

Legal professionals 'sitting on the fence' in terms of embracing new technologies, report finds

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A lack of understanding by, and encouragement from, management is proving a barrier to the uptake of technologies like artificial intelligence

in the legal services sector, according to a new report by UCL, the University of Manchester, and the Law Society.

A survey of more than 650 solicitors found that less than a third (32%) use "lawtech" daily. Lawtech encompasses a range of technologies that aim to support, supplement or replace traditional methods for legal services. These technologies range from lower-level ones with the potential to improve the efficiency of service delivery, such as the use of legal databases and automation of document assembly/discovery, online portals, virtual assistants, and contract review software, to advanced chatbots and the latest advances in predictive [artificial intelligence](#), which have the potential to displace human judgment and decision making.

More than one-third of the sample (35%) said they did not use lawtech at all, or did so highly infrequently. Those that were using the new technologies were doing so primarily in routine administrative tasks, such as managing legal databases, rather than utilizing the more cutting-edge developments to supplant their expert judgment in respect of complex issues.

While respondents acknowledged the benefits lawtech could bring in terms of improving service quality and workflow efficiency, the report found a significant lack of confidence in using it effectively at an individual level. Nearly a quarter (23%) of respondents disagreed with the suggestion that learning to use lawtech would be easy.

Those surveyed also failed to equate the benefits lawtech brought to the wider business with benefits that might enhance their own career prospects. Over half (56%) said they felt lawtech increased their productivity, but around six in 10 (58%) actively disagreed that using lawtech would increase their chances of getting promoted, and more than eight in ten (84.9%) disagreed that using lawtech would increase their

chances of a pay rise.

However, the findings indicated that there is a growing willingness to engage with lawtech despite these concerns. Sizeable proportions of the sample believe that they would be capable of performing jobs and tasks using lawtech if someone else helped them to get started (59%), or were available in the event that they needed help (60%).

Professor Gerard P. Hodgkinson, at The University of Manchester's Alliance Manchester Business School, who led the project, said, "This report shows that a lot of legal professionals are still sitting on the fence when it comes to embracing new technologies. They are not completely resistant, but encouragement and support on the part of senior leaders and key decision makers is badly needed if we are going to see the legal services industry keep pace with other professional service industries, which are considerably further down the line in the adoption of new technologies with similar capabilities.

"Ultimately, it comes down to whether the people at the top of the business consider lawtech to be a strategic priority, and as such, worthy of investment—not only in terms of the purchase of new kit, but equally crucially in the form of the requisite knowledge and skills development, together with the cognitive and [emotional support](#) required to ensure that employees feel valued and psychologically equipped to face the significant change journey ahead."

Co-author Dr. Karen Nokes (UCL Faculty of Laws), said, "The [legal profession](#) is at a crossroads, with new technologies that promise to transform virtually every aspect of the legal services sector starting to gather pace. However, our report suggests that this transformation might not be as rapid as some would think.

"It is clear that there is a [business case](#) for adopting lawtech, but people

are not necessarily equating this to how it will benefit them personally. Senior managers and leaders within law firms need to think about creating a clear connection between the benefits to the organization and the benefits to the individual, if they want to get the buy-in they need from their professional colleagues."

Lubna Shuja, President of the Law Society, said, "Partners and [senior management](#) within solicitor firms have a vital role to play to encourage and support individuals through change that greater use of technology inevitably involves. It's essential that the legal sector capitalizes on the potential benefits of lawtech, but also mitigates the risks involved by upskilling its leaders and managers in the art of change management."

Lawtech is a term used to describe technologies that aim to support, supplement or replace traditional methods for delivering legal services, or that improve the way the justice system operates. Lawtech covers a wide range of tools and processes, such as:

- document automation
- advanced chatbots and practice management tools
- predictive artificial intelligence
- smart legal contracts
- knowledge management and research systems

More information: Read the [full report \(PDF\)](#)

Provided by University College London

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