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On course to drive the new economy

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THIRTY-FIVE years ago, six or seven people got together one fine day in 1966 to set up Malaysian Institute of Management (MIM).

Looking back at those early years, certainly the pioneering years for the Institute, many of them felt that there were too many things to do and so little time to do it.

The country was just beginning the miracle decades of impressive economic growth. The Institute somehow has to keep up with the momentum of national development.

There were no models to work on. A society was thought to have served the needs then.

But this was of course only initially. Ten years later, MIM became a Company Limited By Guarantee.

This allowed it for more room to operate. It assumed a more national character by then.

Of the pioneering years, MIM must recognise the role of the leading lights from the Government, university and business that have made significant contributions to the earlier successes of the Institute.

The famous five included Tun Raja Mohar bin Raja Badiozaman, Sam Abishegam, Syed Adam Al-Jafri, Dr Tarcisius Chin and Ali Thambirajah.

In particular, the presence of three Cabinet Ministers representing Commerce and Industry, Education and Labour at the Institutes Inaugural Meeting on 29 January 1966, underlined the Government's total commitment to enhance the level of professionalism among the country's managers.

The first 10 years of the Institute witnessed the following: in 1967 it started its office in Bangkok Bank Building in Kuala Lumpur; the first Tunku Abdul Rahman Lecture was held in 1970; and in 1973, it finalised the First Development Plan.

In fact, it was observed that during the first nine years, the Institute's membership increased fourfold and its revenues eightfold. The number of activities grew from three programmes in 1966 to sixty-three in 1974.

The next two decades of the Institute's growth could be termed as the developmental years.

What were some of the highlights?

Media articles referred to MIM's role as a nation-builder, in making leaders out of managers and as a change-agent through its management education programmes.

In association with various foreign universities, MIM was able to offer a choice of six MBA courses.

It employed some 500 course-leaders from different backgrounds but whose aim was to impart their hands-on experience on management to the students.

The Diploma in Management Programme for instance, was developed for Malaysians using material based on local case studies.

MIM also conducted in-house training programmes for companies and offered skills training through its public programmes.

Two events pushed the Institute into the limelight. It moved into its own premises at 227 Jalan Ampang in 1994.

The Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, unveiled a new logo. The new identity thus bestowed created opportunities for education, training and research.

The Institute's performance and stature during all these years could be

measured from the recognition that it gained both at home and abroad.

Twice the Institute played host to the meeting of the World Council of Management and did the country proud once again, when it hosted the 8th Asian Association of Management Organisations Regional Management Conference in 1983.

The various programmes on the philosophy, techniques and skills of management, established itself as the centre for knowledge and information on the art and practice of management in the country.

By the 35th year, it was able to respond to the national need of having a steady pool of trained manpower ready to contribute to the economic development of the country.

Today, the Institute is poised to drive the New Economy. It is doing so in three ways.

Firstly, providing a forum for the management community to have constructive dialogues on issues relating to the enhancement of the highest standards of management practice. One such issue is the relationship between technology and human values in the workplace.

Secondly, upgrading its IT infrastructure so that it could offer several new services in the electronic mode to members now numbering nearly 10,000.

Finally it completed plans for a programme for managers to obtain certification for their competencies as well as embarked on consultancy services for small and medium-sized companies.

To succeed in all of the above, MIM has recently begun a series of in-depth review of its founding philosophy, mission, strategies and business plans.

It still aims to be the authoritative voice of management for the country.

Its products and services must continue to maintain the quality and innovation that the Institute has always been known for.

A critical success factor must be how fast the Institute can respond to the demands of the market.

It makes good sense for the Institute not to pander to every whims and fancies of the market.

The so-called cradle to grave attitude can no longer apply in today's working environment.

To survive, it needs to adopt drastic changes in its organisation, human resources and products.

An integrated approach that combines excellence in leadership, teamwork and product design can deliver the expected results.

Based on the discussions that were held, it seemed a new branding is in the works for the MIM.

Its main features are market relevancy, quality products and services, and responding to national needs.

Several of its products and services including membership services, education and training programmes and even the management will undergo changes to reflect the new positioning.

The ultimate objective is to put the Malaysian Institute of Management ahead of the pack in the e-community and to let it be the leader, enabler, and facilitator of knowledge management in the country and the region.

How is the MIM going to do this? Below are some suggestions.

If we consider leadership as the most important thing in this whole exercise, then we would have to start thinking about the kind of qualities that people in top management or the operational and support teams must possess.

There are four areas that we must take heed of: how is information processed, how do people interact with others in the organisation, how do

they deal with conflicts and from where do people get their motivation?

Having answered these questions, the following will separate the leaders from the followers: leaders will need to have a clear picture of the future first, then proceed with the planning and strategising.

Managers will have to do more selling, strategising and speaking. They cannot be content by merely remaining in their offices.

Their outlook has to encompass all the needs of the stakeholders and the global business environment.

As to the shape of the organisation or the management, we need to bear in mind that to succeed in the new economy, the structure must be fluid, mobile, and constantly changing, depending on what the project is, who the customer is, and who we have to work with at a particular time.

Technologies have really brought down the walls that once separated our lives from our work, leisure, learning and other human activities.

The dilemma is to be able to tell when to stop working and when to start living.

How we manage people, markets and expectations of our customers are paramount to the managements role.

All these elements will be brought together via the technologies that are around today - work can be carried out anywhere: office, car, home etc.

Groups of people or teams will comprise of the nuclear workforce that will handle work from now on.

Once the project is completed, new teams will be formed to work on yet another project.

Finally, creativity and innovation must characterise the Institute's offering of programmes and activities.

Its main purpose in conducting various management-related courses is to enhance the overall leadership and change management effectiveness of Malaysian managers.

The programmes, services and activities must be marketed to meet the needs of the customers, able to manage the brand and prop up its corporate image.