A Digital Mindset Will Revolutionize Education: Legal Education as a Global Model

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The future of work is changing. Undeniably our world is becoming more digital, yet not all of us have embraced the digital mindset. Although most of us have the ability to use technology, we do not yet all have the ability to see the possibilities that technology is bringing to our professions and how to optimize that change. Whether it is the democratization of opportunities, the deepening of our interconnectedness, the potential for collaboration, or simply scaling value, the digital mindset lets us maximize technology’s benefits. More than just digital skills themselves, we should reimagine how our professions are impacted by a digital mindset. As we begin to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis, we all need to embrace this mindset.

As we adapt to changes in technology, the lines between education and work will be increasingly blurred. Skills will have a shorter half-life and thus a quicker obsolescence. Rather than earning a degree and considering education and training to be complete, a digital mindset facilitates opportunities for education and training to be revisited throughout an individual’s career. McKinsey predicts that nine out of ten employees will need to reskill by 2030 at a significant cost to the economy. This presents an opportunity for transformative thinking in institutions of higher education as they will be relied upon to provide various aspects of mid-career trainings.

This is particularly true for law, as legal education has traditionally been based on teaching the incremental evolution of case law. Legal education historically was broad and largely unspecialized, graduating lawyers licensed to practice in any number of areas. However legal practice is rapidly changing, especially in the field of intellectual property and technology. Education now needs to adapt to a changing market, with well-trained and specialized professionals, similar to medicine. Such highly specialized professionals have to be prepared to return for updated and further specialized skills, more intense than a typical continuing legal education credit. Academic institutions need to be prepared to provide such condensed, specialized courses in various areas.

Further, people in a variety of fields could benefit from some fundamental knowledge of and access to legal education. It is incumbent upon us to develop a workforce of legally literate and intellectually curious lifelong learners. Similar to “Pocket MBA” courses or weeks’ long leadership programs at business schools targeted to enterprise learners, legal education can include Pocket JD courses providing professionals’ courses—to both lawyers and non-lawyers—on corporate structures, contractual basics, and trends in the legal field. Courses can also be targeted around basic legal and
human rights for all citizens. To do this, we must democratize legal education for a modern market and the effective functioning of civil society. Bringing the digital mindset to the context of legal education could significantly change outcomes in our society.

**Legal education and legal jobs will become more inclusive**

Digitalization has already partially reshaped legal work, transforming it from tasks executed by humans alone to projects driven by humans with the support of machines. With software-powered machines evolving into lawyers’ reliable problem-solving partners, aspiring legal professionals must now learn to frame problems aptly for these software-powered machines to tackle. They must assess risks and trust outcomes of AI analysis. Although this requires navigating unfamiliar situations where attorneys are not always the primary reviewers, it would result in attorneys having the ability to focus more on the critical or pressing portions of their roles. This ability to assess risk, triage information, and read AI outcomes is what advanced legal education and training must provide.

Many tasks typically considered the legal backbone, including basic contract review, simple due diligence, etc., can easily be democratized and modularized by law schools for a broader audience – even high school graduates. The largest growing area for jobs in the legal services market is ancillary to the direct practice of law by lawyers. This shift from degree-based education to skills-based projects means that continuous learning for people from all backgrounds will encourage more participants in the workforce to learn law-related skills and apply those skill in their own contexts. When unbundled from a longer degree and delivered digitally with limited residential requirements, these skill modules can be consumed throughout a professional’s life in highly personalized, smaller sprints of education. The potential of this aggregation of stackable skills to create higher paying jobs for more people makes this is a valuable proposition, especially now that every policy-maker is focused on economic recovery.

**Successful higher education can power better-functioning societies**

Digitalization has taught us how mega-platforms can also deliver microservices. Amazon uses its highly elastic cloud infrastructure to run its own retail establishment while also sharing it with other retailers and innovators. Those retailers participate and innovate, making Amazon’s infrastructure more valuable. In the same way that Amazon has emerged as the “business of businesses,” legal education can emerge as the platform that “keeps society’s order.”

The digital transformation of education we have seen during the pandemic has opened up possibilities, increased acceptance and understanding, and accelerated the typically slow-moving innovation of higher education. There is an opportunity for education institutions to work with corporations and firms to offer contextualized education. Further, there is an increasing need for globalized education which becomes more possible with a digital mindset, especially in tech and IP.

The need to adopt a digital mindset and move us all forward – in the world of law and beyond - has never been greater.


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