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PwC study finds Singaporeans are second most anxious about the future impact of technology on their jobs

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| <i>Contact</i> | Natalie Choo Singapore Communications, PwC Mobile: +65 8722 7545 E-mail: natalie.yl.choo@sg.pwc.com |

- Over half (54%) of Singaporean workers think it is likely that their role will be made obsolete or be significantly changed by automation over the next 10 years.
- 81% of Singaporeans are already learning new skills to better understand or use technology, either independently or through their employer.
- Amongst the 11 countries surveyed, French workers are the most nervous or scared about the future impact of technology on their jobs (20%) followed by Singaporeans (18%) and British (18%)

27 September 2019, Singapore – Technology is changing the way people work and one in five Singaporeans (18%) are scared or nervous about the future impact of technology on their job. The city-state's workforce is second most nervous or scared globally, just behind French workers (20%) and tied with the British (18%).

These findings are from a new PwC report, *Upskilling Hopes & Fears*, which surveyed 22,000 adults across 11 countries worldwide, and build on PwC's economic analysis on the impact of automation on jobs.

Singaporeans are starting to see the impact of technology on work and jobs. As a smart-nation, the pace of technological advancements is expected to be faster than neighbouring countries in South-East Asia, and both government and the private sector are adopting technology quickly which could potentially accelerate the impact on jobs. This makes Singapore jobs more susceptible to the impact of technological advancements.

When Singaporean workers were asked why they had felt nervous or scared about the impact of technology on their jobs, 58% were worried that technology would make their role redundant and 36% were worried that they wouldn't have the right skills.

On top of that, about half the Singaporeans (54%) surveyed believe automation will significantly change or make their job obsolete within the next ten years. While most admit that technology would change their jobs significantly, 4% still believe that technology would not affect their day-to-day work.

Despite the uncertainty, there is also a sense of optimism. The report found

that 53% of respondents indicated that they felt technology would bring about more opportunities than risks in the workplace and 85% felt that technology will change their work for the better.

Fang Eu-Lin, Leader of PwC's Academy in Singapore says:

“With technology, roles that are more process-driven are more at risk of being displaced and individuals doing these roles must prepare for their “version 2.0” role. For example, robotic process automation (RPA) is becoming more commonplace, driving greater efficiency in highly repetitive tasks. In the short term, this change will require employees to understand how to work with the technology. In the longer term, individuals with the skills to maximise these new opportunities will be the ones who thrive in the marketplace.”

Time to upskill

While employees seem to understand how the technology can be embedded into the workplace, they are concerned that they may not have the right skills to remain relevant as the business landscape changes. Given the clear recognition of the change that technology will bring, it is unsurprising that 81% of respondents in Singapore were already learning new skills to better understand or use technology.

Even if they weren't already pursuing opportunities, 92% in Singapore said that they would take the opportunity to better understand or use technology if it were available to them. If their jobs were at risk, 85% of Singaporeans would learn new skills now or completely re-train in order to improve their future employability.

This is a clear reflection that individuals are aware of the necessity of upskilling. This is potentially due to the increase in efforts by both the public and private sector. For example, Singapore has put in place safeguards, such as the establishment of SkillsFuture to inspire an attitude of life-long learning amongst its citizens. Initiatives such as Professional Conversion Programmes (PCP), Industry Transformation Maps and SkillsFuture Frameworks serve as good and tailored guidance for organisations and individuals to prepare for their job in the future.

With the strong national push for upskilling there are many more opportunities in the market for Singaporeans to upskill, but ultimately it's up to each worker to take the step. However, less than half of Singaporeans (44%) recognised that it is their own responsibility to upskill. 32% felt that upskilling was the government's responsibility higher than the global average of 22%.

Although, only one in five (19%) felt that employers were responsible for upskilling their workforce, a majority of employers have already begun to play their part in championing the agenda. In Singapore, 76% of workers said that their current employer was giving them the opportunity to improve their digital skills outside of their normal duties, although only 31% of respondents indicated that they are currently upskilling through their employers. This seems to indicate that there is a need for some reconciliation between the skills employees need and what is being offered to them.

Martijn Schouten, Singapore People & Organisation Leader, PwC South East Asia Consulting says:

“Employers are faced with a lot of complexity in understanding, managing and mitigating the impact of technology on the world of work. It's the type of wicked problem that requires a wide variety of perspectives; deeper insight in the demand and supply for job roles; the capability to redesign structures and roles; an understanding of the skills and capabilities required to fulfil new and changing roles; and the ability to coach and motivate people to embrace learning and upskilling. A challenging, yet very important problem to solve.”

Country comparisons

Singaporeans emerged the most likely to be learning new skills through their employer, tied with the Dutch at 35%. As compared to the other countries surveyed, Singaporean workers were also the most likely to accept a lower level position in another company or industry if they believed their job was at risk of automation (60%, global 47%).

Looking across the markets surveyed, workers in China and India are by far the most upbeat about the impact of technology (even after adjusting for cultural bias), despite being the most likely to believe their jobs will change significantly. Workers in these regions are getting more opportunities to upskill: 97% and 95% respectively are being given these opportunities by

their employers. On the other hand, workers in the UK and Australia say they are given the least opportunity to learn new skills. They also tend to be less positive about the impact of technology.

Despite Chinese workers being more positive about the impact of technology, it's interesting to note that Singaporeans are taking more responsibility for their own upskilling as compared to their Chinese counterparts. Only 26% of Chinese workers reflected that it was the individual's responsibility to upskill (as compared to 44% of Singapore workers), while 40% and 31% of them said the responsibility lies with the government and the businesses respectively.

Although Singaporean workers are ahead of the average worker when it comes to learning new skills (81% in Singapore, 77% globally), our population is still behind emerging countries such as India (96%) & China (96%).

Fang Eu-Lin, Leader of PwC's Academy in Singapore concludes:

“The world of work is changing rapidly. For Singapore to remain relevant on the world stage, every player must do their part to keep the momentum of digital upskilling going. Employers, industries and government play a significant role in this by partnering and creating opportunities for upskilling, supporting and encouraging Singaporeans to upskill in an effective way.”

Ends.

Notes to editors

The Upskilling Hopes and Fears research was carried out by Opinium for PwC. In total, 22098 adults were surveyed in 11 countries: South Africa, Germany, Netherlands, India, Australia, France, Singapore, China, Poland, UK, USA. At least 2,000 adults (18+) were surveyed in each market, between 12th to 19th July 2019.

Read the Singapore insights on www.pwc.com/sg/upskilling

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Contacts



Siew Ling Ong

Press Contact

Manager, Brand and Communications

siew.ling.ong@pwc.com



Candy Li

Press Contact

Team Lead - Brand & Communications

candy.yt.li@pwc.com



Verlynn Heng

Press Contact

Senior Associate

Brand & Communications

verlynn.wy.heng@pwc.com

81251483