

**Transcript of Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth & Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment,
Ms Goh Hanyan's Fireside Chat "From Experimentation to Enterprise Impact: What It Really Takes to Make AI Work at Scale" at Singapore Business Federation's Future Economy Conference at Sands Expo & Convention Centre on 13 May 2026**

Moderator: To start, if you could spend a minute and tell us a little bit about what you do, what your day looks like on average, and your leadership journey.

SPS Goh: It is very nice to see everybody here, and thank you so much for joining us at this panel. So, I am currently in two ministries – Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment (MSE), and Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY). I am also part of the Economic Strategy Review (ESR). Together with MOS Jasmin Lau, we co-lead the Committee on Technology and Innovation. Of course, AI is front, centre and back – it is a technology that I think nobody can ignore right now. And the question is, how can Singapore use this technology to be relevant to the world? Of course, there are other implications in terms of workforce. How does this interact with my daily life? As part of MCCY, I do meet with a lot of young people, and of course, when it comes to AI, I've heard many questions from them, in terms of what it means for them, their future jobs and their lives.

Moderator: Maybe, let's dive back in time a little bit. If each of you could share a story of that moment when it became very clear that it was time to stop playing around, start experimenting with this technology, deciding it is now time to scale. When did that happen and what was that "aha" moment?

SPS Goh: It's a good question. Looking back every time something happened, we thought that would be the moment because AI evolves so quickly. Not too long ago, we had OpenAI o1 that came up, and shortly after that, DeepSeek. Then, we saw agentic AI moving into enterprises. So, at every point in time, it made me reflect that, perhaps for AI, there isn't going to be a single moment. This is mainly because the technology is developing in ways that you cannot imagine. You have to look at it as a continuum. We tend to say – you underestimate the impact in the near term but you overestimate the impact in the long term. I think that is very true for AI.

It has also been continuum for Singapore. In 2019 when AI came up – that was pre-ChatGPT – that was when we came up with our first national AI strategy. Back then, the approach was, let's just try now. Shortly after that in 2023, we had to update it because it became so pervasive that we had to look at it across government, industry and research, because it was no longer just silo within the government. And now, with the recent announcements at the

Budget and Committee of Supply debates, we are making a national priority by saying that we want to rethink how certain sectors are operating. So, I do think that we have to figure out as we go along.

Moderator: You spoke about underestimating the long-term impact. What do you think is the most underestimated – is it the technology itself? Are we underestimating organisational readiness, or are we underestimating how we as leaders?

SPS Goh: I think I'll answer this in terms of what seems to require some focus at this point in time. The technology is there and it is, of course, developing. There are many areas that are still underway, but we see that the adoption is not quite there yet. It's increasing, which is great, but the adoption levels can certainly be higher. And the question is, why isn't that happening?

With AI, the interesting thing is that it's a very powerful technology, but it's also a technology that lends itself to huge experimentation, and for different parts of the organisation to figure out what can be done with it. So, it's not simply an enterprise productivity tool that can just be rolled out, and it requires a cultural change, empowerment at different levels, and top-down direction.

So, this whole multi-layer system is very hard to achieve, and I guess that's why many people are here today to understand how these work. So, organisation, culture and leadership – those are the parts that require the focus.

Moderator: For a large organisation, if you think about an interesting combination between understanding what your technology strategy needs to be and what your business strategy needs to be, and your leadership career now has to actually equally balance these two things in that context, I'd love to get your thoughts on what leadership decisions matter in striking that balance between those two.

SPS Goh: My personal view is that the question that the leader needs to answer is – what is your business here for? When you answer the question, how can AI then impact the way your organisation is? It is not just about how it is operating. Because if you just do that and lay on AI, you'll get some productivity gains and likely you'll see it more as automation. However, if you start understanding what your business is and rethink the way that your organisation fundamentally is, that allows a lot more opportunities.

I also do think that leaders can have a level of awareness around your organisation's strengths and weaknesses. Because when you lay on AI, it amplifies your strengths but amplifies your weaknesses as well. I think many of us would see “AI slop” because you can

use AI for many things, and you churn out several hundreds and thousands of reports, and it muddles what you need to do in terms of data. Your data is residing in laptops and enterprise systems. If you apply AI to it, you're not going to get anywhere as well. So having that level of awareness in terms of where your organisation's strengths and weaknesses are will probably help you to apply the technology best.

Moderator: Having the privilege of seeing the country's views of the different groups of people who are all in and people who may be holding back – how do you think about what's ahead and how can these people actually embrace it?

SPS Goh: Earlier we talked about “FOMO” or the fear of missing out but there's also the fear of the unknown and what you don't know. That's why the government is encouraging every one to just learn the tools and get exposed to them, because you can then understand what it is and what it isn't. When it comes to companies having trainings, it certainly helps a lot and it should be as widespread, or I would say, even almost as military as possible. Because the problem is when it is more voluntary or on an opt-in basis, it widens the divide.

Moderator: Now that we've had this technology for three and a half years, what has proven harder in practice? Is it building AI capacity? Or is it shifting the mindset about people not embracing it actively?

SPS Goh: The first is about how leaders talk about technology, and how even we in government talk about technology. It's very understandable that the minds immediately match to the uncertainties about the anxieties and concerns – the most negative things that come with technology is disruption. However, we have to realise and talk more about the potential that technology brings; the positives – how it can impact lives, help us to do our jobs better, free up time to do more high value things, and allow us to spend time with people we love. The positives have come out more, so there is a positive support and mindset towards embracing this technology that we know is inevitable in our country. It's not something we can block out. So, the best we can do is to approach it in a way that helps uplift our population and workforce. I think that's the first one.

Of course, the second part concerns the risks. AI operates in a way where it's almost like a black box to most people – I can put something in and something comes out magically. It's hard to explain and you don't quite know how it comes from. So, what we call “AI governance” becomes extremely important. We have said that this morning during the launch of the report, we want to be a trusted location where people trust technology. If they do not trust technology, we will not go anywhere. So, I think these are the two areas that, beyond technology development itself, will be big things.

Moderator: Before we go into Q&A, I wanted to pick up on one thing that you said – you talked about how you meet a lot of young people. Can you unpack that a little bit – those people are the future of the country. Tell us more about what you are hearing and sensing.

SPS Goh: I spoke to those who are in schools and those who are early in the workforce. Of course, there were many concerns. Am I being trained for the right roles? Will AI remove entry-level jobs? These concerns are extremely real. At the same time, the young people are also very excited because they are digital natives and very comfortable with technology. Some have even gone on to say that they are starting something. So that is the positives.

Of course, there are concerns and the reality is that it's still playing out. We're still trying to figure out how AI is going to impact jobs. What we hope to do is to ensure that education system evolves to teach us the skills that we truly need in the AI world. When it comes to the workforce – and this is a question back to the companies in the room as well – perhaps you see in the immediate term, that you could replace X number of entry-level jobs because AI can do it now, but I'll urge the company to think longer term in terms of what that means for internal talent development. If you remove certain roles, how would you groom your next generation of leaders? Those are all examples of leaders having to make a choice between short-term productivity gains and long-term considerations, like not having a person taking over the key roles. So, those are things happening when you talk to the younger generation and younger people.

Moderator: Let's talk about business strategy before technology strategy. You talked about this. How do you see Singapore do this well? Are there examples of business strategy and technology strategy doing well? And what would be your parting thoughts for the audience on that front?

SPS Goh: So as part of ESR, we went around consulting companies. Well, the common thread is that what they have done is to democratise AI. They train everybody and give them the chance to experiment. If you fail, that's okay, because that is just part of learning what AI can do for your organisation. So instead of waiting for that one big use case, try 10 small ones that would probably help the companies to at least get going and figure out what needs to be done.

Question from attendee: How do you define success and good job in the age of AI?

SPS Goh: That's a very salient one. We can't run away from the fact that good job means that you earn enough to afford the lifestyle that you want. However, that differs by person. A good job, in the context of AI, is about figuring out parts of the job that have the “human premium”.

Where does human value come to play, and how can we make sure that becomes good jobs for people? Because those jobs will then be more resilient. And when a human premium comes in, it could mean that the job requires you to have a certain level of trust and accountability to another person. You need a human touch.. I think that's how I would characterise it. Apart from pay, there should be a certain sense of resilience as well to the developments that they can see coming.

Question from attendee: Some years back, when I visited Guangxi province, I visited an electric vehicle factory. It was mind-blowing and amazing how robotics were put in place, and the Chinese workers referred to the robots as “big brother” in Mandarin.

So fast forward to Singapore, 2026. I believe the biggest challenge is talent and trust, because the state is pushing policies, and the five polytechnics and the six universities are encouraging this in many ways. But my sense, as a former journalist, is that there is not enough talents out there, and people are not prepared to trust the way forward.

That analogy that SPS talked about — building that boat and sailing it — is a good one. But are the people prepared to come on board the boat and be the sea farers to go on?

Because what I saw in Guangxi province in 2017, we still haven't caught up with the way and how fast they are moving in terms of adoption of technology and robotics, and more importantly, getting their young people to come on board.

So perhaps it's for the panel to tackle the talents and trust. It's my personal opinion. Feel free to disagree. Thank you.

SPS Goh: I appreciate the question. Many countries will have a very different way of approaching AI. In terms of talent, we are a small country, so by numbers, we would definitely never outnumber the big countries. But then again, we do see our smallness as also a happy proposition. We are small, but we're still a country, so you still can have the opportunities to do things at a national level and prove it out to other countries that companies might want to sell to.

The smallness also means being able to pull different parts of the ecosystem together, across different government agencies, together with businesses, strong partnerships, and of course, our tripartite partners, unions, workers, because this requires speed, we're hoping that the ability for us to bring things together in a way that's fast and trusted will then set us apart from many other models that rely on pure numbers and scale.

That's how we're looking to differentiate ourselves. When the world is going towards small, fast, and nimble, maybe this is something that sets us up well as a country.

Question: The youths of today are rewarded for agility and speed, which is exactly what AI is doing. But in such instances, how do we make sure that we are actually providing the incentives for people to take time to understand? What are we doing to make sure that our youths are not being penalised for being slow and using the time to understand, which is what needs to be rewarded?

SPS Goh: I completely agree with what you're saying. In fact, because AI is playing out now, I don't think anyone has got the right answer yet. But within the education system, we are trying to think about: do we expose them to AI tools? Because they will be exposed at some point in time. How do we ensure that it doesn't hinder their learning and development in a job?

We all know that sometimes, staring at a blank page helps you to create some depth in your mind, because it triggers you to think really, really hard, instead of getting a prompt and then, having 10 different options to start with right away. So, within companies as well, what does that mean when you apply AI? How do you still build that slow knowledge? On a very reflective note, I do recognise that today and this is a very important point that we should all think about.

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