Q&A

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Innovation, technology and AI in African finance

Advanced AI can now scan data rooms, analyse financial statements and draft investment memos in minutes. How is this technological shift impacting the workload and expectations of your regional deal teams?

AI is reducing the time spent on tasks like reviewing data rooms, analysing information, conducting research and preparing investment or diligence memos. These are activities that traditionally occupied a large portion of a junior and mid-level professional's workload.

For our regional deal teams, this means the focus is shifting from gathering information to interpreting it. Rather than spending hours extracting data, professionals are increasingly expected to verify AI-generated outputs, identify issues that require deeper analysis, assess transaction risks, and develop practical solutions. In cross-border transactions, this also means applying local market knowledge and understanding jurisdiction-specific legal and regulatory considerations that AI may not fully capture.

Expectations have risen accordingly. Clients now expect faster turnaround times and more efficient work, particularly during diligence and the early stages of a transaction. However, they continue to rely on experienced professionals to exercise judgement, contextualise the findings, and advise on how identified risks can affect deal structure, negotiations and execution.

Because tech handles the tedious data sorting, the traditional entry-level 'rite of passage' for junior analysts is changing. How must training models adapt for young African women entering corporate finance today?

For young African women entering corporate finance, the focus should shift from performing tasks to developing judgement. Rather than spending time compiling reports, they can gain earlier exposure to broader regulatory and drafting work, and transaction structuring assessment. AI can provide information, but people still need to interpret it and make decisions.

Training should also go beyond traditional legal skills. Future lawyers will need a basic understanding of technology, including AI, data and cybersecurity, alongside legal analysis and drafting skills.

Mentorship will become even more important. While AI can make legal information more accessible, it cannot replace the guidance, experience and practical insights that come from senior lawyers. Strong mentors help young women build confidence, develop professional judgement, and navigate complex career decisions.

Critical thinking will also be essential. Young lawyers must learn to question and verify AI-generated outputs, rather than accepting them at face value. The most valuable lawyers will not be those who simply use AI tools, but those who can apply sound legal and commercial judgement to the information provided. Communication and adaptability will become key differentiators. As routine legal tasks become more automated, lawyers will stand out through their ability to explain complex issues clearly and build trusted client relationships.

In African private markets, proprietary deal sourcing and reading a founder's unwritten intentions are vital. Where do you draw the line between tech-driven data insights and indispensable human intuition?

Technology and human judgment are both important, but they do different jobs. Data helps us understand what is happening by identifying trends, screening opportunities, and highlighting potential risks. Human intuition helps us understand why it's happening and whether it feels right.

In African private markets, information is often limited, and many businesses are founder-led. Because of this, strong relationships and trusted networks remain essential for finding opportunities and assessing them properly. Important factors, such as a founder's credibility, willingness to work with investors or approach to succession are difficult to capture through data alone.

For me, technology should guide decisions on objective factors, such as financial performance, growth, market size and industry trends. Human judgment should lead when it comes to assessing people, relationships, and long-term partnership potential.

Given the sensitive nature of cross-border corporate finance data, what unique cybersecurity or data governance challenges do you worry about when implementing new financial technologies?

Cross-border corporate finance transactions involve large volumes of commercially sensitive and confidential information. As firms have started to adopt AI, ensuring the security and proper handling of that information may be a key concern.

One of the main challenges is ensuring that data is stored, processed and accessed in a way that complies with applicable data protection, confidentiality and regulatory requirements. In cross-border transactions, information often moves across multiple jurisdictions, each with its own legal and regulatory framework. Therefore, organisations need to ensure that the technology they are using complies with those requirements and provides appropriate safeguards, as applicable.

There is also the risk of 'over-reliance' on technology. While AI can significantly improve efficiency, firms must ensure that confidential transaction data, proprietary information and client communications are protected, and are not used in a manner that could compromise confidentiality obligations.