

China Development Forum 2026

**China in its 15th Five-Year Plan Period: Advancing
High-Quality Development and Creating New Opportunities
Together**

**Symposium on Digital and Intelligent Transformation of
Manufacturing
(Panel Discussion II)**

The China Development Forum 2026, hosted by the Development Research Centre of the State Council and organized by the China Development Research Foundation, was held at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing on March 22-23, 2026. On the morning of March 23, the Symposium on Digital and Intelligent Transformation of Manufacturing took place. The speakers for Panel Discussion II included SU Bo, Deputy Director of the National Manufacturing Strategy Advisory Committee (NMSAC) and Former Vice Minister of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology; XIANG Wenbo, Rotating Chairman of SANY Group and Chairman of SANY Heavy Industry; Tim Breen, CEO of GlobalFoundries; and Philippe Delorme, President and CEO of KONE Corporation. The session was chaired by YANG Zhengwei, Member of the Leading Party Group of the Development Research Centre of the State Council.

SU Bo noted that the new generation of AI is evolving from general-purpose large models to industry-specific large models, industrial intelligent agents, and embodied intelligence, driving intelligent manufacturing into a new, more advanced stage of development. Over the next decade, China will remain steadfast in prioritizing intelligent manufacturing, with a focus on deeply integrating the new generation of AI into the manufacturing sector. The goal is to build an upgraded version of intelligent manufacturing that combines virtual and physical systems, enables autonomous evolution, and ensures both safety and efficiency.

SU proposed advancing the development of intelligent manufacturing from four aspects.

First, strengthen strategic guidance and improve the mechanisms for nationwide promotion. China should introduce the architecture and development pathways for the new generation of intelligent manufacturing, summarize regular patterns and proven practices, and support the creation of an “upgraded version” of intelligent manufacturing.

Second, advance technological and equipment innovation in intelligent manufacturing. Greater efforts should be made to tackle core and foundational technologies, achieve breakthroughs in essential underlying technologies, support system integration innovation, and accelerate the development of a next-generation intelligent manufacturing technology system.

Third, accelerate the exploration and cultivation of new business models and formats in intelligent manufacturing. Efforts should be made to develop smart factories in a tiered and categorized manner, establish demonstration benchmarks, scale up proven models and solutions, and enable widespread digitalization and networking.

Fourth, enhance international cooperation. It's essential to improve

the ecosystem for intelligent manufacturing development, continuously update and refine national standards in this field, deepen international exchanges and cooperation, actively promote international development, and strengthen the global competitiveness and influence of China's intelligent manufacturing sector.

XIANG Wenbo stated that the world today is undergoing a period of profound change and turbulence. Global governance structures are being transformed, and international order is being reshaped. The Fourth Industrial Revolution is converging with the Third Energy Revolution. Against this backdrop, China is facing fresh development opportunities. On the one hand, with a population of 1.4 billion, it enjoys the advantage of a super-large market. On the other hand, it can precisely seize the “super-technology window” created by the convergence of these two revolutions to develop new quality productive forces.

XIANG noted that China's manufacturing sector must embrace this era of change with digital and intelligent transformation at its core, and achieve three key transitions. The first is the digital and intelligent transformation of manufacturing, such as building “lighthouse factories”. The second is the digital and intelligent transformation of management and operations, adopting big data and other digital technologies to improve organizational efficiency and restructure business processes. The third is the digital and intelligent transformation of products, continuously enhancing product intelligence until ultimately achieving fully unmanned operations.

Tim Breen observed that automation rates in some manufacturing plants have surpassed 99%. Yet even in such highly automated production environments, human roles haven't been completely replaced. Personnel are primarily engaged in monitoring, experimentation, frontier research, and equipment maintenance. This type of highly specialized talent

remains in short supply globally. Artificial intelligence and digital technologies can empower these workers, but the real challenge lies in scaling up deployment and helping people adapt to new ways of working.

Breen noted that as technological transformation enters a new phase, knowledge sharing has become crucial. Companies need to increase investment in factories, tools, and data to enable real-time data access, thereby driving product innovation and improving operational efficiency. At the same time, optimizing the talent base requires investing in diverse types of talent, particularly emerging roles such as robotics engineers. On issues like cybersecurity and AI hallucinations, Breen called for a balance between innovation and regulation, emphasizing the need for appropriate and effective oversight of rapidly evolving processes.

Drawing on corporate practice, **Philippe Delorme** shared three key considerations for digital and intelligent transformation of manufacturing enterprises.

First, operations should be data-driven. This involves building a real-time data platform covering production, materials, warehousing, equipment status, safety, and quality inspection, as well as implementing tools such as digital 5S management. These measures could enhance lean management, ensure transparent and efficient operations, and enable flexible responses to industry changes.

Second, enterprises should increase investment in technology. KONE Corporation's investment in automation and digital technologies has boosted productivity by around 30%, while also enhancing flexibility to meet diverse and changing manufacturing demands.

Third, enterprises should pursue differentiated development through innovation and deepen collaboration with partners.



China Development Press

Contributors: WU Si, ZHAO Rui, ZHUANG Xijie

Editor: CUI Keliang

China Development Research Foundation

Reviewers: CHU Dongxiao, XIA Tian





— Background Information —

The China Development Forum (CDF) is hosted by the Development Research Centre of the State Council and organized by the China Development Research Foundation. Since its inception in 2000, the Forum has been dedicated to the mission of “engaging with the world for common prosperity.” It has served as an important platform for high-level, professional dialogue among China’s senior government officials, global business leaders, representatives from international organizations, as well as scholars from both China and around the world.



中国发展研究基金会
China Development Research
Foundation

中国北京东城区安定门外大街138号
皇城国际中心A座15层

邮编: 100011
电话: 86-10-64255855
传真: 86-10-64255855-8100
网址: www.cdrf.org.cn
电邮: cdrf@cdrf.org.cn

Floor15, Tower a, Imperial International Center, No.138
Andingmen Wai Avenue, Dongcheng District, Beijing, 100011, China

Tel: 86-10-64255855
Fax: 86-10-64255855-8100
Website: www.cdrf.org.cn
E-mail: cdrf@cdrf.org.cn