not explicitly define the scope of the meaning of leadership in this context, their argument suggests that lawyers must study, cultivate and practice leadership capabilities—such as conflict management, decision-making, communication, influence, moral judgment, meaning-making and creativity[66]—to determine what should be preserved and what should be reimagined within the legal profession—following an adaptive leadership framework.[67] Leadership is not a position but a practice and the cultivation of capabilities that are independent of people's roles in the organisation. In this sense, following the adaptive model, leadership should be decoupled from authority. These capacities are particularly salient considering the emergence of GAI, increased competition from non-legal service providers, a globalised market and a highly polarised domestic and international political climate.

From the perspective of cultivating ethical decision-making—a fundamental skill for exercising leadership—lawyers must develop empathy, learn to

[65] Scott A Westfahl and David B Wilkins, *The Leadership Imperative: Preparing Lawyers to Lead*, 52 Stanford Law Review (2017), 1707.
[66] This list is adapted from Rhode (n 41) 40.
[67] Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Your Organizations in a Changing World (Cambridge: Harvard Business Press, 2009).

calibrate emotions, assess and navigate moral risks and mobilise others to approach problems from multiple perspectives to better understand what a given situation demands. Empathy is commonly understood as the ability to put oneself in another's shoes. However, this common understanding does not sufficiently clarify whether empathy is primarily a cognitive capacity *to understand* the world as others see it or an emotional capacity *to feel* the world as others experience it. Psychologists often distinguish between affective empathy or sympathy—feeling as the other feels—and cognitive empathy—understanding the world or a situation from the other's perspective.[68] Empathy can be framed as the difference between sympathy, or feeling with others and perspective-taking, or seeing as others do. Here, we adopt, on the one hand, a narrow understanding of empathy as a cognitive capacity for perspective-taking—not for sharing sentiments or emotions—and one that does not require agreement with the other's view. On the other hand, our approach to empathy is expansive, as cultivating this skill enables the decision-maker to better appreciate the human dimension of legal problems. We borrow this view from Lynne Henderson, who argued that "[e]mpathy enables the decision-maker to have an appreciation of the human meanings of a given legal situation."[69]

Beyond cultivating empathy by expanding our epistemic frames to enhance legal problem-solving, ethical decision-making requires developing the capacity to balance moral values in light of an organisation's vision, mission and strategy. It also entails navigating moral frameworks, professional ethics and market and political constraints to protect core values, including the rule of law, the administration of justice and clients' interests. Ethical decision-making is not simply a matter of following the law, nor is it limited to compliance with professional model rules. Rather, it requires an understanding of one's role within a profession, an entity—such as a law firm, government agency, nongovernmental organisation, or corporation—and a broader political community. It also involves cultivating the ability to prioritise and balance competing values, to recognise trade-offs and to assess the consequences and moral risks associated with different courses of action. Finally, it requires mapping relevant stakeholders and anticipating the distributional consequences that decisions may have on the profession, the organisation, the stakeholders and the political community in which they

[68] Paul Bloom, *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016), 15-17.
[69] Lynne N. Henderson, "Legality and Empathy," 85 Michigan Law Review (1987), 1576.

operate. In short, ethical decision-making involves honing practical wisdom: the capacity to decide well in conditions of uncertainty, incomplete information and competing values what to do and, indirectly, what kind of lawyer one should be.[70]

If a key role in the legal profession is to act as a consensus builder or collaborative lawyer, rather than a litigator, then, as Carrie Menkel-Meadow has suggested

> [lawyers] must know how to maintain process neutrality, often in the face of heated debate and value-based commitments, know how to develop and then enforce process and ground rules for discussion, know how to identify and invite the appropriate stakeholders to a particular problem, understand complex negotiation and coalition bargaining behaviours and dynamics, understand and prevent manipulation of voting strategies involved in the development of appropriate decision rules, guide and facilitate groups and constituents in their deliberations, which often entails knowing when to engage in public and transparent processes and when to use confidential or 'second-track' processes and ultimately, to assist in the development of 'implementable,' 'reality-tested' decisions or, at least, 'contingent' solutions for particular problems. Thus, lawyers who engage in such processes as neutrals will require training in meeting management and facilitation. Also important is a degree of knowledge regarding the sociology and psychology of group behavior, as well as economics, political science, the psychology of strategic

[70] The notion of practical wisdom has its roots in Aristotelian *phronesis.* As political theorist Kenneth Sharpe has argued, "[p]ractical wisdom demands moral skills to deliberate well in making choices and acting on those choices. And this master virtue also demands other virtues—the habits or inclinations (moderns sometimes call these character traits) that motivate people to act, to do the right thing. Practically wise policy-makers or doctors or statespeople or negotiators would want to do the right thing, would notice the relevant particularities of each situation, would know how to reflect and deliberate about their choices, and would have the character traits and emotions to actually act—to practice." Kenneth Sharpe, "Learning the Wisdom to Seize the Moment: How Negotiators Encourage the Learning of Practical Wisdom for Themselves and Others," *Negotiation Journal* (2020), 171. *See also* Deborah J. Cantrell and Kenneth Sharpe, *Practicing Practical Wisdom*, 67 Mercer Law Review (2016).

> voting, negotiation, mediation, bargaining behaviors, and decision science.[71]

Ethical decision-making in neutral and collaborative roles extends beyond compliance with legal or professional norms. Rather, it consists in the exercise of practical wisdom: the ability to balance competing values, anticipate consequences, engage stakeholders, manage risks of manipulation and orchestrate communication toward outcomes that can be operationalised. Menkel-Meadow's example shows how ethical decision-making is role-dependent and practice-based, requiring habituation, reflection and an appreciation of how different institutional, professional modalities and human contexts shape what ethical action demands in the legal domain. In this sense, we approach ethical decision-making as one skill that lawyers need more training in.

The focus on expanding interpersonal 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,[72] for example, identifies 10 fundamental skills for legal professionals.[73] Some of these skills are unique to the legal field (e.g., legal analysis, legal research, alternative dispute resolution), whereas others, such as communication, counselling, negotiation and ethical decision-making, are also applicable to other disciplines. This shift reflects an extension—or innovation—in legal practice, including competencies beyond traditional legal skills. Notably, the Report offers detailed guidance on skills acquisition and retention. For example, problem-solving includes refining the diagnostic lens to spot specific issues, generating alternative strategies, and creating actionable plans.[74] Moreover, communication involves understanding the message recipient's perspective and employing effective methods to influence

---

[71] Carrie Menkel-Meadow, "The Lawyer as Consensus Builder: Ethics for a New Practice," 70 Tennessee Law Review (2002), 82.

[72] 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.

[73] The skills identified in the MacCrate Commission Report were the following: problem-solving, legal analysis and reasoning, legal research, factual investigation, communication, counselling, negotiation, litigation and alternative dispute resolution procedures, organisation and management of legal work, and recognising and resolving ethical dilemmas.

[74] Paul Brest and Linda Hamilton Krieger, "Lawyers as Problem Solvers," *Temp*le *L*aw *Rev*iew 72 (1999): 811.

and persuade the recipient's behaviours and modulate their beliefs. Additionally, the Report aims to transform both legal practice and legal education by broadening and teaching the skills and values required for the profession in the twenty-first century. This call for innovation primarily concerns expanding lawyers' competencies. Innovation, therefore, is also an augmentation of soft skills—or what we will call in this paper, "interpersonal or core skills".[75] 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".[76]

The development of modern technologies and the adoption of inventive approaches necessitate the acquisition of new skills and the definition of new roles. Building such skills and roles for lawyers paves the way for innovative legal practices, more effective client services and an environment where an innovative mindset can thrive. This mindset, grounded in collaboration, emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making and problem-solving, can grow both internally within the law firm and with stakeholders.

Interpersonal skills have traditionally been understood as those skills that enable us to produce effects and impacts on other people to achieve individual or shared objectives.[77] For instance, according to the American Bar Association (ABA), interpersonal skills include communication, social and presentation skills, emotional intelligence and people skills.[78] 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 favourable 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, namely the capacity to "read the room", manage, understand and recognise one's

---

[75] *See supra* fn note 55.
[76] 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.
[77] 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.
[78] Joseph Barrientos et al., "Incorporating Interpersonal Skills in Everyday Law Practice," American Bar Association, February 3, 2023.

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".[79]

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.[80] By contrast, the term "competencies"[81] refers to the application of skills in a manner that is both efficient and effective to complete a task successfully. While possessing a skill is foundational, enhancing and applying that skill effectively are what transform it into a competency. The 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 to align with the evolving demands of the profession. This presents a challenge—namely, what should legal educators do to foster the development of potential skills 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, which can only be achieved through both innovation and adaptation.

Our survey

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 platform unaffiliated with the researchers, in

[79] ibid.
[80] Rabindra N Kanungo and Sasi Misra, 'Managerial Resourcefulness: A Reconceptualization of Management Skills' (1992) 45(12) *Human Relations* 1311; Marvin D Dunnette, 'Aptitudes, Abilities and Skills' in Leaetta M Hough and Marvin D Dunnette (eds), *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology* (2nd edn, John Wiley & Sons 1976), 473.
[81] Kanungo and Misra, (n 80). See also Claude Levy-Leboyer, *Gestión de las competencias*, (Gestión 2000, 1997); Lyle M Spencer and Signe M Spencer, *Competence at Work. Models for Superior Performance* (Wiley & Sons 1993).

order to safeguard neutrality and data disaggregation. Participants were recruited through direct email invitations sent to all lawyers within seven participating private law firms. After providing informed consent, respondents could respond to each of the 30 questions individually or exit the survey before completing it.

The seven firms were selected because they are members of the LawAhead Center, a professional network focused on innovation and transformation in legal services. The selection was therefore based on institutional affiliation rather than statistical representativeness. While these firms include leading organisations with offices in Spain, they are not intended to be fully representative of the entire population of Spanish law firms. This should be considered a limitation of the study.

Before full deployment, the survey instrument was piloted with legal professionals drawn from the same participating firms to test clarity and structure. Ethical approval for the study was sought and obtained prior to data collection. The approval documentation is available upon request.

The primary aim of this paper is to explore rather than explain the phenomenon of interest. To achieve this, the objective of the study, which could be replicated in other countries for comparative purposes, was to gather testimonies on how lawyers and law firms are dealing with fast-paced innovation and how they envision their future.

The survey was organised into four question blocks: personal information, use of technology in law firms, innovation and skills. A pilot survey was conducted between February and March 2024 to test the coherence and validity, collecting information from 61 respondents. Due to the low level of changes required (only in four questions), the pilot survey's observations were kept in the final sample. These observations represent 13% of the final analysed 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. As the sample is limited to specific firms and does not cover the broader spectrum of law firms across Spain, it is not statistically representative of the country's population of lawyers in 2024. Indeed, official statistics indicate a diverse distribution across various firm sizes, regions and practice areas. Therefore, caution is advised when generalising these findings to the entire sector.

Results

Technology

This set of questions explored the role of technology in the legal profession, shedding light on the perceived impact of technology, the benefits and challenges of AI integration and the new dynamics of client relationships.

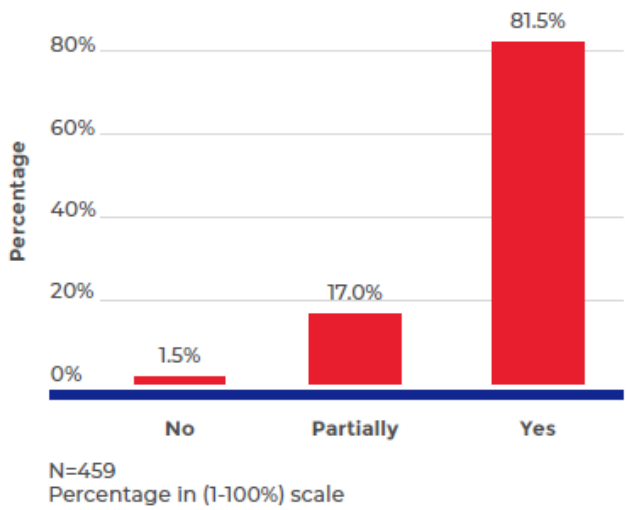


Figure 1: Has technology enhanced the tasks lawyers do in your law firm, according to your experience?

The results reveal a positive outlook concerning the role of technology in law firms, potentially representing a significant discontinuity, as suggested by Susskind,[82] with some interesting insights. A significant majority (81.5%) of respondents feel that technology has enhanced the tasks that lawyers perform,

[82] Susskind (n 1).

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. These findings align with those of other surveys,[83] which emphasise the potential of technology to complement[84] rather than replace human expertise.

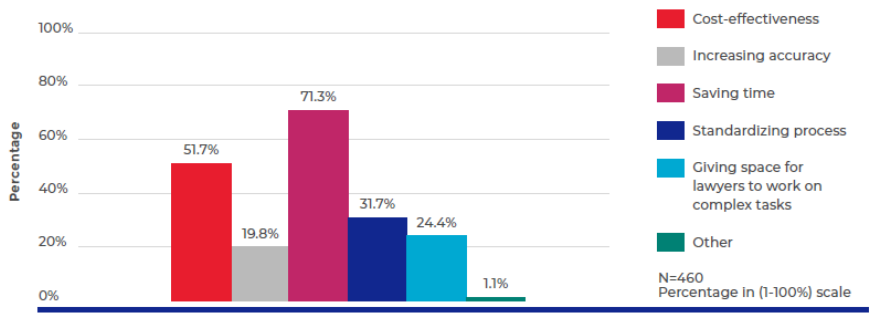


Figure 2: In your view, enhancement means ____? (choose two)

The responses provide a clear picture of the benefits respondents perceive:

- **Saving time and cost-effectiveness:** These top selections show that lawyers highly value technology for its ability to streamline operations, reduce time spent on tasks and cut costs. Efficiency is crucial where billable hours are central concerns. The time freed up by technology can be redirected toward more value-added initiatives, allowing lawyers to focus on complex, strategic tasks.

- **Standardising processes:** A fair number of respondents see value in technology's ability to standardise workflows, which can help ensure consistency and quality in some legal services. This is beneficial for large firms that manage extensive caseloads and require uniformity.

[83] Bloomberg Law, '2023 State of Practice: Practice in the New Era' (Bloomberg Law, 2023).
[84] Thomson Reuters, 'Future of Professionals Report 2024' (Thomson Reuters, 2024).

- **Giving space for lawyers to work on complex tasks:** While fewer respondents favour this option, it remains an important consideration. This choice confirms an appreciation for technology's potential to reduce the time spent on low-value tasks, allowing lawyers to focus on more strategic work that requires human skills.

- **Increasing accuracy:** 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 scepticism regarding technology's reliability.

Surveyed lawyers recognise 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. Novel technologies are well-suited to handling administrative or process-based tasks requiring "more process than judgment".[85]

The widespread implementation of generative AI (GAI) in the legal profession raises an important question: where should the boundary be drawn between processes that require human judgment and those that can be delegated to GAI and other emerging technologies? This boundary appears to be shifting gradually as GAI tools gain traction, become more widely used and continue to improve. Nevertheless, some boundaries will persist for as long as legal practice and reasoning remain grounded in practical wisdom.

In 2008, Richard Susskind did not predict that lawyers would disappear within the next twenty or thirty years. Rather, he anticipated that fewer lawyers would provide traditional legal services and that a new, streamlined and technology-based generation of legal practitioners would emerge, better suited to the demands of the twenty-first century. For Susskind, the central question was "which tasks of lawyers will be better undertaken in the future by systems?"[86] This question mirrors contemporary debates about the limits of automation in legal practice. Legal services consist of a range of processes, some of which cannot—at least for now—be effectively delegated to automated systems that lack the flexibility and discernment required to move

[85] Susskind (n 1).
[86] Richard Susskind, *The End of Lawyers? Rethinking the Nature of Legal Services* (Oxford University Press 2008), 327-343.

beyond replicating past outcomes or common patterns.[87] Non-delegable tasks of legal practice are deeply embedded in a hermeneutic *praxis* of exercising practical wisdom, adapting rules and principles to singular contexts and navigating human dynamics that do not readily translate into predictable, code-like rules or machine-learning models.[88] Even if these tasks could be translated and delegated, an unrestricted use of AI might contribute to the erosion of civic institutions necessary for democratic life.[89]

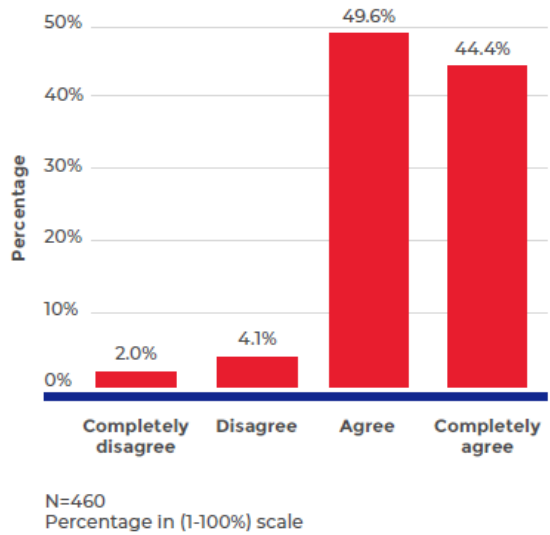


Figure 3: Technology will enhance the tasks undertaken by your lawyers in the next 5–10 years. Indicate the extent to which you agree with such a statement.

When presented with the statement that technology will enhance legal tasks over the next five to ten years, 93.9% of respondents expressed some degree of agreement, with nearly half selecting "completely agree". This broad consensus suggests a prevailing optimism about technology's capacity to improve workflows, streamline processes and strengthen productivity.

---

[87] Mireille Hildebrandt, 'Code-Driven Law: Freezing the Future and Scaling the Past' in Simon Deakin and Christopher Markou (eds), *Is Law Computable? Critical Perspectives on Law and Artificial Intelligence* (Hart Publishing 2020) 82.
[88] For testimonies by practitioners on this topic, *see* Branislav Urosevic, "Experts agree: artificial intelligence cannot replace lawyers," *Law Times* (31 March 2025).
[89] For a detailed development of this argument in institutions such as the rule of law, higher education, and journalism, *see* Woodrow Hartzog and Jessica Silbey, *How AI Destroys Institutions* (December 05, 2025). Manuscript available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=5870623.

Most respondents expect technology to assume an increasingly supportive function in the performance of legal tasks. This outlook may also signal a growing normalisation of digital tools within legal practice and a recognition of their potential to refine processes and enhance client service. As with earlier waves of automated document assembly and review, lawyers in large firms do not appear to perceive these developments as existential threats. Rather, they seem to view them as part of an ongoing process of adaptation through which firms respond to the complexities of contemporary business and shifting client expectations.

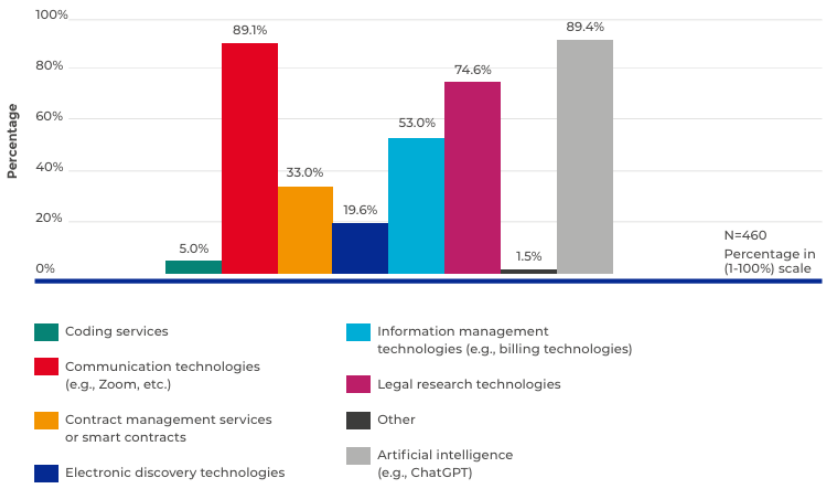


Figure 4: What technology does your law firm use? Select the most relevant ones.

Technology adoption patterns demonstrate clear preferences:

- **Artificial Intelligence and Communication Technologies** dominate. The large uptake of AI suggests growing comfort with automation for drafting, summarising and support in content generation. At the same time, the widespread use of communication platforms reflects the normalisation of hybrid work environments and the need for seamless collaboration with clients and colleagues.

- **Legal Research and Information Management Tools:** Supporting lawyers in navigating document-heavy environments with faster.

- **Contract Management Technologies and Electronic Discovery Tools:** 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 specialised. This gap may be attributed to resistance to change, or a continued preference for manual workflows.

- **Coding Services and Other Technologies:** 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 legal expertise.

These findings suggest a pragmatic approach among legal professionals, who view technology as a valuable means of support that can enhance their work, though they are selective in choosing tools. The high value placed on communication (drafting notes, summarising 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 serves as a "basic starting point", as found in a similar survey on AI in the legal profession—at least this was the position at the time the survey was conducted; things might evolve so that AI is more than a basic starting point.[90] Once again, the responses also reflect recognition that not all tasks are suitable for automation and that technology's role should be complementary rather than substitutive.

[90] Thomson Reuters (n 84).

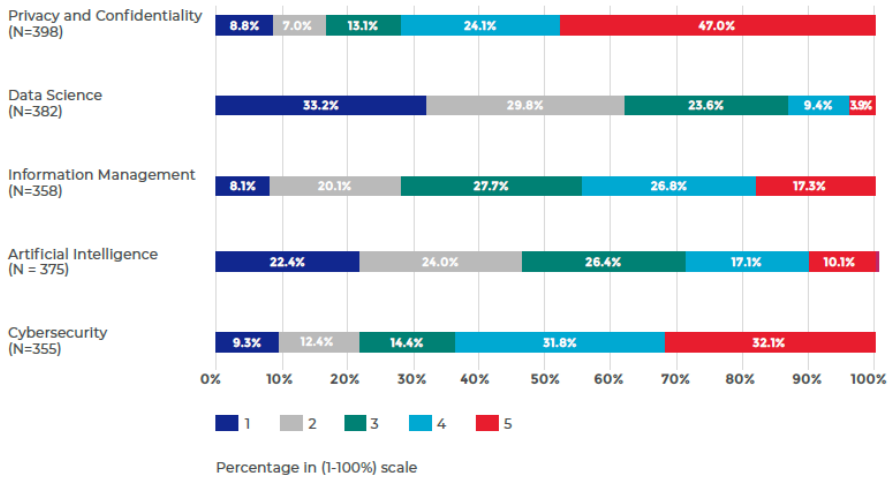


Figure 5: What technological services do your clients need the most? Grade each of them in terms of relevance (5 = most relevant and 1 = least relevant)

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.

- **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 prioritised, likely because efficient data handling and retrieval are essential for ensuring compliance.

- **Artificial intelligence** services rank lower, which may reflect a cautious approach to adopting AI for the purpose of legal work. Clients may have reservations about its reliability or application in relation to complex legal matters.

- **Data science** is seen as the least relevant technology, not much applied in day-to-day legal tasks. This may indicate that data analytics are used more selectively, possibly just for specialised cases or firms focused on data-driven insights.

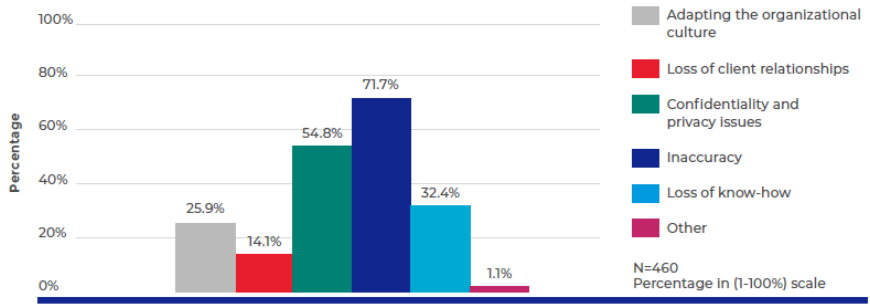


Figure 6: What are the main challenges of using artificial intelligence to provide legal services? Select the two most relevant ones for you.

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

- **Inaccuracy** is the greatest concern, 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, private or confidential 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' skills and expertise over time, particularly in terms of routine tasks that AI might be able to handle.

- **Adapting the organisational culture:** This is a concern for 26% of respondents, indicating that firms may face resistance or require substantial changes to incorporate AI into their operations (e.g., retraining staff, shifting practices and uplifting organisational 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 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.[91] Additionally, the concerns about organisational adaptation and skill erosion reflect the complexities of incorporating AI without compromising traditional legal expertise or the legal profession's core values.



Figure 7: Do you think that, in the future, your clients may obtain legal services from non-legal service providers?



Figure 8: Is your firm already competing with non-legal services providers for a market share?

Responses to this question are almost evenly divided, with 50.9%answering "Yes" and 49.1% answering "No". This narrow margin points to a palpable uncertainty within the profession about whether clients may turn to non-legal providers for certain services. While half of the respondents anticipate such a shift, influenced by the expansion of technology-driven solutions and

[91] Sako and Parnham (n 9).

alternative legal service models, the other half remain confident that traditional legal services will retain their relevance and client loyalty.

When asked more directly about competition with non-legal service providers, however, 78.8% responded "No". This suggests that most firms do not currently perceive themselves as operating in direct competition with non-legal actors. Only 21.2% consider themselves to be competing with such entities for market share. Although a minority of firms already experience competitive pressure, the majority continue to view their market as distinct. The earlier near-even split regarding future client shifts indicates an awareness that non-legal providers may gradually encroach upon segments of the market, particularly in relation to commoditised or technology-enabled legal tasks.

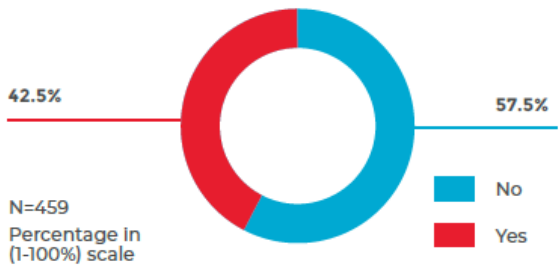


Figure 9: Would you outsource some of your legal work to tech companies?

These two questions explore legal professionals' attitudes toward outsourcing specific legal tasks to technology companies and identify the categories of work they are least willing to delegate. A majority of respondents (57.5%) state that they do not intend to outsource any legal work to tech providers. This response reflects a cautious stance toward transferring legal tasks to third-party technology companies, likely shaped by concerns related to confidentiality, oversight and quality assurance. At the same time, a significant minority (42.5%) express a willingness to outsource certain forms of work, indicating that resistance is far from uniform across the profession.

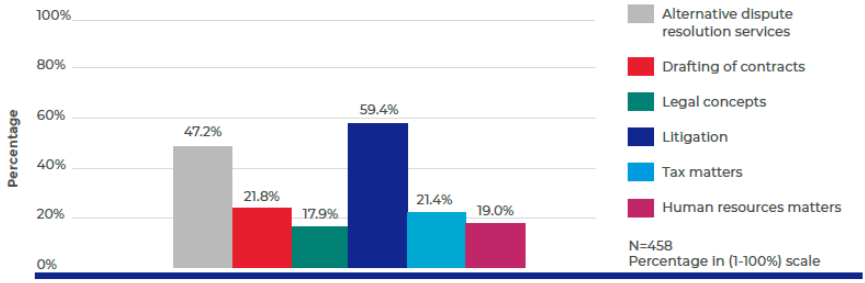


Figure 10: What type of legal work would you be less inclined to outsource to tech companies? Please choose only two of these.

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

- **Litigation** is the most selected option, corroborating the reluctance to outsource in 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** 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 and tax matters** 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.

Legal professionals are open to outsourcing certain tasks to tech companies and service providers, although they remain cautious about delegating high-stakes, complex areas such as litigation and dispute resolution. That said, such a shift appears to be taking place at a reduced pace.

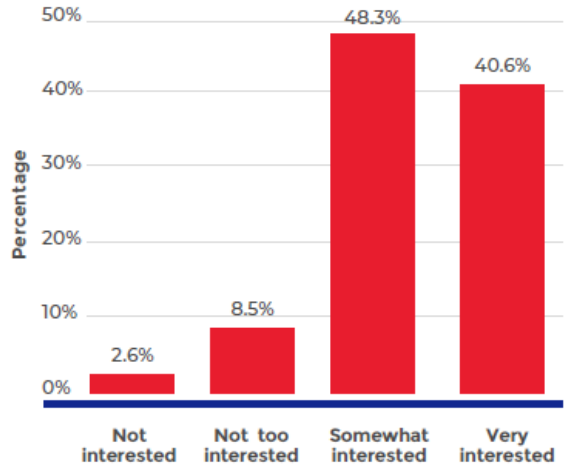


Figure 11: Are you considering adopting automation in your law firm?

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

- **Somewhat interested**: Nearly 50% of respondents express a moderate interest in adopting automation in their firm. This group is cautiously optimistic, recognising the value of automation but wanting to understand its implications more fully.

- **Very interested**: A substantial portion of respondents are highly interested in automation. This indicates strong motivation among some firms to integrate automation into their operations, likely to improve efficiency, reduce costs, or optimise workflows.

- **Not too interested** and **not interested**: 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 practice areas.

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[92] 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 human tasks requiring judgment, emotional or relational intelligence,[93] and ethical considerations[94]—and those that are more routine and automatable. The same approach can be applied to critical tasks, from transactional work to litigation, enabling firms to 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 handle repetitive or process-driven tasks.

Innovation

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

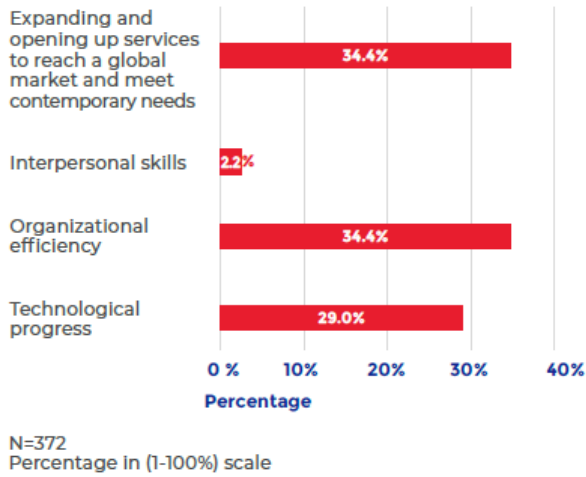


Figure 12: What does innovation mean for your law firm?

[92] Vinciane Beauchene and others, 'AI at Work: What People Are Saying' (BCG, 7 June 2023).
[93] Harry Surden, 'Artificial Intelligence and Law: An Overview' (2019) 35(4) *Georgia State University Law Review* 1305.
[94] Nicolas Parra-Herrera, 'Being a Competent Lawyer in the Age of Generative Artificial Intelligence' *(Center on the Legal Profession*, 6 November 2024).

The first question sought to assess how lawyers view innovation from an institutional perspective—what does innovation mean *for your law firm*? The results reveal that, from the perspective of their law firms, most lawyers consider innovation a tool for improving efficiency (34.4%) or for expanding and opening up services in a global market (34.4%). Here, efficiency 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 seen as a tool for market expansion, improvement of internal efficiency and advancement of technological progress within law firms.

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. However, because this question asked lawyers to adopt their law firm's perspective, it suggests that, from an organisational perspective, innovation is not linked to interpersonal skills.

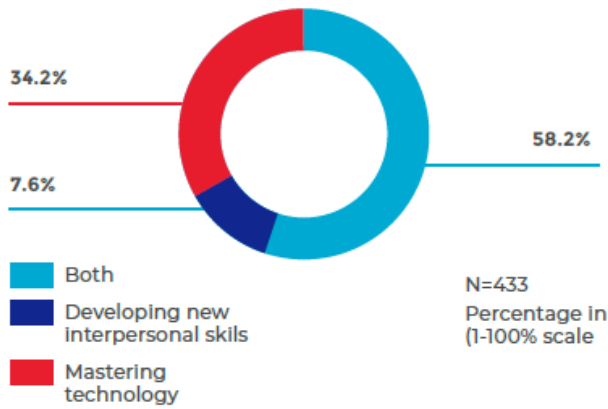


Figure 13: Do you associate innovation more with ….?

Most respondents linked innovation to mastering technology *and* developing interpersonal skills. Moreover, when we combine this result with the percentage of respondents who believe innovation involves "developing new interpersonal skills", we find that 65.8% associate innovation with interpersonal skills.

Why, then, do only 2.2% feel that innovation is correlated to interpersonal skills, do 65.8% associate innovation with such skills? How can we make sense of this apparent incoherence? One plausible explanation is that Q17 asked about what they thought innovation meant *for their law firms*, whereas the following question (Q18) assessed what they, *individually*, associate innovation with. The individual perspective highly values the cultivation and development of interpersonal skills as an aspect of legal innovation.

Asked whether lawyers should be mandated to develop their relational skills (e.g., client dynamics, negotiation, leadership), nearly all the respondents affirmed that lawyers should be mandated to develop such skills (98.6%).

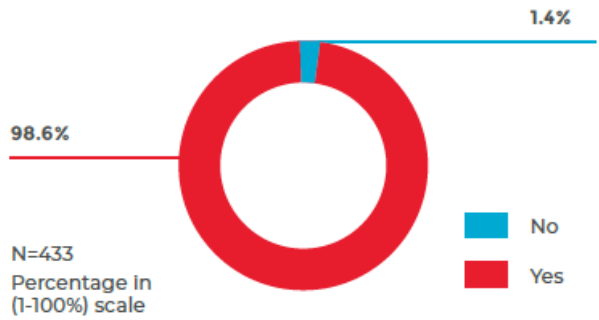


Figure 14: Do you think lawyers should be mandated to develop their relational skills (client dynamics, negotiation, leadership) as part of their skills?

The responses to this question should be analysed in tandem with those concerning Q26, where 93.5% of respondents consider developing interpersonal skills to be part of innovation in legal practice. This shows an appetite to continue developing professional skills to deal with human problems, such as client and group dynamics, negotiation and other forms of collaborative problem-solving and leadership understood as a practice and a collection of capabilities that helps lawyers question what they should preserve and what they should change individually, in their law firms, and in the legal profession to respond and thrive in a new environment informed by AI, polarisation, globalisation of legal services and intense market competition.

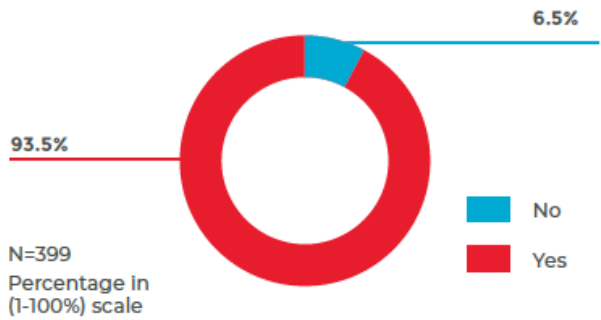


Figure 15: Do you consider developing interpersonal skills to be part of innovation in legal practice?

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 interpersonal skills. A question remains whether this should imply modifications to legal curricula and/or continuing education for lawyers.

Skills development also resonates in the U.S. context. The NextGen Bar Exam will transform legal practice 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 counselling and advice, negotiation and dispute resolution, client relationships and management. The aim is to place greater emphasis on the assessment of lawyering skills to better reflect real-world practice.[95]

The analysis of the dominant trends from the Law Society's second survey of 1660 practising solicitors in Ireland reflects a complementary picture of where the legal profession might be heading in 2030. Among the top fiveopportunities, 38% considered alternative dispute resolution, which includes skills like active listening, communication, negotiation and even

[95] Testing Task Force, *Overview of Recommendations for the Next Generation of Bar Examination* (National Conference of Bar Examiners, Madison, WI, 2021).

leadership, will be an area to continue growing and, hence, practitioners will need more interpersonal skills to succeed in it.[96]

Our survey results reflect an ongoing trend toward recognising legal innovation as a broad concept that cannot be reduced to technological progress. To a greater extent, our findings align with the orientation of the NextGen Bar Exam and with the predictions of those who anticipate significant opportunities in areas such as alternative dispute resolution—fields that demand a robust and wide-ranging set of interpersonal skills.

Another set of questions was related to work automation practices in the surveyed law firms. 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' assistants 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 form of contract drafting, legal research assistance and specialised chatbots are some recent developments in work automation in legal practice.[97]

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.

[96] Mark Garrett, "Back to the Future II," *Law Society Gazette Ireland* (10 June 2025).
[97] See Lauren Colbeck, 'The History of Law Firm Automation' (The Law Society, 26 January 2024).

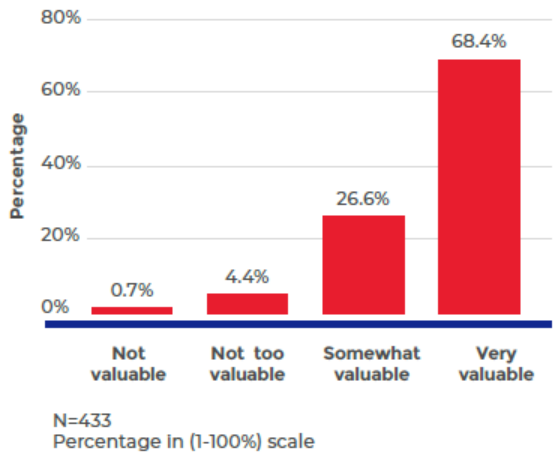


Figure 16: Is legal research automation valuable for your firm?

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

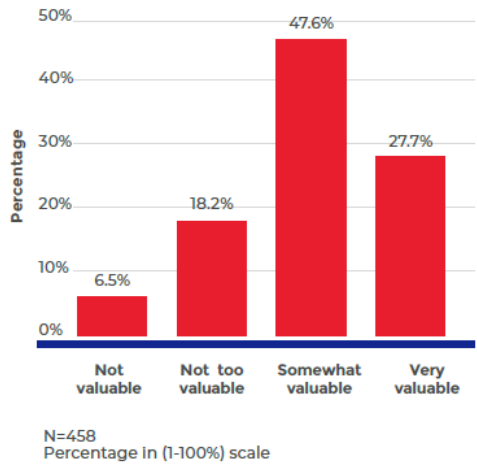


Figure 17: Is litigation automation valuable for your firm?

Both contract drafting and law firm management automation are considered valuable by the majority of respondents. 96.4% 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 a form of automation.

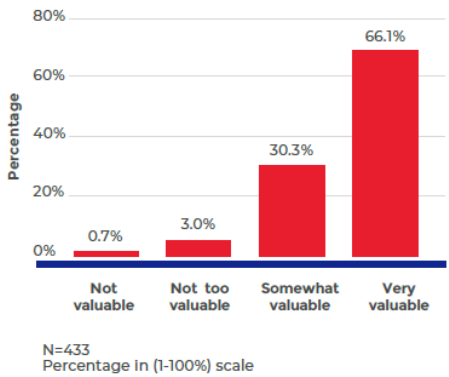


Figure 18: Is automated contract drafting valuable for your firm?

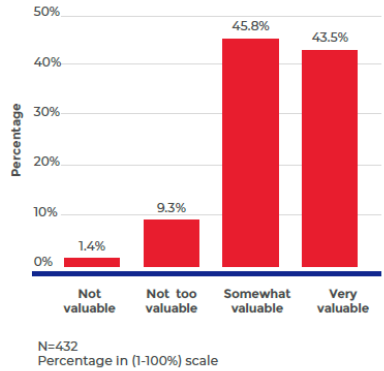


Figure 19: Is firm management automation valuable for your firm?

In summary, the responses reveal a sharp division between the individual approach (what innovation means for the individual respondent) and the organisational 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 and lawyers' views on innovation diverge.

Skills

Analysing the interpersonal skills section of the survey, it appears that 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.

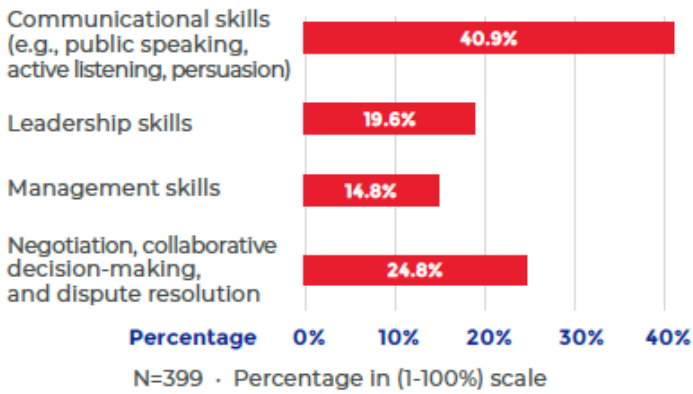


Figure 20: What do interpersonal skills mean for your law firm?

40.9% of respondents answer communication (public speaking, active listening, persuasion), 24.8% stress the importance of negotiation, collaborative decision-making and dispute resolution, 19.6% consider leadership skills, and 14.8% associate interpersonal skills with abilities in the area of management.

The interpersonal skills lawyers consider most useful for their firms are primarily 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%).

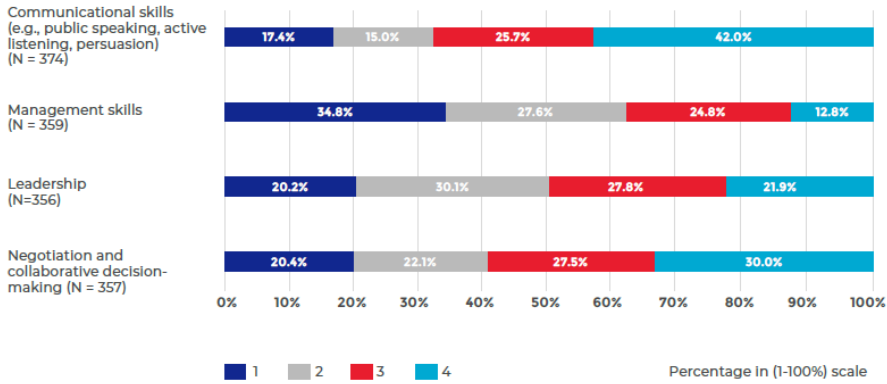


Figure 21: What interpersonal skills are, for you, most useful for your law firm? Grade each of them in terms of their relevance (4 = most relevance and 1 = least relevance).

- **Communicational skills:** The majority (42%) graded this as 4, indicating that it is considered highly relevant. Combined with 25% 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 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 communication 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,[98] 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

[98] Rhode (n 41) 1.

> 2. Since the 1980s, legal scholarship has witnessed a strong influx of negotiation studies, starting with the book *Getting to Yes* (1981), which strengthened the link between the legal profession and negotiation practice.[99]

While there is a broad spectrum of interpersonal skills, lawyers highlight those related to communication as being the most important. This 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 manage verbal and non-verbal language but also the ability to master empathy, assertiveness, mental dexterity and emotional control.

Empathy, like open-minded listening, involves paying attention to the other from their perspective—what we called before cognitive empathy—and "suspend one's judgement and leaving one's internal frame of reference"[100] to better grasp what the other is conveying. 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,[101] the aptitude a person has to make their position known to another through a communicative act. While advocacy skills and oral dexterity have long occupied a dominant place in legal education and legal practice, the other side of communication—namely, listening and empathy—has often been sidelined, despite their importance to what lawyers actually do. Lawyers are rarely taught skills such as listening, empathy and emotional regulation, and law firms often implicitly take these capacities for granted.[102]

---

[99] See Roger Fisher, William Ury and Bruce Patton, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Without Giving In* (Penguin 1981); Robert H Mnookin, Andrew S Tulumello, and Scott R Peppet, *Beyond Winning: Negotiating to Create Value in Deals and Disputes* (Harvard University Press 2000); Menkel-Meadow (n 56).
[100] Jonathan R. Cohen "Open-Minded Listening." 5 Charlotte Law Review (2014), 154.
[101] See, among others, Ivelina Peneva and Stoil Mavrodiev, 'A Historical Approach to Assertiveness' (2013) 6(1) *Psychological Thought* 3; Steve Winer and others, 'Resolving Conflict in Interpersonal Relationships Using Passive, Aggressive, and Assertive Verbal Statements' (2024) 35(2) *International Journal of Conflict Management* 334.
[102] See Cohen (n 100) 162.

This is why communication is so complex: it is necessary to master a set of interpersonal dimensions.[103] 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, lawyers must not only be skilful, but they must also be competent, since only a competent lawyer is capable of reaching an efficient agreement with the other side.

Given that lawyers operate in anm 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 understand the nature of these impacts.

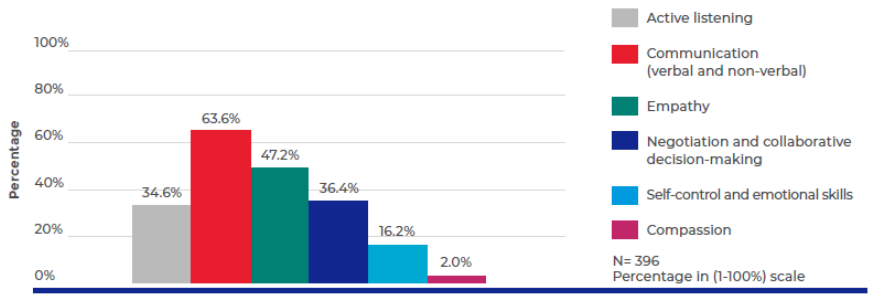


Figure 22: Given the importance of technology today in law firms, which interpersonal skill do you consider will be most affected by the use of technology? Please choose only two of these

Respondents were asked about which skill they thought would be most affected by technology (without specifying whether "affected" implied a positive or negative impact), 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 show 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

[103] See Spitzberg and Cupah (n 77) 481–483.

negotiation and decision-making, as well as active listening, and finally, the least affected would be self-control and other emotional skills.

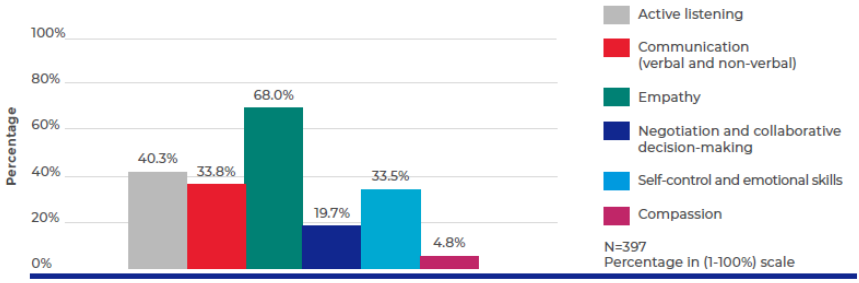


Figure 23: What are the interpersonal skills you consider to be most lacking in law firms?

When asked which of the interpersonal skills they consider to be most pressing, 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%).

Hence, technologies 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 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 standards 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. Along these lines, the ultimate goal of interpersonal skills is to foster effective relationships.[104] For this reason, while 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.

More than ever before, ethical considerations will be central to legal practice, requiring legal professionals to exercise critical judgment and discernment

[104] See Spitzberg and Cupah (n 77) 486–487.

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, combined with the growing capabilities of AI, will offer radically new 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. Overall, the lawyers of the twenty-first centurywill 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.

In 2014, the T-shaped lawyer model[105] 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 involved contacting other professionals. However, this model did not call attention to something that was soon demonstrated to be key: the importance of decision-making and problem-solving.

Other models, such as "the leadership imperative",[106] 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 […] this 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.[107]

[105] Regarding the T-shaped lawyer, see R. Amani Smathers, 'The 21st Century T-Shaped Lawyer' *ABA Law Practice Magazine* (July/August 2014).
[106] Scott A Westfahl and David B Wilkins, 'The Leadership Imperative: Preparing Lawyers to Lead' (2017) 52 Stanford Law Review 1672.
[107] ibid 1672–1673.

The Delta model posited 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 make decisions and solve problems.[108]

Discussion and conclusions

The survey responses reveal a generally positive outlook among legal professionals concerning the integration of technology into practice, although they express the need for a cautious and selective approach tailored to specific needs. The majority of respondents recognise the value of technology in enhancing the performance of legal tasks, 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.

Lawyers prioritise technologies that streamline operations, exhibiting strong support for communication tools and the use of AI for routine tasks, while specialised 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 five to ten 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. 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.

By leveraging technology to perform routine and process-driven tasks, lawyers can better understand and exploit their comparative advantages in areas such as abstract thinking, problem-solving, advocacy, client counselling and big-picture strategy, allowing them to elevate these uniquely human skills to new levels of professional excellence.[109]

---

[108] Regarding the Delta model, see Carrel (n 76).
[109] Surden (n 93) 1305–1338.

Our survey findings call into question two widely held assumptions. The first is that technology and innovation are necessarily synonymous. The second is that law firms and the lawyers within them share a common understanding of what innovation entails. A majority of respondents associate innovation primarily with the development of new interpersonal skills. Indeed, 98.6% consider the cultivation of such skills to be a requirement for lawyers. Yet only a small proportion perceive firm-level innovation as involving the systematic refinement and development of interpersonal capacities.

By questioning the first assumption, our survey shows that innovation cannot be reduced to the adoption of digital tools. It also entails the cultivation of interpersonal skills and the transformation of organisational dynamics. By challenging the second assumption, our findings reveal a potential divergence between individual lawyers and the firms in which they work. More specifically, most lawyers understand innovation as involving the development of new interpersonal capacities, whereas law firms tend to accentuate efficiency and global market expansion. Exploring and addressing this tension constitutes a promising avenue for future research.

Our survey findings indicate that innovation carries distinct meanings for different stakeholders. Most lawyers associate it with efficiency understood as cost reduction and time savings. Notably, fewer than one third of respondents identify technology as the principal driver of such efficiency. At the same time, the data reveal a more nuanced yet still meaningful link between innovation and the development of interpersonal skills.

A central question follows from these findings. Why do only 2.2% of lawyers associate innovation at the firm level with interpersonal skills, while 65% draw that connection when reflecting on innovation from an individual perspective? Some divergence between personal and organisational viewpoints is to be expected. Yet the magnitude of this gap calls for closer examination. Do firms cultivate a culture in which innovation is primarily identified with technological expertise? Are technologists perceived as contributing more visibly than lawyers to gains in efficiency? Or does the equation of innovation with efficiency produce a disproportionate focus on technology at the expense of other dimensions? These questions remain open and deserve scrutiny.

According to respondents, a central component of innovation lies in the cultivation of interpersonal skills as a driver of innovative practice within law firms. Innovation, in this sense, extends beyond the adoption of new roles or digital tools. It also entails embracing new ways of working, thinking, creating and collaborating. It requires lawyers to weave together legal expertise, client needs, technological resources and interpersonal competence into a coherent professional approach.

One step further: The TIE Lawyering model

Building on the literature and our survey findings, we advance a model that captures the core dimensions within which contemporary lawyers must operate and exercise judgment. We term this framework the TIE Lawyering model. Importantly, in addition to deep legal expertise, it comprises three interrelated components: (i) technological competence (T), which acknowledges the expanding role of digital systems in legal practice; (ii) interpersonal skills (I), which sustain collaboration, client relationships and organisational cohesion; and (iii) ethics (E), which anchors professional integrity, sound decision-making, practical wisdom and accountability.

The integration of these three dimensions is indispensable to effective lawyering in today's reality. Doctrinal knowledge, legal reasoning and technical mastery remain foundational. Yet the TIE components together offer a more complete repertoire for navigating technological transformation and form a central part of what innovation should mean within the profession. In the paragraphs that follow, we examine each element of the TIE model in turn in order to clarify its implications for legal education and professional development in the present moment.

Lawyers owe their clients a duty of competence. The most difficult question is whether this duty now includes technological competence and, if so, what that entails. The ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct require lawyers to provide competent representation, which demands the legal knowledge, skill, thoroughness and preparation reasonably necessary for the matter at hand.[110] As emerging technologies became embedded in legal practice, the

[110] *See* American Bar Association, Model Rules of Professional Conduct, rule 1.1. A similar wording can be found in el Código Deontológico de la Abogacía Española, preámbulo ("Se debe actuar siempre honesta y diligentemente, con competencia, con lealtad al cliente, con respeto a la parte contraria, y guardando secreto de cuanto conociere por razón de su profesión.")

scope of competence expanded. In 2009 the ABA established the Commission on Ethics 20/20 to examine the implications of technology and confidentiality for the profession. After three years of study, the Commission prompted the addition of Comment 8 to the competence rule which states that lawyers should keep abreast of developments in the law and its practice including the benefits and risks associated with relevant technology.[111] Andrew Perlman, chief reporter of the Commission, later observed that the reference to technological competence was intentionally open-ended. The recommendation was framed broadly because a competent lawyer's skill set must evolve alongside technological change. Given the speed of transformation over the past two decades, it is difficult to predict the precise skills lawyers will require even a few years from now.[112] Within the TIE model, technological competence does not imply mere technical mastery of every new system. It requires that lawyers be sufficiently capable of using digital tools to deliver legal services efficiently while safeguarding the quality of their work and the expectations, interests and rights of their clients. It also entails awareness of the risks associated with each technology.[113]

In short, technological mastery alone is insufficient. If it were otherwise, automating legal tasks and delegating decision-making to GAI systems and large language models would be enough to propel the profession into its next phase.[114] That is plainly not the case. Our survey indicates that lawyers place significant value on interpersonal skills. These capacities are often decisive in achieving meaningful outcomes, whether in discerning the most appropriate solution for a client or in cultivating a constructive and effective team environment. They also serve as a safeguard, ensuring that professional conduct remains within ethical boundaries and that legal representation is not only technically sound but substantively effective.

Interpersonal skills are foundational to the effective functioning of the legal system. Within our model, we outline a framework for legal education and professional development structured around two levels of interpersonal

---

[111] American Bar Association, Commission on Ethics 20/20, "Revised 105A" (Technology & Confidentiality). (emphasis added).
[112] Andrew Perlman, "The Twenty-First Century Lawyer's Evolving Ethical Duty of Competence," 22 The Professional Lawyer (2014), 25.
[113] Nicolas Parra-Herrera, 'Being a Competent Lawyer in the Age of Generative Artificial Intelligence' *(Center on the Legal Profession*, 6 November 2024).
[114] Andrew Perlman, "The Implications of ChatGPT for Legal Services and Society," 30 Michigan Technology Law Review (2024), 17-18. *See also* Hartzog and Silbey (n 89).

competence. The first level comprises basic interpersonal skills such as oral and written communication, empathy, assertiveness, active listening and emotional intelligence, understood as emotional awareness and regulation.[115] The second level encompasses advanced interpersonal skills that build upon this foundation, including negotiation, complex decision-making, leadership and persuasion.[116] A lawyer who develops both sets of capacities is equipped to exercise leadership within the profession. Such a practitioner is capable of driving innovation while practising law with integrity and distinguishing themselves through ethical conduct.

Technological competence and interpersonal skills alike require ethical grounding if they are to sustain a durable and responsible model of lawyering. In one sense, both dimensions already contain an ethical element. Technological competence involves recognising the moral risks that accompany the adoption of new tools in legal practice, including privacy concerns, fabricated results and forms of institutional erosion or cognitive offloading. Interpersonal skills, for their part, are indispensable to cultivating the ethical judgment and practical wisdom required to navigate trade-offs where values conflict and one must be sacrificed, value tensions where competing commitments must be prioritised and identity challenges where a gap emerges between professional or organisational values and actual conduct.

On the other hand, the ethical dimension of the TIE Lawyering model goes beyond adherence to a fixed catalogue of values or abstract principles. It is better conceived as an ongoing practice. This understanding does not exclude, as Sharon Dolovich has persuasively argued, the need to reflect upon and cultivate certain character traits.[117] Yet it places emphasis on the practical

---

[115] Mark Weisberg and Jean Koh Peters, "Experiments in Listening," 57 Journal Legal Education (2007); Daniel Shapiro, Teaching Students How to Use Emotions as They Negotiate, Negotiation Journal (2006); Henderson n 69.

[116] For teaching negotiation skills *see e.g.*, Andrew Mamo, Negotiation Pedagogy as Democratic Praxis, Negotiation Journal (2021); Carrie Menkel-Meadow: Negotiation: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2022); Hal Abramson: Negotiation Map for Teaching and Practice, 26 Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution (Fall 2024); For teaching leadership, see Scott A Westfahl and David B Wilkins, *The Leadership Imperative: Preparing Lawyers to Lead*, 52 Stanford Law Review (2017) and Deborah Rhode, Leadership for Lawyers (New York: Aspen Publishing, 2020), for persuasion, see Frederick Schauer, *Thinking Like a Lawyer: A New Introduction to Legal Reasoning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[117] Sharon Dolovich, Ethical Lawyering and the Possibility of Integrity, 70 Fordham Law Review (2002) 1686-87.

dimension of ethics as something one actively does in context rather than solely on the aspirational question of who one ought to become.

This ethical practice entails the cultivation of three interrelated capacities. First, moral perception and situational judgment, namely the ability to discern and remain attentive to the ethical risks and values embedded in the delivery of legal services and to determine what ought to be done in the circumstances at hand. Second, organisational judgment, understood as the capacity to assess how a law firm or institution should respond to challenges. Third, personal moral reflection, which concerns an awareness of the kind of lawyer one aspires to be and the moral commitments that shape one's professional identity. Attending to these dimensions equips lawyers to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty, rapid transformation and pressure. It allows them to reassess elements of professional identity, service models and organisational design so that they can respond to evolving realities and continue to flourish within them.[118]

The TIE Lawyering model underscores that the most sought-after lawyers of the future will be those capable of integrating mastery of advanced technologies with well-developed interpersonal skills that reflect personal and professional maturity. Yet this integration cannot stand on its own. Without the cultivation of an ethical practice that offers orientation, even if it does not prescribe a single overarching principle determining what must be done, how an organisation should act or who one ought to become, technological competence and interpersonal ability risk losing direction. Absent ethical grounding, they resemble a chariot without a rider.

These lawyers will distinguish themselves not only through technical expertise but through a sustained commitment to refining their ethical judgment as their technological and interpersonal capacities evolve. Ethical judgment and practical wisdom are inseparable from the cultivation of the interpersonal skills our respondents consistently valued. Training in areas such as active listening, empathy and communication fosters respect for colleagues, clients and stakeholders and lays the groundwork for fair and

[118] This last component of the ethical practice: what to preserve and what to discard in a professional practice is ultimately an expression of adaptive leadership, a model of leadership which has entered the field of law and leadership as a viable form to deal with technological, organisational, and political changes in the legal profession. See Rhode, Lawyers as leaders (n 41) 55.

constructive professional relationships.[119] By contrast, the unreflective exercise of power for its own sake, whether rooted in financial leverage, positional influence or opportunistic conduct, ultimately breaches both legal standards and ethical limits.

The cultivation of interpersonal skills equips lawyers with a versatile repertoire to tackle complex situations while safeguarding the dignity and boundaries of all involved. It also sharpens their ability to perceive the moral and adaptive challenges that arise as the profession continues to redefine itself in the face of innovation. This reveals the dual value of interpersonal competence. In the short term, such skills facilitate agreement by strengthening connections with interlocutors and fostering a culture of collaboration and mutual understanding. In the longer term, they sustain durable professional relationships, reinforce a firm's reputation and refine ethical practices capable of responding to the pressures the profession will confront as technologies evolve, market competition intensifies and the line between legal and non-legal service providers becomes increasingly porous.

When surveyed about how such interpersonal skills should be developed, respondents indicated that the most appropriate approach is in-house training tailored specifically to lawyers. They favoured programmes designed and delivered within the firm, adapted to the realities of practice and led either by senior lawyers and partners or by professors from reputable institutions, with 40.8% and 38.5% respectively supporting these options.

[119] Jonathan R. Cohen, "When People Are the Means: Negotiating with Respect," 14 *Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics* 739 (2001).

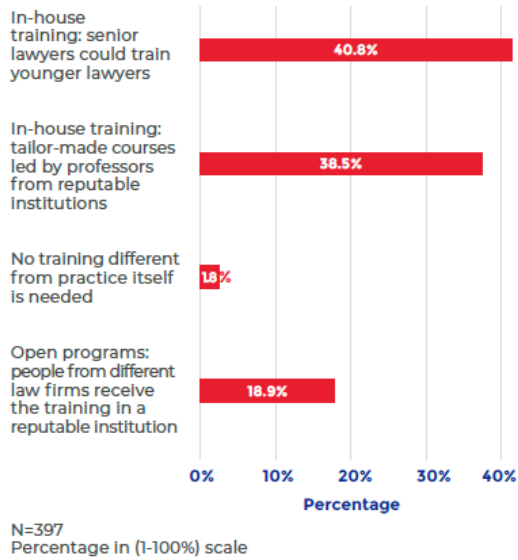


Figure 24: If there is a lack of training in interpersonal skills among lawyers, what do you consider would be the most effective solution?

Learning through the example of others remains a powerful vehicle for professional growth. At the same time, training delivered by lawyers themselves can be equally effective provided they combine substantive expertise with the pedagogical capacity to teach well. The design and methodology of such programmes are decisive. Abstract or purely theoretical illustrations rarely suffice. What is needed instead is practical and experiential training. Immersive exercises or simulations that take lawyers outside their routine professional settings and situate them in varied and even non-legal contexts can generate especially meaningful learning outcomes.

Expertise does not automatically confer the capacity to teach it effectively. Mastery of a subject and the ability to transmit it are distinct competencies. For this reason, we advocate entrusting the instruction of these complex skills to trained educators who can both underscore their significance and guide lawyers toward an ethically grounded use of interpersonal abilities.

In this respect, skill development can continue once a lawyer enters a firm through targeted internal programmes. Yet the groundwork must be laid

much earlier, during legal education.[120] Introducing these competencies at the outset of law school ensures not only that students acquire them but that they internalise their relevance to the profession. Embedding such skills within the curriculum would provide future lawyers with the foundations required to navigate and flourish in an evolving legal landscape.

Much has been written about the value of leadership training within the legal profession.[121] Viewed through the lens of our model, a lawyer who develops both basic and advanced interpersonal skills through structured professional training will be better positioned to assume leadership roles, whether intentionally or by force of circumstance.[122] If leadership is understood as the capacity to influence others or shape situations in order to generate meaningful outcomes, then effective lawyering already entails the exercise of leadership.[123] Yet leadership detached from ethical orientation is insufficient.[124]

What ultimately distinguishes one leader from another is not merely what they do but how they do it. The decisive element lies in the approach they adopt and the principles that guide their actions rather than in the formal tasks they perform. For this reason, the TIE Lawyering model places the ethical dimension at the centre of leadership. In the twenty-first century, the "how" must be shaped by an ethical vision because it is this orientation that anchors

---

[120] Soledad Atienza, 'AI Transformation in the Legal Sector Begins in Law Schools' *The Conversation* (25 March 2025).

[121] In this sense, see Randall Kiser, *Soft Skills for the Effective Lawyer* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 249. Leah W. Teague and Elizabeth M. Fraley, *Fundamentals of Lawyer Leadership: A Skills Guide to Professional Identity Formation* (New York, Aspen Publishing, 2025), Deborah Rhode, *Leadership for Lawyers* (New York, Aspen Publishing, 2020), and Mariano-Florentino Cuellar, "Beyond Weber: Law and Leadership in an Institutionally Fragile World" 69 *Stanford Law Review* 1781–93 (2017).

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

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

[124] Carolyn Kelley, 'Klinsky Professor Mandy DeFilippo on Leading "from the Middle"' (Harvard Law Today, 29 April 2019).

effective leadership. A good leader is not simply one who performs their role correctly but one who exercises it with integrity.[125]

Interpersonal skills are indispensable to the expression of ethical behaviour. They can be cultivated within educational and professional environments where values, standards and moral principles ensure that such skills are exercised with due regard for others and for context. Just as an architect learns from the first blueprint to reconcile structural integrity with aesthetic vision, law students should be trained from the outset to develop interpersonal competence alongside doctrinal mastery. Embedding ethical values and professional principles early in legal education equips future lawyers with the resources needed to navigate both legal and human terrains, shaping them into not only capable practitioners but also responsible agents of change within society.

Final remarks

The emergence of AI systems and other modern technologies presents a range of new challenges for lawyers. Some stem from uncertainty about potential harms and risks while others arise from regulatory activism aimed at governing these tools within the legal ecosystem and beyond.

The survey shows that AI is increasingly used for peripheral and preparatory tasks, including routine service functions. Firms are thus likely to deploy AI primarily for transactional activities that do not depend on building long-term client relationships where in-person interaction remains essential for establishing trust. Any meaningful examination of the impact of automation and AI on the legal profession must therefore attend to the complementary relationship between practitioners and advanced technologies since the adoption of such tools is ultimately an organisational choice.[126]

---

[125] Sharon Dolovich, "Ethical Lawyering and the Possibility of Integrity." 70 *Fordham Law Review* (2002). For an illustrative example of distinguishing doing your role well and doing your role with integrity, see Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day* (New York: Vintage International Books, 1993) and for a reading about the implications of Ishiguro's story in the legal profession, see Rob Atkinson, How the Butler Was Made to Do It: The Perverted Professionalism of The Remains of the Day, 105 *Yale Law Journal* 177 (1995-1996).

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

In short, AI does not inherently eliminate legal jobs, but it reshapes them. Automation affects the time lawyers devote to single tasks, yet its overall impact is far less dramatic than popular narratives suggest. It improves efficiency in routine and process-driven activities but does not essentially reduce the demand for human expertise in complex and high-stakes legal work.[127]

The paper further argues that any radical transformation must be approached with care to ensure that technologies reinforce rather than erode the interpersonal skills that define the profession. These include creativity, communication, persuasion, negotiation and other forms of dispute resolution that respond to clients' needs in efficient or less emotionally burdensome ways as well as leadership capacities required to manage tensions within law firms and mobilise individuals to act collectively and cooperatively.[128]

To continue refining their practices, legal professionals need a clear understanding of who they are and who they must become in order to fulfil their roles effectively. This perspective invites both practitioners and educators to see AI not as a zero-sum dynamic but as an opportunity to extend legal expertise into new domains while strengthening existing human capabilities through intelligent digital infrastructure.

Crucially, genuine innovation in legal practice involves more than adopting AI. It requires integrating technological tools in ways that elevate the human dimension of lawyering. Even in a period of rapid transformation, it is the lawyer's voice, presence and capacity to connect that will shape the future of the profession. In a world increasingly structured by technology, the most durable innovations will be those that enable lawyers to become more human rather than less.

---

[127] Dana Remus and Frank Levy, 'Can Robots Be Lawyers? Computers, Lawyers, and the Practice of Law' (2017) 30 Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics 501.
[128] For the historical roots of the connection between negotiation and leadership *see* Nicolas Parra-Herrera, A Road Not Taken in Alternative Dispute Resolution: Mary Parker Follett and the Emergence of Proto-ADR 40 *The Ohio State J. Disp. Resol.* (2025).