POPIA IS VITAL FOR 4IR LAW

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The fourth industrial revolution ("**4IR**") is causing significant changes to the way we live, interact and do business. This is the future of technology, where objects, machines and various other devices connect with each other in a secure, networked environment. 4IR is being driven by intelligent machines that can perform complex tasks automatically by communicating with other machines, with little or no human intervention.

Technological and commercial advances bring new legal and compliance challenges, which have the potential to expose businesses to risk. However, there have been new legal developments in response to the data protection demands made by 4IR, such as the Protection of Personal Information Act ("**POPIA**") which is South Africa's data protection law. Its purpose is to protect people from harm by protecting their personal information. Similarly, the General Data Protection Regulation ("**GDPR**") is the primary law regulating how companies protect EU citizens personal data.

New markets that have developed as a result of 4IR and 4IR law which has resulted in an increased need for legal services. Client expectations have also changed as they demand more efficient and cost-effective services which involve finding and synthesizing information more efficiently.

Legal technology is being used with increasing frequency to improve efficiency in the legal process. Artificial Intelligence ("**AI**") is now able to significantly reduce both time and cost of legal work. It's not uncommon to use AI in contract analysis supporting mergers and acquisition processes or contract remediation to comply with regulatory changes like POPIA or the GDPR.

Internally, legal professionals may also increasingly rely on AI-powered digital assistants which grow smarter as they process more information. This allows them to focus on higher value-added legal services.

It is unlikely, however, that technology will reach a stage it could replace the legal profession. Technology will empower a new era of augmented intelligence, but humans are strategic – while machines will speed up processes and make onerous tasks easier, humans will always need to guide the process.