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ASEAN: UNITED IN DIVERSITY

DURING the time I worked for an NGO (non-governmental organisation) in Cambodia, my Swiss boss remarked that he found it interesting that “culture shock” affected people like me – Asians moving just a few time zones from home to Phnom Penh – more than it affected people coming from all over the world.

Coming from Malaysia, we certainly have grown up with diverse groups of friends and colleagues – but I do see what Pierre’s point was. Even as we identify with the large and important market of Asia Pacific, we do realise that every country is unique, and how absolutely fascinating the process of discovering each other is!

This week, in recognition of Malaysia’s Chairmanship of ASEAN 2015, we dedicate this issue to our ASEAN neighbours of discovering each other is!

Asean: united

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OF MUTUAL TRUST, RESPECT AND FRIENDSHIP

By LIM LAY HSUAN
layhsuan@leaderonomics.com

WHEN we were children, we often heard friends utter this phrase during a misunderstanding. “I don’t want to ‘friend’ you.”

In most instances, after a few days of silent treatment, relationships are restored when one offers an olive branch to the other party, usually by initiating a conversation, and both parties are willing to forgive each other and move on.

“WE DECLARE WAR!”

It was a similar sight witnessed during the Silega Cold War”, one of the business simulations offered by Leaderonomics. In the simulation, we each governed a “country”, where we spoke in different languages, possessed different resources and had different needs.

To survive as a country on a “monthly” basis, we had to maintain a minimum level of resources as set in the simulation’s guidelines. In order to do that, we made alliances with different countries to help us meet those needs.

Because some countries spoke only one language, our alliance extended to several layers of communication.

Unfortunately, by the second “month” of the simulation, we started to witness the ugly side of countries declaring wars against each other for survival, even though we were from the same region. It came to a point where country “X” didn’t want to speak to country “Y” in the following round because “Y” had refused to assist “X” in an earlier war.

THE TURNING POINT

Thanks to a cue by the facilitator who remind us what our real end goal was, we finally realised that it was pointless to keep declaring war against each other in every round.

“IT is important that individually and jointly we should create a deep awareness that we cannot survive for long as independent but isolated peoples unless we also think and act together and unless we prove by deeds that we belong to a family of South-East Asian nations bound together by ties of friendship and goodwill and imbued with our own ideals and aspirations and determined to shape our own destiny.” – Tun Abdul Razak Hussein

“And those countries who are interested, genuinely interested, in the stability of South-East Asia, the prosperity of South-East Asia, and better economic and social conditions, will welcome small countries getting together to pool their collective resources and their collective wisdom to contribute to the peace of the world.” – S. Rajaratnam

“Particularly what millions of men and women in our part of the world want is to erase the old and obsolete concept of domination and subjection of the past and replace it with the new spirit of give and take, of equality and partnership.” – Thanat Khoman

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WHEN a company grows, manpower challenges move to the forefront as a glaring “growing pain” which inevitably falls on the shoulders of human resources (HR) leaders. Purchasing additional equipment and implementing new processes can help a company to grow in terms of its production capacity – however, in order for a company to gain significant competitive advantage, the additional focus must be on leveraging the potential of its human resources.

Yet, tapping on human potential is a frustrating exercise because human nature is not as predictable in performance as systems, software and equipment.

Hence, when an organisation grows, a strategy in products and services alone is not sufficient without an equally important strategy to hire, retain and develop a talent pool.

The manpower challenges we face today arise because of a superficial understanding of what it takes to attract and hire suitable talent. With a superficial understanding of human nature, we will not be able to hire superheroes. So, the first manpower challenge is that of our internal mindset.

**SUPERFICIALITY #1: BRAND YOUR COMPANY AND THEY WILL SHOW UP**

While it is true that brand attracts, it presupposes something more foundational – a culture that works. Without a culture that is aligned with an organisation’s vision, any exercise in branding will appear to be cosmetic in nature and even hypocritical (if it is not backed up by a commitment for integrity and alignment).

In other words, do not brand until you are ready to play in the band. I am not proposing that branding is unimportant – on the contrary, it is critical that a growing organisation has a strategy for external engagement, i.e. how customers and the community perceive the company.

If we rely on branding to address manpower challenges, it presupposes the existence of an enthusiastic workforce who is engaged and committed.

But if you already have that workforce, then why don’t you have manpower challenges, right? So, branding is more of a marketing rather than a manpower strategy hence, it needs an engaged workforce to promote it in the first place.

**SUPERFICIALITY #2: TEAMBUILDING IS THE WAY TO BUILD MORALE**

When I meet clients, the first solution they usually seek for is teambuilding.

“Can you whip up a two-day programme to improve the morale of my staff so that they come back more passionate and productive?”

This kind of thought-solution because the manpower challenges of the company is now outsourced to the teambuilding vendor. While teambuilding can improve motivation, it requires a supportive environment for the practicing of what the teambuilding event aims to teach. Teambuilding does not address manpower challenges at its root cause.

**SUPERFICIALITY #3: PAY THEM MORE TO PERFORM MORE**

What about dangling the carrot? If money speaks, then more money should speak louder to address manpower challenges. Super money should pay for the superheroes, right?

The thing about money is that it produces quick compliance but the love of money creates a calculative culture where the mode of employee engagement becomes more transactional rather than transformational.

This in itself will create a new set of challenges – the challenge of creating a sense of deep-seated sustainability. Money can buy compliance but it cannot create conviction.

**THE TWO-PRONGED STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABILITY**

According to Gallup, there are five factors as to why employees become disengaged and eventually leave the organisation:

- My relationship with my immediate supervisor.
- My job does not fit with my talent and strengths.
- My colleagues are not committed to quality work.
- My salary and compensation are not good enough.
- My purpose is not aligned with the company’s mission.

Interestingly, the top two factors constitute 75% weightage of why people stay (or leave).

That means when it comes to addressing the manpower challenges of today, organisation leaders need only to focus on two key strategies and this approach is simple to understand and yet difficult to implement because it requires leadership accountability and personal engagement.

**MANPOWER SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY #1: DEVELOP GREAT BOSSES**

Since people join companies but leave managers, it makes good sense then to develop good managers to become great managers.

In fact, from my observation – employees are able to put up with system issues or even lower pay if they have a great supportive boss. Somehow, hard-wired within each one of us is a sense that “I have a need to be needed”. A great boss develops an environment whereby:

- There is recognition for a job well done.
- There is regular acceptance of opinion offered.
- There are clear communicated expectations.
- There is the providence of the right equipment and tools to do a good job.
- There is an ongoing development for personal growth.

**MANPOWER SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY #2: DESIGN GREAT JOBS**

The problem with job description is that it is static. As an employee grows, tension arises when there is an increasing gap between the static job description and the discovery of personal strengths. It is no wonder, then the factor of “wrong job fit” is the second most common factor which contributes to the manpower challenges facing organisational leaders.

Gallup reports that an employee who has the opportunity to do what he or she does best every day is six times more engaged and three times as likely to have a higher quality of life in general.

Great jobs are not defined by job descriptions, it is defined by the willingness of the company to provide alignment between individual strengths and organisational key results.

**Here are a few reflective questions to consider so as to ascertain the degree of job-strengths alignment:**

- Do I have a way to identify the unique strengths of each of my team members?
- Do I know who to place in what role for optimum team chemistry and performance?
- Do I focus on strengths or “areas for improvement” when it comes to coaching my employees?
- Do I customise my approach when it comes to employee development and growth?

Fundamentally, the search for superheroes is first of all, an internal effort because without the right political willpower and cultural unity to develop great bosses and great jobs, there is no “super-environment” that will attract the superheroes in the first place.

Meeting the manpower challenges of the future require that present leadership-housekeeping activities begin to put emphasis on managerial development and intentional job design.
T he Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean) was formed in 1967. By 1990, there were six member states with an aggregate population of 317 million. Today, Asean comprises 10 nations (almost 10% of the global population), with multiple languages, dialects and cultures.

SIZE MATTERS

If it were a single country, Asean would already be the seventh largest economy in the world, with a combined gross domestic product of US$2.4 trillion in 2013. Asean is poised to become fifth largest by 2050 (McKinsey).

“Asean has been a model for regional integration,” says Luong Minh, secretary-general of Asean. “It has many fronts and the benefits from these initiatives are significant. Nonetheless, progress has been made on unity building is far from straightforward.”

“The long journey Asean began with the adoption of the Asean Economic Community Blueprint in 2007 has made major strides toward the goal of an Asean Economic Community (AEC) in 2015. The tasks set out in the blueprint are multi-faceted and the process of community building is far from straightforward. Nonetheless, progress has been made on many fronts and the benefits from these advances have been far reaching,” says Le Luong Minh, secretary-general of Asean.

“A recent survey conducted by the Economist Intelligence Unit asked 171 business leaders of large global multinational companies the AEC will be achieved. 88% indicated that Asean integration is important to their strategic planning. 76% of multinationals companies have a strategy oriented around the Asean bloc, as business leaders increasingly manage South-East Asia as one region rather than 10 separate economies. 85% of manufacturers are centralising manufacturing in the region as cross-border trade becomes easier.

IMPlications FOR ASEAN Talent

With over 600 million people, Asean’s potential market is larger than the European Union or North America. Next to the China and India, Asean has the world’s third largest labour force that remains relatively young,” said Stephen Groff, vice president of ADBe (Asian Development Bank).

“The facilitation of the free movement of skilled labour across Asean, the competition for best employees will intensify (Gallup). Traditional business models, as well as organisation leaders, would have to adjust to adapt to the volatility and ambiguity of talent in Asean.

From a Gallup and Human Capital Leadership Institute study of 72 business leaders across six Asean countries, leaders view complexity as an opportunity, saying that it empowers them to innovate, adapt and thrive.

With barriers to trade coming down, companies can be expected to increase their manufacturing investment “to be more responsive to local demand,” rather than finding cheap labour for manufacturing investment “to be more responsive to local demand,” rather than finding cheap labour for manufacturing investment “to be more responsive to local demand,” rather than finding cheap labour for manufacturing investment “to be more responsive to local demand,” rather than finding cheap labour for manufacturing investment “to be more responsive to local demand,” rather than finding cheap labour for manufacturing investment “to be more responsive to local demand,” rather than finding cheap labour for manufacturing investment “to be more responsive to local demand,” rather than finding cheap labour for manufacturing investment “to be more responsive to local demand,” rather than finding cheap labour

Unity in Diversity

ASEAN countries have their unique, rich heritage and culture. Here are some facts from each of these countries that may come in handy for business purposes or to simply gain more insights and knowledge.

BRUNEI

Shaking hands by a light touch and bringing one’s hand back to the chest is a custom in Brunei. Remember not to point with your finger. You should use your thumb from your right hand with the other four fingers are folded beneath it — Brunei Tourism

CAMBODIA

Cambodians are well-mannered and greet with a “Sampae” where both palms are pressed together and placed at the chest while the body takes a slight bow and a greeting of “Chumrep Suor” is conveyed politely. Foreigners can shake hands with Cambodians but a “Chumrep Suor” greeting is more favourable — Ministry of Tourism Cambodia

INDONESIA

The people here follow the “Pancasila” which is the five principles of nationhood that comprises belief in one and only God, a just and civilised humanity, the unity of Indonesia, democracy through unanimous deliberations, and social justice for all — Discover Indonesia

ASEAN SAME, SAME BUT DIFFERENT

LAOS

People in Laos are friendly and frank with their thoughts and opinions. They believe in courtesy and respect while interacting and all who practise these values will receive a warm welcome — Laos Official Tourism website

MYANMAR

The country is rich with natural resources that has potential for direct foreign investment. Under the market-oriented system, Myanmar has attracted participation of foreign investors that has enhanced a long-term, win-win economic cooperation — Embassy of The Republic of The Union of Myanmar

THAILAND

Although the Thai language is the official language in the country, many Thais speak and understand English, especially in the major cities. As Thailand welcomes visitors from all over the globe, English is commonly used for cross-cultural communications — Amazing Thailand

VIETNAM

Foreign investors are attracted to this country, resulting in an influential part of the country’s open government policies that encourages geographical position near global supply chains, political and economic stability, and labour resources. Foreign investment is seen as a part of the country’s development strategy and commitment to improving the country’s business and investment climate — Invest in Vietnam

Development Of Leaders In Asean: 5 Best Practices

Gallup research shows that employee engagement is strongly connected to outcomes essential to a company’s success, including productivity, profitability and customer satisfaction.

Engaging employees is crucial for organisations to win the regional war for talent. A Gallup and Human Capital Leadership Institute study of 72 business leaders from various sectors across six Asean countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam) found five developmental practices instrumental in helping them succeed.

These actions represent a practical, self-aware approach that emerging leaders can adopt:

1. Long-term career goals are important, and leaders who reflect on their developmental status roughly every three years tend to stay on track.
2. Early cross-border experiences help shape individuals themselves with a diverse, tight-knit group of professionals who can provide the contacts and feedback they need.
3. Taking risks and exploring different roles in the beginning of a leader’s career helps or her identify the right job fit and builds a holistic view of doing business.
4. While there is no one right way to build a network, emerging leaders should proactively surround themselves with a diverse, tight-knit group of professionals who can provide the contacts and feedback they need.
5. Instead of pretending to know everything they need to know, emerging leaders should be humble and speak openly about their own shortcomings to earn others’ trust.

Quote

“I was in the Asean Economic zone before it even came up... I said 12 years ago, I was going to build an Asean airline... You can wait for things to happen or you can effect change.”

Tan Sri Tony Fernandes, AirAsia Group chief executive officer
LIKE a refreshing brew, the Starbucks Experience builds upon a masterful combina- tion of ingredients in product, service and delivery to keep customers coming back for more. This renowned coffee company celebrates its distinctiveness through a passion for great coffee and quality customer service. But the real jewel is its employees, or as the company likes to say, its “partners”.

True to its mission of inspiring and nurturing the human spirit, Starbucks has proven its prowess by capturing the “Best of the Best” Employer in Aon Hewitt Best Employers – Malaysia 2015 and the Malaysian Institute of Human Resource Management’s coveted KPMG HR 100 Awards – Gold Award in 2014. In other words, Starbucks is simply a great place to work. The company does not just offer a job, it offers you an opportunity to find your inner compass.

The Starbucks commitment to making meaningful connections for “partners” and customers is cascaded from these four principles:

1. **EMPLOYER BRANDING**

   Starbucks develops success stories in the form of groundbreaking work done to provide opportunities, compensation and benefits to its partners.

   The company makes a difference through the “Starbucks Experience”, which strategically supports the overall Employee Value Proposition of retaining, engaging and motivating partners in exchange for productivity and performance.

   The word “partner” means working together, and having a sense of belonging as a team and family: To this end, the company plays its part through providing extrinsic elements like rewards and benefits, opportunities for career development, and intrinsic elements of management style, work environment and culture. As an employer centred on strengthening its retail and full-time workforce, Starbucks has long adhered to its Talent Attraction Channel, which creates a great mix of individuals within the ranks through a carefully formulated campaign of “Plan-Attract-Select-Hire”.

2. **PARTNER DEVELOPMENT**

   An employment at Starbucks is the beginning of something bigger and better. Every partner is briefed on their coffee journey, regardless if they are starting as baristas or management trainees.

   The company’s structured career path helps to empower partners to shape their future and manage personal goals.

   In addition, internal promotion opportunities reinforce the concept of treating one another as family. Loyalty is apparent, 100% operation leaders are internally promoted, while half of all department heads have risen from positions behind the counter! Starbucks believes in growing people from within its ranks. Therefore, numerous career enhancement programmes are in place to provide management competencies and build leadership capabilities.

   By showing an invested interest in the careers of their partners, Starbucks exerts a Pygmalion effect by asserting that the greater the expectations placed on a person, the better they will do.

   The focus on career advancement in Starbucks is closely matched by an excellent reward system, which helps to give partners a sense of pride and motivation to achieve more.

3. **COFFEE AND CULTURE**

   Every person who works at Starbucks breathes the coffee culture.

   Coffee tasting sessions are conducted to help partners gain valuable knowledge to form a connection with the brew and therefore enhancing their coffee expertise.

   Partners who are passionate about coffee can pursue their interests by joining the Coffee Master Programme and the Latte Art Programme, two certifiable modules that are available to help individuals continue on their journey to become coffee experts and espresso artists.

   Trips to coffee-growing regions such as Thailand and Sumatra are also organised to enable partners to get a glimpse of where their coffee comes from. The visits to coffee plantations are meant to help partners appreciate the hard work that goes into each pound of coffee.

   Through structured learning and development, Starbucks creates a wholesome experience for its brand ambassadors too.

4. **HUMANITY AND LOVE**

   Humans are hardwired for empathy and emotion. At Starbucks, there is a strong belief to give back to the community.

   The Starbucks Malaysia CUPFund (CUP for Caring Unites Partners) was initiated more than eight years ago. Since then, it has been a major contribution to partners who are experiencing hardships.

   This programme is funded solely by partners’ monthly contributions and fundraising initiatives. More importantly, it is a way for Starbucks to take care of its own.

   Outside the company, community involvement and environmental collaborations set the foundation for the organisation’s hopes to create positive change whenever possible.

   **IN CONCLUSION**

   At Starbucks, the emphasis goes beyond knowing the products and services, and how to sell them.

   As a socially responsible organisation and an employer of choice, Starbucks continues to spearhead improvements in partnerships as well as making positive changes to the community.

   **Ready to board your coffee journey with Starbucks Malaysia? Check out www.starbucks.com.my for more information.**

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**Sydney Quays**
Managing director

“From the very beginning, Starbucks sets out to be a different kind of organisation - one that not only celebrates coffee and its rich tradition, but one that also brings a feeling of connection.”

---

**June Beh**
Partner resources and compliance director

“Setting expectations is key at Starbucks. By knowing what to expect, partners are empowered to chart their own career paths and success.”

---

**Adi Fisfaial**
10-year partner learning specialist

My life changed for the better since day one at Starbucks as I have an unwavering passion towards coffee. While I was a barista, I became a certified classroom facilitator and I developed skills to conduct training classes.

I believe that learning is continuous and it is my passion to educate, therefore, I was thrilled to be given the opportunity to lead the coffee department of Starbucks in Malaysia. I lead the Coffee Master Programme and strategise the certification process for our partners.

I work with a cross-functional team to manage and coordinate the programme’s activities for the market. This will include coffee seminars, coffee-related programmes and competitions.

The process of the certification is not an easy journey. Thus it is truly inspiring for me when a partner receive the Black Apron as it signifies the certification of a Starbucks partner as a coffee master.

Being a coffee master at Starbucks means a lot to us as it indicates that we are experts in all things coffee and trained to be the best of the best. Not only we learn the basics about coffee and its rich history, but we know how to craft our own coffee and demonstrate the knowledge to customers in-store.

I have conducted many coffee seminars at Starbucks stores with other coffee masters where we educate and share coffee knowledge with customers.

I feel truly blessed to be able to breathe, sleep and dream coffee!
THE NEW WAR FOR TALENT

WITH ASEAN’S ASPIRATIONS FOR REGIONAL INTEGRATION ON TRACK, EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS ARE SHIFTING IN UNEXPECTED DIRECTIONS

By MARK ELLWOOD

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) was envisioned as the goal for regional economic integration by 2015. The AEC was set up to envisage the following key characteristics:

- A single market and production base
- A highly competitive economic region
- A region of equitable economic development
- A region fully integrated into the global economy.

In order to do this, the AEC areas of cooperation include human resources (HR) development and capacity building, recognition of resources (HR) development and management talent pool, access to a variety of factors that may impact employee attraction and retention, and the need for organisations across the region to adapt in a changing regional landscape. These are being realised with 47% wondering if they may lose their jobs over the next two years.

AEC AND LEADERS

The economic integration of the region has far-reaching consequences for businesses, their leaders and HR managers. Key to this is the potential for changing dynamics of the workforce and potential shifting of employment patterns in the region.

For example, in the Asuan Business Review (ABR) report released by the American Chamber of Commerce which surveyed more than 100 executives representing small, medium and large US (United States) companies in Asean countries, there are some interesting insights on how business leaders are thinking about the opportunities for the region.

For 84% of those surveyed, they claimed that the region had been increasingly important for their organisations in the last two years in terms of the contribution of the region to their companies’ worldwide revenues, and a majority of the companies who took part in the survey added that Asean markets would become increasingly important to their companies and their global revenue in the next two years.

Therefore, many are planning to increase their exposure in the region, particularly in markets like Indonesia, Vietnam and Myanmar which are viewed as target markets for business expansion.

OPPORTUNITIES AND HR CHALLENGES

The opportunities in these markets drive their own challenges, though, not least in the area of human capital when greater exposure to a region’s full potential is coupled with rising middle and diverse talent pools.

This in turn will place a greater emphasis on organisations assessing how they will attract, train and retain their internal talent pool.

They will need to understand the needs of their employees across their demographic base and take into account a variety of factors that may impact employee attraction and retention.

These comprise remuneration in each country in the region, attitudes to work-life challenges, cultural differences and the aspirations of different age groups of their workforce.

For these types of organisations, in countries like Vietnam, it is important that they recognise the potential importance of the Asian market rather than placing it as a lower priority to markets such as the US, Japan and Europe.

CHALLENGES FOR SMES

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in certain countries can face a few major challenges once the AEC plan comes into affect if they have not positioned themselves adequately to compete in the new marketplace. For instance in Vietnam, according to economic expert Pham Chi Lan, the challenge for many firms will be to get access to markets and capital, a limited management talent pool, diverse qualifications versus other countries and a shortage of the latest technology.

In order to remain competitive, SMEs in countries like Vietnam are going to have to focus on their capacity and develop the HR as a priority in order for them to adapt in a changing regional landscape.

Likewise, it is also necessary for governments to assist SMEs to take advantage of the growing region by simplifying areas such as access to business registration and approval for business registration, foreign currency, capital borrowing and taxes. An International Labour Organisation research paper in 2013 shows that labour productivity in Vietnam was among the lowest in the Asia-Pacific region. This situation in January was nearly 15 times lower in Vietnam than in Japan and only 10 times higher in China. Even among its middle-income neighbours, Vietnam’s productivity ranks among the lowest in the region.

For those types of organisations, in countries like Vietnam, it is important that they recognise the potential importance of the Asian market rather than placing it as a lower priority to markets such as the US, Japan and Europe.

TALENT RETENTION

As the war for talent intensifies in the region due to organisations looking to capitalize on the growing HR potential to their company, the issues around compensation, performance and talent retention will become more of a priority.

To be able to retain talent as organisations will face increased costs for doing business whether in raw materials, taxes, rents etc., while remaining an attractive proposition to current and future employees to help drive growth and maximise the potential for the region.

It is essentially understood how pay trends are changing in the region and the issue of pay has become a consideration in regulations of companies and companies are reacting accordingly. The challenge for these organisations is to create an attractive package from basic salary and bonus etc., whilst remaining an attractive proposition to current and future employees while also allowing them to keep control of costs and talent packages to an increasingly diverse workforce.

Additionally, many organisations currently do not have a long-term focus when it comes to remunerating their employees. This is especially the case if the potential for productivity in one area is not high enough. A recent Indeed survey of 2,000 workers in the US found that one in four respondents was planning to leave even if they were dissatisfied with their job.

For instance, over 80% of respondents declared a preference for working in Singapore under the integrated AEC. Likewise, many believe they would have a better opportunity of finding a higher paid job and 52% intended to look for a new job under the AEC with one-third expecting a higher job turnover rate due to the bilateral job market.

Likewise, employees also rated more importance in the impact of AEC on their jobs versus other factors.

WHAT WILL WE BE AFFECTED?

From job growth prospects, it has been projected that the AEC will generate upwards of 24 million new jobs between 2015 and 2025 although these gains are unlikely to be widely spread across the region. One of the factors that need to be considered is that different countries have different needs in terms of the kind of skills that are required from workers. Also different countries are likely to be affected by the AEC’s growth and therefore its impact may differ from country to country, region to region, sector to sector, and extensive macroeconomic growth.
OPEN COMMUNICATION

TO CREATE A POSITIVE GLOBAL COMMUNITY, WE NEED TO MEET THREE KEY CHALLENGES

1. REACHING OUT TO HUMANITY AND AVOIDING ISOLATIONISM

In the global community, it is easier to reach out and easier to become isolated. Superficial communication with everyone can lead to meaningful impact on no one. We need to be inspired and educated in the value of trying to benefit the world, not just ourselves.

2. CELEBRATING DIVERSITY AND AVOIDING CONFORMITY

Our ability to adapt to changing situations is largely a function of our diversity. Language leads us to view the world in different ways and to have different expectations. We need to encourage diversity in language, culture, and lifestyle to ensure our own survival. Powerful countries must not try to make other countries become like them.

3. BUILDING LONG-TERM VALUE AND AVOIDING SHORT-TERM STIMULATION

Residents of the global community have almost unlimited access to sources of pleasurable, short-term stimulation. We need to inspire and educate people about the value of “investing” in chat rooms, and other options are available at a low cost. Yet few of these activities produce any long-term value.

CREATING A POSITIVE GLOBAL COMMUNITY

To create a positive global community, we need to meet three key challenges:

1. Reaching out to humanity and avoiding isolationism.
2. Celebrating diversity and avoiding conformity.

Global trade and diversity

The advantages of global trade are well known. Increased global competition leads to higher-quality products and services at lower prices. Consumers can have access to an incredible diversity of goods that may have been produced anywhere in the world.

Leaders are now hard-pressed to make decisions because they have too much information. Hence, editing and accessing relevant information are vital. We can't assume that instant information will lead to long-term quality of communication. Today television addiction is a huge problem.

In the future, media addiction (including the Internet) may well pass drug addiction and alcohol addiction as a social problem.

GLOBAL CULTURAL ACCESS

Increased access to information means that more cultural opportunities are available to more people. Cultural access leads to a better understanding not only of art or music, but also of people. Repressive regimes that encourage hatred for others restrict the flow of communication. But by communicating with people of diverse backgrounds, we quickly learn that negative ethnic stereotypes are invalid.

Open communication can lead to mutual achievement and wealth are created. We need to better recognize people who make the transition from success to significance.

Community heroes need to be celebrated based upon their skills in giving—not their skills in taking.

Residents of the global community need to celebrate the fact that “difference” may be synonymous with “fascinating”, “enhancing”, and even “necessary”.

We need to encourage diversity in language, culture, and lifestyle to ensure our own survival. Powerful countries must not try to make other countries become like them.

Residents of the global community need to celebrate the fact that “difference” may be synonymous with “fascinating”, “enhancing”, and even “necessary”.

Global trade is the author of “Global Connectedness” means that we can interact in a way that leads to rapid and positive learning. More information, however, does not necessarily lead to better decisions.

Leaders are now hard-pressed to make decisions because they have too much information. Hence, editing and accessing relevant information are vital. We can't assume that instant information will lead to long-term quality of communication. Today television addiction is a huge problem.

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Residents of the global community need to celebrate the fact that “difference” may be synonymous with “fascinating”, “enhancing”, and even “necessary”.

The global community has the potential to become a nightmare:

1. A world of conformity—with billions of people wearing the same baseball cap, baggy shirts, jeans, and shoes, speaking the same language, and laughing at the same jokes.
2. A world of short-term stimulation—with countless hours spent on mindless television, video games, and a virtual reality that begins to eliminate the real human experience.
3. A world of isolation—with lives spent in front of a screen, striving for personal excitement and gaining little thought for others and even less effort devoted to helping future generations.

On the flip side of the coin, the global community has the potential to be a dream come true:

1. A world of diversity—with billions of people being able to communicate, trade, share cultural experiences, and appreciate each other, with access to a range of products, services, religions, cultures, philosophies, and languages.
2. A world building long-term value—with countless people working together to advance our culture, building on what has been learnt in a manner that is positive, efficient, and productive.
3. A world reaching out to humanity—with people helping each other in ways that could never have been imagined, celebrating each other’s success, and helping less fortunate members of the community become more productive.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Will the global community of the future become a nightmare or a dream come true? No doubt it will be a little bit of both.

The increase in global communication, trade, technology, and culture will continue. By inspiring people and educating them in the values of celebrating diversity, building long-term value, and reaching out to humanity, we can build a global community that is more like a dream come true.
ACCELERATED GROWTH

VEN to a casual observer, the recent transformation of AIA, an insurance company that has been in Malaysia since 1946, is admirable. All the more commendable is the 34% increase in new business profits that AIA Malaysia reported against the backdrop of a two-year complex integration process.

The tremendous gains mirror the transformation that parent company AIA Group Ltd has undergone in the four years since it relocated its regional hub from Singapore to Hong Kong, emerging as the second largest life insurer globally by year-end 2014.

Remarkable is the 34% increase in new business profits that AIA Malaysia reported against the backdrop of a two-year complex integration process.

As one employee aptly puts it, AIA has a great legacy from its more than 90 years of experience and yet, it operates with the speed of a start-up and determination one usually sees in a newly created company.

During its IPO in October 2010, AIA set a clear vision to be the pre-eminent life insurer in Asia-Pacific. Ambitious targets were set across the Group, but with it, there was also the strong desire to create a new culture.

“We knew that in order to clarify about the WHAT that we wanted to achieve; we needed to be equally clear about HOW we would go about achieving our business targets. Creating a culture our people could connect with was especially important for our business, which is essentially about people. We exist to help our customers and their families achieve financial security, even prosperity, and we do this by understanding their needs at different life stages,” said AIA group regional CEO Ng Keng Hooi.

Cultivating a culture of meaningful connections for AIA employees and motivating them to do their best, combined with a clear execution focus has contributed to four consecutive years of record business results for AIA.

This track record of outperformance and great ambitions have produced leadership opportunities in the 17 markets in the Group’s portfolio, and is especially evident in Malaysia where AIA Group saw the opportunity to strengthen its business.

In Malaysia, we took great care in choosing the senior leadership team, always ensuring we had a good representation from both companies with some of the best minds. I am very pleased that the new AIA has not only integrated well, but delivered outstanding financial results in 2014,” said Ng during a recent interview.

MELTING POT OF TALENT

Anusha Thavarajah was deputy business development director in AIA Bhd before she was promoted to the role of regional business development director in AIA Group from Oct 1, 2014.

“Today, AIA Malaysia is a melting pot of key talent, not just from within the industry but also other related fields. Over the last two years, the business went through a transformation and as a result, created a unique identity that is today the new AIA Malaysia.

“My biggest learning came from working with those around me as I was part of a truly great team. Our success can be attributed to our clarity of purpose, having the courage and drive to be bold when faced with roadblocks and finally, the focus on our people – always ensuring that they were in a good space as they worked hard and made sacrifices along the way.

“Our people helped get AIA Malaysia to where it is today – an organisation that is best described as vibrant and filled with people who want to make a difference, not just from a business sense but in terms of helping people,” says Anusha.

“From Brussels to Ampang”

Julie Van Nuffel was part of AIA’s mobility programme and joined AIA Malaysia in March 2014 to head its acceleration programme office. She is currently AIA Group to take on a new senior leader role.

“I was excited but also a little scared when I was first offered the opportunity to work in AIA Malaysia: it was a new role which came with high expectations. But there was also the very compelling prospect of learning and developing.

Anusha and AIA group CEO and president Mark Tucker

Elmie Aman Najas was chief agency officer at AIA Bhd over-seeing its Life Planner network in the Klang Valley before his promotion to AIA Group’s chief marketing officer, 31 January 2015. “My transition from senior leader to CEO was smooth because of good succession planning and strong support from AIA’s leadership team and employees.

“My advice to those with high ambition is that there is opportunity every day for us to learn and give our best. ‘Seize the opportunities as they come and always give your best.

“Do not overlook the importance of leadership. To climb up, you must first show that you can lead. “For me, the new AIA is relevant, in touch with the new generation and vibrant – there is strong optimism for the future,” Elmie Aman Najas said during a recent interview.

Julie (fifth from right) during her time at AIA Malaysia

Elmie (seated, fourth from right) and his team

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By SALIKA SUKSUWAN
eeditor@leaderonomics.com

As a Malaysian, I’d like to believe that having a diverse circle of friends and colleagues in the workforce is very much a part of our DNA. However, I find diversity in the workplace isn’t necessarily an area of focus in many organisations. In broad terms, workplace diversity refers to the variety of differences between people in the organisation, which includes ethnicity, gender, age, where we come from, and our educational background. We can harness workforce diversity if we have a culture of inclusion, which respects our differences and ensures that we encourage each person to reach their full potential. Simply put, diversity is a mix of different individuals; inclusiveness is getting these individuals to work well together.

FOCUS ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (D&I)

As Malaysians, we often say “diversity is a source of strength”. However, not many organisations have complete plans to enhance diversity in the workplace. Some multinationals are using metrics or diversity scorecards to measure progress in hiring, promoting and retaining their workforce whilst in most organisations, “diversity” is deemed a buzzword, not a core focus of their people initiatives. I recall a human resources (HR) leader saying D&I is very American-centric, and not something relevant in their organisation. On the contrary, the HR team can influence their business leaders if we believe a diverse workforce makes a difference to the business. The business case for diversity can be anchored on these key reasons:

1. It’s the future workforce; and
2. It drives better business performance.

THE FUTURE WORKFORCE IS DIVERSE

An Accenture study outlines the need to better prepare our organisation to be future-ready. The study describes the five major shifts that are reshaping work in Asean, as illustrated below (Figure 1).

In response to this change, organisations need to move towards new ways of working which will be more appealing to a multigenerational and diverse workforce. This requires HR leaders to work alongside their corporate captains to drive a more flexible, collaborative, and inclusive culture.

DIVERSITY DRIVES BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

A number of surveys illustrate that diversity is increasingly becoming top-of-mind for CEOs globally. A PwC survey indicates 77% of CEOs globally, have, or intend to adopt, a strategy promoting D&I. A recent McKinsey research illustrates that companies who commit to diverse leadership are more successful. Companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15% more likely to have financial returns above their national industry medians (Figure 2).

Similarly, companies in the top quartile for ethnic diversity were 35% more likely to have better returns. Research on diversity shows that a diverse workforce provides positive outcomes in these areas:

1. Talent attraction: because they address the recent, groups targeted by diversity efforts are often good sources of desirable talent.
2. Strengthen customer orientation: companies with a more diverse workforce forge stronger bonds with increasingly heterogeneous customers.
3. Increase employee satisfaction: a diverse workforce encourages positive attitudes and behaviours, and reduces conflicts between groups.
4. Improve decision making: a diverse workforce fosters innovation and creativity through a greater variety of problem-solving approaches, perspectives, and ideas.

HR LEADING THE CHANGE

HR plays a key role in moving the needle on diversity. Aside from raising awareness and celebrating diversity in organisations, HR teams should place greater focus on:

1. Considering a wider talent pool in talent sourcing efforts; and
2. Reviewing retention strategies to address the needs of a more diverse workforce.

TALENT SOURCING

Malaysian organisations often cite talent crunch as a key business challenge. The World Bank highlighted that 48% of companies surveyed identified the lack of talent as a constraint for future growth. Organisations which prioritise talent diversity will be more prepared to tap into a wider talent spectrum beyond conventional talent sourcing channels. This includes casting the net to recruit talent from tertiary education, foreign talent, diaspora and alumni networks. We’ve begun to see some of these practices in corporate Malaysia:

1. In response to the Career Comeback grant managed by TalentCorp, Accenture recently launched a referral programme which doubles up the referral rewards for staff who refer women returnees.
2. SCOPE International organised a career fair for people with disabilities in conjunction with World Inclusion Day 2014. This initiative had strong support from their leadership team, with 80 candidates attending the event and eventually 15 of them were hired.

Another pool of talent that needs to be managed by SOCSO has been running a successful Return to Work programme to place injured contributors back to the workplace as soon as it is medically possible for them to do so.

1. With Malaysian organisations expanding their footprint regionally, more employers have started to tap into more diverse graduate pool by recruiting international students from Asian countries.

Malaysian public higher educational institutions have close to 30,000 international students, with a larger number in private higher educational institutions. These graduates are typically proactive and eager to secure employment in Malaysia and will add to the diversity of our talent pipeline.

1. A TalentCorp-PwC survey showed that under 35% of Malaysian PLCs provide FWA, it’s nevertheless a positive sign that organisations like Maybank are increasingly driving this shift, placing greater focus on D&I to close talent gaps and encourage better business performance. They have put in place a holistic retention strategy which includes mentoring programmes, FWA implementation, family-friendly facilities and a rigorous tracking of workforce dashboards on gender, age and ethnicity, at all levels.

These efforts have begun to show results, with Maybank enjoying a more diverse workforce at management levels (Figure 4). The workforce transformation in Maybank is driven by HR, with strong support from the leadership team.

MOVING FORWARD

While HR leaders are inundated with day-to-day people matters, we should still take the time to examine our workforce demographics. It may be easier to manage a homogenous workforce, but to quote Steven Covey, diversity is a key differentiator, as “strength lies in differences, not in similarities.”

The first step is to be aware of our own biases and not allow it to come in the way of decisions on hiring, developing and retaining our people, as we work towards being the driver of change in developing a diverse workforce.

Salika Suksuwan is on secondment to TalentCorp to her part in nation building. She dreams of a future when Malaysian organisations will truly believe in harnessing the strength of a diverse workforce to grow their organisations to be regional and global champions. To connect with Salika, email editor@leaderonomics.com

HR WORKFORCE INDEX 2015

The HR Workforce Index shows that flexible work arrangements (FWA) are a key criteria in defining an ideal work environment for the Malaysian workforce. With 54% of respondents willing to forgo higher pay for FWA, HR leaders should consider whether this fixed working hours – which requires standardised face-time for everyone – will be effective in retaining our future workforce, and whether the shift should instead be towards measuring work performance and outcomes (Figure 3). While a TalentCorp-PwC survey showed that under 35% of Malaysian PLCs provide FWA, it’s nevertheless a

DRIVING WORKPLACE DIVERSITY

GETTING ORGANISATIONS ‘FUTURE-READY’
WHY I CHOOSE MALAYSIA

Aussie expat plans to stay for the long haul

By CHRISTOPHER MOORE
editor@leaderonomics.com

I left Australia in May of 2013. I got on a plane and flew of all places, to Mumbai, India. It was a nice nine degree Celsius in Melbourne when I left, and when I disembarked in Mumbai it was 90 degrees – at 9pm!

I went to India because I’d been offered a place on a leadership programme run by my company, and it decided to throw me in the deep end. From there I’ve been to Singapore and Tokyo, and now I’m in Kuala Lumpur (KL). And Malaysia is where I’m planning to stay. But, why?

First and foremost, I want to put my career on the fast track! There are millions of people climbing ladders around the world, and international experience is a must-have if you want to get real traction! From there, it only makes sense to come to KL because there’s no better place to get cross-cultural experience than in Malaysia.

It’s a country where culture, creed and religion are intermixed and the people are the warmest and friendliest you’ll ever come across. This makes my journey a little different to other expats you might read about, though, because I’m not coming in as a chief financial officer or a business head. I run a team of five brilliant people who look after a set of complex products our company offers, and I love the job.

THE LONG TERM

For my initial contract, I’m running a ‘pay as you go’ deal; my apartment, bills and flights are all covered. But, if I secure a role here after my contract ends, I’ll be paying my own rent just like anyone else.

But, it’s more than worth it because Malaysia will be the launching pad for my career. It’s from here that I want to build upon my experiences and skills and see me through the rest of my professional life, because I believe that beneath the surface, Malaysia is the gateway to Asia. I’m an Australian, after all, which traditionally makes me very direct.

WHY MALAYSIA?

So why, you may ask, would a high potential junior manager with complete geographical mobility pick Malaysia as a springboard to achieve these goals?

COMPANIES WANT TO MOVE HERE

You have an intelligent, multi-lingual workforce who are very easy to manage because, culturally, they are warm, friendly and people-focused.

In terms of selling yourself, saying, “yes, I’ve worked there, I understand the culture, the people and I have proven success working there” opens up opportunities just by itself.

RIGHT NOW, MALAYSIA NEEDS PEOPLE WHO ARE COMMITTED TO TALENT

I am passionate about growing and developing staff at every level, and teaching them to care about growing and developing others.

When roles are created in professional services, you end up with more roles to fill than you have talented managers committed to people development as their first priority. It’s a passion of mine, and something Malaysia has a hunger for. A perfect fit, not to mention an excellent opportunity to prove yourself.

MALAYSIA IS THE GATEWAY TO ASIA

Being a key member of Asean, next to Singapore and near Hong Kong and other financial centres, with regular convenient flights to everywhere you’d ever want to be, not to mention cheap direct flights back to my kampung of Melbourne, Australia.

MALAYSIA HAS EVERYTHING IT TAKES TO BE EXCELLENT LEADERS OF PEOPLE

They are warm, kind and focused on people. That’s a power I want to harness because I think that if the world had more Malaysians in leadership positions in organisations, they could spread that culture of community and care and help us all remember that, at the end of the day, work is work and we have to make room for life too. That’s a journey I want to be a part of.

THE SHORT-TERM

You see now the potential and opportunities present here for those willing to seek them, and the chance I am taking is that I have what it takes to unlock some of this in the people I meet and influence.

Initially, I was asked to come to KL because there was a team in my organisation with some goals to achieve, and I am someone with the unique set of tools to help achieve them.

I understand what makes a team run in finance, and I have gained analytical skills through previous roles which continuously come in handy. But success wasn’t guaranteed. I’m an Australian, after all, which traditionally makes me very direct.

We also have what is called “low power distance”, meaning we treat our friends and our prime ministers almost the same way, except truthfully I think twice about letting our prime minister take a beer from my fridge.

But the reason I’ve been travelling is to gain the insights I need to succeed anywhere.

In India, I learned when to fight for something and when it’s better to lose a battle in order to secure a war. In Singapore I learned the value of hard work and dedication. In Japan I learned how to work in a hierarchy.

In Malaysia, I’ve learned the value of a soft (metaphorical) touch, and I’ve used the skills I gained prior to succeed culturally, while helping build on the foundations my team had built before I came along.

And by my sixth month here I already knew I wanted to stay. I’m now in the position of asking my managers if it’s possible for me to find a role in an industry where local regulations would ordinarily not let them hire me.

I’m hoping my demonstrated successes and my passion, not just for people development generally, but my belief in the unique qualities Malaysians bring to the table, will be enough to get me over the line.

TAKE ADVANTAGE!

With all this said, I find it so interesting that so many Malaysians leave the country in order to start building and growing careers, leaving a gap that’s going to allow me to launch my career at a faster pace than in their absence.

I can understand the allure of international travel; after all I’m doing it twice about letting our prime minister take a beer from my fridge.

Christopher Moore is an Australian finance professional who can eat spicy food. He is living and working in Malaysia, with plans to stay. If you are interested to get in touch, email editor@leaderonomics.com
IN BUSINESS, THE CAMERA’S ARE ALWAYS ROLLING

By BRIAN FIELKOW
editor@leaderonomics.com

In 2014, a set of professional athletic organisations were thrust into the spotlight with negative headlines. Two NBA (National Basketball Association) owners faced pressure to sell their teams as the result of making racist statements — Donald Sterling, now former Los Angeles Clippers owner, and Bruce Levenson owner of the Atlanta Hawks. Then, Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice faced a domestic abuse scandal. The news of Rice’s assault on then girlfriend Janay Palmer (now his wife) and the NFL’s (National Football League) slow response to impose higher consequences on him until a video surfaced can be used as a cautionary tale for business leaders, chief executive officers, executives and managers alike. The bright lights of the professional sports world often provide lessons for business leaders everywhere. When personnel-related problems arise in business, keep the following in mind:

1. BE PREPARED
Are leaders ready if an unexpected crisis hits the organisation? It’s up to leaders to respond in the appropriate way. Not only are employees looking for transparent and effective leadership during a crisis, but so are customers. How leaders handle a situation is a direct reflection on the company’s values and their ability to continuously uphold them.

2. DEAL WITH THE ISSUE FULLY
Initially Rice received a hand slap (a two-game suspension) for his actions. It took the public release of the video to prompt a full suspension. What’s the lesson from this episode?

- It’s essential to deal with an issue fully, promptly and swiftly. Not only will an employee’s negative actions damage his/her own reputation, he/she will also harm the company’s brand.
- The NFL and Ravens went into damage control mode. They had the chance to lead by example and stand up for victims of domestic abuse but were too slow to respond.
- Rice initially received “celebrity justice”, meaning that the penalty was mild relative to the incident and what others would have received.
- Does your company administer celebrity justice, allowing star performers to get away with things that a regular employee would not?

3. HIRE FOR VALUES
Technically, excellent employees are often difficult to find. Yet hiring can perform a particular task. Does your company administer celebrity justice, allowing star performers to get away with things that a regular employee would not?

4. DON’T BE WILLFULLY BLIND
Rice’s actions were captured on an elevator camera. Had this occurred off-camera, public awareness and appropriate punishment might never have ensued. When encountering adverse behaviour, treat the issue as if it were in the public eye.

And about those cameras actually they are always rolling. Employees watch and judge every decision the leader and management make. Executives are in the spotlight every day, whether they themselves know it or not.

At best, the Ravens and the NFL were willfully blind to the situation. Therefore, when problems erupt, especially serious issues, don’t be willfully blind. Be committed to digging deeper and taking the right action no matter what the facts say.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS
It might be a great NFL or corporate team, but if the players or employees are misaligned with the organisation’s culture and values, what’s left? Even worse, if the culture and values condone such behaviour, the situation is a ticking bomb.

It’s just a matter of time before management will be doing damage control. This is because, like it or not, the cameras are always rolling.