

TARIKH : 6 APRIL 2022
AKHBAR : THE MALAYSIAN RESERVE
MUKA SURAT : 8

Driving digital transformation through public-private partnerships

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Foreseeing the potential of digital technology, Malaysia leaders is ready to transform the economy into a digitally driven economy through its MyDigital initiatives

OPINION

by MOHD HANIFF MD SALLEH

"THE best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others," by Mahatma Gandhi.

This quote best explains how noble the civil service is, to sacrifice our life for the benefit of the people. You can find the essential purpose of human beings — ability, sympathy, empathy, connection and solidarity, by serving your people and your country.

Working in the civil service for nearly 13 years has taught me a lot of things.

I have been given various tasks during my service including policy and legislation drafting, strategic planning, the drafting of Cabinet papers and providing input for the Parliament.

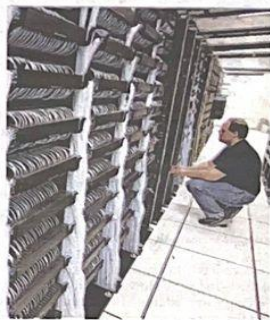
One of the most memorable events throughout my journey in the civil service was the moment I was handpicked to lead the team in evacuating Malaysian students and workers from Pekan Baru following the haze issue in Indonesia in 2015.

At that instant, the air pollution index in the region hovered above 1,000. The prime minister had instructed National Security Council to formulate plans in coordination with the Defence Ministry and Foreign Affairs Ministry to evacuate Malaysians from Pekan Baru.

To accomplish this mission, we encountered numerous obstacles and challenges such as acquiring permission for our Royal Malaysian Air Force aircraft to fly into the Indonesian airspace.

Requesting permission to fly is a big issue for every sovereign country as each country would need to protect its territory and sovereignty, especially in times of crisis. Without proper communication and negotiation with your counterpart, this becomes quite difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, we managed to negotiate the terms and bring back all our evacuees.

With determination and ambition to transform the government service and improve the public delivery system, the Cross Fertilisation Programme initiated by the Public Service Department (PSD) is a medium for me to learn the best practices from the private sector which I can adopt and bring into my work when I return to government service.



Big data has enormous potential in managing daily routine tasks and information that is readily available in real time enables govt agencies and departments to identify and take necessary action

Malaysia-Huawei's Fate Intertwined
Huawei Technologies Co Ltd began establishing itself in Malaysia during a time when Malaysia had just emerged from the Asian Financial Crisis. Prior to the crisis, Malaysia had been dubbed as one of the miracle economies in East Asia owing to its maintenance of high growth rates averaging 8% to 9% during the period between 1988 and 1996.

As a small and young nation state, Malaysia had gone through a lot of challenges to uplift its economy, moving from an agriculture-commodities driven economy to a manufacturing-export oriented economy to achieve its goal of becoming a developed nation by 2020.

However, the progress we have made over the past half century has slowed down and our economic growth prospects have weakened considerably.

We are caught in the middle-income trap where we are no longer one of the top performing global economies.

Foreseeing the potential of digital technology, our leadership has laid out the foundation to transform our economy into a digitally driven economy through its MyDigital initiatives.

The crucial role digital technology plays has been evident, especially since the outbreak of Covid-19 which led to tough and difficult challenges in continuing our normal practices.

Digital technology has proven to be a convenient tool for advancement and an essential tool for survival during the most challenging of crises.

The ability to seize opportunities emerging from innovative digital technology is an important aspect of driving new engines of the country's economic growth and in overcoming productivity limitations as well as

exploring new markets beyond our borders.

As an innovative solutions-based company, Huawei offers various forms of technologies ranging from telecommunication infrastructure to advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), big data analytics, blockchain and digital power to support the country's digital transformation agenda.

I have personally seen how Huawei helps local entrepreneurs by providing technologies and services to enhance their productivity at much lower costs and efficiency.

An example of one such success story is that of T'ur, where the luxury staple, caviar, is produced locally. This is the story of a local company, HEXA, which uses Huawei's technology to ensure the sturgeons are in an atmosphere conducive for their breeding and eggs cultivation. In this scenario, IoT is used to collect data based on the environment setup, connecting all of the sensors with AI across each placing such as the room temperature, UV content, water quality (contamination), oxygen levels for the room and water, air ventilation to control humidity as well as AI to spot plant and organic species for the correction of nutrition imbalances/virus infections for farmers to take corrective action.

Without these digital technologies, it will take years to harvest caviar and it is almost impossible to do so in Malaysia.

The caviar industry has huge potential. The global caviar market is projected to surge at a compound annual growth rate of 6.38% from a market value of US\$209.57 million (RM882.29 million) in 2019 to attain a market value of US\$303.74 million by the end of 2025.

In this regard, the government plays a vital role in designing a masterplan to encourage local entrepreneurs to venture into this field using digital technology so this aquaculture industry can grow and reach its full potential to contribute to our economic growth in the future.

Another success story in transforming from the conservative way of conducting business through the use of digital technology is HEXA's chillies sorting machine, where HEXA IoT builds and trains pepper recognition models based on Huawei Cloud ModelArts, greatly shortening training periods, the use of labour and supporting rapid innovation.

By unifying quality inspection standards and improving sorting efficiency, Huawei Cloud helps HEXA reduce human errors in material preparation and effectively improves product quality.

Embracing Technology to Accelerate Economic Growth

Moving forward, we have to equip ourselves with knowledge and skills in digital technology as it will shape our future way of life.

Rapid growth of disruptive business models like Grab Holdings Inc and Uber Technologies Inc have shown us the necessity of transforming our conservative business models.

Failing to do so, our functions and roles will be taken over and we will be left behind.

As a pillar of this nation, it is imperative for the government to keep up with global digital transformation. The emergence of new technologies, data analytics and a digital environment changes expectations of the ability of the government to deliver public services.

As outlined in the Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint, government agencies are required to implement a holistic approach to technology adoption in order to enable the transformation of government operating models.

For example, AI technology can be used to counter cyber-attacks, for border surveillance systems, crime prevention, floods and disaster management systems, and for other sectors as well such as education, healthcare, energy, irrigation and sewerage.

Big data has enormous potential in managing government daily routine tasks such as managing social benefits, collecting taxes, monitoring the national health and education systems, recording traffic data and issuing official documents as well as in collecting vast amounts of data each and every day.

Information that is readily available in real time enables government agencies and departments to identify areas in need of attention, make more informed decisions more quickly and implement necessary changes.

Huawei has taught me the importance and benefits of embracing technology. I have also played a role in assisting this globally renowned company in its government relations by helping with the standard operating procedures related to government agencies, in assisting with introductions to the right people and in protocols for events involving government guests.

This programme has proven to be a win-win one for both the public and private sector.

I eagerly await more learning opportunities and to use the knowledge learnt through this Cross Fertilisation Programme to transform the public service delivery system in the future for the benefit of this country and our people.

Mohd Haniff Md Salleh is Home Affairs Ministry senior assistant secretary, who recently became part of Huawei Malaysia's team via the Cross Fertilisation Programme, an initiative by PSD to encourage knowledge sharing between government officials and private sector.

The views expressed are of the writer and do not necessarily reflect the stand of the newspaper's owners and editorial board.