



# Justice In the Digital Age

By Jacqueline de Rojas, President of techUK and the chair of the Digital Leaders board

Too often when we talk about transforming the justice system, we break it down into a series of business processes, functions, and budgets. But when we think about the people involved, there is so much more at stake than metrics and budgets.

For me, this is about justice: Within the justice system there are no customers, or clients, or end users. There are victims, witnesses, defendants, and legal professionals. Simply put, justice delayed is justice denied. Yet too many are denied justice through unnecessary delays, errors, and inefficiencies in the system.

I believe a truly world class justice system isn't about the management of crime, punishment, and rehabilitation. It's about delivering more accountability, engagement, and public trust. These fundamentals must shape the way we move forward and build a justice system that's fit for the digital era. The way the state conducts its business, and the way in which we as citizens interact with the state, will fundamentally

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change over the coming decades. Technology presents an immense opportunity. We can let our imaginations run wild and break down barriers to success.

Last year, the Parliament's Public Accounts Committee published a report on "Efficiency in the criminal justice system." The report found that "the criminal justice system is close to breaking point." The criminal justice landscape is fragmented. It is a myriad of diverse organizations and agencies, all of which hold a stake. All of whom need to cooperate and share information in order for the system to function.

Poor coordination and data sharing between these various organizations cause delays and inefficiencies. Most legal professionals will be familiar with the issues the report highlights: significant delays; victims sent conflicting information; and perhaps the most remarkable statistic, almost half of all witnesses would NOT be prepared to do it again. Think about what that means for justice...

There are many different reasons for the problems highlighted in this report, which can't be addressed by digital transformation alone. But many problems can be, and the potential for digital technology to address them is enormous. But if we want to truly harness tech to address these problems, we need digital ambition. The coming decades will be challenging times for Government as it strives to deliver more value for money while meeting the needs of a more demanding population – as citizens become ever more consumer-like in their expectations of services. The transformation of public services must accelerate through the smart application of digital technology.

In the UK, our consumers are the most prolific online shoppers in Europe. The expectations and demands of consumers are therefore increasing as retail and online experiences improve. This is creating an insatiable appetite from us as citizens for quick and easy services from the public sector. Just look at how Deliveroo, UberEAT, Netflix, and so many others are changing our expectations of what service delivery means. The public sector must therefore prepare itself for the high level of service and convenience that citizens will expect when accessing various public services as well.

So -- what might a smarter, digitally enabled justice system look like? Fifteen years ago, we lived in a world without smartphones, without apps, without widespread social media, without autonomous vehicles. I am not saying that I can predict the future but there are certain identifiable trends that might allow us to guess what a digitally transformed system may look like.

### **First, less HQ, more IQ**

HM Courts and Tribunals spend about a third of their budget on estate/property costs each year. To reduce this spend, it is embarking on a program of estate rationalization. It wants fewer crumbling court houses to look after, to move more out of the courtroom, and have more done remotely and online. This includes video testimony and online dispute resolution, which could reduce demand for physical hearings and demands on buildings, saving victims, witnesses, defendants, and plaintiffs unnecessary travel and hassle.

The margin for error here is small. Digital services to enable remote work must be reliable and secure and the buildings that remain must work efficiently and flawlessly, with state of the art technology and network infrastructure.

## **Next, an end-to-end system.**

Joined up, seamless data sharing between the different stakeholders in the system. This will reduce duplication, save time and money, and will provide a single view of people through the system, to minimize confusion, improve outcomes, and ensure people are receiving the support needed. Public contact with the justice system will become increasingly digital and multi-channel. Video and photographic evidence will be submitted digitally from members of the public, revolutionizing evidence gathering, saving hours, and improving access to justice.

## **And, automation could play a huge role too.**

Last year an AI chatbot made headlines after overturning 160,000 parking tickets in London and New York. What other processes could be automated, saving time and money? What other roles could AI have? The scope of possibilities is immense. So if that's the end state, what do we need to do now in order to get there? A few things spring to mind for a start:

- Common data standards for interoperability. If organizations can adopt common data standards, both formal and informal, which are accessible and understood by the majority, they can tackle the problem of information silos. Tech-enabled collaboration cannot prevail if one system cannot store, access, and exchange data seamlessly with another.
- Second, improving digital skills and capabilities within the civil service. Tech savviness across Government is improving and it has worked hard to create a digital-by-default culture with increased engagement with new

and established tech companies. Welcome steps, but we have to pick up the pace.

- Finally, trust. If the criminal justice system is going to be sharing, processing, and analyzing citizens' data to improve outcomes, then citizens need trust in HMG's handling of their data. This is fundamental. It is vitally important that people trust the public sector to handle their sensitive data with the care that is required.

There are challenges ahead, but I am optimistic about our ability to digitally transform the justice system. The UK is well placed to lead that revolution and those in the justice system must be ambitious enough, innovative enough, and collaborative enough to deliver a justice system fit for the digital age.

Justice is a problem worth solving. And this is where technology comes to the fore.

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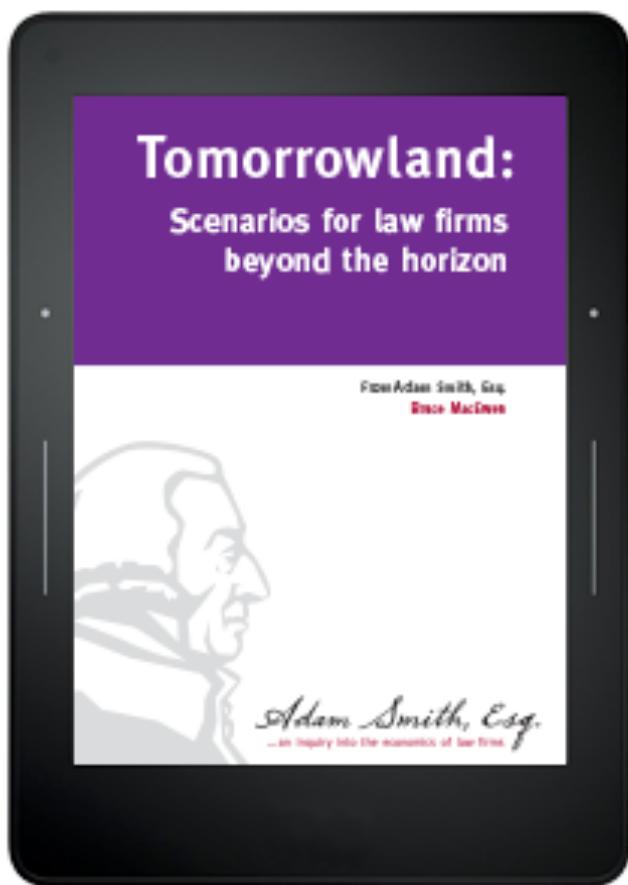
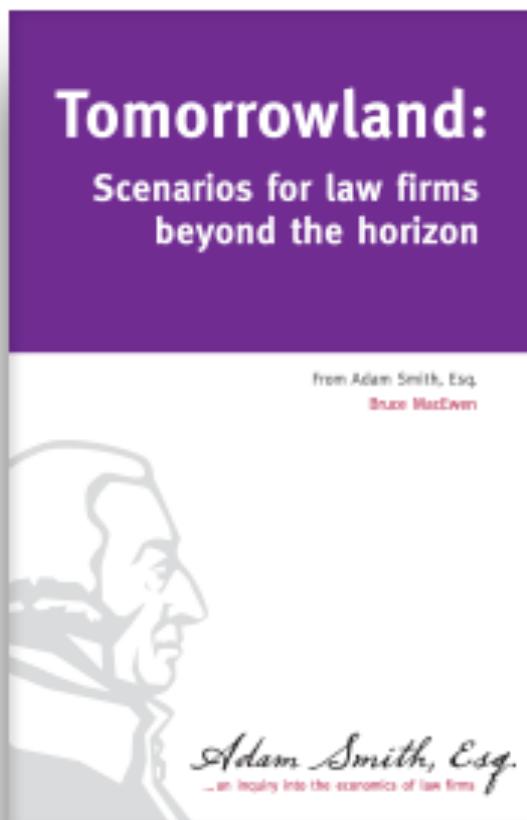
## **About the Author**

Jacqueline is the President of techUK and the chair of the Digital Leaders board. She sits as a Non-Executive Director on the board of UK technology business Rightmove plc and on the board of Costain plc, which is committed to solving the nation's Infrastructure problems. Jacqueline also serves on the government's Digital Economy Council & is Patron of the UTC Newcastle. A business advisor to fast moving tech businesses and a business mentor at Bird & Co offering board and executive level coaching. She advises the board of Accelerate-Her and is especially delighted to lend her support to the Girlguiding Association for technology transformation. ——————

In 2016 she entered the @Computerweekly Hall of Fame after being voted Computer Weekly's Most Influential Woman in IT 2015; she was listed on Debrett's 2016 500 People of Influence – Digital & Social and named in Europe's Inspiring Fifty most inspiring female role models for 2017. Passionate about diversi-

ty and inclusion which informs where she places her support.

Happily married to Roger Andrews, they have three children and four dogs.



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