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SMU-LSE Global Forum examines what it will take for universities to fulfil their responsibility toward societal impact in a fractured world and puts both universities' strategic partnership into action, with new joint research projects tackling urban sustainability, workforce and longevity challenges in Singapore, the UK and beyond

SINGAPORE, Sept. 10, 2026 /PRNewswire/ -- In an increasingly fragmented world, universities must rethink not only what they teach and research, but how they demonstrate the value of that work to society.

That was the central message from Singapore Management University (SMU) President Lily Kong and London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) President and Vice Chancellor Larry Kramer during a fireside conversation at the inaugural SMU-LSE Global Forum today, moderated by SMU Vice President (Impact) Professor Scott Fritzen.

Professor Lily Kong said, "Academics have been trained to think about publications, citations and rankings. But in an increasingly complex world, universities must ask themselves how they can make a difference. We must encourage academics to think beyond publications—how their work can make a difference to business, government and society—and how university systems and academic culture can better support them. Changes to policy and practice are usually based on the accumulation of knowledge, oftentimes drawing on the work of various scholars. So, we need to recognise the difference between an academic's contribution and the attribution of change to any single individual or work. Both are important."

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Professor Larry Kramer said, "If you think about the problems that we face within our societies, there are few institutions that are better set up than universities to be able to think clearly about this. The independence that universities have, the culture that we have for fostering honest and active debate across differences, is actually one of the best ways to get the best outcomes that we can. We are also training the generation of leaders who are going to go out and take the ideas that are coming out of universities and implement them in real life."

Both university leaders argued that this requires a shift in academic culture, as well as in how universities and their work are assessed. While academic rigour and intellectual independence remain fundamental, they called for greater recognition of what scholarship achieves beyond traditional measures such as rankings and publication metrics.

This includes developing more human-centred systems of recognition that value the contribution research and education make to society, rather than only what can be measured and counted.

Universities as bridges in a fragmented world

In her opening address, Singapore's Senior Minister of State for National Development and Transport and LSE alumna Sun Xueling emphasised the importance of universities in helping cities respond to challenges by developing talent, connecting knowledge across borders and turning research into practical urban solutions. She said that "SMU and LSE are well-placed to observe first-hand how artificial intelligence and the digital economy impact businesses, residents and communities. By serving as living laboratories, universities can contribute to building resilient cities that evolve and respond to changing needs."

This was echoed by British High Commissioner to Singapore Nik Mehta in his remarks, where he underscored how the SMU-LSE partnership contributed to broader Singapore-UK ties, particularly in education, which he described as the "golden thread" running through the relationship alongside free trade and international law.

The Forum brought together more than 150 participants, including diplomatic representatives, industry leaders, faculty and alumni from both universities. Besides the British High Commissioner and the ambassadors of Finland and Norway, diplomatic representatives from Brunei, Canada, Denmark, France, Ireland, Germany, Switzerland and Vietnam were among the audience, reflecting the global relevance of the issues discussed.

Research collaborations for impact

The Forum also marked the first major research milestone under the SMU-LSE strategic partnership, with the announcement of three joint projects selected from a total of nine proposals under the LSE-SMU Research Seed Fund examining urban sustainability, artificial intelligence (AI) and the future of work, and longevity and healthy ageing.

The three projects focus on:

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Urban sustainability

How the rapid growth of data centres in Johor, Singapore, and London is reshaping land, energy, water, and urban sustainability across regions. By mapping the infrastructure, governance, and cross-border flows behind digital economies, the project will explore the tensions between smart city ambitions and sustainable urban development.

AI and the future of work

How leaders use generative AI in decision-making, communication, and self-reflection, and how AI is reshaping leadership agency, authenticity, and identity. Through interviews and experiments in Singapore and the UK, the project will investigate when AI enhances leadership and when it may undermine judgment, accountability, and human collaboration.

Longevity and healthy ageing

Whether Singaporeans' preference to age in place reflects informed choices or misconceptions about longevity and future care needs. Using a large-scale survey experiment, it measures how information about ageing and care risks influences housing preferences, helping policymakers design more effective ageing and housing policies.

Partnership built for a changing world

The SMU-LSE partnership was elevated to an institution-wide strategic partnership in January 2026, building on a shared commitment to address complex social challenges through interdisciplinary research and global engagement. Other collaborations include the Global Alliance on Sustainable Urban Societies, established in 2025 with SMU and LSE among its founding universities alongside Boston University, the University of Melbourne and the University of Toronto.

The alliance brings researchers together to examine how urban development can better respond to the needs of people and communities.

Photos will be uploaded here.

About Singapore Management University (SMU)

Established in 2000, Singapore Management University (SMU) is recognised for its high-impact, multi-disciplinary research that addresses Asian issues of global relevance, and for its interactive, collaborative and project-based approach to learning. Home to over 13,000 students across six schools and two colleges, SMU offers bachelors, masters and PhD programmes across Accountancy, Business, Economics, Information Systems, Integrative Studies, Law and Social Sciences, as well as executive development and continuing education programmes. SMU graduates are consistently ranked among the most employable in Singapore, and command one of the highest mean starting salaries. Through

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its city campus, SMU enjoys strategic linkages with business, government and the wider community in Singapore and beyond.

www.smu.edu.sg

About the London School of Economics and Political Science

The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) is an internationally renowned university specialising in the social sciences, awarded University of the Year 2025 and ranked top in the UK by the Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide.

Its expertise spans a wide range of disciplines from economics, politics and law, to sociology, health policy, data science and finance. As one of the most international universities in the world, the School's diversity of people, ideas and interests make it an exciting centre for research, education and public engagement.

Established in 1895, the original vision of LSE as "a community of people and ideas, founded to know the causes of things, for the betterment of society" remains true to this day. It continues to use its research-led expertise to influence governments, NGOs, businesses and others to help tackle the world's most pressing problems. For more information visit lse.ac.uk.

Annexe A

Annex B - Details of awarded joint projects

(1) Urban Sustainability

Data Centre Urbanism in Comparative Perspective: Infrastructural Pathways, Cloud Capital, and Sustainability Transition in Johor, Singapore, and London

LSE

- Professor Hyun Bang Shin, Professor of Geography and Urban Studies and Department Head, Department of Geography and Environment (Lead PI)

SMU

- Dr Andrew Stokols, Assistant Professor, College of Integrative Studies (Lead PI)
- Professor Orlando Woods, Professor and Director of Urban Institute, College of Integrative Studies (Co-PI)

Project Abstract

This collaborative 12-month project examines the comparative rise of data centre urbanism in Johor (Malaysia), Singapore, and London (UK), with urban sustainability as its central concern. The project asks how data centres are territorially embedded, resource-intensive,

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and politically contested urban infrastructures whose expansion reshapes land use, energy and water systems, planning regimes, and the socio-ecological metabolism of cities and regions.

The project develops 'infrastructural pathways' as its core analytical concept, tracing how data centres are embedded within regional systems through land conversion, electricity and water provisioning, connectivity infrastructure, labour networks, and downstream cloud and AI monetisation, processes that together constitute what can be referred to as 'cloud capital.' It compares three contrasting cases: Johor as an emergent infrastructure frontier shaped by cross-border computing spillover from Singapore and the Johor–Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ); Singapore as a resource-constrained city-state emphasising technological innovation in energy and cooling technology to use compute clusters as an engine of low-carbon innovation London as a mature metropolitan region characterised by fragmented planning, infrastructural saturation, and growing contestation.

A central concern of our project is the paradox between smart city and sustainable city agendas, agendas that are frequently antagonistic yet rarely studied together. The project addresses this gap through the lenses of urban political economy and comparative urban studies, examining how sustainability trade-offs are produced, distributed, and contested across the three cases. It pays particular attention to scalar mismatch between planning, infrastructure, and environmental governance; the outsourcing of sustainability burdens across jurisdictions; and the cross-border flows of capital, labour, and data that shape the development of data centre urbanism across the case study sites.

Methodologically, the project combines documentary analysis, comparative infrastructural pathway mapping, and semi-structured interviews with planners, developers, utilities actors, and sustainability professionals across all three sites. It will produce comparative academic publications, policy briefs, and analytical pathway maps, contributing to urban political economy, sustainability transitions, and critical infrastructure studies.

(2) AI and Future of Work

Outsourcing the Leader Self: Generative AI, Agency, and Identity in Leadership Work

SMU

- Burak Oc, Associate Professor, Lee Kong Chian School of Business (Lead PI)

LSE

- Niranjan Janardhanan, Assistant Professor of Management, Department of
- Management (Lead PI)
- Caleb Phillips, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Management (Collaborator)

Project Abstract

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Generative AI is rapidly becoming part of everyday leadership work. Leaders use generative AI to prepare communication, support decisions, generate feedback, rehearse difficult conversations, and reflect on leadership. Recent evidence suggests that AI is no longer peripheral to managerial work,with guidance, writing, information seeking, and decision support among frequent use cases (Chatterji et al., 2025; Mayer et al., 2025). Yet we know little about what happens when AI becomes involved not merely as a productivity tool, but as a counterpart in the act of leading itself.

This project examines how leaders use generative AI and how such use reshapes their agency, identity, authenticity, and delegation. We ask: when leaders use AI, to what extent are they retaining, sharing, or delegating aspects of the leader role to AI? A leader may use AI as a mirror or devil's advocate to challenge their thinking, as a co-creator of decisions or communication, or as a proxy self that drafts messages "in their voice." These uses may enhance reflection and effectiveness. Yet they may blur authorship, weaken felt ownership, alter leader identity, or reduce reliance on human subordinates.

These questions are timely because leading others requires judgment, accountability, and social correction. Research suggests that AI systems can validate users' actions more strongly than human advisers, with sycophantic responses deepening users' convictions and reducing willingness to repair conflict (Cheng et al., 2026). Further evidence suggests that executives using generative AI may become more optimistic and overconfident in some decision contexts and produce worse forecasts than those consulting peers (Parra-Moyano et al., 2025). For leaders, AI may support better thinking, but it may also replace constructive conflict, dissent, and correction provided by human others.

We will use a mixed-methods design. First, we will interview Singapore- and UK-based leaders across hierarchical levels and AI-use frequency. Interviews will examine AI use across people-facing, decision-oriented, communication-facing, and self-reflective leadership work. Where possible, participants will share AI prompts and outputs. Second, the qualitative findings will inform a 10-working-day quasi-field experiment testing whether structured AI-use protocols shape felt agency, authenticity, leader identity, and delegation to human subordinates.

This project makes three contributions. First, it reframes AI from a productivity tool to a leadership counterpart implicated in leaders' agency, communication, and identity. Second, it addresses a tension the AI literature has not yet engaged with: the same capabilities that make AI attractive to leaders may also undermine the cognitive and social processes that leadership requires. Third, it develops a role-configuration typology (mirror, devil's advocate, co-creator, delegate, and proxy self) to distinguish AI uses that may help or hinder effective leadership.

(3) Longevity and Healthy Ageing

Valuing Ageing in Place: A Discrete Choice Experiment on Housing and Care Preferences Among Older Singaporeans

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LSE

- Joan Costa-Font, Professor of Health Economics, Department of Health Policy (Lead PI)

SMU

- Seonghoon Kim, Associate Professor of Economics, School of Economics (Lead PI)

Project Abstract

Singapore is rapidly aging, and most older adults want to remain in their homes, yet policymakers do not know whether these preferences reflect informed choices about future care needs or misperceptions about longevity and care risk. This distinction is essential for policy: if housing preferences partly reflect belief distortions, subsidies calibrated to stated demand may overshoot, and information campaigns may shift demand more cost-effectively than financial incentives. We propose a discrete choice experiment (DCE) embedded in the Singapore Life Panel (SLP) to estimate willingness to pay (WTP) for aging in place and to measure the "information wedge", the gap in WTP between respondents who receive actuarial information on life expectancy and care-need probabilities and those who do not. Over 10,000 SLP respondents aged 50 and above choose among housing options under experimentally varied attributes, with a randomized information treatment administered to half of the sample. European estimates suggest WTP to avoid institutionalization reaches 16% of income (Costa-Font, 2017); we test whether a comparable premium exists in Singapore and how much of it survives belief correction. This project combines Costa-Font's expertise on aging-in-place valuation with Kim's access to the SLP through ROSA, generating preliminary results for an MOE Tier 2 grant and an ESRC Standard Grant application.

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