



AIGW Policy Observatory
Global AI Governance & Workforce Transformation

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AIGW WORKFORCE TRANSITION DEEP DIVE

SimplifyNext: Building a New First Rung for AI Work

How an employment-first training model links structured learning, live client delivery and early responsibility in the AI economy

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CONTENTS

Contents

Executive Summary	03
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Key Findings	06
--------------	----

Institutional Context and Policy Infrastructure	08
---	----

From Trainee to Production Contributor	11
--	----

Multiple Doors into the Pipeline	13
----------------------------------	----

Capabilities, Mentorship and Decision Rights	20
--	----

Business Case and Singapore Context	23
-------------------------------------	----

AIGW First-Rung Architecture, Risks and Measurement	29
---	----

From Bootcamp to Stakeholder Action	34
-------------------------------------	----

Evidence, Conclusion and Sources	42
----------------------------------	----

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

SimplifyNext provides a useful answer to one of the hardest questions raised by artificial intelligence and early-career work:

If AI is compressing traditional entry-level tasks, what should a new first rung of work look like? The Singapore-headquartered digital engineering firm has built an entry pathway that differs from a conventional training-first model. Through Singapore's Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) Company-Led Training programme, or CLT, trainees are not merely enrolled in a course and later asked to search for work. The CLT programme is designed around employment plus structured on-the-job development. Eligible trainees sign an employment contract before the programme begins, receive a salary, work on projects under experienced mentors and follow structured career-development pathways. Training can last up to 12 months depending on role complexity.[1] SimplifyNext has used that infrastructure to hire fresh graduates and mid-career professionals into AI and automation work. By January 2026, IMDA reported that SimplifyNext had hired close to 50 trainees through the pathway. The company planned to onboard another 30, but those additional places were a future intention at the reporting point and should not be counted as completed hires.[2] The strongest evidence is what happened after hiring.

SimplifyNext had delivered more than 35 AI-powered client projects, with CLT trainees involved

in nearly half of them under the guidance of in-house data scientists and AI architects. CEO Mayank Gupta also reported that more than 90% of SimplifyNext's CLT trainees were leading AI and automation projects within the company.[2] These figures do not prove that trainees became people managers, owned projects without supervision or achieved a particular promotion level. They do show something more important than course completion:

The pathway moved trainees from employment into real AI delivery and, for most of the reported cohort, into some form of project-leading responsibility. That makes SimplifyNext different from many early-career AI programmes. The programme does not treat work experience as something that comes after learning. It makes live work part of the learning architecture. The firm's current graduate roles reinforce that model. Its AI Engineer (Graduate) role is designed for fresh graduates and includes real-world AI work across model development, data preparation, solution engineering, validation, deployment and client collaboration. Its Technology Analyst (Graduate) role includes client problem analysis, requirements gathering, solution design, implementation, user-acceptance testing and post-implementation support.[3][4] The entry role is therefore not structured as:

observe senior experts → complete low-risk administrative tasks → wait several years for meaningful responsibility. It is closer to:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

learn → build → deploy → work with clients → receive guidance → take increasing ownership. SimplifyNext has also developed an earlier pre-employment layer. Its Agentic AI Hackathon brings students from Singapore universities together to solve real-world business challenges with training and industry mentorship. The 2026 edition was open to full-time university students across Singapore, and SimplifyNext reported that winners from the previous edition subsequently became interns who were building real AI solutions alongside the company.[5][6] Again, that evidence must be handled carefully. A winning hackathon team becoming interns does not establish a general hackathon-to-employment conversion rate. But it reveals an emerging pipeline:

university challenge → applied project evidence → internship opportunity → potential employment/training pathway. This case therefore offers a different perspective from PwC, where AI is compressing the traditional apprenticeship base. PwC asks:

How do we preserve learning when foundational work disappears? SimplifyNext asks:

Can we design the first rung around real AI-enabled work from the beginning? The public evidence suggests six design elements:

1. Access: bring in fresh graduates and career switchers through real job openings and talent programmes.
2. Employment: hire before or at the beginning of structured development, rather than training people without a job destination.
3. Structured learning: combine classroom and formal learning with role-specific capability development.
4. Production exposure: put trainees into real internal and client AI/automation work under experienced practitioners.
5. Increasing ownership: move trainees from participation toward project-leading responsibility.
6. Progression: connect the pathway to a wider career architecture rather than a temporary traineeship.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AIGW calls this model demand-backed apprenticeship. The defining feature is that training is linked to work the organization genuinely needs delivered. This distinction matters because many reskilling programmes optimize for:

- enrollment; • course completion; • certificates. A demand-backed apprenticeship should instead be measured through: • actual employment; • real project exposure; • demonstrated capability; • increasing responsibility; • retention; • progression; • quality of the destination role. SimplifyNext provides strong evidence for the first four measures. It provides much weaker public evidence for the last two. The available sources do not disclose: • the exact composition of the close-to-50 hires between fresh graduates and mid-career professionals; • programme completion

- rates; • attrition; • compensation progression; • promotion rates; • the exact meaning of "leading" a project; • client-quality outcomes attributable to trainees; • how many trainees remain with the company after one or two years; • how many unsuccessful applicants or trainees did not complete the pathway.

The case should therefore not be presented as proof that this model solves the early-career employment problem at scale. It is better understood as a high-quality institutional design example. It shows that a new first rung can be built around a tighter connection between:

hiring → training → real work → mentorship → responsibility. For employers worried that AI is removing traditional junior tasks, that sequence may be more important than preserving the old tasks themselves.

KEY FINDINGS

Key Findings

01

Employment-First Entry and Project Exposure

1. SimplifyNext's pathway begins with employment, not training in isolation

IMDA's CLT programme requires successful trainees to sign an employment contract before the programme begins. Trainees receive a salary while developing in-demand digital skills through structured training, real projects and experienced mentors.[1] This changes the risk allocation. The trainee is not asked to learn first and hope the market recognizes the learning later.

2. Actual hiring is directly evidenced

By January 2026, SimplifyNext had hired close to 50 CLT trainees.[2] A plan to onboard 30 more was also reported, but it remains a hiring intention until separately evidenced as completed.

3. Real project exposure is central to the programme

SimplifyNext reported more than 35 AI-powered client projects, with CLT trainees involved in nearly half under the guidance of in-house data scientists and AI architects.[2] This is stronger evidence of capability formation than classroom participation alone.

4. Most of the reported cohort had moved beyond observation

CEO Mayank Gupta said more than 90% of CLT trainees were leading AI and automation projects within the company.[2] The public source does not define "leading" precisely, so it should not be equated automatically with project-manager title, independent budget authority or unsupervised client accountability.

02

Pathways, Responsibility and Long-Term Outcomes

5. The first rung is designed around end-to-end work
Current SimplifyNext graduate roles include: • problem definition; • AI development; • data preparation; • architecture participation; • implementation; • testing; • deployment; • client interaction; • post-implementation support.[3][4] The role architecture is broader than narrow junior execution. 6. The company is building multiple entry points SimplifyNext combines: • CLT hiring; • graduate roles; • internships; • university hackathons; • structured learning and certification.[5][6][7] These mechanisms belong to one broader talent pipeline but are not the same programme and should not be counted together without a common denominator. 7. The pathway serves business capacity as well as workforce development SimplifyNext says CLT-trained teams helped it respond faster to client needs, shorten delivery timelines and expand regionally without compromising quality.[2] These are company-attributed qualitative business outcomes, not independently quantified causal estimates. 8. Long-term transition quality remains under-evidenced Public evidence is strong on: • hire; • training; • project participation; • increasing responsibility. It is weak on: • retention; • pay progression; • promotion; • worker choice; • long-term career mobility. The pathway is therefore better evidenced as an entry architecture than as a complete long-term career-outcome model.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Why Employment Belongs at the Start of the First Rung

The case connects public training infrastructure with paid work, client delivery and capability formation.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Institutional Context and Policy Infrastructure

1. Why This Case Matters — The entry-level employment problem in the AI era is often described as a contradiction. Companies want workers with:

- AI experience; • business judgment; • production experience; • client communication; • ability to deploy real systems.

But young people need an entry role in order to acquire those capabilities. If AI removes the routine tasks that traditionally justified hiring inexperienced workers, the contradiction becomes sharper. A graduate may hear:

We need people who can work with AI in production. and simultaneously:

We prefer candidates who have already shipped AI systems. That is a classic experience trap. SimplifyNext matters because its pathway attempts to solve the problem institutionally rather than leaving it entirely to the individual. The organization:

- hires; • trains; • mentors; • exposes trainees to real delivery; • gives increasing responsibility.

This is fundamentally different from telling a young person:

complete an AI course, build a portfolio, then compete for an experienced-hire role. The employer absorbs part of the cost and risk of capability formation. That is the defining characteristic of an apprenticeship.

2. Institutional Context: A Growing Firm Needs a Talent Engine — SimplifyNext was founded in 2018 and describes itself as a digital engineering and transformation firm focused on intelligent automation, AI, next-generation applications and related technologies. Its website says it has worked with more than 150 organizations across the region.[8] By October 2026, the company's live careers site described a workforce of more than 300 practitioners across Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, spanning business consultants, software engineers, architects, AI engineers and designers. [7] That current headcount should not be backdated to January 2026. It is useful because it illustrates the organizational context in which the trainee pathway sits:

SimplifyNext is building talent while expanding a delivery business. This matters. A professional-services and digital-engineering firm has a natural demand for project-based learning because client work itself generates:

- business problems; • datasets; • technical requirements; • deployment challenges; • stakeholder interactions; • quality expectations.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

That creates an environment in which learning can be attached to productive work. The model may therefore be easier to implement in a consultancy than in an organization with few suitable entry-level AI projects. That is not a weakness. It is a boundary condition. The transferable question for other employers is:

What real work can we place around a developing worker without making the worker merely an observer or exposing the organization to unacceptable risk?

3. The Policy Infrastructure: What Company-Led Training Actually Changes — The SimplifyNext pathway cannot be understood without Singapore's Company-Led Training programme. IMDA describes CLT as a structured programme for:

- fresh professionals; • mid-career professionals; • mature PMETs;

to gain competencies for in-demand digital roles through on-the-job training.[1] Employment is part of the design For trainees, IMDA states that:

- the programme is full-time; • the successful applicant signs an employment contract with the company before commencement; • the trainee receives a salary; • training duration depends on role complexity and can last up to 12 months.[1]

This is institutionally significant. The individual does not occupy an ambiguous position between student and job seeker. The learning takes place inside employment. Employers must commit more than a classroom To participate, companies must demonstrate the capability to deliver training and commit resources including:

- practical projects; • mentors; • structured career progression.[1]

Companies are also expected to plan the types and numbers of digital roles they need over the next one to two years.[1] This links workforce development to demand planning. The programme is tied to recognized skill architecture CLT aligns with Singapore's Skills Framework, jointly developed across public institutions and industry stakeholders.[1] This reduces the risk that training is based only on one employer's ad hoc interpretation of a role. AIGW interpretation The institutional mechanism can be summarized as:

Employer demand → real job → employment contract → structured training → mentored project work → career pathway This is more than a subsidy for courses. It is a mechanism for changing the economics of early-career hiring.

THE FIRST RUNG

From Training to Production

The defining transition is from learning in isolation to developing capability while doing bounded, supported work.

THE FIRST RUNG

From Trainee to Production Contributor

4. The Core Transition: From Trainee to Production Contributor — The strongest SimplifyNext evidence comes from the relationship between training and live delivery. IMDA reports that the company's CLT framework combines:

- classroom learning; • real-world project experience.[2]

Trainees co-develop:

- client AI solutions; • client automation solutions; • internal AI initiatives.[2]

They work under the guidance of:

- in-house data scientists; • AI architects.[2]

This matters because the programme crosses a boundary that many training schemes never cross. The participant becomes accountable to a real production context. Why real projects change the learning process A classroom can teach:

- model concepts; • prompt techniques; • frameworks; • architecture; • development methods.

A live project adds constraints such as:

- incomplete requirements; • client expectations; • legacy systems; • data quality; • security; •

integration;

- deadlines; • testing; • deployment; • maintenance; • communication.

Those constraints are not peripheral. They are much of what makes someone employable. The first-rung principle The first rung should therefore not be defined by low difficulty. It should be defined by:

bounded responsibility with support. A trainee can work on meaningful problems if the organization provides:

- supervision; • review; • architecture guidance; • escalation; • quality control.

SimplifyNext's reported use of in-house data scientists and AI architects is important because it indicates such a support layer exists.[2] The exact decision-right boundary is not public. That remains an evidence gap.

5. The First Rung Is Not an Observation Seat — Current SimplifyNext graduate job descriptions help make the role design concrete. AI Engineer (Graduate) The company's current AI Engineer (Graduate) role is explicitly open to fresh graduates and candidates with 0–3 years of experience.[3] The work includes:

THE FIRST RUNG

- building and training machine-learning models; • experimenting with LLMs, embeddings, prompt engineering, RAG and agentic workflows; • preparing and transforming data; • contributing to solution architecture and model selection; • integrating AI models into applications, APIs and automation workflows; • building proofs of concept;

- testing and validating models; • supporting deployment on cloud platforms; • monitoring performance and continuous improvement; • working with domain experts; • participating in workshops, demonstrations and client discussions. [3]

The role is not designed around a narrow "junior-only" slice of the AI lifecycle. It exposes the entrant to multiple stages of production. Technology Analyst (Graduate) The current Technology Analyst (Graduate) role is similarly broad. Fresh graduates may be expected to:

- engage with client subject-matter experts; • analyze business pain points; • gather technical and operational requirements; • support architecture and solution design; • implement

solutions; • identify use cases and expected outcomes;

- conduct user-acceptance testing; • support rollout; • provide post-implementation support.[4]

This is significant because it combines:

business understanding + technical delivery + client exposure + post-deployment responsibility. AIGW interpretation: entry-level seniorization without pretending the entrant is senior There is a subtle distinction here. The roles expose early-career workers to higher-context activities earlier. That does not mean a fresh graduate is equivalent to an experienced consultant or architect. A strong first rung should therefore create access to senior-type tasks without erasing the supervisory layer. The desired transition is not:

junior becomes senior overnight. It is:

junior gets earlier, structured exposure to the full work cycle while experienced people remain accountable for guidance, architecture, quality and escalation. This is one reason "project exposure" and "project ownership" should be measured separately.

ENTRY PATHWAYS

Multiple Doors into the Pipeline

6. The Pipeline Architecture: More Than One Door In — SimplifyNext appears to be building a talent pipeline with several entry mechanisms. They should be understood as related but analytically distinct. Door 1 — Company-Led Training The CLT pathway is the strongest evidenced mechanism. It supports:

- fresh graduates; • mid-career professionals; • mature professionals;

and places them into employment with structured development.[1] IMDA's current CLT job listing includes a Technology Consulting Analyst role at SimplifyNext.[9] Door 2 — Direct graduate hiring SimplifyNext currently advertises dedicated graduate roles including:

- AI Engineer (Graduate); • Full Stack Developer (Graduate); • Technology Analyst (Graduate); • User Experience Designer (Graduate).[7]

This suggests the company is not treating CLT as its only early-career channel. Door 3 — Internships The careers site currently includes internship roles, and SimplifyNext has publicly connected previous hackathon winners to internships where they work on real AI solutions.[6][7] Door 4 — University hackathons The 2026 Agentic AI Hackathon was open to full-time university students across Singapore. Participants worked in teams on real-world business challenges and

received training and mentorship from industry experts.[5] NUS described the programme as involving four training sessions plus solution development, semi-finals and a final presentation. [10] SimplifyNext's hackathon site says the initiative has accumulated:

- 600+ participants; • 150+ submitted solutions; • three years of activity.[5]

These are hackathon programme metrics. They are not hiring or employment metrics. Why multiple doors matter A single entry mechanism tends to favor a single candidate profile. A broader pipeline can identify different forms of potential:

- academic foundation; • applied problem-solving; • project execution; • career-switch motivation; • client communication; • technical depth.

AIGW interpretation A new first rung may need to be less dependent on one signal such as:

degree → resume → interview. Applied project environments can reveal capabilities that traditional screening misses. But this creates a new fairness question:

Who has the time, resources and prior exposure required to perform well in hackathons and project-based selection? The public SimplifyNext evidence does not answer that question.

ENTRY PATHWAYS

7. Hackathon → Internship: A Pre-Entry Bridge — The hackathon pathway deserves separate treatment because it sits before full employment. In 2026, SimplifyNext publicly stated that winners from the previous year's Agentic AI Hackathon had become SimplifyNext interns and were gaining hands-on experience while building real AI solutions alongside the company.[6] This is direct evidence of:

competition participation → internship opportunity for at least one winning team. It is not evidence of a general conversion rate. Why the bridge is interesting A hackathon can function as more than a branding exercise if it gives students:

- a real problem; • a deadline; • team collaboration;
- technical mentoring; • a demonstrable artifact; • exposure to employer decision-makers.

That can create a different hiring signal. Instead of asking only:

What have you studied? the employer can observe:

What did you build, how did you reason, how did you work with others, and how did you respond to feedback? The risk Hackathons can also over-reward:

- prior access to AI tools; • free time; • confidence; • polished presentation; • existing networks.

They should not become the only gate into early-career opportunity. Evidence-safe conclusion SimplifyNext has demonstrated that an applied university challenge can feed into internship opportunity. The evidence does not establish:

- the number of internships created; • the percentage of participants converted; • whether interns later entered CLT or permanent roles.

ENTRY PATHWAYS

Four Entry Routes and Their Evidence Boundaries

FIGURE 1.1

documented entry mechanisms

The pathway has several doors, not one merged cohort

Route	What the source documents	Evidence boundary
Company-Led Training	Employment-based training with structured learning, mentoring and practical projects.	Do not merge CLT employees with hackathon participants, interns or direct graduate hires. [1] [2] [9]
Direct graduate hiring	Current AI Engineer and Technology Analyst roles describe production and client-delivery work.	Role postings describe current demand; they do not establish CLT cohort outcomes. [3] [4] [7]
Internships	A documented hackathon-winning team later interned and built AI solutions.	One documented pathway; no general participant-to-intern or permanent-hire rate. [6]
University hackathons	Student access to business problems, training, mentoring and solution development.	Participation and submissions are not employment metrics. [5] [10]

Source: AIGW synthesis of case evidence [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[5\]](#) [\[6\]](#) [\[7\]](#) [\[9\]](#) [\[10\]](#)

Note: These are adjacent but distinct mechanisms; their populations and outcomes should not be combined.

PROGRAMME EVIDENCE

Hiring, Project Participation and Reported Leadership

8. The Core Metric: Close to 50 Hires — The strongest workforce signal is not training participation. It is actual hiring. By January 2026, IMDA reported that SimplifyNext had hired close to 50 trainees through the CLT programme.[2] This supports the "Hire" classification because the individuals were not simply candidates or trainees promised future work. Under CLT, trainees are employees. What the number tells us It establishes:

- the pathway moved beyond pilot scale; • the company had absorbed dozens of people into paid employment; • the talent strategy was linked to real workforce demand.

What it does not tell us It does not tell us:

- exact cohort size; • fresh-graduate versus mid-career split; • gender or demographic profile; • completion rate; • retention after training; • salary progression;
- role distribution; • promotion outcomes.

The planned 30 SimplifyNext also said it planned to onboard another 30 trainees, including participants from its Agentic AI Hackathon.[2] That is useful evidence of intended continuation. It is not an outcome. The correct reporting distinction is:

Actual: close to 50 hired. Planned: 30 additional trainees. This separation should remain visible in the final report.

9. Project Participation: Learning Under Production Constraints — SimplifyNext reported more than 35 AI-powered client projects, with CLT trainees involved in nearly half.[2] This metric is unusually valuable. It links workforce development to business delivery. Why project participation matters Many AI learning programmes are evaluated through:

- attendance; • assessment scores; • certificates.

Those metrics can indicate knowledge acquisition. They do not establish whether a person can work inside a real project. Project participation adds evidence that trainees encountered at least some of the conditions of professional AI delivery. But project participation is not the same as project ownership The source says trainees were involved under the guidance of in-house data scientists and AI architects.[2] This suggests supervised delivery. The public evidence does not specify:

- whether trainees owned workstreams; • whether they interacted directly with clients; • which tasks they performed; • whether participation was billable; • whether every trainee had project exposure; • how project quality was assessed.

PROGRAMME EVIDENCE

AIGW measurement rule The progression should ideally be measured as separate stages:

observe → contribute → own bounded task → own workstream → lead project → mentor others
Public SimplifyNext evidence directly supports movement beyond observation. It partially supports project leadership. It does not document the full progression ladder.

10. More Than 90% “Leading Projects”: Strong Signal, Ambiguous Definition — The most striking workforce outcome is the statement that more than 90% of CLT trainees are now leading AI and automation projects within the company.[2] This deserves both attention and caution. Why it is strong A programme where most trainees move into some form of project-leading responsibility suggests:

- capability is being used; • work is not confined to classroom exercises; • the organization is trusting the cohort with meaningful responsibility.

Why the wording is ambiguous

"Leading projects" could mean different things:

- project manager; • technical lead; • workstream owner; • solution lead; • primary implementer; • lead contributor under senior oversight.

The public source does not define the term. Therefore AIGW should not convert the statement into:

90% were promoted to project manager. or:

90% independently managed client projects.
Better formulation SimplifyNext's CEO reported that more than 90% of CLT trainees had progressed into roles in which they were leading AI and automation projects, indicating movement beyond training and basic participation, although the precise level of authority is not publicly defined. This preserves the outcome without overstating hierarchy.

PROGRAMME EVIDENCE

Reported Scale: Hiring, Projects and Responsibility

FIGURE 1.2

distinct measures; not a common denominator

Company-reported scale and the limits of each signal

Reported signal	Value / statement	What it does and does not establish
CLT trainees hired	Close to 50 hired	Actual hiring reported by IMDA; not a training-only or job-placement count. ^[2]
Additional trainees	30 more planned	Planned future hiring, not completed hires. ^[2]
AI-powered client projects	35+ projects; trainees involved in nearly half	Project participation is not the same as project ownership or independent authority. ^[2]
Project-leading responsibilities	>90% of CLT trainees reported as leading projects	The wording is ambiguous; it does not establish people-management authority or job placement. ^[2]
Hackathon activity	600+ participants; 150+ solutions	Company-reported participation and submissions; not employment conversion. ^[5]

Source: AIGW synthesis of case evidence [2] [5]

Note: These figures use different populations, units and evidence types. They are not additive, directly comparable or a longitudinal outcome series.

CAPABILITY AND AUTHORITY

The Supports That Make Responsibility Safe

A first rung combines technical learning with production support, judgment and increasing responsibility.

CAPABILITY AND AUTHORITY

Capabilities, Mentorship and Decision Rights

11. The Capability Stack: What the New First Rung Is Actually Teaching — The case is valuable because the target capability is broader than "AI literacy." Current role descriptions show a multi-layer stack. Technical capability For AI engineering:

- Python; • machine learning; • LLMs; • embeddings; • RAG; • agentic workflows;
- model evaluation; • cloud deployment; • APIs.[3]

Data capability

- data collection; • cleaning; • transformation; • exploratory analysis; • documentation of assumptions and limitations.[3]

Solution capability

- model selection; • architecture; • integration; • reusable components; • deployment.[3]

Business analysis Technology Analysts are expected to:

- understand business problems; • gather requirements; • identify use cases; • define expected outcomes.[4]

Validation Graduate roles include:

- model validation; • scenario testing; • user-acceptance testing; • rollout support.[3][4]

Human capability The postings emphasize:

- communication; • collaboration; • explaining technical decisions; • working with domain experts; • client interaction.[3][4]

AIGW interpretation The first rung is being designed around AI orchestration plus delivery discipline. The worker is not valuable simply because they can prompt an LLM. The emerging role requires the ability to move between:

problem → data → model → system → user → deployment → outcome. That is closer to a professional practice than a tool skill.

12. Mentorship as Production Infrastructure — Mentorship is often described as an employee benefit. In an early-career AI pathway, it is better understood as production infrastructure. IMDA says CLT companies must commit practical projects and experienced mentors, and SimplifyNext says its trainees worked under in-house data scientists and AI architects.[1][2] That support layer performs several functions. Risk containment A junior worker can contribute to meaningful work without being given uncontrolled authority. Experienced practitioners can:

- review architecture; • validate assumptions; • inspect outputs; • catch errors; • decide when escalation is needed.

CAPABILITY AND AUTHORITY

01

Mentorship as Production Infrastructure

Knowledge transfer AI delivery contains large amounts of tacit knowledge:

- how to scope a problem; • when not to use AI; • how to interpret weak data; • how to communicate uncertainty; • how to manage clients; • how to move from prototype to production.

These capabilities are difficult to learn from a course alone. Calibration A developing worker needs repeated feedback on:

- what good looks like; • which errors matter; • how much independence is appropriate.

AIGW concept: guided autonomy The strongest first rung is neither:

low-responsibility observation nor:

unsupported ownership. It is guided autonomy. The worker has real responsibility, but the organization deliberately shapes:

- scope; • review; • escalation; • feedback.

The public SimplifyNext evidence strongly supports mentorship and guided project exposure. It does not publish the review cadence or authority matrix.

13. Human Decision Rights: Responsibility Grows Before Authority Is Fully Visible — Public IMDA materials report that trainees work under the guidance of data scientists and AI architects, while public sources do not specify their precise decision rights.[2] What is evidenced Trainees:

- participate in real AI projects; • progress toward project-leading responsibility; • work with experienced technical mentors.[2]

Current graduate roles also participate in:

- solution design; • testing; • deployment; • client discussions.[3][4]

02

Decision Rights and Scope

What is not evidenced The sources do not define whether a trainee or graduate can independently: • approve production architecture; • deploy a system to a client environment; • sign off model risk; • commit scope or budget; • approve security exceptions; • determine go-live; • override senior technical review. Why this matters A role can be high-responsibility without holding final authority. This distinction is particularly important when discussing early-career work. The goal should not be to give inexperienced workers unbounded authority in the name of accelerated learning. The goal should be to design meaningful responsibility inside explicit governance boundaries. A future high-quality disclosure would specify: trainee can do X independently; Y requires senior review; Z remains architect/client authority. SimplifyNext's public material does not yet provide that level of detail.

CAPABILITY STACK

The Capability Stack for Production AI Work

FIGURE 2.1

qualitative capability areas

Capabilities described across the first rung

Capability area	Work described in the source	Boundary
Technical	Model development, GenAI, RAG, agentic workflows, architecture, deployment and testing.	Current role descriptions do not establish that every trainee performs every task. ^[3]
Data	Data preparation, analysis and understanding how evidence behaves in a workflow.	Training participation alone does not demonstrate proficiency. ^{[2] [3]}
Solution	Translate client problems into solution design, implementation, UAT and rollout.	Role-design evidence, not a measured cohort outcome. ^[4]
Business analysis	Understand requirements, client context and operational problems.	Do not infer independent decision rights from client exposure. ^[4]
Validation	Test, evaluate and challenge system outputs in context.	The public evidence does not provide a common competency assessment. ^{[3] [4]}
Human capability	Communication, collaboration, judgment and client engagement.	Capabilities listed in roles are not proof of progression or worker outcomes. ^{[2] [3] [4]}

Source: AIGW synthesis of case evidence ^{[2] [3] [4]}

Note: This table synthesizes capabilities in company and programme sources; it is not a verified curriculum map for all trainees.

BUSINESS CASE AND CONTEXT

Business Case and Singapore Context

14. The Business Case: Talent Development as Delivery Capacity — The SimplifyNext case is especially interesting because workforce development appears linked to business expansion. CEO Mayank Gupta said CLT-trained teams helped the company:

- respond more quickly to client needs; • shorten delivery timelines; • expand regionally; • maintain quality.[2]

These are company-attributed qualitative claims. No independent evaluation or numeric decomposition is published. Still, the logic matters. Conventional talent framing Training is treated as a cost:

employee learns → company bears expense.
Demand-backed framing Training can create delivery capacity:

company hires → employee learns → employee contributes to client work → capability expands. This creates a reinforcing loop. client demand → hiring demand → training → project capacity → more delivery capability → further growth
Boundary The public evidence does not establish that CLT caused SimplifyNext's regional growth. The company had multiple growth drivers. The strongest safe formulation is:

SimplifyNext says CLT-trained teams contributed to delivery agility and regional expansion by

strengthening its AI and automation talent pipeline.

15. Current Demand: The Pathway Has a Labor-Market Destination — A training pathway is stronger when its target roles can be observed in actual hiring demand. As of October 2026, SimplifyNext's live careers board listed multiple early-career roles in Singapore, including:

- AI Engineer (Graduate); • Full Stack Developer (Graduate); • Technology Analyst (Graduate); • User Experience Designer (Graduate).[7]

IMDA's CLT job-role listing separately included SimplifyNext's Technology Consulting Analyst.[9] This shows that the broader entry architecture continues to have current labor demand. It does not establish that every one of these roles is part of the same CLT cohort. Why current postings are useful evidence They reveal what the firm currently expects from early-career workers. For the AI Engineer (Graduate), the expectation is production-facing AI engineering.[3] For the Technology Analyst (Graduate), it is end-to-end technology consulting and implementation.[4] The first rung therefore leads toward identifiable roles rather than an undefined promise of "AI opportunity." AIGW principle A credible reskilling pathway should be able to answer:

What actual job exists at the other end?
SimplifyNext can answer that more clearly than many generic AI-skilling programmes.

BUSINESS CASE AND CONTEXT

16. The Singapore Context: Why This Model Exists Now — SimplifyNext's pathway sits inside a labor market where AI demand is rising. IMDA's Singapore Digital Economy Report 2025 found that Singapore's tech workforce grew to about 214,000 workers in 2024, up 2.7% year on year, with growth led by AI & Data and Cybersecurity roles.[11] IMDA also reported that:

- resident tech workers had a median monthly wage of S\$7,950 in 2024;
- overall resident median monthly wage was S\$4,860;
- job postings requiring AI skills increased from 2019 to 2024 across sectors including finance, manufacturing and professional services.[11]

These are Singapore-wide labor-market indicators. They are not SimplifyNext outcomes. Their relevance is that the programme is training people into an area with observable demand rather than creating skills in a vacuum. The wider TeSA infrastructure IMDA reported that more than 21,000 locals had been placed in tech jobs through TechSkills Accelerator programmes by the 2024/2025 reporting period.[12] Again, this is not a SimplifyNext conversion metric. It situates the case inside a larger national strategy that combines:

- employer demand;
- job placement;
- skills frameworks;
- company-led training.

Institutional significance The employer does not have to solve every coordination problem alone. Government infrastructure helps connect:

labor demand + skill standards + hiring + training support. That may be one reason the model is easier to scale in Singapore than in systems where training policy and employer demand are weakly connected.

17. External Benchmark: Entry-Level Work Has Four Pressure Points — The World Economic Forum's 2026 report on entry-level work identifies four areas where AI is putting pressure on early-career pathways:

1. job access;
2. job design;
3. talent pipelines;
4. education-system alignment.[13]

SimplifyNext is useful because the case touches all four. Job access CLT converts a training pathway into paid employment. Hackathons and internships provide additional access points. Job design Graduate roles involve AI-enabled, end-to-end delivery rather than only routine junior tasks. Talent pipelines The company links:

- university engagement;
- internships;
- CLT;
- graduate hiring;
- structured learning;
- project leadership.

BUSINESS CASE AND CONTEXT

Education-system alignment University students are exposed to applied agentic-AI challenges, mentorship and real business problems before employment.[5][10] Evidence boundary The WEF report is an external framework. It does not validate SimplifyNext's outcomes. It helps identify why the case is analytically important.

18. PwC and SimplifyNext: Two Sides of the First-Rung Problem — The SimplifyNext case becomes more useful when paired with PwC. PwC: the old first rung is being compressed AI reduces the volume of:

- research; • data preparation; • documentation; • repetitive audit work.

The organization must deliberately rebuild apprenticeship because foundational tasks carried learning value. SimplifyNext: a new first rung is being built around AI-enabled work The entrant begins closer to:

- real client problems; • AI development; • solution delivery; • deployment; • project responsibility.

The learning architecture is designed around work that already assumes AI is present. The contrast PwC asks:

How do we preserve capability formation when old junior tasks disappear? SimplifyNext asks:

How do we create capability formation when the new job starts with AI from day one? These are complementary problems. AIGW interpretation The first rung of the AI economy may be rebuilt through two strategies:

Strategy A — Apprenticeship substitution Replace the learning previously embedded in routine tasks. Strategy B — AI-native apprenticeship Design entry roles around real AI-enabled work with structured support from the beginning. SimplifyNext is an example of the second strategy.

SINGAPORE CONTEXT

Singapore’s Digital-Economy Context

FIGURE 3.1 external benchmark; not SimplifyNext outcomes

National context for early-career AI work

Indicator	Reported measure	Source boundary
Tech workforce	Approximately 214,000 tech workers in 2024	National workforce context; not company employment. ^[11]
Annual growth	2.7% year-on-year in 2024	National tech workforce growth; not an AI-specific company effect. ^[11]
Resident median monthly wage	S\$7,950 for tech workers; S\$4,860 overall	National wage comparison; not trainee compensation. ^[11]
TeSA placements	More than 21,000 locals placed in tech jobs through TeSA programmes	Programme-system scale; not attributable to SimplifyNext. ^[12]

Source: Infocomm Media Development Authority; national context [11] [12]

Note: The Singapore figures establish labour-market and programme context only; they do not validate company-specific outcomes.

FIRST-RUNG DESIGN

PwC and SimplifyNext: The First-Rung Problem

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AIGW FRAMEWORK

From Case Evidence to Workforce Architecture

The AIGW frameworks make access, work, capability, ownership and progression visible as separate dimensions.

AIGW FRAMEWORK

AIGW First-Rung Architecture, Risks and Measurement

19. AIGW First-Rung Architecture — The case suggests a six-stage architecture for designing early-career work. Stage 1 — Access Create a credible way in. Possible mechanisms:

- graduate role; • CLT; • career-conversion route; • internship; • applied challenge.

Question: Can a person without years of experience enter? Stage 2 — Employment Connect learning to a real job. Question: Is there actual paid demand, or only training supply? Stage 3 — Capability Provide structured learning tied to the role. Question: What must the worker be able to do, not merely know? Stage 4 — Production Put the worker

into real work with bounded responsibility.

Question: Can they contribute to outcomes that matter? Stage 5 — Ownership Increase responsibility as capability develops. Question: Does the worker move from participation toward workstream or project ownership? Stage 6 — Progression Create the next rung. Question: Where can the worker go after the entry programme ends? The missing evidence at SimplifyNext The public evidence is strongest at Stages 1–5. Stage 6 is less visible. The careers site describes career growth, structured learning and regional opportunities, but the CLT-specific long-term progression data are not public.[7] That gap should remain explicit.

AIGW FRAMEWORK

AIGW First-Rung Architecture

FIGURE 4.1

AIGW analytical framework

Six stages for examining an employment-first pathway

Stage	Question for the pathway	Evidence boundary
Access	Who can enter, through which routes, and with what selection criteria?	Hackathons, internships, CLT and graduate roles have distinct populations. [1] [5] [6] [10]
Employment	When does paid employment begin, and under what terms?	CLT employment evidence does not establish the status of every adjacent pathway. [1] [2] [9]
Capability	What skills are taught, practiced and assessed?	Participation and training hours do not alone prove proficiency. [2] [3] [4]
Production	When does the learner contribute to real client or operational work?	Participation does not establish project ownership. [2] [10]
Ownership	What decisions and responsibilities can the worker actually hold?	“Leading projects” is reported, but scope and authority are not fully defined. [2]
Progression	What happens to pay, role, retention and career mobility over time?	Long-term worker outcomes are not yet publicly evidenced. [2] [3] [4]

Source: AIGW First-Rung Architecture, synthesized from cited programme and role evidence [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[5\]](#) [\[6\]](#) [\[9\]](#) [\[10\]](#)

Note: The architecture is an AIGW analytic framework. It is not a claim that every participant has completed every stage.

RISKS AND MEASUREMENT

Risks and Measurement

20. What Could Go Wrong? — A high-quality first-rung model needs to be evaluated for failure modes, not only success stories. Risk 1 — Project exposure becomes disguised cheap labor Real project work is valuable only if the learner receives:

- supervision; • feedback; • appropriate scope; • skill development; • progression.

Without those protections, "learning by doing" can become a way to allocate difficult work to junior employees without adequate development. The public SimplifyNext evidence supports mentorship and structured training, which mitigates this risk. It does not provide worker-level evidence about workload, hours, stress or perceived learning quality. Risk 2 — Early responsibility outruns capability Putting fresh graduates into real AI delivery can accelerate learning. It can also create risk if employees are asked to make consequential technical decisions before they are ready. This is why architecture review, testing, escalation and mentoring matter. Public sources do not provide a project authority matrix. Risk 3 — Training becomes too employer-specific A worker may learn:

- one internal process; • one platform; • one firm's delivery style.

If skills are not portable, the worker may become employable only inside the company that trained

them. SimplifyNext's current roles include widely used technologies and broader consulting/engineering capabilities, which suggests some portability.[3][4] But long-term external mobility is not measured. Risk 4 — Only the strongest candidates benefit Hackathons, selective hiring and client-delivery environments may favor candidates who already have:

- technical confidence; • prior project experience; • strong communication; • university access.

The public evidence does not show who is screened out. A scalable public-policy model should measure access as carefully as success. Risk 5 — Project leadership becomes title inflation The >90% leadership figure is impressive. If "leading" is defined loosely, it could overstate responsibility. Future reporting should specify:

- workstream lead; • technical lead; • client lead; • project manager; • independent owner.

Risk 6 — The employer's demand cycle changes Demand-backed training works because there is real work. If client demand slows, the company may have fewer projects available for trainees. This is a structural difference from a university, which can continue teaching even when employer demand falls. A durable apprenticeship system therefore needs either:

RISKS AND MEASUREMENT

- a diversified project portfolio; • internal project work; • cross-company placements; • public-sector or ecosystem projects.

21. A Better Measurement System for Early-Career AI Pathways — The SimplifyNext case shows why traditional training metrics are insufficient. AIGW proposes six measurement layers. Layer 1 — Access Measure:

- applicants; • applicants meeting baseline criteria; • interviews; • offers; • acceptance; • demographic and educational background.

Layer 2 — Employment Measure:

- actual hires; • employment status; • salary; • contract type; • role family.

Layer 3 — Learning Measure:

- training started; • training completed; • certifications; • assessed capability; • time spent in structured learning.

Layer 4 — Production exposure Measure:

- real projects participated in; • client-facing exposure; • production deployments; • task complexity; • mentor ratio.

Layer 5 — Ownership Measure:

- bounded tasks owned; • workstreams led; • projects led; • decision rights; • quality outcomes.

Layer 6 — Progression Measure:

- retention after 12/24 months; • promotion; • pay progression; • movement into advanced roles; • external mobility; • mentoring of later cohorts.

Where SimplifyNext is strongest Public evidence is relatively strong on:

- actual hires; • project exposure; • reported project-leading responsibility.

It is less developed on:

- completion; • quality; • retention; • progression; • worker outcomes.

This measurement architecture should be used when evaluating future "AI apprenticeship" models.

MEASUREMENT SYSTEM

AIGW Measurement System for Early-Career AI Pathways

FIGURE 4.2 proposed measurement framework
Measure conversion and worker outcomes across six layers

Layer	What to track	What it clarifies
Access	Applicants, selection, eligibility and who is excluded.	Who can reach the first rung. [1] [5] [10]
Employment	Actual hires, contract timing and employment conditions.	Whether learning is joined to paid work. [1] [2] [9]
Learning	Training offered, participation, assessment and demonstrated proficiency.	Whether capability forms, beyond attendance. [2] [3] [4]
Production exposure	Project assignment, task contribution, review and client exposure.	What work learners actually perform. [2] [10]
Ownership	Decision scope, supervision and responsibility for outputs.	Whether project leadership claims represent authority. [2] [3] [4]
Progression	Role change, pay, retention, promotion and portability.	Whether transition quality persists over time. [2] [3] [4] [13]

Source: AIGW proposed measurement framework [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[9\]](#) [\[10\]](#) [\[13\]](#)

Note: This is an AIGW proposal. Public evidence remains incomplete on several worker-level outcomes; missing values should stay missing rather than be inferred.

INSTITUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS

From Bootcamp to Stakeholder Action

22. What Makes the Model Different from a Bootcamp? — The distinction is important because both can involve intensive skills development. Bootcamp logic Typically:

training → portfolio → job search The learner carries much of the employment risk. SimplifyNext / CLT logic The institutional design is closer to:

job → training → mentored work → increasing responsibility The employer carries more of the capability-formation risk. Why that changes incentives When the employer hires first, it has stronger incentives to make training relevant because:

- the worker is already on payroll; • project quality matters; • the company needs the worker to become productive; • poor training becomes a business cost.

The trainee also receives:

- income; • work history; • references; • real project exposure.

AIGW concept: employment-first learning This is a useful category distinct from:

- education-first training; • unpaid internships; • generic reskilling; • self-directed certification.

It may be particularly valuable in AI because employers often distrust skills that have never been tested in production.

23. Why Real Client Work Is a Strong Capability Signal — AI capability is difficult to assess through credentials alone. A certificate can show exposure. It cannot always show whether someone can:

- translate an ambiguous business problem; • work with messy data; • choose an appropriate architecture; • manage trade-offs; • validate output; • communicate with stakeholders;
- deploy and maintain a solution.

Real client work can generate stronger signals. Signal to the employer The organization observes the worker under real constraints. Signal to the worker The worker learns which skills matter in practice. Signal to the labor market Project experience can become a more credible form of evidence than course completion alone. But evidence quality matters A worker who "participated in a project" may have:

- observed; • completed a narrow task; • owned a workstream; • led delivery.

Future workforce reporting should disclose the level of responsibility. That is why SimplifyNext's >90% project-leading claim is important but still incomplete.

INSTITUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS

24. Decision Takeaways for Employers — 1. Hire against real demand

Do not build an early-career AI programme without identifying where participants will work. The destination role should exist before the curriculum is finalized.

2. Make employment part of the learning model

Where possible, reduce the gap between:

learning AI and:

being employed to use AI. That improves both motivation and signal quality.

3. Use real work early

Simulation is useful. Production constraints teach different capabilities. Give new entrants bounded parts of real problems.

4. Preserve a senior support layer

Accelerated exposure does not remove the need for:

- review; • mentorship; • architecture guidance; • escalation.

Early responsibility should be matched by experienced oversight.

5. Define progression explicitly

A programme should answer:

What is the role after trainee? and:

What is the role after that? Without progression, the first rung becomes a holding zone.

6. Separate project participation from project leadership

Track increasing responsibility in stages. Do not use one broad "project experience" metric.

7. Measure worker outcomes, not only employer outcomes

Ask:

- Was pay maintained? • Did the worker progress? • Did skills become portable? • Did the worker stay?

A talent pipeline can help the company while producing weak careers. Both outcomes need measurement.

8. Create multiple entry doors

Direct graduate hiring, apprenticeships, internships and applied challenges can reveal different forms of talent. Avoid a single gate that systematically excludes capable people.

INSTITUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS

9. Align skills with production architecture

Teach the technologies, practices and human capabilities that the role actually uses.

10. Treat mentorship as capacity, not goodwill

Mentoring time must be planned into project economics. If seniors have no time to teach, the apprenticeship will collapse under delivery pressure.

25. Decision Takeaways for Policymakers — Design around jobs, not courses A government can subsidize training without creating demand. CLT's stronger institutional feature is the link to actual employment. Require employer commitment Useful conditions include:

- employment; • salary; • mentors; • practical work;
- career progression; • defined job demand.

Track conversion quality Public reporting should distinguish:

- planned places; • actual hires; • completions; • retention; • promotion.

Support smaller employers Many smaller firms may have real AI demand but insufficient capacity to design structured training. Shared curricula, mentor networks and common skill frameworks can reduce fixed costs. Preserve portability Public

skill frameworks can reduce over-dependence on company-specific credentials. Measure inclusion Policy should ask which groups enter:

- graduates; • mid-career workers; • mature workers; • non-traditional candidates.

A pathway can be effective and still be narrow.

26. Decision Takeaways for Universities — The SimplifyNext hackathon pathway offers a useful signal. Universities can help students move closer to employment by creating experiences that combine:

- real problems; • teams; • deadlines; • external mentors; • implementation; • presentation;
- iteration.

But the goal should not be to turn every course into a competition. Universities still need to provide:

- deep fundamentals; • conceptual understanding;
- room for failure without employment consequences.

The bridge model A strong university-employer bridge can look like:

course → applied challenge → internship → employment / apprenticeship Each stage should serve a different purpose.

EVIDENCE AND REPLICABILITY

A Promising Design, With Outcomes Still to Prove

The case supports a promising institutional design while leaving important questions about durability and transfer unanswered.

EVIDENCE AND REPLICABILITY

Evidence, Quality and Replicability

27. What the Evidence Establishes — The reviewed evidence establishes that:

- SimplifyNext has used IMDA's Company-Led Training programme to hire fresh and mid-career professionals into AI and automation roles.
- CLT is an employment-based programme in which successful applicants sign an employment contract before training begins and receive salary while learning.
- IMDA requires participating employers to provide structured training, practical projects, mentors and career progression.
- By January 2026, SimplifyNext had hired close to 50 CLT trainees.
- SimplifyNext planned to onboard another 30 trainees, but those were future places at the reporting point.
- SimplifyNext had delivered more than 35 AI-powered client projects.

- CLT trainees had been involved in nearly half of those projects under the guidance of data scientists and AI architects.
- SimplifyNext's CEO reported that more than 90% of CLT trainees were leading AI and automation projects within the company.
- Current SimplifyNext graduate roles involve real AI development, data preparation, solution design, testing, deployment and client collaboration.
- Current Technology Analyst graduate work includes requirements, implementation, user-acceptance testing and post-implementation support.
- SimplifyNext continues to advertise early-career and internship roles.
- Its Agentic AI Hackathon uses real-world challenges, structured training and industry mentorship.

- SimplifyNext publicly reported that winners from an earlier hackathon became interns working on real AI solutions.
- The current company describes a regional workforce of 300+ practitioners, although this should not be treated as the January 2026 programme denominator.
- Singapore's tech labor market has continued to grow, with AI-related skill demand rising.

28. What the Evidence Does Not Establish — The reviewed evidence does not establish:

- the exact number of SimplifyNext CLT hires;
- the exact split between fresh graduates, mid-career and mature professionals;
- the number who applied;
- the selection rate;
- the programme completion rate;
- the programme dropout rate;

- the retention rate after training;
- salary levels or salary progression for CLT trainees;
- promotion rates;
- whether all trainees participated in client projects;
- which tasks each trainee performed on projects;
- the precise definition of "leading" a project;

- that >90% of trainees became project managers;
- that trainees independently controlled architecture, budget or client decisions;
- that trainee involvement caused shorter delivery timelines;
- that CLT caused SimplifyNext's regional expansion;
- the number of hackathon winners who became interns;
- a general hackathon-to-internship conversion rate;

EVIDENCE AND REPLICABILITY

- that hackathon interns later became permanent employees;
- that current graduate roles are all funded through CLT;
- that the pathway produces better long-term earnings than alternative routes;
- that the model is equally replicable in large enterprises or non-consulting sectors;
- independent validation of project quality attributable to trainees.

29. Research Gaps to Watch — 1. What is the exact number of CLT hires by cohort? 2. How many are fresh graduates versus mid-career professionals? 3. What are the source occupations of mid-career entrants? 4. What is the application-to-hire rate? 5. What is the demographic profile of the cohorts? 6. How long does each training pathway last?

7. What proportion of learning is classroom, self-paced, mentoring and project work? 8. What are the specific curricula for AI and automation roles? 9. Which certifications are used? 10. How are trainees assessed before they are placed on live projects? 11. What tasks do trainees initially own? 12. What review is required before deployment?

13. What does "leading a project" mean operationally? 14. How many trainees lead client workstreams? 15. How many have direct client responsibility? 16. What is the mentor-to-trainee ratio? 17. How much senior time is allocated to

mentorship? 18. What is the programme completion rate?

19. What is the 12-month retention rate? 20. What is the 24-month retention rate? 21. What are promotion rates compared with non-CLT hires? 22. How do salaries evolve? 23. Do CLT graduates mentor later cohorts? 24. How many move into AI Engineer, Technology Analyst or other role families?

25. How many leave SimplifyNext and where do they go? 26. Are the skills portable across firms and sectors? 27. How many hackathon participants receive interviews, internships or jobs? 28. Are hackathon pathways equitable across disciplines and socioeconomic backgrounds? 29. What percentage of current early-career hiring comes through CLT? 30. Can independent project-performance data validate the business benefits attributed to CLT-trained teams?

31. How does the model change as agentic AI automates more junior engineering work? 32. Will the first rung remain broad, or will entry roles themselves become more selective and seniorized?

30. The AIGW First-Rung Quality Test — The SimplifyNext case suggests a practical test for any employer claiming to build an AI-era early-career pathway. Test 1 — Demand Is there a real job? Evidence should include:

EVIDENCE AND REPLICABILITY

- actual hiring; • defined roles; • business demand.

A course without a destination fails this test. SimplifyNext passes strongly: actual CLT hiring is directly reported.[2] Test 2 – Work Does the entrant do real work? Evidence should include:

- production or client projects; • real users; • real constraints.

SimplifyNext passes strongly: trainees were involved in client AI projects.[2] Test 3 – Support Can the entrant learn without being abandoned? Evidence should include:

- mentors; • review; • escalation; • structured learning.

SimplifyNext passes at programme-design level, although mentor intensity and review boundaries are not public.[1][2] Test 4 – Ownership Does responsibility increase? Evidence should include:

- task ownership; • workstream ownership; • project leadership.

SimplifyNext provides unusually strong company-reported evidence through the >90% project-

leading claim, but the definition requires clarification.[2] Test 5 – Progression Is there a credible second rung? Evidence should include:

- promotion; • advanced roles; • retention; • pay progression.

SimplifyNext's careers architecture suggests progression exists, but cohort-level CLT outcomes are not publicly disclosed.[7] Test 6 – Portability Would the worker's capability retain value outside the programme? Evidence should include:

- recognized technical skills; • transferable professional capability; • certifications; • external mobility.

Current job descriptions suggest substantial portability, but actual post-programme mobility has not been studied.[3][4] Overall interpretation SimplifyNext is strongest on:

Demand + Work + Support + early Ownership and less evidenced on:

long-term Progression + Portability outcomes. That is already a more meaningful assessment than asking only how many people completed training.

QUALITY TEST

AIGW First-Rung Quality Test

FIGURE 5.1

AIGW diagnostic framework

Six questions for evaluating an early-career pathway

Test	Question	Evidence boundary
Demand	Is hiring tied to real and current work demand?	A planned role is not a completed hire. [2] [3] [4] [7] [9]
Work	Does learning connect to bounded production work?	Project participation is not project ownership. [2] [5] [10]
Support	Are mentoring, review and risk containment explicit?	Mentorship descriptions do not establish equal support for every learner. [1] [2] [10]
Ownership	Does responsibility grow with demonstrated capability?	Reported “leading” requires a clear definition of scope and authority. [2]
Progression	Are pay, role, retention and mobility tracked over time?	Long-term outcome evidence is not yet available. [2] [3] [4]
Portability	Can capabilities transfer beyond one employer’s stack?	Employer-specific capability may not transfer without recognized skills and evidence. [1] [3] [4] [13]

Source: AIGW First-Rung Quality Test [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[5\]](#) [\[9\]](#) [\[10\]](#) [\[13\]](#)

Note: AIGW diagnostic questions synthesized from this case and the cited institutional benchmark; not a validated scoring instrument.

METHOD AND CONCLUSION

Evidence, Conclusion and Sources

31. Replicability: What Other Employers Can Copy — and What They Cannot — The exact SimplifyNext model will not transfer everywhere. A consulting firm has distinctive advantages:

- frequent client projects; • multiple technologies; • varied industries; • a natural mentor hierarchy; • project-based staffing.

A manufacturer, bank or public agency may have fewer suitable projects or stronger controls on junior access. The transferable principles are more important than the exact programme structure. Transferable principle 1 — Start from demand Identify real roles and work before building the curriculum. Transferable principle 2 — Employ people while capability forms Where feasible, avoid placing all risk on the learner. Transferable principle 3 — Decompose real projects into bounded learning opportunities A junior does not need to own the whole project to learn from production work. Transferable principle 4 — Make senior review explicit Mentorship should be designed into workload and economics. Transferable principle 5 — Increase responsibility deliberately Do not leave progression to chance. Transferable principle 6 — Track long-term worker outcomes An apprenticeship succeeds only if it produces a credible career, not merely short-term project capacity. For large enterprises A large employer may need to create an internal project marketplace where trainees rotate through:

- process automation; • AI evaluation; • data work; • internal product development; • business transformation.

For SMEs Smaller firms may need shared infrastructure:

- pooled mentors; • common curricula; • public co-funding; • joint project environments.

For governments The SimplifyNext / CLT case suggests that policy can reduce coordination failure by connecting:

employer demand + employment + skill framework + learning + project experience.

32. Method and Source Quality — This Deep Dive separates six evidence layers. A. Government programme evidence IMDA's official CLT materials are the strongest source for the institutional design of the pathway. They establish:

- eligible worker groups; • employment-contract requirement; • salary; • on-the-job training; • mentor/project expectations; • training duration; • career-progression requirements.[1]

This evidence is authoritative for the programme framework. It does not establish SimplifyNext-specific outcomes. B. Government-hosted company case evidence IMDA's January 2026 SimplifyNext case is the core source for company outcomes.[2] It provides:

METHOD AND CONCLUSION

- close to 50 actual hires; • planned additional intake; • 35+ AI-powered client projects; • trainee involvement in nearly half; • >90% project-leading claim; • mentor structure;

- company-attributed business effects.

This is a government/public-institution source, but the SimplifyNext-specific claims are largely based on company testimony. They should therefore be treated as publicly hosted, company-attributed outcome evidence, not independent evaluation. C. Current role-design evidence SimplifyNext's live graduate job postings provide current demand-side evidence of what early-career work contains. [3][4] They are strong for role architecture. They do not prove what every CLT trainee does. D. Company talent-pipeline evidence SimplifyNext's hackathon, careers pages and current hiring board provide evidence of:

- student engagement; • internships; • graduate roles; • current organizational scale; • mentorship/learning positioning.[5][6][7][8]

These sources are useful for understanding the broader pipeline. They should not be merged statistically with the CLT cohort. E. University corroboration NUS's career-development pages independently confirm the structure of the university hackathon, including:

- target participants; • training sessions; • mentoring; • timeline.[10]

This corroborates the student-development mechanism, not employment outcomes. F.

External labor-market and institutional benchmark IMDA's Singapore Digital Economy reporting and the World Economic Forum's entry-level work framework provide external context.[11][12][13] They are not evidence that SimplifyNext produced Singapore-wide labor-market outcomes.

33. Evidence Discipline — Actual versus planned
Actual: close to 50 hires. Planned: 30 more. Never combine these into:

SimplifyNext hired 80 trainees. unless later evidence confirms the planned cohort was actually hired. Training versus employment In CLT, the trainee is employed. But this does not mean every person who applies or attends an earlier hackathon is employed. Keep:

- hackathon participant; • intern; • CLT employee; • graduate employee;

as distinct statuses. Participation versus leadership Nearly half of client AI projects included trainees. More than 90% of trainees were reported as leading projects. Those are different metrics. Neither should be interpreted without clarifying responsibility level. Role architecture versus outcome quality Current graduate roles show what work is expected. They do not establish:

- performance; • worker satisfaction; • long-term progression. Company testimony versus independent evaluation The core workforce outcome figures come from SimplifyNext statements hosted by IMDA. They are strong attributable evidence. Independent longitudinal evidence remains limited.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

SimplifyNext is a small case compared with global employers such as Salesforce, DBS or PwC. Its value comes from something different. It shows, at unusually high resolution, how an AI-era entry pathway can be deliberately constructed. The pathway begins with a real employment relationship. It combines structured learning with live work. Trainees are placed on AI and automation projects under experienced technical guidance. The company reports that most of the cohort moved into project-leading responsibility. University challenges and internships create earlier bridges into the same ecosystem. Current graduate job descriptions show that the first rung is built around end-to-end AI-enabled delivery rather than a narrow set of low-context junior tasks. The model can be summarized as:

Access → Employment → Capability → Production → Ownership → Progression The public evidence is strongest through Ownership. Progression remains the least visible layer. That distinction matters. A first rung is not successful merely because a young person enters it. It is successful when it produces the second rung. SimplifyNext therefore should not be treated as proof that employer-led AI training automatically creates sustainable careers. It should be treated as evidence for a more specific proposition:

Early-career capability formation becomes stronger when training is attached to real employer demand, real work, experienced supervision and increasing responsibility. That proposition matters because AI is weakening many of the old mechanisms through which inexperienced people entered professional work. Routine execution is becoming cheaper. Observation alone is becoming less valuable. Employers increasingly want workers who can:

- understand problems; • collaborate with AI; • work with data; • build systems; • test outputs; • communicate with clients;
- deliver into production.

The danger is an experience trap:

employers demand production-ready workers while eliminating the jobs through which workers become production-ready. SimplifyNext and Singapore's CLT infrastructure show one way to break that trap. The employer does not wait for the labor market to produce a finished worker. It hires a developing worker and participates in producing the capability it needs. That may be the defining institutional shift required for the next generation of early-career work. The first rung does not need to preserve the old junior task. It needs to preserve the opportunity to become capable.

SOURCES

Notes and References

1. Infocomm Media Development Authority. *Company-Led Training Programme (CLT)*. n.d.. Government / public programme documentation.
Supports: CLT design; fresh, mid-career and mature PMET eligibility; employment contract before programme; salary; on-the-job training; experienced mentors; practical projects; structured career progression; up to 12 months depending on role.
<https://www.imda.gov.sg/how-we-can-help/techskills-accelerator-tesa/company-led-training-programme-clt>
2. Infocomm Media Development Authority. *How Upskilling Talent Powers AI Transformation*. 22 January 2026. Government / public-institution case material based on company testimony.
Supports: close to 50 trainees hired; plan for 30 more; classroom + real-world project model; 35+ AI-powered client projects; trainees involved in nearly half; guidance by data scientists and AI architects; >90% of CLT trainees reported leading AI/automation projects; qualitative business benefits.
Boundary: SimplifyNext outcome claims are attributable to company leadership; they are not an independent longitudinal evaluation.
<https://www.imda.gov.sg/resources/blog/blog-articles/2026/01/how-upskilling-talent-powers-ai-transformation>
3. SimplifyNext. *AI Engineer (Graduate), Singapore*. n.d.. Current company job posting / role-design evidence.
Supports: fresh-graduate role; model development, GenAI/RAG/agent workflows, data preparation, architecture, deployment, testing, client/domain collaboration; hands-on production exposure.
Boundary: role description does not establish that all CLT trainees occupy this role.
<https://job-boards.greenhouse.io/simplifynext/jobs/4996764007>
4. SimplifyNext. *Technology Analyst (Graduate), Singapore*. n.d.. Current company job posting / role-design evidence.
Supports: fresh-graduate eligibility; client problem analysis, requirements, solution design, implementation, UAT, rollout and post-implementation support.
Boundary: current demand-side role description, not cohort outcome evidence.
<https://job-boards.greenhouse.io/simplifynext/jobs/5031317007>
5. SimplifyNext. *Agentic AI Hackathon 2026*. n.d.. Company / university talent-pipeline programme.
Supports: open participation for full-time university students in Singapore; real-world business challenges; training and mentoring; 600+ participants, 150+ solutions and three years of activity as reported by SimplifyNext; internship/career opportunities.
Boundary: participation and submissions are not employment metrics.
<https://hackathon.simplifynext.com/>
6. SimplifyNext. *From Hackathon Winners to SimplifyNext Interns*. July 2026. Company social communication.
Supports: prior hackathon winning team later interning at SimplifyNext and building real AI solutions.
Boundary: does not establish a general participant-to-intern conversion rate or permanent employment outcome.
https://www.linkedin.com/posts/simplifynext_simplifynextagentic-ai-hackathon-2026-activity-7485879981357805569-n-QG
7. SimplifyNext. *Careers / Current Openings*. n.d.. Company careers evidence.
Supports: current 300+ practitioner description; offices in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand; current internship, graduate and professional roles; ongoing early-career hiring.
Boundary: October 2026 snapshot; should not be backdated as the January 2026 CLT programme denominator.
<https://job-boards.greenhouse.io/simplifynext>

SOURCES

Institutional and Benchmark Sources

8. SimplifyNext. *About*. n.d.. Company / institutional context.
Supports: founded in 2018; company mission and services; 150+ organizations served as reported by the company.
<https://www.simplifynext.com/about>
9. Infocomm Media Development Authority. *Job Opportunities under Company-Led Training*. n.d.. Government / current programme listing.
Supports: SimplifyNext listed as a CLT employer with Technology Consulting Analyst job role.
<https://www.imda.gov.sg/how-we-can-help/techskills-accelerator-tesa/company-led-training-programme-clt/full-list-of-job-roles>
10. National University of Singapore, Centre for Future-ready Graduates. *SimplifyNext Agentic AI Hackathon 2026*. n.d.. University / independent programme corroboration.
Supports: university-student eligibility; four training sessions; mentoring and solution-development structure; competition timeline.
<https://nus.edu.sg/cfg/events/details/a5782200ddb15305672ee3426b4f4753>
11. Infocomm Media Development Authority. *Singapore Digital Economy Report 2025*. n.d.. Government labor-market / digital-economy benchmark.
Supports: ~214,000 tech workers in 2024; 2.7% year-on-year growth; AI & Data among leading growth areas; resident tech median monthly wage S\$7,950 versus S\$4,860 overall; rising AI-skill demand across sectors.
Boundary: Singapore context only; not SimplifyNext outcome evidence.
<https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/about/resources/corporate-publications/annual-report/imda-sgde-report-fy2024-2025.pdf>
12. Infocomm Media Development Authority. *Annual Report 2024/2025 / Singapore Digital Economy Report highlights*. n.d.. Government institutional benchmark.
Supports: more than 21,000 locals placed in tech jobs through TeSA programmes; wider national digital-workforce infrastructure.
Boundary: programme-system context; not attributable to SimplifyNext.
<https://www.imda.gov.sg/resources/press-releases-factsheets-and-speeches/factsheets/2025/ar-sgde-2025>
13. World Economic Forum. *Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Entry-Level Work: A Framework for Safeguarding and Reinventing Early Career Pathways*. 22 June 2026.
Institutional benchmark report.
Supports: more than one in three young workers globally in occupations with medium/high AI task-change exposure; framework covering job access, job design, talent pipelines and education-system alignment.
Boundary: analytical benchmark, not validation of SimplifyNext-specific results.
<https://www.weforum.org/publications/artificial-intelligence-and-the-future-of-entry-level-work-a-framework-for-safeguarding-and-reinventing-early-career-pathways/>