

Taking A Job Offer From A Competitor: A Career Move In Paradox

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Prologue

It was a bit hot day in December 2005; Syed Zainal was driving his car back to his home in Kuala Lumpur. It is already afternoon, and the sun is slowly setting down while he is driving his car on the congested roads of Kuala Lumpur.

'I am a corporate guy looking for career opportunities, and I learn about making the best out of any given opportunity,' Syed Zainal narrated his career progression mindset.

Syed Zainal went for a job interview at the Proton head office in Kuala Lumpur. He met with the board of directors at the Proton head office. The board offered Syed Zainal the opportunity to join the Proton group and lead the production operation at the group level.

Syed Zainal finished his interview for the position of managing director of Proton Group (The largest Malaysian car production group) and slowly driving back toward his home and thinking about the offer, the competition Syed Zainal gave to the Proton Group, and the lifetime opportunity coming in the shape of the current job offer.

Syed Zainal has to decide and provide the answer next week. Syed Zainal was building steady capacities at the Perodua car manufacturing (A competitor of the Proton group); Syed Zainal spent a good ten years at Perodua company and became deputy managing director in the same year.

A good job offer is at hand, and Syed Zainal needs to make a critical decision of his life to accept the new job offer to start a career at Proton Group (the biggest car production group in the country) or keep working with the Perodua (the second large production group in the country). Proton Borad wants the answer from Syed Zainal by next week.

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A humble start

Syed Zainal was born in Kota Bharu (Kelantan) in 1962 into the family of Syed Mohamed Tahir. Syed M Tahir worked as a clerk in the Road Transport Department Malaysia (*Malay: Jabatan Pengangkutan Jalan Malaysia*) in Kota Bharu. Syed M Tahir's family settled in Kota Bharu and lived in her mother's house with three siblings families. Syed Zainal starts schooling in Kota Bharu, and in the meantime, Syed M Tahir will get a new appointment in the JPJ in Johor Bahru. Then, Syed M Tahir moved his family from Kota Bharu to Johor Bahru. Syed Zainal moved to the new school from Kota Bharu to Johor Bahru.

Syed Zainal settled well from the small city of Kota Bharu to Johor Bahru. Syed Zainal made new friends here and started participating actively in scouting, playing hockey, and experiencing the life of living nearby Singapore. Then again, life took another turn, and Syed M Tahir transferred to Penang, and young Syed Zainal moved with his family to Penang. Young Syed Zainal made new friends here in Penang, most of whom are Chinese students in Syed Zainal's class.

Syed Zainal exclaimed, ' I learn to make friends as I move from one state to another with my family. My father was getting new appointments in different states, and I had to move with my family.'

Syed Zainal learns to live with different cultures, respect the cultures, and deal with people from different religions, states, or backgrounds.

Syed Zainal narrated it: ' In my life, I like to experiment and experience cultures and people; I love to live with people from different cultures. It always helps us to learn about people and learn from them about life, work, discipline, and money. I had many good Chinese friends from my school days, and whenever we met, I liked to deal with them as my childhood friends, talking freely and listening to their critical views. Irrespective of my financial or work status.'

Higher Education in the USA

After completing high school, Syed Zainal was selected for an international scholarship to study engineering at Maryland University, USA. The Petronas group sponsored that international scholarship, and only a handful of students were selected to study in the USA.

It was a great experience to study on scholarship at one of the top engineering universities in the USA. Syed Zainal explained the experience: ' I prefer to live outside campus with an American family as paying guest. It helps me to understand the American lifestyle, family issues, and the value of money. To earn money, I worked as a cleaner, dishwasher, community worker, and many other odd jobs. I even worked as a match referee to earn some money.'

For Syed Zainal, education is an influential step in staying competitive and enhancing skills and helps him keep moving forward. Further study in another country that was specialized in his field equipped

him with better practical skills and knowledge that can apply to his career. Syed Zainal also learn other culture that is great use in his current position as high-level management position in various companies that have many international collaborators.

The proof that education influences professional success is seen via his career progression faster where Syed Zainal received many job offers in top management position. The value of a degree is not just in the literal application of the knowledge gained from registered courses, but in the skills and habits picked up via the process of study.

During his university life, Syed Zainal also doing many part time jobs during his study. He believed that education goes beyond the acquisition of knowledge; it expands horizons and broadens perspectives. By doing many part time jobs to diverse ideas and cultures, it enables him to explore different perspectives, cultures, and develop a broader understanding of the world. Each of these talents can add value to his organization. And, such skills can give him the experience to be prepared and equipped to take that next step toward achieving his career goals.

Syed Zainal also likes traveling and being in the USA; it was a great experience. Syed Zainal commented, ' I was a sport-loving person; I played Hockey from my school days. I was selected for the university hockey team and traveled to many cities in the USA. It helps to learn about forming teams, traveling in groups, and integrating well into people.'

Syed Zainal is a person that have clear goal in his leadership style. He believed that leadership is not something that can be taught in class, but rather it is something learn from experiences to learning how to be a better and effective leader. As for that, Syed Zainal study experiences more as he traveled. He have traveled too many cities. Many people around the world do not have the same luxuries that we often take for granted in the United States. He have examined that the people he've met cherish one another and have extremely strong community ties. As a leader, having a community you can rely on is important. Syed Zainal always think about how he can contribute to his community.

Traveling has opened up his creative process and envision new business ideas.Syed Zainal always thought about how he wanted to implement his ideas and what he would do to streamline business plans. The business ideas grew and the strategies spread like wildfire. As a leader, Syed Zainal remember that those outrageous ideas come first beyond anything else that will benefit in the long run. For him, it is important to travel and learn more about the world. From his experience, this will open his eyes to new opportunities and ways of contributing and marking your mark on others.

Back to Malaysia

Syed Zainal came back in 1985 and started looking for a job. Syed Zainal started a salesman job in a local furniture shop in Kuala Lumpur. Syed Zainal learn about selling and communicating with the customers, understanding customer needs, and how to offer help to complete the sale transaction.

Syed Zainal narrated the experience as ' I do not like to sit idle, I keep looking for a job, and I started the first job at the local furniture store. It was a great experience to deal with customers, understand their needs and requirements, and help them in all possible manner. I learn about working a 9-5 job and being an independent young guy with a monthly income.

Syed Zainal worked here for a few months and was called by Petronas to work as a Project Engineer for a pipeline project in 1987. NOVA Corporation, Canada, ran the gas pipeline project. Syed Zainal was sent to Canada for training and received good knowledge about managing international corporations.

During that time, Syed Zainal got married and started his family. Syed Zainal had to travel around Malaysia and Singapore for the gas pipeline project. Syed Zainal starts looking for a new job to spend more time with his family. Luck bring a new great opportunity for Syed Zainal in the shape of a career position as a senior executive of corporate planning and international business development at Petroliam Nasional Berhad in 1992. The job was great, and it helped Syed Zainal travel to different parts of the world and work with different global and local players. However, the job requires much traveling, and Syed Zainal is looking for an opportunity to spend more time with his family.

Syed Zainal kept looking for his next career move, and the next opportunity came in the shape of production head at HICOM Holding Berhad in 1995. Working for HICOM brings great career opportunities in terms of training. HICOM was producing commercial automobiles, and Syed Zainal had the opportunity to travel to Japan for training.

Syed Zainal shared his experience: ' I was sent to Daihatsu, Japan, for the production manager training. I was asked to stand on the shop floor for a few days and asked to watch the people working on the shop floor. Standing on the shop floor and doing nothing was not very pleasant. I called my executive director in Malaysia to ask the plant manager in Japan to change my training. The Japanese manager called me and said that as a production manager, your job is to understand the production flow, and observation is the key to performing the job at the best possible level. I learned one great thing: a manager must know all the jobs of his coordinates to manage them well, and observation is the best strategy to learn and understand the people and jobs.'

Syed Zainal came back and brought many learnings from Japan. Syed Zainal narrated the learning as 'I really came back as a different individual; I really learned about the importance of observation, understanding towards performance, wastage, and efficiency. Japanese are very particular about identifying wastage (inefficiencies) and working hard to eliminate these inefficiencies to achieve performance and excellence.

In 1999, Syed Zainal became senior general manager at Perodua Corporation. It was time that Syed Zainal started working to develop a 100% local car from the design to actual production. Moreover, in 2002, Syed Zainal was appointed Executive Director of Perodua Auto Corporation.

Car manufacturing market in Malaysia

Malaysian automotive industry started before independence from British rule, and Ford Malaya started car production in 1926 with Model T sold here. The semi-knock down (SKD) production started in 1930, and imported engine and body parts (From Ford Canada and Ford England) were assembled at Ford Malaya. The full-fledged assembly plant was established at Bukit Timah (Singapore) in 1941, and it became the first fully operated automobile assembly plant in Southeast Asia with a complete knockdown (CKD) production facility.

The Ford Malaya production facility remains the sole automobile assembly plant in combined Malaysia, and production was exported to neighboring nations such as Thailand, Indonesia, Burma, Pakistan, and India. Other major international car manufacturers like General Motors (GM) approached the British administration to build a production facility in British Malaya. However, they refused at that time, and GM established their production plant in Java under the Dutch Administration in 1927.

After the independence from British rule in 1957, self-resilience and sufficiency drove the industrial policy. In 1964, the 1st Malaysian automotive policy aimed to fast-track industrialization through local manufacturing of parts and assembling small and large commercial vehicles. The primary objectives were to reduce import bills and create jobs by luring local and international players to establish vehicle assembly plants. That drive helped to establish six car manufacturing plants in the country.

The rise of Japanese car manufacturing firms in the early 1960s astonished the world, and Japanese car companies became major players in the global market in the early 1970s. Japanese car manufacturers are working on quality, reliability, and high fuel efficiency, becoming a real choice globally. Nissan and Toyota fiercely competed in the Malaysian market in the early 1970s. Malaysian market became a net buyer of imported cars market, and automobile manufacturing at the national level became a dream to realize. Car manufacturing in Malaysia was initiated with the visionary policy of 1970s import substitution industrialization (ISI), promoting automobile parts and components production in Malaysia. Self-resilience and reducing the import bill on the importing of cars was the vision laid down in the said policy document.

However, the vision set in the 1970s caused the birth of the Proton (Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional) corporation in 1983 as the first automotive production unit in the country. Proton was started with the major ownership held by HICOM (Heavy Industries Corporation of Malaysia Berhad) and a minor stake held by Mitsubishi Group, Japan. The production facility was in Proton City, Perak, and the head office was in Shah Alam, Selangor. Initially, the production facility started producing badged and non-badged engineered cars in Malaysia (mostly with Mitsubishi engines).

The launch of the Proton Saga in 1985 was the major milestone achieved by the Proton, and it was the start of the Malaysian indigenous car production era. The Proton Saga was built on a second-generation Mitsubishi Lancer saloon car with a 1.3-liter engine. Proton Saga was a success, and within two years, the Proton captured the domestic below 1600 cc car segment, with 64% of the market

share. In 1987, the new Proton Saga Aeroback was launched with a 1.5-liter engine as a hatchback variant of the Proton Saga. In 1989, Proton Saga started exporting the Saga Saloon and Hatchback to England and Ireland and made record-breaking sales in the United Kingdom.

In the early 1990s, Proton Saga Iswara was launched in 1992, and the Proton Wira was introduced in 1993 as the fourth generation of the Mitsubishi engine. The diesel engine variant was also made available for the Proton Wira. Proton introduced the three-door Proton Satria hatchback in 1994 and a two-door Proton Putra Coupe in 1996. Proton products were received warmly in the market and exported to European and Middle East markets in the 1990s.

Perdana was envisioned to develop mid-range and luxury vehicles in Malaysia and curtail the import of cars in the country. The Perdana premium saloon segment was launched in 1995, with the seventh generation of Mitsubishi Eterna 2.0 liter engine. A later version of Perdana comes with a V6-powered engine to offer luxury and comfort to high-end customers. Proton purchased the 80% stake in the Lotus Group International Limited for 51 million pounds sterling in 1996. The purchase of Lotus Corporation helped uplift Proton's car suspension and allied engineering matters.

Perdana came into being in 1993 as a subsidiary of Proton Holding Berhad, carrying the flag of Malaysia's national car manufacturers.



Figure 1: Proton Logo over 20 years

Perusahaan Otomobil Kedua Sendirian Berhad (Perodua)

Perodua emerged as the 2nd Malaysian car manufacturer in 1993 and offered their first product, 'Perodua Kancil', as a five-door hatchback. The Perodua came into being as a partnership between UMW Holding Berhad, Daihatsu Motors (Japan), and Daihatsu Motors (Malaysia). Initially, Perodua aimed to produce minicars and supermini cars for the Malaysian market. Perodua's market offerings are much different than those of Proton. The Perodua uses Daihatsu's main components and remains

the assembling plant for Toyota and Daihatsu in Malaysia. The production facility is located at Sungai Choh, Serendah, Selangor.

Perodua Kancil was a great success as the small hatchback offers economy, low price, and comfort and targets low-income or young Malaysians. About 10000 units of Kancil were sold in the first six months after the launch of Kancil. The units sold reached 40000 in 1995. Making the waves with the success of 'Kancil', Perodua launched Rusa Microvan in 1996, having a 7-seater capacity. The third car introduced by Perodua was the Kembara SUV, a stylish and affordable 4x4 car that captured 71% of the SUV market in Malaysia. Perodua steadily progressed in the market and gained significant market share in the early 2000s.



Figure 2: 1st Generation Myvi Car

The 1st generation Myvi was introduced in the Malaysian market in 2005. The Myvi was a great success and attracted 52000 bookings in August 2005. However, the production capacity was about 10,000 cars per month. Perodua Myvi was built on the Daihatsu Sirion engine and had five variants. Myvi became the best-selling car in Malaysia for the next ten years. Myvi crossed the 1 million units sold in 2017. It also helped Perodua become the largest car manufacturer in the country.



Figure 3: Perodua Logo over 20 years

Epilogue

Syed Zainal joined HICOM Holdings Berhad in 1995 as senior general manager. He later became the executive director for Perodua Auto Corporation Sdn Bhd in 2002. Syed Zainal worked with his teams to design and develop the Malaysian dream car 'Myvi'. With the launch of Myvi in 2005, Syed Zainal received appreciation and respect for the success of Perodua Myvi. He was promoted to deputy managing director position in October 2005.

The success of 'Myvi' changed the face of Malaysian car manufacturing, and Syed Zainal became the face of Malaysian car manufacturing. That was when Proton struggled with the competition put on by Perodua. The Proton CEO resigned in the meantime.

Syed Zainal is expected to be the first Malaysian managing director of Perodua in 2006. However, by December 2005, Syed Zainal was called for an interview at the Proton group. The interview was conducted in a good environment, and the group director suggested that Syed Zainal join the Proton group as a Managing Director to oversee the production and business of Proton.

Syed Zainal needs to make up his mind and decide about accepting the new job offer or keep working for the job he already has at hand. Syed Zainal must also understand that the new job offer comes with great responsibilities to revamp the Proton corporation as Managing Director. For the last six years, Syed Zainal has been working with Perodua, developing products to compete with the Proton automobile products.

Lastly, Perodua is becoming the market leader and challenging the Proton with a very competitive market offering. Syed Zainal is the head of car production in Perodua, knows Perodua's strengths and weaknesses, and is possibly the first Malaysian CEO of Perodua. Syed Zainal's efforts to make Perodua the largest automobile manufacturer may be lost. However, Syed Zainal must take the best step possible to bring back the success to Proton as the national car manufacturer.