Technology enables individuals to build institutions: Microsoft chief

Microsoft and NUS sign MOU on data science research

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THE chief executive of Microsoft said on Friday that digital technology has become increasingly relevant in people's lives and that efforts should be made to spread the benefits of digital technology more evenly.

Satya Nadella, who is on his first visit to Singapore since taking Microsoft's helm in 2014, said the tech giant thinks "deeply about how digital technology not only empowers the individual, but also empowers the individuals to build institutions that outlast them".

He was speaking at the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Microsoft for a collaboration on data-science education and research.

This came with the launching of NUS' Institute of Data Science (IDS) on Friday. The institute is a research institute for data science research and translation, education and related activities of NUS.

Microsoft is the first industry partner for IDS.

The MOU, which established a private-public collaboration to enable research and tools development for data science, was signed by Ho Teck Hua, deputy president (research & technology) of NUS, and Jessica Tan, managing director of Microsoft Singapore.

Aside from Mr Nadella, the witnesses to the signing were the chairman of NUS Board of Trustees Wong Ngit Liong, NUS president Tan Chorh Chuan, Microsoft Asia-Pacific president Cesar Cernuda, along with faculty members, students and guests.

The collaboration provides a framework to work collectively on data-science research and to translate the research into tools and methodologies to be used by the industry and academia in Singapore and the Asia-Pacific.

The framework will also pave the way to collaborate on capability and talent development in the fields of analytics and research, with the aim of building a pool of skilled individuals with a strong understanding of data analytics and data science, in support of Singapore's "Smart Nation" vision.

Microsoft will provide its cortana intelligence suite education programme to help NUS faculties and schools create an optimal environment for data science labs and projects, as well as its advanced analytics process and technology to enable the building and deploying of predictive models at NUS.

NUS will also work with Microsoft on research areas of mutual interest, such as data science, deep learning and artificial intelligence, and extend co-creation opportunities with Microsoft researchers into building tools for broader use in Asia-Pacific education.

Prof Tan noted that the big data revolution was unfolding extremely rapidly and that the ability to understand and exploit data will shape "how we live, work and play in the future".

"NUS has extensive strengths in data analytics, operations research and cybersecurity. The new NUS IDS will coordinate these interdisciplinary efforts and create a critical mass of researchers focused on this important area of research."

Mr Nadella described it as a "real honour and a real privilege" for Microsoft to have a chance to partner NUS, "which, in spite of its long tradition and heritage, is willing to break new ground on how they teach, how they bring people across disciplines together to create new knowledge that is going to drive our society and our world together".

He added that Microsoft would bring the best of its technology, platforms and tools to the table, to ensure that "what gets done during the four or five years that people spend in school can then translate into a lifetime of achievement".

Earlier, he reaffirmed the company's commitment to empower the developer community in Singapore, to support the Smart Nation vision.

Speaking at the Microsoft Developer Day event held at NUS, he highlighted the need for local developers to harness technology to the fullest, in order to be able to create opportunities, improve the lives of citizens and build stronger communities for a people-centric Smart Nation.

More than 1,700 students and developers attended the event; an additional 3,000 followed the proceedings via live stream.

He added: "At Microsoft, our mission is to empower every person and every organisation on the planet to achieve more. If we're going to achieve this mission, we must empower every developer in Singapore with the technology and platforms to express their creativity and change the world."

In the morning, he sat down to breakfast with students and developers at NUS and was briefed on the projects they were working on.

A STEP FORWARD FOR DATA SCIENCE Prof Ho and Ms Tan signing the MOU, witnessed by Prof Tan, Mr Nadella, and other NUS and Microsoft officials. The collaboration provides a framework to work collectively on data-science research and to translate the research into tools and methodologies to be used by the industry and academia in Singapore and the Asia-Pacific.