Chapter 23

Integrating Corporate Education in Malaysian Higher Education:
The Experience of Open University Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The rise of corporate education can be attributed to changes in higher education worldwide in the 1990s, when many countries bore witness to restructuring and reforms. In Malaysia, this restructuring process saw the corporatisation of public universities, rise in private higher education, increasing interest in quality assurance as well as growing awareness of the importance of lifelong and workplace learning. One of the significant parameters of these new dynamics is information and communication technology (ICT), which allows for many corporations to address education and training through online platforms and Web-based tools. The success of some of the most prominent "corporate universities" – many in the United States of America like Motorola University and McDonald's Hamburger University, can also be attributed to the inability of traditional higher education to meet current workplace needs, a phenomenon also common to many other countries.

1. INTRODUCTION

In other words, the importance of corporate education today lies with its function in providing education, training and human resource development to suit specific business needs. The motivations for corporate education are many, e.g.

competitive advantage of employees, increased workplace productivity, cost-saving (especially for large-scale programmes), as well as recruiting and retaining quality manpower. Central to the success of today's corporate education provision is the leverage on ICT; where a novel approach like open and distance learning (ODL) has been

able to provide many advantages in due to a cost-effective system that does not require learners to spend extensive time away from work.

This chapter will examine the broad concept of corporate education, the status of higher education in Malaysia as well as OUM's role in Malaysian corporate education. This chapter will also explore how universities can contribute to the success of university-corporate partnership for further development of the corporate education cause.

There is a growing realisation that education has importance and connotations beyond formal schooling; an awareness partly influenced by new perspectives on higher education and the role of universities. These perspectives, through restructuring and reform of higher education around the world, have resulted in diverse forms of formal educational institutions, e.g. community colleges, polytechnics, private universities and for-profit institutions. Similarly, the worldwide concern for creating and sustaining competitiveness through a knowledge-driven economy has influenced the need for building and developing human capital-an issue that also lent a new angle on the importance of education.

A common theme within these phenomena is corporate education. Its origins lie with corporate America's awareness that "*education and training were critical to innovation and competitiveness*" (Ryan, 2001), leading to the establishment of 'universities' that carried famous brand names, e.g. Motorola University and McDonald's Hamburger University, in the late 1980s and 1990s. In essence, these institutions served as a central unit to coordinate all education and training activities of each company. In the years to come, as buzzwords like 'capacity building', 'globalisation', 'K-economy' and 'lifelong learning' came into the picture, the idea of corporate education began to encompass more than just an extension of a company's human resource department. While earlier generation corporate universities, like Motorola University, continue to hold relevance in human

resources (especially on a large, multinational scale), corporate education itself has evolved to include novel approaches in teaching and learning.

One such approach involves leveraging on information and communication technology (ICT). An ICT-based delivery platform, like open and distance learning (ODL) and e-learning, can allow for greater cost-effectiveness and time-saving for many organisations. Through technologies too, programmes and curricula can be customised to suit specific business needs. Employees need not spend extensive time away from work, hence, leading to less disruption and better productivity.

In Malaysia, formal education (up to the higher education level) remains the predominant concern for its Government and people. It is considered the major educational pathway for individual, societal and economic well-being. However, within recent years, Malaysia too has witnessed restructuring of higher education and growing interest in lifelong learning, corporate education and human capital development – all in the name of national progress. The establishment of Open University Malaysia (OUM) in 2000 was the premier introduction of the ODL approach to the Malaysian society. In the past decade, OUM has been actively involved in championing the lifelong learning cause, especially for working adults who are at the heart of the country's economy. OUM's foray into corporate education has also been aided by the flexible nature of ODL and its leverage on ICT, thus helping the university to conduct corporate education programmes for both local and international clients.

This chapter will detail how corporate education has taken shape specifically from the viewpoint of Malaysia and OUM, in light of various developments in higher education, ICT and ODL. This chapter will also detail the history behind the emergence of corporate education and briefly describe higher education in Malaysia. This is followed by a quick look at the country's current corporate education scenario, examples of corpo-

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