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Insight

AI in Law Firms Can't Take Away the Profession's Human Elements

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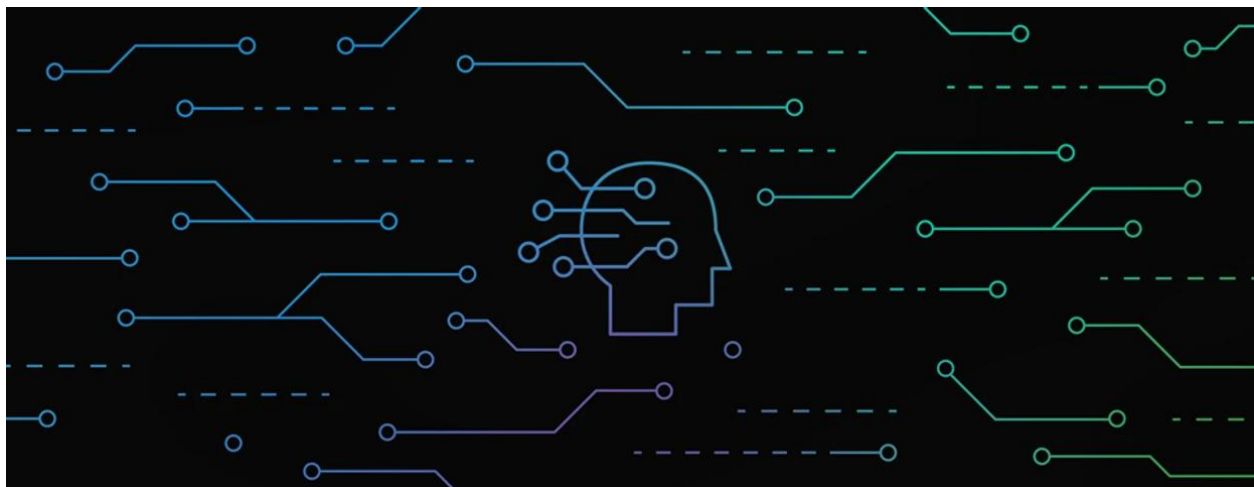
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While much of the conversation over artificial intelligence in the legal field has focused on productivity gains and competitive advantage, the way AI may affect an attorney's well-being has received far less attention.

As AI becomes more deeply integrated into legal work, it's important to consider its potential impact on lawyers' stress levels, professional identity, emotional health,

and overall career satisfaction.

Successful lawyers need excellent cognitive health to focus on their clients' needs, think clearly about complex matters, and exercise sound judgment. Stress, anxiety, and work fatigue all affect that capacity.

As AI increasingly performs repetitive tasks such as planning, comparing, summarizing, drafting, and organizing, it will likely reduce some routine burdens. But it won't fundamentally change the skills that distinguish great lawyers. Creative thinking, strategic judgment, and nuanced analysis will only grow more important. For some attorneys, anxiety about AI may reflect a deeper concern about how their role is evolving. That concern may prompt them to develop new capabilities.

The speed and volume of AI-generated content, along with the risk of errors or "hallucinations," simultaneously may introduce new forms of cognitive strain. Lawyers need time to think independently, reflect on AI outputs, and apply their own judgment. AI can enhance legal analysis, but it should never replace lawyers' responsibility for critical thinking and decision-making.

Professional Identity

For many attorneys, being a lawyer is a core part of their professional identity, not just their job. Technology capable of performing tasks lawyers have traditionally handled, such as research, drafting, and document analysis, may rock the foundations of an attorney's professional identity.

But AI doesn't eliminate the lawyer's role; it shifts where the lawyer is able to pay the most attention. AI also underscores the continuing importance of lawyers as trusted advisers.

When AI is used within the attorney-client relationship, lawyers can help ensure that sensitive information is handled appropriately and that legal analysis occurs

within frameworks that support attorney-client privilege and other professional protections. When clients rely on AI on their own, those safeguards may not exist. Some lawyers may worry about keeping pace with new technologies or about shifting expectations within the profession, but developing AI fluency can deepen rather than diminish professional identity. It can expand attorneys' capabilities and competence—and ultimately make them more effective at serving their clients.

Shifting Legal Workplace

Due to the nature of legal practice, much of the stress and fatigue stems from long hours spent on repetitive and execution-heavy tasks. AI may help relieve some of that burden and allow lawyers to devote more time to the parts of the profession that are intellectually engaging and collaborative: developing strategy, crafting arguments, advising clients, and working with colleagues. For many attorneys, these higher-value activities are also the most professionally fulfilling and socially connected aspects of legal work.

It's still important to monitor the impact of AI on professional connections, though. Legal work can already involve long hours and isolation, but it includes many opportunities for collaboration, debate, and discussion among colleagues. If AI reduces those moments of interaction too much, there may be fewer natural points of connection within teams. But if it's used to handle routine execution under the supervision of lawyers, it could free up time for mentoring, strategy discussions, and client engagement, strengthening the collaborative relationships that support both effective lawyering and emotional well-being.

Keeping Human Elements

AI's value in legal practice depends as much on how it affects emotional health and well-being as how it automates tasks and reshapes work.

AI has great potential to reduce cognitive burden on lawyers, but it also raises

challenges related to professional identity, emotional health, and social connection within the profession. To promote well-being and peak performance, AI should be integrated responsibly and accompanied by human-centered practices.

Because the technology is constantly evolving, education about AI should be continual and should include frank discussions about its risks and limitations, including the need to check sources and guard against misinformation. While models continue to improve, they can't be blindly trusted—AI can “hallucinate” and generate plausible but incorrect answers, and is often designed to be supportive and agreeable. Lawyers therefore need to recognize when outputs require verification or shouldn't be relied upon at all, so that efficiency gains don't come at the expense of accuracy or professional responsibility.

The traditional model of success based on grueling work schedules and intensive workloads is likely to shift. Lawyers will need to focus less on out-grinding the competition and more on the skills that technology can't replicate: judgment, creativity, strategic thinking, and trusted client counsel.

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