

"Shaping the Modern Lawyer: Insightful, Versatile, Human-Centred"

In the early days of my career, I was in awe of senior lawyers who commanded board rooms much like they did in the Courts. Masterful deliveries with eloquence, legal precision, and a touch of Latin which often left clients more impressed than informed.

Traditionally, legal services were shaped by lawyers — they determined the scope, timeline, and cost, with little client input. That dynamic has fundamentally changed. Today, legal services must be defined by what clients truly need to address their business challenges. Embracing an innovative mindset means shifting perspective: thinking like the client, understanding their goals, and finding new ways to deliver effective and efficient solutions.

As my experience grew, I began to realise that lawyers' relationships with clients, both internal and external, their peers and other professionals needs to be more collaborative which not only entails depth of knowledge, which for lawyers is inevitably legal knowledge, but also breadth of knowledge. To add value today, lawyers must understand not only the law but also a client's industry, pressures and business environment. That doesn't mean offering business advice or telling clients what to do but clients expect their lawyers to align with their values and goals, that solve problems and bring in results.

This is not the output of a scientific formula or theory - it emerges over time, through real-world exposure, intuition, and listening (a skill I cannot stress enough).

We often hear buzzwords like *disruption* tossed around when talking about the future of the legal profession. But what does disruption in the legal industry really mean? Is it just about technology? Is it about doing things differently?

I would argue that disruption is first and foremost a mindset shift. It's about breaking the traditional mould from the I-shaped lawyer - the "I" being the shape representing the depth of expertise solely in the law – and embracing new shapes of lawyers that authors, analysts and recent studies have been developing: the Ts, the Os and the Deltas.

It's about hearing what the market expects, what it demands even, and what it responds to. With AI encroaching on many things lawyers currently do, evolving is not optional. Lawyers need to expand their skills, knowledge and capabilities.

Commercial awareness and tech literacy now complement legal acumen. Possessing commercial knowledge allows the lawyer to have a genuine understanding of their client's industry in which legal assistance is required. Couple this with soft skills and you have a lawyer who is far more capable of aligning themselves to client needs and helping them achieve better business outcomes. Lawyers are no longer just service providers—they become strategic partners.

With this in mind and with an eye on professional growth, lawyers ought to seek to build relationships across organisations and not just within legal circles. In time, and having amassed legal knowledge and experience, they could aim to gradually move away from low value work and contribute to strategic business leadership work.

These ideas are clearly not unique to me - but have been the subject matter of conversations, analyses and the drivers of change in the legal industry. Firms and companies look for lawyers that will bring innovation, collaboration and problem-solving to the table.

The research demonstrates the growing importance of empathy and emotional intelligence in legal practice. Emotional intelligence subsumes many soft skills – particularly in the area of self-awareness, communication, relationship management and conflict management, and are critical to how lawyers communicate and lead.

The shapes of the future lawyer that have emerged in recent years, the T, the O and the Delta model are an evolution of the traditional I-shaped lawyer.

T-Shaped Lawyer: Combines deep legal expertise (the vertical bar of the “T”) with broad capabilities across business, communication, and collaboration (the horizontal bar).

O-Shaped Lawyer: Emphasizes a rounded, open approach. It’s less a diagram and more a mindset built on five traits: *Openness, Optimism, Ownership, Opportunity-seeking, and Originality*. It’s about who the lawyer is—not just what they know.

Delta Model Lawyer: A triangle (Δ) representing three core competency areas: *The Law* (doctrine and practice), *Business & Operations* (e.g. tech, project management), and *Personal Effectiveness* (e.g. emotional intelligence, leadership).

Despite their differences, all three models share a common theme: legal knowledge alone is no longer enough. What’s needed is a blend of legal, commercial, and human skills. All three frameworks reflect a shift toward client-centric, multidisciplinary lawyering—designed to meet the demands of a more complex, interconnected world.

Each model promotes a more human-centred, holistic view of the lawyer — blending hard skills (law, business, tech) with soft skills (empathy, resilience, communication). These models are responses to rapid changes in law, technology, and client expectations and aim to bridge the gap between legal competence and client centric service.

In an age when lawyers are incessantly and increasingly called upon to develop specialisations in particular areas of the law it may seem like an oxymoron that they are simultaneously required to develop a wealth of non-legal knowledge, skills and competencies. Yet, here we are and there’s no going back.

Maria Clappa
Partner