

The HKIE – Electrical Division
The 39th Annual Symposium 2021 - Powering the New Normals
Closing Address
21 October 2021

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Good afternoon, Ir YH LEUNG, Ir WS TAM, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It's my great pleasure to give a closing address for today's symposium. First of all, I'd like to thank the Electrical Division for giving us this interactive platform every year to exchange ideas in tackling some of the most pressing issues facing our industry. I'd also like to congratulate the Organising Committee for a symposium thoughtfully planned and well received.

New Normal Defined

When I was told today's theme is "Powering the New Normals", I was eager to know more what new normal really means. So I searched the Collins English Dictionary, and here is a formal definition - "*a hitherto unusual state of affairs that suddenly becomes standard or typical*".

I also found that the term "new normal" is actually not "new". It's been used many times over the years. More than a hundred years ago, back in 1918, a guy called Henry Wise Wood used this term in his article on what to be expected after World War One. This War profoundly changed lives in many ways, one of which was that with millions of men went off to fight, women started to join the workforce. More recently in 2010, the International Monetary Fund used new normal in a publication to discuss the 2008 financial crisis. The effects of this crisis, such as the quantitative easing policy adopted at the time, can still be felt today.

What's common among all these old uses of new normal is what would be going on after something big. The biggest event as of today, as most of us would agree, is the COVID-19 pandemic. But I trust, as long as we are confident and united, the unusual will pass and we will eventually become stronger and stronger. What should we do then to prepare ourselves for the new normal this time?

Stop, Start and Accelerate

Recently, I have read an article published by the McKinsey, called “*From thinking about the next normal to making it work*”. While the article is based on scenario assessments in the commercial world, there’re still insights relevant to our electrical engineering industry.

There are many different actions mentioned in the article and I have extracted three actions to share with you today. In each action, there are three attitudes including what we should stop, we should start and we should accelerate to prepare for the new normal.

The first action is we need to move from “just-in-time”, to “just-in-time” AND “just-in-case” operation. What the pandemic has taught us in the past twenty-months is that – we need to stop optimizing primarily for “just-in-time” operation, which we’ve done so for many years as we strive for ultimate efficiency. We need to step further by starting to pay greater emphasis on the “just-in-case” as well. We need to redesign our systems in order to optimize for both efficiency and resilience so that we can still survive under some extreme conditions or environment. And in doing so, we need to accelerate our industry’s transition to digitization and embrace technology to devise new solutions to help our industry adjust to the new normal.

The second action is we need to move from simply returning, to returning AND reimagining. We should stop assuming that the old ways before the pandemic will totally resume. They won’t. The accelerated trends in remote work, e-commerce, automation, and even hybrid-mode conferences like this symposium, will surely continue after the pandemic. So, instead of just simply thinking about going back to the old days, we should start reimagining our systems and processes so that they can adopt to the new normals, and accelerate the application of innovation and technology so that our industry can seamlessly operate under the new normal, where social distancing, lockdowns and remote working are the norms, rather than the exceptional.

The third action, we need to move from making trading-offs, to making trade-off and embedding sustainability in our operation. It makes sense to think about the possible similarities between COVID-19 and climate change. The pandemic has created simultaneous shocks to our operations, supply chains and consumer demands; and even

serious knock-on effects. The same is likely to be true for climate change, as it brings more frequent extreme weather, heat waves and rising sea levels. So, as we build resilience and reimagine our systems and processes, we should stop treating environmental management as one of the items for trade-offs in our overall corporate financial and management decisions. Instead, we should start embedding sustainability in our systems, and accelerate the adoption of new environmental friendly technology in different processes.

As I go through today's programme, from reliable power system to smart building and transportation, as well as the keynote speech "*4 Network and 4 Flows Integration*", I'm excited to learn that our eminent speakers had shown they've indeed stopped thinking about the past, started building the resilience in our electrical systems, and accelerated the adoption of innovation and technology. They're also using their imagination, embedding sustainability in their designs, and proposing smart systems and processes; to allow our industry to operate under the new normal.

Closing

Before I close, I'd like to remind everyone that, after the pandemic, as history tells us, new waves of new normal will come. In fact, one is already on the horizon, and that is the announcement by the Chief Executive in her Policy Address in striving to achieve carbon neutral before 2050 and the corresponding Climate Action Plan 2050. This new policy and Plan would fundamentally change our industry and even our daily lives in the decades ahead, covering electricity generation, energy saving and green transport. I appeal to you all to actively contribute our expertise in making this goal a reality.

I understand that the works towards carbon neutrality will be tough, but it's a challenge that we, as electrical engineers, would embrace. It's because electrical engineers are not people who fear what the future will be because we will shape it. Just like our Hong Kong Olympians, as long as we dare to imagine, face difficulties with courage, and work hard, I trust we can co-create a better future and grasp the carbon neutrality medals.

Thank you.