Speech by His Excellency Mr. Rajkeswur Purryag, GCSK, GOSK, President of the Republic of Mauritius, at the Annual Leadership Gala Dinner, held on Friday 24 October 2014 at 19:30 hrs at Le Meridien Hotel, Pointe aux Piments.

Mr. Tan Chee Peng, Chairman and CEO of Team Synthesis
Mr. Sarat Lallah, CEO of Mauritius Telecom
Mr. Kent Grayson, Chief Information Officer of Team Synthesis
Dr. Hemant Chittoo, Acting Director General of the University of Technology, Mauritius
All Protocol Observed
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to thank Team Synthesis (Mauritius and Africa) for inviting me for the third consecutive year to address this august gathering of leaders and managers on the occasion of their Annual Leadership Gala Dinner.

I also thank Mr. Tan Chee Peng, the Chairman and CEO of Team Synthesis for his relentless effort in promoting the leadership and innovation culture in businesses in Mauritius.

I understand Team Synthesis has been serving Mauritius for a couple of years now with much dedication and commitment.

It’s a real pleasure this evening to be in the midst of senior leaders and managers of some of the reputed organisations in Mauritius.

Indeed, I feel more honoured and privileged to speak on the very challenging theme that you have chosen to mark this year’s Leadership event, that is, “Integrating an Innovative Future for Mauritius”.

That is because innovation has serious implications for organisations, especially, in the century we are living.

And as the famous management guru, Peter Drucker, once said and I quote:

“The enterprise that does not innovate ages and declines. And in a period of rapid change such as the present, the decline will be fast.” (Unquote)

This is very true for all countries including Mauritius, the more so as we are confronted with an era where technologies are forming an integral part of innovation and sustained productivity.

Therefore, it is evident that organisations that do not keep pace with innovation run the risk of losing out to their competitors, even, of disappearing.
As we know, the world is changing dramatically in this 21st Century.

In fact, the process of change is accelerating at an unparalleled pace.

Technology has now eliminated many of the barriers of geography and ignorance that previously kept capitalists as well as consumers from finding the lowest price inputs and products anywhere in the world.

Organisations have become more global and are more diverse and interconnected than ever before.

To-day, every organization, big or small, is faced with a high level of ambiguity and uncertainty never experienced before.

Because the traditional road of the era of industrial revolution that we have been travelling for so long has almost reached an end with the advent of technology and digitalisation in the management of business.

As Rowan Gibson, the world foremost thought leader on business innovation, says: “From here on, the journey to to-morrow will be an off-road experience.”

And the probability is that that complexity will continue to increase in the years to come.

To-day, the debate is about the right skills v/s the wrong skills.

Even in the age of incredibly powerful and capable digital technologies, some human skills are more valuable than ever.

However, other skills have become worthless and people who have wrong ones have little to offer to their organisations.

Consequently, organizations will need to bring fresh policies and mindset, with unprecedented creativity and resilience in order to stand out and to thrive in an increasingly competitive international environment.

Ladies and Gentlemen

We are in the midst of challenging times, indeed, new times that call for organisations that are more technology driven.

Computers are going to get more and more powerful and capable with an even bigger impact on jobs, skills and the economy as a whole.

Technologies are racing ahead but many of our skills and organisations are lagging behind.

What we need at this present juncture therefore is an altogether new organizational vehicle that can take us through the rough and uncertain landscape into which we are moving.
So, it is imperative to-day that we capture what is happening around us, discuss their implications and come up with strategies that allow our organisations to move ahead with our human resources.

The lessons that we have learnt from these past two decades is that no country can afford to drive into the future without creativity, entrepreneurship and technological innovation.

I am no leader or manager, still less an expert in organizational innovation.

Having been involved in public life for a long period of time, I can very safely assert that if we do not innovate and challenge the status quo, the risk is that we will simply become irrelevant.

Because digital technologies coupled with the right skills and innovation have become the most important driving force in the economy to-day.

In fact, they are transforming the world and workers.

They are increasingly regarded as the key drivers of productivity and growth.

The question that should be asked is what does innovation imply and why do organisations have to *perforce* innovate to survive?

Should the race towards innovation be against the machine or with the machine?

Innovation is looking into the future by being creative and imaginative and allowing digital technologies to be part and parcel of our transformation process.

And, this is even more imperative if we want to remain above the curve, especially against a background of fierce competition and more sophisticated customers.

That’s why managing innovation is fast becoming a priority in the global business environment.

Those who will catch up will remain relevant, otherwise some will disappear.

Let me stress however, that the organization of the 21st Century cannot be created without a radical change.

There is, in my view, need for a big paradigm shift in how business is to be conducted in an environment that desires more and demands more.

There are no easy or ready-made answers.

As leaders and managers, I am sure you are not oblivious to the fact that customer expectations are now rising at an alarming rate with a great level of sophistication.
But unfortunately, the speed of business is not fast enough to keep up with the speed of change.

Innovation is therefore the only way that can respond to public confidence and satisfaction as well as sustain long-term growth of organisations and by extension, of the country.

I have no doubt that most of you present to-night understand that organizational change and development is enormously important.

It’s the only insurance against irrelevance and obsolescence.

Also, it’s the guarantee of long-term customer loyalty.

To-day, it is no longer enough to do the same thing better, no longer enough to be efficient and solve business problems.

What matters most is to be creative and innovative, and to rethink your strategies and business model.

You have to create your own ideas, look ahead and explore what the future holds for your organisation.

Because as Albert Einstein once put it and I quote:

“If you always do what you always did, you will always get what you always got.” (Unquote)

If as leaders and managers, you have ideas, then you have the main asset you need, and there isn’t a limit to what you can do with your business.

It was Ted Levitt, the famous German-born Economist who said:

(Quote) “Just as energy is the basis of life itself, and ideas the source of innovation, so is innovation the vital spark of all human change, improvement and progress.” (Unquote)

Innovation doesn’t simply mean imagining the future.

It also means building it.

It’s a matter of continuing to grow and transform by developing a platform for continuous and relentless re-engineering and overhaul.

All this no doubt requires a new mindset – one that promotes a culture of innovation in every corner of the business.

Innovation should not be seen as a threat, rather as an opportunity.

It means offering things in different ways, creating new combinations, such as talent management, strategic planning, technological development, and above all, renewed customer satisfaction.
It doesn’t mean small, incremental improvements.

These are just part of being a dynamic organization.

The big challenge in being innovative is not to predict the future, but to imagine the future that is plausible and that can be created.

Because nobody can hold back the forces of change.

The role of leaders and managers in this 21\textsuperscript{st} Century will be even more critical to the success and future of organisations.

No doubt, business will be more stressful and competitive.

Your intelligence and adaptive capacity will thus be a valuable asset to your own organisations.

You will require the foresight to prepare to-day the foundations for the future, while bearing in mind that if you want to stay in business in this Century, then the change has to be made.

And now!

With these words, I would like to thank you again for the invitation you have extended to me this evening.

I wish you all good luck and success in your future endeavor.

I thank you for your attention.