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As industrial landscapes and business models change, employers and academics say individuals should be prepared to embrace technology and never stop learning in order to stay relevant in the workplace.

By Kane Benjamin Cunico

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From left: Prof Ehsan Mesbahi, Mr Jairo Fernandez, Mr Arnoud De Meyer and Dr Finian Tan chatting with Channel NewsAsia's panel host, Teymoor Nabili. (Photo: Kane Cunico)

SINGAPORE: Imagine a computer replacing the role of a panel show host and moderator, in fine repartee with its guests like any human being could.

It is a seemingly dystopian thought of a world where even the most human-dependent roles could be replaced by computers, but one that is plausible regardless, said guests on Channel NewsAsia's Perspectives panel show.

"Today, technology is changing many facets of our jobs, not just the companies that deal with technology. I am talking about every industry in every department in the company," said Mr Jairo Fernandez, senior vice president of human resources at SAP Asia Pacific Japan.

Mr Fernandez, who has changed job roles in various departments five times in his career, said the days when IT skills were solely for IT departments are long gone. Today, there's a dependency on data and IT knowledge across companies' departments, and a need for individuals to have a grasp of data translation.

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Speaking at SMU Labs during a live recording, which posited “Future Jobs” as the subject, Mr Fernandez said: “Departments are looking for individuals who are able to combine business knowledge and tech skills.”

Other panel speakers included Mr Arnoud De Meyer, president of Singapore Management University (SMU), Professor Ehsan Mesbahi, dean and CEO of Newcastle University International Singapore, and Dr Finian Tan, chairman of Vickers Venture Partners.

The topic also touched on undergraduate education, workforce preparation, digital technology and data knowledge, and optimism levels on employment amid an increasingly connected world dependent on robotics and artificial intelligence.

LEARNING TO LEARN AGAIN

The panel, however, returned to the topic of skills upgrading, and warned of complacency when undergraduates enter the workforce.

“Learning does not stop in university. It is about reskilling and upskilling. Learning how to learn,” said Mr De Meyer. “Take medical care, for example. Who is most important in medical care today? It is obviously the medical doctor. Who is less important? It is the nurse. But who can be automated? Not the nurse.”

The idea of being a jack of all trades was repeated when discussing the needs and expectations of millenials entering the workforce.

Said Professor Mesbahi: “We talk about Generation X and Baby Boomers. Millenials behave completely differently. They want more options to do what they want to do, to work remotely from wherever they are. So their flexibility in jobs is going to be key for the future.”

Taking a question from an audience member regarding the relevancy of her engineering degree, the panelists felt that what people study should not necessarily hamper or dictate their career choice.

“Education is what makes the progress great, it’s the place of ideas,” said Dr Tan. “Ultimately, it is all about trying to guess where the ball is going to be; you cannot do that with just school. You have to figure out where the world is going to be in the future.”

Tune in to Channel NewsAsia on May 20 at 8pm to see the panel discussion in full, or go to the Perspectives website to view past episodes and polls.

- CNA/kc