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EFFECTIVE UNIVERSITY – INDUSTRY LINKAGES

By: Prof. Ir. Dr Siti Hamisah binti Tapsir

The issue of the effectiveness of university-industry linkages has always been a lively debate topic that crops up regularly at numerous seminars or forums organised by both the public and private sectors. It seems that each party tends to put the blame on the other for the shortcomings. However, there is a need for both parties to honestly reflect on each other's role in ensuring that effective university-industry linkages can be achieved. The universities must understand the need of the industry where bottom line figures are usually the critical success factor. Therefore their curriculum and programmes should be tailor-made to suit the industry's requirement. However, the industries must also not look at the bottom line figures as the sole driving factor. They have to understand that universities are supposed to train the mind for critical, lateral and analytical rather than hands-on skill. Skills can be acquired during employment. The attitudes of the graduates, rather than skills per se, are important in facing challenges during employment.

However, the universities must also be forward-looking and be able to produce both graduates and research products that are for the future's need and not yesterday's need. It is pertinent that universities work closely with industries to access knowledge on the industries future plan and thus universities should offer courses in line with the industries' master plan. The duration for practical training or industrial attachments should be more than 10 weeks or even better sandwich courses should be offered.

We have seen how some multinational corporate giants have benefited tremendously by placing R&D as one of their important strategies for success. They have sponsored numerous research projects that have resulted in important breakthroughs in the field of medicine, engineering and sciences. The universities that participate in these programmes in turn provide a lot of opportunities to their lecturers to carry out R&D work.

In the era of globalisation and a borderless world, we must take heed of the importance of University-Industry Linkages and prepare ourselves to face the future.