

AI in Saudi Arabia: New opportunities in the Kingdom's AI-led transformation

Asia House & Microsoft post-roundtable report



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Executive Summary

Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents transformative opportunities for economic development, society, innovation and efficiencies across an array of sectors and industries in Saudi Arabia – and indeed globally. As the world seeks to understand the transformative potential of AI, Saudi Arabia is strategically positioning this technology as an instrumental tool in delivering its Vision 2030 strategy: the country’s roadmap for economic diversification away from oil and gas. With AI at the forefront of its economic and digital transformation, Saudi Arabia seeks to not only utilise AI to catalyse sustainable, technology-driven growth but also to play a leadership role in the sector. As Saudi Arabia’s government, educational institutions and commercial entities devote greater focus towards AI, it becomes increasingly essential to discuss the benefits and implications of this technology.

Against the backdrop of rapid change within the Kingdom and the government’s specific focus on AI, Asia House in partnership with Microsoft organised a roundtable in Riyadh in April 2024. This report summarises some of the key themes and insights generated from the discussion. The in-person roundtable was a private discussion at which we agreed to capture and publish the key themes of the dialogue but would not attribute comments to any individual or organisation. This report has also been informed by separate on-the-record interviews with leading AI experts and practitioners based in the Kingdom.

The main findings of this report are:

- **There are vast sector-specific opportunities and applications for AI in the Kingdom.** Sectors and industries in Saudi Arabia stand to benefit from AI, including its applications in cognitive cities, the banking sector and Arabic large language models (LLMs). AI-driven solutions can be, and often already are, used to optimise efficiencies and enable innovation across these sectors. AI is also being deployed in areas unique to Saudi national interests, namely in the Hajj and Umrah. These strategic applications align with the national drive to transform Saudi Arabia into a dynamic, diversified economy and achieve its Vision 2030 goals.
- **Saudi Arabia has shown a commitment to developing an AI-friendly ecosystem that aims to balance risk and regulation with fostering innovation.** This includes by establishing a national AI strategy; institutional bodies, such as the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA); and regulatory frameworks, including the Personal Data Protection Law (PDPL).
- **The Kingdom has the potential to become a leading AI hub.** Saudi Arabia has stated its ambition to become a global and regional AI hub. To achieve these goals, Saudi Arabia needs to encourage investment and entrepreneurship, foster research and development (R&D) and innovation and upskill local talent. Saudi Arabia will also need to continue to collaborate internationally and regularly adapt its strategies and regulatory frameworks in response to the rapidly evolving AI landscape.

Introduction

This report summarises the key findings of a private Asia House and Microsoft roundtable on AI in Saudi Arabia. Attendees included senior-level AI experts, practitioners and researchers from government, business and academia in Saudi Arabia. The roundtable fostered dialogue among these key stakeholders within Saudi Arabia's AI landscape, exploring the potential, current state and prospects for AI in the Kingdom. Participants offered views on the opportunities for AI and the value of its applications within the Kingdom; Saudi Arabia's enabling environment for AI development and adoption, including the state of regulation and best practices; and what is needed to achieve the Kingdom's potential leadership role in AI. This dialogue is particularly crucial given AI's potentially transformative impact. Key themes and insights from this roundtable discussion are detailed in this report, but not attributed to any individual or organisation.

In parallel, on-the-record interviews were conducted with the following Saudi-based AI practitioners and academics: **Dr. Fatmah Baothman**, Chief Executive Officer of AIOthaim Investment AI and R&D Company, and Member of the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on the Future of Artificial Intelligence; **Dr. Tony F. Chan**, then-President of King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST); **Dr. Emna Chikhaoui**, Aide to the President for Compliance and Policies and Senior Compliance and Policies Manager at Prince Sultan University; **Dr. Jalal Alowibdi**, Associate Professor of Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence at the University of Jeddah; and **Tahani Alsubait**, Associate Professor of Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence at Umm Al-Qura University. This report is informed by insights drawn from the roundtable and these interviews, extracts of which are included throughout the text.

Section One:

Opportunities and Applications for AI in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is poised to leverage AI as a significant force across various sectors and industries. AI is a crucial component for innovation, aiming to enhance efficiency and thereby encourage further economic growth and diversification in the Kingdom, in line with Vision 2030.

Vision 2030 sets an ambitious roadmap for creating a diversified and innovative nation that empowers its citizens. In terms of the opportunities for AI and its application, Saudi Arabia can leverage AI to drive economic diversification.

–Dr. Emna Chikhaoui, Aide to the President for Compliance and Policies and Senior Compliance and Policies Manager at Prince Sultan University

Roundtable participants agreed that AI presents transformative opportunities for the Kingdom and in achieving its Vision 2030 goals. AI has the potential to significantly contribute to innovation and economic growth in the Kingdom, transforming many sectors of the economy:

From resources to investment, economy, energy, finance, commerce, education, healthcare, industrial, transportation and other sectors, AI can contribute to the Kingdom's list of priorities.

–Dr. Fatmah Baothman, Chief Executive Officer of AIOthaim Investment AI and R&D Company

The discussion focused on four key opportunities for AI's application in the Kingdom: cognitive cities; the banking sector; Arabic LLMs; and Hajj and Umrah.

Cognitive Cities

As part of its diversification plans, Saudi Arabia has undertaken several large-scale construction projects, often called 'giga-projects'. Giga-projects in the Kingdom include new futuristic cognitive cities. For example, NEOM in Northwest Saudi Arabia encompasses a diverse portfolio of innovative projects, ranging from a linear, cognitive city powered by renewable energy (THE LINE), tourist resorts and spaces (for example, Trojena, a winter sport and mountain resort) and a floating industrial complex (Oxagon). As observed by Dr. Tony F. Chan, then-President of KAUST, "The total magnitude, scope and ambition of these projects, like NEOM's THE LINE, is breathtaking."

Roundtable participants discussed AI's application in NEOM's THE LINE project, which aims to use AI to automate the lives of inhabitants and the city's operations. Cognitive cities will employ AI predictively and reactively, in a way that maximises efficiency and sustainability. Cognitive cities are designed as end-to-end products that include the platforms needed to build AI solutions and applications. Innovative solutions and significant technological advancements are essential to accommodate inhabitants and enable cognitive cities' reimagined way of living, working and operating. Participants broadly agreed that research, development and innovation are crucial and necessary to provide innovative solutions for projects such as these. Participants also reiterated the necessity of upskilling local talent, noting that importing talent is not a long-term solution and instead a short-term fix while the Kingdom trains its own population in AI.

However, with the potentially extensive integration of AI in cognitive cities, participants flagged potential apprehensions regarding the control of data, biases and transparencies of algorithms, and ensuring AI is developed and integrated ethically.

The Banking Sector

Roundtable participants noted AI's significant potential in the banking sector given that it possesses a large amount of data. AI has the potential to enhance efficiencies within the industry and improve certain processes to elevate the customer experience. In the banking sector – and indeed across other sectors – participants pointed to AI's ability to digitalise and automate repetitive tasks.

However, the banking sector remains highly regulated; one challenge noted was access to data. More broadly, participants agreed that countries' different regulatory environments pose a challenge to the free flow of data as some countries restrict data flows, prioritising data localisation instead.

Arabic Large Language Models

A region-specific opportunity for AI is Arabic LLMs. Participants noted that while the Arabic language comes with its distinct complexities and linguistic diversity, different bodies in the Kingdom, including universities, are working on developing Arabic LLMs. A participant gave the example of SDAIA's ALLaM, an LLM that generates Arabic text. Participants agreed that more researchers and LLM developers who understand the complexities of the Arabic language and AI are needed in both the education and public sectors, and that the development of Arabic LLMs should be a priority for Saudi Arabia.

Hajj and Umrah

An AI application unique to Saudi Arabia is the Hajj and Umrah sector. We want to move from being able to accommodate two million Hajj pilgrims each year to triple that in 2030. You cannot really accommodate a huge number of people without the help of AI and other technologies to ensure that crowds are safe and comfortable, that they are enjoying their spiritual journey and for authorities to do their jobs without any problems or issues. This is a sector specific to Saudi Arabia.

– Tahani Alsubait, Associate Professor of Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence at Umm Al-Qura University

The Hajj and Umrah sector is a Saudi-specific application of AI. AI is increasingly being used to enrich pilgrims' experiences and address challenges that arise from mass pilgrimages. Participants noted that during Hajj and Umrah, there is a need to ensure the safety and well-being of the large numbers of pilgrims while performing their religious rituals. A participant noted that the sheer number of people comes with problems, including theft and overcrowding. AI solutions have already been applied to track people within the Holy Mosque and in transportation to and from the site, to address the challenge of dealing with the constant inflow and outflow of people.

Previously, I worked in the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah. They are adopting technology and AI, including in the thousands of cameras surrounding this area for security purposes. Counting people is one of the most difficult things. It's not as easy as just putting a camera on a door and counting that way – we have many gates surrounding this area and there are people coming in and out of them five times a day.

– Dr. Jalal Alowibdi, Associate Professor of Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence at the University of Jeddah

Despite existing applications of AI in Hajj and Umrah operations, participants agreed that they are still not fully developed and extensive opportunities in the sector remain, suggesting a need for further investment and research in AI solutions.

Section Two:

Saudi Arabia's AI-Enabling Environment

Saudi Arabia's commitment to fostering an AI-friendly ecosystem in order to establish itself as a global AI leader by 2030 includes establishing an ambitious national AI strategy and AI bodies to advance its AI agenda. As outlined by Dr. Emna Chikhaoui, "The Kingdom's current AI strategy includes training data, data protection and AI experts, and aims to increase the presence of active startups in the field of AI and to attract greater national and foreign investment in AI." The Kingdom's regulatory frameworks are also adapting to promote the ethical and secure deployment of AI. This roundtable discussed the conditions for enabling a productive AI ecosystem in the Kingdom, including Saudi Arabia's regulatory environment that encourages responsible AI and best practices without stifling innovation, as well as forward-looking strategies to encourage the development and integration of AI in the Kingdom.

National Strategy and Governing Bodies

Participants noted the Kingdom's establishment of several bodies dedicated to nurturing AI in Saudi Arabia. SDAIA is the main such body and responsible for leading the national data and AI agenda. As described by Dr. Emna Chikhaoui, SDAIA "is the competent authority in the Kingdom concerned with data and AI, including big data. SDAIA is also the national reference for all matters related to organisational development and the handling of data and AI. It is also competent in all matters related to research and innovation in data and AI." SDAIA is made up of three core entities: the National Data Management Office (NDMO), the National Information Center (NIC) and the National Center for Artificial Intelligence (NCAI).

Participants agreed that SDAIA has been fundamental in shaping and driving Saudi Arabia's AI agenda since its inception in 2019. While the Kingdom is keen to advance legal platforms for AI, evident through the development of SDAIA alongside other AI entities and centres, participants agreed that efforts and progress remain in their early stages.

AI Regulation: A Balancing Act

NDMO, the regulatory branch of SDAIA, is mandated to develop policies, governance mechanisms, standards and controls related to data and AI, and already launched the training of data protection officers and data protection professionals last year. They are developing AI ethics policies, and SDAIA published its AI Ethics Principles framework in September 2023. This framework will mark a significant difference in the use of AI because it will help businesses and institutions comply with these ethics before using AI.

– Dr. Emna Chikhaoui, Aide to the President for Compliance and Policies, and Senior Compliance and Policies Manager at Prince Sultan University

Beyond the AI Ethics Principles framework, SDAIA published the Kingdom's PDPL, which was submitted for public consultation for recommendations before coming into effect in September 2023. Participants agreed that the PDPL is a step towards changing Saudi Arabia's AI regulatory landscape and welcomed the AI Ethics Principles framework to ensure safe and ethical applications of AI.

One participant noted that although the NDMO has been successful in establishing regulations such as the PDPL and other frameworks and guidelines, it must ensure businesses and universities are kept informed as AI and corresponding regulations develop. Participants also advised that Saudi Arabia's AI regulatory frameworks are still in their early stages and need to be further developed.

Participants widely acknowledged the need – albeit complex – to balance risk and regulation with encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation. It was noted that the technology's development is far ahead of regulation, but that regulating AI is complex. Indeed, this balancing act

is not a challenge unique to Saudi Arabia – participants agreed that there is no right or wrong way nor one coherent view on how to best regulate AI globally. As one participant explained, for regulation to be effective, it should: be risk-based and outcomes-focused, rather than prescriptive; ensure both developers and deployers of AI meet the responsibilities of responding to the scenario-specific nature of AI risk; and utilise impact assessments and testing to ensure transparency and accountability.

It was broadly agreed that the quality of the data is essential as an input to training AI models. The issue raised, however, was that when high-quality data is available, such as in the banking sector, data is highly regulated, resulting in data localisation and restrictions to the flow of data across borders. A participant gave the example of the Data Free Flow with Trust (DFFT) initiative, recently endorsed by G7 leaders, which aims to promote the free flow of data while ensuring data privacy and security, intellectual property rights and trust, and compatibility with other international data governance policies. The participant noted how operationalising the DFFT initiative is very complex, largely due to different motivating factors among stakeholders.

Despite this, participants agreed that finding interoperable mechanisms to enable the free flow of data across borders would prove valuable to building responsible AI. Again, it was emphasised that this is a global challenge as some countries are open to the free flow of data while others are not. Participants noted that this causes significant barriers when exporting, importing or localising data. However, digital corridors are emerging and becoming more common, including building reciprocity between countries. It was also noted that this goes beyond allowing AI to flourish as cross-border data flows affect trade and the digital economy more broadly.

Best Practices for Responsible AI

In terms of implementing best practices, one participant emphasised that outcomes of AI applications are difficult to forecast and suggested that organisations' public codes of conduct and best practices will be necessary as AI becomes more widely integrated. Another participant suggested that entities wanting to incorporate AI solutions should implement these necessary practices, applying clear standards, external benchmarks and safeguards to ensure legal protection. It was also noted that due diligence is essential when investing in AI entities.

Companies and businesses driving AI innovation should take steps like preparing ethical guidelines. It is important for companies to tailor guidelines to the cultural, social and legal context of Saudi Arabia in order to overcome challenges in using AI. We cannot copy guidelines from somewhere else; we need to adapt ours to respond to our needs. These guidelines should address issues such as fairness, transparency and accountability. It is also important to engage local communities, including government agencies and academic institutions, to improve the use of AI.

– Dr. Emna Chikhaoui, Aide to the President for Compliance and Policies and Senior Compliance and Policies Manager at Prince Sultan University

Participants encouraged embedding ethics and human rights into the development of AI solutions. They stressed the importance of the interoperability of these regulations to align with international standards, such as the AI principles and standards outlined by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United States National Institute of Standards and Technology. It was noted that ethical challenges will inevitably arise when implementing AI, as data laws and clauses may impact the technology. One contentious area mentioned was in healthcare. This was emphasised as a global problem, not Saudi-specific. Nevertheless, one participant referred to the [Stanford University's International AI Index](#), which ranks Saudi Arabia second globally in societal awareness of AI.

Section Three:

Saudi Arabia's Global AI Ambitions

As the Kingdom advances its AI agenda and accompanying regulatory environment and best practices, there is a growing focus towards developing advanced, local AI capabilities, sustaining innovation and ensuring readiness. The future of AI in Saudi Arabia is envisioned to be a leading force, promoting not only national growth but also international collaborations and potential regional, even global, leadership. Discussions focused on Saudi Arabia's potential to achieve its stated ambition of becoming a global leader in AI and areas it should continue to devote efforts towards, specifically encouraging investment and entrepreneurship, fostering R&D and innovation and upskilling talent for human capital.

Saudi Arabia's Potential to Achieve AI Leadership

Participants discussed Saudi Arabia's potential to achieve its ambition of becoming a global leader in AI. There was little doubt expressed that Saudi Arabia can become a leader in AI given its potential and evident determination to adopt AI and innovate. One participant also mentioned the clear links between the youth of the Saudi population, the widespread investments in AI and the government's drive to collate efforts to further AI.

However, it was noted that achieving this goal will be complex given challenges spanning data regulation to upskilling talent. Participants also agreed that the Kingdom cannot achieve its ambitions alone, at least for the time being, emphasising that collaboration and alliances with the international community and global companies are necessary to help the Kingdom as it progresses through different stages.

Participants agreed that AI will change how we live, comparing it to how mobile phones have changed how we communicate. However, participants stressed that AI is not a single entity and that certain applications of AI impact processes, others impact regulation, and importantly, others impact people. Participants noted that generative AI and its foundations are talked about the most but added that its foundation model can be developed for different innovative purposes and that Saudi Arabia can lead the growth in these other models.

The government stands to play a role here, particularly in communicating what AI is being used for. A participant gave the example of the Absher platform, which already uses AI in processing identity documents, licenses, visas and the like, to emphasise the importance of communicating how AI is used.

Encourage Investment and Entrepreneurship

There was widespread agreement that AI will be pivotal in enabling business, economic and investment growth and as an enabler across sectors in the Kingdom. Conversely, it was also noted that capital and investment will be important to generate AI solutions. Several participants mentioned Saudi Arabia's plans to create a US\$40 billion fund to invest in AI, noting investments in AI and its development are central to the Kingdom's Vision 2030 goals. There was agreement that Saudi Arabia's leadership recognises this.

Several participants highlighted the importance of expanding the Kingdom's startup and entrepreneurship ecosystem for AI innovation. One participant noted that it is no coincidence that generative AI was accelerated by OpenAI and not one of the larger technology companies as OpenAI was afforded a degree of freedom and creativity that allowed it to invest in innovation.

It was agreed that generating a startup culture is important for entrepreneurship and innovation. Participants noted various government incentives for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to set up, relocate, scale their operations and/or invest in the Kingdom, including low-cost entrepreneurship licences, support services and acceleration programmes. Beyond SMEs, participants noted that dedicated teams have been established to support international entities setting up in the Kingdom, agreeing that attracting international companies should continue alongside supporting local businesses.

Foster Research, Development and Innovation

Participants agreed that training AI experts and students will be essential for AI R&D and innovation, noting universities, research centres and innovation centres are key enablers of AI R&D and its implementation and application. One participant also recognised that AI R&D projects in universities are now aligned with Vision 2030 and its objectives, with the aim of contributing.

Participants emphasised that creating fertile ground for R&D in other technologies like quantum, robotics and automation must also be prioritised, alongside AI. It was noted that research in these other technologies will help accelerate AI innovation and that the use of these technologies should be integrated and combined.

AI is an umbrella for other technologies. For example, the Internet of Things, sensor technology and chip technology are all very important and fall under AI in one way or another. Saudi Arabia has been focusing on these technologies to bring together a complete AI ecological system.

– Dr. Fatmah Baothman, Chief Executive Officer of AIOthaim Investment AI and R&D Company

Upskill Local Talent

Given Saudi Arabia's plan to train experts in data and AI, its education system is already reforming.

When it comes to education, there are currently many efforts in Saudi universities to establish new curriculums in AI – we have new bachelor's and postgraduate programmes focused specifically on AI. We also have AI courses that all students can enrol in. Beyond the university level, we are also preparing students in AI at the school level. Previously, we only had the usual computer science textbook, but now we have specialised textbooks on AI. This sends an important message to the new generation that the Kingdom wants and needs their help to be a part of AI's development.

– Tahani Alsubait, Associate Professor of Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence at Umm Al-Qura University

Participants widely agreed that the education sector is critical to meeting the challenge of supplying local AI talent, with universities, in particular, providing an umbrella for sustainable R&D and innovation.

Still, discussions emphasised the need to accelerate the upskilling of human capital and local talent in AI as progress remains gradual. Although Saudi universities already offer undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in AI, participants recommended that Saudi universities cater their programmes further to address current gaps, including providing more PhD programmes in AI. Participants noted that local students are motivated to study the subject and highlighted the need for the government to encourage universities to provide a positive research environment.

Participants pointed to the example of China's successful efforts towards upskilling talent in AI through universities, citing that China is now competing globally in AI.

It was agreed that public-private partnerships (PPPs) and public-private-people partnerships can help bridge the opportunity gap by upskilling local AI talent:

Public-private partnerships can play a huge role in developing a skilled AI workforce in the Kingdom. The Kingdom has already led different initiatives when it comes to this, through various government or semi-governmental bodies. They have invested in, for example, free training with universities and events and training programmes that SDAIA and others have initiated.

– Dr. Fatmah Baothman, Chief Executive Officer of AIOthaim Investment AI and R&D Company

For newly trained AI talent to be retained domestically, it was noted that it is equally critical to ensure jobs are available for them within the Kingdom:

We need to be more focused on developing work opportunities – training with objectives to guarantee creation of new positions in the workspace. The people are the main resource for any country, and gladly, they are focusing on this in Saudi Arabia, but it has to be more directed.

– Dr. Fatmah Baothman, Chief Executive Officer of AIOthaim Investment AI and R&D Company

Section Four:

Key Takeaways and Recommendations

Key Takeaways

- **AI should continue to be leveraged as it presents transformative opportunities across sectors and industries in the Kingdom, in line with Vision 2030.** AI's potential and existing applications include in cognitive cities, the banking sector, Arabic LLMs and Hajj and Umrah.
- **Saudi Arabia has established a national strategy and strong institutions, namely SDAIA, which have been fundamental in advancing the Kingdom's AI agenda.** Saudi Arabia's strategy and significant government bodies also demonstrate its commitment to fostering an AI-friendly ecosystem.
- **The Kingdom is attempting to balance risk and regulation with innovation, which will contribute to its successful leveraging of AI.** This includes through the AI Ethics Principles framework and the PDPL that are meaningfully changing the regulatory landscape of the Kingdom. However, achieving this balance is complex and there is no single way to regulate AI. Indeed, this remains a global challenge with countries opting for different approaches. In addition, establishing interoperable mechanisms to enable the free flow of data globally remains a challenge but would benefit AI.
- **In order for Saudi Arabia to demonstrate regional and global leadership in AI, it should continue devoting sustained focus to encouraging investment and entrepreneurship and fostering R&D and innovation.** AI should also be developed and integrated alongside other technologies, such as quantum, the Internet of Things, semiconductors, robotics and automation.
- **Further accelerating an upskilling of local talent will continue to be necessary.** The Kingdom's educational system is reforming gradually and remains critical to addressing current gaps in AI talent. The Kingdom's universities, in particular, are a key enabler of AI's development and application and meeting the challenge of supplying local AI talent.

- **Given the inherently global nature of AI, further collaborations with the international community can help the Kingdom achieve its leadership goals.** This may necessitate a degree of flexibility and preparedness to adapt and amend its strategies and regulations in response to changes in this fast-evolving technology.

Recommendations for Stakeholders

- **Embrace AI and digital transformation.** Although people need to be conscious of the use of their data and relevant regulations, individuals' lives and society can be improved by adopting AI across sectors. Businesses can also gain a competitive advantage by integrating AI into their operations. Businesses should encourage innovation and digital literacy within their organisations to optimise productivity and efficiency. The increased automation of some tasks will enable human capacity to be redeployed elsewhere in the organisation.
- **Proactively engage with technology regulation and remain informed about the ethical implications of AI and encourage responsible AI development, deployment and use.** Regulation in Saudi Arabia will continue to evolve in line with developments in AI, and businesses should work to adopt and adhere to these regulations. This will help to build trust among AI users and society, ensuring the protection of individuals' personal data and compliance with fundamental principles of fairness, inclusiveness, reliability and safety, transparency, accountability, privacy and security. AI will necessitate large amounts of data, including personal data, which should be used responsibly. Business leaders and society at large should keep abreast of existing and emerging regulations and stay aware of data protection rights.
- **Companies should establish public codes of conduct, clear standards, external benchmarks and safeguards to ensure best practices as AI becomes more widely integrated.** These ethical guidelines should engage with local communities so that they can be catered to and adapted to their local contexts.

- **To help the Kingdom achieve its ambitions of becoming a global leader in AI, society and businesses need to continue to invest in AI entrepreneurship, leveraging government incentives and drive research, development and innovation.** Taking advantage of government incentives and support systems afforded by the Kingdom will allow startups and SMEs to contribute to the Kingdom's global ambitions. Supporting a robust startup culture is crucial for fostering innovation, not limited by constraints faced by larger organisations. University leaders should also continue to encourage research, development and innovation in AI, alongside other technologies.
- **Invest more in education, skill development and talent acquisition strategies to attract and retain skilled AI professionals.** AI will increasingly impact industries in the Kingdom and may result in some restructuring of the labour market. Government and academic initiatives to develop local talent will foster a pool of young and innovative workers skilled in AI. Attracting these individuals will encourage innovation and speed up AI integration. By contributing to developing AI talent in Saudi Arabia, companies can get a head start on identifying and securing top talent. Training current employees on how to work with and leverage AI effectively can make them – and business operations – more efficient and innovative. While the government is currently promoting this, efforts should be accelerated.
- **Foster partnerships with government agencies, academic institutions and other commercial entities to access resources and expertise in AI.** Business leaders should seek PPPs, including international partnerships, in order to gain expertise and bridge the local opportunity gap by upskilling human capital. Saudi-based AI conferences and expos can also be worth engaging with to explore potential new partnerships, including with foreign firms.

Section Five:

The Path Forward

Next Steps

The following recommendations would enable key Saudi stakeholders, including AI experts, practitioners, researchers and regulators, to build on the engagement, dialogue and momentum fostered by the roundtable. Further action can generate ideas and insights for Saudi Arabia to capitalise on AI's application, integration and growth, particularly as this is such a rapidly changing landscape.

- Focus group conversations, delving further into specific topics covered in the initial roundtable discussion and in this report would enable targeted discussion and thinking on applications for AI in the Kingdom, how to further develop Saudi Arabia's AI-enabling environment and/or what is necessary to achieve the Kingdom's ambitions to become a global AI leader.
- Further focus group sessions focusing on implementing this report's recommendations would encourage discussion on how to best actualise them. These sessions should include key senior-level stakeholders from academia, commerce and government, particularly regulators.
- Developing programmes and initiatives based on pertinent issues brought up during the roundtable, such as training and upskilling local talent in AI, would encourage action and further Saudi Arabia's headway towards its regional and global leadership ambitions.
- Given that international collaborations and partnerships were advocated for during the roundtable discussion, fostering dialogue between Saudi Arabia and international AI players could inspire innovation through an exchange of ideas and practices, extending the discussion beyond Saudi Arabia's AI community alone. This could be achieved through virtual roundtables with international participants.

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