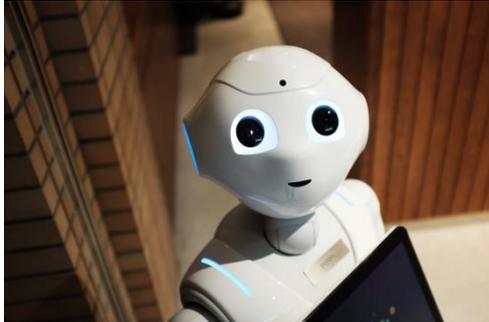


Artificial Intelligence is Not a Threat to Lawyers...Yet

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AI will undoubtedly change the way we practise law but not necessarily in the way you might think. It's unlikely robots will replace lawyers completely, however that doesn't mean the legal industry is immune to disruption. The many question marks that exist around artificial intelligence and the future of law has some of us fearing the worst.

In many cases, this fear comes down to not understanding exactly what AI is and how it works, says Dan Hunter, Executive Dean of the Faculty of Law at QUT. While he doesn't suggest lawyers rush out and learn how to code, he does recommend gaining a fundamental understanding of AI in order to assess its risk and opportunity.

Dan will be sharing more around AI for lawyers at [Legal Innovation & Tech Festival](#) 2020. He'll explore the different practice areas that are at risk of disruptive change, and offer practical ways to respond.

Here, he breaks down AI to reveal what it is, who's at risk and how lawyers can use AI to gain competitive advantage.

Think of AI as huge data sets

The easiest way to understand AI is to think in terms of data sets. If you've got big data sets, then AI can very quickly generate a model of human behaviour based on prior predictions. For example, self-driving cars are really just huge data sets that are generated by sensors. They know that when you see a thing that looks a little bit like a human-shaped "blob" they should avoid it because it's been shown that "blob" millions and millions of times.

The same applies to certain areas of the law.

Due diligence in mergers and acquisitions is one area that requires you to look through huge data sets of text such as lease agreements or supplier contracts. AI technology like machine learning and natural language processing can be used to pull out relevant or important information from millions of contracts, and ensure that vital clauses like 'change of control' provisions aren't missed.

This is happening now and it's revolutionizing the way we practise law. So looking ahead, if you consider areas that have huge data sets, then you can start to understand the aspects of the law that are going to be impacted by AI.

Not all AI is created equally

Technology is undoubtedly changing the nature of work across industries and functions. The role of an accountant is very different to the way it looked 50 years ago, and the same thing is happening with law.

There will be some pretty radical changes happening to certain areas of the law in the next decade. Older types of AI (e.g. the old school "rules-based" AI) is going to have a massive

impact on areas like conveyancing or wills and probate. Technology will automate a lot of that and clients wanting a cost-effective legal service will migrate towards automated solutions that won't rely on human lawyers. However, that technology has been around for 20 or 30 years and it's not really considered AI these days.

“Uberisation” of law more alarming than AI

So while AI is not going to significantly change the practice of law, the one thing that will have an impact is the “Uberisation” of law. Platform technologies, much like Uber, will open up legal services and see the gradual removal of the law firm as the only place for legal services. You'll see a lot more freelance lawyers pull together to answer a legal problem and then dissipate.

Great for clients, not so great for lawyers.

Alternative legal service providers have started to incorporate elements of this, such as flexible staffing models and telecommuting practices, but many still have a hierarchical structure in place. I don't think we've seen a true emergence of a platform model for delivery of legal services in Australia as yet. I'm talking about a flexible staffing environment tied to a rating system, tied to the automated delivery of backend services. But I guarantee that it will happen.

Love AI by embracing innovation

AI is really at the far end of the technology adoption scale for lawyers. And the reality is that the majority of legal practice won't be significantly impacted by AI, at least not in the next 10 to 15 years.

Instead of worrying about AI, lawyers should focus on innovation.

Engage really seriously with innovation and change models. Don't just listen to news reports that are basically just PR spin. Get out there to industry events and conferences like [Legal Innovation & Tech Festival](#) and see what's possible. It's only by actually interacting with a range of people who know what they're talking about, that you can actually start to see where the opportunities are for your practice area.

Too many lawyers miss that opportunity.

They focus on the worry, the risks, the compliance. The reality is that intelligent, capable lawyers with good business sense in this space are going to out-perform and do insanely well as a result of technologies like AI.

Hear more from Dan Hunter at [Legal Innovation & Tech Festival](#) 28-29 April 2020, Hyatt Regency Sydney.

Author

Dan Hunter is Executive Dean of the Faculty of Law at QUT, and until recently also the Foundation Dean of Swinburne Law School. His role in both these jobs is to innovate within legal education to produce a new type of tech-savvy and innovation-enabled law graduate.

Dan is also a chief investigator on the \$32M ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society, and the founder and co-host of [The Future Law Podcast](#).

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