Human resources management. Nurturing our future leaders

JUST recently I received a letter from an official organisation, which is not an uncommon occurrence. What was jarring about it was that the name of the university printed and placed on the envelope was Universiti Tunku Abdul Razak rather than Universiti Tun Abdul Razak. It is a small thing that speaks volumes about the importance placed on meticulousness, on just doing a simple job right these days. This instance was not the first, and I have had acquaintances receiving letters with misspelled names, designations, and institutions.

It is not simply about getting a title right, or even about the inconvenience of letters that are addressed to the wrong person or institution. It’s about an increasing lack of competency, even for simple things, that is becoming more and more noticeable in our workforce. Our workforce is supposed to be younger, better educated and better trained, yet they don’t seem to be able to eliminate these simple mistakes. This shows a need for us to take a close look at how our human capital has eroded in terms of skills, competency and meticulousness.

It is about time that our organisations should take a serious look at this. If we don’t, the quality of the talents that we have will slip further, creating more complex situations for the organisation and for the community in the immediate future. It isn’t important to track down who is at fault or find someone to blame; what is important is trying to move forward and find proactive ways and measures to overcome these shortcomings.

THE VALUE OF DILIGENCE: Our younger generation seems to be constantly multitasking, yet because so many things are going on at once, it may become difficult to focus on one, resulting in the ‘very touch and go’ sort of work. Why does this happen? Perhaps it is because no one tells them how important it is to have pride in their work. I remember in the mid 1970s when I went to a Government Ministry, and the senior officer had to tell his staff three to redo a letter three times before he finally signed it. Imagine those days, a typewriter was used instead of a computer, and you could not ‘cut and paste’. This senior government officer did not even allow his staff to use whiteout — they had to rewrite the letter. If you don’t inculcate these values, it is difficult to ensure that workers will be diligent and conscientious.

This is an important issue because of the rising VUCA culture. VUCA, a term coined by the US Army War College and now co-opted by well known business consultants to describe business and economic situations, stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. This is the world that the millennials who make up the workforce have to face today. Is the Malaysian population ready to cope with this VUCA culture, considering our own current culture? Right now, nurturing leaders seems like a burdensome task. Compared to the current situation, the older generation faced a more stable environment, a less complex society and limited ambiguity. The world’s living landscape is changing and impacting everything and everyone, and unless we take steps to minimise the gaps we see now, we may be heading for a major catastrophe.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that ignoring this problem would lead to a situation akin to World War III, as the outcome will devastate the world. How can an economy flourish when it is supported by ineffective workers who are unable to give quality service to its customers? Therefore, it is imperative today that business leaders and public leaders should prioritise nurturing quality human resource leaders, because they are the ones who will succeed us in managing the future of our nation. Heads of companies must give priority to human capital budgeting that ensures the quality of their manpower will not deteriorate. The government-approved human resources development fund (HRDF) must not be allowed to remain idle; instead it should be utilised to nurture our future leaders. Going to the core of the matter and addressing issues of training and incorporating values is essential so that the nation would not have an ‘economic heart attack’ should the competency of our human resources seize up.

For this reason, UNIRAZAK offers a Master’s degree in Strategic Human Resource Management. We realise that right now we need to start nurturing future leaders who will help us to move towards a creative and innovative mindset in the knowledge economy. Our first step is to set our compass and move towards the direction of educating our precious workforce. Its better late than never.

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