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Contributor Article



Corporate counsel in the age of AI: Beyond table stakes



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Most of us are both enthralled and apprehensive about Artificial Intelligence (AI). PwC forecasts that AI could contribute \$15.7 trillion to the global economy by 2030 from increased productivity alone. At the same time, it's easy to think of AI as a fad — too complicated, too undeveloped, or unlikely to have any significant impact on your job in the short term.

The hype around AI has been overwhelming. And there's no shortage of commentaries from experts, law firms, and business leaders.

For corporate counsels, what do you need to know about AI — for your company and, perhaps as important, for your career?

There certainly are “risks” associated with incorporating AI into a business:

- AI-Generated Content:** The legal and ethical implications of AI-generated content, including copyright infringement, defamation, and misinformation;
- Data Privacy and Security Concerns:** Compliance with data privacy regulations such as GDPR and CCPA, and protection against cyber-attacks;
- Intellectual Property Rights and Ownership:** Ownership and associated rights of AI-generated content, especially in collaborative or commercial settings;



Ethical and Bias Considerations: Responsible development and deployment of AI systems, promoting fairness, transparency, and accountability;



Regulatory Compliance: Compliance with applicable and new regulatory frameworks addressing AI transparency, accountability, and safety, including industry-specific regulations; and



Liability and Legal Responsibility: Comprehensive risk management strategies and protocols for handling AI-related disputes or incidents, with both end-customers and AI vendors or service providers.

While these are important, I consider these as “table-stakes” issues for corporate counsels. Proactive lawyers will make sure their companies consider these concerns and risks.

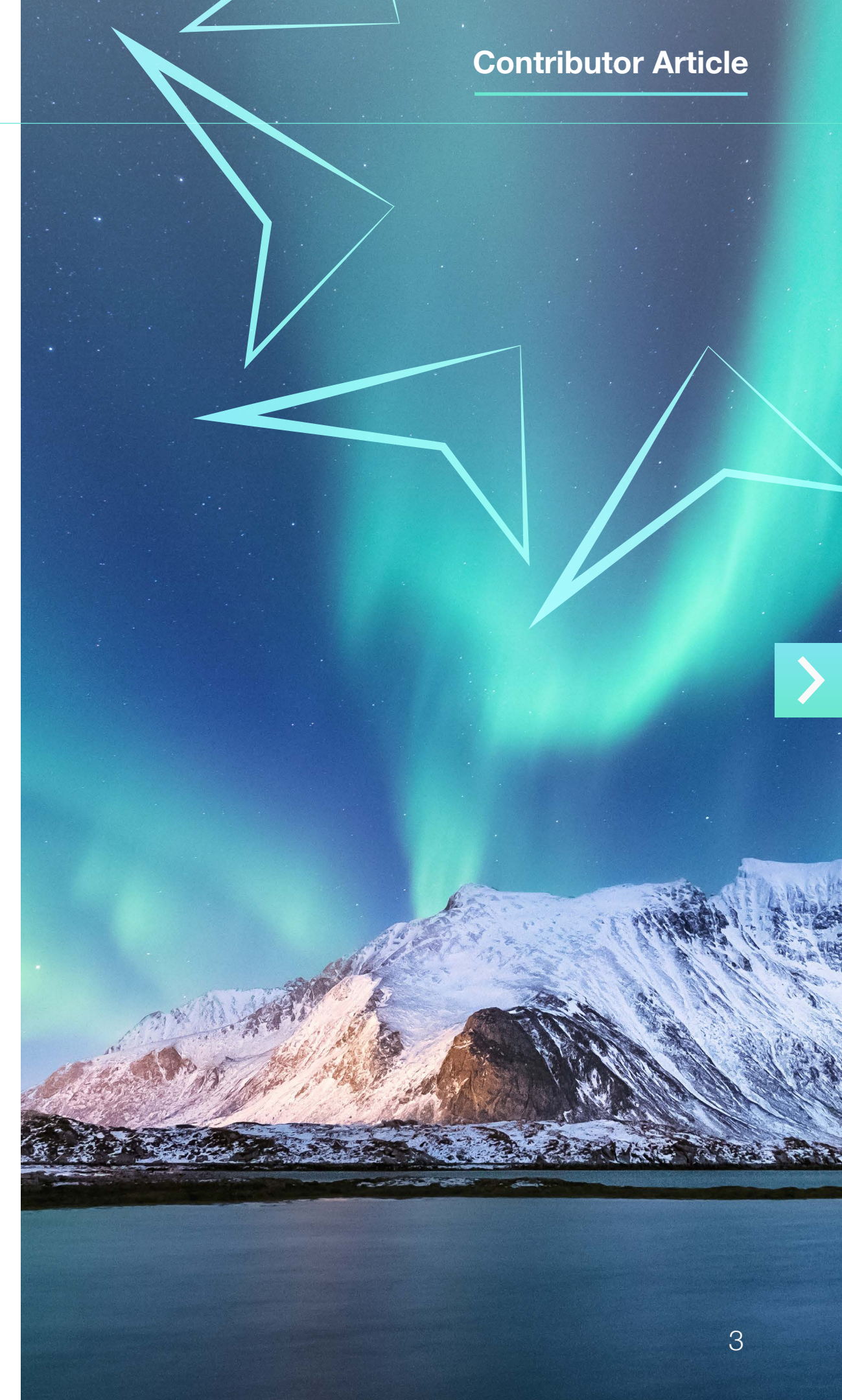
What’s more intriguing, and less discussed, is the broader context of what AI may mean for both corporate law departments and each in-house counsel in delivering legal services:

01

Missed Opportunities for Efficiency and Innovation: In-house counsels should evaluate how AI tools can streamline repetitive tasks, improve efficiency, and augment corporate decision-making processes. In-house counsels who are resistant to adopting AI may miss out on opportunities to optimise legal processes, enhance productivity, and drive innovation within their legal departments. AI technologies offer capabilities such as document automation, contract analysis, and legal research optimisation, which can significantly improve efficiency and free up time for strategic tasks.

02

Delivering a More Strategic Legal Coverage Model: The integration of generative AI technologies can significantly impact legal workflows and resource allocation. Using AI, corporate law departments will be able to design and deliver a more strategic coverage model – ensuring that the right people, with the right skills, in the right place, are doing the right things to support the company’s commercial priorities.





03 Organisational & Individual Wellness: Without the support of AI-driven tools and technologies, in-house counsels may find themselves overwhelmed by manual tasks, administrative duties, and routine legal work. This may lead to burnout, reduced job satisfaction, decreased overall productivity among legal teams, and increase retention risks.

04 Limited Capacity to Address Complex Legal Challenges: In an increasingly complex corporate landscape, companies rely on in-house counsels to provide strategic guidance and navigate legal complexities in increasingly complex business environments. By shying away from AI, counsels may limit their capacity to address complex business and legal challenges, such as regulatory compliance, risk management, and dispute resolution. This could result in missed opportunities to proactively identify and mitigate legal risks or capitalise on emerging opportunities. In-house counsels who are reluctant to adopt AI risk falling behind their peers who embrace technological advancements to focus on high-value legal activities that drive business outcomes and contribute to organisational success. This leads to the next item, which creates professional risk for corporate law department leaders.

05 Failure to Meet Stakeholder Expectations: Stakeholders, including executives, clients, and regulatory authorities, increasingly expect legal departments to leverage technology to enhance legal services, and improve corporate decision-making. In-house counsels who resist AI adoption may struggle to meet these expectations, leading to dissatisfaction among stakeholders and reputational damage for the law department. Failure to embrace AI could signal to senior leadership a lack of commitment of the law department to innovation and responsiveness to changing industry trends.

06 Education and Training for Legal Professionals: Given the rapid advancements in AI technologies, in-house counsels should prioritise ongoing education and training for legal professionals within their organisations in two key-areas. First, in-house lawyers will need to be trained how to use AI to extract efficiencies from the technology. Second, assuming AI will free up time for lawyers to spend time on higher value and complex matters, query whether lawyers actually have those skills. Our research shows that, beyond legal issues, there's much room for improvement in developing higher cognitive skills, such as strategic thinking, complex problem-solving and business/commercial acumen.

07 Failure to Use AI Hinders Professional Advancement: Proficiency in emerging technologies such as AI will likely become a prerequisite for professional advancement within the legal profession. Employers and clients alike value legal professionals who demonstrate adaptability to AI tools and methodologies, as they are better equipped to deliver high-quality legal services, drive operational efficiencies, and achieve strategic objectives.

In-house counsels who proactively leverage AI to solve complex legal problems and enhance their clients' decision-making processes are more likely to gain recognition, credibility, and leadership opportunities within their companies. They can position themselves as trusted advisors who bring value beyond traditional legal expertise. Conversely, those who remain resistant to AI adoption may be perceived as reluctant to adapt to change, lacking in forward-thinking mindset, and potentially hindering the organisation's ability to stay competitive in a technology-driven world. In-house counsels who resist or neglect the adoption of AI technologies risk stagnating in their careers and falling behind colleagues who embrace AI.



I interact daily with general counsel, and AI consistently emerges as one of the key issues occupying their mind space. Despite such preoccupations, informally, most of them share that they have hardly even played with the technology. Lawyers are not the exception. BCG did a survey late last year of 1,400 executives around the world asking them about generative AI and what they're doing with it. Ninety percent of them are just "observing and waiting for things to happen". The number of lawyers just "observing", however, perhaps is even higher.

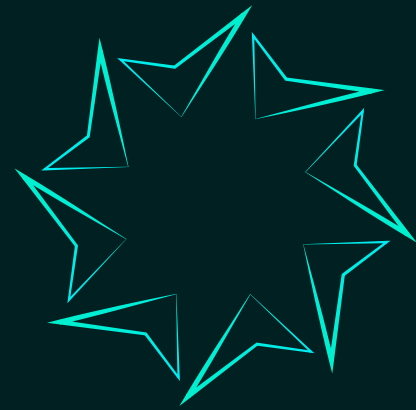
Don't be complacent; my suggestion is to dive right in. Be curious – focus on how to couple "human" capabilities with machine-learning to drive better outcomes for clients. The benefits of knowing how to deploy AI are enormous – both to the corporate organisation and to one's own professional development.

Embracing AI technologies can empower in-house counsels to future-proof their careers, by enhancing their effectiveness, delivering greater value to their organisations, and positioning themselves as leaders in the legal profession.

Using AI as a tool for professional growth and advancement, in-house counsels can position themselves at the forefront of innovation, differentiation, and excellence in the legal profession.

Duc Trang's career includes stints as general counsel, global law firm attorney, author, business leader, educator, executive coach, and consultant. His work has spanned continents, including the United States, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, as Duc currently is Head, Talent & Workforce Management at Briefbox, where he designs talent solutions software. Duc's legal career includes senior legal and business leadership positions at **Motorola Solutions, Inc.** and **IBM**, and in private practice at **White & Case** and **DLA Piper**. He also previously advised corporate legal departments and law firms on organisational strategy and human capital strategy.

Duc recently published **Architecture of Deals: Strategies for Transactional Lawyering**, which delves into legal education and training innovation, and has served as an adjunct professor of law at the National University of Singapore and Central European University.



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