



GLOBAL SUMMER PROGRAMME 2027

AI TRANSFORMATION IN ASIA: SOLVING REAL-WORLD BUSINESS CHALLENGES

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

AI is advancing rapidly, but adopting AI does not automatically create business value. The more important managerial question is not simply “What can AI do?”, but “Where should we use it, where should we not, and what needs to change for it to create real value?”

Asia provides a powerful setting for answering this question because there is no single “Asian” model of AI transformation. Across the region, organisations operate in markets with very different cultures, regulations, digital maturity, demographics, labour economics, consumer behaviours and technology ecosystems. An AI solution that works in one market may need to be redesigned, implemented differently, or may not make economic sense at all in another. AI technology may be global, but its economics, adoption and implementation are deeply shaped by local context.

This course examines AI transformation as a business and managerial challenge rather than simply a technology challenge. Students develop practical literacy across capabilities such as generative AI, predictive AI, recommendation systems, computer vision, intelligent automation and AI agents. They learn to match these capabilities to different types of business problems, evaluate their limitations and data requirements, and determine when AI is—and is not—the appropriate solution.

The course also examines how AI reshapes business processes, jobs, managerial roles and human–AI collaboration. Students consider not only what organisations can automate, but what they should automate, where human judgement remains critical, and how organisational and cultural differences across Asia influence adoption.

The course is built around a real industry challenge. From the first lesson, students work in consulting teams with an industry partner to diagnose a genuine business problem, distinguish the client's stated challenge from the needs of customers, employees and other stakeholders, evaluate alternative AI solutions, and build an evidence-based transformation recommendation.

Throughout the course, students continuously test one central question:

How should this organisation use AI to create sustainable business value in its specific Asian context?

By the end of the course, students should be able to make and defend the managerial decisions at the heart of AI transformation: what problem to solve, whether AI should be used, which AI capability is appropriate, why the answer changes across Asian markets, and what is required to turn the opportunity into an implementable and responsible business transformation.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Evaluate Major AI Technologies and Their Business Uses
 - Distinguish the capabilities, limitations and business applications of predictive AI, generative AI, recommendation systems, computer vision, intelligent automation and AI agents, and determine which technologies are appropriate for different types of business problems.
2. Diagnose the Right Business Problems for AI
 - Identify whether a business challenge requires prediction, generation, personalisation, perception, decision support or workflow automation, and determine when AI is likely to create measurable value—and when a non-AI solution may be more appropriate.
3. Design AI Solutions for Different Asian Market Conditions
 - Develop AI-enabled solutions that account for differences across Asian markets in customer behaviour, language, digital ecosystems, labour economics, data availability, infrastructure and organisational maturity, and explain why the same AI solution may need to be designed differently across markets.
4. Evaluate AI Adoption, Regulation and Ecosystem Differences Across Asia
 - Compare how regulation, government policy, technology ecosystems, data governance and market structure influence AI adoption across major Asian economies, and assess how these differences affect technology choice, implementation and competitive strategy.
5. Redesign Work and Organisations for Human–AI Collaboration
 - Evaluate how AI technologies such as agents, automation and generative AI change business processes, employee roles and managerial decision-making, and design new ways of working that combine human judgement with AI capabilities.
6. Build and Defend an AI Transformation Business Case
 - Develop and defend an executive-level recommendation that specifies the business problem, AI technology, data requirements, expected value, implementation approach, organisational change, governance risks and Asian market assumptions, and justify why the proposed solution is appropriate for the selected market.

PRE-REQUISITES / REQUIREMENTS / MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE COURSE(S)

None

ASSESSMENT METHODS

Consistent with the course's experiential and project-based approach, assessments are designed to develop both individual AI proficiency and managerial judgement, while progressively building towards the semester-long industry consulting project.

Students will be assessed not only on what they know about AI, but on their ability to understand different AI capabilities, identify appropriate business problems, evaluate where AI creates value, account for differences across Asian markets, and translate their analysis into implementable business recommendations.

Assessment activities progressively feed into the final industry project so that students build and demonstrate these capabilities throughout the course.

1. Individual Assessments: 60%

• Class Participation: 10%

Students are assessed on their contribution to class discussions, AI experiments, problem-solving workshops, client deliberations and peer learning activities.

- **AI Technology & Business Application: 20%**

Students demonstrate practical understanding of major AI technologies such as generative AI, predictive AI, recommendation systems, computer vision, intelligent automation and AI agents. They evaluate what each technology can and cannot do, identify appropriate business applications, and assess how its feasibility and value may differ across selected Asian market conditions.

- **AI Problem Scoping: 15%**

Students diagnose a business challenge and determine whether it requires prediction, generation, personalisation, perception, decision support or automation. They compare the proposed AI approach with at least one non-AI alternative and justify whether AI is the appropriate solution, identify relevant stakeholders and distinguish the client's stated problem from the underlying customer or user problem.

- **Individual Reflection Journal: 15%**

Students reflect on how AI may reshape a profession, business function or managerial role relevant to their future career. Using evidence from a real role, organisation or industry, they examine which activities may be automated, augmented or remain primarily human, how these changes may differ across Asian markets, and which capabilities they need to develop.

2. Group Assessment: 40%

- **Interim Client Review: 10%**

Consulting teams present their problem diagnosis, stakeholder analysis, proposed AI opportunity and initial market assumptions to the industry partner. Teams receive feedback and refine their recommendations before the final presentation.

- **Final AI Transformation Consulting Presentation: 30%**

Teams present and defend an integrated AI transformation recommendation addressing the industry partner's business challenge. Teams must demonstrate why AI should be used, which AI capability is appropriate, how the Asian market context changes the solution, whether the business case is viable, how people and processes must change, and how implementation and governance risks will be managed.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS AND EXPECTATIONS

This course adopts an experiential, technology-enabled and project-based learning approach. Students learn about AI not only through lectures and case discussions, but by experimenting with AI capabilities, diagnosing real business problems, comparing their application across Asian markets, and applying their learning progressively to a live industry challenge.

The course draws on knowledge from AI and technological change, strategy, design thinking, human–computer interaction, organisational change, and cross-cultural management. Rather than attempting to master individual AI tools or platforms that may quickly become obsolete, students develop an understanding of enduring AI capabilities, their limitations, and the managerial judgement required to apply them appropriately.

Learning activities include:

- **Interactive Concepts and Asia Cases** – Short lectures and comparative case discussions introduce key AI technologies, business concepts and managerial frameworks. Cases examine how similar AI opportunities produce different outcomes across Asian markets because of differences in regulation, culture, digital ecosystems, labour economics, customer behaviour and organisational conditions.
- **AI Capability Labs & Technology Bazaar** – Students experiment with and compare major AI capabilities, teach selected applications to peers, and evaluate what each technology can and cannot do across different business and Asian market contexts.

- Human–AI Transformation Lab – Through activities such as an AI Trauma Clinic and Self-AI-Proofing exercise, students explore job displacement, augmentation, trust, changing professional roles and how individuals and organisations should adapt.
- Industry Consulting Project – Students work in consulting teams throughout the semester on a genuine organisational challenge provided by an industry partner. Dedicated class time is provided for teams to analyse evidence, test AI applications, challenge assumptions, work with feedback and develop their recommendations.
- Executive Presentations – Present and defend consulting recommendations, simulating real business consulting engagements. The emphasis is not simply on producing a solution, but on explaining why a particular AI technology should—or should not—be used, why the proposed approach fits the selected Asian market, and what evidence supports the decision.

Students are expected to take an active role in their own learning and contribute meaningfully to both individual and team activities. As the course emphasises critical thinking and real-world problem solving, students should be prepared to engage in discussion, challenge assumptions, and support their recommendations with evidence.

Students are expected to:

- Attend and actively participate in all classes and discussions.
- Complete assigned readings and case studies before each class to facilitate informed discussion.
- Experiment with AI technologies while developing an understanding of their capabilities and limitations.
- Challenge AI-generated outputs rather than accepting them at face value.
- Work collaboratively within consulting teams and contribute equitably throughout the semester.
- Demonstrate professionalism when interacting with classmates, faculty, and industry partners.
- Deliver high-quality analyses, consulting reports, and presentations supported by evidence, sound reasoning, and appropriate business frameworks.

CONSULTATIONS

On appointment basis during office hours.

RECOMMENDED TEXT AND READINGS

Class notes, articles, and references

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity

All acts of academic dishonesty (including, but not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, facilitation of acts of academic dishonesty by others, unauthorized possession of exam questions, or tampering with the academic work of other students) are serious offences.

All work (whether oral or written) submitted for purposes of assessment must be the student's own work. Penalties for violation of the policy range from zero marks for the component assessment to expulsion, depending on the nature of the offense.

When in doubt, students should consult the instructors of the course. Details on the SMU Code of Academic Integrity may be accessed at <https://smu.sharepoint.com/sites/oasis/SitePages/DOS->

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Use of AI

Students are encouraged—and expected—to use AI capabilities and technologies appropriately for research, experimentation, analysis, ideation and development of project work.

However, AI should be treated as a capability and decision-support resource rather than an authority or substitute for independent judgement. Students remain responsible for verifying AI-generated information, recognising limitations and potential biases, evaluating alternative perspectives, and defending the decisions and recommendations they submit.

Assessment will therefore focus not simply on the quality of AI-generated outputs, but on the student's ability to question, validate, apply and exercise judgement over those outputs.

LESSON PLAN	
LESSON	TOPICS
LESSON 1	AI Transformation in Asia: From Hype to Business Value • Understand how AI transformation differs from traditional digital transformation. • Recognise why AI adoption does not automatically create business value. • Examine how differences in regulation, digital maturity, labour economics, customer behaviour, and organisational readiness shape AI transformation across Asian markets. • Frame a business challenge before considering technology. Additional • Industry partner introduces the organisation and real-world challenge. • Students question the client, identify assumptions, and begin framing the underlying business problem. Main Question to Answer: What is the real business problem, and why does the Asian context matter?
LESSON 2	AI Technology Bazaar: What Can AI Actually Do? • Understand the capabilities and limitations of predictive AI, generative AI, recommendation systems, computer vision, automation, and AI agents. • Match different AI capabilities to appropriate business problems. • Recognise the basic data, infrastructure, and organisational requirements of different AI technologies. • Examine how language, local technology ecosystems, infrastructure, and access to AI platforms affect technology choices across Asian markets. Main Question to Answer: What can AI actually do, and which technologies are relevant in different Asian markets?
LESSON 3	AI Problem-Scoping Drill: Should This Be an AI Problem? • Distinguish symptoms from the underlying business problem. • Identify whether a problem requires prediction, generation, personalisation, perception, decision support, or automation. • Evaluate when AI is appropriate and when a non-AI solution may be better. • Examine how customer needs, labour conditions, digital behaviour, and organisational context can cause the same business problem to require different solutions across Asian markets. Main Question to Answer: Should AI be used to solve this problem, and would the answer differ across Asian markets?

LESSON PLAN	
LESSON	TOPICS
LESSON 4	Understanding Asian Customers and Markets Through AI • Use AI-supported research and analytics to understand customers and markets. • Evaluate the reliability and limitations of AI-generated market intelligence. • Examine how culture, language, demographics, digital ecosystems, and purchasing behaviour shape customer expectations across Asia. • Translate differences in Asian customer and market behaviour into relevant AI opportunities. Main Question to Answer: Who are we solving for, and how do customer needs differ across Asia?
LESSON 5	Designing AI-Enabled Solutions for Asian Markets • Understand how AI can enable new products, services, and customer experiences. • Design alternative solutions using appropriate combinations of generative AI, predictive AI, recommendation systems, automation or AI agents. • Evaluate solutions based on customer value, commercial viability, and technological feasibility. • Determine which aspects of an AI solution can be standardised across Asia and which require localisation for different markets. Main Question to Answer: What should the company build or change, and what must be localised?
LESSON 6	AI Agents, Automation and the Future of Work in Asia • Distinguish traditional automation, intelligent automation, and AI agents. • Identify which activities should be automated, augmented, or remain human-led. • Understand how humans and AI can work together within redesigned workflows. • Evaluate how differences in labour cost, demographics, workforce skills, and digital maturity influence automation decisions across Asian economies. Main Question to Answer: What should AI do, what should people do, and how does this differ across Asia?

LESSON PLAN	
LESSON	TOPICS
LESSON 7	AI Strategy & Competitive Advantage in Asia • Understand how AI can create competitive advantage through cost, differentiation, data, customer experience, and ecosystems. • Analyse how competitors, industry structure, local platforms, and digital ecosystems shape AI opportunities across Asian markets. • Evaluate whether an AI-based advantage is sustainable or easily replicated. • Determine the appropriate strategic approach, build, buy, partner, or localise, based on the company's capabilities and the conditions of the selected Asian market. Additional Interim Client Review Teams present their problem definition, proposed AI opportunity, customer and market insights, competitor analysis, and initial strategic recommendation. Main Question to Answer: How will the company win in its selected Asian market?
LESSON 8	The Economics of AI Across Asia • Identify the major costs and benefits of enterprise AI. • Evaluate AI investments based on value, scalability, risk, and uncertainty. • Compare AI solutions with alternative non-AI investments. • Examine how labour costs, talent availability, infrastructure, market size, and implementation costs change the AI business case across Asian markets. Main Question to Answer: Is AI actually worth it in this market?
LESSON 9	Human + AI: Jobs, Organisations and Leadership Across Asia • Understand how AI changes jobs, tasks, and managerial roles. • Distinguish between automation and augmentation of human work. • Examine trust, resistance, and human–AI collaboration. • Explore how hierarchy, communication styles, organisational culture, workforce expectations, and attitudes towards technology influence AI adoption across Asian workplaces. Individual Reflection Journal Main Question to Answer: How should people and organisations change, and how does culture shape that change?

LESSON PLAN	
LESSON	TOPICS
LESSON 10	Responsible AI, Regulation and Trust Across Asia • Understand major AI risks including bias, privacy, intellectual property, cybersecurity, and accountability. • Apply basic responsible AI and governance principles. • Determine where human oversight is required. • Compare how regulation, data governance, public trust, and government policy affect AI deployment across major Asian markets. Main Question to Answer: Can we deploy this AI responsibly in this Asian market?
LESSON 11	From AI Strategy to Execution Across Asian Markets • Assess organisational readiness across technology, data, people, and governance. • Develop a practical roadmap from pilot to scale. • Define milestones and measures of business impact. • Adapt implementation priorities to differences in infrastructure, talent, regulation, organisational maturity, and market conditions across Asia. Main Question to Answer: How should this AI transformation be implemented in the selected Asian market?
LESSON 12	Executive Boardroom Challenge To be held at SMU or, subject availability, at the client organisation's office. • Present an integrated AI transformation strategy that addresses a real organisational challenge in one or more Asian markets. • Defend the strategic recommendation by responding to executive-level questions concerning business value, implementation, governance, financial assumptions, and market conditions. • Demonstrate the ability to integrate AI, business strategy, organisational transformation, and regional market knowledge into a coherent consulting recommendation. • Critically reflect on how differences in culture, regulation, market maturity, and organisational context influence AI transformation outcomes across Asia. Main Question to Answer: Can we defend why this AI strategy is right for this Asian market?