

# ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS OPPORTUNITY, NOT THREAT, SAY IBERIAN LAWYERS

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## **Amid fears that AI will mean law firm associates are laid off, leading firms in Spain in Portugal insist lawyers will not be replaced by machines, though security risks exist**

In the battle to remain competitive, law firms in Spain and Portugal are increasingly adopting artificial intelligence (AI) and so-called 'cognitive computing' in order to streamline operations and allow lawyers to prioritise the biggest tasks as well as focus on personal client contact. However, there are concerns that AI will ultimately replace junior associates, with at least one recent survey showing that more than a third of lawyers believe systems such as IBM's Watson will result in junior lawyers being made redundant.

However, a number of firms in Spain and Portugal insist they see such technology as an opportunity rather than a threat. Francesc Muñoz, chief information officer at Cuatrecasas, Gonçalves Pereira in Barcelona, says: "There are tools that allow you to automate certain processes but they will not lead

to layoffs – instead lawyers will be able to focus on tasks of greater value.” Muñoz adds that AI would not be used in more complex cases involving major clients because such matters involved a higher level of juridical and technical complexity. He continues: “Simpler cases are more easily automated, and these tools are beginning to be used for due diligence, for example.” Yet, according to Muñoz, the use of AI also raises the question of how to ensure junior partners are trained in its use and how firms can harness it and help their younger partners embrace it. “It is a challenge, but we see it more as an opportunity than as a threat,” he says, pointing out that in five years, for example, the change could be exponential so it is important firms begin to use AI now for tasks lower down the value chain.

### **Security risks**

Other firms remain sceptical about AI, saying they are keen to maintain a personable approach with clients, while being wary of the security risks associated with entrusting confidential information to software. Inês Reis, a founding partner at Pbbr in Lisbon, said her firm does not intend to use IBM's Watson. “I think law is still a people's business,” she says. “Law firms as brands stand out, but it is often a particular lawyer that people want to deal with – we cannot avoid using computers and software to help in our daily lives, but we don't have to use tools to create a tailored contract.” Reis also highlights what she sees as a privacy issue. “We have to work a lot to raise our awareness about the hacking risks we are exposed to,” she says. “It is strange and scary how much information we can provide to a third party without knowing it.”

Despite the concerns of some lawyers, PLMJ managing partner Luis Pais Antunes believes that AI will change the way law firms operate in the same way that the advent of email did. “I anticipate a major revolution, in the same way that the arrival of email was – by 2020 or 2025 all major law firms will use AI tools,” he says. That is not to say that Pais Antunes does not share privacy concerns. He continues: “Privacy will become a very sensitive issue and we will become very dependent on the service providers making the AI available.”

Pais Antunes says PLMJ is in a 'trial-and-test' phase with regard to the management of cases and the control of schedules using AI. He adds that law firms will eventually be compelled to incorporate technology and automate tasks such as data management, but rules out the possibility that AI will lead to a downsizing of law firms' workforces. “Every time there is a new invention everybody says there will be a major impact on employment,” Pais Antunes says. “Lawyers will still be in their jobs in ten years' time but they will spend their time doing different things, and will be able to be more creative as administrative tasks are carried out by software. Lawyers will not be substituted by machines.”