

New 8-week course to help SMEs navigate adoption of AI

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Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that need help in deciding how and where to deploy artificial intelligence in their organisations can turn to a new eight-week course.

Called AI.dea, the programme is conducted in three phases, with eight days of face-to-face sessions, culminating in a proof-of-concept project.

Telco Singtel, which introduced it together with professional development provider SIM Academy, said the programme came about after its SME customers raised concerns about AI adoption.

“Some of (the concerns) have to do with being able to identify the right use cases, some of them are about building the right internal capabilities and ensuring that implementation is done in a secure, systematic and responsible way,” said Singtel Singapore chief executive Ng Tian Chong.

He was speaking during the official launch at the Singtel Cyber Security Institute on April 29.

In the first phase of the programme, business owners or senior management of a company will be guided on how to select and prioritise AI use cases that meet their business needs.

They will also be taught to assess potential risks, including what information is appropriate to share with AI systems, how data is handled and protected, and how to guard against misuse or breaches.

In the second phase, department heads or those leading their AI pilot will be guided on developing a plan to roll out the technology.

This includes performing cost-benefit analyses, deciding which AI vendors to use for their project, and putting in place plans to train staff.

In the third phase, project leads will be taught to monitor and evaluate the performance of their AI project, consider how to scale it, and develop practices so humans can oversee AI decisions.

Trainers teaching the programme include consultants from SIM Academy, experts from Singtel Cyber Security Institute and lawyers from Drew & Napier.

The first phase of the programme began in February, and seven companies and 22 employees have been trained so far.

AI.dea costs \$15,000 per person to attend, and each company has to send at least three participants.

Eligible companies can receive up to 90 per cent SkillsFuture funding support, bringing the cost to around \$1,500 per attendee.

To qualify, companies must be registered and incorporated in Singapore, have at least 30 per cent local shareholding by Singaporeans or permanent residents, and have annual sales turnover not exceeding \$100 million or an employment size of fewer than 200 employees.

Mr Christian Chao, chief executive of social service agency Care Corner, is among the course’s first attendees.

He is exploring a voice-based AI pilot that lets junior social workers practise role-play scenarios, such as building rapport with a caregiver or calming someone in emotional distress.

He and his colleagues chose this use case as it does not involve real client information, reducing the risk of exposing sensitive data or breaching confidentiality.

“The programme’s space, structure and facilitation allowed us to think more clearly about AI adoption,” Mr Chao said.

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