

Chapter 36

Marketing Education in Sarawak: Looking at It From the Employers' Viewpoint

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ABSTRACT

The state of Sarawak is the biggest among the 13 states in Malaysia. It is strategically located in South East Asia in the island of Borneo. In the state of Sarawak, Marketing education has seen a tremendous growth over the years. Marketing is one of the most sought-after business courses by many school leavers. In Sarawak, Marketing education is provided by public and private universities and institutions of higher education in the form of degree and diploma courses. Marketing education views marketing as a discipline that can be learned through the classroom (off the job). However the employers' perspectives differ as they prefer hands on (on the job). The main challenge confronting the Sarawak institutions of higher learning is to produce marketing graduates capable of being competent marketing practitioners serving in public and private sectors. The question that remains unanswered is whether the marketing education curriculum content matches the trends and major forces in our external environment as proper attention to these dimensions will enable the institutions to produce graduates equipped with the relevant skills in the workforce or whether the curriculum content has been designed in recognition of the fact that students will need to cope with the complex nature of today's business planning and decision-making. The literature on marketing education in Sarawak, is limited and very few research articles are found exploring the effectiveness. The authors have contributed to the field of Marketing education in Sarawak in one of their previous article published five years ago. Therefore this chapter is an attempt by the authors to explore the effectiveness of marketing education in meeting the organizational needs in Sarawak from

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the perspectives of employers. This study uses qualitative methods which includes interview (face-to-face and telephone), informal discussions, email communications with managers, personal observations by the authors, and a review of literatures in the area of Marketing education. Marketing education, like marketing practice, is dynamic. Marketing education should continually evolve in such a manner to accommodate and satisfy various stakeholders such as government, business and industry, academics as well as students. The findings reveal several issues and challenges of Marketing education from the employers' perspectives in Sarawak. These findings will be useful for curriculum design of marketing courses. It will also assist marketing educators in understanding the organizational needs of marketing knowledge, skills and abilities required of a graduate. Future marketing students will also be able to know the industrial and organizational expectations required of them as a marketing graduate. This chapter clearly identifies some of the deficiencies in the area of practical skills required by marketing graduates in the context of Sarawak. This chapter is expected to provide the framework and prospect for conducting an in-depth quantitative research in Marketing education in future in Sarawak (Borneo).

1. INTRODUCTION¹

Malaysia is a well known country located in Southeast-Asia with Singapore, Thailand, Brunei and Indonesia as neighboring countries. The state of Sarawak is the biggest among the 13 states in Malaysia. It is strategically located in South East Asia in the island of Borneo. It covers an area of 125,000 sq. km and has a population of 2.619 million and has 27 ethnic groups from diverse backgrounds living together (Yearbook of Statistics Sarawak, 2013). With its strategic location, Sarawak is emerging as a profitable investment hub offering cost-competitive advantages with good air transportation linkages.

Recently, the Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy or simply known as SCORE was launched by the Federal Government of Malaysia. It is one of the five regional development corridors being developed throughout the country. SCORE is a major initiative undertaken to develop the Central Region and transform Sarawak into a developed State by the year 2020. It aims to achieve the goals of accelerating the State's economic growth and development, as well as improving the quality of life for the people of Sarawak (<http://www.sarawakscore.com.my/>).

In this context, recently the Sarawak state government indicated that it will help some 4,000 graduates with diplomas and degrees (Marketing included) by giving them on the job training under a special program called "Capacity building for graduates in Sarawak" over the next two years (The Borneo Post, 2009). With this program, graduates could gain practical skills such as in manufacturing, IT, utilities, tourism, social and government, financial and professional services. The former Chief Minister Pehin Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud said "in the coming years, there would be manpower requirement in industries like the agro-based ones with the development of the halal hub, aluminium and poly-silicon, construction and education and training in the SCORE". He also hopes that the jobs created in SCORE would go to the local people in Sarawak (The Borneo Post, 2009).

With all these developments taking place, the organizations in Sarawak in this millennium are becoming very competitive and demanding. This has a great implication for the state human capital development especially in the area of education and training of the workforce. The employees are expected to be multi-skilled and capable of taking greater responsibility and creative in solving problems and making decisions. Thus, the graduate students are expected to enter the workplace equipped not only

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