

## **A digital master plan?**

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The best and most relevant master plan for the realisation of an information and knowledge society in Malaysia was called "The Multimedia Utopia" and for that McKinsey Report, Telekom Malaysia paid US\$5 million in 1995.

The content of that report was used to frame the MSC Malaysia and the National IT Agenda or NITA. Besides these three documents, we already have the info-structure ingredients or master plan of the digital society and economy, or what Bill Gates called the digital nervous system for Malaysia. So, what is new about the digital master plan that is being talking about now?

In fact, as one of the authors of the 19 slide version of the NITA, I will categorically say that within the work we did at the NITC while it was still with Mimos Berhad, the agenda for a full and complete migration of the nation through three stages into a Knowledge Society by 2020 was already clearly spelt out for those who took time to understand.

In fact, from right at the very onset, when then-education minister Najib Abdul Razak moderated the final session of the 1st Infotech conference in November 1996, not only the telecom minister then, Leo Moggie, but also the opposition leader, Lim Kit Siang, were on stage to "buy into the full thesis of the NITA, but also to say that IT was for all. In fact, the DAP even issued a book by that name immediately after that Infotech conference.

Therefore, rather than being 'idiocratic' about this whole matter, it is better for the mainstream multi-media Intelligentsia (3Mi) in Malaysia to stop selling more storylines about big plans but focus on getting on with existing master plans being well executed. We do not need better plans and agendas, what we need are better quality men and women who are integrated with integrity to achieve excellence. What do I mean?

The DAP is not the demon in Malaysia, and neither is it the Christians. The devil is already there in the details of the NITA; which most public servants have never read nor have sought to fully understand, but which I dare say LKS and his DAP colleagues all have read and fully understood since 1999.

In fact, I further understand now that they ran their entire Sarawak campaign fully equipped with their hornbill branding strategy and electronic messaging system entirely using new media models of Twitter and other social networks in Sarawak; the so-called disconnected state. They worked on the devilish details and won, clean and fair.

### **Start doing the real work**

So, I say, if DAP can do it, why not the federal government and all its many agents with so much funds? So let us not become envious just because things are not going one way or the other. My advice is for Umno is to stop all the game-playing of 'wayang kulit' and start doing the real work of serving people well.

The Umno of yesterday, the one led by Tunku Abdul Rahman (right) and Abdul Razak Hussein did it, and the people never gave up their hope in Umno. In fact, the honest truth is that in the early 1990s, a good family friend in Sungai Petani, Desa Darus, took an Umno membership form and invited me to sign up, after my social network helped him get a driving school licence without paying corruption money.

So, why is there now another need for the so-called "blueprint or master plan" for the development of Digital Malaysia? Or, maybe they only call it a master plan to justify setting up a Global Advisory Committee in New York with all the full glamour and glitter of it. Allow me to explain my scepticism with two examples of "master planning work we did".

I was one of the content authors of the IMP2 or the Second Industrial Master Plan. The more than

400-page document was never executed well. The system believed in a worldview which assumes and believes in power and authority as a prerequisite to drive change. Without power and authority, one cannot drive and mobilise change.

Regardless, we undertook the IMP2 using and deploying the Michael Porter diamond model based on the thesis of the competitive advantage of nations. Our belief was that if we could grow global clusters on the ground in Malaysia, our industries should be able to remain competitive.

Therefore to simplify the entire thesis, we summarised the entire strategy into two value chain curves. The thesis of the first and lower curve was that unless Malaysian industries moved up the value curve either upstream or downstream, we are going to lose our cost competitiveness. In Blue Ocean thinking they call this Value up and Cost down Value Innovation strategy.

Today, we have consequently lost our competitiveness and are not attractive to global and world class players entirely on a cost basis.

The second curve was really the more important curve. It actually posited a similar thesis even before the MSC was born. We called for value creation through information-intensive knowledge driven processes. Such new growth and value appreciation must come from new or high-end value creation services, not just mere residual support services.

Today we call it innovation from R&D or the facilitation of the growth and development of Knowledge Industries. To give credit where it is due, this second curve was drawn by Abdullah Mohd Tahir, my immediate boss at the International Trade and Industry Ministry (Miti). The naming of the entire approach as "Manufacturing Plus Plus" was done by our then chief consultant of MIER, Sulaiman Mahbob, who is today chairman of MIDA.

### **Ripples of change**

The next master plan document was the National IT Agenda or NITA which was not a master plan but an agenda or a live programme and the application of the Second Curve strategy of moving up the value chain using a totally new and disrupting phenomenon called multiple media convergence. We called this agenda of anticipating paradigm level sea change opportunities: the National IT Agenda or Turning Ripples into Tidal Waves.

Today, these ripples of change started by the multimedia or digital revolution is in fact driving, inspiring and mobilising change like never before, all over the world. They have also become tidal waves of change, and if we do we not really know what is happening, just look at what is happening in the Middle East and any good student will understand.

In fact, while teaching at UM, we had a course called "ICT and Society". In that course we taught exactly about this kind of societal change that would come about and happen. The serious joke is that the students actually saw it happening right in front of their very eyes as the course was taught in the first semester of 2008.

So, to the Malaysia mainstream multimedia intelligentsia or 3Mi, I say: Our real challenge is to learn to listen, think through the full consequences, and then execute with excellence.

Our greatest problem in Malaysia therefore is not the lack of grand planning but it is our inability to execute with excellence. Abdul Razak's brilliance was simply his ability to ensure execution.

Regardless of the policies, he relied on his able deputy, the late Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman to ensure execution with excellence by using the National Operations Room as his command and control centre. But, unfortunately today, we do not exercise such brilliance in execution. May God still bless Malaysia.

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