

“My story, while less dramatic than that of Captain Nathan Algren, shares similarities in principle and in the journey towards self-discovery.”

Mohamad Idham Nawawi

CEO, Celcom, 2018 – Present
Group Chief Corporate Officer, Axiata, 2012 – 2018

My acquaintance with Tan Sri Jamal goes back a long way, from our IBM days in the early 90s when he was the boss of my boss, to throughout his Maxis days. Just like kismet, our paths kept crossing in our individual journeys. In 2012, Tan Sri Jamal, upon hearing of my departure from P1, asked me what I was doing next. I told him that I wanted to start my own consultancy company. He said, “Very good. And why don’t we be your first client?”

From that moment, my Axiata journey started. Through Incite Consulting I rendered my services to Axiata to manage the Axiata Business Transformation Programme. This programme saw the birth of, among others, edotco and Axiata Digital Services (ADS). I, for one, was thrilled to be a part of this formative period.

A year passed, then TSJI asked me again, “What do you want to do next?” My response, “I don’t know.” “Where do you need help?” I asked him back. And we left it at that.

A few days later, over breakfast, I started drawing on a napkin what I thought would be the next phase for Axiata: How do we push Axiata to the next level from a different lens, as globally responsible corporate citizens, building its mark in sustainability, to truly delivering its purpose of Advancing Asia as a regional champion. That morning, we introduced the fourth “Pillar” into Axiata’s vision: Planet and Society (on top of Profit, People and Process).

Thus began my new chapter as Axiata’s Group Chief Corporate Officer.

We worked tirelessly on Axiata’s first annual Sustainability Report. Truth be told, getting the initial buy-in was not easy, as most people think that sustainability is just a newly glorified word for CSR. We persevered, focused and stayed the course. All the sleepless nights and hard work paid off when Axiata won the award for Best Sustainability Report in 2014.

One of my fondest moments in Axiata was during the formation of Axiata Digital Innovation Fund (ADIF), a RM100 million fund to help Malaysian startups. We worked very hard to convince the Board and to find partners to co-invest. Together with MAVCAP, we launched the Fund with an initial RM80 million and, to date, it has invested in 16 local digital companies.

I am very proud to have worked with such great regulatory and corporate affairs teams across the Group. When I saw an untapped source of knowledge for us to learn from one another, we took the initiative to bring everyone together, to work more closely, and to exchange and build talent. Regulatory is a subject that is boring to most, but we must acknowledge that it is a scarce skill that is critical to the sustainability of our franchise. By learning the social and political landscape of each country we were able to define and strategise the most diplomatic approach in doing business there.

And now my journey continues towards making Celcom a champion again!

