

CHAPTER 2

Transformational Change: Between Theory and Reality

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

In 1990, Tun Mahathir Mohamed the Prime Minister of Malaysia proposed the idea of a unique collaborative industry-driven academic programme between UTM and the University of Warwick to the late British Prime Minister the Right Honourable Lady Margaret Thatcher. Formally established in 1992, The main idea was to set up a center of excellence called Business and Advanced Technology Centre (BATC) in Malaysia to foster knowledge exchange between industry and academics with the mission to help train industry managers who will assist in the transformation of Malaysian technology through a truly novel concept (then) of executive management programme specifically targeting future change managers.

This was no theoretical academic programme so popular in those days but a truly innovative one delivered by industry and academic lecturers from the UK and Malaysia within the context of an industry-centred academic programme. The aim was to foster knowledge transfer in engineering, management, manufacturing, and technology. This innovative model was conceived by the Warwick Manufacturing Group (WMG) of the

University of Warwick UK and implemented with a wide degree of success and acclaim in British industry at that time. It became the gold standard by which executive development programmes were measured worldwide. Such was its fame that branch campuses in Hong Kong, Calcutta, Bangkok, and South Africa were set up to cater for executives in those countries. Tun Mahathir, ever the astute politician, saw an opportunity to jump unto the bandwagon and get Malaysia in on the act.

The first program to be launched was called the Integrated Managers Development Scheme (IMDS), a post-graduate executive diploma (awarded by Warwick University). The second program was called the Integrated Graduate Development Scheme (IGDS), a master's level programme in Engineering Business Management (awarded by Warwick University). The third programme was the Engineering Doctorate (Eng.D), a PhD level programme (this degree was awarded by UTM).

2.2 THE BEGINNING

Launched with a great deal of fanfare in 1992 and operating out of the Kuala Lumpur UTM campus, the programmes started by BATC captured the imagination of the public corporations who committed themselves to support the programmes by providing scholarships to their staff who were enrolled at BATC.

Since it was a government-to-government initiative, the BATC programme quickly became a premier programme and got the full support of government or corporate bodies like Tenaga, Telekom Malaysia, Petronas, Malaysian Airline Systems, Malaysian Police, and the Malaysian Armed Forces. Every year new batches enrolled, consisting of groups of young

and rising executives specially chosen from each corporation. Every class was overflowing with students and the income from the fees more than made up the total costs of managing the whole programme. This was truly a golden era for BATC and in truth, the programme succeeded in training well over 600 diploma and masters' students from its inception until the year 2005. These alumni played important roles in their corporations after their graduation. For instance, at one time, three alumni of the IGDS programme assumed the top three positions within the Royal Malaysian Armed Forces.

2.2.1 Changes in the Malaysian Educational Landscape

However, over the years, many changes happened within the Malaysian educational landscape. Corporations like Petronas, Tenaga and Telekom set up their own private universities. Universiti Teknologi Petronas-1997, Multimedia Universiti-1996, Uniten-1997, and Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia (UPNM), was set up in 2007 prior to it was called Akademik Tentera Malaysia (ATMA) in 1995 plus a host of other private Institutional universities proliferate within a more liberal higher educational framework meant to transform Malaysia into a centre of learning in the ASEAN region.

Whilst this was a boon for Malaysian Higher Education, it spelt new challenges to the BATC IMDS programme. These corporations that used to support the Warwick IGDS Programme now stopped sending their officers and sent their staff to be trained in their own institutions of higher learning.