



# Adapting a Global Mindset

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**H**AVING watched the movie *Avatar*, I could not understand what the hype behind the movie was all about. My expectation of a movie is to have real people with real possibilities or issues that require solving (different to others' expectations of a movie). A creature with a 'bonding' tail traversing an alternative universe did not make sense. Having said that, I thought I owed it to myself to watch it a second time. Feedback on the movie, from friends and family, was very different to mine.

The second time though, I had to make an effort to keep an open mind and drop my old expectations and truly give the movie a chance. Interestingly enough, I found the concept ingenious, the graphics breath-taking and thought the message behind the movie very pertinent. There was a shift in my perspective.

## PERSPECTIVES AND THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

It seems that the key criteria for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is to possess a global mindset. This applies to nations, organisations and individuals. Interestingly, at the core of a global mindset is openness – to enable us to appreciate and leverage differing perspectives. By definition, a global mindset is one that has an

awareness of and openness to diversity (differing perspectives) within (national, regional) and globally, then leveraging these to achieve great results.

## HOW CAN WE DEVELOP THIS GLOBAL MINDSET?

In my last article I mentioned a structured platform, using action-based learning at its core. The aim of the platform is to learn and solve real challenges concurrently. The success of this platform is based on the principles that lay at its foundation. These principles enable the development of a mindset, which is open to the unknown, embraces curiosity, reflection and most importantly learning.

## WHAT ARE THESE PRINCIPLES?

### DEALING WITH THE UNFAMILIAR

To deal with the unfamiliar requires us to take a step back and scan the current realities. Just as my second attempt at *Avatar* required a conscious effort, in action-based learning, learners are moved away from solving challenges they are familiar with. To solve problems in the unfamiliar requires individuals and teams to focus on asking questions. The typical approach to problem solving when the problem is familiar is to search for answers, ideas and solutions. Questions when asked in such situations, are more for



information gathering than anything else. In contrast, when dealing with the unfamiliar, individuals or teams experience curiosity, question asking, reflection and learning. The focus on considering questions before looking for answers is inculcated.

Over time, the quantity and quality and use of questions expand, leading to individuals and teams collaborating to resolve real challenges and learning in the process. They become comfortable with 'not knowing' and with asking questions of both themselves and others. Just as I asked myself 'what is it that I am missing?' – helped me appreciate the magic of *Avatar*.

#### ENGAGING DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES

In most instances in business or life, we are used to the 'inside-out' perspective. By this I mean a perspective that has

us focused on ourselves driven by our assumptions, routines and expectations that we are used to. This leads to a 'silo' mentality where we associate ourselves with certainty or the comfort zone of our business unit, environment, culture or community.

The 'outside-in' perspective is a view of how others, stakeholders (including customers, suppliers) perceive us. An example in business would be to get team members, from a non-customer facing department, to seek a customer's perspective on their business. Though difficult at first, the learning from such an exercise helps teams break down internal silo mentality by bringing them together to focus on common (real) challenge. In this manner, the interdependence of teams: their impact on one another leads to a more collaborative and trust building

environment. Giving *Avatar* a second chance by dropping my 'inside-out' perspective and listening to 'outside-in' perspectives of the movie from friends and family helped shift my perspective.

#### EMBRACING DIVERSITY

An article in the September 2010 issue of the *Harvard Business Review* stated that globalisation is making the world's economy more diverse. To succeed, organisations that truly want to be global require their top performers to work with diversified groups of people from different cultures. Working with homogenous cultures, where everyone thinks and acts the same does not prepare the organisation to deal with differences.

In the Malaysian context we are lucky that on a daily basis we interact with different cultures. This ability to understand and appreciate the contributions of different cultures gives us an advantage over many other countries. It certainly helped me when I was working across cultures in Europe, in considering all perspectives and embracing differing thoughts and ways. This is the diversity and difference that the Prime Minister wants the citizens of Malaysia to leverage.

When we appreciate, celebrate and engage the diversity and difference we become open and develop a new sense of awareness. Just as in *Avatar*, by engaging with the residents of Pandora, Jake learns and appreciates their ethos and purpose, ultimately saving Pandora and adapting to their way of life.

#### ADAPTING

As humans we are unique, in comparison to other species, in that we strive to be better, be resilient and most importantly in our ability to adapt. In life, we adapt constantly using our own and known methods to evolve. In business, adapting via a structured platform, using the principles above is a start towards enhancing a global mindset. [mb](#)

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