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5 LOCAL COMPANIES THAT GOT THEIR OFFICES RIGHT

6 1850 TO NOW: HOW THE WORKPLACE HAS EVOLVED

11 EASY WAYS TO MAKE YOUR OFFICE FEEL LIKE HOME
Navigating Change

Business leaders discuss the bright future ahead for Asian organisations

By MATT NAYLOR
matt.naylor@leaderonomics.com

A

S REA Group chief executive officer (CEO) for Singapore and Malaysia Haresh
Khobchandani takes to the stage in Johor, he is keen to
impress that the potential for business
growth in the region is higher than ever before.

He stands before a room full of young,
enthusiastic business leaders at the
second AmBank BizCONFERENCE, with
the crowd eager to learn.

“Welcome to the age of disruption,”
he says.

Though often the scarcest word in
the business leader’s vocabulary, Haresh is
quick to point out that “disruption” is the
key to an impending boom in the Asian
market.

WHY ASIA?

Because, quite simply, 88% of the
next one billion entrants of the middle class
will be in Asia, meaning that two thirds of all middle class people globally will be
based in the continent. As globalisation
continues and companies reinvent the
ways that they promote and sell their
products, Asia is set to emerge as the
largest market of any.

The biggest organisations in the world,
based in the United States, the UK, Europe and the Middle East are all already
forecasting this change and planning
ahead accordingly. For those currently
setting up shop in Asia, and especially
home-grown companies, their finger is
already on the pulse and they are each set
to see a huge turnaround in their fortunes.

“The world is changing faster now
than it has at any other time in human
history,” says Haresh in front of the
conference attendees.

“So many people think of change as
only being a bad thing, that it is
something that we should be afraid of.
That could not be further from the truth as
I believe there has never been a better
time to build a business here in South-
East Asia.”

The rise of millennials, both in the
workforce and as consumers, as well as
a boom in female leaders, means that
growth cannot come from homogeneity any
more. Businesses must now be able to
tap into so many different demographics
and what makes them tick that diversity
will continue to be the hot-button topic for years to come.

“We have all heard that our people are
our greatest asset,” Haresh continues.

“The fact is that people adapt much
faster than businesses do. Failing to
recognise that has been the downfall of
many of the once-biggest companies in
the world.”

In fact, it is expected that, of the
companies currently ranked as the Top 500
in the world, many have a lifespan of
just 15 years. The other side of the coin
is that, in 2019’s time, 75% of these
will be companies that have not even
begun operation as of 2017, according to
research by Deloitte. The potential is certainly
there, it will simply be a question of inno-
vation and who is best able to adapt.

PROMOTING LOCALLY

This is precisely why AmBank chose to
announce this free series of talks along-
side a raft of other exciting events to help
companies grow in Malaysia. It is all done
in the name of helping small to medium
time enterprise (SME) owners and leaders
understand and harness the potential
that is currently at their fingertips.

As hundreds gathered in Johor for the
second BizCONFERENCE in a series of
five, Haresh was among the five speak-
er on the day, with AmBank managing
director of business banking Chris Yap,
Leaderonomics CEO Roshan Thiran,
director of business banking Chris Yap,
Leaderonomics Good Monday CEO Joseph
Tan and Valiram Group executive director
Sharan Valiram also on the billing.

Sharan’s Valiram Group is the perfect
everyone of a company that has had to
move with the times in order to stay
relevant. It was established in 1935 by
Sharan’s grandfather as a textile manu-
facturer, before Sharan and his brothers
took over the Group and moved into the
world of retailing.

Originally specialising in airport retail
with small stores selling raw materials
at Subang’s Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah
Airport, the Group now boasts more than
350 stores representing more than 200
brands. It was a gamble to shift gears so
dramatically for such a well-established
business but it was also a move that has
also paid off in the long run.

Sharan admits at the conference that
such risks are not for the faint of heart,
however.

“We didn’t have the first clue how
to operate in the retail space,” Sharan
admits.

“Looking back, there were so many
decisions that we made that I now put
my head in my hands and regret. But it
was all a learning process and it is those
early failures that have shaped who we,
as leaders and as a Group, are today.”

LEARNING FROM THE BEST

Taking lessons from local CEOs and
business leaders who have successfully
scaled their businesses to the next level is
at the forefront of AmBank’s vision with
the ongoing events.

Helping leaders understand the
successes and failures of Haresh, Sharan
and many more, combined with the
internal capability building provided by
“culture gurus” Roshan and Joseph, are
what will give businesses in Johor and
indeed nationally, the best platform on
which to grow.

Other events in the AmBank
BizCONFERENCE series in Penang, Kota
Kinabalu and Kuching have similarly
promised more prizes and opportunities.

With Haresh’s assertion that South-
East Asia is set to be the epicentre of
business growth globally, now is the
perfect time for AmBank to launch their
ambitious initiative and give Malaysian
companies the perfect platform on which
to expand internationally.

Sharan Valiram also on the billing.

Charles Liew to FashionValet’s Vivy Yusof and iCube Innovation’s Dato Patrick Liew among many others – each have shown the possibilities for Malaysian companies to grow their businesses into global players.

It is with the belief that there are many
more hidden gems ready to break out as
Malaysia’s future thought leaders that
AmBank is bringing these knowledge-
sharing sessions to a nationwide
audience.

With that in mind, Chris closed the ses-

The AmBank BizCONFERENCE series will
conclude at Kuala Lumpur Convention
Centre on Nov 1, with applications for the AmBank BizRACE closing Nov 15. To register your place at the event and begin the first step of your RACE journey, visit ambankbizclub.com

To sign up for future AmBank BizCONFERENCEs and to join the AmBank BizRACE, visit ambankbizclub.com/register
I have heard sexual harassment allegations, accusations of strike-breaking, and a failed expansion to China. But with Travis Kalanick out as CEO, Uber faces a new challenge: a potential internal war.

It’s not only Kalanick’s chair that’s been vacant in the C-suite. The ride-hailing giant hasn’t had a CFO since 2015, and recently announced plans to hire a COO after years of doing without. General counsel and SVP of Engineering round out the list of high-level vacancies. After years as one of the most sought-after employers in Silicon Valley, the company is facing a harsh reality: it’s hard to recruit qualified people to work there.

The ideal “team of rivals” would also be more diverse in terms of gender and race. More diverse groups hash out issues more thoroughly before making a decision: one 2006 study found that compared to all-white juries, racially diverse juries exchange more information, make fewer factual errors, and discuss more factors that might be relevant to the case.

It would have been tempting for Uber’s board to fill the CEO position with someone more tractable than the aggressive Kalanick. Or to build out a management team that will march in lockstep with Kalanick. But that would be wrongheaded. Hiring Dara Khosrowshahi as their new CEO, I believe was the first step in recognizing Uber needed diversity. In filling the rest of the vacancies in Uber’s C-suite, the board should recognize that what an organization in crisis needs isn’t less diversity, but more of it. It needs what Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Doris Kearns Goodwin has called a “team of rivals”.

**A TEAM OF WHAT?**

In her 2005 book Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln, Goodwin used this term to describe Lincoln’s unusual presidential Cabinet. Instead of packing it with allies, Lincoln included his three main rivals for the Republican presidential nomination, alongside other men who disagreed with him on major issues of the day. When asked why he made this choice, Lincoln replied, “We needed the strongest men in the party in the Cabinet. These were the strongest men.” The resulting group was fractious, but listening carefully to their differing viewpoints helped Lincoln make some of the hardest decisions of the war.

Goodwin’s book has been widely influential, reportedly even influencing former US president Barack Obama’s picks for his own Cabinet. But it stands to reason that another president would take inspiration from Lincoln. How would a tech company like Uber benefit from a team of rivals in its C-suite?

**RIVALS BUILD CONSENSUS**

Like the United States at the dawn of the Civil War, Uber is at a turning point. It faces a major lawsuit for allegedly stealing secrets from Waymo, the self-driving car maker owned by Google’s parent company. Its “Uber Everything” initiative, which aims to move things instead of people, is rumoured to be driving big domestic losses. Plus, there’s all that sexism to deal with—even the board is not immune.

Lincoln’s Cabinet included every faction in the Republican Party’s fragile coalition, from radical abolitionists to former slaveholders to former members of the anti-immigrant Know Nothing Party. You’d think such a group would crack under the intense pressure of the war, but ultimately, these differences created unity. Lincoln promoted openness and creativity—the opposite of a dictatorial strongman. Though each faction might disagree with Lincoln’s ultimate decision, they all felt heard.

Uber could learn a lot. The obvious place to start: drivers. In February, a Facebook Q&A with then-president of Ridesharing Jeff Jones went awry when drivers plopped on hundreds of complaints. A few weeks after Kalanick’s ouster, Uber finally enabled in-app tipping—some drivers had been asking for six years.

Following the team of rivals model, Uber should find a way to give drivers a greater voice in discussions—even by including HR chief Liane Hornsey in more board-level meetings. Brought on last year to remake Uber’s culture, she has been frank about the complaints she’s been hearing from workers, especially about compensation. A CHRD who can bring workers’ feedback to the C-suite will be invaluable to the company in the long-term.

**RIVALS MAKE BETTER DECISIONS**

Who else should make up the team of C-Suites? An executive from the auto industry would have an invaluable perspective on Uber’s future. So would a manufacturing executive or labour leader who has overseen the transition to automation in factories—an issue that will be increasingly critical.

The ideal “team of rivals” would also be more diverse in terms of gender and race. More diverse groups hash out issues more thoroughly before making a decision: one 2006 study found that compared to all-white juries, racially diverse juries exchange more information, make fewer factual errors, and discuss more factors that might be relevant to the case. It goes without saying that Uber’s public image will be significant. Regarding that reality, it needs what Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Doris Kearns Goodwin has called a “team of rivals.”

**THE HARDEST PART: FINDING LINCOLN**

Ultimately, a team of rivals is only as strong as the political skills of its leader. Lincoln was able to get tremendous work out of his Cabinet because its individual members came to trust him, even if they didn’t always trust or agree with each other.

Leaders willing to both listen sensitive-ly and make hard decisions are tough to come by. But at this critical point in its life cycle, that’s exactly what Uber needs. Not a strongman like Kalanick or even a Steve Jobs-esque visionary, but a Lincoln-like leader who can contend seriously with conflicting viewpoints without losing sight of the way forward—as long as they have a team of rivals to help them. Can Khosrowshahi be to Uber what Lincoln was to the USA?
A
n organised mind spills into how we do things. How do we apply that in our immediate physical environment and intentionally design a workspace that works for us? What does that really mean?

While this might take a while to grasp and apply to our daily lives, I can attest that it has worked for me recently. Looking back about a year or two ago, my workspace was simply a table with drawers stuffed with everything I had, wherever possible.

As I got busier, I realised that, as my mind was a mess, so was my workspace. Instead of having a desk that was effective and intuitive, I had to constantly reorganise my things. That was when I realised that my workspace could do with improvements.

As I learnt the concept of streamlining and the idea of designing an innovative workspace that boosts creativity and productivity, a little improvement every day has come a long way for me.

These are the things we can do to improve our workspace:

1. **Clear, Clear, CLEAR!**
   - We can’t have room for improvements if we have no room at all. The very first thing to do if we are not starting from scratch (a new and empty space), is to clear the clutter. This involves keeping what we need, and letting go of what we don’t.
   - Challenge ourselves to get rid of what we don’t need, and maybe even give them to those who may find it useful. It might be tough — especially for hoarders and collectors — but a useful way to decide if something should be kept is to determine if it was ever used in recent years.
   - If it has been there for many years and takes up too much space, it would be good to reconsider if it really is worth keeping, compared to the possibilities it could bring once we’ve learnt to let it go.
   - It is when we let go of something that we are able to make room for something better.

2. **Organise Effectively**
   - Everyone knows how to organise, but it is in organising effectively that the difference is seen. This is more than just categorising things and putting them together — it is also in rethinking how to place them systematically according to our ease of use.
   - If we’re going to use something often, it won’t be a good idea to keep it nicely in a box. Though it may appear organised at the start, it won’t be long till we leave it outside of where it’s supposed to be.

3. **COLOUR MOODS**
   - Colour can produce a certain mood, whether or not we realise it. Blue is calming like the ocean, while yellow can make a place look warmer — like watching a sunrise or sunset.
   - Sticking colours like hot red can draw much attention, but it could create a stressful atmosphere if the walls of the meeting room are all red. Picking the appropriate colours for your workspace can affect how you work daily, and often, subconsciously.
   - The worst part is when we don’t even realise it. So take a simple study on colour (type ‘colour moods’ into a search engine) and take a conscious look at the colours around you. How can you use colour to your advantage?

My current upgraded worktable which is big enough to accommodate my art and craft-making as a designer. All the different stationery and tools are well sorted and no longer kept in drawers for easy access and practicality. Pic by Jesslyn Lai.
BREAKING BOUNDARIES IN WORKSPACE INNOVATION

TWO LOCAL COMPANIES THAT DID IT RIGHT

By PRETHIBA ESVARY
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“You are a product of your environment. So choose the environment that will best develop you toward your objective. Are the things around you helping you toward success, or are they holding you back?”

– United States businessman, W. Clement Stone

Macrokiosk

Macrokiosk is a mobile technology enabler that prides itself in “powering connectivity” by providing their customers market access to more than two billion mobile users for interactions, notifications, authentications, security and/or payments. The company focuses primarily on Enterprise Mobility Solutions (EMS), and Mobile Payment Services (MPS).

In layman’s terms, Kenny says: “Take mobile banking and airline ticketing. These require security features. This is where we come in. We deliver mobile OTI: mobile QR and console for instance.”

To date, the company has physical operations across Asia and Australia, and over 2,000 clients from 18 different industries in 37 different countries.

Like just the sculpture, upon closer inspection of the office, one will notice plenty of beautiful and meaningful details on the walls and spaces of the Macrokiosk office, located in The Troika, Kuala Lumpur.

Examples include a scabbard wall art which depicts the 12 countries Macrokiosk physically operates in, and sunflowers leaning against the walls due to their presence in Australia.

What we were blown away by was the ‘Den’, which gives an otherworldly feeling with two resting pods and several Star Wars decorations, and the ‘Space Bar’ (named after the function on one’s keyboard), its office pantry that has a free daily menu and a section with ‘closed off kitchen’ for employees to eat together.

The moment you enter their offices, it is to tell whether an organisation has a great workspace. For Macrokiosk, it is a mirror of their product and innovation environment. So choose the environment that will best develop you toward your objective. Are the things around you helping you toward success, or are they holding you back?”

– United States businessman, W. Clement Stone

Macrokiosk’s EIC (engagement and collaborative) centre, which you see the moment you step out of the lift. Pic by Muhammad Shahril Rosli/THE STAR

“Since we are a solutions-based company, we thought why don’t we project the philosophy of our products and solutions into our workspace?” Kenny tells us.

“If you looked at any area in the office, you’ll notice that it is carefully designed in a way that combines functional, engaging, collaborative, creative, and innovative elements.

The workspace is uniquely designed like a horseshoe, Kenny describes. There isn’t a perfectly square-shaped area in the entire office layout because each area is asymmetrical.

While optimising space may seem like a challenge, Macrokiosk managed to overcome it with the aid of local interior designers.

Another aspect the founders looked at was focused on incorporating their family-like culture into the workspace.

“Macrokiosk started with three brothers (Kenny, Henry Goh and CS Goh). We want to enlarge the family.”

He quips (with a laugh): “You may not see uncles and aunts here, but we will become uncles and aunts together. Because we will grow with you.”

Mindvalley

The second office we visited is the only company in Asia, and one of the four companies in the world to have won WorldBlu’s Most Democratic Workplace for 10 consecutive years, and is listed as the top resource that HR practitioners in the world use.

Looking at employees work in the midst of nature-inspired furniture and vibrant colours gives one the impression of “working in a playground”.

Vishen says: “I believe that any job is about a mindset, and, if I want to get the best out of my people, I want them to be in the right frame of mind, something that can only be achieved by putting them in the best space possible.”

According to Vishen, the company initially operated out of a ‘shady’ and tiny apartment unit in Times Square, New York. When he was forced to return to Malaysia in 2004, he was faced with two impediments. One, the brain drain issue in Malaysia, and two, all their clients, partners and vendors were in the US.

These pushed Vishen and his team to create a new model.

"By 2020, we want to be the number one place in the world to work. The best company in the world is going to be here in Kuala Lumpur," Vishen says.

He adds: “Thanks to Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC), I was able to get talent from all over the world and I was not restricted to only hiring local Malaysians.”

Having a smart and diverse workforce is one thing, but to motivate and inspire all his employees to work towards a mission to “launch a school of growth and humanity for a billion people” is no easy feat.

To achieve this, the company places a huge emphasis on employee growth and happiness, and this is reflected in their workspace.

“We wanted to give our people a workspace that is so beautiful that they would not want to return to their homes because they enjoy being in the office so much.”

This was exactly how we felt when we walked into the Mindvalley headquarters in KL. The indoor hammocks, meditation room, set-worthy kitchen, tree house, and ‘tribal council’ room are just a few of the amazing features in this office.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Both companies used different elements as a foundation for what makes a great workspace. For Macrokiosk, it is a mirror of their product and solution design philosophy. Whereas for Mindvalley, it is about encouraging and supporting their employees’ happiness.

What they did right was to look internally and analyse what would inspire and motivate their employees. Certainly, it is to tell whether an organisation has done it successfully or not from the moment you enter their offices.

To further understand the Macrokiosk and Mindvalley business and what makes them both so unique and successful, visit www.macrokiosk.com and www.mindvalley.com
tracking the evolution of the office space

by jack chua

in december 1868, the last issue of the new york times was published. at the time, newsprint was still written by hand, with many of the typesetters working in dimly lit rooms with rows of drawers on each side. workers could stand up and write on the drawers, but then would need to be sent out to be typewritten. as a result, many workers would sit down to their writing. in fact, the first acquisition to the new larkin building was a machine used to cut paper into slips, which were then used to create the paper for the newspaper.

by the late 19th century, businesses were expanding rapidly and companies were starting to develop into large organizations. in 1870, offices began to grow in size.

the 1890s - 1910s: industrial revolution

in the 1890s and 1900s, factories and offices were becoming more mechanized. the first typewriters and punches were invented, and office work was becoming more standardized. in 1870, the first typewriter was patented, and in 1900, the first punch cards were introduced.

the 1920s - 1930s: scientific management

at the start of the 20th century, there was a push for efficiency in the workplace. in 1911, the metal office furniture company was established, and in 1912, the first office building was completed in new york. the new larkin building was designed as a model workplace, with a focus on efficiency and productivity.

the 1950s - 1960s: knowledge workers in cubicles

in the 1950s and 1960s, cubicles began to become popular as a way to create individual workspaces. the first cubicle was patented in 1950, and by the 1960s, cubicles were becoming more common in offices.

the 1970s - 1980s: open plan offices

in the 1970s and 1980s, open plan offices became popular as a way to increase communication and collaboration. the first open plan office was designed for the us navy, and in 1980, the first open plan office was completed in new york.

the 1990s - 2000s: the rise of the internet

in the 1990s and 2000s, the internet began to transform the workplace. the first internet connection was established in 1991, and by the 2000s, the internet had become an integral part of the workplace.

the 2010s - today: the future of work

in the 2010s and today, the workplace is continuing to evolve. with the rise of remote work and virtual collaboration, the traditional office is becoming less common. however, as technology continues to advance, the future of work is likely to be shaped by new and innovative ideas.
9 THINGS TERRIBLE BOSSES TELL THEMSELVES

By JEFF HADEN
editor@leaderonomics.com

Leadership is hard. Being the boss is hard. I know that makes me sound like Captain Obvious, but that doesn’t make it any less true. That’s even truer when you own your own business, because the leadership buck ultimately stops with you.

Being a boss is stressful, demanding, and often overwhelming — yet also incredibly fulfilling and rewarding, as long as you do everything possible to truly inspire, serve, and lead.

And that means never saying things like this:

1. “I SHOULDN’T HAVE TO THANK MY EMPLOYEES FOR DOING THEIR JOBS.”

Yes, you should. Praising employees is the courteous thing to do and, from a performance point of view, praise reinforces positive behaviours and makes it more likely that those behaviours will occur in the future.

By all means, expect your employees to do their jobs, but praise them when they do — because that’s your job.

2. “I SHOULDN’T HAVE TO WORK UNDER THIS KIND OF PRESSURE.”

Yes, you should. Join the leadership club. Every boss is stuck in between, with employees, the “rock”; and customers, vendors, investors, and even yourself, the “hard place.”

If demands seem overwhelming and are pulling you too far away from your team, get your employees more involved in your projects and responsibilities.

They’ll be glad to help, especially if they gain skills and exposure in the process.

3. “I DON’T GET PAID ENOUGH TO DEAL WITH THIS.”

You’re right. Great leaders are chronically under-compensated and under-appreciated, and that will probably never change.

But great employers see the satisfaction they gain from praising, developing, mentoring, and helping employees reach their goals as a part of their total compensation package.

If you don’t see it that way, rethink whether you want to run a business. Otherwise, you’ll always be dissatisfied.

4. “MY EMPLOYEES DO BETTER WHEN I LEAVE THEM ALONE.”

If that’s true, means you are the problem. Great employers don’t need (or want) to be told what to do, but they do need to hear they do a great job — it will help them learn about new directions or strategies.

Everyone likes some amount of attention. Just make sure the attention you give makes a positive impact.

5. “I DON’T HAVE TIME TO DEAL WITH ALL THE POLITICS/AGENDAS/EMOTIONS.”

Company politics can be a factor even for a business owner in total command of the operation.

Tough. It’s your company. If the culture is bad, fix it. If politics keeps people from doing their jobs or performing as well as they could, fix it.

Taking care of any problems that make it hard for your employees to do their best is your job. So do it.

6. “I DON’T WANT HER TO GET TOO MUCH CREDIT.”

Don’t be afraid your employees might outshine you. Your goal is to have employees outshine you.

Great leaders surround themselves with outstanding talent. That’s how they become great leaders.

The better your team, and the individuals that make up your team, the better you look.

7. “I DON’T KNOW WHY THEY’RE COMPLAINING. IT WAS GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME.”

Do you train employees by tossing them into the fire simply because that’s how you were once treated? Whenever you feel something was “good enough for me,” realise that it isn’t good enough for your employees.

Determine the best way to train and develop employees, and then make it happen. Any bad experiences you had should shape a more positive approach, not serve as a blueprint.

8. “I NEED TO BE SEEN ENGAGING WITH MY TEAM... SO I’LL GO CHAT WITH KIM.”

You need to get to know employees on a personal level, but do you gravitate toward those with whom you share common interests? Maybe so, but the employees you need to connect with the most are often those with whom you have the least in common.

Kim may be the path of least resistance, which means she shouldn’t be the only person on your employee engagement list.

Every employee deserves your attention and respect. So take an interest. Ask questions, find a common interest, even if it’s simply trying to help that person reach his or her career and personal goals.

When you make a sincere effort, your employees will make it easy for you. After all, we naturally appreciate anyone who is interested in us.

9. “HE DOESN’T LIKE ME, SO I’M NOT GOING TO WASTE MY TIME.”

Few things are more awkward than working with — or even just talking to — employees who you feel don’t like you.

Reach out and clear the air. Say: “Mike, I don’t feel our working relationship is as positive as it could be, and I’m sure that’s my fault. I really want to make it better.”

Then let Mike vent. Sure, you may not like hearing what he says, but once you do, you’ll know how to make the situation better.

Making things better is what your job is all about.

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Jeff Haden is a public speaker and author of more than 50 non-fiction books and ghost-written for innovators and business leaders. To engage with him, email editor@leaderonomics.com

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M.A.D. YOUTH SUMMIT 2017 | 21 OCTOBER

1 WEEK TO GO!
AZHAR IBRAHIM, 34

Azhar was born without eyesight. Yet, here is what’s astounding about this young man – despite his blindness, he runs his own workshop, where he repairs motorcycles himself.

Azhar says: “Since I was young, I have always had an interest in the sounds produced by engines. “When I hear a particular humming or grinding sound from a motorcycle engine, I feel uneasy and will work on fixing it till the engine is smooth again.”

Here’s an interesting bit: Despite having no formal education, Azhar only took two months to learn about the different parts of a motorcycle and how to repair it, and that too, all on his own.

In addition to fixing motorcycles, he also teaches children how to play the rebana or Malay traditional hand drum. He says one of the reasons he does this so he can avoid being idle.

Make the most of what you have

Azhar has been a mechanic for close to six years now. Recently, with the aid of Malaysia Automotive Institute (MAI), he opened his own motorcycle workshop within the premises of his home. The MOHR also stepped in to help by providing him the necessary equipment.

2. You will undergo the painful process of sharpening, but you need to do it better

3. You are able to correct any mistake you make

4. What’s inside you is what matters most

5. No matter what happens, keep writing

The above was shared by Human Resources Ministry (MOHR) labour standards director Rahmat Ismail, who was present as a volunteer for the last Slim Lathian 1Malaysia (SL1M) roadshow held in Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSRI), Tanjung Malim, Perak.

We were fortunate enough to meet with three outstanding individuals who serve to remind us of the uniqueness of the five points mentioned, and that no disability or marginalisation can stop one from achieving one’s goals in life. These are their stories.

Naza Basir, 28

Naza belongs to the Jakun tribe of the orang asli community in Pahang. He admits: “When I got accepted into university, life was challenging at first. I was only the orang asli student.”

But when he realised that the students and lecturers actually didn’t care that he was an orang asli, his fears dissipated. He says: “Through group discussions and assignments, my relationship with other students strengthened. Until today, some of us are still in touch.”

Learning to mingle with students of other races in school and university, not only opened Naza’s mind, but also enhanced his communication skills.

Challenges in the business world

Naza’s first real experience in business was when he began selling packed food with some of his Malay friends at university.

After some time of doing sales and multi-level marketing, Naza decided it was time to open his own business. Also in 2016, he started his own company, Aura Asli Enterprises, which sells natural products made of agar-wood, such as perfumes. “Why agarwood? Apart from the fact that it is precious to the orang asli community, Naza believes that it has a lot of business potential.”

He explains that he would travel to different parts of Malaysia to enter various exhibitions as a means to get his brand out there and to promote and sell his products.

He says: “I had to sleep in my car near a petrol station or bus stop, because I was so tired and some of the exhibition centres were far.”

Today, a year after his business was established, Naza says he has customers from all over Malaysia. In fact, visiting Singaporeans love his product.

Aida Fayiza Mohamad Alias @ Avit, 23

Born with syndactyly and no legs, life wasn’t always easy for Aida. Aside from attracting unwanted looks from strangers, she also has to make do with the lack of disabled-friendly facilities in some places, and this makes moving around difficult for her.

When her father passed away when she was three, Aida’s mother was left to take care of her and her eight siblings.

Speaking to us recently, Aida revealed that her mother is everything to her. “When the time came for Aida to pursue her tertiary education, her mother was reluctant to let her go, out of fear and worry.”

Aida admits: “It was scary at first because I’ve never had to be away from my mother.”

When Aida graduated from the University of Science (USM), she revealed that her mother was there for her “as a phone call away” as her pillar of support.

“She always advises me to be patient.”

Have good support

When Aida joined Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) in Perak to study graphic design, she wondered if she would make any friends because of her condition.

She says: “But thank God, I made some really good friends who have been with me since my diploma years until degree.”

IN A NUTSHELL

The three stories above depict that no matter what background, ability or disability we have, we can achieve success – as long as we put in effort, grab the opportunities in front of us and persevere.

If a girl with no legs, a man with no eyesight and a man from a marginalised community can make it today despite their challenges, so can everyone else. It’s a matter of whether we want to take action today or not.

Naza Lathian 1Malaysia (SL1M) is a programme targeted to unemployed and underemployed graduates. It is a programme under the purview of the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) under the Prime Minister’s Department and is done in collaboration with GLCs and private corporations. For more information on SL1M, visit https://sl1m.my/. For success stories from SL1M, visit our YouTube page ‘SL1M Official’. 
PUTTING THE TEAM FIRST

THE KEY TO DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE CULTURE OF COMMUNICATION

By KHAILA RAMEEZ
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TEVIE Jobs explained teamwork using the story of an old man showing him how really ugly rocks can turn into incredibly beautiful ones after putting them in a can with some grit powder and liquid.

The friction that was created among the rocks while they were in the tin made them come out as beautiful and polished ones.

The idea is that, as individuals, we can be fairly ordinary. But when we are within the tin can of “teams”, we go beyond our comfort zones. We fight, we argue and we are exposed to different viewpoints.

Through this process, teams can mould their members in a way that they not only become great team members but also better version of themselves.

There are several benefits of teamwork. These include a marked increase in efficiency, problem solving skills and effective communication. While there are many benefits to working as a team, not all of them can be as effective as we expect.

In fact, in some cases, teamwork can turn out to be more catastrophic and unproductive than individuals working separately. This is due to a lack of team cohesion and an inability to reconcile the differences between team members.

Different personalities, perspectives and approaches to work coming together to achieve a goal definitely has its own challenges. For this reason, getting the team on the same page and making them work together is a time consuming and difficult task for managers.

So, managers take a look at their teams and ask: “Are they at their peak performance? Or are they breaking each other apart?”

Improving team performance? Sounds great! But how?

1. CHOOSING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

The success or failure of a good team begins with its members. Finding people who can understand – or more accurately, empathise – with one another, is half the job done already. Additionally, getting people with the right talent in relation to the task at hand will increase the effectiveness of the team.

2. BUILDING A CULTURE OF TRUST

Knowing that each of the members is trying to achieve the same goal and that team members will be there for support whenever needed, creates a culture of trust.

This can improve performance and group cohesion which, in turn, sparks their creativity and sense of innovation.

When there is trust, taking a risk or trying something new suddenly seems far more possible and even exciting.

3. ENCOURAGING TEAMWORK

Encouraging teamwork at the workplace can be done by simply rewarding good teamwork, identifying and resolving existing issues in a fun team environment.

4. EMPHASISING CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

Leaders need to guide team members on conflict resolution. For instance, encouraging members to speak to one another directly and have clear guidelines on how to resolve issues within the team that will not only improve effective communication, but also build a culture that is more solution-oriented.

5. TEAM BUILDING

Team building exercises are an excellent approach to improving teamwork. Through these exercises, members improve their skills, get to know each other better, and develop deeper connections in a fun and exciting environment.

Although organisations spend a lot of money and resources on various team building retreats, oftentimes they report a lack of improvement in team effectiveness. For instance, outdoor and group problem-solving activities in the name of team building may not be as effective as most people believe it to be.

While these exercises enhance relationships and teams have a good time engaging in them, at the end of the day, they often go back to their routine work style with little to no improvement. One reason for this is that team building exercise like these fail to address the real issues in the work environment.

One of the most effective approaches to team building is to do simulations, which bring the complexities of real-life scenarios and operations into a safe, guided and controlled environment.

These simulations provide a platform for members to work together to complete a specific task in which their conflicts such as lack of trust, poor communication and ego become evident clear. These issues can then be discussed during the debriefing session.

This is where team members can address those issues and relate it back to their workplace. Such simulations gives a holistic view of team performance at the workplace and insights to resolve conflicts through feedback from members.

“When the truth is that teamwork is at the heart of great achievement,” said John Maxwell.

As mentioned earlier, bringing teams together to work at their best in synergy is a difficult task. There could be various factors that’s making your team unproductive that you may not be aware of. Identifying those factors and getting to the root of the problem is key in building an effective team.

Leaderonomics provides a variety of simulations such as Silega Team Alignment simulation, Knolskape Contextual Team Leadership, and many more that provide a deeper understanding of team conflict.
H
OW often have you heard someone say that they “practically live” at the office? Or, called people at 7 or 8 pm and found them still at their desks?
The fact is, we all put in way too many hours at our desks. And today’s coolest office designs take that fact into account by giving us spaces to work where we can be relaxed and comfortable, and give full attention to our work.

How do you do that? The upscale office designs common today – incorporating lots of glass and chrome; black, white, and grey; and striking modern art – make for gorgeous photo spreads. But they may not be the kind of environment where employees feel the most relaxed and focused.

Instead, consider these tips from Jessica Dowling, head of trade services and marketing at the Global Workplace Design Group of CBRE, for how to create a welcoming space where employees can feel at home while concentrating on their work.

1. **GO NATURAL**

Cold and sterile finishes could breed a cold and sterile work environment. Instead, Dowling recommends favouring woods and fabrics over metal finishes. “Install soft whites or, even better, leave the windows bare and let the outdoors in.”

2. **CREATE FLEXIBLE SPACES**

With real estate increasingly unaffordable, Dowling suggests “flexing” your space so that you can accommodate with less. “It’s important to make your common spaces perform in many different applications,” she says.

For instance, you can eliminate conference rooms by creating sitting areas with furniture such as sectional sofas and funky coffee tables. “Consider desks on wheels that move together to create a large table for group meetings,” she says. “Complete the area with ottomans – they have a dual purpose and can be moved throughout the office easily for pop-up discussions.”

3. **BUILD A “FAMILY-STYLE” KITCHEN**

“Traditional cafeteria-style tables are so passé,” Dowling says. Replace them with a rustic dining table or wrap them in fabric, and incorporate plants in your decorator.

4. **CREATE A SPACE TO UNPLUG**

“Most of us find ourselves staring at a computer for hours on end,” Dowling says. “Sometimes we need a moment or two to decompress and collect our thoughts.”

To enable these refreshing moments, Dowling recommends setting aside a room or quiet corner of the office where employees can disconnect and quietly recharge. “No group meetings here!” she warns. “Incorporate home furnishings, such as comfortable chairs and sofas, incandescent lighting, plush pillows and throws, plants, framed artwork, and bookcases full of books, and soft music.”

5. **DON’T FORGET TO HAVE FUN!**

“Many small businesses want to set playful, fresh tones to encourage innovation,” Dowling says. “To do that, she suggests mixing new and old building materials, such as reclaimed brick or barn board.

Add interesting and fun art pieces and colourful lighting. And then put some purely-for-fun elements such as a table tennis table or pool table, foosball, an old-fashioned jukebox, etc.

If you do all that, she says, “you’ll have yourself a fun, interactive space that inspires creativity and fosters a strong team environment.”

Minda Zetlin is a business technology writer and speaker, co-author of The Geek Gap, and former president of the American Society of Journalists and Authors. This article first appeared on Inc.com

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