



**NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY ORGANIZATION  
LIAISON OFFICE APO, JAPAN**

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**BRIEF REPORT ON**

**SPECIAL ONLINE TALK ON ACTIONABLE INTELLIGENCE: POST-COVID-19  
SENSE MAKING IN AN AGE OF FEAR AND UNCERTAINTY**

**Date:** 8<sup>th</sup> April 2020

**Expert 1:** Prof. Keith Carter, Director of the National University of Singapore Ripple Fintech Lab and Associate Professor of the School of Computing, Singapore

**Expert 2:** Prof. Datuk John Xavier of Putra Business School, Malaysia

**Presentation/ Discussions by Prof. Keith Carter**

Prof. Keith gave a very insightful presentation and emphasized that even in these times of current crisis there's an opportunity for all people, businesses & governments to really grow and change for the better. It is through 'Actionable Intelligence' that governments and leaders can strive and thrive. Actionable intelligence means having the right information in the hands of right persons at the right time in order to improve outcomes. He discussed how actionable intelligence is necessary to gain critical insights and how strategies based on facts and evidence can help governments, businesses and community leaders to withstand this crisis and take full advantage of this opportunity to grow. What is more interesting is that earlier organizations were reluctant to move to digitalization and yet Covid-19 is now making digital transformation a reality. Another aspect that we as leaders need to consider and governments need to recognize is Maslow's hierarchy of needs – there's no question that the most important aspect is the physiological needs of people and therefore it sets a foundation for what a truly smart nation is. And this crisis is exposing countries that have prioritized this pyramid and countries that have not. For example the first thing that Singapore government did during Covid-19 pandemic was to assure their people regarding the food supply availability so as to avoid panic and ensured that digital processes are in place for their convenience. He further highlighted how we can maintain productivity and readiness through the use of digital technology by identifying the zones of fear, learning and growth. It is not about standing still during difficult times rather it is about experimenting new ways of delivering knowledge, products & services by effectively using technology. We need to understand that automation is not a situation where robots will replace jobs but rather robots replace tasks so that people can provide better value and deliver higher quality services. Therefore governments, organizations and business leaders are advised to fully capitalize on this opportunity by creating new streams of revenue through collaborating, establishing corporate capabilities and developing people.

## Presentation/ Discussions by Prof. Datuk John Xavier

Prof. John, in his presentation, talked about public sector resilience amid Covid-19 storm. Governments are working hard to minimize the damage occasioned by the pandemic upon people's lives, private sector productivity and economic growth. There have been sharp declines in GDP across the world, stock markets are smashed, businesses are shuttered and some 11 M people will be pushed into poverty in Asia alone. This will give rise to massive unemployment, shrink expenditures and decline in demand & investments. Therefore in order to offset this loss of economic productivity, the governments / public sector needs to intervene and break this vicious cycle of recession and depression. Traditionally, governments have used two primary instruments or policy choices i.e. fiscal policy and monetary policy to revive an ailing economy. Governments all across the globe, as a policy response, have introduced massive fiscal stimulus packages and made monetary policy more accommodative by applying ample liquidity in banking systems to help them with loan defaults and to lend more in order to support private sector productivity. This, to certain extent, has helped save jobs, support workers, increased aggregate demand and stopped the decline in productivity growth. However, on the other hand, this lockdown has also contracted aggregate demand and disrupted supply chains therefore in order to offset the decline in productivity growth governments & central banks need a more forceful fiscal response by introducing new economic tools like 'Helicopter Money' i.e. crediting bank accounts of individuals who have been affected by the crisis. Another solution would be announcing 'Haircuts by creditors' i.e. providing partial exemptions / write offs of loans for customers/businesses who are in difficulty

### Recommendations

Amid this time of fear and uncertainty 'People' remain the top priority. Individuals can remain productive by developing new skills and improving corporate capabilities, SMEs / organizations can promote business continuity by adopting actionable intelligence process and governments can build economic resilience by introducing financial stimulus packages and maximizing digital transformation. Let knowledge serve as the antidote to fear, let solidarity be the antidote to blame and let our shared values be the antidote to this our common threat.

### Questions & Answers

**Question 1** How do we process this collective grief, make sense of things as this pandemic spreads and move on in life?

**Answer** **Prof Keith:** The critical success factor is staying connected with people and engaging/participating in online sessions to see each other's smiling faces and realizing that we all are facing the same challenge and are in the same situation together. Governments and leaders need to anticipate the future crisis by having a very clear response as it is extremely challenging to decide whether to prioritize the economy or health as both are entwined.

**Prof. John:** Governments, businesses and leaders will have to show more tenacity and commitment to overcome this crisis and bring the economy into shipshape as quickly as possible. At the level of economy, governments will have to think in terms of the apportionment of the budget on the basis of priorities. For example they will need to grapple issues like guns and butter – that whether they need to put more money on health & education or on security & defense. On the level of businesses, they will have to stay guarded and be more economically resilient towards the future. In terms of growth and development, businesses need to factor in contingency and introduce major provisions that can help them to cover losses. At personal level, people need to realize that it's more

important to take care of the environment and to produce / consume with more responsibility during and after this pandemic.

**Question 2** How new education policy measures in Malaysia and Southeast Asia including Singapore meet the challenges which youth will encounter during Covid-19?

**Answer** **Prof. John:** The lockdown has imposed this contingency of digital transformation upon the education system in South Asia and especially Malaysian government has been proactive by quickly adopting online delivery system so that there is no disruption of activities. It is now incumbent upon the government to double up digital transformation of delivery of education services.

**Prof. Keith:** It is an opportunity for the government to relook at education and drive maximum benefits for all. Online education and telecommuting provides an interesting buffer for individuals to acquire new skills and develop additional capabilities. This lockdown has not only given an excellent opportunity to people/families to get to know each other and enhance family ties but also to learn from the best teachers / experts around the world and get certificates from the world best institutes. Another thing that education meant to do was to inspire us towards a particular direction in life and serves as a chance to look very introspectively as to whether we return back to the old norms or return to something new and different.

**Question 3** According to the latest HBR research article, almost 60% of global SMEs may never recover or go bankrupt in the wake of Covid-19 disaster. How SMEs in APO member countries should deal with this situation, remain resilient and sustain business continuity?

**Answer** **Prof. John:** SMEs are definitely a crucial part of the economy and governments are expeditiously trying to make them survive by providing host of incentives like interest payments, loan deferrals, business/retail premises discounts, full or partial exemption of rental, job retention scheme payouts, wage subsidy, interest free loans etc. Surely it may not be enough as government's resources are limited therefore it is incumbent upon the businesses to make the best use of these incentives / opportunities in order to push through these times. Moreover, it is also important for the governments to target those businesses that are vital to the economy like utilities, telecommunications, aviation etc. and distribute stimulus packages even more effectively and efficiently.

**Prof. Keith:** SMEs need to realize that the business is always about the customer and not about the product, service or brand. It is about how well you delighted and supported the customer and there is no better example than Japan to analyze how Japanese companies like Uniqlo (a casual wear designer, manufacturer and retailer since 1949) and Shiseido (a beauty, skincare and makeup brand since 1872) survived and make it through so many crises since their time of inception. The process of actionable intelligence or the roadmap to value creation that organizations need to follow starts by asking key questions using an ideation session to figure out potential goals and problems that need to be solved and knowing the benefits of answering those questions. Then you begin to collect data. Once you find and visualize the current situation, opportunities and performance then you take action and implement change. IT department also plays an important role as they are not only responsible to deliver the project but also responsible to deliver the adoption of process and ensuring that people actually use the information to deliver results.