NAVIGATING CHANGE: EMPOWERING YOUNG PROFESSIONALS FOR ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY BREAKTHROUGHS IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS ERA THROUGH THE MALAYSIAN SOCIETY FOR ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY INFORMAL NETWORKING AND MENTORSHIP SESSIONS

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ABSTRACT

In a world where change is the only constant, embracing change becomes a crucial factor for success. This paper highlights the benefits that young professionals can gain by participating in the Informal Networking and Mentorship (MENNET) sessions. MENNET activities are overseen by the Malaysian Society for Engineering and Technology Young Professional group. MENNET provides a platform for young professionals to build talent through professional and personal contacts and networking, and to gain up-to-date technological knowledge and information, along with social and cultural connections. It is imperative to continuously learn and adapt cutting-age technology skills in the twenty-first century to ensure the continuous relevance and indispensability of young professionals so that they can contribute effectively to Sustainable Development Goals-driven breakthroughs and make a positive impact on society.

Keywords*: Sustainable development goals era, youth empowerment, technology breakthroughs, navigating change, career growth*

INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were initiated by the United Nations in 2015. These seventeen goals promote environmental sustainability, economic growth and inclusive societies, with the aim of attaining a sustainable world by 2030 [1]. The Malaysian government committed to support and implement the SDGs through, for example, its New Economic Model (NEM), which was launched in 2009. The NEM pursues sustainable development based on three pillars, namely high income, inclusivity and sustainability, which mirror the three elements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, encompassing economic, social and environmental elements.

Digitalisation is one example of the latest advancements in engineering and technology that could help Malaysia to achieve the SDGs. Digitalisation, which includes technologies like the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, machine learning, blockchain technology, 5G, robotics and cloud computing, can provide innovative solutions that contribute to achieving the SDGs [2]. The importance of digitalisation for industry and business has also been mentioned in the National Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy (2021 - 2030) [3]. This policy helps to reduce dependence on foreign workers, resulting in economic growth and the creation of more job opportunities for the local workforce.

Young professionals need to learn and adopt cutting-age technology skills in the twenty-first century to contribute to a high-skilled local workforce. These professionals do face challenges, especially to keep pace with rapidly evolving technologies that could hamper their career progress. Realising the need to establish a platform to bring together young professionals who are committed to making career progress, MENNET was established in early 2021 under the Malaysian Society for Engineering and Technology (MySET) Young Professional Group. A series of MENNET activities has been conducted since April 2021, and these activities have been reported and published in Engineering & Technology [4 – 7]. This paper will discuss how the establishment of MENNET could encourage young professionals to make engineering and technology breakthroughs in the SDGs era.

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EMPOWERING YOUNG PROFESSIONALS THROUGH THE MENNET PLATFORM

A. The MENNET Platform as Professional Networking Group

The MENNET platform can be best associated with a professional networking group. The platform brings together young professionals who have professional interests in common so that they can develop both their professional and personal contacts. It helps members build peer-to-peer connections based on common problems at work, common professional experiences, shared intellectual interests, and shared professional concerns, to name a few areas. Such networking cultivates the talent of young, professionally minded people, which is important in facing challenges related to the SDGs, especially those related to adapting to the fast-paced world of emerging technologies.

Young professionals, need to constantly update their knowledge and be able to work with information, allowing them to create value based on knowledge. Bolshunova and Zimin [8] highlights that integrating technologies with information can lead to the development of new goods and services, resulting in the creation of unique products in the global market at lower costs compared to previous offerings. This integration is encompassed by the term knowledge economy which relies heavily on knowledge-based activities and intellectual assets. The MENNET platform encourages young professionals to impart knowledge, especially for creating a continuous learning culture through a series of knowledge sharing and discussion sessions, which include sessions with guest speakers from different professional backgrounds and which integrate valuable insights from a range of professional books.

Knowledge sharing through MENNET sessions (as seen in Figure 1) encourages MENNET members to learn faster and connect with relevant experts. Having the opportunity to learn best practices at work from these experts provides young professionals the opportunity to learn quickly on the job and add value to the company. Sessions in which insights from professional books are discussed help young professionals to gain the ability to grasp knowledge and apply it to solving problems efficiently.

Figure 1 Group photo of the MENNET sessions

B. Using the MENNET Platform to Promote Technological Awareness

Technology is moving faster than ever before due to the fourth industrial revolution, or Industry 4.0. Most people's daily activities nowadays rely on digital and computer technologies. The world is moving towards the digitalisation era [2], and businesses and industrial sectors are shifting towards digitalisation solutions [9]. Thus, it is imperative for young professionals to embrace skills and abilities with regards to digitalisation to enhance their career marketability. Through the MENNET platform, members could expand their network and collaborate with other MySET members through organised MySET events, which include seminars, conferences, industry visits and a series of engineering and technology talks and forums (as shown in Figure 2). MENNET members are exposed to the latest information on emerging technologies and have the chance to participate in relevant trainings and courses. Their knowledge and technology skills are thus always up to date.

MENNET members are encouraged to join professional bodies at an early stage in their careers, such as the Board of Engineers Malaysia (BEM) and the Malaysia Board of Technologists (MBOT). These professional bodies provide certification programs that validate a professional's knowledge and skills in specific technologies. Being awarded such certifications demonstrates proficiency and signifies familiarity with the latest industry-relevant technologies. MySET provides training and coaching and conducts assessments for these certifications. In fact, there are members who have recently obtained certifications due to their involvement in MENNET sessions.

Figure 2 Group photo of a MySET Event

C. Using the MENNET Platform to Promote Social and Cultural Connections

Young professional clubs or groups exist all around the world, and one reason for their existence is to promote social and cultural connections that lead to inclusivity. Such groups also inculcate cultural understanding through membership that can bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds, including different cultures, ethnicities and professional fields. Inclusivity fosters collaboration among individuals with diverse perspectives, expertise, and experiences. Young professionals from different cultural and social backgrounds can bring unique insights and innovative solutions to address complex challenges related to the SDGs.

In multi-ethnic country like Malaysia, young professionals at a very young age are directly involved with other ethnic groups with different cultural traditions in classrooms and at other social gatherings. By getting involved and understanding differences and similarities, they learn to communicate with and tolerate each other effortlessly. This great attribute prepares them well for their future undertakings when dealing with multinationals companies [10].

CONCLUSIONS

MENNET provides a platform to create more leader in technology - not merely followers. Young professionals play a crucial role in driving emerging technologies that can create wealth, promote job creation, enhance quality of life and facilitate global connectivity among people. These actions encompass the overall aims of the SDGs, which include environmental sustainability, economic growth, and the development of inclusive societies.

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