

# Will lawyers become extinct in the age of automation?

29 Mar 2018

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'The robots are coming'. It's fast becoming the mantra of our age. And it comes with more than a hint of threat. I've noticed especially in the last year or so the phrase has become the go-to headline in the legal news pages when they report on technology in our industry.

For our profession – where for thousands of years, trust, diligence and 'good judgement' have been watchwords – the idea of Artificial Intelligence 'replacing' lawyers continues to be controversial. From law school and all through our careers we are taught that the Trusted Advisor is what all good lawyers aspire to become.

The most enduring relationships in the legal profession are the ones where the client feels and believes the lawyer has their back. And often the most valued advice we give clients isn't just based on how we respond when they ask, 'Should I do this?'; but on how we respond when they ask, 'Would you do this?'

Trust is hard won over time, across relationships and often, for our firm, across borders. But the world is speeding up; globalisation, technological advances, and the Internet of Things all mean there is huge pressure to be quicker, smarter, more productive. So if machines can do the learning, will lawyers become extinct?

## Change is happening

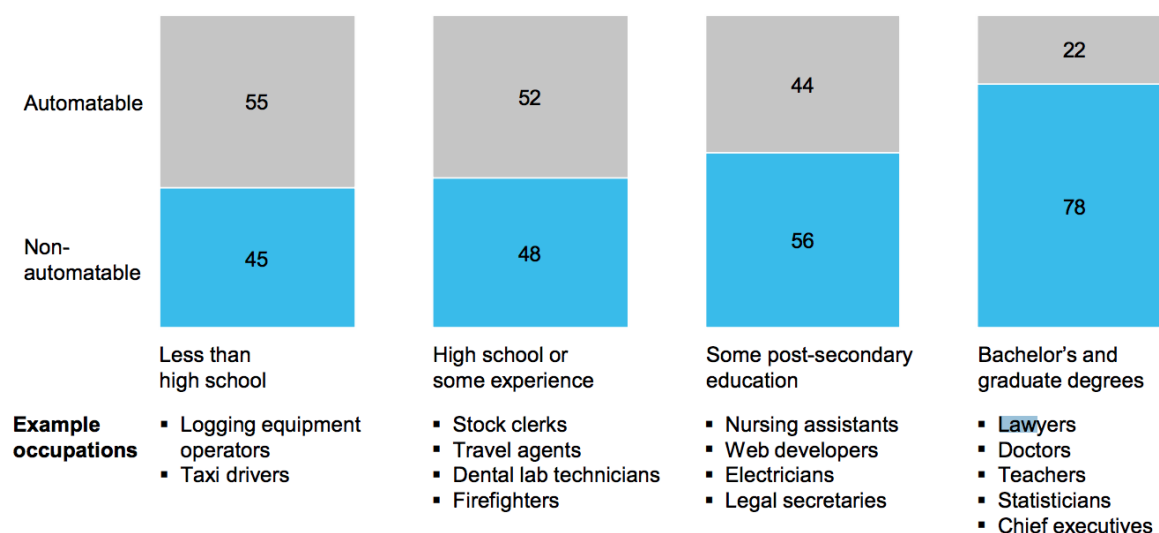
The AI that we are seeing on the market now and for the foreseeable future – which I am not naïve enough to put as any longer than 3-5 years – will enable us to deliver better legal services, quicker, more efficiently and sometimes cheaper. But it does not fundamentally change the game, yet.

But change is happening and being simply a good lawyer is no longer enough. Let's be clear, this is not new. The financial services industry is going through similar challenges, but there will need to be an evolution in law and regulation to allow the true potential of technology in the legal sector.

If you look at document review, 30 years ago a client would pay millions to have thousands of documents manually reviewed. Thanks to technology, much of that work is now done by machines. Many other legal processes can be automated. AI and the tools that 'bring it to life' is more of an opportunity than a threat: a chance to focus on the valuable work for clients; a chance to have more information to empower lawyers to make better decisions more quickly; a chance to offer young lawyers more than spending their first two years in a data room.

### Occupations requiring higher levels of education and experience have lower automation potential

Technical automation potential of work activities by job zone in the United States  
%



NOTE: We define automation potential according to the work activities that can be automated by adapting currently demonstrated technology.

SOURCE: US Bureau of Labor Statistics; O\*Net; McKinsey Global Institute analysis

This revolution impacts not only how we practice law, but also how the law applies to whole new sectors. Our global aviation group's first-of-its-kind specialist Drone

Team is a good example of how we are adapting as the world changes. Drones are revolutionising industries, while simultaneously pushing aviation law's boundaries because they don't fit the standard aviation framework, and many companies entering this space for the first time need industry-specific advice to navigate this rapidly evolving legal landscape and use drones to their fullest capabilities.

Driverless cars are another example. When they knock someone over, who's to blame? Who's going to pay? Where are the liabilities? That's a fascinating area for a lawyer.

### **The future is bright**

The fundamental issue is trust. Our human instinct is to want to speak to a human. I don't think that will change. Trust is what we crave, it's what separates us from machines; empathy, human instinct, an ability to read nuances, shake hands, and build collaborative relationships.

As we see at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting every year, through our long-standing involvement, the world has changed more, and faster, in the last five years than in the last 50.

Businesses (our clients) demand that we not only understand the pace their sector is moving at, but that we as lawyers harness AI to make sure we can do more with less. We don't just talk the talk – we've seconded our lawyers to the WEF's Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution to make sure we are right in the midst of the changes that are coming, and learning by doing.

Put simply, innovation isn't about the business of law, it's about the business of business. So how do we keep up? By having better conversations and by having a richer understanding of the world. To listen and learn so we are better equipped.

Investment in tech must be in tandem with investment in talent. Because, let's be frank, the market will kill those who don't adapt. They are the ones who should be scared of the machines. For them, the robots are coming. The really wise lawyers, they know it's not one versus the other.

For those who can find ways to use AI to augment, not replace, judgement and empathy, I believe the future is very bright indeed.

**Written by**

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Source - <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/03/will-lawyers-become-extinct-in-the-age-of-automation/>