

Reflections on Managing Technology in the New Economy:

The 2002 IEEE International Engineering Management Conference.

The 2002 IEEE International Engineering Management Society Conference Managing Technology for the New Economy was held August 18-20, 2002 at St. Johns College of the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom. The University of Cambridge originated in the year 1318, and attracts students of excellence globally to its thirty-one self-governing colleges. Research is of importance and since the beginning of the twentieth century more than eighty university members have won Nobel prizes.

St. John's College proved to be a venue of excellence for the conference. Most conference delegates were accommodated in the college residence adjoined to the modern Fisher Building Conference Center. This facilitated discussion and networking among participants. Submissions from some 35 countries were received, resulting in a program of over 164 presentations. These presentations offered stimulating insights into emerging approaches for managing technology, organizations, and individuals, in order to achieve success and growth in today's turbulent business environment.

1.0 Plenary Addresses by Distinguished Industrialists

A series of plenary addresses by distinguished industrialists who shared their wisdom and experiences in managing organizations in the New Economy was a highlight. The conference opened with a plenary address "nurturing innovation" by Dr. Lewis Terman, President IBM Academy of Technology. The IBM Corporation has a distinguished record of innovation leading the world for the last nine years in issued U.S. patents. Dr. Terman discussed the IBM programs that stimulate, recognize, and reward the creativity of its employees. Important to success is support from the highest level of management. The afternoon's plenary address "creating value for science - The New Alchemy" by Sir John Chisholm, Chief Executive Qinetik Group discussed the challenge of creating value from science and the Qinetik model works as one large science provider. Starting the second day of the conference Sir Robin Saxby, Executive Chairman ARM Holdings discussed how the creation of a new business model for the exploitation of ARM chip architecture technology now licensed to 90 semiconductor partners globally. ARM technology is at the heart of 80% of the world's mobile phones and is used in many consumer products. This was followed in the afternoon by Mr. Chris Earnshaw, Chief Technology Officer British Telecommunications. Discussing new approaches adapted by BT to stimulate innovation and exploit creativity. This was enabled by building partnerships with an extended network of commercial and academic organizations as well as by developing new ways to acquire, retain, and reward its employees. Dr. Hans Thambain who was IEEE Engineering Manager of the Year in 2001 presented the final Plenary Address. Dr. Thambain shared with conference delegates his view of the best practices of team leadership and his recommendations of tools and techniques for effective teamwork in technology-based work environments.

2.0 General Sessions

In the general sessions 164 presentations were delivered all of which stimulated lively discussion and provided valuable learning experience to conference participants. A host of topics were covered including: Aligning Business and Technology Strategies; Organisational Learning; Knowledge Management; Managing, Sustaining, and Financing Innovation; Managing Complex Systems; Management of R & D; E-Business Strategies and Processes; Managing ICT and Software Technology; Effective Engineering Management; Technology Transfer/Technology Acquisition; and Decision Support Systems. Distinguished academics, business people, and students all contributed and shared insights of value to the professional development of all.

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3.0 Common Themes Emerging from the Conference

One of several common themes emerging from the speakers is that an organization's failure is seldom attributable to the employee but rather is a result of management failure. Another is the importance of having engineering and technical expertise in management. Inquisitiveness is a necessary personal characteristic necessary for career success. You should not fear failure or be punished for taking reasonable risks many of which may fail. Employees are motivated by external recognition of their work, people who are properly motivated do whatever is necessary to get the job done in the finest possible way. It is important that employees that they find their work interesting and challenging and that management treats them with respect. Employees should be committed to success and actively seek ways of removing barriers to success. This will result in a satisfied work force that will produce quality products and services ensuring competitive success in today's competitive work environment.

4.0 Networking and Conversation

In addition to the technical sessions a full social program was organized keeping delegates busy in the evenings and giving them the opportunity to network and converse under relaxing conditions. An example of this was the farewell reception hosted in the Fitzwilliam Museum. This museum is distinguished for its architecture, its fine collection of Egyptian, Greek, and Roman antiquities and paintings by Titian, Rembrandt, and Gainsborough.

5.0 Importance of Professional Conferences

In an earlier article (IEEE Society Conferences and Their Value to Your Career. Today's Engineer April, 2002) I discussed the importance of participation in conferences. In today's economy the development of an information network is critical to career success. Conference attendance provides you with the opportunity to meet and discuss with others who are role models, who can provide career advice, and who may act as mentors and references as you advance in your career. Conferences provide you with the opportunity to get to know your peers, competitors and leaders as individuals in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. This is one of the best ways of finding out where the job opportunities are, what skills are in demand, and what the future may hold so that you can be proactive in your career management. The most successful people are those who have a mind prepared by making the effort to become knowledgeable and therefore gaining insights into the future - they are forward thinking.

Copies of the conference proceedings are available from the IEEE Services Center Catalogue # 02CH37329. Next years conference will be held in Albany, New York, November 1-3, 2003.

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