



WHAT IS A LEGAL PROCESS ENGINEER?

BY JOE DAVIS



In the first of a series of articles examining new job titles in legal, we explain the role of a legal process engineer.

Leigh Snider often has to explain what she does as a legal process engineer, so she has now perfected her answer. 'I examine processes and technology—especially related to AI—to drive client value proactively by connecting the business of law to the art of the possible,' she says. Snider is a part of the innovation team called IncuBaker at BakerHostetler, a US-based law firm.

The IncuBaker team grew out of a realization that the pace of change in legal technology was increasing. The firm's practice services team found itself to be fielding more and more questions about emerging technologies and new vendors from attorneys and clients, so a business analyst was asked to focus on monitoring the legal innovation space. Later on, a data scientist and a dedicated

researcher were added to explore the tolerance for change and to conduct a deep examination of the underlying business imperatives in the face of disruptive technology. 'Last year,' Snider says, 'my role, legal process engineer, was added to lead the conversation across the firm—and in some cases with clients—on AI in legal operations.'

The creation of this team has allowed the firm to take on a more proactive role with respect to its understanding of technology and the way it communicates that understanding. 'We're paying attention to what's happening in the emerging technology landscape to the point where we've identified almost 300 emerging technology companies at various levels of maturity and we're tracking what's happening with their funding, partnerships and adoption,' she says. 'We are creating prototypes, collecting data and mapping the risks or benefits of process options. It's the kind of information we need to be able to respond to enquiries from our attorneys as well as clients.'

Snider describes IncuBaker's work with the firm's clients as 'organically client facing,' meaning that the team does not proactively market its services. Rather, it is through the internal work with BakerHostetler's attorneys that the team gets drawn into conversations with external clients. Since joining the

firm earlier this year, there have been several instances in which 'I was directly communicating with the client trying to understand what they were specifically looking to do in a legal operations space and helping to set them on the right course to navigate the legal technology landscape. If you think about a business that has had some change in leadership or an acquisition, they might have diverse systems and be looking to figure out what is the best future process and asking "where do I look for that?" and "how can these new technologies help?" Those are the kind of conversations we are having.'

We are creating prototypes, collecting data and mapping the risks or benefits of process options

She cites her work with a variety of contract analytics platforms as a good example of the type of understanding she brings to the table. That involved 'studying the differences between systems, understanding the potential applications of these solutions for our attorneys, and trying to be as specific and measured as possible so that we can

clearly define the outcomes for ourselves and our clients.'

Snider believes that the legal process engineer role will continue to become more critical. 'If you think about an explosion of hundreds of possible solutions that all do slightly different things, ultimately someone has to know which one to implement and why. That's going to become increasingly difficult. Meanwhile, in the business community there are companies pushing the envelope of what is possible, and the more we see innovation from major companies that are the clients of a large firm, the more pressure it's going to create for the legal market to be savvy with innovation as well.'

With a law degree and a background in consulting, Snider believes a combination of skills are required to be a successful legal process engineer. 'To really be able to dig into what is important about the change, why you're doing it at all, and what you're trying to solve, is critical. Typically, you develop those skills through change management or leadership training, like a Six Sigma program. Leadership savvy is more critical to my role than a JD [Juris doctor law degree], although the JD is an obvious plus, because of the ability to assess risks and impact across the business.'

In fact, she believes even technology skills are not as critical to the legal process engineer role as the ability to understand 'the organizational and cultural impact that is inherent in changing a business process by introducing emerging technology that the end user may not trust. Managing the human-machine trust gap requires the kind of soft skills more frequently found in people leaders than technologists.'

Joe Davis has spent 18 years in legal IT, and is a member of ILTA's Program Planning Council. A frequent speaker and author on artificial intelligence and enterprise content management, Joe has led applications teams at several law firms and is currently consulting with a large corporate legal department. Prior to his IT career, Joe was a teacher, an entrepreneur, and a DJ in a flea market. Contact him at joed@josephpdavis.com.

