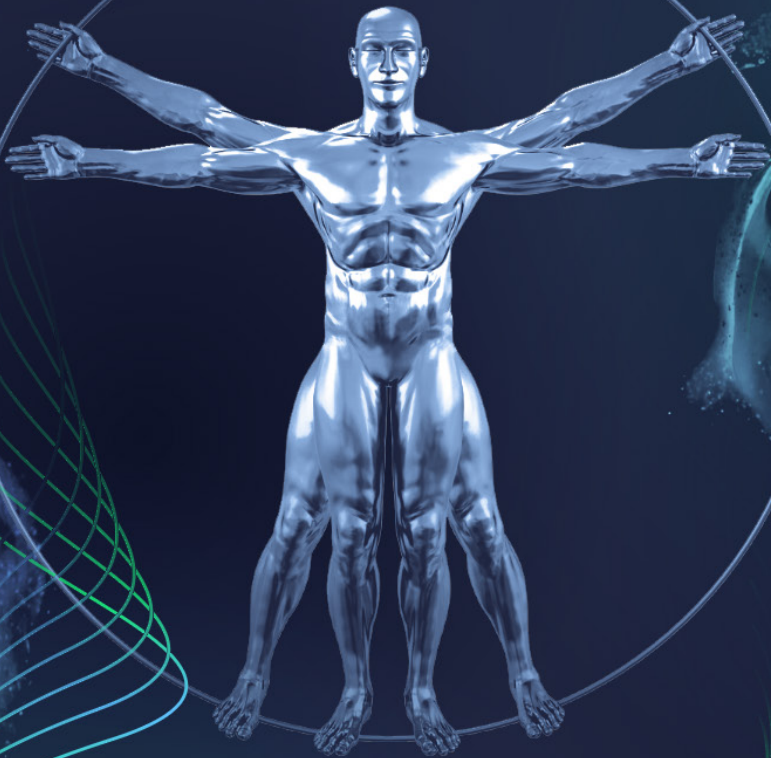


The  
**Fluid  
Lawyer**



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**“It is interesting to see principles from Firm of the Future applied to the legal industry, like those presented in the idea of ‘Fluid’ Law Firms.”**

**James Root**

Partner in Bain & Company

”

**Lawyers of the future will need to diversify to stay in business. If it is accepted that traditional services will become less common, then I expect lawyers will broaden their capabilities by becoming increasingly multidisciplinary.**

**Richard Susskind**

Tomorrow's Lawyers: An Introduction to Your Future

# Introduction

The Fluid Lawyer is a Renaissance man (or woman): It is a modern professional equivalent to Leonardo da Vinci, the man who excelled in as diverse disciplines as painting, science, engineering, biology, architecture, music, philosophy and math. He painted the Mona Lisa, discovered the Human anatomy in relation to geometry with the Vitruvian Man, invented the parachute, build the first iteration of a helicopter, designed a castle in Switzerland and so much more.

While the future lawyer may have to settle with less glamorous and historical merits, they must nevertheless adopt Da Vinci's polymathic approach. They must develop and hone a variety of skills. They must explore new capabilities and talents. And they must move seamlessly across disciplines and draw on differentiated bodies of knowledge to solve the problems of the future. That is what this book is about in a nutshell.

We have previously introduced **The Fluid Law Firm**, which, as a concept, is a proactive response to the expanding gig economy and the client-centric era in law. Legal consumers have gained significant amounts of power since the Financial Crisis, and they are ready to exercise it with a demand for more with less. The Covid19-pandemic has only accelerated that trend. Therefore, we believe that law firms must reshape themselves in the image of the client; they must embrace the digital transformation, join the access-to-justice movement and open up to the surrounding world with more client-faced innovation and improved offerings. Not only to improve their own business models - but also to increase the access to justice.

To [quote our own book](#):

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” “We believe that **law firms must open up**. Instead of being entrenched entities with solidified boundaries, they should have flexible membranes that can absorb and extract seamlessly. They shall value inclusion over segregation, strategise for externalisation and **engage in collaborative ecosystems** to meet client demands and maintain trust.”

**The Fluid Law Firm** is a firm that engages in various communities, or ecosystems as we call them. It takes an active interest in the tech community in order to be able to offer its clients a modern tech-stack. It participates in professional networks to win new clients, take advantage of the emerging gig economy and attract talent that can execute their tasks in small interim and project-based teams. In this way, law firms get full utilisation of their employees and highly specialised talent at the same time. And last but not least, The Fluid Law Firms plays an active part in the educational system to recruit talent and help shape tomorrow's lawyers.

A fluid law firm needs fluid lawyers. They need legal professionals with specialised expertise and deep knowledge of their practise areas. But they also need employees with a profound understanding of business matters, a high level of tech-literacy, great people skills and most importantly, they need agile and adaptable professionals who are able to respond to an accelerating, unpredictable and ever-changing world. A fluid lawyer must, as the fluid law firm, be able to operate in different ecosystems, open up to the surrounding world and show an innovative spirit to take advantage of the constantly improving new technologies.

**It must be a polymath.**

The multidisciplinary lawyer is not a new concept. Legal tech pioneer, Richard Susskind, **predicted** this almost ten years ago. He saw that lawyers should diversify and extend their capabilities to cover business strategy, management, market expertise, psychology, or even enhance themselves by getting a fundamental understanding of the latest technologies. Since then, there have been numerous debates about the future of the legal profession and how lawyers can prepare themselves and adapt to deliver more client-centric, data-driven, value-driven, digital, and scalable legal services. We even covered the topic in **our very first podcast**:



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Should they focus on hard skills or soft skills? Should lawyers learn to code? Should they learn from the big four's holistic approach to legal services? Should they augment themselves with the basic know-how of data analytics? Should they come in the form of a T? Or maybe even an O?

**The Fluid Lawyer** is an attempt to take a step back, summarise the knowledge and condense it into a digestible format that calls for reflection, debate and further exploration.

Be sure to also check out

**The Manifesto of the Fluid Law Firm**



Download free Ebook

## Deep legal expertise

It seems pretty obvious, but it is nevertheless important to mention: Expert legal knowledge will still be the main asset for lawyers in the future. Deep legal expertise is going to remain the core product for fluid law firms, and the fluid lawyers will be responsible for delivering that.

There has been **a lot of talk about** the T-shaped lawyer concept; a lawyer who possesses excellent legal knowledge and specialist skills in very specific areas while also having broad knowledge and base skills in other areas. Or to put it more simple: one that is both a specialist and a generalist. This T-shaped lawyer stands in opposition to the more traditional I-shaped lawyer that are deeply specialised problem-solvers.

There is usually much focus on the horizontal multidisciplinary skills when talking about the future lawyer. However, it is essential to emphasise that the vertical specialist skills in the T are equally important. In fact, expert specialist knowledge is expected to become even more critical in the future. Standardised low-complexity legal work is destined to be solved by new automation tools and other legal technologies to such a degree that Deloitte predicts 39 % of all legal work to be automated within the few coming years. Templates and drafter solutions already enable clients to generate their own

documents, modern AI-technologies **outperform** human lawyers in legal reviews, and automation can do everything from writing legal briefs to giving simple legal advice. McKinsey's famous Future of Work **report** estimated that

**” 50 % of current work activities are technically automatable by adapting currently demonstrated technologies.”**

Those activities are dull, manual and of low complexity. Simple triggers and actions can be automated, but profound knowledge of a legal area cannot. Being able to use this knowledge to find creative and actionable solutions is what separates man and machine. There is always going to be a demand for your services as long as you are holding expert knowledge that nobody else has. There will always be a need for expert trusted advisors who can creatively and intelligently articulate solutions and strategies for complex or high-value legal cases. That has led some law firms to adopt a strict up-market strategy. We believe that strategy to be short-sighted and flawed because it isolates law firms from other ecosystems.

Here is why:



Read the article



We expect that the generalists will be challenged in a gig economy where fluid law firms can comfortably in and outsource resources. Instead, fluid law firms will favour lawyers with specialist legal knowledge that can be insourced for their interim teams to perform their expert work and give their expert advice. As we predicted in The Manifesto of the Fluid Law Firm, much legal work will be solved in legal teams of experts managed and organised by project managers. This gig-based consultancy work can be profitable for the legal expert, while the fluid law firm can have full utilisation of their experts which saves them money. It is a clear win-win.

So to summarise:

**The Fluid Lawyer must not be a jack of all trades and master of one. They shall master one and be a jack of many trades which requires them to have **deep expert legal knowledge** of at least one practise area.**

# Tech literacy

Should lawyers learn to code? No, they should not. Lawyers do not need to learn how to code, just like doctors do not need to know how to build surgical instruments or software developers do not need to know how to make computers. The idea with modern legal tech is that it enhances the skills of the lawyers and enable them to be conversant with technology. They do not need to make it themselves. With that question out of the way, we can take a closer look at the level of tech literacy lawyers should have.

First of all, all lawyers should be able to use all the basic digital technologies: drafting tools, communication software, task management technologies and so on. Like all other professionals, they should have a basic conceptual understanding of concepts like the cloud, automation, data-driven decision making and to some degree machine-learning and artificial intelligence.

They do not need to be experts, they do not need to know exactly how they work, and they definitely do not know how to make them. However, they must know how to use all these technologies and understand them conceptually and metaphorically.

It is fair to assume that most lawyers are using a smartphone. They drive cars with smart autopilot functions, and when they arrive at their homes, they turn on their Apple TV's and watch entertainment that some algorithm has suggested that they watch. Lawyers should have the same comfortable approach to these quite advanced and often AI-powered technologies when they are at work as when they are at home. They should not be afraid or feel alienated from modern technologies.

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Instead, they should be enhanced and use technologies to work with more speed and certainty. A fundamental conceptual tech literacy as well as practical skills to take advantage of modern tech is key here.

**Lawyers should not build the software; they should not set up their own API's or develop their own legal tech companies. They should be able to take advantage of the latest technologies and offer them to their clients.**

However, that might require lawyers to have a fundamental understanding of how digital technologies work. If they were to make their own tech solutions, it would most likely be sufficient to use no-coding platforms to create basic automations. That requires an understanding of how software works according to simple if-then statements.

That said, there will be a need for lawyers with specialised expert knowledge of modern digital technologies. Some will act as IT and technology lawyers and advise tech companies. Others will help fluid law firms maintain a first-rate tech stack. To have that, they must engage with developers, tech providers and digital consultants to make

sure they can always offer their clients state of the art. Some firms will make their own incubators; others will make labs, tech sprints and even hackathons. However, they also need hybrid legal technologists that understand the digital fundamentals while also knowing the legal field inside/out. First of all, these legal technologists should have an overview of the legal tech market. They must be able to test digital products and separate the weeds from the chaff. They can also help with educating the lawyers, function as links between legal and tech to make collaboration smoother and last but not least, ensure that the legal tech applications are working is they should.

When algorithmic logics and opaque digital processes increasingly govern our legal activities, then it is important that there are certain hybrid figures who can make sure that the technologies reshape our world that actually benefits us. Technologies are not neutral. They are cultural products with a huge impact on the way we think, act and work, so experts must oversee them. We have seen **examples** of software with racist bias, we **have seen** machine-learning algorithms trained on the wrong data, digital systems going rogue and tech companies with little regard to data ethics and the law. The legal field is a critical infrastructure that constitutes our democratic societies. It is crucial that we also have legal professionals to oversee that technologies do not corrupt the system.

Technologies can make the legal system more transparent, but they can also make it more opaque. We have to ensure it is done right.

That said, the majority of lawyers can do with a basic conceptual understanding of the new technologies. What is most important is that they are not afraid to use them and that they know how to enhance themselves and their legal work.



# Business operations

A law school introduces law students to all the important practise areas so that all future lawyers will have a basic conceptual understanding of everything from commercial law to administrative law and criminal law. Now, we need to expand that curriculum, so it also encompasses a fundamental knowledge of business operations, innovation processes, project management, economy and everything else that relates to running and optimising a company. Not every one will work with it, but everyone needs to know the basics of business administration, so they are equipped to enter a workforce where more a holistic approach to professional services is required.

Fluid law firms cannot focus solely on law in the future. Already, we see the big four consultancies triumphing with one-stop-shop concepts. They leverage cross-service collaboration to create synergies and offer their clients more holistic all-round services at a favourable price. They have expanded their services, so they now cover a broader spectrum of offerings; from accounting and compliance to legal services, business strategies and management consulting. That means they can function as a full-service supplier of professional services and thereby give their clients a more holistic service and a lower price. In other words, they can provide

more for less. In the future of professional services, you need more **pillars** to compete with the accounting firms.

The nature of the legal product will also undergo a bit of change. In the future, people will not only come to lawyers to get an assessment of their risk. They want someone that understands what it means to run a business and can see opportunities in the market. As Mark Cohen stated in [a previous article](#):

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” **“Clients want data-driven recommendations. They want answers to questions, not legal briefs. They want solutions to business challenges, not narrow, one-dimensional legal answers. Law is only one in a constellation of factors and variables that go towards making an informed business judgement. So increasingly clients are looking for multidisciplinary, holistic counsel as opposed to just legal advice.”**

Lawyers that can give proactive, creative solution that is not restricted to legal but also benefits the commercial side of the business will be tremendously valued.

This is not only relevant for fluid lawyers on fluid law firms. As **mentioned** earlier, legal counsels must:

**” Reinvent themselves as profit-centres, focusing on enforcing the company's contractual rights. They must become strategic advisors and see changes in legislation and new geopolitical conditions as opportunities to develop new services and take up new markets.”**

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And last but not least. This general understanding of business matters will also help the lawyers to reshape and run their own organisation. It will make it easier for lawyers to commercialise their offerings, develop new business models and exploit all the opportunities that a more fluid market will bring.

# People skills

Technologies are not neutral. They can improve **the access to justice** and help make law much more understandable if they are well-designed, intuitive and customer-centric. For example, the invention of the internet has made the law more accessible because it enable people to find legal information, templates and even automated contract drafters online. But technologies can also make the law seem even more opaque. If the new digital technologies are not designed correctly, then the legal consumers will experience a legal system that feels even more unapproachable, like a bureaucratic faceless system. It is important that we get it right and that the new technologies will not become yet another barrier for legal consumers.

This balance also shows that there is a general need for lawyers who **understand their clients and their problems**. In certain matters, lawyers that meets their clients with empathy and emotional understanding will be better equipped to balance the fact the alienation that digital products will make some legal consumers feel.

**Trusted advisors will not only be valued for the expert legal knowledge they bring but also for the emotional understanding they can show.**

Furthermore, emotionally intelligent lawyers with good people skills will be better equipped to thrive in the work environment of a fluid law firm. Most of the legal industry is currently structured in a hierarchical pyramid formation and lawyers are often rewarded for the amount of hours they bill. That makes a great habitat for brilliant jerks. However, the legal industry will most likely change this culture in the years to come.

**A hierarchical company structure** is a great barrier to innovation. Good ideas die when they have to get through five layers of approval - and they are rarely spoken if when those in the bottom of the hierarchy are not listened to. You need flat structures to excel in innovation. You need to create a room where everyone is allowed and encouraged to speak their mind, where everyone can contribute, bounce around ideas and test them quickly. In such a company culture, you cannot have brilliant jerks.

That requires different personality types; people that are more open, friendlier and more collaborative. To thrive in these environments you need good people skills.

The fluid law firms also depend on lawyers that are able to move seamlessly through different eco-systems. People who can work in interim teams and utilise their expertise in a more collaborative environment. The fluid lawyer must be able to adapt and co-operate on projects with ease and empathy. They will also benefit from showing good networking skills and simply being a friendly person to get the best tasks in a gig economy.

**Innovation thrives on collaboration, straightforward communication and the mutual understanding that comes from listening.**



# Fluidity

In the coming years, fluid lawyers will need expert legal knowledge, basic conceptual tech literacy, a fundamental understanding of business operations and excellent people skills to succeed in fluid law firms. But that might quickly change.

Our modern world is characterised by its accelerating nature. The world is increasingly dynamised, set in motion, and our environments are in a constant state of reshaping. The world changes at a higher pace, and it is not staying the same for that long at the time. The present is simply shrinking. That means lawyers must be agile, adaptable and fluid to keep face with the acceleration world. The fluid lawyer must show curiousness to learn new things and willingness to change in order to exploit all the new opportunities and avoid possible dangers.

The legal world has been prone to competition which has kept it artificially protected and stable. But the liberalisation of the legal market and all the new players on the market - both legal tech solutions and alternative legal service providers such as the big four - forces a new kind of competition to the market. The logic of competition forces a growth-mindset where you need to innovate just to keep up with the status quo.

To differentiate on this competitive market, fluid law firms will need to develop new legal products, present new business models and new approaches to their work. Fluid law firms need fluid lawyers that can work in that reality.

The technological development might alter the skills lawyers need in the future even more. Digital technologies are evolving at a rapid speed, and the development has an exponential logic. We may not be able to predict what the future is going to look like, but there is a good chance that artificial intelligence has reshaped our lives significantly in 20 years. What that means for the legal system and the lawyers that is going to work in it is hard to say. But it is rather easy to predict that those who are able to adapt quickly will thrive better.

The truth is that the legal field will be exposed to a more social-Darwinistic logic where adaptability is key to survival. Already, lawyers cannot rely on their legal knowledge. They must adopt the traits of the renaissance man, and even those traits might change over the course of a career.

**The fluid lawyer must embrace that fluidity.**

# About Contractbook

**Contractbook** is a software company that enables small and medium-sized businesses to manage the entire lifecycle of their contracts in a single automated flow. The platform allows users to create contracts using updated templates, sign them with a digital signature and organise them in the cloud. They can also collaborate in teams, automate all parts of their workflow, and execute the contracts directly on the platform that integrates with more than 2000 other apps.

Funded by investors including byFounders, Bessemer Venture Partners and Gradient Ventures, **Contractbook** was founded in Copenhagen in 2017 and serves over 100,000 users in more than 75 countries with data-driven document automation.

**Contractbook**, the leading legal tech company, also has offerings for law firms and legal professionals. That includes a client-facing document drafter that automates document creation. And a client portal where lawyers can collaborate with their clients and support them in their day-to-day work. Both tools allow legal professionals to adopt a more client-centric and proactive approach to legal work which helps to increase the client-retention and develop new modern business models.

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