

The
Economist

EVENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

REINVENT INDUSTRIES, TRANSFORM BUSINESSES AND BUILD A FUTURE- READY WORKFORCE

MARCH 21ST 2019, BANGKOK



Sponsor



The 3DEXPERIENCE[®] Company

PARTICIPANTS

- Susan Chen, senior vice-president and head of talent, organisational development and transformation, **Go-Jek**
- Dr Yong Chern Chet, chief innovation officer, **Ananda Development**
- Voraprapa Nakavachara, lecturer, Faculty of Economics, **Chulalongkorn University**
- Masaki Sox Konno, managing director, Asia-Pacific South, **Dassault Systèmes**
- Charles Ross, editorial director, Asia, **The Economist Intelligence Unit** (Moderator)



The Industry Renaissance:

Reinvent industries, transform businesses and build a future-ready workforce



INTRODUCTION

Asian business executives are more optimistic for the potential of technology to augment the capabilities of employees over its ability to automate jobs, according to panellists at a recent Dassault Systèmes' 3DEXPERIENCE Forum. However, for employees to reap the full benefits of new technologies, they need to be equipped with the appropriate digital skills and, more importantly, learn how to apply those skills to solve problems within an organisation.

The panel used "Thailand 4.0", an ambitious government-backed plan to transform Thailand into a value-based economy driven by innovation and technology, as a case in point. Participants noted that the success of this policy would hinge on the availability of a future-ready workforce that can leverage technology to keep pace with change. They also noted that businesses will need to engage in private-public partnerships (PPPs) with educational institutions and encourage lifelong learning within the workplace in order to build such a human resource capacity.

The perspectives were shared by four Asia-based experts who participated in a discussion on how to build future-ready workforces in the region. Part of Dassault Systèmes' annual 3DEXPERIENCE Forum, held at the Athenee Hotel in Bangkok on March 21st 2019, the panel explored how organisations across Asia are rethinking their strategies and operations to remain relevant in a period of rapid technological progress.

The panel, which was moderated by Charles Ross, editorial director for The Economist Intelligence Unit in Asia, brought together Susan Chen, senior vice-president and head of talent, organisational development and transformation at Go-Jek, Dr Yong Chern Chet, chief innovation officer at Ananda Development, Voraprapa Nakavachara, lecturer at the Faculty of Economics at Chulalongkorn University and Masaki Sox Konno, managing director, Asia-Pacific South at Dassault Systèmes, for a morning of animated discussion.

"There's a huge list of things we identified that we can help in all the different (Thailand 4.0) projects from 5G to airport to laying of fibre for villages...the ability to enable everybody in Thailand to have digital capability and connection to the internet will enhance the whole economy."

Masaki Sox Konno,
managing director, Asia-Pacific South, **Dassault Systèmes**



BRIDGING THE GAP

“We do not remove their (employees) importance in the process but we make them more efficient. It’s almost like giving them superpowers.”

Dr Yong Chern Chet,
chief innovation officer,
Ananda Development

Companies have reaped huge productivity and cost savings benefits from incorporating new digital technologies into their business models, according to the panel. As businesses continue to automate parts of their operations, there is growing concern that artificial intelligence (AI) and robots could replace people in the process, potentially resulting in huge future unemployment. However, the panellists believe there is a more optimistic view of the future; one where people harness technology to free them from mundane tasks, enabling them to pursue more meaningful work.

Key to realising this promise is the ability to build a resilient workforce using PPPs where businesses collaborate with education institutions and the government to equip workers with the requisite digital skills they need to embrace technological

disruption. “The industry renaissance is not about automation—replacing people with robots—but a much deeper cultural shift of training people to adopt new technologies,” Mr Konno explained.

He believes that technology can be leveraged to augment the capabilities of employees, making them more efficient in their work. In the construction industry for example, building inspections can be recorded directly onto a cloud network, saving time spent on paperwork. Dr Yong, chief innovation officer at Ananda Development likened the process of equipping employees with digital skills to that of giving them “superpowers” that enhance their performance at work. “Digital transformation has to make sense to the people that we are dealing with...we use technology and digitalisation to augment our workers,” he said.



THE WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

Thai educational institutions are preparing graduates with the skills to meet industry needs by working alongside businesses to solve real problems, according to Ms Nakavachara. “The world is changing...so we are changing what we teach the students and how we teach them,” she said. “We invite people from the industries to teach our students and throw in real cases to challenge them,” she added. At Chulalongkorn University, basic programming classes are also offered to students across faculties so that all graduates have the means to leverage technology for their benefit.

At Go-Jek, fresh graduates go through a three-month long boot camp to show them how to

apply the skills they acquired in school to solve challenges within the organisation. Ms Chen said this programme has helped Go-Jek address the gap between the knowledge that hired graduates have and their lack of work experience. “Through the boot camp, graduates will come to understand that yes, they have the data science skills but they then need to ask how does that go back to contribute, go back to problem solving for the organisation?” She said the boot camp also helps integrate graduates within different parts of the business to overcome challenges and not merely “throw a technology solution” at an organisational need.

“You don’t have to be a programmer but you need to know what the technology is and how you are going to utilise that to enhance your skills.”

Voraprapa Nakavachara,
lecturer, Faculty
of Economics,
**Chulalongkorn
University**



GENERALISTS OR ADAPTABLE SPECIALISTS?

“We don’t need millions of data scientists and specialists. I think everybody has data at their fingertips, now it’s about knowledge management.”

Masaki Sox Konno,
managing director, Asia-Pacific South, **Dassault Systèmes**

Digital expertise is an important skillset, but employees adaptable to change are the most highly sought after, according to Mr Ross. He quoted a recent EIU study which found that although companies were in need of people with data science skills, the number one attribute employers looked for was organisational change management skills. “The conversation has changed; maybe this is a reflection of how we have got to some point of digitalisation and we are now moving on to a future world where we need to reorganise ourselves,” he said.

It is also not enough to be an expert these days, as organisations look for competent and fast learners—or “deep generalists”—that can respond to a diverse set of problems very quickly. “Maybe one day your boss throws you something and you

have to figure it out, and the next day your boss throws you another thing and you have to figure that out too,” explained Ms Nakavachara. “So it’s not just about critical thinking but adaptability to handle organisational change.” Subject matter experts should strive to become “adaptable specialists” that can apply their skillset to solve a range of different challenges, she added.

Companies also need to reorganise themselves from a knowledge management perspective. Businesses today have access to a wealth of data sets and teams of data scientists that can gather and manage data. Moving forward, organisations that want to succeed should think about knowledge management that draws insights from data to drive organisational change.



LIFELONG LEARNING

As industries evolve, the workforce must keep pace and adapt alongside said Mr Konno. As such, the learning journey of an adaptable specialist or a deep generalist is continuous throughout their career. “In order for (companies) to preach transformation, we’d better be changing ourselves as well.”

He added that companies are approaching this from different angles, although some believe in empowering their employees to transform and add value to themselves. At Dassault Systèmes, “if someone is afraid of doing something, we make sure they try,” said Mr Konno.

Some firms also believe that the responsibility of lifelong learning lies with individuals. Instead of telling their employees what to learn, they

are encouraged to decide for themselves what skills they think are needed and want to pursue. However, this approach may be counterproductive, as Ms Chen raised the potential challenge that “employees having the ownership of what and how they learn may not necessarily help drive change within the organisation”.

Instead, Go-Jek adopts an approach that focuses less on acquiring new skills, but more on learning existing ones within an organisational setting. For example, the ride-sharing company hosts an intense three-month engineering boot camp where graduates work with industry mentors to understand how they can apply their data science skills to solve real-life problems and contribute to the organisation.

“We focus on learning how to learn, how to unlearn and how to relearn in an organisational setting.”

Susan Chen, senior vice-president and head of talent, organisational development and transformation, **Go-Jek**

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Technology will augment the future work force.** Technology can be leveraged to augment the capabilities of employees, making them more efficient in their work. But employees first need to pick up the requisite digital skills to tap into these opportunities.
- **Graduates must apply digital skills to solve problems.** It is not enough for graduates to be equipped with digital skills. They need to know how to apply those skills to meet industry needs. As such, Thai education institutions work alongside businesses to prepare graduates for the work force.
- **Employers look for “deep generalists”.** Organisations are in need of competent and fast learners—or “deep generalists”—that can respond to a diverse set of problems very quickly. Although critical thinking is important, employees that are able to manage organisational change will stand out.
- **Organisations embrace lifelong learning.** Some companies provide learning opportunities while others encourage employees to take responsibility of their own learning. Nonetheless, most agree that investment in technologies will be crucial to support collaboration, knowledge management and know-how application.

