

Embracing a More Dynamic Culture

by Reika Kua Kee Eng

FLEXIBILITY, open-mindedness and the willingness to adapt to changes are some of the essentials to realise any form of improvement in an organisation. And to make such improvement possible, the most important factor is the cooperation extended by every member of the organisation, as the members are the ones who will mobilise the plans to achieve the goals that have been set forth by the organisation. So how far are the members of IEM willing to go in order to seek the improvements that they have always been looking for?

"Many ... are simply skeptical [sic] that real change can occur. There is so much fear, so much mistrust that has built up over the years. But if we choose to be bound by the past, we will never move forward. And I want to particularly say this to young people of every faith in every country. You more than anyone have the ability to reimagine [sic] the world, to remake this world." — Barack Obama (speech, 4 June 2009)

THE NEW PRESIDENT OF IEM

"Have a seat. Take some time to catch your breath before we start the interview session." Such were the very first remarks that came from Ir. Choo Kok Beng as I walked into his office, gasping after climbing a flight of stairs leading to his office. Despite his many remarkable achievements and high-ranking positions in various organisations both locally and regionally, Ir. Choo is humble, approachable and open-minded, but decisive and insightful all the same. Such are the traits possessed by Ir. Choo Kok Beng, the President of The Institution of Engineers, Malaysia (IEM) for session 2013/2014. Such profound leadership qualities, if coupled with the cooperation extended by every member and by all the divisions, council members and committees would serve as a powerful driving force for the Institution and lead to the betterment of IEM in all aspects, ranging from its administration to operations, as well as its service to members and activities. This would then promote IEM's overall reputation and effectiveness.

I was debating with myself as to whether I should begin the introduction of this write-up with a major highlight of his many outstanding achievements or to begin describing the incoming President of IEM for session 2013/2014, Ir. Choo Kok Beng, from a more personal perspective. I chose the latter style of introduction without hesitation due to his open style of communication and his "down-to-earth" approach

of issues. From my standpoint, getting to know the person beyond his notable achievements, and understanding what he has envisioned for IEM during his tenure of office, is of utmost important, as these would determine the direction that IEM would take in the immediate future and beyond. Thus, let us examine what the new President of IEM has planned for the Institution in the near future.

PROGRESSING TOWARDS A MORE DYNAMIC CULTURE

"Refreshing the existing IEM!" exclaimed the new IEM President excitedly. Such was his comment when he was asked about the future plans he has set forth for IEM. Ir. Choo further elaborated that he has envisioned IEM progressing towards adopting a more dynamic culture within its organisation. By a dynamic culture within IEM, Ir. Choo considers all IEM members to be part of the system, the problem and the solution, that will contribute towards the development of IEM.

"We should value the people (i.e. IEM members) who are the main force that would carry out the plans to improve IEM, in the aspects of administration, operations and its functionality, so that the overall processes and procedures can be simplified, resulting in improved efficiency and effectiveness," emphasized Ir. Choo. He further explained that trust, teamwork, engagement, and effective communication between all levels of IEM members would be inevitable to speed up the implementation of any activities or plans.

The new President of IEM also highlighted the importance of offering fair opportunities to all members of IEM. Although seniority and experience are some of the factors to be considered, other significant factors such as capability, creativity and innovativeness must not be overlooked.

He added, "The staff should be independent so that they can perform effectively with as little instruction as possible. This in turn will make everything work at a quicker pace, and thus, enable more plans or activities to be carried out within a shorter period of time." Therefore, Ir. Choo strongly believes that adopting a more dynamic culture within IEM is essential to enhance IEM as an organisation.

ENHANCING AND EXTENDING IEM'S SERVICES TO MEMBERS

Ir. Choo pointed out that about 80% of the current services

and activities of IEM are focused on the members within the Klang Valley. He remarked, "It has always been our aspiration to enhance and extend IEM's services to all our members across Malaysia. Hence, we need to reach out to all our members across the country at the shortest possible time." He further elaborated that once he takes office as the President of IEM, he will see to it that all activities, including training sessions, workshops, seminars, and so forth, are evenly held at all the branches throughout Malaysia, and not just within the Klang Valley.

In line with the aspiration to enhance IEM membership services, Ir. Choo also emphasizes the need to expedite the processing procedures of membership application. According to Ir. Choo, the current member admission process requires one month for approval. "If we could find a solution to automate the membership admission such as through online membership processing, it will cut down the processing time and procedures, which will greatly boost the effectiveness in terms of membership management," suggested Ir. Choo.

In addition to the above, Ir. Choo also expressed his desire to increase the interaction among committee members within every branch and also between all the branches across the nation.

GREATER RECOGNITION OF OUTSTANDING MEMBERS

"Sadly, there isn't much recognition given to those outstanding members of IEM who actually deserve to be recognised. I found it odd that numerous Malaysian engineers are internationally recognised and honoured, but not locally," remarked Ir. Choo. He stressed the importance of recognition as one of the motivating factors that will maintain the enthusiasm of engineers to push forward in providing greater services and innovation, and become the leaders in the engineering industry.

Thus, as the new President of IEM, Ir. Choo urges all the divisions

and relevant committees to play a more active role in recognising the services and contributions of engineers regardless of whether they are veterans or new blood. According to the current practice, the Award Committee will hold its meeting once every 2 months. It would be great if the committee members could schedule their meetings more often in order to ensure that more deserving engineers would be recognised for their innovative efforts and contributions to society.

"I strongly recommend that fellow engineers be more proactive in terms of nominating commendable individuals for the related awards or recognitions. We shall not make the Award Committee bear such responsibility. In fact, we should encourage all divisions and other committee members to be more proactive when it comes to nominating the deserving engineers for awards or any form of recognitions," suggested Ir. Choo.

LET THE VOICE OF IEM BE HEARD

"We ought to speak loud enough to be heard, but in a gentle or diplomatic manner," commented the new IEM President, Ir. Choo. He continued, "To make our voice be heard does not mean that we have to be hard-lined. In short, we can express our opinions in a pleasant manner but still make an impact". Ir. Choo pointed out that there was a need for engineers to play their roles as a civil society, for the betterment of the public at large and for our country's development as a whole.

According to Ir. Choo, more often than not, engineers tend to have a straightforward attitude due to the way they are trained and educated in the engineering field, which sometimes make their manner of conveying their message or addressing a public concern sound more aggressive than it was intended to be. Such a situation could make it less favourable for them as some parties might get offended. Hence, we engineers should always improve our public relation skills so that our message





can be put across effectively and thus generate the impact that is intended. "Perhaps, we could also leverage on the PR skills of the relevant media members to ensure that the voice of IEM is widely heard and generates the intended positive outcomes at the same time," said Ir. Choo.

PROSPECTS FOR 2013/2014

Before the interview session ended, the new IEM President said that he plans to visit all the IEM branches across Malaysia by July 2013 so that he could personally listen to what each branch actually requires, as this will certainly help him lay out a strategy that works in line with their needs and desired outcomes. When asked about the timeline required to implement all the plans that he has in store for IEM during his term of office, Ir. Choo confidently replied, "There is a very good chance to achieve the plans as set forth within the 2013/2014 term."

"I strongly believe that whatever plans that we have set out to achieve would eventually be the succession plan for our future leaders who would then continue to take on the initiatives and improvise on them for the betterment of IEM in every aspect!" concluded Ir. Choo Kok Beng, the President of IEM for session 2013/2014. ■