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## Developing the mindsets and skills of lawyers for the age of AI

**To ensure that employees of law firms are prepared mentally and practically for an era in which artificial intelligence will come to the fore, law firm leaders need to foster a culture and activities that help them learn and adapt, writes Daljit Singh.**

My article in the [September issue](#) of ALMJ looked at how artificial intelligence will shape the future of work, and the mindsets and skills that lawyers will need to succeed in the future. This article focuses on how to best foster and develop these mindsets and skills.

### Setting the context

Besides emphasising the relevance and importance of the new mindsets and skills as discussed earlier, legal organisations need to share behavioural examples such as those in the table below. This will help make the concepts more concrete and assist with their development.

Mindsets	What it does	Behavioural examples
Growth mindset	Promotes life-long learning and foundation for the new skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Embrace challenges</li> <li>Persist despite obstacles</li> <li>View effort as the path to mastery</li> </ul>
New smart (humble) mindset	Builds on the growth mindset and also the foundation for the new skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognise and acknowledge 'not knowing'</li> <li>Ask rather than tell</li> <li>Open to changing personal mental models</li> </ul>

<b>Skill</b>	<b>What it does</b>	<b>Behavioural examples</b>
Curiosity	Opens the door to learning and creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deepen interest to explore and better understand a topic</li> <li>• Ask more questions. For example, about the situational context, interpretations, what's missing etc.</li> <li>• Explore assumptions</li> </ul>
Creativity	Promotes innovation and value creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look for connections between ideas</li> <li>• Challenge 'what is'</li> <li>• Embrace and learn from experimentation and failure</li> </ul>
Empathy	Facilitates a deeper understanding of others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Express genuine interest in the thoughts and feelings of others</li> <li>• Actively listen to what they say, as well as communicate non-verbally</li> <li>• Communicate understanding</li> </ul>
Collaboration	Teaming in an increasingly Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactively share experience and perspectives</li> <li>• Help to foster team psychological safety</li> <li>• Build on the ideas of others</li> </ul>
Adaptability	Navigating smoothly through a world of constant change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embrace change as a constant</li> <li>• Open to new ways of doing things</li> <li>• Flex behaviour to contribute to positive outcomes</li> </ul>
Learning agility	Generating quality learning from experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek out challenging experiences</li> <li>• Critically self-reflect on experience</li> <li>• Invite and learn from all feedback</li> </ul>

## **Development strategy**

There is no shortage of 'content' available on the new mindsets and the six skills, so the key question is how to turn that content into action through an effective development strategy.

Development should follow the 70-20-10 rule of development based on research on how people tend to learn, grow and change over time.

This indicates that 70 per cent of our total learning is derived from our work experience, 20 per cent from our developmental relationships and 10 per cent from our formal learning. An effective development strategy needs to focus on all three forms of development.

## **Challenging experiences**

We can use a range of work activities and projects to provide challenging experiences to help foster the new mindsets and skills.

Project work using 'design thinking' will help to significantly accelerate the development of the new mindsets and skills. Design thinking is a collaborative process that taps into creativity to solve complex problems with an end-user focus.

There are five stages to the design thinking process:

1. Empathising with the end-user (internal or external client etc).
2. Defining the need and problem (from the end-user perspective).
3. Ideating (generating creative ideas).
4. Prototyping (starting to create potential solutions for testing).
5. Testing (and iteration based on end-user feedback).

Aside from generating innovative solutions, the design thinking 'process' itself leverages the new mindsets and skills. When we analyse the 'design' of design thinking, we can see how the growth and new smart mindsets form its bedrock and how it harnesses the six skills to make it work.

Some legal organisations use design thinking selectively, for example, to help their key client teams generate innovative client services, often for unstated and emergent client needs. There is a huge upside for all legal organisations in using design thinking, and for those using it selectively, to use it even more widely.

Besides developing the mindsets and skills, design thinking will help to drive more innovation and yield many other benefits, including enhancing the employee and client experience. The resources listed in the reference section provide more information on design thinking for the legal sector.

Doing effective major matter or project 'debriefs' will also help foster the mindsets and the skills. Teams can use the table of behavioural examples to debrief on the extent of their adoption of the mindsets and skills.

Here is a simple framework with just three questions for a debrief:

1. What did we do well?
2. What could we have done better?
3. What will we do differently in future?

These questions help to positively affirm performance, identify improvement areas and create commitment to future actions respectively. Aside from generating team learning, the debrief 'process' also reinforces the growth and new smart mindsets.

Some lawyers forgo debriefs as they mistakenly believe that these are 'navel gazing' exercises and also time consuming. My experience is that these can be done fairly quickly, and effectively, leading to significant improvement in team learning and performance.

### **Developmental relationships**

Developmental relationships are the relationships that we have with our supervisors, mentors and others who help us develop at work.

For there to be an effective developmental relationship, we need leaders to:

- role model the mindsets and skills
- challenge us to 'stretch' while providing support and guidance
- encourage us to reflect on our performance
- provide us with coaching and feedback.

However, the challenge here is that the new skills will take leaders time to achieve proficiency. This is especially the case for curiosity, creativity, empathy and collaboration, which are not signature strengths for many lawyers.

Leaders therefore need to accept that they too may be at the very early stages of learning some of the skills. The emphasis on humility in the new smart mindset is an apt reminder here. This role modelling of the mindsets is critical for embedding the mindsets and skills across the organisation.

### **Formal learning and development**

Training programs should include real-world simulation exercises to help develop the mindsets and skills. For example, a simulated client meeting that requires the demonstration

of the mindsets and skills, followed by coaching and feedback to participants (using behavioural checklists based on the table above).

There are also imaginative exercises based on 'improv' techniques (drawn from the world of theatre) that can help foster the skills. These experiential activities are fun and creative and can be used to complement the simulations.

What should be avoided are 'presentation heavy' training programs which have little or no time for skills practice, coaching and feedback.

While we have dealt with each form of development separately, an effective development strategy ensures that they work synergistically.

### **Other actions**

All key talent processes need to support the mindset and behavioural changes. Aside from development processes, this means reflecting the importance of the new mindsets and skills in organisational competency frameworks, recruiting, performance management and career progression.

***Daljit Singh is the Principal of Transforming Talent and a Teaching Fellow at the College of Law, where he teaches two subjects in the Master of Legal Business – Workforce of the Future and Leadership. Daljit specialises in talent management and leadership development and has also worked in senior talent management and leadership development roles at Baker McKenzie and KPMG. Contact him at [daljit.singh@transformingtalent.com.au](mailto:daljit.singh@transformingtalent.com.au).***

### **References**

The Centre for Legal Innovation – video series on design thinking.

<https://www.cli.collaw.com/resource-hub>

Davies, Alex (Ed) (2021), Design Thinking for the Legal Profession, Global Law and Business Ltd.