Professor Konrad Young, Former R&D Director at TSMC, Highlights Global Collaboration at London Tech Week 2024

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Looking ahead to the global semiconductor market in 2024, with the stabilisation of end-product shipments and the growing demand in automotive, HPC, and AIoT markets, confidence in the industry's overall recovery is widespread. Taiwan continues to showcase its capacity and plays the leading role in global semiconductor manufacturing. The National Science and Technology Council of Taiwan is set to launch a five-year "Chip Innovation Project" to establish Taiwan as a prominent international IC design hub.

Against this backdrop, the European industry event London Tech Week 2024, held in London this June, garnered significant international attention. One of its highlights was the Semi Impact Forum 2024, a semiconductor series forum organised by Taiwan's National Applied Research Laboratories (NARLabs) and the UK's Semi Venture.

Professor Konrad Young, a Berkeley Ph.D. graduate and one of Taiwan's acclaimed "Six TSMC R&D Knights," was invited to London as a keynote speaker. Having held significant positions at TSMC, SMIC, and Intel, Professor Young transitioned from being an Intel advisor in the second half of 2023 to a visiting professor at National Taiwan University, focusing on international stage development for young leaders and promoting sustainable education.

During his interview, he stated, "I have always believed that technological innovation is the key to driving social progress and economic development, and the role of leaders is crucial in this. Influential business leaders have the responsibility to lead by example, driving other companies to collectively promote sustainable development through their actions."

Additionally, he shared his past experiences at TSMC and his personal mantra, the "failure resume": "By treating failures as growth nutrients, one can always move forward in a better direction! Just like Taiwan's semiconductor capabilities, which have been built through continuous efforts, overcoming numerous failures and setbacks, eventually evolving and iterating to conduct the global symphony."

NARLabs Incubating International Semiconductor Development

Under the joint efforts of Taiwan's National Applied Research Laboratories (NARLabs) and the UK-based Semi Venture, several Taiwan semiconductor-related companies showcased the achievements of Taiwan's semiconductor industry to the world during a forum. In an exclusive interview, Professor Young highlighted the critical role NARLabs has played in the development of the semiconductor industry: "NARLabs has been a vital driving force in Taiwan, empowering not only the industry but also integrating academic and research sectors."

Professor Young pointed out that Taiwan's semiconductor giants, such as TSMC (Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company) and UMC (United Microelectronics Corporation), have already earned a global reputation. These companies attract attention effortlessly. However, for smaller companies and startups that initially seem less prominent and struggle to quickly enter the international market, NARLabs provides a crucial platform that helps them grow rapidly.

"Unlike the Industrial Technology Research Institute (ITRI), Taiwan's NARLabs focuses more on collaboration with the academic and research communities. Since its establishment in the 1970s, ITRI has primarily supported Taiwan's industrial sector, especially the semiconductor industry. With the industry's success, ITRI's role in the semiconductor sector has become somewhat ambiguous. In contrast, NARLabs significantly drives project progress through various collaborations in international academic, research, and industry spheres," Professor Young explained. "NARLabs is committed to transforming academic and research achievements into practical applications, enabling SMEs to quickly establish close international collaborations with overseas academic institutions and companies."

Professor Young also emphasised NARLabs' specific impact on international cooperation. For example, when the Czech Republic needed to develop its semiconductor industry, NARLabs effectively provided talent training and technical support, helped plan laboratories, and established incubation centres. Additionally, NARLabs has extensive experience in bringing overseas talent to Taiwan for training and even conducting online training for overseas participants, which is crucial support for startups with

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international capabilities.

"The incubation role of NARLabs is especially critical for supporting startups," Professor Young emphasised. "Startups can leverage NARLabs' resources and technology to turn their ideas into practical products and complete proof of concept (POC). With early-stage support from NARLabs, these companies can smoothly transition to the venture capital stage and ultimately reach commercialisation."

Professor Konrad Young's Three Pillars of Leadership

During London Tech Week and the Semi Impact Forum 2024, Professor Konrad Young met with founders, CEOs, and other leaders from around the world. Known for his long-standing focus on leadership, he discussed the three essential pillars of leadership during his interview: "Independence," "Trustworthiness," and "High Productivity."

First, "Independence" means leaders must have the ability to think independently and solve problems: "A good leader must be able to make correct decisions independently without external help, requiring deep knowledge and extensive professional experience, even life experiences." He emphasized that leaders should not only have their own ideas but also remain calm in the face of difficulties and quickly find solutions.

Second, "Trustworthiness" refers to a leader's ability to build and maintain trust with team members and partners: "Trust is the foundation of all cooperation, without it, efficient collaboration cannot exist." He shared an example from leading a multinational project where time zone differences and cultural discrepancies caused misunderstandings and conflicts among team members: "Leaders must exhibit sincere attitudes through patient communication, gradually eliminating doubts about themselves and among team members. Reflecting on that multinational project, I remember the key factor to its success was the leader first demonstrating sincerity and consistency, which the team members then emulated, leading to smooth collaboration."

Lastly, "High Productivity" indicates a leader's ability to lead the team to efficiently complete tasks while continuously improving their and the team's efficiency: "Good productivity comes from a love for work and attention to detail." He mentioned that during his days at TSMC, he often worked late, meticulously scrutinizing every detail to achieve the best: "Only by wholeheartedly investing can one truly unleash their potential and lead the team forward."

Konrad Young: Highly Influential Companies Should Lead by Example for Sustainability!

Professor Young, who has always focused on the development of young leaders, also highlighted the importance of education. He believes education is not just about imparting knowledge but also about inspiring creativity and critical thinking: "Education should equip people with problem-solving skills, not just rote memorization, especially in Asia, where young students should be given more practical opportunities to grow through practice."

He pointed out that the current education system needs more interdisciplinary education to cultivate talents that meet future needs. He believes that future competition will not only be about professional knowledge but also about comprehensive qualities. He suggests that educational institutions should place more emphasis on interdisciplinary education to equip the new generation with a broader knowledge base and flexible thinking abilities: "The future society needs talents with cross-disciplinary abilities, as finding correlations across different fields can lead to innovative solutions."

When discussing technological development, Professor Young also mentioned the importance of tech ethics and humanistic care. He believes technological development should be human-centred and not detached from human values: "Technological progress should serve human well-being, not the other way around." He stressed that tech workers should have a strong sense of social responsibility, pushing technological advancements while also being aware of potential negative impacts.

In the interview, Professor Young also discussed ESG and corporate social responsibility, emphasising that technological innovation should continue advancing while maintaining a focus on social responsibility. He noted that many companies overlook the environmental and social impacts while pursuing technological breakthroughs, which is a concern: "Technological progress should not come at the cost of the environment and social welfare; we must find a balance between innovation and sustainability." He shared his experience promoting ESG at TSMC, where significant resources were invested in environmental protection, not only raising process environmental standards but also actively participating in social welfare activities:

"Highly influential companies should lead by example through concrete actions to drive other companies

in collectively promoting sustainable development!"

Innovation in Technology is a Global Collaboration

Now, as a visiting professor at National Taiwan University after leaving the industry, Professor Konrad Young leverages his experience from managing teams at TSMC, SMIC, and Intel, advocating for the development of future talent from an international perspective.

He believes technological innovation should not be the affair of a single country or region but a global collaboration: "Future technological innovation requires the collective effort of global talents. We need to cross borders and jointly address global challenges for mutual benefit. This is similar to sustainability issues; everyone faces the same environmental challenges, whether discussing ESG or SDG. No company or even a single country can tackle these alone. Therefore, cultivating young people's international vision, participation in international affairs, and ability to cooperate with the world is vital."

Professor Young also hopes that various sectors will invest more time and resources in education, allowing young talents to gain the DNA to stand shoulder to shoulder

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