

Legal Innovation & Tech Fest 2019 Highlights – and Thanks to the Community

3 July 2019



We kicked off [Legal Innovation & Tech Fest](#) 2019 with the Queen of legal operations, **Connie Brenton**. Connie returned to the stage for the first time since 2014 – needless to say A LOT has changed since then.

“This is the first year where there is a real energy, collaboration and hopefulness about legal change, rather than fear and doom, it’s

exciting” Connie said.

Addressing the 450 attendees, she said that today’s lawyers are acting within a completely different ecosystem consisting of many different internal stakeholders and services in addition to a variety of new roles, external consultants, and a whole range of external (Tech) vendors with different services they have to deal with. Corporate legal departments are now expected to run their legal department as a business.

Referencing the latest Harvard Business Review [Law Department Survey](#) which found 81% of in-house law departments have reported an increased demand for their services, she says this is having a big knock on effect – squeezing legal resources, increasing demand for technology solutions and more adoption of self-service tools to ease the demand of costly human support.

Connie said that to deal with the urgency of innovation in this complex ecosystem, a solid strategy is of utmost importance. “It’s always people, process and technology – in that order. People are always first.”

Professor Erik Vermeulen continued the conversation of disruption and innovation as he explored how lawyers can prepare themselves for the digital age and unique opportunities that exist for lawyers.

He said that technologies like blockchain, augmented reality and neural networks are not just hype – they are going to impact all facets of business and that includes lawyers. This means that lawyers are going to need different skills. While we won’t necessarily need to know how to code in order to create smart contracts, we will need to know some basic skills and how to communicate with the people who do.

“Most lawyers aren’t ready for this new world of coding and smart contracts. We need to understand how blockchain and coding works, and how AI can make our lives easier. It’s an exciting time for lawyers,” he said.

The New Lawyer and Rise of Wellbeing

The Legal Forecast threw the spotlight over to the Legal Innovation & Tech Fest community in their #askmeanything session to help get inside the mind of the next generation of

lawyers. Questions included how to improve mental wellbeing, how different were expectations vs reality of starting work in the legal industry, and what ideas they had for revamping graduate programs.



Cannon's Chief Legal Counsel, David Field wrapped up day one of the conference with arguably the most pressing topic for the legal community – mental wellbeing for lawyers. He offered his perspective as Board Member for Minds Count Foundation and as a practicing lawyer.

He reflected on the changing nature of legal services and how we can adapt to the changes that are upon us. “As the traditional bundle of legal services is undermined by offshoring, automation, and intelligent legal systems, it will no longer be viable for us to have as many lawyers doing as many traditional tasks as we’ve previously had. You cannot take these technologies head on and think you can win. We need to double down on the things that are fundamentally human and focus on the skills that are the highest value add like empathy, insight and judgement.”

He also said that it’s important to remember we are all essentially human. “Lawyers are taught from day one to project invulnerability but at the end of the day we are all fundamentally vulnerable. No matter how tough you think you are, you are all just one health crisis, one loss of a loved one, or one financial crisis away from mental health issues,” David said.

He finished by reminding us that our career is a marathon, not a sprint, and we should be managing our mental sustainability accordingly.

Automation Technologies

Day two started with a lively discussion about one of the buzzwords of 2019 – automation. There was a general sentiment that automation is one of the biggest growth areas in the legal tech market and is rising higher on the wish list for many Australian organisations.

“We are seeing more and more organisations prioritising automation in their legal functions – workflow and process automation, eDiscovery, and digital signatures are becoming commonplace,” said Hennie Laubscher from K2.

Chandra Sinnathamby from Adobe said that automation technologies are increasingly taking over transactional work, freeing up time for us to focus on more “human” skills like relationship building and creativity. “automation is essentially allowing us to have more empathy,” he said.

The panel pointed out a few challenges that come with implementing automation including: embracing a start-up mentality in a large organisation with embedded risk and compliance

standards; innovating while keeping the lights on; and finding the right talent to implement automation and new technologies.

So are we ready for automation? The consensus was that the legal community isn't ready, but we need to be. The immediate challenge will be getting our organisations to change their mindsets to embrace the possibilities of automation.



Nicola Shaver picked up on this challenge of changing mindsets in her session on how to instil an innovation mindset in your organisation. She said that while most lawyers are aware that change is afoot, the need for change and innovation doesn't feel immediate. But she pointed out that many of our clients are now asking for innovation, requiring a more strategic partnership from their legal providers than they have in the past. To respond to this need, she laid out a three phase plan for rolling out innovation.

"Any culture change strategy cannot be a big boom," she said "this is an iterative, amplification cycle built in three phases: education, engage and execute."

She points out that innovation in law firms does not start with technical tools, but with the right mindset and openness for creative problem solving methods to be integrated into the overall organisation.

The Legal Tech Landscape in 2019

Eric Chin took us on a fascinating journey through the LegalTech landscape to lay out what is happening in the space today. It's good news for those of us who are trying to drive innovation, with 23 of the 50 largest law firms in Australia now having a formalised innovation function, demonstrating that innovation and LegalTech are now firmly on the agenda of law boardrooms.

Chin cites a rise in NewLaw players entering the landscape and says they are winning more and more of the legal spend. Corporate counsels in Australia and New Zealand are redistributing their legal wallets to the most cost-effective legal services – NewLaw firms now account for 9% of spend which is a significant increase from previous years.

So are we having a Cambrian moment in LegalTech? Chin says "not necessarily" but thinks we are seeing the foundations of a Cambrian movement being built at the moment. Watch this space.

Key Themes from Legal Innovation & Tech Fest 2019

The conference wrapped up with a panel of experts who reflected on the key discussion points that dominated the event. Their key takeaways were:

Data: the need to collect it is well understood, we now need to focus on what we're going to do with it. Along with this comes the need to add headcount to support the collection and analysis of data so this is likely to be a growth area for legal teams.

Changing role of lawyers: providing legal advice is a given, we are now expected to become a strategic advisor and innovation driver, able to look at a problem in a creative way and come up with solution that integrates people, process and technology.

Automation continues to be the legal tech at the forefront of many conversations and strategies. It seems we are experiencing a sweet spot of technologies being in the right stage of maturity to bring automation together. Process automation featured in a lot of presentations but the common sentiment was automation is not just about implementing a new shiny technology, it's about freeing up time for lawyers and teams to concentrate on more "human" skills like collaboration, design thinking, and creativity.

Wellness is on the rise – Next Gen lawyers are expecting a push for this as they enter the market. Mental health is also a pressing issue that needs to be addressed among the law fraternity. We also heard that a healthy brain can bring more than just happiness, it's an imperative for better business outcomes.

A huge thanks to everyone that made [Legal Innovation & Tech Fest](#) 2019 another huge success. The talented speakers who so openly shared their ideas, successes and even failures. Thanks to our incredible sponsors who make these ideas come to life with their technology. And of course the Legal Innovation & Tech Fest community – your passion for driving the innovation agenda in your firms and organisations is what gives this event life.

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