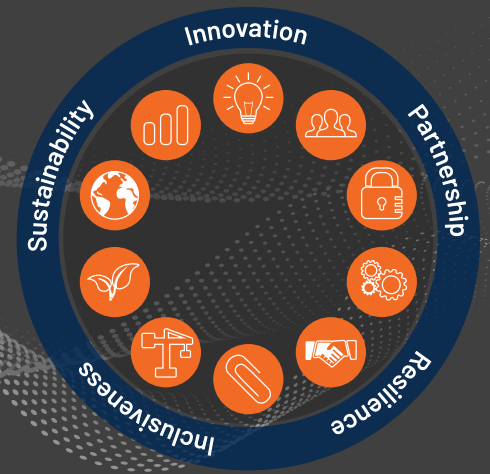


# Frame the Future Thought Pieces



## Collaboration, Competitiveness and Collective Well-Being



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One clear takeaway from the COVID-19 pandemic is that no country can claim to be able to overcome it alone. The international health industry and fraternity is an obvious example of nations putting their efforts together to agree on rules and standards, share information, and establish good practices. Additionally, even if a country is in a better state than most other countries, the struggle of foreign economies undermine the collective well-being of all nations, since physical movement is hampered, trade stops, and supply chains are disrupted.

This compels a re-thinking of the concept of competitiveness as a zero-sum game. Improvements in productivity and competitive ability require changes on many levels and are not without risks, stress, and costs. In the business world, financing and project consortia have long operated on this very concept of risk management and collective resilience. With the benefit of hindsight and looking ahead to a post-pandemic future, collaborating to compete is the way to go.

Malaysia ranked 25th on the World Competitiveness Index 2021. Despite the current difficulties, efforts are continuously taken to improve the dynamism and buoyancy of the Malaysian economy vis-à-vis that of other nations. Competitiveness, however, is more than just numbers and indices. The Global Competitiveness Report 2021 states that countries which invested in innovation, digitalization, and a sound welfare system, which in turn

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resulted in greater social cohesion, have been better able to navigate the crisis and rank higher in competitiveness. Collective well-being and competitiveness are in fact complementary concepts.

### Getting the Prerequisites in Place

High productivity together with demonstrated adaptability and resilience are what the nation continuously aspires to — the "True North." Building resilience calls for foresight and an accurate evaluation of risks and future scenarios. Recognizing this, the Framing the Future initiative of the Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC) examines parameters that promote agility, adaptability, and innovation to go beyond merely weathering storms to emerging stronger from them.

## The Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils

The GFCC is a global multi-stakeholder membership organization that has universities, corporations, government agencies and private sector industry organizations and councils as members. Combining its members and fellows, the GFCC has a footprint in more than 30 countries. Leaders and organizations in our network strive to advance innovation, productivity and prosperity in their nations, regions and cities.

To know more about the GFCC, visit our [website](http://www.thegfcc.org) or contact [info@thegfcc.org](mailto:info@thegfcc.org).

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The F.I.R.S.T. model, which stands for Finance, Infrastructure, Regulatory, Skill and Talent, and Technology, is a systematic line-up of prerequisites. This may be fulfilled by the public sector if the project has a strategic nature or the capital outlay is too big, or by the private sector, especially in areas of operations and maintenance.

Investors are attracted to the synergy of human capital, infrastructure, and operation costs, which results in the competitive production of goods and services. One winning example is the Kulim High-Tech Park (KHTP); an industrial park in Malaysia that continues to register interest from potential investors in areas of medical, biotechnology, and electronics, among others under the current global economic struggle. Typically, potential investors would scout and assess through detailed evaluation more than 50 industrial and technology parks worldwide before reaching the final investment decision. The coming together of all the elements of F.I.R.S.T. is the proof to the adage that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts."

### More Bang for the Buck

Another tried and tested collaborative model is resource matching. An example is the Newton-Ungku Omar Fund (NUOF). The program, which started in 2015, is a science and innovation partnership between the United Kingdom and Malaysia aimed at promoting the prosperity and well-being of Malaysians through fundamental and translational research, as well as capacity-building activities. Areas of focus are digital innovation, environment and climate change, food security, health and life sciences, and weather and climate science. Using this resource matching model, the benefits are both tangible and intangible. It shortens the learning curve and lessens financial outlay with its mutually beneficial outcomes.

## 360-degree Touchpoints

The impact of a well-executed collaboration often goes beyond an intended economic outcome. It triggers inclusiveness and environmental sustainability.

The waste-to-wealth project involving the rice farmers in Kedah, Malaysia, is an illustrative case. Rice husks, the by-product of rice milling, is an agricultural waste. Because they seem to be of little or no value, farmers traditionally resort to open burning and scorching, creating environmental and community issues. By bringing together universities, government agencies, and funding institutions, as well as farmers and manufacturers, the ensuing research and development resulted in the conversion of the rice husk into highly sought-after products, for example for use as packaging material.

Rice husks decompose at a faster rate than petroleum-based products, have a considerably lower carbon footprint, are more environmentally friendly, and, therefore, are labeled as green products. As a result, they are marketable in developed countries, especially the Scandinavian economies. They were also marketed in the Silicon Valley and were met with great interest for use as internal casings for laptops and smartphones.

While the economic benefits are commendable, the positive outcome of collaborations goes much further on both the national and global fronts. Ultimately, collaborations encourage parties to take ownership, responsibility, and accountability — the bedrock of sustainable partnerships.