TRANSLATING VISION INTO ACTION

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A LOOK AT EASTERN AND WESTERN VIEWS ON INTELLIGENCE AND SUCCESS

BY SANDY CLARKE

East-West Outlook on Intelligence

In the West, the general idea of intelligence is that it’s an inherent quality – in other words, you either have it or you don’t. If you’re ‘bad’ at maths, chances are you won’t improve much, but that’s probably because you’re more creatively inclined... or so the misconception goes.

Traditionally, a struggling child in a Western school does not carry positive connotations; it’s very much seen in a negative light. Support and encouragement will be provided, but only in terms of making sure there is no further slip in a standard, rather than helping the child to overcome their struggles and thrive.

In the East, if children are struggling, rather than being seen as a weakness, it’s looked upon as an opportunity. Jin Li, a professor at Brown University, has spent more than a decade recording and comparing conversations between parents and children from America and Taiwan.

In an interview, she reveals that American parents view intelligence as a cause – something that is already within us that enables us to make progress. Meanwhile, Asian cultures see the link between intelligence and excellence in a different light. Li explains, “It resides in what they do, but not who they are, what they’re born with.”

In 1979, Jim Stigler – currently a professor of psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) – visited Japan as a graduate student to research teaching methods and was astonished at what he found.

A child, who was struggling to draw three-dimensional cubes, was invited to put his work on the classroom board. Following repeated attempts to correct the drawing, the teacher asked the class if it was correct. The students shook their heads in unison.

Finally, when the struggling child correctly drew the three-dimensional shape, the class applauded the progress and the proud student went back to his seat. The struggle had paid off, and the perseverance rewarded. Stigler later observed, “I think that from very early ages we (in America) see struggle as an indicator that you’re just not very smart. It’s a sign of low ability – people who are smart don’t struggle, they just naturally get it, that’s our folk wisdom.”

As with struggling, success is also generally viewed with more nuance in the East compared to the West. Studies suggest that, while Westerners perceive success as an individualistic concept (‘Doing well for yourself’), Asian cultures tend to view it through a more communal lens – whether that points to collective benefit, or seeking external approval that represents – in effect, a collective recognition of a person’s excellence.


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Belief alone does not yield success. Great breakthroughs can only be accomplished through hard work, planning, leadership and practice, but without the fire of belief, most people quit. What are the things in your life that you want to do but everyone thinks are impossible? Maybe even you believe they are impossible? Perhaps it is a goal you have given up on, or a target you think can’t be achieved. Maybe you think it is impossible to turn your business around or to inspire your employees?

Check out this article on Leaderonomics: [bit.ly/3tBeliefsystem](http://bit.ly/3tBeliefsystem)

Sandy Clarke is a freelance writer from the UK with over 10 years of experience in journalism and public relations. To connect with Sandy, send an email to editor@leaderonomics.com.
By ROSHAN THIRAN

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." – Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. was born Michael Luther King Jr. on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia. He was the youngest of six children – five girls and one boy. His father was a Baptist minister and his mother was a schoolteacher. King was brought up in a Quaker home, where he was exposed to the teachings of pacifism and non-violent resistance.

King was a brilliant scholar and a gifted orator. He attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, where he studied sociology and economics. After graduating, he entered Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, where he studied religious studies and was awarded the Bachelor's of Divinity. In his senior year, he changed his name to Martin.

Leaving school at the age of 15, King went to work as a domestic servant. He later became a bond salesman and then a schoolteacher. In 1953, he met and married Coretta Scott, a fellow civil rights activist.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a key figure in fighting for civil rights and equality for African Americans. He was a key figure in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 for his efforts in leading the Civil Rights Movement.

THE EARLY DAYS

He was born Michael Luther King Jr. and was known as little Mike before his father changed his name to Martin. Leaving school at the age of 15, King achieved his BA degree at Morehouse College – the same institution from which his father and grandfather graduated.

Following his study of theology at Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, he was awarded the Bachelor's of Divinity. In his senior class, he was elected president in a predominately white group.

THE RELUCTANT LEADER

In 1955, he achieved his doctorate in Theology from Boston University. It was there that he met his future wife, Coretta Scott, with whom he had two sons and two daughters.

He was constantly reading and learning, and his speeches are littered with references to great leaders and philosophers of the past. A key trait of great leaders is that they learn continually, reading voraciously and absorbing content everywhere they go.

Later that same year, a woman named Rosa Parks was arrested in Montgomery for refusing to give up her seat on a bus for a white passenger. On the evening of Dec 5, following a day of boycotting the bus services, the Montgomery Improvement Association was formed at the basement of the Holt Street Baptist Church (Dr King's church).

When no one seemed to step up to the plate, he was elected president at 6 pm – although Dr King had no intention of leading this movement. At 7 pm, the newly elected president was supposed to give a speech during mass. Dr King ran home to tell his wife and had about 20 minutes to prepare a speech. Normally, he would take about 15 hours to prepare a sermon but after a few minutes of panic, he jotted down some lines and headed back to the church where thousands had gathered.

He delivered an inspiring speech from his heart that began the movement which not only helped him figure out his calling, but inspired millions to follow suit.

BEING FAITHFUL TO YOUR VISION

Many times, in life, like Dr King, leadership is thrust on us. How we seize that moment (even if we are unsure, as he was) and leverage it, determines the kind of leader we are.

In 1956, as the movement began to take shape, Dr King received death threats, and his house was bombed in late January as he addressed a meeting. Although no one was hurt, the charismatic pastor later had to implore angry crowds to observe non-violence as they called for retribution.

He once observed that, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.” It was this belief that fuelled his spiritual journey and social conscience, along with drawing inspiration from peaceful campaigners such as Mohandas Gandhi and Thich Nhat Hanh.

Dr King knew that despite calls from many to fight back and defend yourself when violence is dished out to you, he stood his ground – faithful to his calling for a non-violent protest and movement.

What about us? Are we faithful to our vision? Do we cut corners and compromise principles to achieve our goals? Or do we, like Dr King, remain faithful to our calling?

TAKING THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD

Knowing that the struggle for civil rights and equality would be a long and winding road, stretching out even after his own time, Dr King was nevertheless determined that action should always be taken where action was necessary. The length of time it took to achieve the goal didn’t matter – only that it was achieved. As he once said, “If you can’t fly then run, if you can’t run then walk, if you can’t walk then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward.”

If you can’t fly then run, if you can’t run then walk, if you can’t walk then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward.

Many a time, we feel like giving up. Our goals seem too impossible, too far away. I have on many occasions felt like giving up on the Leaderonomics dream. Yet, like Dr King, we need to have long-term focus and patience.

Great things come to those who wait, to those who keep at the task at hand and know that even if he or she fails to achieve the mission, someone else will carry that work on to completion one day.

Our role is to patiently keep going forward.

THE POWER OF THE SPoken WORD

On Aug 28, 1963, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom saw over 200,000 people in attendance at the Lincoln Memorial. It was on this day that the famous ‘I Have A Dream’ speech was delivered by Dr King, who included several hopes he had for humanity: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.”

This speech rocked the nation and began swinging the pendulum for the movement.

Many times, as leaders, we do not realise the power of the words we use. Words have a profound effect on people. The words we choose and the words we utter, can inspire or defeat.

Words can bless or curse. Words can have a magical effect on people’s motivation and zeal towards you and your work.

As leaders, we need to be conscious that words can define our success or failure. In December 1964, Dr King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize at a ceremony in Oslo, Norway. He announced that the USD54,000 would go entirely towards helping the civil rights struggle.

THE FINALE

In his last public speech, delivered in Memphis on April 3, 1968, Dr King gave an inspiring call to peaceful action to those in attendance.

In the prophetic ‘I’ve Been to the Mountaintop’ speech, he said: “Like any man, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will. And He’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over. And I’ve seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land.”

The following day, Dr King was shot and killed as he stood on the balcony of his hotel in Memphis. He was buried in Atlanta – returning to the place where he called home and where his struggle began.

Dr King always spoke out, even when it was not convenient and even if it meant death. He always held to his principles, never compromising. He always put the mission ahead of even his own personal agenda.

Dr King was a leader who showed the importance of living with courage, staying true to your principles, and to keep fighting to realise your vision even if the odds are stacked heavily against you.

Passion and perseverance are powerful forces against any challenge, no matter its size or how long it takes to overcome. As for his legacy, less than a year after his assassination, Shirley Chisholm became the first black female member of Congress. America saw its first black American president elected to the White House in 2008, and black Americans now rightly enjoy greater freedom and rights.

But if there’s one thing that the life and times of Dr King show us, it’s that we should never rest on our laurels. We need to keep struggling, believing, and pushing forward with our convictions, beliefs, and dreams.

Only when we do, can we leave a legacy as powerful as Dr Martin Luther King Jr.

Lessons From Martin Luther King Jr.

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Today, the word ‘Madisonian’ refers to someone, especially a political figure, who is viewed as stily, cunning, unscrupulous and ruthless. It’s a term rarely used in a complimentary manner and yet, the man behind the expression is regarded as one of history’s most brilliant strategic minds and ‘the father of modern political theory’. Check out another of Roshan’s lessons from the greats here:

At times, we can be facing an uphill battle to bring about a change in the world. It can feel like we are stuck in a hopeless situation and we get fixated on the idea that we will never have a choice in certain situations.

Leaderonomics leadership training programmes can help you become an effective strategist who is also proactive and action-oriented. Some of our leadership courses are designed to help you take control of your life and use your strength of character to make the right decisions. Through these courses, participants will also learn to focus on things they can change and how to be in charge when situations go beyond control. Email us at info@leaderonomics.com to find out more.

Roshan Thiran is the founder and CEO of Leaderonomics and is hoping that many others will go forward to start movements that make a difference like Dr King did. To connect with Roshan and to receive daily leadership insights, go to facebook.com/roshanthiran, leaderonomics, Twitter (@Elephant), Instagram or LinkedIn.
By LISA STEPHENSON
editor@leaderonomics.com

EADING with strength and authenticity, attracting the right talent to work in your business, having healthy workplace culture and achieving strong financial growth, can all be attributed to the emotional intelligence of those sitting in the leadership roles.

Champion of emotional intelligence Daniel Goleman recommended to the world that the ability to manage one’s own emotions and those of others was more important than a person’s intellect.

According to research from Harvard Business School, emotional intelligence – commonly referred to as emotional quotient (EQ) – is twice as important as intellectual ability (IQ).

**EQ vs IQ**

Historically, the corporate world has heavily valued IQ, measuring it thoroughly before appointing people to positions of influence. Being ‘smart’ was a direct reflection of your ability to do business.

In more recent times, we have generally acknowledged that this thinking does not equate to building successful relationships. We’ve seen organisations invest in teaching their teams to have courageous conversations and provide quality feedback, to take time to initiate activities that build the self-awareness of those who are responsible for the development of people. But have we really understood what is possible if we truly value EQ in our leaders?

Words such as ‘authenticity’ and ‘collaboration’ are constantly used when we refer to expectations of our leaders today – they both require an ability to deeply understand the experience a person creates for others.

On the surface, this creates conversation around what we mean by personal brand, but more strategically this is a true ability to work robustly and respectfully with others.

**CHARACTER AND VALUES**

We want to report to people who are emotionally healthy and resilient. We admire leaders who are confident in their ability to navigate conflict and say sorry if they get it wrong. We want those setting the strategy to tell the truth and bring optimism to the room.

We want leaders who are strong in their values, beliefs and life experience. My experience as a success coach tells me that these attributes equate to trust, and we can’t have strong leadership without it. In fact, this may be more important than inspiration.

Patty McCord helped create the high performing workplace culture that now exists at Netflix. In her best-selling book *Powerful* she essentially tells us that traditional approaches to leading people through performance appraisals and bonuses don’t work. Certainly, we are not all working in Silicon Valley, but what people need and want from leaders is global. This is not about what some might call soft skills. Sure, listening and rapport building matter. Resolving conflict and negotiating are seen on most of our CVs, and being likeable does count, but what we are really talking about here is not soft. It’s critical. It’s essential.

**TAPPING INTO POTENTIAL**

The challenge for small businesses and global organisations alike is to move at pace and to do it with innovation, while tapping into the potential of the people who are actually doing the work!

Leaders need to leverage both their instincts and intuition. If your current role or the team you are leading want to be successful, then investing in building EQ bench strength is possibly the most important investment you will make.

Lisa Stephenson is a global success coach, author of *Read Me First* and founding director of Lisa Stephenson Consulting. To connect with her, send an email to editor@leaderonomics.com.
I t is natural for businesses to evolve over time, as they tweak their business strategies to meet the ever-changing needs of consumers. However, we live in rapidly changing times and there are various factors that can disrupt the niche that owners have carved out for their businesses, many of which they have no control over.

Businesses cannot afford to rest on their laurels just because they have enjoyed satisfying returns in the past because they risk becoming irrelevant if they do not keep up with the evolving market.

It is said that the only constant is change, and it is far better to seek change than to be forced into it.

ADAPTING TO CHANGE

Segamat Panel Boards (SPB) is a company that originally specialised in high-quality, thin panel medium-density fibreboard (MDF) when it was first established in 2002. These were more difficult to make at the time, and commanded a premium price.

However, the business climate has changed with fierce competition coming from neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam, and the product has become commoditised.

With the market no longer being niche and business cycles getting shorter, the company realised a few years ago that its business model was maturing – and more worrying is that it was outdated.

This is in part due to the dwindling availability of rubber wood, the raw material used to produce MDFs and other wood-based products – and this has become one of the major obstacles faced by SPB.

Hence, the company embarked on a mission to seek an alternative to the rubberwood and tropical timbers which – up until a few years ago – was their primary source of raw material, as they knew it would not be sustainable in the long term.

While SPB has been successful in identifying an alternative (i.e. oil palm trunk) through collaborations with researchers from several European universities, this brought on its own set of challenges.

Managing director Peter Fitch shares that the company’s profit margins are far cry from what they were five to ten years ago, making it difficult to justify new investments and secure financing for new projects.

“When people look at our recent performance in the current business, they will ask a lot of questions such as, ‘Are you sure that what you want to do is really going to generate money and yield returns?’”

This issue is not unique to SPB; it is a challenge for the Malaysian timber industry as a whole, which has been classified as a sunset industry. “It’s quite common knowledge that all the banks have put an overall restriction on the amount of investment they are willing to put into this industry, because they classify it as an industry that is in decline,” says Fitch.

“That’s why funding for this industry is always extremely challenging.”

PEOPLE AND COMPANY CULTURE ARE THE CORE

Nevertheless, Fitch says that the company is driven by the mission that all these issues boil down to being people and company culture-related. “It doesn’t matter whether it’s a technical or product problem, a sales or marketing issue, or even a challenge with getting financing - at the end of the day, it’s all about people and company culture.”

As for the middle management, Fitch says that many lack the appropriate skill set. “Even though candidates say they have a degree or diploma, we find that their education level and skill sets don’t match up – in fact, it can be surprisingly poor.”

The company’s distance from metropolitan areas, however, is a blessing when it comes to attracting general workers. “It’s relatively easy, because we’re able to recruit workers from the (Segamat) town and the nearby villages and fields areas,” says Fitch.

Fitch also believes that it is important to empower employees, but first they need to become more confident in their roles. This is critical as the company’s factory operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Senior management may not be on site early in the morning, late at night, and on weekends, so supervisors, line leaders and operators must possess the necessary skills to make critical decisions autonomously and work with confidence.

To achieve that, Fitch says that the company needs to encourage employees to take more responsibility for their own actions and find ways to continually improve skills and develop positive attitudes.

Another key way that this is done in SPB is by having the more senior staff mentor the junior staff.

When asked what other SMEs should keep in mind when trying to evolve with the market, Fitch had this to share: “We have a check sheet to see if we’re on track or not. First, is it technically and commercially feasible? Is it something you can afford in the business, the company, the country, and the environment?”

“Companies have a responsibility to maintain a competitive edge, and to not let the competition catch up,” says Fitch.

“Before you go ahead with your innovative idea and business model,” states Fitch.

When SPB’s initial obstacles were related to technical issues and creating a market for its products, the ongoing challenge is to ensure that the company’s employees possess the correct skill sets to sustain its markets and keep it at the forefront of product innovation.

“This is why the recruiting, training and nurturing of the relevant skill set to run our business is very crucial,” says Fitch.

Fitch shares that being based in Segamat (a district in the north of Johor) poses a challenge when it comes to recruiting senior management, because many tend to gravitate towards major cities such Kuala Lumpur or even Singapore.

Once they hear that they will have to live in Segamat, they are not interested,” he says.

As for the mid-management, Fitch says that many lack the appropriate skill set. “Even though candidates say they have a degree or diploma, we find that their education level and skill sets don’t match up – in fact, it can be surprisingly poor.”

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Fitch: It doesn’t matter whether it’s a technical or product problem, a sales or marketing issue, or even a challenge with getting financing - at the end of the day, it’s all about people and company culture.

It is because of this that SPB is not dependent on foreign workers to operate the machines in its factory, unlike many other small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia.

“We need to move away from a dependency on unskilled, low-salaried workers, and move towards a high-skilled, highly educated, and inclusive workforce. We need a workforce that shares our company culture,” says Fitch.

Fitch adds that not only does the company benchmark itself against domestic and international peers within the industry, it also looks to other industries for inspiration as well.

“We look primarily at the people with-in the wood industry, but why not look at other industries such as the electronics, automotive, or even the service sector as well? There’s much to learn about what we can improve, and how we can bring our business up to that level.”

To ensure that all employees possess skills that match the requirements of their roles, SPB reviews its training needs regularly to identify gaps in competencies. “We have a continued commitment to both internal and external training,” states Fitch.

For example, any manager or supervisor who has gone for external training is obliged to transfer their newly-acquired knowledge to the others by becoming an internal trainer in that particular skill.

Likewise, any internal training is shared from the top down and is inclusive of all workers.

“When we carry out training, we tweak the theme to ensure it fits in with our company culture of integrity, innovation and sustainability,” says Fitch.

The Segamat Panel Boards management team at its premises in Segamat, Johor.
TRANSITIONING TO THE C-SUITE

LESSES FROM FAILURE

By Cassandra Frangos

Editor-in-Chief

With change, career and life transitions can be exciting. But change is also unchartered territory for most people, and it can be particularly challenging for women. The transition to the C-suite is a rarefied level that few women have ever occupied. As the head of a growing agency, I meet women who aspire to CDs at some point in their careers. But what does it take to be a top CED in this business? It’s a great article on this topic, backed by global studies on women. Let’s connect, human to human.

The ability to connect two or more people can have a huge impact on the way we think and feel about our own lives. Author Gary Chapman says that we should communicate our love for others. Language encompasses the non-verbal, tangible and intangible. It can express our emotions, thoughts, and feelings. By using language effectively, we can strengthen relationships and create a positive impact on others.

There are many practical things we can do to improve our language skills. First, we can listen actively and empathetically. This means paying attention to what the other person is saying and responding in a way that shows understanding and support. Second, we can express our thoughts and feelings clearly and directly. This means using language that is simple and easy to understand, and avoiding vague or ambiguous expressions. Finally, we can ask questions to clarify and build greater understanding.

By communicating effectively, we can help others to feel more connected and engaged in their lives. This can lead to a more fulfilling and successful future for all of us.

This article first published in the Financial Times (FT), the world’s leading business news organisation. It is written by Cassie Frangos, a consultant at Spencer Stuart’s Leadership Development team. The article focuses on executive assessments, succession planning, leadership development and top business effectiveness.

Executive transitions to the C-suite are often the result of a combination of factors. Some of these factors include the level and nature of experience, as well as the individuals’ ability to communicate and work with others. Other factors that play a role include the level of support and resources available to the new executive.

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By communicating effectively, we can help others to feel more connected and engaged in their lives. This can lead to a more fulfilling and successful future for all of us.
One does anything worthwhile alone, and that’s why we all want — scratch that — why we all need — to build great teams.

But ‘teamwork’ doesn’t always translate, especially for different cultures.

That’s something I realised when I talked with Phuong Uyen Tran, the deputy chief executive officer of the family-owned Tan Heep Phat (THP) Group, Vietnam’s leading independent beverage company. And she’s the author of Competing With Giants: How One Family-Owned Company Took On the Multinationals and Won.

I’m embarrassed to admit I didn’t realise ‘teamwork’ doesn’t necessarily translate across countries and cultures.

In the United States (US) and throughout the West, corporations place great emphasis on the word ‘teamwork’. But for companies with global teams, its meaning does not necessarily translate. Rather than bring employees together and help take efforts to the next level, it can be a source of confusion and even friction.

This is especially true in Asian countries including Vietnam. Throughout much of Asia, teamwork tends to be an alien concept. Much of this has to do with cultural norms around face and respect.

In most Asian cultures, people typically do not express their disagreement publicly. It is also extremely important not to lose face, and there is a strong attachment to hierarchy.

In the corporate world, this manifests itself as a desire to respect those at a more senior level and receive respect from those at a lower one.

This mindset is prevalent in Vietnam, although it is not as strongly rooted in the culture as it is in Japan, Korea, and to a lesser extent, China.

The idea of not losing face, even though it’s not necessarily referred to in that way, definitely applies in the US, though.

True, but Vietnamese people find teamwork particularly difficult, because they are such a self-reliant people. History has made it so. Put too much trust and reliance in other people, and you will end up being subjugated by them.

That’s why trying to instill a teamwork culture is something many multinational struggles with when they attempt to import Western business practices to the region. It is one of the biggest mistakes they make when they come to Asia, and they will almost certainly fail.

But a simple mindset shift can help prevent this. The shift begins with focusing not on the teamwork dynamic, but on the notion of ‘owning your work’, which resonates more intuitively throughout much of Asia and certainly in Vietnam.

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In essence, owning your work is about taking responsibility. It’s about understanding that success or failure results from personal efforts, not external factors.

Equally important is emphasising that helping others achieve success is a form of personal success, too — and can even enhance personal success in various ways.

This tends to resonate best with competitive type-A personalities who may be fairly self-focused as they strive to climb the corporate ladder. Once they get into management positions, they are often ineffective until they realise they are being judged on their ability to support others. They start making an effort once they understand that making others look good makes them look good, too.

Another aspect of the mindset shift is that it can make people less likely to help others.

Owning your work is about taking responsibility. It’s about understanding that success or failure results from personal efforts, not external factors.

For instance, each year my company holds a songwriting competition. All of the entrants are invited to our headquarters to take part in a gala performance each October that celebrates THP’s anniversary. Some of the entries are by individual people, but most of them are by departments who have worked collaboratively on a song and a routine. Typically, they’ll dress identically as well.

Although they behave as a collective, they still would not describe their actions as teamwork. What they have is a shared sense of ownership. Everyone feels they have a stake in the outcome and they take great pride in being able to show-case their work to their colleagues and the rest of the organisation.

All of these steps enhance collabora-
tion and results, producing the very same dynamics that teamwork creates without even mentioning this potentially awk-
ward concept.

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By CHRISTIE CHUA
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ACT, DON'T JUST REACT
HOW TO HELP SMEs EXCEL IN THE CHEMICAL INDUSTRY

D
you tend to associate the term ‘chemicals’ with the materials found in chemistry laboratories back in school, such as hydrochloric acid, sodium and ethanol, just to name a few? The fact is that almost everything that we use and consume daily contains a certain type of some sort—from our toothpaste and shampoo, to the salt and vinegar in our food.

The chemicals and chemical products industry is very diverse and complex, it encompasses petrochemicals, agrochemicals, cosmetics and toiletries, paint, industrial gas, oil and biochemistry, pharmaceuticals, detergents, and fertilisers and pesticides.

Based on the 2017 Productivity Report 2017/2018, it is one of the leading economic subsectors in Malaysia, accounting for 8.9 per cent of Malaysia’s total export for manufactured goods.

The majority of businesses in this industry fall under the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) category, and despite the diversity, there are two common aspects that need to be addressed for the industry to flourish further.

Human capital

The upskilling of local talent is necessary for Malaysia to remain relevant in the global market. Chemicals and Chemical Products Productivity Nexus Champion, Datuk Dr Abd Hapiz Abdullah says that it is important to train, certify and pay workers accordingly, in order to change the perception that certain jobs are less dignified. This, according to Dr Hapiz, means there is a future for them in the industry, and the development of local talent will give Malaysia the opportunity to displace skilled foreign workers.

Business operations

SMEs in Malaysia need to maintain their competitiveness in a commodity market, and Dr Abd Hapiz believes that innovation is the way to go. “When you’re in a commodity market, the most relevant concern is how to reduce your cost—to me, that’s the number one thing.”

“Reducing cost doesn’t mean cutting down on manpower—they are other ways, such as the adoption of industry 4.0,” says Dr Abd Hapiz.

“SMEs need to become more innovative rather than relying on the big players like Petrokem to drive innovation in the industry.”

NEXUS INITIATIVES

Establish a centre of excellence (COE) for chemicals

Elements that the COE are responsible for include the implementation of Responsible Care programmes and innovation through research and development.

Responsible Care is the global chemical industry’s initiative to enhance environmental, health, safety and security performance, where its signatories pledge to conduct business in a responsible manner.

The Nexus has been reaching out to SMEs through the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation (MOSTI) to connect them to the principles of Responsible Care, but Dr Abd Hapiz says that the chemical industry practitioners found these roadshows in the first place, even though there is no cost involved.

This is where certain government agencies, for example, SME Corporation Malaysia and Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH), need to come in to encourage SMEs to come listen to us.”

The roadshows aim to illustrate the correlation between safety and productivity, as many business owners do not realise how a simple injury to a worker can impact their business.

“If SMEs adopt the Responsible Care programme, we can guarantee that their safety will improve tremendously, and their productivity will automatically go up—this in turn translates into more money in their banks,” says Dr Abd Hapiz.

He adds: “The challenge is mammoth, but I think it’s worthwhile if it involves human lives. The Nexus and government agencies must keep pushing this.”

2 Deepen collaboration between industry players and local educational institutions

Malaysian businesses tend to seek foreign labour—to be skilled or unskilled—even though local talent is readily available.

“I don’t know why people see foreign talent as being better. I’m impressed by some of the work that local universities have in their portfolio, and they should collaborate with the industry to help crystalise local ideas and provide local manpower,” says Dr Abd Hapiz.

Unfortunately, there is currently a large gap between the industry and related education institutions, which the Nexus hopes to close by creating more awareness on both ends.

Dr Abd Hapiz shares an example from his personal experience: “One SME needed skilled workers and it did not know where to get such manpower, when in fact, the factory was only about half a mile away from a technical college—they didn’t even bother checking to see if they could get students who have compulsory internships to complete.”

“It’s surprising that SMEs have no idea where to look, and their first instinct is to go to a foreign worker agency when there is cheap local labour.”

Another aspect of collaboration that the Nexus is looking at is to get industry players who have the right technology to work with local universities or agencies in using palm oil to create bioplastics.

“This immediately narrows it down to a local context,” says Dr Abd Hapiz.

“It will only be 3 million dollars to start a facility. It doesn’t require hundreds of millions of dollars in investment. A small company, at least 10 to 20 people, can make the whole endeavour worthwhile.”

3 Enhance SME capabilities

Dr Abd Hapiz says that while SMEs may be from mom-and-pop businesses to bigger ones that are more organised, their standard operating procedures (SOPs) are nearly the same across the board, which is rather alarming as they are quite outdated.

However, the Nexus sees it as an opportunity for them to guide SMEs by providing technical, digital and management support, for example, conducting industry 4.0 readiness assessments and pilot projects. “Their SOPs cannot remain the same, they have to evolve to keep up with the times,” says Dr Abd Hapiz.

Help SMEs move towards high value components

Dr Abd Hapiz shares that it is extremely difficult to convince traditional business owners to invest in value-added products if it requires them to revamp their operations.

He explains that the change has to be done in phases, and government agencies need to understand that change cannot happen overnight—they must be for the long haul.

“SMEs have to be willing participants and this is where we provide them with the opportunity to be innovative. Rather than telling them what to change, we tell them what the goal is, and partner with them to work towards it.”

Help provide support to high potential SMEs to expand internationally

According to Dr Abd Hapiz, most of the players in the industry only target the local market (30 million people), when they really should be thinking about penetrating the ASEAN market, which is much larger with a population of 635 million.

This is where the Nexus comes in, providing support to SMEs that want to increase their exports. “The idea comes from the Nexus, and it’s open to everyone. Whoever wants to pick it up can do so, and we’ll work with you to grow your market,” says Dr Abd Hapiz.

He adds that the challenge here is to get SMEs to collaborate, instead of trying to outdo one another. “Instead of competing with each other for the local market, they should work together and go for the foreign market. This way they will have an opportunity, otherwise they won’t even be able to start.”

SAFETY FIRST

Safety is the number one priority in this industry, as there can be huge repercussions when an accident occurs.

“People can talk about the damage to their reputation and loss of business, but the onus is on the chemical industry players to ensure that there is no loss of life,” says Dr Abd Hapiz.

He adds that this is crucial, as each incident—even a simple one such as a chemical spill—reinforces the public’s negative perception of the industry and gives it a bad name.

SMEs have to be willing participants and this is where we provide them with the opportunity to be innovative. Rather than telling them what to change, we tell them what the goal is, and partner with them to work towards it.”

At times these safety processes make us too rigid, but it’s something that needs to continue for the chemical industry to have a sustainable future. It is not enough to get all riled up only when something goes wrong—we need to be cognizant of the risks at all times.”

“The mantra of the Nexus is safety. SMEs and manpower are our focus, but it is driven with safety in mind. The more we push that, the better off we are,” says Dr Abd Hapiz.

“We hope that these Responsible Care principles are adhered to at all times, irrespective of the future environment.”

“At the end of the day, I want everyone to be at peace knowing that the chemical industry is doing its utmost best to make sure that they are safe, that you are safe to use and eat products that contain chemicals,” says Dr Abd Hapiz.

The Malaysia Productivity Corporation (MPC) has started a nationwide productivity movement across all segments of society to create higher levels of awareness and understanding of the importance and benefits of productivity at entrepreneurial, organisational and individual levels.

With guidance on how to measure and track productivity, and more information on their Productivity Nexus, go to www.mpc.gov.my.

The cost of providing private healthcare continues to rise, due to the escalating costs of medical supplies and manpower. Can the healthcare industry keep costs low so that it translates into more affordable care for patients? Find out more at: bit.ly/healthcareCC

There is a growing gap between the machinery and equipment (M&E) industry’s demand for skilled technicians and the number of graduates who enter the workforce each year. It is therefore crucial that local institutes work hand-in-hand with the industry to ensure that Malaysia can optimise its local talent pool. Find out more at: bit.ly/MEmanagingtalentCC

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PRIORITYING
THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

7 IMPORTANT TRENDS TO MAKE THAT HAPPEN

1. INFORMATION IN THE HANDS OF ALL
In the past, information was held and controlled by a few. Now with the Internet of Things and social media platforms, information is in the hands of many (even if it is fake news!).
It takes something special to get through the background noise of mass digital communication. So how do you do it?
You need to position yourself as the thought leader – by providing unique insights that are valuable to others, and have the ability to capture and share these insights with others.

2. THE BUSINESS WORLD HAS CHANGED
There has always been change in business, however never before has the business world shifted this quickly from one trend to the next. Thought leadership offers an evolved way of thinking and acting.
By staying on the leading edge of new trends and insights, this allows you to be more flexible in both your thinking and your ability to mobilise your people in a new direction in less time.

3. SHIFT IN FOCUS BY GENERATIONAL BANDS
We have an ageing and independent workforce of experienced staff who in the past would have retired to enjoy their ‘golden years’. Not anymore.
This, coupled with the younger generation that is wired into digital and social media more than any other generation, can create a quagmire of issues in how these generations relate.
These generational shifts require new forms of thinking and thought leadership to identify new trends for younger generations of consumers, as well as leverage and harness this new talent to create faster internal processes.

4. MARKETING HAS CHANGED FOREVER!
Going back as little as 25 years ago, television was the primary form of mass marketing. Now, traditional marketing has been pushed on its head. Even the top marketing experts can’t provide the data of what specific marketing is working.
What hasn’t changed? People trust the brands that have a solid reputation. By being viewed as a thought leader, your business has a stronger reputation that influences candidates, suppliers, customers and industry commentators on the way your business operates, which everyone knows is the strongest form of marketing – word of mouth and referral.

5. WHAT WE KNOW IS ALL WE KNOW – AND IT IS NO LONGER ENOUGH
A sustainable competitive advantage is still considered to be the holy grail of business success. The challenge is that the concepts and approaches that were used in the past are no longer working – just ask any taxi company CEO who has seen what Uber has done to their industry.
For you to get in front of the speed of change and demand for innovation, you will need to be more agile and responsive than in the past.
By harnessing the thought leadership across your business, you will develop skill sets and a process that are designed to invent, discover, innovate and create ideas, so you are the ones that are creating the leading-edge approach in your industry.

6. SHORTENED SPANS OF ATTENTION
With everyone plugged in 24/7, it is getting more and more difficult to capture customer (and staff) attention. Both Facebook and Twitter have conditioned us to live in a society that is full of short bursts of activity and communication that arrive in a compact timeframe.
Unless you are regularly positioning yourself and your ideas in an engaging way, people will not listen.
People listen – and follow – what thought leaders are saying because they have the respect for their knowledge and insight. To rise up above the noise, you need to be the thought leader.

7. INCREASED NEED TO INNOVATE AND DIFFERENTIATE
Many businesses fall into the trap of inadvertently settling into a pattern of habitual thinking. These are often previous ways that were successful, however, it may not suit the new changing environment.

Facebook and Twitter have conditioned us to live in a society that is full of short bursts of activity and communication that arrive in a compact timeframe.
Unless you are regularly positioning yourself and your ideas in an engaging way, people will not listen.
People listen – and follow – what thought leaders are saying because they have the respect for their knowledge and insight. To rise up above the noise, you need to be the thought leader.

We can no longer follow the crowd and jump in on based on duplicating what competitors are doing. True thought leadership is about looking for new ways of doing things and having the ability to capture, package and communicate this differentiation to the market.
More than ever, you need to make thought leadership an imperative to fast-track your performance and gain a competitive edge in today’s world.

Scott Stein is a leadership pathfinder who has helped thousands of leaders to implement fast-track strategies that improve results. He is the author of Leadership Hacks: Clever Shortcuts to Boost Your Impact and Results (Wiley) and The Order: Doing The Right Things At The Right Time In The Right Way. To connect with him, send an email to editor@leaderonomics.com.

By SCOTT STEIN
editor@leaderonomics.com

The success of an organisation and its leaders typically depends on how managers and staff understand psychological influences and thought processes. Leaderonomics has suitable workshops for those in managerial roles to learn the right techniques for critical, analytical and creative thinking for self and organisational improvement.
In this workshop, participants will also learn to understand employees and harness this new talent to create faster internal processes. and harness this new talent to create faster internal processes.
HOW TO LEAD A NEW TEAM

By DAN ROCKWELL
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YOU can’t predict the path forward when facing new challenges. But leading a new team, thanks to ‘Tuckman’s Stages’ has elements of predictability.

FOUR STAGES – PLUS ONE

1. Forming
   - Mission – What are we here to do?
   - Introductions – Who are we?
   - Stories – Tell-stories of past teams that thrived. What made them thrive?
   - Timeline – How long do we have to complete our mission? (Operations teams establish intermediate goals.)
   - Engagement – What contributions will each team member make?

Tip: Everyone at the table leaves with an assignment. This is especially true at the beginning. No drifting allowed. You shouldn’t be at the meeting if you consistently leave without something to do.

2. Storming
   - Collaboration – you maximise each other’s strengths.
   - Standardisation – you know how to respond to tension, conflict and failure.
   - Monitor – team leaders monitor team interaction for reversion to the storming stage.

Tip: Team leadership requires you to notice tension and bring it up. The issues you avoid, get worse. They don’t magically disappear.

3. Norming
   - Collaboration – you maximise each other’s strengths.
   - Standardisation – you know how to respond to tension, conflict and failure.
   - Monitor – team leaders monitor team interaction for reversion to the storming stage.

Tip: Team leadership is less hands-on. How will we respond to failure?

4. Performing
   - Mission focus – teams focus more on the mission and less on navigating relationships.
   - Interdependence – you learn when and how to count on each other.

Tip: How will we respond to new ideas? How will we respond to failure? How will we treat each other when we disagree?

3. Adjourning
   - Interdependence – you maximise each other’s strengths.
   - Mission focus – teams focus more on the mission and less on navigating relationships.
   - Interdependence – you learn when and how to count on each other.

Tip: How will we respond to new ideas? How will we respond to failure? How will we treat each other when we disagree?

Four stages – plus one: The mission.

Team leaders have four concerns:
- Monitor team interactions.
- Maximize everyone’s strengths.
- Bring up issues’ others might avoid.
- Deliver great results through others.

Effective interactions are the foundation of great results.

Employee loyalty is becoming a concern in organisations, especially when it involves the younger generation. How is this different from the past? Listen to Connie Lee share her thoughts about how millennials are not just looking for employers that help them fulfill their career and life goals, but also employers who inspire passion in their work. bit.ly/RYGenoughreasonstostay

SIGNED & SEALED

On Nov 29, Leaderonomics and Inspire Group signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to work together to facilitate collaborations on projects, products, initiatives, marketing and promotion activities in order to enhance mutual growth in Asia and Australasia.

This collaboration will increase the span of leading-edge learning solutions and experiences to be customised to meet the differing needs of Leaderonomics’ corporate clients in Asian countries, and at the same time expand Leaderonomics’ products and services to Australia and New Zealand markets.

Inspire Group is an award-winning professional services firm which has developed thousands of learning solutions for clients worldwide, including bespoke e-learning courses, leadership workshops and online blended solutions.

In 2018 alone, Inspire Group has scooped up six new awards across multiple categories at the world’s most prestigious learning awards, Brandon Hall and LearnX.

Having great networking skills allows leaders to create a set of relationships and data sources that they can tap into when necessary. The question is, how do you become better at it? Here are three tips: bit.ly/ARBusinessNetworking
CREATING CONVERSATIONS
3 WAYS TO INFLUENCE WITH EASE

By DARREN FLEMING
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THE secret to bringing in a new client is to connect with them before you try to influence them. If they don’t feel that you ‘get their business’ and their problems, they will never work with you.

Connecting with clients is about letting them feel that they have been heard. Influencing is about showing them you understand their situation and providing a solution.

Below are three ways to make connecting and influencing easier.

1 MAKE IT ABOUT THEM

The start of any sales conversation needs to focus on your potential client. It’s a conversation about their problems—not your services.

Find out about the problems that are affecting their business now and project-ed ones. If you’re providing bookkeeping services, what are the main issues they face from a bookkeeping perspective? Are they up to date? If not, why are they behind?

Make every question about them and they will tell you what you need to sell them. This helps them feel connected to you and that you understand their problems.

When you focus on your potential client this way, they psychologically invest in you and your solution. They tell you what they want and will feel as though they have been heard.

Treat this conversation the same as a doctor would. Before a doctor gives you their diagnosis, they ask you a series of questions to find out what is going on. Without the questions, the doctor won’t know how to treat you, and you won’t follow their advice.

Resist the temptation to tell them how good you are. Talking about yourself at the start of a sales conversation is one of the fastest ways to kill a connection.

2 SOLVE PROBLEMS

Your clients want you to keep the books up to date, look after payroll, etc. While these are the activities that your client engages you to do, it is not really what they want. What they want is the result of someone else doing these activities.

By having someone else keep their books up-to-date, they solve the problem of not being across their cashflow. By having someone else take care of the data entry, they solve the problem of having to work on weekends to do it themselves.

By having you do the payroll, they solve the problem of them being stuck in the business when they could be out generating more income. This reduces the stress in their business and in their personal lives.

The result of this is less weekend work, more time for their family, predictable cashflow and the ability to sleep at night knowing they have next week’s wages covered.

When you show that you can solve these problems for potential clients, they see the value that you can bring to their business. This makes influencing easier.

3 LEAD THEM

Most business owners don’t know how to buy your services. After all, how often does someone engage a bookkeeper? So, make it easy for them to buy you. State clearly what your fees are, and do not be apologetic about them. Do not ask if the fees seem ‘alright’ or fair to them.

Don’t get caught in comparisons with other bookkeepers. You don’t know what their cost base is or how much (or little) they are willing to make.

When you state your fees with confidence and without apology, you show yourself to be a strong partner to engage with. This gives you greater positioning and influence. It also makes it easier for you to influence your client when you’re working with them.