



(From left) Singapore Management University provost Timothy Clark, The Straits Times editor Jaime Ho, SMU vice-president of partnerships and engagement Lim Sun Sun, Google country managing director for Singapore Ben King, SkillsFuture Singapore CEO Tan Kok Yam, SMU Centre for Computational Law deputy director Jerrold Soh, ST associate editor for newsroom strategy Jeremy Au Yong and humanoid robot Sophia at The Straits Times Education Forum on March 8. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

Focus on AI's potential to help in workplace: Experts

Workers should not fear job displacement but embrace how AI will change jobs

Gabrielle Chan

Those in the workforce should not worry about losing their jobs, but embrace how artificial intelligence (AI) will change the nature of jobs, said industry experts.

AI will even introduce new jobs, they said.

It will augment the skills we hold, and we should focus on its potential to help us, said Mr Ben King, Google's country managing director for Singapore, responding to a question about the impact of AI on jobs and the workplace.

He added: "AI won't necessarily replace us, because we're not competing. You can imagine, humans are bringing creativity, they're bringing empathy, they're bringing critical thinking to work, and AI can really supplement their systems."

Mr Tan Kok Yam, chief executive of SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG), referred to his employees as "choice architects", and cited the example of how they came up with personalised course options for individuals based on data collected.

"The nature of work has changed. It will change, I think, for the majority of the work," Mr Tan

added.

Mr King and Mr Tan were among the panellists at The Straits Times Education Forum 2024 held on March 8 at the Singapore Management University (SMU), where they discussed the benefits of AI and its perceived threats in the workplace.

The third panellist, Assistant Professor Jerrold Soh, deputy director of the Centre for Computational Law at SMU, also addressed the worries people have about job displacement, and said that it is important to talk about how the average person perceives the impact of AI.

The forum was moderated by Professor Lim Sun Sun, SMU's vice-president of partnerships and engagement.

"The problem with AI in particular is that lay perceptions of what the technology will do often do not line up with what it actually does," Prof Soh said, adding that the worries about AI taking over jobs may not always be true.

"As long as we see AI as an enterprise of making computers act and think like humans, there will always be a need for some human input," he said, adding that he felt confident that AI is creating jobs.

But in order for individuals to

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fully enjoy the benefits of AI, there is a need for continued and lifelong learning as they navigate the job market, said Mr King, adding that Singaporeans are actually taking action to be part of this AI revolution.

He said that in Singapore, searches for jobs and education related to AI are at a 19-year high, and the term "AI courses" is also the top related search term.

At SSG, Mr Tan said he looks at "smart user soft skills", and how to combine relational skills found in industries like law, customer service or even sales, and integrate them with AI to build stronger connections with people.

But more than just understanding how AI works, it is also important to know its limitations, said

Mr Tan, listing jobs like caring for the elderly that are difficult to automate.

"Certain fields will remain very human, and for quite a while, and it will be interesting to see how society can place more value on some of these jobs where we know that you cannot automate them away," he said.

There is no one skill or one field of study more valuable than the other, said Prof Soh, in response to Prof Lim's question about skills that are still worth pursuing in the AI revolution.

Prof Soh said: "So the question I think people need to ask themselves is, 'What are you good at?'"

"What do you love doing so much that you are willing to go through pain, putting in the hours and the effort to become really good at it, at the level that you are not worried about computers doing it?"

He added that AI is a part of every industry, so it is up to the individual to pursue "core competencies", and to remain curious, passionate and keep an open mind about continuous learning as the world changes.

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