Leading Change in an Age of Uncertainty



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21 Oct 2026

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My Public Service Journey



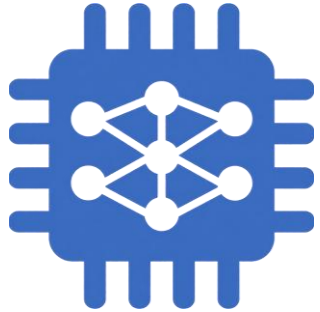
Outline



Navigating Uncertainty



Leadership, Empowerment & Accountability



Succeeding in the AI Transition



(I) Navigating Uncertainty

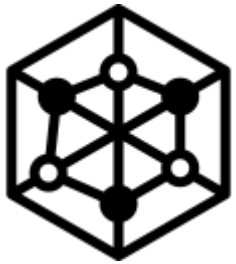
Describing the Uncertain World

Volatile
Uncertain
Complex
Ambiguous



Brittle
Anxious
Non-linear
Incomprehensible

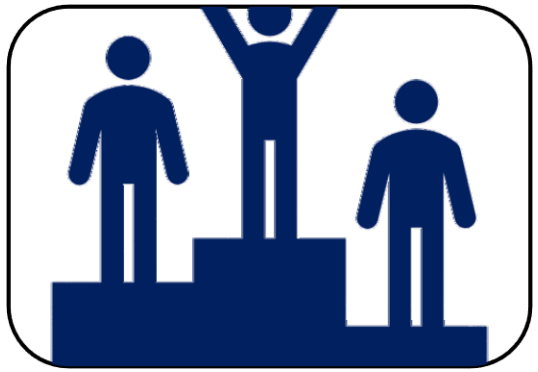
Rapid
Unpredictable
Paradoxical
Tangled



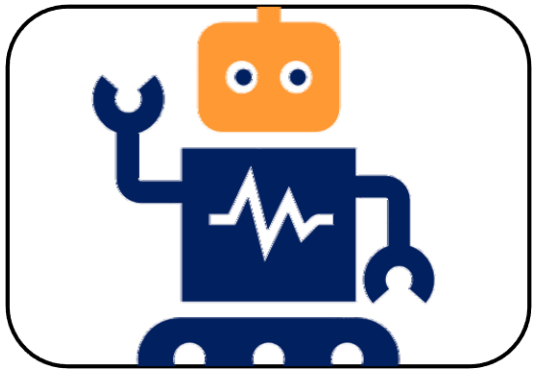
Turbulent
Uncertain
Novel
Ambiguous

Reference: https://www.vuca-world.org/vuca-bani-rupt-tuna/

Driving Forces of Change



Competition



Technology



Regulation



Consumer Demands, Staff Aspirations



Sustainability



Geopolitics

Cynefin Framework (Snowden 1999)

Unknown unknowns



Known unknowns

Cause & Effect unclear

Knowns

Source: Using the Cynevin Framework. The Exchange, Vol. 2, No. 2, December 2013, SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2395466

4 Elements of Future-Readiness



Anticipate the Future



Adapt nimbly



Accumulate assets and expand options



Acquire expertise

Anticipate the Future

- **“Anticipate change, stay relevant” –** one of Singapore’s Principles of Governance
- Late 1980s – Futures planning began in the Ministry of Defence
- 1993 – scenario planning approved by the government as a tool for long-term policy and strategic development
  - Took reference from Royal Dutch Shell
  - Helps the Civil Service to re-examine conventional wisdom and formulate strategies to meet potential new challenges and opportunities
- 1995 – Scenario Planning Office (SPO) set up in Prime Minister’s Office

Anticipate the Future

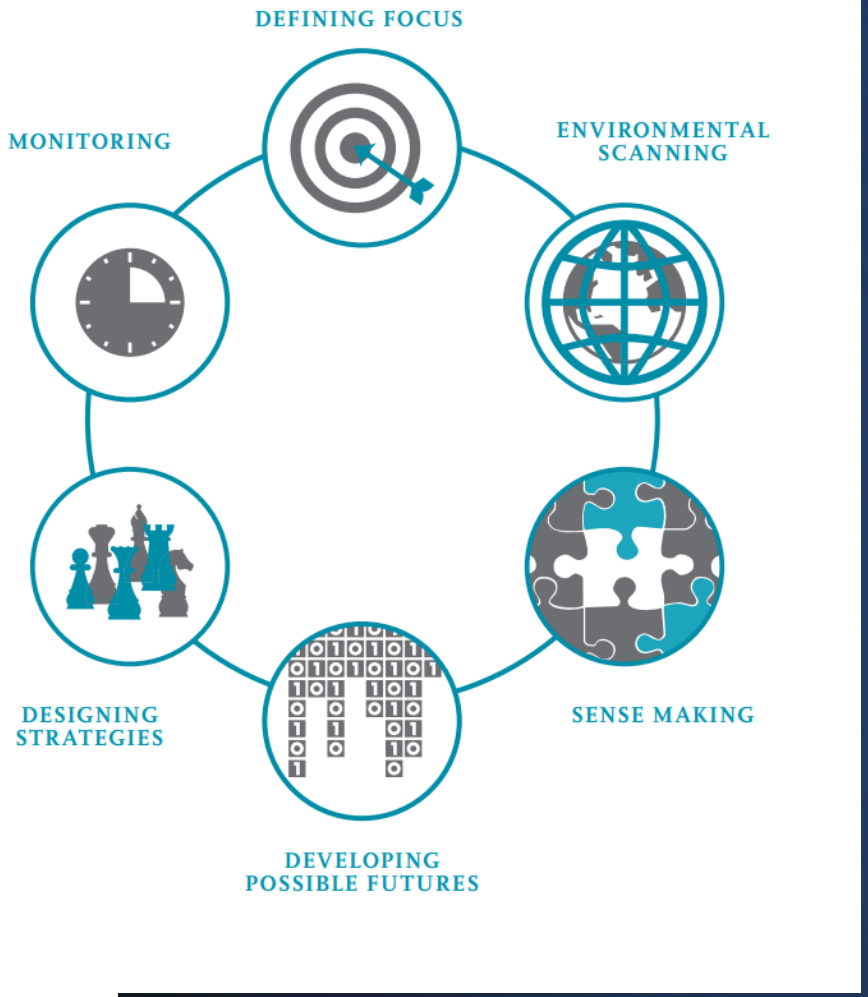
- 1997 – first set of national scenarios launched
  - “Hotel Singapore”
  - “A Home Divided”
- Designed to both be plausible and challenge decision-makers’ current assumptions and worldviews
- Focused on both geopolitical and economic issues as well as softer “social” issues like national identity, rootedness to Singapore and community ties

Centre for Strategic Futures methodology

- **Emerging Strategic Issues and Wildcards**

- Generates a diversity of ideas based on research, as well as interviews with a range of people from the public, private, people, academic sectors.

- Asks public sector leaders to prioritise them by:
  - impact on Singapore;
  - likelihood of occurrence; and
  - level of institutional surprise each issue would cause if it occurred (i.e. how public sector agencies would be caught off-guard despite current safeguards)



Adapt Nimbly
Expand Options
Acquire Expertise

- Don’t get locked into past paradigm
- Update plans on the go
- Follow the evidence
- Data and records
- Resource buffers
- Dual-use infrastructure, partnerships
- Design for optionality
- Training, expertise and capabilities

COVID-19 Response and Takeaways

Don’t get locked into past paradigm

SARS vs COVID-19 vs Disease X

Update plans on the go

Jobs Support Scheme

Follow the evidence

Mask-wearing

Data and records

Foreign worker health and housing data; data sharing between public and private healthcare systems

Resource buffers

Stockpiling and diversification of critical supplies

Dual-use infrastructure, partnerships

Quick conversion into testing centres, quarantine facilities; SG Healthcare Corps as an additional standby reserve for healthcare manpower

Design

Changi Airport Terminal 5 will allow for segregation of spaces

Expertise and capabilities

New Communicable Diseases Agency and team that will anticipate and monitor risks

Adapt Nimbly
Expand Options
Acquire Expertise

How may these apply in your context?

- Don’t get locked into past paradigm
- Update plans on the go
- Follow the evidence
- Data and records
- Resource buffers
- Dual-use infrastructure, partnerships
- Design for optionality
- Training, expertise and capabilities

(II) Leadership, Empowerment & Accountability



Values – Singapore Public Service

Integrity

Define values and promote values-based decision making

Uphold highest standards of integrity

Merit-based appointment and performance accountability

Service

Responsive and adaptive public service

Consultation/engagement with stakeholders

Citizen-centric / business-centric design

Focus on policy implementation / delivery

Set service quality standards, appoint quality service manager

Excellence

Proactive and innovative public service that takes a long-term perspective

Build up staff and organizational capability e.g. evidence-informed policy

Refreshed Set of Core Competencies

6 CORE COMPETENCIES:



HEAD: MAKES THE CALL
· Thinking Clearly and Making Sound Judgements

HEART: PURPOSE & PASSION
· Serving with Heart, Commitment and Purpose

HANDS: GET THINGS DONE
· Working as One Public Service
· Working Effectively with Citizens and Stakeholders

TORCH: THE PUBLIC SERVICE VALUES
· Integrity, Service, Excellence.

LEGS: PROPEL US FORWARD
· Improving and Innovating Continuously
· Keep Learning and Putting Skills into Action

2 Additional Competencies For Supervisors & Leaders

· Stewarding Systems for Today and Tomorrow
· Caring for, Developing and Inspiring Staff

Building a Leadership Pipeline

Talent attraction & recruitment	Recruit staff through transparent, open and merit-based processes
	Offer competitive, transparent employment terms and conditions
Talent development	Identify skills and competencies needed, and send staff for appropriate training
	Create a learning culture and environment
	Job rotation as part of development process
Talent management & retention	Promote staff through transparent, open and merit-based processes
	Reward and recognise performance, skills and initiative
	Match skills with demand through workforce mobility and development opportunities e.g. through assignments within and outside the public service

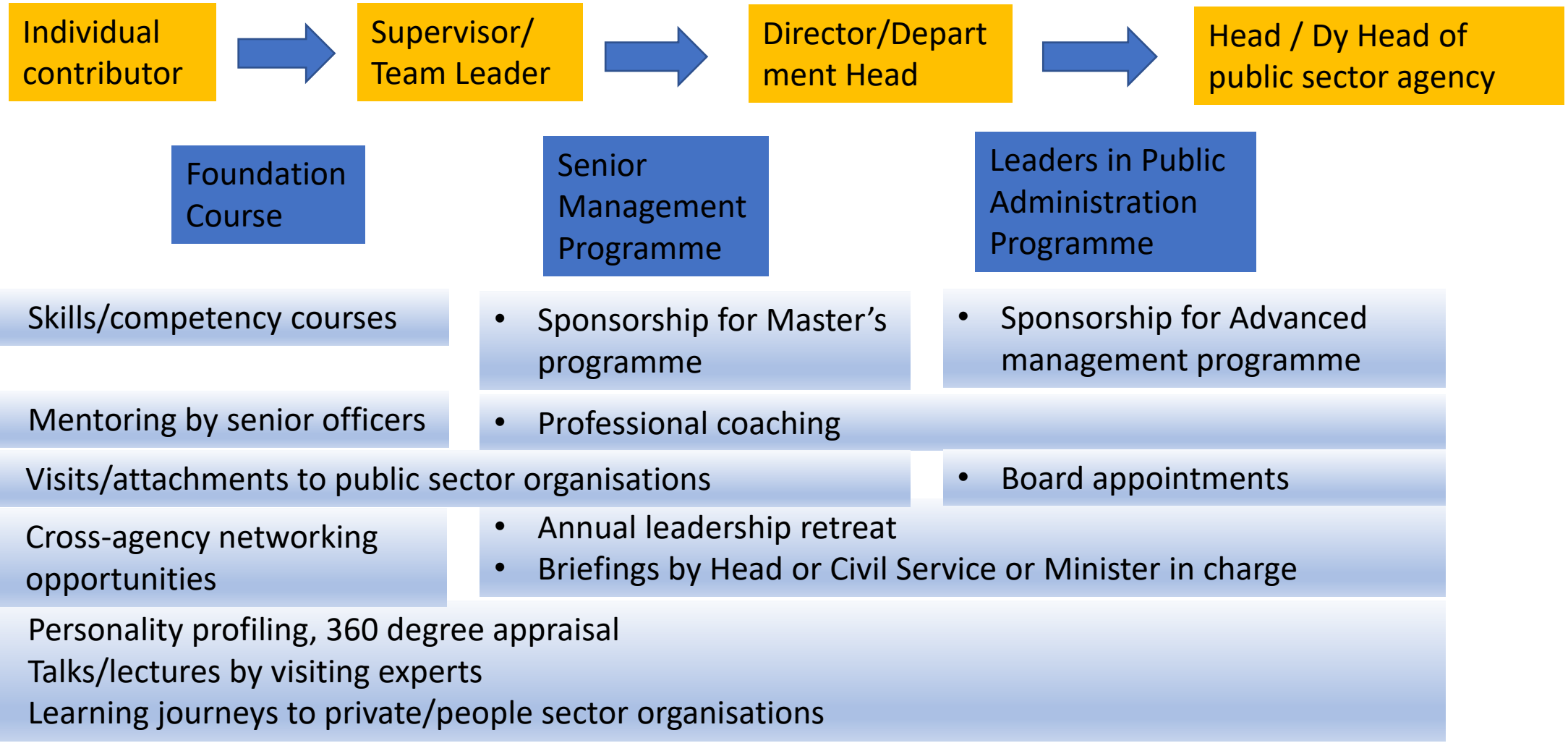
Rotation Across Public Agencies

- Allows public officer to gain **breadth of experience** (through rotation to agency in a different **policy** domain) or **depth** (through rotation to related **policy** domain)
- Allows officer to gain both experience in **policy** (at ministry HQs) and **implementation** (at operational agencies)
- Enables officer to be assessed for **performance and potential** by supervisors from different agencies, for cross-ranking purposes and in relation to different kinds of work
- Helps to **break down agency silos**, with officers having appreciation of priorities and constraints of different agencies
- Infusion of **fresh perspectives** can help in agencies' work

Trade-off

Less time for officer to acquire deep expertise / experience in a particular agency's work

Leadership Development Roadmap



Culture of Continuous Improvement & Innovation

- Service-wide change movements to build “organisational capital”
- Championed from the top, with aim of empowering the wider body of public officers
- Public Service 21 introduced in 1995 to help public sector to be ready for the future. Aimed to
  - Anticipate change, welcome change, execute change
- Public Service Transformation latest iteration. Aims to:
  - Transform work, workforce, workplace

Empowering Public Officers

- Everyone an agent of change – empower officers to contribute ideas
  - Work Improvement Teams
  - Staff Suggestion Scheme

- Recognise innovation and effort
  - PS21 convention and awards
  - Public Service Transformation awards



How Singapore Beat the Odds

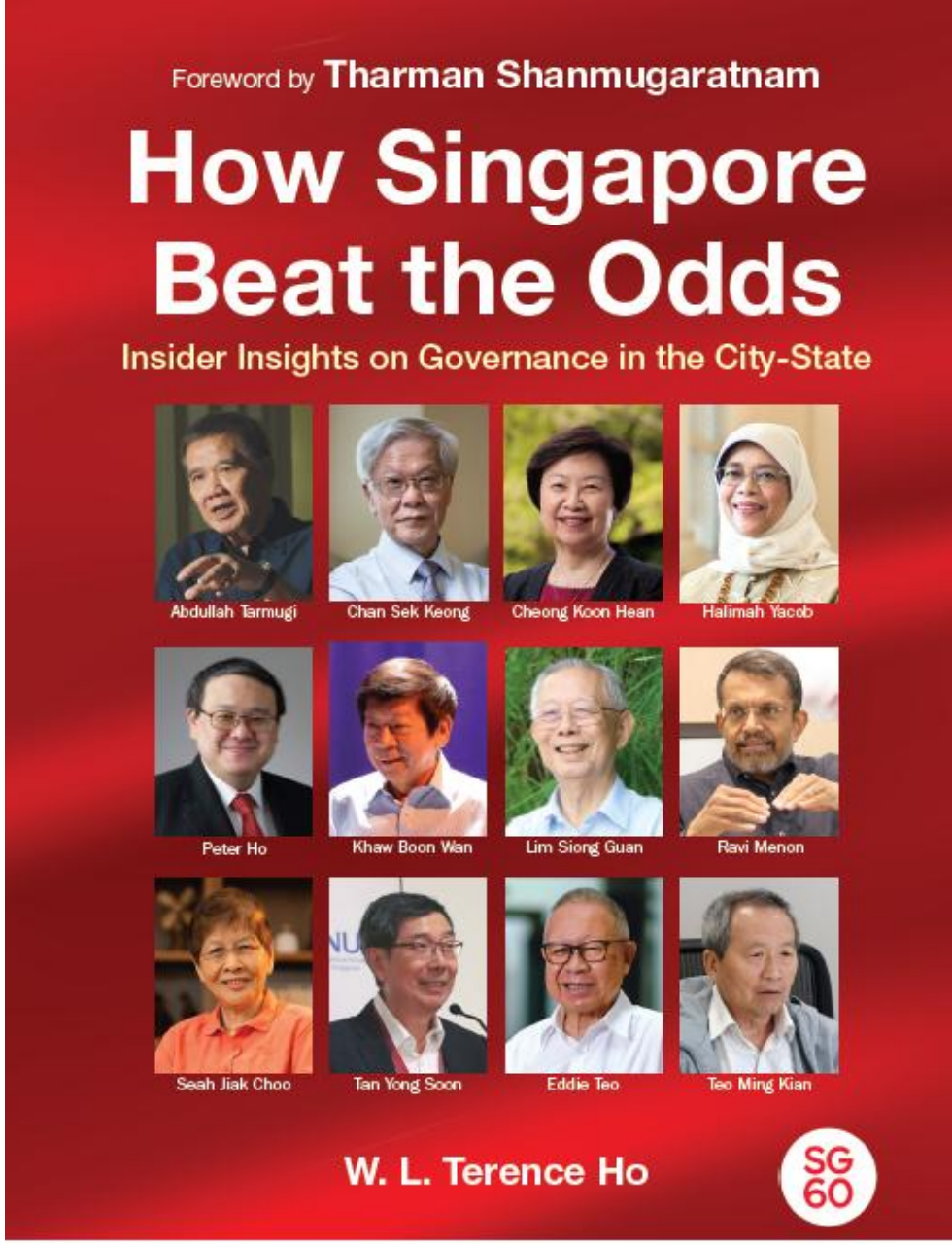
Insider Insights on Governance in the City-State

"For **school leaders**, we emphasise a ground-up approach. The goal is to empower them to take ownership and initiative, making decisions that benefit students without always waiting for directives from headquarters."

– **Seah Jiak Choo,** former Director-General of Education

"**Ministries** now had full autonomy to allocate their assigned budget according to what they considered best for themselves. In summary, this block budget approach saved ministries their arduous annual submissions, gave them the freedom to allocate their budgets in-house as they would know their needs best, and required ministries to drive for efficiency and productivity."

– **Lim Siong Guan**, former Permanent Secretary (Finance)



Leaders' Appraisal and Accountability

Assessed on

- Stewarding systems for today and tomorrow
- Caring for, developing and inspiring staff

Supported through

- Communities of Practice: Leaders helping to develop other leaders
- 360 degree feedback exercise

Audits and Oversight

Public Accounts Committee

- Parliamentary Select Committee that examines various accounts of the Government

Auditor-General's Office

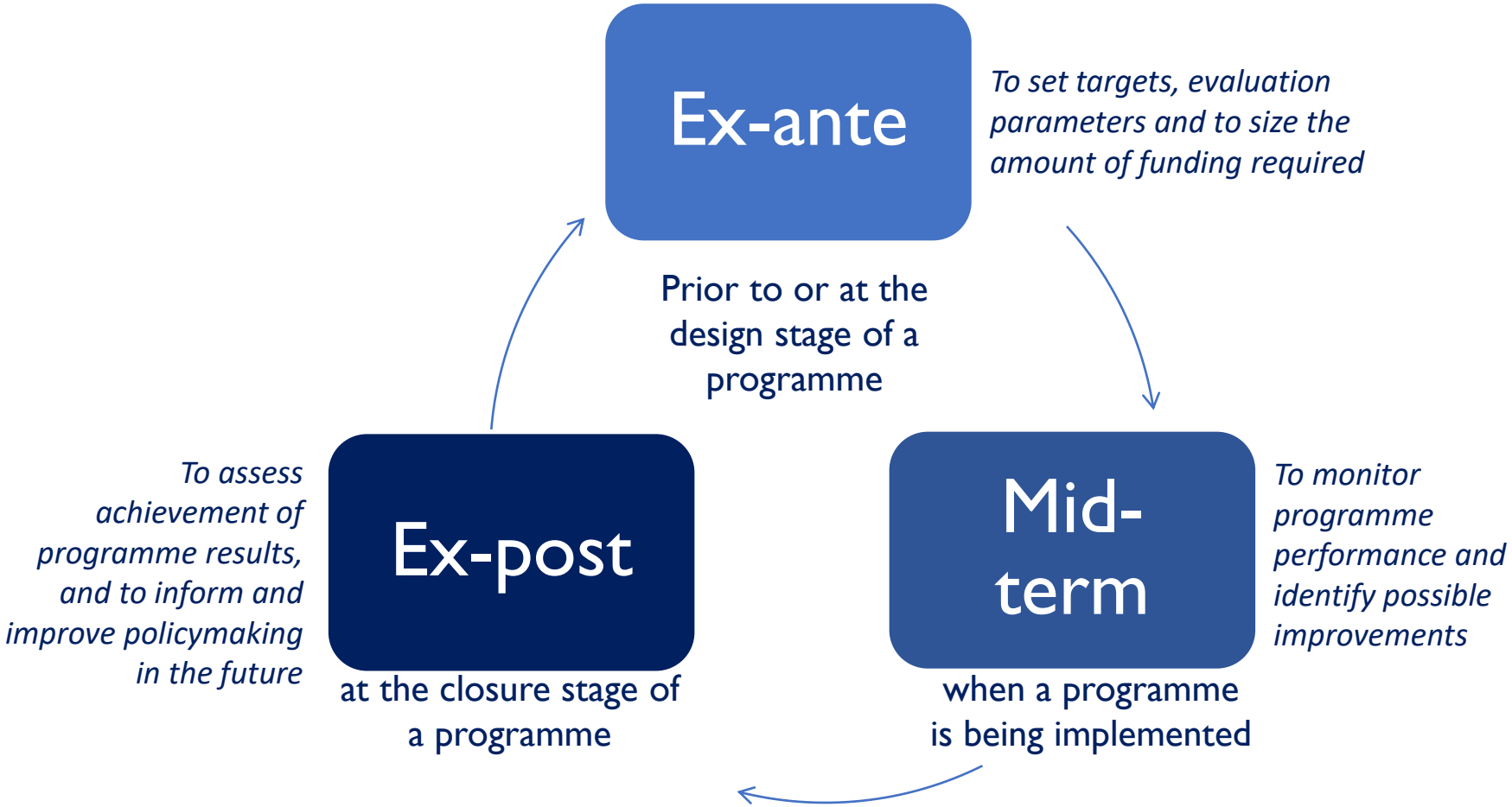
- An independent organ of state that audits govt agencies as well as public funds and bodies administering public funds
- Cover system weaknesses, non-compliance with control procedures or legislation, and instances of excess, extravagance, or gross inefficiency leading to waste in the use of public funds and resources.

Internal Audit, Value-for-Money Audits and After Action Reviews

Value-for-Money Audits

Focus on Cost-Effectiveness viz. achievement of outcomes in cost-efficient way	
Effectiveness: Spending must lead to the desired outcomes being achieved	KPI monitoring
Economy: Spending less without prejudicing required outcomes.	E.g. demand aggregation, procurement process
Efficiency: Spending on the “right” resources to ensure optimal outcomes	E.g. utilisation of facilities, overlap with other programmes, keeping to construction schedule

Evaluation of Programmes/Projects



Accountability to the Public

Singapore Public Sector Outcomes Review

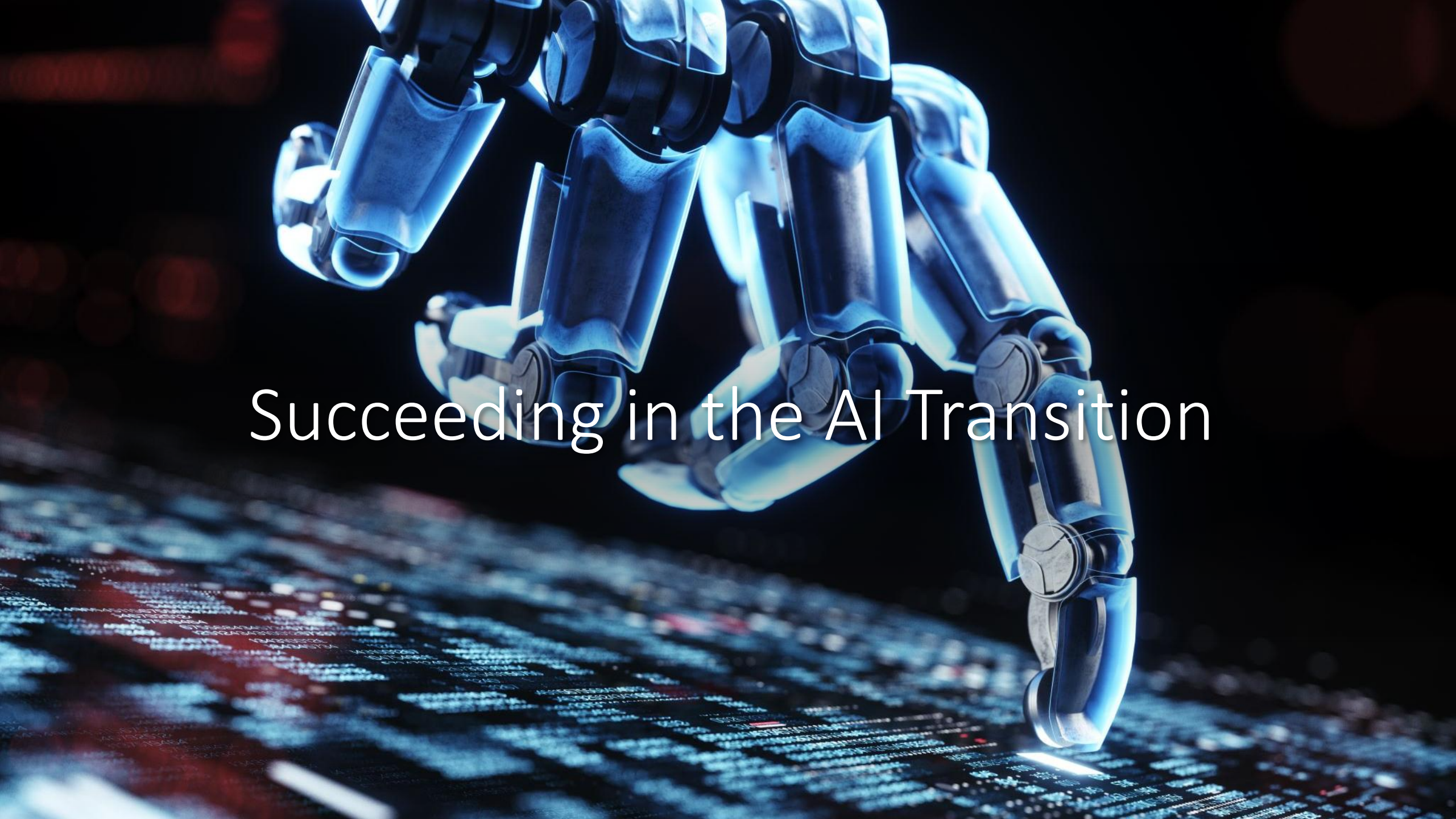








- The biennial publication takes stock of how Singapore has fared in key areas of national interest.
- Focuses on whole-of-government outcomes and indicators that reflect current and emerging policy concerns and issues.
- Coordinated by the Ministry of Finance with inputs from all ministries
- Reports the strategies, programmes, and resources that are employed by public agencies to achieve these outcomes.

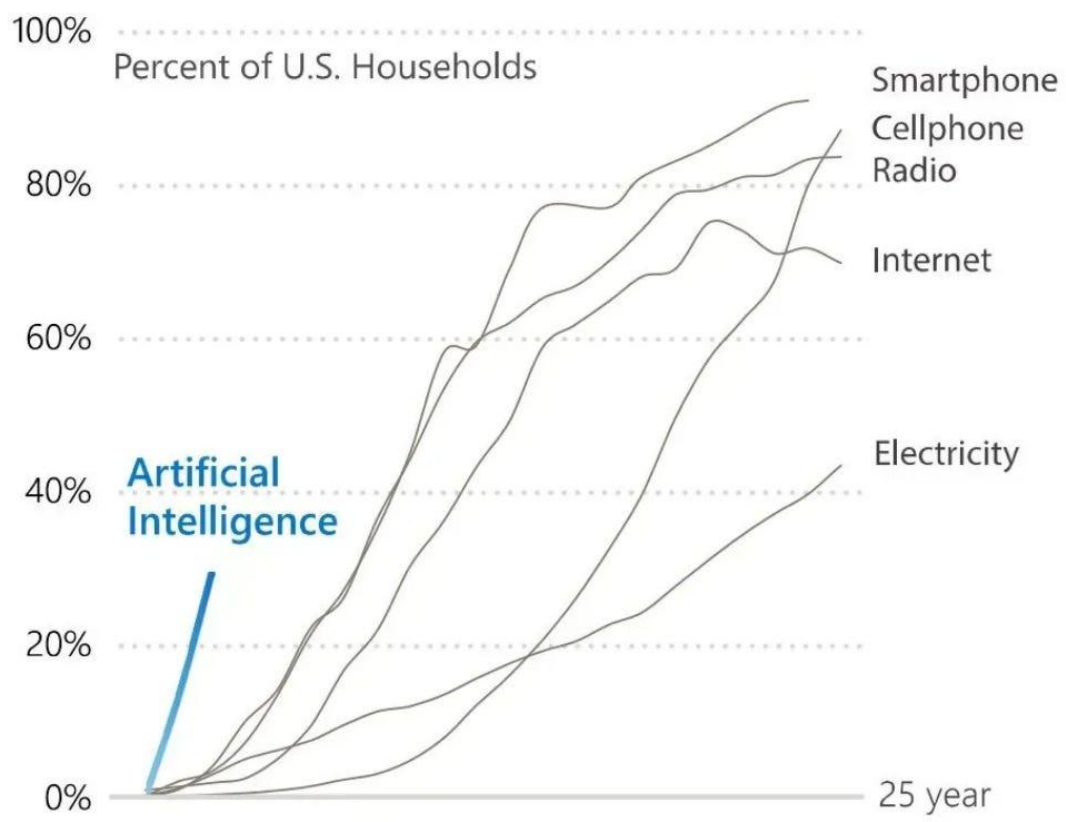

Succeeding in the AI Transition

General Purpose Technologies through History

- Electricity (1880s)
  - Powered factories, lighting and appliances
  - Reorganised work around the assembly line
- The Computer (1950s-80s)
  - Automated calculation, records and control
  - Created entirely new categories of work
- The Internet (1990s)
  - Collapsed the cost of communication and coordination
  - Enabled global, distributed and remote work
- Artificial Intelligence (2020s)
  - Automates cognitive and creative tasks
  - Reshapes skills, jobs and how we learn

What's different with AI?

Speed of Diffusion



Source: Microsoft AI Economy Institute (2025)

Time taken to reach 100 million users

Technology / Platform	Time to 100M users
Telephone	75 years
Mobile phone	16 years
World Wide Web	7 years
Facebook	4.5 years
Instagram	2.5 years
TikTok	9 months
ChatGPT	**2 months**

Sources: European Commission (2020); UBS analysis, reported by Reuters (2023)

Human Roles

AI and automation will analyse and execute.

Human beings will:

- set the agenda
- prioritise tasks
- frame the questions
- weigh up the options that AI suggests
- make decisions
- take responsibility for outcomes

16 Critical Core Skills



https://www.myskillsfuture.gov.sg/content/portal/en/career-resources/career-resources/education-career-personal-development/2022_Critical_Core_Skills.html

Learning Agility

- Willingness and ability to
  - learn new things to obtain results under difficult or different conditions (Lee and Song 2021)
  - learn from experience and apply lessons learnt to perform successfully under new or first-time conditions (De Meuse 2010)
- Initial literature focused on learning agility as a leadership competence
- Later, linked to success of a learning organisation, recognising that all members – and not just leaders – need to adapt quickly to the changing environment

Determinants of Learning Agility

Closely related to mental and psychological factors:

- **Individual disposition**
  - Goal orientation, cognitive / metacognitive ability, openness to experience
- **Cognitive processes – habits of mind**
  - Cognitive simulations, counterfactual thinking, pattern recognition
- **Behavioural Processes**
  - Feedback seeking, experimentation, reflection

Source: DeRue, Ashford and Myers. Learning Agility: In Search of Conceptual Clarity and Theoretical Grounding. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*. 2012;5(3):258-279.

Enhancing learning agility

- **Keep learning**
  - Whether through formal training or on the job
- **Seek new challenges, experiences**
  - E.g. new job role, stretch assignments
- **Set personal learning goals**
  - Leverage technology and data to identify gaps and personalise training
- **Experiment**
  - E.g. dabble with new tools and apps
- **Seek opportunities to apply what you have learnt**
- **Seek feedback, reflect on learning experience**
  - E.g. 360-degree reviews, real-time coaching, after-action reviews
- **Join a community of fellow enthusiasts & learners**
- **Be curious about other sectors / disciplines**
  - Talk to experts from other sectors

How will we respond to AI?

FEAR





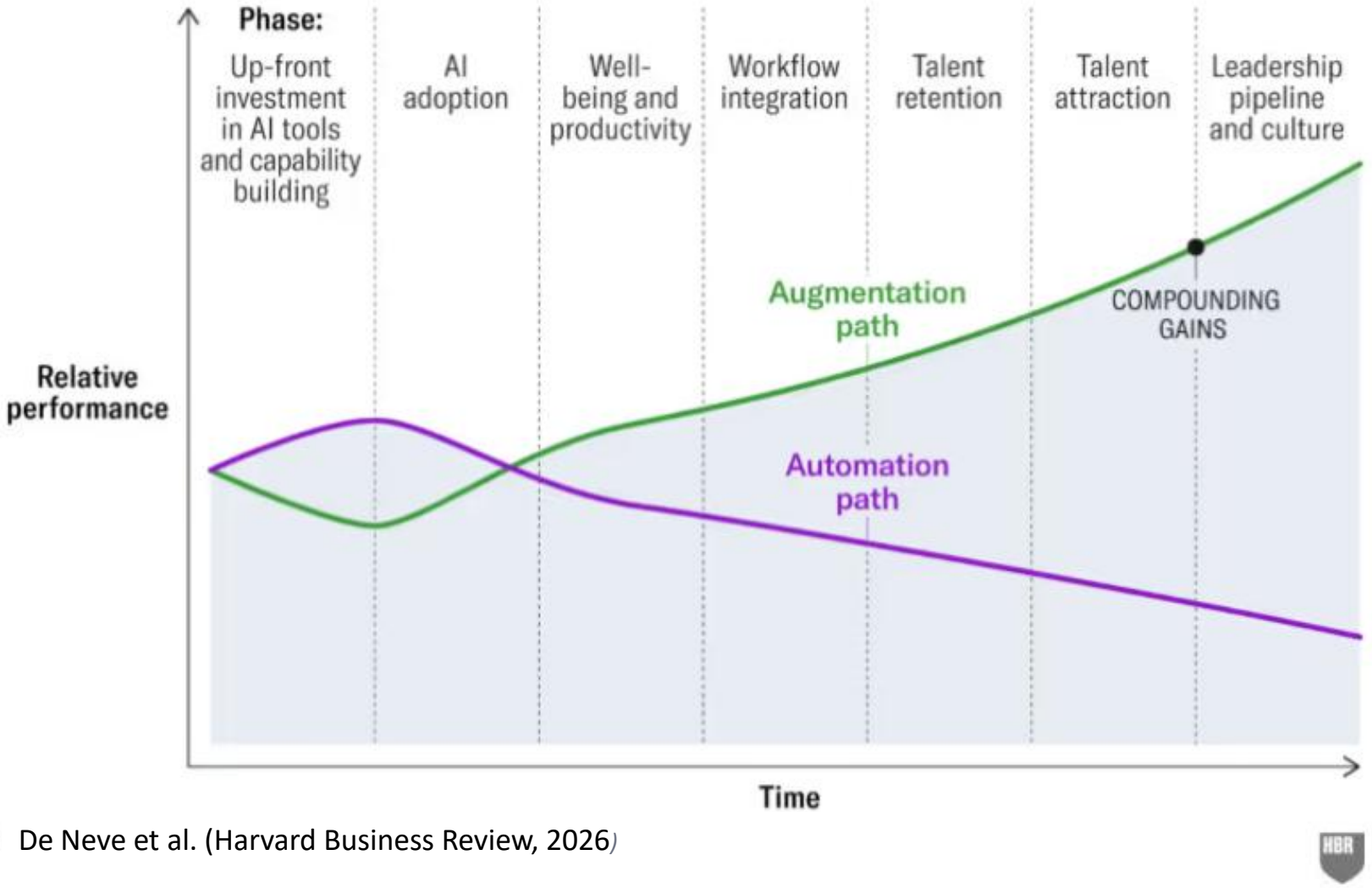
OPPORTUNITY



AI Transition: the Question for Leaders

Is AI merely increasing productivity without increasing human capability?

Productivity J-Curve: Automation vs Augmentation



De Neve et al. (Harvard Business Review, 2026)

Automation path

Appeals to leaders: fast, visible cost savings — but relative performance erodes over time.

Augmentation path

Dips first through investment and adoption, then compounds via well-being, retention and culture.

Employees' feelings about their leaders were the strongest predictor of whether they saw the organisation's AI strategy as augmentation or automation

IAL's 7-Step Human-Centric AI Transformation Process

1

Align on Purpose and Scope

Define why the redesign is happening and who is accountable.

2

Baseline the Role and the Data

Map tasks and workflows; gather pain points from incumbents.

3

Classify Tasks and Assess Value

Sort tasks as routine, cognitive or judgment-based.

4

Decide Redesign Options

For each task cluster: automate, augment, or retain as fully human.

5

Reconstruct the Role

Design the new end-to-end task portfolio and the new skills it demands.

6

Pilot, Demonstrate, Refine

Run a structured trial; measure business and human-centric outcomes, then refine.

7

Embed, Scale and Sustain

Embed in processes and policy; scale across roles; sustain through culture and governance.

AI amplifies human contribution

People-centric · Purpose-driven · Value-focused · Future-ready

Gog et al. (2026), Institute for Adult Learning, Singapore

The Critical Hurdle is Operational Translation

AI Capability & Training

What organisations invest in today

SUSS–IAL PRACTICE-LOGIC BRIDGE

Everyday Work Practices

Embedding AI into routines: reporting, incidents, customer engagement.

Managerial Routines

Equipping leaders to make adoption feel safe and practical.

Operational Decision-Making

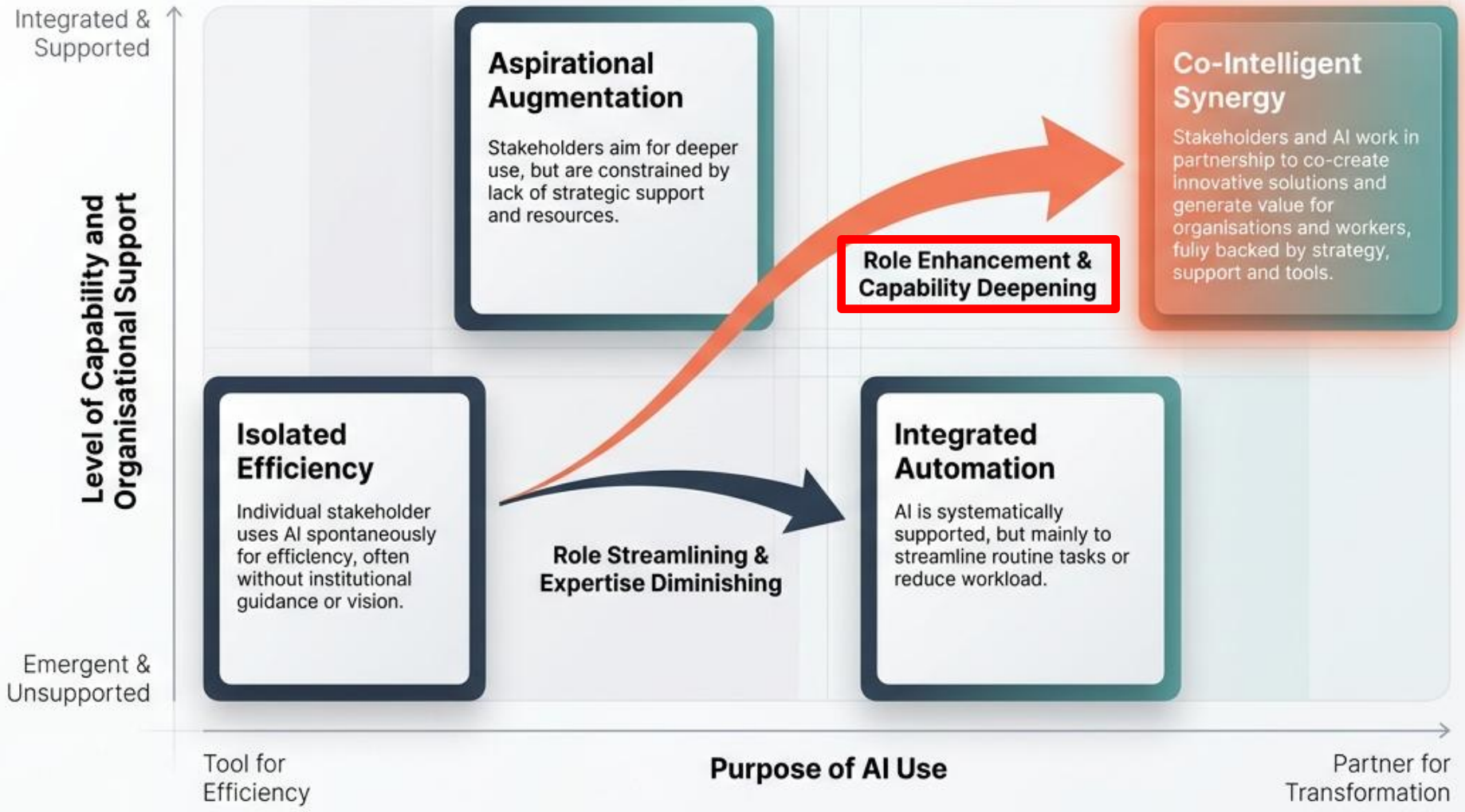
Aligning daily choices with responsible AI governance.

Everyday Work & Enterprise Value

What actually delivers returns

Lasting adoption occurs when new behaviours are embedded in the routines through which work is already performed.

Going Beyond Pockets of Efficiency



Source: Chen, Z. (IAL) (2026)

NotebookLM

Change Management Models

What are some commonalities?

ADKAR model
An approach centred on what individuals need for successful change.

Bridges Transition Model
Focuses on managing the individual's experience in the transition process

Dean Williams' Six Adaptive Leadership Challenges
A set of leadership challenges, each of which requires a different leadership style

Kotter's 8-step change model
A comprehensive process to initiate, execute and sustain organisational change

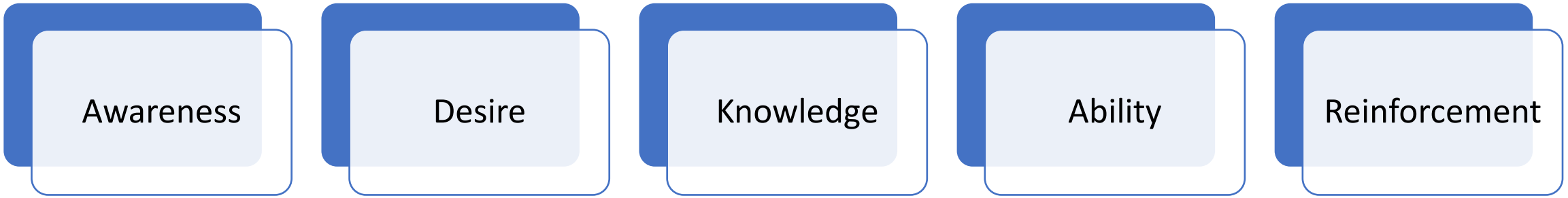
Kubler-Ross change curve
Outlines the internal experience of change through the 5 stages of grief.

Lewin's change management model
Uses the analogy of melting and refreezing ice to describe the process of change

McKinsey 7S model
Identifies seven elements in any organization that are fundamental to success and organizational change

Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) Cycle
An interative process for continuous improvement.

ADKAR Model



Kotter’s 8-Step Change Mgt Model

1. Create a sense of urgency.
2. Build a strong coalition.
3. Form a strategic vision.
4. Get everyone’s buy-in.
5. Enable action by removing barriers.
6. Generate short-term wins.
7. Sustain acceleration.
8. Institute change.

Awareness, Desire, Knowledge

Ability

Reinforcement

Kotter + Williams

1. Create a sense of urgency.
2. Form a strategic vision.
3. Develop a theory of change.
4. Identify barriers.
5. Seek Buy-in, build a strong coalition.
6. Enable action by removing barriers.
7. Encourage early adoption and generate quick wins.
8. Get teams to own the change.
9. Embody and institute change.

Awareness, Desire, Knowledge

Ability

Reinforcement

Addressing Barriers to Change

Technical vs. People Barriers

- Inertia, lack of interest – burning platform, extrinsic/intrinsic motivation, behavioural nudges and norms
- Requires extra effort or expertise – make it easy, time and resource buffers, training
- Fears and concerns – leadership backing, guardrails, active listening, psychological safety
- Winners and losers – fairness, win-win, sharing credit

Building Momentum with Quick Wins

- Get information out
  - Email blasts, startup screen messages, lifts, townhalls, dept meetings
  - Easy to remember
- Move from training to immediate application; learning in the flow of work
- Publicise early outcomes
- Reinforce fear of missing out (FOMO), give other departments/teams confidence
- Encourage peer sharing

Getting Teams to Own the Change

- Inclusive leadership
  - Take in input and suggestions
  - Share credit
- Forums and committees with reports or deliverables
- Department champions / representatives
- Communities of Practice

Embodying Change, Leading by Example

- Leader as the visible symbol of change

- Demonstrate what you value in personal attention, time spent



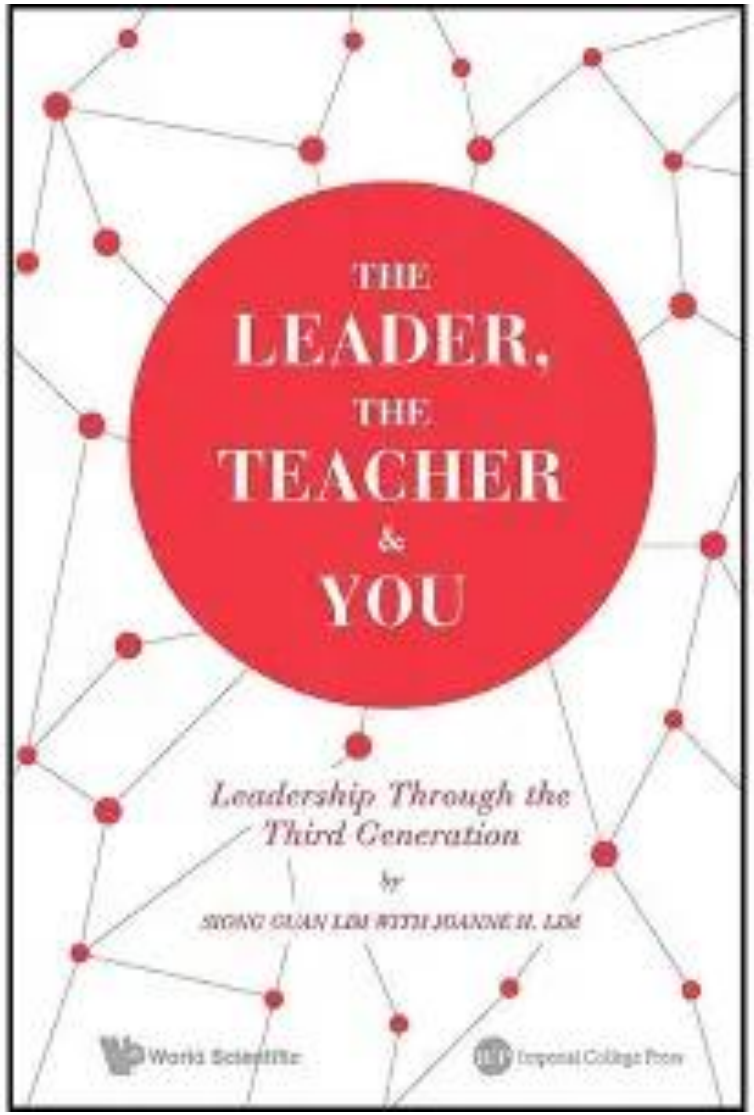


Institutionalising Change

- National or organisation-wide movement
  - E.g. SkillsFuture, Public Service 21 movement comprising Work Improvement Teams, Staff Suggestion Scheme (part of staff appraisal form)
- Renaming organisation
  - E.g. ENV -> MEWR -> MSE
  - E.g. Facebook -> Meta
- Creating new depts and positions
  - E.g. Futures office, MOM Academy Chief AI Officer, Chief Sustainability Officer

How can you be a more effective

Leader-
Learner-
Teacher?



Leading Amid Uncertainty and Change

LEADER

Develop 4 dimensions of future-readiness

Invest in people and capabilities, not just technology

LEARNER

Hone critical core skills and learning agility

Look out for opportunities for personal growth

TEACHER

Listen and engage to build trust and confidence

Inspire, motivate and embody change