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Multipliers of Change

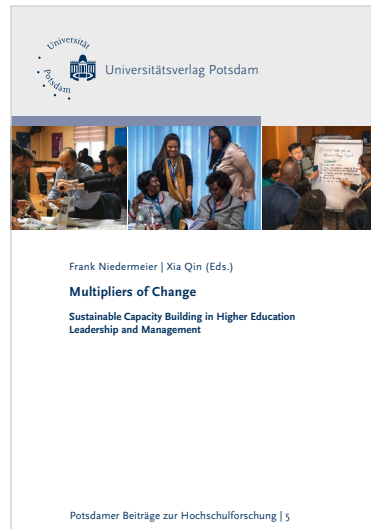**Sustainable Capacity Building in Higher Education Leadership and Management**

Potsdamer Beiträge zur Hochschulforschung | 5

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Lessons Drawn from Evaluation and Implementation of the Malaysian Chapter of the International Deans' Course

ABSTRACT: Deans at Institutions of Higher Education are seldom recipients of effective or specific professional management training, institutional mentorship, and coaching despite an increasing demand on them to play a more dynamic leadership role in the face of ever-changing local and global challenges. To address this deficiency, the inaugural Malaysian Chapter of the International Deans' Course (MyIDC) was held in three parts over 2019 and 2020. In this paper, findings related to feedback on the programme are presented and discussed. Responses from the participants from two sets of surveys, and written feedback provided by two IDC international trainers involved in MyIDC were analysed. These reveal potential areas of improvement for the forthcoming MyIDC programme, such as in terms of planning and organisation, duration, content, and delivery. The article explores the lessons learnt from the MyIDC 2019/2020 training programme and discusses the improvements that can be made arising from the feedback received.

KEYWORDS: higher education, academic leadership

1. Introduction

The Malaysian higher education (HE) environment has changed tremendously over the last two decades. Not only has there been an increase in public higher education providers (HEPs), but the liberalisation of Malaysia's HE in the mid-1990s has also brought about an increase in private HEPs (Abd Aziz & Abdullah, 2014). Similar to most universities around the world, public HEPs have had to deal with internationalisation and globalisation. Among the visible changes are the more diverse campuses with international students and faculty members. Further, the need for global recognition has seen increasing links and collaborations with universities around the world (Wan & Sirat, 2018), and regional and international accreditation of academic programmes. This is also reflected in the participation of several private and public HEPs in global ranking and rating exercises, and the public responses to the results.

To a large extent, this need for global recognition and excellence has seen drastic changes in the output expected of public HEPs. These changes are evident in the deliverables expected of individual academic staff in terms of, for example, innovative and outcome-based teaching and learning, high impact research, and the push towards commercialisation of research outcomes. Another recent development is that all public universities were accorded 'autonomous' status in 2018. This autonomy, however, comes with responsibility and accountability, including the responsibility to effectively generate income and manage resources. As universities navigate and address the dynamic nature of HE, including preparing their graduates for the Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR4.0)[1] and beyond, much of the implementation of new approaches and strategies will cascade down to middle management, that is, the Deans (Wahlers & Wilde, 2011; Wilde & Wolf, 2019).

Thus, Deans or Directors or Heads of Faculties, Schools and Institutes, and their deputies, cannot function effectively without an understanding of the ever-changing scenario of HE, not just in Malaysia but around the world. They also need to understand the tasks that they do at their respective centres of responsibilities, and how these need to be aligned with current national priorities. Deans need to be dynamic individuals

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1 IR4.0 refers to the new phase in the Industrial Revolution. The focus in IR4.0 is on advances in technologies which include artificial intelligence (AI), augmented/virtual reality, and big data and analytics.

who can inspire academic and support staff to be engaged in the changes taking place. They have a range of portfolios to manage at the faculty level, requiring specific skill sets. These include dynamic leadership skills and capacities in human resource and financial management, academic matters, student development and well-being, research performance, national and international collaboration, marketing of courses offered, community and stakeholder engagement, and development and maintenance of resources and facilities. They need to very ably handle conflict management and to make sound decisions. As put forth by Mayer and Wilde (2015)

> Deans of faculties need new skills, they need to have a sound understanding of new requirements, they have to have knowledge about the potential of modern management methods, and their limitations. They need to have the necessary social skills in order to create a climate where tertiary institutions find a way that is accepted by people inside and outside the academic realm. (p. 16)

However, in many cases, deans may be appointed without having had prior specific training, and they often have to learn what they need to do whilst on the job. Any training that they receive whilst in office is likely to be a one-off affair with no sense of continuity from one course to another. There is also little in the way of institutional mentorship and coaching. Without relevant professional management training, matters of governance and accountability may be compromised. This was highlighted in the World Bank's Report on HE in developing countries, i.e., that "poor management is often the single greatest obstacle to stronger higher education" (World Bank, 2000, p. 95).

2. Malaysian Chapter of the International Deans' Course

In Malaysia, the Higher Education Leadership Academy or its Malay acronym, AKEPT, was set up in 2008 under the Ministry of Higher Education to train and develop university leaders based on a framework of core competencies (Asian Development Bank, 2012). The focus on talent identification and talent development is expressed in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Higher Education) under Shift 2 on talent excellence (Ministry of Education, 2015). Guidelines on leadership development are also outlined in the University Transformation Programme (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2017). It is expected that insti-

tutional leaders will be able to "demonstrate managerial capacities by being flexible, adaptable, strategic, and most of all, effective. In addition to being scholars in their own right, they will be able to inspire others by creating, supporting, and sustaining environments for talent to flourish" (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2017, p. 65). Moreover, they are also expected to "combine their strategic and managerial talents with holistic human values to promote well-being among students, staff, community, the nation, and humanity" (ibid.). Whilst attention has been given to talent development for university leaders, deans may not receive appropriate training before they take on their leadership roles or may have missed out on the training provided due to the timing of the programmes or their busy work schedules.

To begin addressing this skills deficiency among Deans, the inaugural Malaysian Chapter of the International Deans' Course (MyIDC) was held in three parts over 2019 and 2020. In line with the expectations expressed in the University Transformation Programme (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2017) and the core competencies outlined by AKEPT, the objectives set for the programme were the following:

1. To provide participants with knowledge of the current trends and challenges of higher education in Malaysia and other parts of the world;
2. To provide participants with innovative ways of thinking about strategic management and decision-making processes;
3. To provide participants with practical and transferable skills to respond to changes in higher education at their own faculties/schools/institutions;
4. To enable participants to apply methods and tools received during the programme in their academic contexts;
5. To create a support system comprising mentors and peer support.

The programme was spearheaded by a group of current and former deans who attended the Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies (DIES)—International Deans' Course (IDC) for Southeast Asian universities over the last twelve years, with the support of AKEPT, in collaboration with five local universities (Multimedia University, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Malaya, Universiti Putra Malaysia, and Universiti Utara Malaysia). The second and third parts of MyIDC 2019/2020 were partially supported by the DIES National Multiplication Training (NMT). A total of 15 IDC alumni, along with Professor Dr. Peter Mayer, who is the IDC Africa/Southeast Asian Project Director, were in-

volved in the planning and execution of MyIDC. Twelve Malaysian IDC alumni were involved as trainers in MyIDC 2019/2020, and a total of 24 participants took part in MyIDC 2019/2020.

Two of the alumni were involved in an NMT programme in 2013, and the expansion of alumni involvement in the 2019/2020 programme is testimony to the impact that DIES IDC has had on the Malaysian IDC participants. This impact is not just evident on the successful leadership roles the alumni have held or are currently holding, but on the sustainable effect that DIES IDC has on its alumni who see the need to replicate their training to newly appointed academic leaders in Malaysia.

In this paper, the following key points are discussed concerning the MyIDC 2019/2020 training programme:

1. Examination of the feedback on the programme from the participants and two international trainers;
2. Exploration of the lessons learnt from the MyIDC 2019/2020 training programme and discussion of the changes that can be derived from them.

The paper aimed to address this question: What improvements can be made to the MyIDC programme based on the feedback received?

2.1 MyIDC: Content and Delivery

Like the IDC, MyIDC 2019/2020 was conducted over three parts which were held in different locations. The first part was held in Kedah, the northwestern state in Peninsular Malaysia, over ten days. The second part was held in Melaka for five days, and the last one, in Cyberjaya over five days. The rationale for conducting the training over three parts echoed that of IDC, where it was felt that "the complex skills required to manage higher education institutions cannot be meaningfully discussed, trained, or reflected upon when there is just one get-together" (Mayer & Wilde, 2015, p. 16). Further, Lacerenza et al. found that training programmes "with multiple sessions spaced temporally resulted in greater transfer and results than massed training sessions" (2017, p. 16). The reconvening of the same participants for the second and third part of the programme provided more time for reflection of their leadership practices, meaningful sharing, and development of their own Project Action Plans (PAPs). The length of the face-to-face and online contact among the group of participants is also aimed at promoting camaraderie and establishing peer support among the participants.

In total, 24 Deans, Deputy Deans, Directors and Deputy Directors of academic centres from 19 Malaysian universities completed their My-IDC training. The participants included three participants from private universities. Only one participant from part one withdrew from the programme as he was subsequently appointed as deputy vice-chancellor of a university.

The overall content of the three-part MyIDC programme was developed based on the IDC training modules, but these were modified and adapted to suit the Malaysian context. The development of the modules and training of the trainers were facilitated by Professor Peter Mayer and Professor Ong Duu Sheng, who is also an IDC Southeast Asia trainer. Table 1 provides an overview of the modules in each part of MyIDC. Modules 7 and 12 are modules developed specifically for MyIDC.

Table 1: Modules in MyIDC 2019/2020

Part	Modules
1	University Governance
	Strategic Faculty Management
	Entrepreneurial University
	Project Action Plan
	Leadership
	Change Management
2	Communication
	Conflict Management
	HR and Talent Management
3	Research Management
	Internationalisation
	Psychosocial Profiling for Effective People Management

The modules were arranged in such a way as to cascade from major issues related to faculty leadership and preparation for the development of individual PAPs in part 1 of the training programme, to more people-oriented modules in part 2. The modules in part 3 continued as people-centred and with two other important areas for higher education in Malaysia, internationalisation and research management.

As previously mentioned, the core trainers comprised a group of 12 IDC alumni. Invited trainers included Professor Mayer, Dr. rer nat Jutta Fedrowitz (Centre for Higher Education, Germany), as well as, Professor Dr. Maria Flordeliza L. Anastacio (Vice-President of Centro Escolar

University, The Philippines—Malolos Campus), and Professor Dr. Didi Achjari (Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia). The latter two are IDC alumni, and Dr. Anastacio is also an IDC Southeast Asia trainer. Invited speakers from Malaysia included the Director of AKEPT, Professor Dr. Nordin Yahaya. The organising team felt that the diversity of expertise and leadership experience among the trainers and invited speakers would strengthen the MyIDC programme not just with theoretical knowledge but with actual practices and lived experiences as well. This is in line with the IDC curriculum which "seeks to equip participants with the knowledge, tools, and experiences to respond to challenges and opportunities in their operating environments" (Antia, 2019, p. 22).

To engage the participants and encourage more reflective practices among them, various delivery methods were utilised. The use of multiple delivery methods, particularly those that are practice-related, have been shown to affect the extent to which participants used the knowledge and skills obtained during the training in their jobs (Lacerenza et al., 2017). Similar to IDC, the delivery methods used in MyIDC included the gallery walk, discussion of case studies, role-plays, and peer consultations. The participants also visited two local universities to learn more about how things are done at these universities. In one of the trips, participants learned about a student entrepreneurship programme at the university. In another trip, the participants were exposed to an agricultural-based business model. Student entrepreneurship and income-generating programmes are important elements in Malaysian institutes of higher education (Ministry of Education, 2015). Hence, these site-visits provided participants with possible ways of doing similar activities at their institutions. Short social and educational trips including engagement with a local minority community in Melaka were also included in the programme.

One of the aims of these trips was to foster a closer relationship between participants. It was important for them to bond and feel comfortable with each other as this helped to establish trust between them and reduce inhibitions. As a result, more meaningful and open discussions could be carried out during the programme. The discussions included, for example, strategies involved in different institutions on postgraduate intake, income generation, and grant proposal writing. To protect the confidentiality of some of the matters discussed, examples will not be provided here. However, in terms of topics, the matters discussed included conflict management and challenges related to dealing with human resource issues.

The PAP was also a major component of the knowledge transfer. The PAP was not just an exercise in project management but was directly related to the participants' contexts, managing the change project in a faculty. The conceptual framework for PAP was presented in part 1 of the programme, after which the participants consulted their assigned mentors (from amongst the MyIDC trainers) online and began developing and implementing their PAPs over eight months. The participants then presented the progress of their PAPs in parts 2 and 3, and obtained feedback from the trainers and their peers. A colloquium was held immediately after the conclusion of part 3, where the MyIDC participants showcased their PAPs in the form of poster displays, not only to fellow participants and MyIDC trainers, but also to deputy vice-chancellors and representatives of Malaysian universities, and other guests.

Table 2 shows the broad thematic distribution of the 24 PAPs. The themes revealed areas of concern among the MyIDC cohorts. The projects included one that was working towards establishing a green sustainable transportation system at a university, and another on engaging alumni to increase joint research and publications. Based on the presentations of the PAPs, most of them were already being implemented at that point. For example, for the PAP on engaging alumni to increase research and

Table 2: Thematic Distribution of MyIDC 2019/2020 Project Action Plans

Themes	Number of PAPs	Notes
Faculty Management	8	Included projects related to the establishment of a business unit, a centre for continuing education and development, and a community engagement centre. Other projects related to creating a 'happy workplace', and a mental health programme for students and alumni engagement.
Personnel Management	7	Included four projects related to research and publications, and two related to entrepreneurship.
Curriculum Development	4	Included projects were related to entrepreneurship, service-learning, and soft skill development.
Project Management	2	Included a project on energy-efficient campus mobility.
International-isation	2	The projects focused on student and staff mobility.
Research Management	1	The project was related to engaging alumni to increase opportunities for research collaboration and publications.

publication opportunities, the alumni association had already been officially set up and registered by part 3 of the MyIDC programme. As a result of the engaging alumni, three joint research grants had been secured and two co-authored journal articles were in progress. This particular PAP enabled the participant to strategise alumni engagement which is already showing quick gains in research collaboration. These collaborative efforts and their outputs in terms of publications and research grants are important to the institution's research reputation and prominence. The efforts also contribute to the university which is a research-intensive one.

3. Methods

The study employed the following methodology. First, two main sources of data were used to examine the feedback from the MyIDC 2019/2020 participants. The first was an online survey designed by AKEPT via Google forms (henceforth, AKEPT's survey) for part 1 of MyIDC 2019/2020. The surveys required participants to provide feedback for each module and related trainer (henceforth, 'speaker'). The participants were asked to evaluate if the:

1. speaker was well prepared;
2. speaker was knowledgeable regarding the subject matter;
3. speaker effectively engaged with the attendees;
4. content was beneficial to them.

Comments could also be added. A total of 25 participants responded to the survey by AKEPT.

Second, feedback from two other surveys carried out by the Centre for Quality Development from the University of Potsdam as the DIES NMT Coordinator (henceforth referred to as the NMT survey) was collected. The first survey was carried out from 18 to 20 December 2019, and the second one from 5 February to 5 March 2020 via an online system. Apart from the main demographic information, the main question in this survey was about the personal benefits the participants gained through their participation in the training course. They were asked to assess a series of statements on a five-point agreement scale. They were also asked to comment on what their expectations were for the training and to provide suggestions for future workshops. A total of 18 of the remaining 24 participants responded to this survey, resulting in a 75 % response

rate. Some failed to respond within the given time possibly due to their work commitments. The second NMT survey focused on ten areas including content, trainers, the PAP and personal benefits. A total of 22 of them (92%) responded to the second NMT survey.

Whilst the surveys were generally related to the level of satisfaction of the participants on the speakers, content, delivery, and organisation of the training programme, triangulation was also done with the feedback provided by two IDC experts who were involved in several training components of MyIDC 2019/2020. As the PAPs were an important element of the programme, feedback on lessons learnt from the PAPs which participants presented in their oral and poster presentations was also examined.

4. Findings

This section presents the feedback on the programme.

4.1 MyIDC 2019/2020 Participants

The first part of the programme started with 25 participants, 9 females and 16 males. The positions they were holding are shown in Figure 1. Most of them were aged between 36 to 45 years old (64%) and 36% of them were 46 years old and older (36%).

Figure 1: Positions Held by MyIDC 2019/2020 Participants
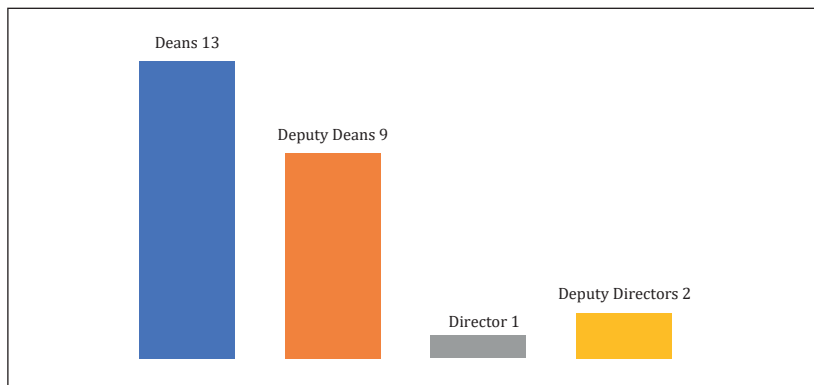
4.2   AKEPT's Survey

The overall feedback for the modules conducted in part 1 of MyIDC 2019/2020 is shown in Table 3. The means were calculated based on the evaluation for each session and the related speaker. Based on the performance indicators provided by AKEPT, all the modules in part 1 were rated as 'good', with average scores of between 3.5 to 3.9.

Based on the 77 comments from the participants for part 1, the following themes emerged:
• content
• delivery
• duration of the programme
• food and accommodation
• logistics
• networking and bonding
• out-of-class activities
• trainers/speakers
• others

Table 3: Mean and Frequencies for Module Achievement in Part 1 of MyIDC 2019/2020

Module	Mean
1. University Governance	3.6
2. Strategic Faculty Management	3.8
3. Entrepreneurial University	3.7
4. Project Action Plan	3.9
5. Leadership	3.8
6. Change Management	3.8

Key Performance Indicators	
Mean	Performance
4.5–5.0	Excellent
4.0–4.4	Very Good
3.5–3.9	Good
3.0–3.4	Intermediate
2.9 and below	Low

Of these, most of the comments were related to delivery (27%), content (20%), duration (13%), and out of class activities (13%). The comments on the methods of delivery (N = 21), content (N = 15) and out-of-class activities (N = 10) were generally positive. Concerning delivery, there were suggestions for fewer lectures, more discussions, and a range of activities. The participants also felt that there should be pre-session materials, and that the session notes should be shared more quickly. There was also a suggestion to use interactive online learning. There appeared to be contradictory feelings about case studies with one comment saying that there were too many of these. Two out of 15 comments were on content, saying that one of the modules was too general and was not of interest to the participants. On duration, all 10 commented that part 1 of the programme was too long and too intensive.

4.3   NMT Survey

The NMT survey for part 2 of MyIDC showed encouraging results. Table 4 shows that the responses to the question on the personal benefits gained through their participation in the training course were on the whole positive, with the majority of the respondents strongly agreeing to the statements shown in Table 4. The participants rated acquiring relevant 'soft skills' (e.g. conflict management, communication skills, leadership etc.) ($M = 1.5$) as the most beneficial to them throughout the training course.

The positive responses to these items suggest that the programme objectives of providing participants with knowledge of the current trends and challenges of higher education in Malaysia and other parts of the world, with practical and transferable skills, and with innovative ways of thinking about strategic management and decision-making processes were fulfilled (refer to the objectives of MyIDC 2019/2020).

The NMT survey for part 3 of MyIDC had a more comprehensive coverage compared to the AKEPT survey as it was conducted at the end of the MyIDC 2019/2020 programme. In terms of programme content, Table 5 and Table 6 show that the responses to the question of the training fulfilling the objectives of sessions or modules, and the evaluation of the organisational and didactical structure of the training course, were overwhelmingly positive. Again, this feedback indicates that the objectives of the programme concerning the provision of new knowledge and transferable skills were achieved.

Where trainers and experts were concerned, as shown in Table 7, all the respondents strongly agreed or agreed to the related statements.

Table 4: Level of the Agreement for Personal Benefits Gained in Part 2 of MyIDC 2019/2020

Items	Mean	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I acquired new thematic expertise in the field of university management.	1.7	56%	33%	6%	–	–	6%
I have gained knowledge of the current trends and challenges of higher education in Malaysia and other parts of the world.	1.7	61%	28%	6%	–	–	6%
I have acquired relevant 'soft skills' (e.g. conflict management, communication skills, leadership etc.).	1.5	78%	11%	6%	–	–	6%
I have acquired innovative ways of thinking about strategic management and decision-making processes.	1.6	67%	22%	6%			6%

Table 5: Level of Agreement for Objectives Fulfiled for Part 3 of MyIDC
2019/2020

Items	Mean	Strongly agree	Agree
I acquired new knowledge in the respective field the session/module covered.	1.3	73%	27%
The newly acquired knowledge is relevant to my job.	1.2	77%	23%

Table 6: Level of Agreement for Organisational and Didactical Structure of the
Training Course for Part 3 of MyIDC 2019/2020

Items	Mean	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree
The training course enabled me to practise my newly acquired skills in my work context.	1.3	68%	32%	–
The training course struck an adequate balance between inputs and discussions.	1.4	64%	36%	–
The training course provided opportunities to discuss the taught topics.	1.2	82%	18%	–
The training course struck an adequate balance between theoretical and practical inputs.	1.4	64%	32%	5%
The experts presented content in an organised manner.	1.4	68%	27%	5%
The training course used a good mix of didactical approaches to engage the participants.	1.3	68%	32%	–
The team coaching helped solved questions and problems related to the training topics.	1.2	77%	23%	–
The team coaching helped coordinate exchange with other participants.	1.3	73%	27%	–

Table 7: Level of Agreement for Performance of the Trainers and Experts for
Part 3 of MyIDC 2019/2020

Items	Mean	Strongly agree	Agree
The trainer/key expert possessed strong expertise in his/her field.	1.2	77%	23%
The trainer/key expert used appropriate didactical methods to convey knowledge.	1.3	73%	27%
The trainer/key expert responded flexibly to the participants' needs.	1.3	68%	32%

Similar responses were recorded for networking where all the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that they used their newly established contacts to exchange information and initiate cooperation (see Table 8). Their responses were consistent with the sharing of administrative and research expertise and experience through the MyIDC 2019/2020 WhatsApp group. Events held at each of the participants' universities, such as conferences, talks, seminars, and, more recently, webinars, are still being constantly promoted in this WhatsApp group. This mode of communication not only creates an informal platform to discuss matters related to work but also creates a social network of peers and mentors that encourages and supports each other. This close network of MyIDC 2019/2020 alumni and facilitators enables them to reach out to others in different fields of academia and research at all the institutions involved in MyIDC 2019/2020, thus, creating new connections and extending each of their networks even further. Therefore, the objectives of creating a support system comprising of mentors and peer support were largely been met.

Table 8: Level of Agreement for the Use of Newly Established Contacts for
Part 3 of MyIDC 2019/2020

Items	Mean	Strongly agree	Agree
I used my newly established contacts to exchange information.	1.2	77%	23%
I used my newly established contacts to initiate cooperation.	1.4	64%	36%

Similar to the findings from the NMT survey for MyIDC part 2, the respondents generally agreed to the statements in the section on personal benefits that they gained from the training programme. Table 9 shows that they rated acquiring new thematic expertise in the field of university management (M = 1.2) and acquiring relevant 'soft skills' (e.g. conflict management, communication skills, leadership etc.) (M = 1.2) as the most beneficial to them throughout the training course (see Table 9). These skills help them be better equipped in carrying out tasks in their present positions especially in managing human resource issues more effectively, and addressed the related MyIDC 2019/2020 programme objectives.

Table 9: Level of Agreement for Personal Benefits Gained for Part 3 of MyIDC 2019/2020

Items	Mean	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree
I acquired new thematic expertise in the field of university management.	1.2	77%	23%	–
I can transfer and apply new knowledge in my profession.	1.3	73%	27%	–
I have gained specific expertise in internationalisation and research management.	1.3	73%	27%	–
I have acquired relevant 'soft skills' (e.g. conflict management, communication skills, leadership etc.).	1.2	77%	23%	–
I have acquired knowledge in Psychosocial Profiling for Effective People Management.	1.5	59%	32%	9%

The skills acquired were mainly transferred or shared at the universities of the respondents through sessions that were conducted to explain their newly acquired knowledge and skills (N = 17) and the distribution of materials from the training to colleagues (N = 17). The findings in Table 9 are consistent with the level of satisfaction expressed by the respondents on the overall training in general (see Table 10) and their high level of agreement to the statements related to the training course meeting their expectations (see Table 11). All these findings suggest that the programme objectives were being met.

Table 10: Level of Satisfaction with the Training in General

Items	Number of responses	Percentage
Very satisfied	14	63.6%
Satisfied	8	36.4%
Total	22	100.0%

Table 11: Level of Agreement for Expectation of Training Course

Items	Mean	Strongly agree	Agree
I feel more prepared for my position in university management.	1.5	55%	45%
The training course improved my career development prospects.	1.4	62%	38%

As Table 12 shows, the respondents were satisfied with the conceptual set-up of the course into three phases.

Table 12: Level of Satisfaction on the Conceptual Set-up of the Course in Separate Contact Phases

Items	Number of responses	Percentage
Very satisfied	11	50.0%
Satisfied	11	50.0%
Total	22	100.0%

The second NMT survey contained specific sections on the PAP. Table 13 shows the responses to the question regarding the current implementation status of the PAPs. Eight participants (36.4%) responded they had already started implementing the projects at their institutions and 8 participants (36.4%) responded they were in the middle of implementing them. Based on the oral and poster presentations at the end of MyIDC 2019/2020, almost all of the participants will be able to complete their PAPs by the end of 2020 (see Challenges and Lessons Learnt).

Concerning the question on how the higher education management at the participants' universities had been involved in their projects, majority of them (86%) responded that their university management had been informed of their project whilst 67% of them responded that the university management was involved in the implementation of their project in terms of supporting the projects by officially approving them

Table 13: Current Implementation Status of the PAP or Change Project

Items	Number of responses	Percentage
I am in the middle of implementing my change project at my institution.	8	36.4%
I already started implementing my change project at my institution.	8	36.4%
I have finished implementing my change project at my institution.	3	13.6%
I am currently finalising my change project and am coordinating with the university's leadership.	3	13.6%
Total	22	100%

and, in some cases, even providing funding for the projects. All the participants who responded were satisfied (N = 14) and very satisfied (N = 8) with the mentoring of their PAPs. The participants were also asked to provide suggestions regarding the mentoring process, and, in general, they suggested more frequent and regular communication and discussion between the mentors and mentees.

Table 14 shows the level of agreement to the type of changes the projects initiated in the participants' universities. The responses show that they mainly agreed with the three related statements, and most of them strongly agreed, in particular, with the second statement where their PAP had made a positive impact on their faculty and university development. The participants answered these questions based on the knowledge and skills that they acquired in the MyIDC programme and with regards to their PAPs.

When asked what they did between the second and third workshops, the responses from the participants indicated that 77.3% of them modified their PAPs (N = 17), whilst 63.6% (n = 14) of them implemented the project at their universities. Only seven said that they read relevant literature recommended by the trainers. It is likely that they did not have the time to do this due to their busy schedules, heavy administrative commitments and research workload. In other words, Deans still have to meet their personal research targets since their core position is as academics, and they have to do all these whilst serving in term-based administrative positions (e.g. a two- to a three-year term as Dean).

Like the AKEPT survey, the comments from the two NMT surveys were analysed in terms of emerging themes. Similar but fewer themes emerged from the comments in the first NMT survey which were on pro-

Table 14: Level of Agreement about the Types of Changes Initiated in Universities from the Projects

Items	Mean	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree
My university has established new processes/ structures in the field of university management.	2.3	19%	48%	24%	5%	5%
My university has improved the possibilities to achieve its stra-tegic objectives within its field of work.	2.0	32%	36%	27%	5%	–
My university has developed new ideas and concepts in the field of university management.	2.1	19%	57%	19%	5%	–

gramme delivery, content, and organisation and out-of-class activities. The same points about having more discussions, sharing and reflection sessions, and participating in more out-of-class activities, rather than lectures, were brought up in the NMT surveys. The participation of other university officials and the involvement of leaders of other organisations as part of the MyIDC programme were also suggested in the comments. Further, it was felt that at least one part of the module should be held outside Malaysia, and that a yearly refresher course to monitor the prog-ress of the MyIDC participants should be conducted.

The comments in the second survey were similar to the comments in AKEPT's survey reported in the previous section. Themes related to several of the programme objectives emerged in the comments on what the respondents liked about the training. They are as follows:

1. The **community of practice** with shared issues, a sense of camarade-rie, and a support system.
2. The acquisition of **new knowledge** and **skills**.
3. **Networking** among participants.

The suggestions for improvements included having more activities in the sessions and even outdoor activities or excursions to foster camaraderie among the participants. These comments, which were mainly to do with content and delivery, have been discussed by the main organising committee to improve the next MyIDC. Based on the positive feedback related to the programme objectives, it seemed that the objectives were being met to a large extent.

The respondents also suggested topics for future training programmes, and these included the following:
- community service,
- cross-cultural management,
- dos and don'ts lists for human management skills,
- managing difficult people,
- risk management,
- sessions with targeted stakeholders of universities,
- social behaviour management,
- spiritual values,
- sustainable management/leadership, and
- the psychology of a leader.

These topics are especially related to the Malaysian context. Community service, for instance, has become an important pillar of public education in which universities are asked to account for the impact of their research on communities and society at large. The incorporation of spiritual values is also understandable within the local context and is, in fact, already being carried out by AKEPT through its QALB (values) Guided Leadership Module. Almost half of the participants have attended this programme to date. About the psychology of a leader, a module on psychosocial profiling for effective people management was offered in the final part of MyIDC 2019/2020 (see Table 1). Many of the topics are connected to human relations as deans have to deal with Malaysian and international academic colleagues, non-academic colleagues, students, and other stakeholders (e.g., government officials, people from industry, community members and parents).

4.4 Feedback from IDC Experts

Two IDC experts provided their feedback on MyIDC 2019/2020: one on MyIDC part 2/NMT part 1 (Expert 1) and the other, on MyIDC part 3/NMT part 2 (Expert 2). Both were involved in the training programme in these respective sessions. Feedback on five components of the training programme was provided. The list is as follows:
- what they liked about the programme;
- preparation and organisation;
- workshop implementation;
- training committee as a speaker, moderator, facilitator;
- fulfilment of the main goals or learning outcomes of the workshop; and
- concrete enhancement proposals.

In terms of **what they liked about the programme**, both experts mentioned the teamwork and distribution of roles among the Malaysian alumni of IDC Southeast Asia. Expert 1 also commended the well-designed and balanced programme inclusive of topics and methods according to the needs of deans. Both experts felt that the **preparation and organisation** of the programme, including excursions, were well organised. Expert 1 also commented on mutual benefits for MyIDC and the community derived from a community engagement activity which took place at a village in Melaka. Both experts were also of the opinion that the **implementation of the programme**, coupled with relevant and important topics, was suitable for participants. Expert 2 thought that the poster presentation of PAPs was a good idea, and that the PAP presentations were interesting and well executed.

Concerning the **training committee**, Expert 2 felt that the team of trainers was very strong and very committed. Expert 1 noted that the team used its different talents and experiences wisely. However, she felt that some of the trainers could still learn from their presentation experience in MyIDC part 2, and further improve their training methods.

In terms of programme objectives, both trainers reported that the **goals,** in general, were met, although Expert 1 felt that the intended learning outcomes of one of the sessions were unclear to her, and, therefore, emphasised that trainers must be clear of the intended learning outcome of a method or activity. Expert 2 felt that there should be a reassessment of the tasks assigned with role re-distribution among the committee

members and trainers. Expert 1 also pointed out that given the amount of work and time involved in planning and organising MyIDC, a financial allocation for administrative support may be warranted as a means of **concretising the MyIDC programme.**

4.5   Project Action Plan Presentations

Each participant presented the progress of their PAPs in the form of oral presentations in parts 2 and 3 of MyIDC 2019/2020. At the end of part 3, they also presented their PAPs in the form of posters, which was a major highlight during the post-MyIDC colloquium. This colloquium was held immediately following the final of part 3. The findings on the challenges and lessons learnt from each PAP were collated by trainers present in the various oral presentations and from the participants' poster presentations.

Several challenges were identified by the participants during their oral presentations. These were related, for instance, to budget constraints when, in some cases, the project had to be scaled down or alternative funding had to be sought. The lack of funding could also potentially affect the sustainability of the project. Related to this were the allocation of time and the need to balance the project with administrative duties, and academic and research tasks. Due to this, meeting the projected deadlines for the project or monitoring the progress of the project was not always possible.

Another challenge was obtaining buy-in from colleagues and related stakeholders, and managing people from within the faculty and institution. As Deans, for example, the participants had to present their ideas to their faculty management team and faculty colleagues and stakeholders (e.g., students, community, industry), and, in some cases, even to the university management, to convince them of the viability of the project, and to obtain official support for it. Other challenges were related to persuading colleagues to work together as a team or committee, and to convince them to invest their time and energy on the project. Without committed teamwork, the success of the project was not guaranteed, and several participants reported that it was a real challenge trying to convince people. This was especially true when it came to what one participant referred to as 'academic compassion', or the willingness to help and mentor junior colleagues. Communication skills were of the utmost importance here to be able to engage colleagues and other stakeholders and to garner support for one's PAP.

Still another challenge mentioned was the lack of expertise and skills among non-academic staff and students, such as technical skills, which meant that they were unable to contribute meaningfully to the project in this particular capacity. In such cases, tasks like building an online system for students' progress needed to be outsourced to external parties resulting in added costs to the project.

Changes in management or administrative structure within the university was another challenge faced by some participants as was any type of sudden change in situations which could delay scheduled milestones for the project. The ability to respond to change quickly and effectively was critically important. Suggestions from other participants and facilitators may have helped them overcome some of the challenges they faced. Among them were strategies to get more colleagues involved in the implementation of the project. The peer support and a gesture of solidarity from fellow participants also provided a sense of "I am not alone" to participants as some of them faced similar challenges with their PAPs.

Based on the challenges encountered by the participants, the lessons learnt from the PAPs were divided into two main categories which address two of the programme objectives. The first related the guidelines provided in the programme to knowledge and skills on project management acquired by carrying out PAP. The second included the learning points gained through the experience of planning, implementing, and monitoring the success of their PAPs, which are as follows:

- engaging relevant stakeholders and getting the buy-in from stakeholders and the university administration,
- establishing effective communication and teamwork,
- being flexible and making changes where necessary,
- looking at the bigger picture within which the PAP is situated,
- employing data analysis in the planning stage so that one is well informed of the context involved, and
- sourcing adequate funding, and even space in some cases.

The participants generally felt that these lessons derived from working on the PAPs could also be applied to other projects they are currently involved in, or in future ones. The methods used to manage the PAPs were found to be useful in planning and implementing projects systematically. In the words of a participant, "I find the PAP helpful as it makes me consider all angles of proper planning. I see the potential for a spin-off stand-alone PAP course". Organising a stand-alone module on PAP is something that is being considered by the MyIDC committee.

Further, based on the feedback received from the participants, it was also felt that the facilitators should receive training on mentoring PAPs. The challenges and lessons learnt from the PAPs will be shared with future MyIDC participants to help them plan their PAPs more effectively. An idea has been mooted to write about the PAPs from MyIDC 2019/2020 in the form of a book so that it may act as a point of reference to others (e.g., the current MyIDC alumni, colleagues of the alumni, and future MyIDC participants).

5.   Discussion

5.1   Feedback on MyIDC 2019/2020

Based on the AKEPT and NMT surveys, as well as reports from the international trainers, the overall feedback on the content, delivery, and trainers was generally positive. The overall rating of 63.6% 'very satisfied' and 36.4% 'satisfied responses' from the participants about the training in general, strongly suggests that the three-part MyIDC programme was a success. Participants felt that they were more prepared for their positions in university management and felt that this course improved their career development prospects. For the participants, finishing the programme equipped with a higher degree of confidence and belief in one's abilities to carry out duties at work had been an important mark of achievement, and indeed, a measure of success for the programme.

However, it also needs to be said that the AKEPT survey for part 1 was methodologically different in that it sought feedback on each session in every module, including feedback on the trainers from that session. This did not provide overall feedback of part 1. Rather, the responses to all the sessions in every module were quantitatively analysed and rated based on AKEPT's Key Performance Indicators (refer to Table 3). Based on this, the modules were all rated as 'good' rather than 'very good' or 'excellent'. The ratings for each module combined the evaluation of individual trainers and content of a session, and compared to the NMT surveys, suggest a less favourable response from the participants despite the overall 'good' evaluation. This result contrasted with the high level of agreement and satisfaction in the NMT surveys. It is therefore suggested that in future MyIDC programmes, an NMT-type of a survey be carried out as the AKEPT, one is more appropriate for a single module than a comprehensive three-part programme like MyIDC.

The findings from parts 2 and 3 are consistent with the feedback from the two international experts. The training team and organising committee were commended for their planning and implementation, i.e. team effort and support among the Malaysian IDC alumni involved in MyIDC was key to the success of MyIDC. This was despite not having a dedicated administrator to assist the organising committee, all of whom were also involved as trainers or moderators in the programme. Many man-hours were spent above and beyond their administrative, academic, and research duties to ensure the success of MyIDC 2019/2020. This included having to make last-minute changes in the venue and schedule for part 3 due to the unavailability of the training facilities at AKEPT, which was being used as a quarantine centre for Malaysians arriving from abroad in light of the impending COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. This situation also led to the trainers having to advance their personal funds to ensure that this part of the programme could still be carried out. Discussions about the most suitable venue and changes in the schedule were made mainly via communication on the MyIDC WhatsApp group, where participants were free to share their opinions and express their anxieties. In the end, a consensus was reached about the venues and schedule. This was indeed a lived experience and lesson on crisis management and a consultative decision-making process.

The feedback on content, delivery, and trainers was also positive. However, a point about trainers learning from their experience, and being more aware of the learning outcomes of the session they were conducting, was brought up. This point needs to be considered and could account for the evaluation in AKEPT's survey. The trainers only attended one 'train-the-trainer' session due to time and funding constraints, and although they may be content experts, more professional training sessions are necessary to enhance their delivery and presentation skills. The lack of separation of duties among members of the organising and training team, which placed an unnecessarily huge burden on the team as a whole, was also noticed by the international experts.

The comments from the participants pointed to the need to rethink the duration of each part. Whilst the participants liked having the programme broken into parts, they generally felt that part 1, in particular, was too long. This is perhaps not surprising given their administrative duties and the many responsibilities that are associated with their work make it challenging for them to be away from the office for long. Unlike the two-week phase in Germany in IDC, the first part (and indeed, the other two parts as well), was held in Malaysia. This meant that the par-

ticipants could be asked to return to their universities for meetings and events, or had to answer emails and calls whilst the training was going on. This broke the momentum of the training for them and affected the dynamics of the group.

Being in the administrative positions that they are in, and with Professors and Associate Professors among the participants, it was clear that they did not favour sitting down and listening to lectures, although there was a consensus that they had acquired new knowledge and skills in this course. Nor did they favour an intensive pace for the delivery of content. Instead, they suggested that there be a range of activities and more time for discussion. This ties in with the feeling that being in the programme created a community of practice where they could share ideas and issues with both trainers and fellow participants.

The participants also felt that there was a need for more out of class activities. Many outdoor activities were organised for them during the programme to encourage them to get to know each other better. These included a forest walk, a day trip to the island of Langkawi (to visit a university's geopark), campus tours and visits, a cooking session with a local minority community, a riverboat cruise, and even short hikes organised by the participants themselves. Online learning was also suggested as a component of MyIDC.

Concerning the PAPs, faculty management was an important area to the participants, which is not surprising given their administrative positions. However, a closer look at the topics of the PAPs (refer to the notes in Table 2) indicates that the PAPs were related to the setting up of units or centres, and generally to creating a better environment for colleagues and students. Given the drive towards research output in Malaysian universities, many of the projects were also related to enhancing research and publications.

The participants were generally positive about the benefit of planning a real project as part of MyIDC, but suggested more frequent communication and discussions with their mentors in between the three parts of MyIDC. Worth mentioning here is that most trainers kept in touch with their mentees via WhatsApp individually or as a group (each trainer was assigned four to five mentees). A WhatsApp group, comprising all the participants, trainers, and AKEPT representatives, was also set up for ease of communication among everyone involved in MyIDC. This WhatsApp group continues to be active with members, especially the participants who share information about academic and research events, updates on research findings, and the latest news of awards and achievements.

5.2   Lessons Learnt

In this paper, feedback on the MyIDC 2019/2020 programme from the participants and two international trainers was examined, and the lessons learnt from feedback to improve forthcoming MyIDC programmes were explored. Based on the feedback it would appear that the objectives of the programme have been met.

For instance, the objective of providing participants with knowledge of current developments, changes and challenges of higher education in Malaysia and at the international level, to which the participants reacted positively, would have been derived from the modules, and expertise and experience of the local and international trainers and speakers.

Providing participants with new and creative ways of thinking about strategic management and decision-making processes, which again, the participants agreed that they had obtained through the modules and various delivery modes, as well as the PAPs, would have contributed to the achievement of this objective. The knowledge and skills obtained throughout the course would have been derived not just from the formal content and delivery but from informal communication with the facilitators, speakers and fellow participants.

One way of ascertaining if participants applied some of the skills, methods and tools to respond to changes and demands at their institutions would be their choice of PAP topics (see Table 2), and the way they planned and implemented their PAPs. Based on the progress of the PAPs from part 2 to part 3, it would appear that the participants had made use of some of these skills and abilities to effect changes at their faculties and, in some cases, at the university level.

Among the essential skills and abilities is the ability to make informed decisions, to be mentally and emotionally prepared to manage colleagues, and to deal with the high demands of work (e.g. increasing student intake, conducting high impact research, increasing number and quality of publications, securing national and international research grants, generating income) amidst limited resources. These demands are reflected in the topics of the PAPs, and the support from individual institutions of respective PAPs is a good indicator of the relevance of the projects to the faculty or institution. Given that there is an observable trend of younger academics under the age of 45 leading faculties in Malaysian institutions of higher education, presenting them new ways of thinking and doing things would benefit them further. Moreover, having gone through MyIDC should make them better ready to face the ever-

changing scenario in higher education both in the home front and in the global context.

The PAP, as well as the ongoing communication via the WhatsApp group, can be taken as a measure of success in addressing the last objective of creating a support system of mentors and peers. Thus, all the objectives of MyIDC can be considered to have been met. Since the objectives of MyIDC were developed in tandem with the expectations of HEI leaders as outlined in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Higher Education) (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015) and the University Transformation Programme (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2017), the fulfilment of the objectives of MyIDC means that the expectations of leaders in higher education institutions are also being addressed. In other words, MyIDC is helping to develop the kind of academic leadership that the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education endeavours to establish and develop for the nation as a whole.

To sum up, based on the findings from the three sets of surveys and feedback from the international experts, several key lessons emerged, and these are being taken into account in the planning stage of the next MyIDC programme:

- **Planning and organisation.** The organising and training committees should be separated so both groups can focus on their tasks. To ensure the sustainability of the programme, the current team of trainers should be reorganised into a core team for each part of MyIDC supported by a local organizing committee. Funding should be made available for the hiring of an administrator who can assist with the planning and organisation of MyIDC as the AKEPT representatives are also occupied with their administrative duties and other training programmes.
- **Duration.** The full length of part 1 needs to be reduced to just eight training days. In reality, this would entail five working days if the weekend is taken into account (although it is noted that in several states, the working week is from Sunday to Thursday).
- **Content.** The topics suggested by the participants were taken into account and so was the reflective feedback from the trainers who conducted the modules to assess how the content can be improved.
- **Delivery.** The delivery methods should be diverse and interactive with more time for participants to reflect on their learning, share their challenges, ideas and opinions, and to discuss issues related to the training modules. Online learning support beyond the sharing of course materials should also be seriously considered, especially

as online education and training have now become a norm in most countries in the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic. An online platform can help bridge the time between the three parts.

- **Training team.** The training of trainers needs to be conducted more systematically and in several sessions to enhance their training and delivery skills, and to develop and document training plans and activities for assigned modules. Support through formal recognition of each core trainer's university is important as many man-hours are invested in the organisation and implementation of MyIDC.
- **PAPs.** The mentoring system for PAPs needs to be revisited to ensure that participants receive adequate and timely support from their mentors. Time could also be set aside for participants to meet their mentors individually or as a group in all three parts of MyIDC. The sharing of PAPs with university leaders and other participants should continue in future MyIDC programmes. This could be in the form of a poster display or through digital means. At the same time, MyIDC alumni can be brought on board as buddies to new MyIDC participants. Such peer support could extend beyond the PAP module.

6. Conclusion

The findings that were shared in this chapter point to favourable outcomes for MyIDC in terms of (a) addressing the objectives and meeting the general needs and expectations of higher education leaders through the 12 modules, (b) the various tasks and modes of delivery, (c) the planning and implementation of individual PAPs, (d) the out-of-class activities, and (e) the ongoing communication platform via the MyIDC 2019/2020 WhatsApp group.

In meeting the programme objectives, the deans should be better prepared to plan, gather support, and implement strategies to meet current (e.g. internationalisation, globalisation, and of late, remote and online learning) and future challenges in higher education. The positive evaluation of the programme has resulted in AKEPT continuing to support the second MyIDC programme. However, the findings from the different sources have provided several salient lessons that need to be considered when planning the forthcoming MyIDC programme to strengthen the programme concerning its objectives and the needs and expectations of institutions of higher education and the country as a whole. These include elements in planning and organisation, content, duration, deliv-

ery, the training team and PAPs. It would be useful to obtain follow up feedback from MyIDC participants, for example, after one year, to gauge the long-term effects and impact of the programme. This could be done through an online survey or focus group interviews with the MyIDC 2019/2020 participants.

Acknowledgements

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