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POWERING PIVOT:

POLIMAS BEST PRACTICES

Since young we have always been made aware of the five senses; namely sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. Imagine you are denied any of the five due to illness, accident or other misfortunes. Life would not be normal, especially if it involves the first two in the list. Every day we also make decisions based on our thought, understanding, experience, intuition or simply through our sub-conscious minds. Sometimes we do not even have to think hard to find a sensible solution to a problem. Even though common sense solves most complications, many do not maximize it. Contrary to our belief, many a time our problem is not unique after all. There is always a ready answer to any problem, obstacle or challenges. What we need to do is probably to adopt and adapt to suit our case. In modern term it is known as **Best Practices** where the definition according to **Investopedia** is as follows:

"A set of guidelines, ethics or ideas that represent the most efficient or prudence course of action. Best Practices are often set forth by an authority, such as a governing body or management, depending on the circumstances".

Let's say you are working in an assembly plant of an automobile company. It involves production process where the less time you take to assemble a car, the better. As a production manager, you should devise a list of Best Practices so that the task could be made in most efficient or most optimum way. In Ipoh, Perak there is a stretch of road known as Horley Road where the Flea Market offers plenty of antiques and old stuff including technology from the yesteryears. Should you need anything under the sun, the chance is one of the stalls would offer it. What is the impact? It will attract a lot more customers, even from faraway places. Consider **1 Village, 1 Product** concept. In Changlun, Kedah the whole area is gazetted as Pamelu (Limau Bali) area. What is the end result? Overtime, everyone knows that you can get such fruit along the highway in that area throughout the year. It creates a brand name of its own. If you are asked to name two soft-drinks, the chance is you would say Coca-Cola and Pepsi. Similarly, the brand name POLIMAS has become synonymous with quality technical education, at least in the northern part of Kedah. How do we translate the idea of **1 Village, 1 Product** in such a way that our polytechnic is more efficient and more productive?

1-Lecturer 1-Machine:

There are three engineering departments in POLIMAS; namely Civil, Electrical and Mechanical Engineering with 250 lecturers and 50 different types of machines, both heavy and light, sophisticated and simple. We are also well aware that our graduates advantage over the other institutions is due to their more practical or hands-on exposure. This could only be done if our equipment are up-to-date, well maintained with competent and experienced instructors. How do we make sure that instructors meet the required quantity and quality? In short, through scheduled training.

Let's take the case of our CNC Machine which is huge, sophisticated and expensive. Our expert is Zainal Zulia Zainuddin who will end his service in the not so distant future. We need him to mentor a pool of lecturers so that the successors will be ready in time. Going by **1Village, 1 Product** concept, we must have 1-group of lecturers for 1-kind of equipment or machinery in the laboratory or workshop. The idea should be repeated across all the departments for all the machinery. Should they need to be exposed to some new skills then one or two will be sent for further training outside of campus and return to share with the group members. For example, our Industry Partner, Aerospace Composites Manufacturing (ACM) offered us to use their 5-axis CNC Machine at their plant in Bukit Kayu Hitam. We must take the opportunity because we cannot afford to acquire such equipment as it costs millions of dollars. When will the training be most suitable? It is probably during the semester break as someone rightfully pointed out; we must prepare for war while the country is at peace.



Zainal Zulia Zainuddin

Down to the Ground:

One of the most effective management practice is to go **down to the ground**. Some call it **Wandering Around** and some others use the term **Connecting with the Grass Root**. The original concept of *Management By Walking Around* (MBWA) was introduced by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman (1982) in their bestseller *In Search of Excellence*. If you really want to understand the real situation on the ground, connect with the staff and communicate with the workers informally then MBWA is still relevant. Consider the points raised by Reid for managers in 1999, highlighted by **Randolph M. Boardman**:



	Boardman suggested you should try to:	How to go about it? My suggestions:
1.	Give frequent and meaningful recognition for a job well done;	We must be alert with our charges who have achieved excellent results. Contrary to popular belief, a simple Thank You carries as much meaning as any other tangible present. It is best to give credit to our staff but keep the blame to ourselves.
2.	Interact on informal basis;	Most people would not open up in formal session, especially the lower rank staff. If we meet them in a more relaxed manner, probably they will lower their guard. If possible, everyone should be on first name basis.
3.	Meet on their own turf;	Let's say you go to the main store. The store keepers feel very much at home. They are able to show you what they are doing, tell their problems and possible solutions. This way, you are meeting them on their own turf.
4.	Ask for their opinions and listen with an open mind;	You should meet up with your staff with an open mind with no bias or pre-conceived belief. Listen to their version of the story. It could shed some new light and new truth.
5.	Ask what rumours they have heard;	Sometimes it is interesting to find out what the rest of your work force is talking about. They may have misunderstood the company's announcements or plan. There could be rumour mongers who churn up half-truth or total nonsense about the company or the management team members.
6.	Build bridges with those you are uncomfortable;	In a large organisation, there will be multiple employee characters. Many are reasonable but some would be very difficult to deal with, selfish, fond of challenging orders, etc. Still, you must try your best to reach out to every one including those you are very uncomfortable with.
7.	Ask what is making them most and least satisfied; and	Try to gather information on what your staffs are happy and not happy with. Different people see things differently. Find out what policy or changes they like or dislike, and why.
8.	Have lunch with them.	Imagine, out of the blue, you get an invitation to have lunch with the CEO of your company. Or, your big boss simply sits next to you at the company cafe. What would you tell him? Similarly, you can always set a date to have lunch with your staff. It will be difficult initially but will be more comfortable later on.

Similarly, **Jones** (2003) indicated that the leaders in Hewlett-Packard, PepsiCo, Disney, WalMart and 3D have been using MBWA which are still effective today. Consider the following:

	Jones suggested you should try to:	How to go about it? My suggestions:
1.	Remain open and responsive to questions and concerns;	The Japanese companies are well known for allowing every staff to suggest improvements to their product or services. There may exist some good points out of the many questions, concerns and responses. By opening such opportunity, everyone will feel appreciated.
2.	Observe, listen, and let everyone see you do so;	You should walk around and observe. You should stop and listen intently. As the others see you doing it, they will start to trust. Trust is the single most important factor for your company or institution to succeed.
3.	Talk about their passions, hobbies, families, and other interests;	Do not talk to your staff or subordinates about job alone. You may spend a little bit of time to enquire about their hobbies, family members, how their children are doing in their studies or any activity that they are passionate about. After all, we are humans, not robots.
4.	Spend an equal amount of time in all areas of your organisation; and	Try your best to visit all departments, sections or different offices in more or less fairly. Each of the area in your organisation is important in its own right.
5.	Catch others doing something right and recognise them publicly.	While going around, you may stumble upon a few good things. You may stop at the cafeteria to talk about it to anyone present. Your good words will travel fast. In no time at all it will reach the ears of the good samaritans.



While going round your company, institution or shopfloors, consider the 9 points proposed by **S. Smith** in the **Empowering For Quality Revolution**:

	Smith suggested you should be clear about:	How to go about it? My suggestions:
1.	Tell people what their responsibilities are;	Many a time our staffs fail to deliver because they are not clear about their responsibilities, roles and functions. Put it down clearly on paper. Tell them the target and Key Performance Indicator (KPI) we expect of them.

2.	Give them authority equal to the responsibilities assigned to them;	This is almost logical. No one could carry out their tasks with bare hands. They need authority, enough of it to see that their responsibilities are accomplished.
3.	Set standards of excellence;	The standard of achievement is sometimes subjective. There must be some agreed measurement of delivery that is considered excellent. The KPI is a good example because it is based on quantity and quality that are measurable. For example, the number of item produced in an hour, the percentage of graduates scoring higher than 3.50.
4.	Provide them with training that will enable them to meet the standard;	It is said that the target now is no longer stationary but moves all the time. Therefore, our staffs need to upgrade their skills through regular trainings. With the new skill, they are able to meet or exceed the standard required.
5.	Provide them with knowledge and information;	Without timely and relevant information, our staff cannot be doing their job well. We should provide them reference books, manuals, guidelines, etc.
6.	Provide them with feedback on their performance/achievements;	The feedback could be weekly, monthly or yearly depending on the need. In government service, the appraisal is called LNPT/SKT and our staffs have the right to their performance marks. Their achievement feedback will help them correct any weakness in order to perform better.
7.	Trust them;	If there is any one single factor that is crucial for the success of any company or institution, it will be trust. Low trust equals low productivity; and high trust equals high productivity.
8.	Allow them to fail; and	We have to be reasonable. There must be some tolerance on failure. Failure is not all bad because we all learn from making mistake or fail to achieve certain objective. However, repeated failure in the same area is not acceptable.
9.	Treat them with dignity and respect.	At work, everyone should be treated with dignity and respect irrespective of race, religion or creed. When our staffs feel that they are respected, they would deliver better.



My style will be management by being on the street, management by walking around. Third persons won't have to tell me what's going on in our city. I'll hear it, I'll see it, I'll touch it myself.

(Carl Stokes)



1. COFFEE SHOP:

Every where we go in this world, we will find coffee-shops in various set-ups and styles which serve different patrons' need. One of the most famous up-market international-chain is Starbucks. The high price of the drink is not due to its coffee per se but the ambience associated with the place - great music and free Wi-Fi. Consider an ordinary cup of coffee like Nescafe served in flight, 10,000 metres above ground level will be many times more expensive. The next time you drive along our north-south highway, drop by at any R&R for a cup of coffee. Its caffeine effect will help to keep your eyes wide open. In many countries, across all continents and cultures, coffee has become the number one beverage. In most cities in Malaysia, you would find Kopitiam which serves good black or white coffee. See if you have come across the following coffee terms: Espresso, Cappuccino, Cafe Latte/Mocha/Macchiato, Americano, Viennese Coffee, etc. Some of the great minds in history who took plenty of coffee in their lifetime were composer Ludwig von Beethoven, scientist Benjamin Franklin and French philosopher Voltaire. And if you are not aware, 29 September is declared as International Coffee Day!

In my village, there are 5 coffee stalls which I frequently visit, especially during weekends. On top of the regular drinks, each one has its own specialty. The first one serves *Roti Canai* and *Nasi Kandar*, the second serves *Gulai Temenong* and Grilled Fish, the third one serves *Nasi Lemak* and *Laksa*, the fourth serves *Nasi Goreng Ayam* and *Bihun Sup*, and the last one offers *Bihun Goreng* and *Roti Jala*. As the majority of the villagers are farmers, the most common topics talked about are rice planting and harvesting, rain and dry season, paddy diseases, pesticide and vitamin used and of course the price of paddy and the percentage of deduction imposed by the buyers. Other topics may include anything under the sun; be it political, economy, social or religion. Coffee-shop talks refer to unverified stories for any willing listeners. It is a great past-time if you do not take it too seriously. However, there are some good points too. You get the latest news about any of your villagers being involved in accident, hospitalised or passed of whatever causes. The meeting place is not only to enjoy coffee but to exchange information and updating news.



Kedai Kopi DIN: Writer, Fadzil, Isa, Din



2. FINAL SEMESTER PROJECT

Each semester consists of 16 weeks of lecture, workshop and laboratory works. For the final semester students; which involve Civil, Electrical and Mechanical Engineering, Commerce and Information & Communication Technology departments, the 16th week is reserved for project presentation. It is one of the most exciting times as groups of students showcased their ideas and innovations which they proposed and worked on for 2 semesters. Normally, the project presentations are held together with the annual Innovation and Invention Competition through Exhibition (iCompEx) event which attracted hundreds of other exhibits from all over the country. On 30 September 2014, the writer had an opportunity to look closely at 5 Mechanical Engineering Department students project at the Students' Mall. The projects were Rice Washer, Food Warmer, Corn Thresher, Smart Down Pipe and Executive Chair Repair Kit. The Rice Washer should find its way to restaurants where large amount of rice is cooked and labour cost could be reduced. Should your office chair leg or its wheel is broken, you probably need the Chair Repair Kit. Using the kit, the leg or the wheel could be removed easily without any scratch, making the replacement of a new spare easy and money saving. Finally, the best 48 projects battled out amongst themselves over 2 days; 14-15 October 2014. I was honoured to be invited to do the closing and presentation of medals and certificates to the winners.

On 1st October 2014, the writer was invited to Politeknik Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin (PTSS) for its inaugural event, known as Innovation Project Presentation Exhibition (iProPEX 2014). On top of that, the programme also included the signing of Letter of Intent (LOI) to carry out collaboration with a few companies. The companies which have provided placements for the students to do their Industrial Training were presented with Commendation Letters. The guest of honour was Deputy Minister of International Commerce and Industry, Honourable Datuk Ir Hamim Samuri. In his speech, he stressed on our country needs for highly skilled workers in Electrical and Mechanical Engineering, film and animation etc to realise the vision of being an advanced country. We need to continue developing our human capitals that match the industry needs to ensure employability. Congratulations PTSS for the job well done.



3. SMK TENGGU SULEIMAN

Many things in this world sometimes come your way when you least expect them, both good or otherwise. On 20 October 2014, I have been officially invited to Sekolah Menengah Tengku Suleiman, Besei, Perlis to officiate and present certificates. The school committee members prepared the text but I was allowed to add some extra points. So, I decided to promote Study@Poly and offered them to be one of our adopted schools. There were 273 school leavers; SPM, STPM and about 10 physically challenged (spastic) students who were most heart-touching. If we could replicate this initiative with other schools in our neighbourhood then it will help our intake effort. The following was part of my text for promoting Study@Poly:



SMK Tengku Sulaiman, Perlis
20 Oct 2014



I would like to take this opportunity to encourage school-leavers of SMK Tengku Sulaiman to apply for places in Polytechnic Malaysia. The number of polytechnics now is 33, scattered all over Malaysia which offers various diploma-level and a few degree-level programmes with 100 thousands of students enrolment. What are some of the features of Polytechnic Malaysia?

- a) The first institution to receive Gold Award for APACC (Asia Pacific Accreditation and Certification Commission);*
- b) An institution which received CTAB (Canadian Technology Accreditation Board) recognition;*
- c) All programmes are accredited by MQA (Malaysian Qualification Agency);*
- d) Industrial oriented curriculum;*
- e) Run by competent teaching staff;*
- f) Industry partners totalling 10,000 through 'Partnering Industries Engaging Employers';*
- g) An institution which have produced 90 innovations that are protected by Intellectual Rights; and*
- h) An established institution for 45 years with 420,000 working force for the nation.*



KEMENTERIAN
PENDIDIKAN
MALAYSIA

*Sistem Permohonan Kemasukan Pelajar
Sesi Akademik 2014/2015*

