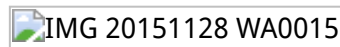


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## “BRIDGING THE UNIVERSITY-INDUSTRY GAP ESSENTIAL FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE” – MUTHARASU



The role of a Director for Industry Network at the Division of Industrial and Community Network (BJIM) Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) is truly challenging in ensuring close ties between the university and its external partners. These include the multinational companies (MNCs), the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as well as the non-governmental organisations in order to attract funds for investments and more importantly, to establish collaborations and consolidate efforts to develop a culture that is “discovery-driven” for the university and in creating an “innovation-driven environment” among the industries.

Dr. Mutharasu Devarajan, 46, considered his role as being essential in developing strategic partnerships based on professional relations, by establishing a connection between the academia and the industry, and at the same time striving towards giving emphasis on the values and acknowledging the various objectives of the internal stakeholders.

“We share information with the industry on the main duties of the academicians and in their research competencies for the university, or in simpler terms, the expertise that we possess and how to seek for suitable matches between the two, in terms of the available resources and the existing capabilities within the industry,” he added further.

According to Mutharasu, currently the progress has been encouraging due to the efforts resulting from various programmes and schemes available, however there is a need to further explore and understand the current complexities in ensuring such successes in the future, to clarify and capitalise on the added values of the university when the researchers are involved in dealing with the challenges faced within the industry.

“We have many success stories to inspire more collaborative efforts with the industry, in fact, it is now time for us to strengthen and assess the existing relations to spur further efforts towards establishing a long-term strategic planning, as obviously there is a need for a continuity amidst the world economic downturn which had occurred since 2007, and this would allow the researchers at this university to capitalise on such opportunities and establish collaborations based on the needs and demands of the industry in the related fields and with the available expertise,” stressed Mutharasu.

He added that, the existing intellectual capital available around the university has yet to be optimised, for example the Penang Free Trade Zone (FTZ) area as there is still lack of confidence evident on both sides. Both sides need to develop a sense of trust towards each other through commitment in relations and the credibility of the available expertise.

“BJIM (Division of Industrial and Community Network) USM for example, has taken some steps and is utilising a system which can spur changes that involves new programmes with the public agencies and private bodies as well as establishing space for collaboration through various available means,” he further said.

As he sees it, there is a need for a paradigm shift in the mindset among the academicians in dealing with the challenges in the future, furthermore with the government’s move in reducing the allocations for research resulting from the global economic changes, which would pose more problems in acquiring funds from the various government agencies.

“Working alone (in a laboratory) or within a small group would no longer yield a significant impact compared to a collaboration with the industry, which is more relevant and inclusive through a symbiotic ecosystem involving the government-industry-academia, for instance in establishing a collaboration to develop a cluster of researchers who share a clear understanding on the needs of the industry and the shared values, building the confidence towards the industry which would be critical in understanding their needs, demands and problems, having closer interactions which would allow a more effective communication as the key factor in having effective relations with the industry, and increasing the mobility of researchers across the current industry-academic ecosystem,” explained Mutharasu.

Mutharasu himself, being an academician at the School of Physics USM, focuses his research on “thermal management” for microelectronics, specialising in “LED packaging” with a team of researchers who are currently studying the demands and trends in the LED industry.

He possesses a Ph.D. in the field of Energy Technology from MK University through a fellowship from the prestigious Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore India and he joined USM in 2005, with his 12 years of experience in research. The son of an Economics professor, most of his family had migrated to the USA and Middle East, whereas his wife works as a Design Engineer with Intel.

“I chose Malaysia for its unique character in having various cultures, good infrastructure and an interesting living environment, and chose USM resulting from a search on the internet, by having it as my main destination and obtaining the status of a Permanent Resident (PR) of Malaysia with the support from USM, Talent Corp., the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Home Affairs – it’s an opportunity that I truly appreciate,” said Mutharasu.

Currently, the main focus and desire would be to strengthen relations with the industry especially those involving the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in efforts on product development for their assured continuance in the future, as well as to redefine the role of a Research University (RU) as a source of competency with the vision of having more meaningful cooperation in dealing with various challenges within the industry and society.

“There has been a lot of changes within the last five years, with the current global economic situation and the likelihood of reduced government funding for R&D at universities worldwide which requires an understanding by the academicians, where there would be possibilities of rivalry among colleagues in

similar fields of expertise, not to mention advancements in technology and demands from the industry which would require the development of highly-skilled workforce to adapt to the swift changes in the scope of business,” said Mutharasu.

He stressed that, the agenda of modernising the country’s higher education system through the Malaysia Education Development Plan – Higher Education (PPPM-PT) would further enhance the ties connecting higher education-researcher-industry and would provide the impetus to drive innovations towards achieving more sustainable and established levels, as means of giving back to the country and to reduce the reliance on research funds from the government.

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