First of all, a big welcome to everyone to the Professional Services Awards and in particular those who have come here to recognise.

As Brenda said, this is the second year that we have held this recognition ceremony. It is over two and half years since we began the SMARTER@HKU journey. We have achieved a great deal in that timing.

In HR, Finance and FM (Facilities Management), we have identified a road map, a way forward that will help us transform the way in which we deliver these services. Colleagues in IT have identified the organisational model that they believe best suits their mission and purpose. They are at an advanced stage of implementation. In Catering, whilst the road has been tough and the lessons learned hard ones, the 'path less trodden' is never easy. The rewards will come. From a standing start, the Purchasing Team have made a remarkable progress in a short time. The Sustainability Task Force has just begun its journey.

We were correct to anticipate that we would be expected to change the way in which we deliver administrative services. However, we are now under even more pressure to transform the way in which we deliver those services.

We are not alone. We met recently with colleagues from the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. They are on the same journey. What, however, is different about their journey is that the entire leadership team - HR, Finance, Student Support, Registry - have all recently been appointed from outside the higher education sector. Most of them have commercial backgrounds.

We have chosen, rightly in my view, to make the journey with colleagues who have a deep and valued understanding of the University sector in general and this University in particular. I am pleased that we have made that choice. I would not have wished it to be any other way. However, it is a harder journey for us because it means changing not only the way we work, but the way in which we think.

We need to develop new mindsets and capabilities to transform ourselves, our teams and our organisation. For many organisations, surviving and thriving in today’s environment depends on making a fundamental transformation to become more agile. That’s what NTU are doing and that is what SMARTER@HKU is all about.

I was right three years ago when I said we needed to change. And I am right today. My regret is that times I have doubted my own judgement.
The dominant traditional organisational model evolved primarily for stability in a well-known environment. They say the idea is based on an organisation as a machine, with a static, siloed, structural hierarchy operating through straight lines, a linear planning model. And one that is designed to control or execute one or two business models.

SMARTER organisations, on the other hand, are living systems. They evolve to thrive in unpredictable, rapidly changing environments. These organisations are both stable and dynamic. They focus on customers - in our case staff and students. They fluidly adapt to environmental changes. They are open, inclusive, non-hierarchical. They involve continually and embrace uncertainty and ambiguity.

It is suggested that such organisations are better equipped now than the traditional ones to face the future. If we accept that the agile organisation is better placed to meet the needs of our staff and students, how do we get from where we are to where we want to be?

Again, SMARTER@HKU points the way. It asks us to review the way in which we do things and how we do things with a view to becoming more streamlined, more flexible, more responsive and more efficient.

However, organisational transformation requires more than that. The new kind of organisation requires a fundamental different kind of leadership. We must extend and transcend the competencies that made us and HKU successful in the past.

To lead an agile transformation, you need to do two things. First, you need to transform yourself. Second, you need to transform the teams that you lead. Today, I just want to focus on transforming yourself.

To transform yourself, you need to move from a reactive to a creative mindset. A reactive or socialised mindset is an ‘outside-in’ way of experiencing the world based on reacting to circumstances and other people’s expectations of us. This limits our perspective. Focuses on what can go wrong and cause feelings of fear, anxiety, frustration and stress. If we adopt that method, we can only make mistakes, and we are noticed when we make those mistakes.

A creative or self-authoring mindset is an ‘inside-out’ way of experiencing the world, creating a reality and the way forward through tapping into and expressing our authentic selves, our core passion, our purpose. Being ‘in the creative’ expands our perspectives and focuses on the positive.

And to build and lead agile organisations, leaders you must make personal shift to run primarily in the creative.

Think about your typical day - do you and your team spend most of the time reacting to problems, your bosses’ requests, and you seek to control others’ work to deliver perfect outcomes? Or do you spend your time pursuing your purpose and your passion, trusting and empowering others, exploring new and sometimes messy possibilities? I fear it may be the former.

So there is a need to a fundamental three-phase shift from reactive to creative.
From certainty to discovery is the first. The reactive mindset of certainty is about playing not to lose. It is essentially a defensive mindset being in control, replicating the past, playing it safe.

Today’s leaders need to shift to a creative mindset of discovery, about playing to win, seeking diversity of thought, fostering creative collision, embracing risk, experimenting.

We need to move from authority to partnership. Traditional organisation designs tend towards siloed hierarchies based on reactive mindset of authority. The relationship between leaders and teams is one of superior to subordinate. The new organisation - the agile organisation - is designed for collaboration, employing networks of autonomous teams. It requires an underlying creative mindset of partnership of managing by agreement based on freedom, trust and accountability.

The third characteristic is to move from a mindset of scarcity to one of abundance. In an organisation like this, where resources are scarce, the first instinct is to protect the resource you have however you can. If you manage to increase your share of the resource, you do so at the expense of others. It is a win-lose approach that reflects the reality of a limited opportunity and resources.

But today’s challenges evolve continually and rapidly. To deliver results, leaders must look across the organisation with a creative mindset of abundance. Access the unlimited resources that exist across the organisation and are potentially available. I have always said that there is plenty of money in this University but it is just in the wrong places.

These mindset shifts may be new and require a significant ‘letting go’ of the old beliefs and paradigms. Because of the inherent autonomy and freedom, leadership in an agile organisation comes from a self-disciplined approach - not leading by punishment or sanction but in service of purpose and passion.

Before you dismiss all this as just the EVP going on one of his managerial sort of rants that happen annually, think about what I have said and think about the characteristics of the individuals, teams and projects that we are here to celebrate today.

Most, if not all of the projects, cited under the team awards are self-organising, cross-functional, multi-disciplinary projects that come together for relatively short periods of time to address particular problems or challenges. Every member of that team is needed to take a project from an idea to an implementation. Management is by agreement based on freedom, trust and mutual accountability.

An agile organisation would talk of ‘scrum’ and ‘sprints’, but we don’t use that sort of language at HKU. The most often adjectives used to describe the individual awardees are dedication, leadership, creativity, passion, determination, commitment and self-motivation. These individuals have to repeat the phrase I used earlier - tapped into and express their authentic selves, their core passion and their purpose. Their leaders have allowed them to do so. In doing so, they have expanded their perspective and focus, and the result is today’s success that we are here to recognise.
So these individuals and teams have shifted from a reactive to a creative mindset, and the University is delighted to be able to recognise their achievements and to thank them.

Thank you very much indeed.

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