



by Engr. Dr Balamuralithara Balakrishnan

# Importance of Professional Networking

ENGINEERING EDUCATION TECHNICAL DIVISION

A talk titled “Professional Networking For Academics And Researchers” was jointly organised by the Engineering Education Technical Division (E2TD) and Chemical Engineering Technical Divisions (CETD) on 8 January 2013.

The talk was delivered by Ir. Prof. Dr Dominic Foo Chwan Yee, 2012/13 Session Chairman of CETD. He is the Professor of Process Design and Integration at the University Of Nottingham Malaysia Campus (UNMC), and the Founding Director for the Centre of Excellence For Green Technologies Of UNMC. There were more than 40 participants, including lecturers and practising engineers.

Prof. Foo started by sharing his own experiences on various advantages that he gained for having good professional network among his collaborators.

He has worked with more than 30 collaborators (comprising university professors, researchers and companies) from various countries in Asia, Europe, American and Africa. He told the audience that networking should not be restricted to the commercial world. Having a long list of collaborators had helped him get recognition among the research community worldwide in the past few years.

He said some of the incentives that he had obtained from professional networking included the following: Getting to know latest research trend, research papers collection, joint research output (publication, research grants, student supervision and exchange), among others.

He showed the audience some email communications made during his early days of postgraduate study, where he had contacted the authors of some papers to obtain their latest publications, as well as communicated with some senior professors in his area of research, to discuss the research direction that he was moving into.

Such interaction with experts in the field had greatly helped shape his research direction up to the completion of his PhD.

He also explained how he was appointed to the International Scientific Committee for several important conferences in his area of research. The main “trick” that he used was to attend similar conferences regularly. After some time, he got to know the conference committee, which then appointed him to help promote the event in Asia (note: Prof. Foo is the rare Asian representative for high profile conferences mainly dominated by the western community).

Another advantage of knowing the organiser, he said, was that he had been invited to be the keynote or plenary speaker for more than 15 times.

Another advantage of professional networking is increased research output. Prof. Foo told participants that his annual journal publications had seen double digits in the past 5 years, after he started working with collaborators.

Many of the publications were the results of collaborations with visiting scholars, who were often postgraduate students of his international collaborators.

He encouraged researchers in the country to expand their network with international researchers. He showed the participants some tricks for writing good emails. We can start by sharing ideas and views with international researchers on the areas that we are working on or even offer feedback to the authors on the papers that they have published. Usually, we will start with formal language and later on carry out with less formality.

The talk ended at 6.30 p.m. with a Q&A session. On behalf of E2TD and CETD, session chairman Engr. Dr Chong Chien Hwa presented a token of appreciation to Prof. Foo and thanked him for his informative talk. ■



Photographs of the talk as shown above

Engr. Dr Balamuralithara received his Electrical-Telecommunication Engineering degree from University Technology of Malaysia in 2000. He received the Master of Engineering Science degree from Multimedia University in 2005 and obtained his PhD in Creative Multimedia from Multimedia University in 2011. He is currently Senior Lecturer at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris Malaysia. His research interests include E-Learning in Engineering Education, Technical and Vocational Education, Wireless communication and Error-Control Coding.