

IMPACT OF LEGAL TECHNOLOGY ON THE ROLE PERFORMANCE OF PARALEGALS IN THE NIGERIA LEGAL ENVIRONMENT*

Abstract

In our contemporary legal system, the use of paralegals in the delivery of legal services is slow but definite. Paralegals are saddled with administrative responsibilities under the supervision of a legal practitioner. Administrative legal tasks such as, legal research, drafting of correspondences, pre and post-trial obligations amongst others are undertaken by paralegals. With the rise of legal technology, paralegals are finding new opportunities to enhance their skills, improve their efficiency and ability to take on more responsibilities, in line with global trends. Thus, this study which is doctrinal, seeks to examine the implication of legal technology on the role performance of paralegals in the legal system. This study reveals that paralegals are integral to the success of law practice. However, the challenges of adapting to new legal technology by paralegals can be daunting, especially in cases of data security, expensive cost of acquiring, using and maintaining legal technology, as well as, training of paralegals to use these technologies. This paper therefore recommends amongst others, the need for adequate training/continuing legal training of paralegal/legal professionals, to fully harness the benefits proffered by legal technology for enhanced productivity.

Keywords: Paralegals, Legal Technology, Role Performance, Nigeria

1. Introduction

In Nigeria and indeed the world over, there is a constant evolution of the legal landscape. To this end, staying informed and adapting to the latest technological trends and advancements in the business realm, will give a law firm a competitive edge. Technology today is the driving force of legal transformation if properly and effectively tapped, but without the right people and well-defined processes, its potentials remain untapped. It is thereto very essential to recognize the crucial role that paralegals play through the use of technology in staying competitive in the business world. In the 21st century, law firms are expected to transit from the process of adapting and evolving traditional legal practices, to embracing legal technology and innovation, as well as employ the services of trained assistants – Paralegals, to aid in the effective and efficient dissemination of justice.¹ By leveraging legal technology, digital platforms, artificial intelligence, mastering of technological devices, the entire legal team consisting of lawyers, paralegals, *etc.* can enhance effectiveness, streamline workflows, improve client experience, and deliver more accurate results. Legal technologies and an effective team can empower law firms to compete favourably and remain relevant in a rapidly changing system while meeting the growing demands of clients who expect optimal service delivery through fast results and cost-effective solutions.

The Covid-19 pandemic experience significantly propelled the adoption and exploration of digital methods in ensuring the maintenance of peace in the nation. The advancement in technology *cum* legal technology offered the legal industry the needed flexibility to discharge its obligation even remotely.² Post Covid-19, the use of legal technologies in the legal profession has remained very effective largely because of the flexibility and ease it offers. For example, a legal team can work simultaneously on a document stored in the cloud and hold meetings via zoom or Microsoft Team to discuss legal matters without having to meet physically.³ The paralegal profession in Nigeria is growing, albeit slowly to become an integral part of the legal system where sophisticated tasks can be undertaken by paralegals in the dispensation of justice.⁴ This is quite different from the trend in other climes like the United States, England, Canada and South Africa where paralegals are already integrated and are performing elevated legal tasks for legal practitioners and the legal system as a whole. With the proliferation of legal technologies, such as the generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), Case Management Systems, Digital Law Platforms, *etc.*, it is important to determine the effectiveness of such tools on the role performance of paralegals in a law firm.

It has been argued that legal technologies, such as, Generative AI, which excels at querying vast libraries of information and drafting documents, as well as, analysis of legal problem; Case Management Systems, used in streamlining workflow, improve collaborations among legal teams and providing real-time updates about case progress, has gradually led to the reduction of mundane tasks, and are gradually taking over the duty of paralegals who handle much of the administrative work of law firms, such as: reviewing of documents, conducting legal

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¹ This involves moving from manual processes to automated systems, and utilizing data-driven insights for decision-making.

² Cazalis, C. 'Legal Tech in a Post COVID -19 World' (*St. Andrews Law Review* 12 May 2021) <<https://www.standrewlawreview.com>> accessed 10 August 2024

³ LexisNexis, 'How has Covid changed the use of legal technology' <<https://www.lexisnexis.co.uk>> accessed 10 August 2024

⁴ According to Yakub Hammed, this is not unconnected to the fact that the legal profession is gravely saturated and there is little or no room for paralegals to fully optimize their potentials. There also appears to be a low appreciation of the usefulness of paralegals and how their skillset can be effectively deployed within the law firm. See Yakub Abiola Hammed, 'Origin of the Modern Paralegal: Role of Paralegals in Nigerian Law Firms and Ethics of the Profession' (2023)

research and drafting pleadings etc.⁵ Others argue that although legal technological tools will reduce the time a paralegal spends on task, it will however, enhance the paralegal's operation of administrative duties and draw them closer to the clients, as well as reassuring the clients of the firm's dedication to their cause. Hence, the job of the various legal technologies will be complementary the role performance of paralegals, rather than replace it.⁶

This study therefore seeks to examine the impact of legal technology on the role performance of paralegals in the Nigeria legal system. The Study is divided into six parts: part one deals with the definition of a Paralegal, the scope of paralegal duties in the legal industry, as well as provides a workable definition of legal technology. Part two delves into the origin of the Paralegal's profession in the Nigeria legal system and beyond. Part three deals with the legal framework for the licensing of a paralegal in Nigeria. Part four looks at the legal technology employed by paralegals and its functions, while part five assesses the impact of legal technology on the role performance of paralegals in Nigeria legal systems. Part six draws conclusion and recommendations made.

2. Who is a Paralegal?

Robinson⁷ defines a Paralegal thus; 'a legal paraprofessional is an assistant with limited training in the law, working for and under the general supervision of a solicitor, performing responsible tasks which might otherwise be carried out by solicitors'. To Regan,⁸ paralegals 'exist as a shadow – supporting the work of the legal profession in crucial ways but with strict limits on what they can do, receiving no formal training, no kudos, having no associations, and being poorly paid'. In 1997, the American Bar Association Standing Committee on Legal Assistants⁹ adopted a definition of legal 'assistant/paralegal' (replacing their 1986) as 'a legal assistant or paralegal is a person, qualified by education, training or experience, who is employed or retained by a lawyer, law office, corporation, government agency or other entity and who performs specifically delegated substantive legal work for which a lawyer is responsible.' To Harris,¹⁰ a paralegal is defined as 'a person who is employed, usually for reward in a legal environment, who possesses legal knowledge, but also has organisational, communication, and interpersonal skills which are utilised in providing a service to the community'. This definition recognises that a sound knowledge of laws and a use of that knowledge is crucial, but a paralegal's role falls short of the right of appearance in court. Inherent in this definition is the understanding that a paralegal's role is not merely as a 'little people(s)...little lawyers'.¹¹ This definition accurately represents the type of substantive work that paralegals perform in the United States. In the Nigeria legal system, a paralegal is any person, trained through experience and or education, who support or assists a Judge, lawyer, the court system, a law office, legislature, legal department in delivery of legal services and dispensation of justice. It also includes all persons carrying out administrative, clerical, procedural and substantive legal work under the supervision of a judicial officer or a barrister and solicitor enrolled in the Supreme Court.¹² Indeed, not every task that constitutes legal work need necessarily be performed by a qualified legal practitioner. There are many people who work in a legal capacity but are not admitted to practice, and therefore cannot be called legal practitioners. They have been variously designated as paralegals, legal assistants, law clerks, articulated clerks – depending to some extent upon their role.

Though there are myriads of varying definitions of who a paralegal is, core to these definitions is that paralegals are persons qualified by education, training or work experience to perform delegated or subsidiary tasks of a legal practitioner. It may thus be necessary to heed the words of Statsky¹³ that; 'the day has long passed when so many had to ask, 'what is a paralegal?' Today, the most likely question is, 'what's the most effective way to use a paralegal?'

3. The Scope of Paralegal Duties: The Nature and where Paralegals Work?

Since the legal practitioners' monopoly of the legal profession is confined to his right of appearance in a court of law and to the preparation of certain documents for a reward, there is therefore a vast field of legal tasks open to performance by paralegals. Paralegals work in a variety of legal environments which include but are not limited to, working in a private legal practice where they are supervised by a lawyer. In countries such as Nigeria and Australia,

⁵ Brendan, T., 'AI and what it means for the Legal Profession' (1 June 2019) <<https://www.linkedin.com>> accessed 2 September 2024

⁶ Hall, E., 'What Does AI Mean for the Future of Paralegals?' (2023) <<https://www.linkedin.com>> accessed 2 September 2024

⁷ Johana, R., 'The Need for and Training of Legal Paraprofessionals in New South Wales Solicitor's Offices' (1976) Law Foundation of NSW, Sydney

⁸ Regan, F., 'Legal Service Delivery, can we do it a better way?' (1988) 13(5) Legal Services Bulletin 195

⁹ American Bar Association Standing Committee on Legal Assistants Home Page <<http://www.abanet.org>> accessed 10 October, 2022

¹⁰ Harris, R., 'Paralegal Education: A View from 'Down Under' – An Australian Perspective' (1996) 12(1) Journal of Paralegal Education and Practice, 49, 55

¹¹ Cowley, J.I., 'A Comparative Study of Paralegalism in Australia, the United States of America, England and Wales' (Llm thesis Southern Cross University 2004) <<https://researchportal.scu.edu.au/esp10ro/>> accessed 10 August 2024

¹² 'Paralegalism: Essential for Administration of Justice Reform' *THISDAY* (Nigeria, 12 January 2021) <www.thisdaylive.com> accessed 15 September 2022

¹³ Statsky, W., *Essentials of Paralegalism* (3rd edn, West Publishing 1998)

there is no substantive acknowledgement by legal practitioners of the community of paralegals as a distinct legal group or of their dependence upon paralegal services. But nonetheless, the paralegal profession has been evolving largely in the shadow of the legal profession. The scope of duty of a paralegal was clearly buttressed in *Greene's* case. In *Akron Bar Association v Greene*,¹⁴ Raymond Greene was not an attorney licensed to practice law in Ohio, yet he drafted and filed divorce documents for a client (under a corporate name) signing as 'Paralegal for Doretha Driggs'. He then appeared in court on behalf of Ms Driggs. The trial judge dismissed the case because neither the plaintiff nor an attorney had signed the complaint. The Akron Bar Association brought a claim against both the corporation formed by Greene and Greene himself. The Board of Commissioners on the unauthorized practice of law, issued an order prohibiting Greene from any further of such activities, Greene indicated by letter that 'he had not represented himself as an attorney and would no longer perform acts that are questionable'. Despite this undertaking Greene further prepared and filed a Counterclaim on behalf of another client, signing the complaint for 'Deborah Price Christian, *pro se*, R Edinborough Greene, Paralegal, Power of Attorney for both'. Having determined that Greene was not an attorney, the trial judge refused to hear Greene's representation on behalf of Ms. Christian. The Akron Bar pursued an action against him. The Court found against Greene, instructing the respondent to refrain from any further activity involving the counselling of persons with respect to their legal rights, the preparation of legal instruments and documents to secure legal rights for any person, the preparation, signing or filing of pleadings or other papers on behalf of persons incident to actions in courts or other tribunals in the State of Ohio, and the appearance of respondents on behalf of any other persons in any court or tribunal in the State of Ohio.

Also, in *the Matter of William Randolph Easler*,¹⁵ the Court was asked to examine the role of a paralegal as a support for the supervising lawyer. The Court held that,

Paralegals are routinely employed by licensed attorneys to assist in preparation of legal documents such as deeds and mortgages. The activities of a paralegal do not constitute the practice of law as long as they are limited to work of a preparatory nature, such as legal research, investigation, or the composition of legal documents, which enable the licensed attorney – employer to carry out a given matter to a conclusion through his (sic) own examination, approval or additional effort.

Thus, the Court was able to accommodate a role for a paralegal purely of a preparatory nature. However, the Case of *Missouri v Jenkins*¹⁶ is considered the seminal case that acknowledged the role of paralegals in the delivery of legal services in the United States. In this case, amongst other issues raised, the United States' Supreme Court considered the issue of fees, due to paralegals. It held that the compensation of paralegals and law clerks at relevant market rates, as part of the attorney fees, was proper. The Court stated thus;

It has frequently been recognised in the lower courts that paralegals are capable of carrying out many tasks, under the supervision of an attorney that might otherwise be performed by a lawyer and billed at a higher rate. Such work might include, for example, factual investigation, including locating and interviewing witnesses, assistance with depositions, interrogatories, and document productions, compilation of statistical and financial data, checking legal citations and drafting correspondence. Much work lies in a gray (sic) area of tasks that might appropriately be performed by either an attorney or a paralegal.

Thus, the Court effectively recognised the importance of the paraprofession and the role that a paralegal plays in the delivery of legal services by describing many of the tasks undertaken by them. The judgement also approved the recovery of fees for paralegal services. Flowing from the above cited authorities, the role/duties of a paralegal include:

- a) Conduct client interviews and maintain general contact with the client.
- b) Locate and interview witnesses.
- c) Conduct investigation and documentary research.
- d) Carry out legal research
- e) Draft legal documents, correspondence and pleadings.
- f) Summarise depositions, interrogatories and depositions.
- g) Attend execution of wills, deposition taking, court or administrative hearings and trials with the attorney.

4. Importance of Paralegals in the Legal System

1. Increased Access to Justice: Paralegals bridge the gap between lawyers and citizens, especially those who cannot afford legal representation. Their services ensure that individuals receive necessary legal assistance and have their voices heard in court.

¹⁴ (1997) 673 NE 2d 1307 <www.casetext.com> accessed 16 August 2024

¹⁵ (1980) 275 SC 400 <www.casetext.com> accessed 16 August 2024

¹⁶ (1989) 491 US 274 <www.casetext.com> accessed 16 August 2024

2. **Cost-Effective Legal Services:** Paralegals provide cost-effective legal services, making legal assistance more affordable for clients. By handling routine tasks, they allow lawyers to focus on complex legal matters, reducing overall legal fees.
3. **Efficient Judicial System:** Paralegals contribute to the efficient functioning of the judicial system in Nigeria. Their valuable support in document preparation, case management, and research, ensures smooth and timely legal proceedings.
4. **Increased Legal Awareness:** Paralegals play a role in promoting legal awareness among the general public. By providing basic legal information and guidance, they empower individuals to understand their rights and make informed decisions.
5. **Enhancing Advocacy Efforts:** Paralegals assist lawyers and legal organizations in their advocacy efforts by conducting research, preparing reports, and staying updated on relevant legal developments. They contribute to the advancement of legal rights and justice in Nigeria.

Thus, Paralegals play a vital role in promoting affordable legal services, efficiency in the judicial system, legal awareness, and advocacy efforts.

5. What is Legal Technology?

Whalen¹⁷ describes legal technology as “all devices capable of being used as a means for interacting with the substance of the law or assisting its user to interact with the law, and the skills and techniques by which we use them.” Flowing therefrom, legal technology can be viewed from two perspectives. It can refer to the devices used in aiding interaction with the law as well as the skillset or methodology involved in the use of these devices. Legal technology is simply the use of technology and innovations in a way that enhances the legal system.¹⁸ It means utilizing technology to enhance and simplify legal services. It encompasses two fundamental categories – hardware and software, both of which are essential to the successful operation of law firms. The Hardware refers to the physical equipment necessary to utilize legal technology including computers, printers, photocopiers, and scanners. In selecting a suitable hardware, factors such as processing power, storage capacity, connectivity options, and security issues are very crucial.¹⁹ The legal software plays a very pivotal role in transforming the management of law firms, their operations and delivery of legal services. Practice management software, document management systems, and legal research platforms are examples of legal software applications that streamline tasks, automate processes, and enhance collaboration within law firms.²⁰ Legal technology is versatile and can be used by law firms and legal departments to automate repetitive tasks, manage documents effectively, improve research capabilities, and streamline legal workflows, thus, minimise mistakes, save time, and enhance client satisfaction. Accordingly, choosing a reliable and secure legal technology that aligns with the firm’s needs and workflow is essential. It ensures smooth operation, enhances productivity, and protect sensitive client data. By building a robust and integrated technological infrastructure, law firms can empower their legal team to work effectively, collaborate and provide exceptional legal services to their clients.

6. The Origin of the Paralegal Profession in the Legal Industry: Perspectives from the United States, United Kingdom and Nigeria

Perspectives from the United States

The roots of the paralegal profession can be traced back to the United States of America in the mid 1960’s, after the World War II. The aftermath of the World War II led to a fee hike in the cost of securing legal services or legal representation. Thus, only the affluent could afford the high cost of legal services. As a response to this imbalance, the American Government established the Legal Service Corporation to provide funding for legal services to indigents pursuing justice. Simultaneously, low cost legal clinics started cropping up and prepaid legal service plans were formulated. The American Bar took the initiative to rethink the traditional model of rendering legal services as well as its management, to make justice easily accessible to all and sundry.²¹ To ensure that justice was within everyone’s reach, and without sacrificing quality, “increased automation” of legal service delivery, “better management” and the “use of legal assistants or paralegals” by attorneys were put in place to: reduce workload on attorneys when providing legal services; bring down the high fee for providing legal services; and consequently, make access to justice easy and seamless for low- and middle-class citizens. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the use of legal assistants or paralegals by attorneys nationally in America had risen significantly. In 1967, the American Bar Association (ABA) endorsed the concept of a paralegal profession and established its first committee on legal

¹⁷ Whalen, R., ‘Defining Legal Technology and its Implications’ (2022) 30(1) *International Journal of Law and Information Technology* 47,67

¹⁸ Atoyebi, O ‘Legal Technology as a Catalyst for the Development of the Nigerian Legal Regime’ (2023) <<https://www.lawpavillion.com>> accessed 10 September 2024

¹⁹ Sparrow, R., ‘What is Legal Technology for Law Firms’ (2024) <<https://www.theaccessgroup.com>> accessed 10 September 2024

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Wikipedia, ‘Paralegal’ <<https://www.en.m.wikipedia.org>> accessed 20 August 2024

assistants in 1968 which metamorphosed into a standing committee of the ABA.²² In 1974, the ABA adopted guidelines for the paralegal education curriculum and began approving paralegal programs under those guidelines in 1975. The Mid – 1970’s also witnessed the rising of professional paralegal associations in America, such as the National Federation of Paralegal Associations (NFPA) which was the first paralegal association was formed in 1974. In 2021, the Association was renamed, the “National Association for Legal Support Professionals”.²³ In 1975, the Government of the United States of America recognized the existence of paralegals as a profession and created a new job classification for it within its workforce. States, Counties and cities followed suit. Like the legal practitioners, the modern paralegals also have specialties in different areas of the law, for example, Corporate Law Paralegal, Litigation Paralegal, Criminal Law Paralegal, and so forth.

Perspective from the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, it took a longer time to get the paralegal profession standardized. In 1987 –the Paralegal Association, later renamed, the National Association of Licensed Paralegals was established. In 1988, the Association, adopted standards for and the general overseeing of the profession. The Institute of Paralegals (IoP) is also another professional body that oversees the affairs of paralegals in the United Kingdom. There are also accredited training centres and schools in the United Kingdom engaged in the training of persons willing to become certified and licensed paralegals as the profession continues to grow.

Perspective from Nigeria

Unlike other jurisdictions, such as, the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, South Africa and so forth, where the paralegal profession is firmly standardized, in Nigeria, the profession is yet to be standardized. Whereas some law firms in Nigeria specifically and exclusively retain a paralegal professional with the appellation “Paralegal”, many others do not. It is not uncommon to find a litigation Paralegal in smaller law firms performing the dual responsibility of a litigation officer and a legal secretary, as they are collectively referred to as support staff. Paralegals are also found within the court system and they perform the role of Legal or Judicial Assistants, Court Registrars, Court Clerks, Bailiffs/Sheriffs etc.²⁴ Some reputable institutions offer Paralegal programs in Nigeria, such as; the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (NIALS), University of Lagos (UNILAG), Kaduna State Polytechnic, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEx), and Institute of Paralegal Services (IOPS).

7. The Legal Framework for the Licensing of Paralegals in Nigeria

In principle, Paralegals are recognised under the Legal Aid Act, 2011. The Act makes provisions for the licensing of Paralegal service providers by the Legal Aid Council (the Council) of Nigeria. The Act provides that the Council may grant licenses to persons who have undergone a prescribed course in paralegal services to render such services in appropriate situations.²⁵ The Council classifies paralegals into two categories in terms of the scope of work they do – paralegals who are attached to lawyers and perform delegated duties, and community paralegals who perform first aid legal services for communities. By section 23 (4) of the Act, the Council is vested with the responsibility to make regulations for the conduct of “paralegal aid provision.” In the Act, a paralegal is defined as “as any person although not admitted to the practice of law in Nigeria, performs “substantially legal tasks” under the discretion and supervision of a legal practitioner”.²⁶

8. Some Legal Technological Tools Employed by Paralegals in the Legal Industry in the Practice of Law in the 21st Century and their Benefits

In time past, legal research used to require long hours in law libraries. The Introduction of basic office technology like type writers and Dictaphones revolutionized legal practice in the 20th century. The advent of personal computers and word processors further increased productivity. In recent times, software technologies like, Law Pavilion, LexisNexis, Casetext, provide instant access to a vast array of legal resources. These technologies are indispensable in facilitating thorough and efficient legal service. The ability to speedily and easily wade through case laws, statutes, legal journals and other vital legal documents significantly reduces time and effort required for comprehensive legal research. Efficiently gathering and analysing legal information, allows paralegals to prepare better legal arguments and support attorneys more effectively, ultimately contributing to favourable outcomes for clients. Some of the Legal technologies²⁷ that help paralegals discharge their duties and obligations more effectively, include:

²² The name of the committee was later changed to the Standing Committee on Paralegals in 2003 in recognition of the growing preference for the title “paralegal” among law firms and lawyers.

²³ Hamed, Y. A., ‘Origin of the Modern Paralegal’ (2023) <<https://www.spaajibade.com>> accessed 1 September 2024

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Legal Aid Act 2011, s 17(3).

²⁶ Legal Aid Act 2011, s 24 (1).

²⁷ Arrotta, M., ‘A Guide to Legal Technology for Paralegals’ (2024) <www.clio.com> accessed 1 September 2024

Document Management Systems (DMS): Document Management Systems like Cloud Computing, NetDocuments, iManage, have transformed the way legal documents are stored, retrieved and managed. They ensure documents are secure, easily accessible and efficiently organized to facilitate quick retrieval. This system allows for seamless collaboration among legal teams, as multiple users can access and work on the same documents simultaneously. These systems protect sensitive client information, reducing the risk of data breaches. Implementing a DMS helps Paralegals streamline a law firm's workflow, reduce administrative overhead and ultimately provide better client service.

Practice Management Software (PMS): A legal software such as Clio, helps in managing client relationships, scheduling and billing, which improves overall efficiency and achieves client satisfaction. This legal technology, offers a centralized location to manage case information, track time and expenses and maintain client communication records. Integrated calendaring features ensure that deadlines and court dates are never missed.

Artificial Intelligence (AI): Artificial Intelligence tools like Ross Intelligence, AI Meta, etc., aid in legal research by providing more accurate results of search subjects based on machine learning algorithms. Predictive coding and other AI applications help in reviewing large volumes of documents more effectively. By automating routine tasks such as contract analysis, legal document review, and even some form of legal drafting, AI can save enormous amount of time. Also, the predictive capabilities of AI can also assist in case outcome analysis, allowing for more informed decision-making and helping legal professionals strategize more effectively.

Remote Collaboration Tools: Technologies such as Microsoft Teams, Amazon Chime, Amazon WorkDocs and videoconferencing apps like zoom, file sharing, cross-channel messaging and unified workspace software, have become essential for ensuring seamless communication and collaboration among legal teams. These platforms enable effective communication and productivity among a dispersed team of employees, wherever they are to achieve a common goal, thus, enhancing enterprise collaboration, increasing productivity and eliminating management hassles.

Benefits of Legal Technologies for Paralegals: Some of the benefits of legal technologies for paralegals include:

Improved Efficiency: Legal technology tools reduce time spent on routine tasks like document drafting, streamline administrative processes and also minimize the risk of errors that occur with manual handling, thereby allowing Paralegals focus on more complex tasks. By leveraging these tools, paralegals can manage larger caseloads more effectively, contributing to the overall productivity of the legal team which translates to faster case resolutions, optimal and satisfactory client service.

Enhanced Accuracy: Technological tools such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Practice Management Software etc., minimize human error, ensuring greater precision in legal research and document review. AI tools can cross-check information, verify data, and ensure that all relevant legal citations are included, thereby reducing the risk of oversight.

Cost-Effectiveness: By minimizing the time paralegals and other legal professional spend on repetitive tasks, legal technology enables firms to reduce billable hours for administrative work. This allows for more competitive pricing and delivers higher value to clients. Also, technology reduces the need for physical storage space and paper-based processes, leading to savings on office supplies and storage. Investment in legal technology, also enables firms to operate with leaner teams while maintaining high levels of productivity.

Better Client Service: Operating with legal technologies frees up paralegals from time-consuming tasks, allowing them to focus on personalized client service, detailed case management, and timely client communication. By improving the overall efficiency and quality of legal services, technology helps build stronger client relationship.²⁸

9. The Challenges of Adapting to New Legal Technologies by Paralegals

Embracing legal technology is not without its challenges. Learning new systems and adapting to digital tools can be daunting, especially for those accustomed to traditional methods. The following are some of the challenges faced by paralegals in adapting to new legal technologies;

Lack of Training/ Professional Development: Many paralegals lack adequate training in the use of legal technologies, which can lead to inefficiencies and errors. Paralegals must continuously learn and adapt to legal technologies, and stay current on legal trends. By staying up-to-date with new and existing legal technology, paralegals can remain competitive and provide more valuable services to their employers. Law firms can support

²⁸Steele, A., Paralegals and Technology: Adapting to New tools in the Legal Field, (May 30, 2024) <<https://www.linkedin.com>> Accessed 4 September, 2024

their paralegals by offering training and development opportunities, encouraging continuing education, and providing access to legal technology resources.

Data Privacy/Information Security Concerns: The use of legal technology such as videoconferencing, e-mailing, e-service of documents, raises data privacy/information security concerns. The technological systems supporting these processes such as e-service platform and emails may be subject to cyber-attacks, such as hacking. In such cases, unauthorized persons may access the system and engage in unwarranted practices such as stealing of information, deleting information or sending unwanted information to the detriment of some parties. Thus, ensuring the security and confidentiality of sensitive information is a challenge. Paralegals must thereto, be knowledgeable about cyber security best practices and be able to identify and prevent potential security breaches.²⁹

Costs: The costs associated with the use (acquiring and maintaining) of legal technology could result in a large majority of the population being unable to access and afford the justice system. The use of legal technology relies on devices such as computers, laptops, smartphones and internet connectivity that may be out of reach for poor citizens, too expensive for some law firms to afford for their paralegal and sometimes, the network connectivity might be unstable. However, the upfront cost of acquiring legal technology may fade away in the long-term.³⁰ As research shows that firms that have implemented legal technology have seen an increase in productivity, a reduction in administrative tasks, and an overall improvement in their bottom line.³¹ It is thus important to take into account such concerns in the move towards embracing legal technology in order to ensure that the right of access to justice for all is upheld.³²

Ethical Considerations for Paralegals: With the use of legal technology and the rise of remote work and collaborations, paralegals must be mindful of ethical guidelines and maintain professional standards when working with clients and other legal professionals. For example, a paralegal should not pass off himself as a legal practitioner to a client, no matter the circumstance.³³

Malware and viruses: With the use of technology, malware and viruses can corrupt or damage electronic files, leading to loss of important legal documents, which can be very detrimental to the law firm and client. Paralegals must thereto, be knowledgeable about malware and virus threats and be proactive to identify and prevent potential harm, for example, how to use an antivirus program to scan a computer.³⁴

10. The Impact of Legal Technology for Paralegals' Role Performance in the Legal Industry

The rise of legal technology has particular implications for paralegals especially in shifting the role performance of paralegals from administrative tasks to more strategic roles.³⁵ Automated legal research tools can sift through thousands of documents, highlighting relevant information in a fraction of the time it would take a paralegal to manually review. This legal technological efficiency allows paralegals to focus on analysing the data, interpreting the findings, and building strong cases. Furthermore, case management systems streamline the workflow, improving collaboration among legal teams and providing real-time updates about case progress. This means, paralegals can manage their time more effectively, aligning their efforts with the most pressing tasks and deadlines. Also, the implementation of legal technology facilitates better communication and collaboration between paralegals, legal practitioners, and clients, leading to a more streamlined and transparent legal process, and overall satisfaction. Paralegals who master legal technologies, can distinguish themselves within their firms and the legal industry, demonstrating their adaptability and commitment to innovation. Furthermore, a profound understanding of legal technology can open doors to specialized roles within law firms, such as legal project managers. Therefore, the future of paralegal work is not defined merely by the ability to adapt to these digital tools but by the ability to leverage them effectively, strategically, and innovatively.³⁶

²⁹ Muigwa, K., 'Challenges and Concerns with the use of technology in the legal profession' (2022) < Challenges and Concerns with the use of technology in the legal profession – The Lawyer Africa> accessed 8 September, 2024.

³⁰ Many platforms provide a significant return on investments ranging from cost savings to increased productivity. The tools also helps the firm work more efficiently which will result in significant savings in the long run.

³¹ Kluwer, W., 'Legal Technology – increasing value for the clients' <www.wolterskluwer.com> accessed 15 September 2024

³² Bhaskar, N., 'Is the Price of Innovation worth it? Demystifying the Cost of Legal Tech for Law Firms (2024) <www.linkedin.com> accessed 15 September, 2024

³³ Pahwa, A. The Paralegal Profession in the Digital Age: Opportunities and Challenges, (June 1, 2023) < The Paralegal Profession in the Digital Age: Opportunities and Challenges (linkedin.com)> Accessed 8/9/2024

³⁴ McAfee, 'What is Malware?' <www.mcafee.com> accessed 15 September 2024

³⁵ Career Naija, The Impact of Technology on Paralegal Work in Nigeria (January 26, 2024), < The Impact of Technology on Paralegal Work in Nigeria (professions.ng)> Accessed 8 September, 2024.

³⁶ Szalay, H., Legal Tech: Shaping the Future of Paralegal Work, (July 21, 2023) < Legal Tech: Shaping the Future of Paralegal Work (linkedin.com)> Accessed 7 September, 2024

11. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, it is crystal that a paralegal plays an integral role in the pursuit and dispensation of justice. Embracing legal technology is not without its challenges. Learning new systems and adapting to digital tools can be daunting; however, these challenges bring new opportunities for growth and advancement within the paralegal profession. Paralegals who master legal technological tools can hone their skills and distinguish themselves within their firms and the legal system, demonstrating their adaptability and commitment to innovation. Furthermore, a profound understanding of legal technology can open doors to specialized roles within law firms, such as legal technology consultants or legal project managers. Thus, by embracing legal technological advancements and developing relevant digital skills, paralegals are not only securing their future but actively shaping it. By harnessing technology, paralegals are transitioning into tomorrow's legal technology experts, defining the new normal in the legal profession and pioneering a more efficient and effective approach to legal work. The researcher therefore recommends the following: There is need for adequate training/continuing legal training of legal professionals, and particularly, paralegal staff to fully harness the benefits proffered by legal technology in the legal practice. To mitigate data privacy concerns, stakeholders in the legal industry must ensure that they put in place, robust measures for data protection in line with the Nigerian Data Protection Act 2023 and other relevant instruments, especially in dealings with clients, third party technology vendors, etc. The awareness and importance of legal technology in the legal industry must be canvassed intensively.