

# AI can improve productivity, be 'game changer' in cities like S'pore with labour shortage: PM Wong

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## AI can improve productivity, be 'game changer' in cities like S'pore with labour shortage: PM Wong

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Artificial intelligence can improve productivity in cities with labour shortages like Singapore, Prime Minister Lawrence Wong said on June 8.

While the technology presents risks including to jobs and security, Singapore sees it as positive overall, he said at a dialogue by the Singapore Press Club held at the SPH Media auditorium in Toa Payoh.

"We can harness AI well to really transform processes and oper-

ations to become far more productive. And in a city like Singapore, where we are always labour short – you talk to companies and employers, they are always looking for people, and we cannot afford to just keep importing labour," he said.

"We need to be more productive. I think AI can be a game changer."

PM Wong added that what is important is to not have a very superficial use of AI, such as by just running AI chatbots.

"The key is really to embed AI and start thinking about how it transforms processes across all organisations, and that will take

time." However, it is uncertain what AI's net impact will be on the labour market. "Will we end up with more jobs or fewer jobs at the end of the day in the longer-term?" he said.

"We should have some humility in saying we do not know the answer. No one can predict what the future will be."

What is certain, said PM Wong, is that there will be disruption to existing jobs – roles and tasks may be automated, and the pace of change is also accelerating.

PM Wong was responding to questions on the Government's approach to helping workers master

artificial intelligence to stay ahead and the impact of the technology on city-states like Singapore.

Singapore's focus is hence on helping companies to use AI well to improve their productivity and operations, and helping workers to adapt, reskill and upskill to be able to take on better jobs as the firms transform, he added.

"I think in Singapore we can do that. We are small enough, we have a strong tripartite partnership, so we can guide the way AI is deployed in our country to make sure that it complements workers, to make sure that AI benefits workers and serves humanity, not the other

way around."

This is one aspect about AI that Singapore has some certainty on – "we are not passive bystanders, we have agency".

PM Wong said that while ideally, there would be a global framework for how AI is developed, that is currently "a tall order" as it is difficult for the US, China and the major powers to agree on such a framework in the near term.

The AI revolution is still at a very early stage, noted PM Wong. Similar to how other technological revolutions played out, everyone gets "hyped up" at the start, but the actual transformation of organisations and the development of new business models will take time.

"Along the way there will be hype, there will be some companies that fail, don't do it well, and then there will be successes."

PM Wong said that the public service is currently looking at its

own internal processes and considering how those used to serve Singaporeans can be improved with AI.

He also gave an update on the work of the National AI Council formed in February, which he chairs.

The council has started its meetings, he said, and has looked into interesting applications of AI that can be considered in sectors such as advanced manufacturing, healthcare and finance. These are among the sectors identified in February that the council will launch and drive AI missions in.

"In each of these areas, I think there are many potential exciting applications that will really improve lives, improve productivity, and eventually put Singapore in a much better and stronger position."

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