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LEVERAGE LOCAL TECH, EXPERTISE FOR GROWTH

NATIONAL agendas such as the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry's (Miti) National Policy on Industry 4.0 (Industry4WRD) are emphasising the use of emerging technologies to fast-track industry transformation in order to spur economic growth.

National applied research and development (R&D) centre Mimos Bhd has its eye set on changing the rules of the game in driving industry transformation through digital technology. The centre, which employs just below 800 talents, has filed more than 1,200 patents over the years, with around one quarter already commercialised.

Feedback from industry and trade associations have always stressed that to accelerate small and medium enterprise (SME) investment in digital transformation, technology adoption has to produce return on investment (ROI) between three to six months.

Mimos has certainly taken that to heart. Having significant experience in researching and developing patent-backed digital products and solutions for domestic industry take-up and government usage, it is now going full throttle to encourage SMEs and start-ups alike to adopt local technology.

Strongly supported by Miti, it has been working behind the scenes with SMEs and larger corporations to create 'living labs' to drive a local movement towards technology adoption.

Mimos has been under the ministry's purview since 2018, with Miti playing a facilitatory role in providing monetary and policy support, alongside strong leadership, to help chart its path forward.

According to Mimos chief technology officer Thillai Raj T Ramanathan, the 'living labs' are SMEs that Mimos has worked with to identify and address specific business pain points by implementing various enabling technologies.

Seeing is believing: Thillai Raj explains that Mimos works with industry players to create 'living labs' where SMEs will be able to see real-life technology applications.

This includes artificial intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data Analytics (BDA), cybersecurity, blockchain, cloud and edge computing amongst others.

Otherwise known as centres of excellence, the 'living labs' demonstrate real world applications of Mimos' Smart Manufacturing Intelligent Service Platform (SMISP) in positively impacting aspects such as productivity and efficiency, service quality and cost management for faster business growth. SMISP is a shared services infrastructure founded upon Operational Technology (OT) and Information Technology (IT) that enables the adoption of Industry 4.0 technologies.

The results have been very encouraging. In three short months, Mimos has six 'living labs' in Penang, Perak, Negeri Sembilan and Selangor that showcase a spectrum of different manufacturing areas. These 'living lab' projects, which are smaller in scale and relatively easy to implement, bring ROI within a short time frame.

"The idea is to create a centre of excellence that SMEs can visit, which demonstrate real world applications bringing results following implementation.

"SMEs are very cost sensitive and manufacturing is very labour dependant. Our job is to promote the compelling business reasons for technology adoption, starting with small projects that will quickly show results and encourage SMEs to invest and digitalise more," he says.

With one factory, Mimos installed sensors to track the usage of electricity for cost optimisation, as electricity is among the highest costs for manufacturing companies.

The result was a trend showing the highest usage point early in the day, when all the machines in the factory's 10 production lines were switched on at the same time.

As factories are charged based on an electricity tariff classification derived from business activity on premises and the supply voltage level, Mimos then made the recommendation for the machines in the factory to be switched on at slightly different times.

The simple action is expected to save the factory 10% in electricity usage.

Mimos' goal for 2020 is to build more partnerships and linkages with SMEs in the manufacturing industry to drive Industry4WRD. Its technology and expertise will also be extended to other related industries in the future, in line with the national agenda, for greater impact.

The target is to transform 15 companies into centres of excellence in the next one year.

He shares, "In the years to come, we will expand this further and go into more factories nation-wide to implement relevant technology solutions. At the same time, we will share best practices."

"The whole ecosystem and supply chain for manufacturing – supporting services industries such as accounting, warehousing, legal, traceability, logistics – has to be covered to really see improvement in industry productivity," he explains.

To deep-dive into research and promote technology-related activities, Mimos champions several technology reference centres (TRCs) for specific technology focus areas such as Information Security, BDA, IoT and AI.

For example, the TRC for AI is known as the Centre of Artificial Intelligence for Future Industry (CAIFI). Jointly established by Mimos and Microsoft, CAIFI aims at building an AI R&D ecosystem to help move the Malaysian industry towards Industry 4.0.

The centre would carry out collaborative R&D, conduct workshops and training, as well as provide access to developmental tools and laboratories to help train SMEs and other entrepreneurs in making full use of emerging technologies.