

Measuring the Impact of Artificial Intelligence Technology on Employment and the Work Environment in the Legal Industry

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As generative artificial intelligence (AI) rapidly advances and becomes integrated into various professional fields, its implications for the legal profession remain underexplored. Existing studies on the impact of AI on the legal profession are limited and focus mainly on legal research, document review, and predictive analytics, with some interview-based investigations (Kaukinen, 2024; Weinstein, 2022). To the best of my knowledge, there is no research on the impact of AI on employment practices, interactions with clients, and structural dynamics. This study seeks to provide insights into the ongoing and potential future transformations driven by AI in the legal field.

In this research study, I conducted qualitative interviews (about 40 minutes each) with alumni from a prep school and a liberal arts college, both located in New England. Alumni were eligible to participate if they were over the age of 18, had at least one year of experience working in the legal profession, and were currently employed in an occupation in the legal field in the United States. I recruited participants via the prep school's alumni website and LinkedIn. So far, I have conducted 10 interviews, with more expected. Participants included 4 men and 6 women, with years of experience ranging from 3 to more than 20 years; 9 were partners or senior associates in business law. Other fields of expertise included litigation law, contract law, and civil law. The participants described some of their typical work tasks as advising corporate clients on contracts, handling mergers and acquisitions, reviewing documents and agreements, and participating in pro bono activities. On average, they dedicated about 10 hours per month to pro bono work such as contract review, supervisory roles within the firm, and assisting non-profits.

Interview topics included the potential benefits and harms of AI usage in legal settings and AI's impact on hiring practices, organizational structure, workplace hierarchy, and the job market. I also asked participants about the impact of AI on interactions between lawyers and clients, the public perception of lawyers, and the future adoption of AI.

My research revealed that about half of the law firms where the participants currently work, along with several competing firms, have begun incorporating AI tools like Harvey, Westlaw, and Kira to perform routine tasks such as drafting emails, document review, and summarizing short rule releases and court opinions. Some implemented AI tools are used to forecast returns on certain investments and optimize portfolios. A few firms have yet to fully integrate generative AI across their systems, but they are currently exploring how these technologies can best support junior associates, who are the primary users.

At the same time, most lawyers in the study doubt AI's readiness for independent use due to its limited accuracy and credibility. They find it more efficient to perform tasks themselves rather than fact-check AI's work. Contrary to expectations that lawyers would fear AI taking jobs, many lawyers do not have much faith in AI's accuracy to do so. They view AI as a supplementary tool rather than a job threat, emphasizing its current limitations in precision and reliability. The consensus is that while AI has the potential to support lawyers, it cannot fully replace them. As a result, its impact on employment, hiring practices, and company structure is expected to be minimal.

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References

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