

**Interview by Ahmad Suaedy with Don Murniadi, Jakarta, 2 January 2014**

**BA, Computer Engineering, UNSW, Colombo Plan, 1963**

After graduating from senior high school, I was looking for affordable options. My father is a civil servant, my mother is a school teacher, my father is an agricultural expert, in spinning. There was an agricultural office in Bogor.

I was trying hard to get into any university I could afford, as cheap as possible. Then I went to Jakarta in PTIP to look for any scholarship. There was an offer from Mexico and Australia's Colombo Plan. I applied for both but I got the Australian offer first. We departed in December. When we applied we took an English test. It was a very rigorous test taken from the national certificate office in Bogor, all schools in Indonesia used to be examined together. It wasn't leaked because each score was different from one another and coincidentally I was accepted in Bogor. My first intention was the scholarship, not the nationalism.

It was 1963, I was in the same batch as Mustakim Hadi Winarto. Actually the departure after graduating in September was postponed. And we departed in December. During that time, I went to a university in Bogor, joined the orientation in IPB and paid because it was nearby. IPB used to be a part of UI. I took marine fishery major.

Then I went to Australia. Only a few could speak English at that moment, I could speak English by learning from BBC radio in school but it wasn't reliable specifically for conversation. I learnt my English from that radio, Australian radio.

At that time, television had not been common, it was there after I graduated in 1963. If you wanted, you had to learn from radio. I took electrical engineering, but I was interested in the engineering program because computers had just appeared at that time, the size was still huge. There had been computer in 1963, but it wasn't the same as one nowadays, one person took care of one computer. If you wanted to do it, you made the program yourself. Then I enrolled in New South Wales University. Then I worked in a job at the Pasri Kepinga, steel company in Newcastle. There was a computer in Sydney.

After graduation, I didn't come back to Indonesia directly. I was given an opportunity to have work experience as a programmer, at that time there were a few, so there was ICLBM. There were companies that had been computerized. IBM and ICL didn't recruit newcomers.

I went home to Bogor, at that time the biggest company there manufactured tyres for cars. They offered me a position in management training for accounting. I just applied for fun so I learned business. I changed my focus.

I was trained for 6 months in digital accounting, after 3 months I became assistant manager for the unit that handled accounting for the company. Because the company was big, the employees were 23 people. Since computer hadn't been used, all was done by human resources. Even the Excel application hadn't been available, so calculator was used.

Interviewer: Were there any difficulties to get training in this?

I formed my own company as a CocaCola company in 1981. I was asked to work in one of the franchises that CocaCola opened in Bandung. Finally, I moved there. Because I was challenged, I had to make procedural systems from the company to the distribution. I felt more comfortable there. It was in 1982 till 1989 if I am not mistaken.

Then there was a process to sell this franchise to another company. I moved to civic company, a small shipping company. I was asked to work there but it wasn't compatible, better to pay a Singaporean than an expatriate, so there were a driver, rented house, and department. I was 49 back then. Then I came back to Jakarta and back to engineering and created training and engineering company. But I was minority.

I created this when I was still an employee. They said I created it because my stock was 10%, I became the manager and started from zero.

I didn't have sufficient experience in engineering since I took engineering from school and finance from the practical experience. The company was founded in 1985 but there was no real activity nor personnel till 1990. So in 1990, I paid 3 employees as a start. There are Indonesians holding stocks now in the company.

We sell engineering equipment for industrial purposes. If it's oil, the tools are related to drilling; if it's related to transfer, it includes the efficiency of energy and so on. Such type of work. So, the electrical matters have developed significantly since 1970, and nowadays many have disappeared. We used to have transistor for electricity. But now we use ICI. The main instrument has changed, so to count uses circuit, labatraform equation, fulustransform; it is so different from the other, different from mechanical.

One of the lessons there is aerodynamics, it wasn't the major in electrical engineering. That is the one I use.

Interviewer: Basically, what is electrical matter?

Electrical matters are weak and strong currents related to generator along to generate electricity, that's still the same. The principle, for instance, if it's spun it will create electricity such as dynamo. Vapor can also be used to spin the turbine.

The weak current is like people creating radios. The radio used to be big, but now it is small such as one in this smartphone. So the technology changes drastically.

Interviewer: The companies handled by you are a few, not related to electrical matter but mechanical. So the knowledge can develop anywhere?

We can say that people studying in university are judged based on the basic. Later it's up to them to take specification. The basic is trimodynamic, not a part of electrical engineering since electrical engineering has various specifications, as a part of engineering. No.

The lesson is not only one, there are various lessons. Chemistry in the first level, but not in the second level. The second level is related to trimodynamics. The lessons till the fourth level are related to electrical matters.

The lessons used are in level 1, 2, 3 which are implemented, so it's like accounting people that also get law lesson, so there is not only one lesson.

But, what is used is not the manager, the others are comfortable working in this company from 1990 up to now because here is what is most interesting, there are many innovations.

Interviewer: There are many opportunities to work in big companies? Why do you prefer to go back to a small company founded by yourself. You even started it since 1990 from zero. Why?

Actually, from all aspects, from financial aspect, for instance. Actually, from financial aspect, there is question of equity. If we open a catering company worth 100 millions, we get 10%. If we sell 10 times in a month, we will get 100%. Because the result is more and it is more certain. That is how business. If it's catering, it can get 200% in a year, if you are not a senior manager, you won't get it.

Our company employees get health insurance. We can apply for the health insurance now. If there is a need below the estimation, there is a financial capital as a factor in business.

The simple one can benefit 30%. There are so many businesses in which we can get some amount from what we put. If the financial capital is 40 billion, we get 10 billion in a year. Considering all the risks, 10 billions are clean. If the financial capital is little, the result is also small.

Interviewer: What did you want to do when you first got back?

I figured that I was capable enough in finance because I was in engineering. Many experiences are the factors. I once paid for a truck in installments. Because I needed financial capital, the truck was turned into money again and put in the bank.

I already had this intention since I was in Singapore. Because my expertise is in accounting and finance but I didn't have the certificate of qualification. So there was a company who didn't look at certificate but experience and I got into that.

If the stocks are big, it can organise the company and the small one will have difficulty to follow. The start is 10% which in first year turned over about 200 million by being the agent for an oil company. I appointed the employee that has oil expertise. I only had the concept so the rest was given to the others. But, the restaurant business is unique, it cannot be learned, the owner should always monitor the business.

In 1985 till 1990, I sold one type of goods in a small amount. I have just increased this business to now move over a billion of these products in 2013.

Since 1990, I haven't moved and my stock in the company is still 10% as a managing director, 30% in total as there are 3 of us. They are never involved, they just trust it. The benefit is taken from the company benefit. Some of the benefit is shared, but some is taken for the financial capital. The owner never took his money, but this is how the company works. The benefit can be shared or used as financial capital.

All experiences determine the future.

Nowadays, many graduates from IPB work in a bank. Our fish is often stolen. What we do us to fix patrol boat.

Polices usually use the very small amount of diesel fuel to be economical. Police like bribery. Koreans catch fish and it is put in the cans while on the ship so the fish is fresh.

Natural resources can empower if they are processed. The mistake lies in the huge corruption during the Soeharto era. [...]

When I got back to Indonesia, I didn't have political problem. I just wanted the commitment. People back then weren't good in English so they employ those studying abroad.

Interviewer: What about your family?

I was married in 1977, after returning in 1971. My first child was born in 1978 and my second in 1983. The oldest took postgraduate studies in America and both have their own businesses.

[Interviewer note: Now Pak Don is 67 years old, yet he doesn't want to retire.]

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