

# LEADING HIGHER INSTITUTION

## Leadership Traits, Dreams and Achievements

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UNIVERSITY LEADERS' ENTREPRENEURIAL  
EDUCATOR BOOTCAMP (UNILeeb)  
CASE STUDY

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Chief Editor  
Nik Maheran Nik Muhammad

Leading Higher Institution:  
Leadership Traits, Dreams and Achievements

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# Preface

University Leaders' Entrepreneurial Educators Bootcamp (UniLeeb) is a program hosted by UMK and funded by AKEPT with the aim to enhance entrepreneurial leadership competencies among university's leaders. AKEPT provides a platform for renowned leaders in higher education institutions to impart their knowledge and skills to their future successors based on their best practices. These invaluable sharing of success stories and experience are usually passed from word of mouth and rarely documented. Taking a different stance from a famous quote, 'leaders are born, not made', this book aims to inspire the readers, especially the future leaders, to learn from the incredible journey made by nine remarkable leaders in higher learning institutions.

Therefore, this book provides a compilation of stories presented in a case study of nine (9) successful leaders. Their traits, dreams and achievements were shared in this book to inspire the potential leaders of higher institutions which focus on leadership traits, dreams and achievements of a leader can stimulate the reader's critical thinking. We hoped this book would be a good starting point for the upcoming series of a recorded knowledge-sharing session from our local intellectual to all local and global readers.



# Acknowledgements

In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the Most Merciful,  
All praises are to Allah S.W.T the Almighty for blessing the Taufik and Hidayah and giving us the opportunity and strength to accomplish this book.

Finishing this book is indeed not an easy task. Though with great difficulties, we had given our best efforts to give an outstanding output. Thus, it is hoped that this book can help the students and public at large, especially those with interest in leadership to become successful in their undertakings in the future.

We would like to express our gratitude and appreciation to the Higher Education Leadership Academy (AKEPT) for taking the initiative to publish this book and not forgetting to the contributors of the book who are the participants of the UniLeeb program. Last but not least, to everyone who was directly or indirectly involved, for being supportive and patient throughout the accomplishment of this book. The acknowledgment also goes to the university leaders for giving us the opportunity in producing this piece of manuscript.

Thank you.

# Synopsis

The manuscript explores the various leadership styles, dreams, and achievements of 9 renowned leaders in spearheading the institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. All the case studies were the result of sheer hard work and compilations done by 9 groups of authors through a series of interviews with the respective leaders within the course of 3 to 4 months.

The first case study **“Bulldozer in Action: In Bridging the Underdog to the Top”**, talks about Prof. Dato’ Ts. Dr. Noor Azizi Ismail, dubbed as the 'bulldozer' in bringing the underdogs to the top and nurturing them to their fullest potential.

The second case study entitled, **“Aligning Academics' Competence to the University's Expectation: For the Better Future of All”**, is about Prof. Awang Bulgiba, who is an expert in strategizing the governance of the university while meeting expectations of the academics.

The eighth case study **“Leadership in Action: Founder of CEO@ Faculty”** revolves around Prof. Dr. Arham Abdullah, whose leadership skills has bridged the gap between industry and academia in just six months through his brainchild, the CEO@Faculty Programme .

The third case study, **“Shadowing a Great Leader”** discussed how the author aspires to follow the footsteps of Prof. Datuk Dr. Raduan Che Rose who uses the Swift Eagle leadership style in shaping and restructuring one of the youngest higher learning institutions in the country.

The fifth case study entitled **“Nurturing Future Leaders in Research and Innovation via Knowledge Sharing and Exchange”**, centers around Prof. Dr. Mohd Shahir Shamsir Omar who started the initiatives to provide supportive working environment for 'otai' and young academics in creating a more effective and productive academia.

The sixth case study, **“The other side of the coin: creating opportunities out of difficulties”** features the story of Tuan Akmal Abdul Manap, the struggles, and challenges in dealing with the transition from public to the private higher learning institution.

The seventh case study **“Fight It or 'Buy' It?”** highlights the story of how Prof. Datuk Dr. Mohammad Shatar Sabran managed to build his dynamic team and get everyone to work harmoniously together using his strategy of ‘buying them in’ and this strategy has also helped him to resolve one of the toughest challenges and crises in his career.

The fourth case study, **“Academic Leadership and Leadership Challenges of the Vice Chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)”**, showcases Prof. Dr. Faisal Rafiq Mahamd Adikan’s implementation of sustainability leadership during his years as the Vice-Chancellor of USM.

Finally in the last case study **“Transformational Leadership in a New Era”** brings the readers the story of Prof. Datuk Dr. Marliham who rose from the bottom of the management ladder and within the span of ten years became the president of one of the leading private institutions in Malaysia.

The sole purpose of this book is that it could be used as an example and reference to everyone who aspires to become great leaders one day. As the saying goes, “A good leader leads by example and not by force”, hopefully, all the stories and experiences shared here by these authors will help to mold the young minds into becoming the next generation to lead the higher learning institutions to the pinnacle, locally and globally.

# 01 CASE STUDY

# Bulldozer in Action: In Bridging the Underdog to the Top

Mohamad Faiz Mohd Amin<sup>1</sup>,  
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## PROF. DATO' DR. NOOR AZIZI BIN ISMAIL

### Prologue

Professor Noor Azizi let out a long breath. His feet moved slowly as his gaze watched every corner of his new university, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK). On his first day in UMK, Professor Azizi was imagining the pain and struggle that would be accompanying his long journey in transforming the university from nothing into something. Of being established for a decade ago, UMK seems to not have progressed that well when it is still stuck at the bottom three in the Malaysian public university ranking. “This university has almost nothing to be proud of. I will transform this university into what everyone can be proud of and look forward to being with. I will make it the top entrepreneurial university in the country. Although it is going to be hard, I know I can do this”. Professor Noor Azizi promised this to himself.

### Leadership Characteristics

Prof Dato' Ts. Dr. Noor Azizi Ismail is the Vice Chancellor of Universiti Malaysia Kelantan appointed for a three-year term effective Jan 7, 2019. Professor Noor Azizi holds a doctorate in Accounting and Information Systems from Loughborough University, United Kingdom; Master's degree in Accounting Information Systems from the University of Memphis in the United States; and a bachelor's degree in accounting from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM).

He began his academic career as a lecturer of Accounting Information Systems at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), before being appointed as the Dean of UUM School of Business (Research and Innovation), and as the Dean of UUM Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business. The development of the Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business (OYAGSB) of UUM owes much to the strong and capable leadership shown by its founding dean, Prof Dato' Ts. Dr. Noor Azizi Ismail (2011-2015). A man with a strong vision and leadership skill, Professor Noor Azizi was instrumental in making OYAGSB a respected, relevant, and responsive business school in the country. Through his keen observation and deep understanding, he knew what a business school should have to make its mark on the international stage.

### Charismatic

As a person, Professor Noor Azizi carries out his life as usual as others. Yet, he is often viewed as a passionate and charismatic person especially by those who know him and have experienced working directly with him. At home, Professor Noor Azizi is found to be energetic and a family man. This is usually shown from his sharing in his social media, as family is also a number priority in his life besides his job. In reaching out to more subjects and audiences, Professor Noor Azizi loves to use social media especially in making himself more visible to the world. To him, social media is an essential medium of visibility for a leader and organisation to share knowledge and promote branding.

### The “Bulldozer”

With the support of everyone at the School, Professor Noor Azizi embarked on an uncharted journey to internationalisation. Though perilous it may seem, the journey yielded expected results. The long, hard work was not without gain. Defying all odds, the School succeeded in getting international accreditations of ABEST21, AMBA, and AACSB. Now, the School can stand tall with its achievements and as one of the business schools to be reckoned with.

Having sketched out his excellence at the Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business (OYAGSB), Professor Noor Azizi continued the glory of his leadership in UUM as he was later appointed as the deputy vice-chancellor (Research and Innovation) of UUM. Other than being the top management in the university, he also served the ministry as the deputy director-general of higher education in the Ministry of Education from July 2017 to December 2018. In January 2019, Professor Noor Azizi's journey with UMK began as he was appointed as the vice-chancellor of the university.





## “ Nothing is Impossible

### **Visible**

Professor Noor Azizi believes that a leader should be 'visible', and therefore he is the most comfortable to do so through social media platforms. Although he has all sorts of accounts ranging from Tweeter, LinkedIn and Facebook account, he is more active in using his Facebook and LinkedIn account. Facebook is more for his social life and makes sharing related to his daily life with his family. As a highly motivated person, Professor Noor Azizi loves to share words of encouragement to his "Facebook friend". As for LinkedIn, it's more toward professional business and image branding. With the LinkedIn account, he would share thoughts and words that would inspire others in professional ways. He often asks for opinion and welcomes helping hands from his followers to help his cause. To him, social media platforms are very useful to be utilised as it allows him to have much more personal communication and two-way communication with his followers, who in majority are his fellow subordinates and students.

The two-way communication that Professor Noor Azizi has been doing with his followers on social media has created more opportunities for his followers to let their voice be heard whenever decision making is due. More importantly, social media brings the relationship between them closer, making it easier especially for the staff and students to understand Professor Noor Azizi's intention and ways of doing work.

### ***The Journey with UMK***

Known to many, Professor Noor Azizi's journey with UMK took place unplanned, as a result of a change that happened in the country's leadership and management at that time. Replacing the former vice-chancellor (Professor Dato' Dr. Husaini Omar) who still had the remainder of his services and supposedly the vision he wants to achieve in UMK, this adds to the burden felt by Professor Noor Azizi in carrying out his responsibilities as the new vice chancellor of UMK.



Indeed, UMK in the past was very ordinary that no one would bother themselves to get to know this institution. Even Professor Noor Azizi himself honestly thought that UMK was not at a level that can be proud of as a higher education institution in Malaysia. Despite its core business of being an entrepreneurial university and producing human capital that can create jobs for others, actively involved in enterprising, business and so on, UMK and a large part of its members unfortunately did not seem to be doing what they are supposed to do.

Their performance in every aspect was generally poor, be it in teaching and learning, staff competence and graduate performance. Human capital that was produced and developed in UMK in the past was also not that significant and great to boast about to which UMK did not become the top selected university by potential students as they were applying for university admission.

“  
**I will not allow this university to sink any longer. I will bring it to the top, to the eyes of the world.**

As for teaching and learning, the approach that was used before was very much outdated where conventional teaching and delivery methods were favored by the academics. So much so, Professor Noor Azizi could see only a handful of academics showing determination to try to get out of their cocoons, bringing themselves away from the comfort zone they had been in for so long. With the technological advancement that is happening and future challenges awaiting where everyone needs to be profoundly proactive, advanced and expert in handling technological tools and mediums, Professor Noor Azizi thought that the existing teaching practice at UMK was in need of a major transformation.

### .....Enhance Collaboration

A ‘bulldozer’ by nature, Professor Noor Azizi started off by breaking silos that hamper collaboration. He wants UMK staff and students to collaborate more with both internal and external stakeholders. To become number one in entrepreneurial education, Professor Noor Azizi stressed that the teaching and learning process should not only involve what happens around the classroom.

Students should be given opportunities to communicate directly with industry players where they can get first-hand information and experience is the best, for knowledge and skills acquisition process to occur very effectively. This leaves the academics with no other options than to collaborate with the industry players to gain their valuable inputs that are not available in the textbooks. “Close collaboration with industry can help us to address the real issues out there.” Professor Noor Azizi’s moves were merely to engage UMK’s faculty members teaching entrepreneurship and to push them to contact industry players. “Call them, learn from them and bring them in to teach relevant lessons, otherwise it is all textbook,” he stresses.

### .....Teaching Differently

‘In workplace learning, I’m challenging the faculty to reduce face-to-face teaching time from 100 percent to 75 percent and further down to 50 percent. The rest of the time can be spent on fieldwork and more practical things where students learn by doing. “Once you change the mindset of the academics, the change will naturally flow down to change the mindset of the students.” The best thing results from this is the academics now have got more time for themselves to focus on their other career development aspects especially on research and publication. This change initiated by Professor Noor Azizi in fact brings the UMK academics to a closer step to becoming a more competent and productive academics.



### .....Interdiscipline Culture

Professor Noor Azizi also urges the science and technology faculty members to work with the business faculty and join their strengths and intelligence to work on research and collaboration hence build names in their field of expertise. As a result of this, we now have academic members working on applied research and innovation with financial management and strategic planning and operations departments. This collaboration between academics of multiple disciplines of study which did not even exist in their minds to do so before turns out to be a wise leading path that successfully broke the cocoon and conservative thinking culture of the academics in UMK all this while. More and more collaboration is now actively being carried out by the academics, leading to another beautiful success story of UMK where a considerable number of business start-ups have been started.

### .....University as Learning Factory

Start-up culture is indeed a glory resulting from Professor Noor Azizi’s wise planning and tireless efforts in bringing UMK as the number one entrepreneurial university in Malaysia. Start-up is celebrated and nurtured at UMK where students are highly encouraged to do business even when they are still at the university. “Entrepreneurship through UMK’s lens is not about selling tudung (Islamic headscarves) or online reselling of products, but about adding value,” explains Professor Noor Azizi. He inspires students to create business which is unique and has a value not to be found in others’ products or services. Only with that, their business can sustain in the market. Currently, UMK has over 400 student-registered companies. Standouts include a biryani restaurant operator and a science student generating over RM100,000 monthly revenue from a garlic-based product.



### ..... Technology Focus

What has been achieved by UMK so far although has made Professor Noor Azizi happy, it is not the final destination where he wants to bring UMK to. Professor Noor Azizi has made a more aggressive move in order to bring UMK further forward and make it visible in the eyes of the world. He has a more brilliant development and sustainability plan for UMK, for which through international collaboration. He even has made his first move on this by initiating collaboration with big international companies such as Alibaba and Huawei. “We are now working with Alibaba and Huawei to co-design a curriculum for an IT programme to be offered in our university, so we can nurture more IT talents and technopreneurs.’ This will provide more opportunities for UMK members to unleash their potential and most importantly to prepare UMK as an excellent entrepreneurial university with future ready curriculum design and education framework hence leading to more talented great human capital to be produced by the university.

## Epilogue

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"Leader comes and goes, but the people remain" that is the quote that motivates Professor Noor Azizi to move forward in his everyday life while pursuing UMK success. Regardless of the challenges coming, Professor Noor Azizi is still enthusiastic and confident in bringing UMK and its members to continue to move forward and become the best that they can. With his passion and compassion, Professor Noor Azizi opens the space for his UMK comrades to excel and help them as a "brother" figure. He hopes to carry out his duty as the leader of the university towards a brighter future of all.

# 02 CASE STUDY

# Aligning Academics' Competence To The University's Expectation: For The Better Future of All

Ponmalar N Alagappan<sup>1</sup>,  
Ivy Chung<sup>1</sup> & Massudi Mahmuddin<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universiti Malaya  
<sup>2</sup>Universiti Utara Malaysia



**PROFESOR. DATUK DR. AWANG BULGIBA  
BIN AWANG MAHMUD**

## Prologue

The mandate given was just a sentence – Be in the top 100 universities! That is so demanding and arduous, how do I achieve this? thought Professor Awang Bulgiba (Professor AB). Professor AB stared far ahead with his head full of thoughts of what needed to be done to achieve the mandate which had been given to him. Professor AB was indeed in a dilemma on how he can bring remarkable changes into the university and more importantly to change the direction of others so that they will walk the same path with him for the brighter future of their beloved university.

## Background of Professor AB

Professor AB was appointed as the Acting Vice Chancellor of the University of Malaya from the 1st of May 2017 until 31st October 2017. It is known that for Malaysian public universities, the Vice Chancellors and Deputy Vice Chancellors constitute the core of academic leadership and are in charge of managing and leading the university to be recognised as the best university in the country.



Apart from holding the position as the Vice Chancellor, Professor AB is also a public health physician, with a double master's in Public Health and Applied Statistics. Professor AB is the first Malaysian doctor to gain a Ph.D. in Health Informatics. As a prolific educator and researcher, he has influenced many public policies at national and international levels. He had overseen a period of extraordinary research growth in this university. He has resumed multiple top management positions, including Deputy Vice Chancellor of Research and Innovation, Deputy Vice Chancellor of Academic and Internationalization, and finally as the Acting Vice-Chancellor. With vast experience in key aspects of the university's functions, Professor AB can grasp sufficient hindsight to lead a transformation exercise to tackle the degrading quality of our local university academics.

## Challenge In Pursuit of The Top 100 Universities

Professor AB realizes the fact that getting the University of Malaya listed in the 100 best universities in the world is not an easy job that can be accomplished overnight. It requires a demand for competitiveness, creativity, and innovation. There are daunting responsibilities and obstacles in the competitive learning climate that require the university to be receptive. The catch – to change the quality of human capital by focusing on all the characteristics needed to determine the first-class mindset. These high expectations are also in the midst of inconsistent and shrinking financial capital.

## Industry 4.0



The dilemma gets worse with challenges imposed by the new industrial revolution (IR4.0). Industry 4.0 (IR4.0) calls for a dynamic transformation in all aspects of our life including education (Restart Project, 2020). Such a new wave of technology changes our way in communication and internationalization, and that the education providers are expected to generate citizens of the world. Such transformation also calls for producing leaders that are critical thinkers, problem solvers, and excellent communicators. Where education is no longer expected to produce specialized professionals, delivered via training in a specialised discipline, but to produce well-rounded global citizens who are also strong in emotional intelligence and soft skills, delivered via cross-cutting, interdisciplinary education.

## Social Change

Amid all these debates and concerns, the role of tertiary education has often become the bullseye of discussion. Indeed, high quality of education is instrumental to meeting national aspirations in driving political stability and socio-economic growth. The critical question here is whether our tertiary education is ready for this change? Malaysian tertiary education, in particular the public sector, is already burdened with many challenges. There are

The conventional two main streams of thoughts in higher education – science and technology, and the arts and humanities – are both equally affected by IR4.0. This is in contrast to many popular views that only disciplines in science and technology should be reformed, to meet the demand to produce future workers who are highly trained in these emerging technologies. Many miss the other half of the side, where we also need professionals to be trained in making sure our future workers understand the values associated with using these IR4.0 technologies. In other words, it is not the shortage of employment that the world faces, but the shortage of skills that these new jobs will demand.

still unresolved issues such as academic freedom and autonomy, lack of Ph.D. qualified lecturers, poorly equipped infrastructure, low graduate employability, and many more. With the shrinking public funds due to the worsening global economy and now the challenges of operating in the post-COVID-19 time, most public institutes of higher learning are in hot waters to pivot effectively in these trying times. The consequence of failing to meet the expected change can only put Malaysia backward, and such a scenario is not unthinkable.

## Economic Change

To be fair, Malaysian's higher education system has experienced multiple restructuring episodes since achieving independence. From an agricultural-driven economy in the 1960s, Malaysia's economy has shifted towards industrial development from 1980 to 2000 (Zain NM, et al 2017). Consequently, there was a huge demand for a highly skilled workforce to feed into the newly found knowledge-based economy. The Malaysian government has capitalised a substantial budget to send many students for scholarships abroad. New private providers are allowed to enter the Malaysian tertiary market to meet the increasing market demand. Research universities are designated to drive innovation through a rigorous R&D pipeline. An ambitious goal to achieve a high international ranking is set for many public universities. All these changes are deemed to pivot our education system to meet future needs. Unfortunately, the speed of change is too fast, and it seems that we are forever behind the curve.

## Brain Drain

Underlying these transitions of change, one key factor that is often overlooked for its importance is the quality and credentials of the academic lecturers whose expertise is sought to shape the education that the next and future generations are demanding. With the right education pedagogy and delivery system, these experts should be one of the few people on earth to understand where we are heading, and to guide us toward the desired direction. After all, these academics are among the brightest in the nation. Up to 2015, Malaysia is reported

to generate about 15,000 PhDs in various disciplines, which indicates that we are not lacking talent. Yet, institutes of higher learning are suffering from a significant brain drain of talented Malaysian faculty. The reasons are not particularly clear.

Almost 1.7 million Malaysians are employed outside the country. Lack of career prospects is particularly detrimental to those with niche subject areas such as arts or pure science. The mainstream job market is still very much focusing on mid-level knowledge targeting basic degree holders. Most Ph.D. holders seek employment in R&D in public and private sectors, but there has been a very limited job market in these domains. Hence, they are forced to seek opportunities abroad, where they have an opportunity to earn a living with their skillset. With the average 30-year career lifespan of an academic faculty, this makes the turn-over rate is particularly low, and subsequently a career in academic education is particularly competitive in Malaysia.

## Academic Responsibilities

That leads to the question of whether it is possible to re-train the remaining faculty members who are currently still in the workforce, to have the necessary skill sets to be the agent of change in pivoting the country towards IR4.0 transformation. It is of importance to note that the academic faculties nowadays wear multiple hats. They are not only expected to teach passionately in their subjects and manage students' welfare, but they are also expected to excel in research and translate their knowledge into marketable products and services. Some of them are also active professionals in the medical

service sector, and many are involved at different levels of university administrative positions. Many times, the academics are also active in servicing the governmental and industry bodies as well as the community. There are relatively few career choices out there that require someone to be so adaptable and talented in multiple skill sets. Of course, the number of academics who can excel in all aspects is understandably low.



### ....Globalize Human Capital

Hence as the leader of the university, Professor AB saw the immediate need to put the university's human capital in a highly competitive global higher education system. Professor AB needed a quick and fast progression plan. That is when he decided for no more time to be wasted and he should move as quickly as possible. The first step to everything was restructuring, then the process and flows to be followed. To achieve educational excellence, Professor AB had to emerge as a leader that builds collaborative and supportive teaching and learning environment, to ensure the effectiveness of work within the university.

But where do I start? This has been haunting Professor AB's mind for days. The challenges are considerable, and it is a tedious and complex route to reform performance which remains unequivocal till now. Changes must start with the internal environment. This transformation must be supported by able players in the institution, such as faculty members, institutional leaders, and administrators. Faculty members will mainly be involved in re-evaluating and restructuring of programs offered and internationalising the curriculum.



### The Strategies

With these circumstances faced by Malaysian higher education, Professor AB was thinking hard for strategies to overcome these problems to prepare a strong and equipped workforce of talented academics, who are entrusted to educate a larger pool of nation builders to drive our country towards the future. The solution may not be straightforward, as he needs to touch upon the mind-blowing speed of technology injection into every discipline, the alignment and adjustment between disciplines to co-create a future-ready curriculum, and not forgetting the overall culture and legacy that have been protected by individual discipline-fraternities all these years.



### ....Addressing Academic Culture

In a public university with a long-ingrained organizational culture that has everyone in a comfortable zone, there is an accepted means of doing things. The academicians come from a collectivist culture, where people will follow others within the social group rather than be isolated, there is strong clan culture. How do the academicians view themselves? do they only see themselves as a passionate educator, accomplished researcher, or experienced practitioner? The need to address the academic culture is crucial, it sets out a common framework of reference for fluctuations within the university, making it an integral part of the effective implementation of creativity-promoting improvements in the framework, structure, or method. Professor AB now must get the academicians to unlearn their pattern of behaviour, values and assumptions concerning their working styles

### ... Structure Re-engineering

That was when the idea struck Professor AB, let us start from the bottom up - reverse engineering by analysing every structure, function, and operation of the university. If need be, I will re-examine the entire structure of the academic pathway, remove those that are redundant and create a new pathway. This is going to cost me upheaval, nobody wants to change what they have been doing for the last 10 or 20 years and especially when it is working fine. Professor AB knew what to do, now he needs the people to move his agenda.

*"It is now our main agenda to bring our university into the top 100 universities. We shall all work together on this. To make this happen, I need a right group of experienced people with the right ideas and thoughts who can move this vision together. This team needs to be foresighted to be able to defend the vision and be part of the vision."*

## Way Forward

Professor AB called for a management meeting the next day. He first started the meeting by reminding everyone to take part in the meeting with a clear mind and positive attitudes to embrace what was going to be conveyed next.

*“Leave your preconceived ideas and the ought outside this door, listen to what I am about to say with an open mind. “Don’t interrupt and listen till the end, this is going to change the way we are going to work, so pay close attention. This is based on the multiple reviews and feedback we have had with the academics over the years”.*

He could sense unrest among the senior management staff, they seemed agitated. That was however a small matter to him as that kind of reaction was expected already. Professor AB started by explaining his idea on building talent excellence and the way to go about it.

To accomplish our mission in bringing our university to the top 100 list, I will be employing seven cornerstones for planning”, he said. Professor AB in high motivation and spirit explained to his subordinates the seven cornerstones for planning which include:

1. fixing the structure of the university– the management should come up with a new management structure to be put in place. Clusters need to be reorganized.
2. establishing a super team of those who are capable and believe in the vision wholeheartedly.
3. gathering evidence and data to back the vision, for fore sighting, and to get the staff moving – they need to set up a planning and strategy unit that will work only on this. It must be set up by statisticians who understand numbers and analytics. Monitoring is the keyword here.
4. paying attention to details, even if it is the smallest detail.
5. emulating from other successful universities who have succeeded in placing themselves in the top 100 universities.
6. success build success. We need to celebrate the successes of our staff as this makes them feel that they are appreciated. They will then want to contribute to the team and at the same time spur others to work harder as they feel that the university recognizes their contributions no matter how small. The effect is a snowball of achievements and the university and the staff will all see this as a winning formula.
7. be something or someone no one can ignore



## ... Resolving Problems and Conflicts

Indeed, the briefing was just a start to more hard work and detail planning to be carried out in the future. To ensure effective delivery and execution of his planning for the university, Professor AB made it clear to his staff that existing problems and conflicts occurring in the university should first be resolved. Thus, a series of workshops with the relevant Deputy Vice Chancellors offices to iron out the problems or loopholes were conducted to understand dilemmas and conflicts experienced by the stakeholders all this while.

Following the workshop, the second meeting was held to discuss the plan. Here the Deputy Vice Chancellor of Academic brought the stakeholders’ pertaining questions that Professor AB had to ponder on, relating to the following five issues, 1) the criteria for the excellent award within the university, 2) awards conferred by bodies outside the university, 3) number of publications set

for Tier 1, 2 and 3, 4) the technology that can support e-learning platform to be effectively used by the university members and lastly 5) the succession plans for the university.

## ....Develop Holistic Academicians

Upon hearing the questions thrown to him, Professor AB gets that the Deputy Vice Chancellor of Academic was concerned about the current practices which are mostly based on research output. Now the idea is to develop holistic academicians with different capabilities. “A simulation of the right mix and proportion of talent in each different career pathway” will be the way forward and this has been discussed in the UniTp Orange Book. The designed career pathways have to be aligned with the University’s vision. Starting by allocating a selection of pathways based on an inclusive spirit of collegiality and individuality, establishing promotion

criteria with fairness and mutual benefit for the different talents, and facilitating flexibility and career growth opportunities to chart their preferred pathways. This means the key performance indexes will change, the weightage will change according to the chosen pathways, be it teaching, research, professional practice, or institutional leadership.

Now Professor AB needs to incorporate this in his plan, his move, trickle it down to the lecturers, listen to their ideas, bounce off their ideas, and go back to the drawing board. One thing was clear to Professor AB, he cannot please everyone, if a decision needs to be made, he must put some people in their place and a decision has to be made quickly. He just needed to get everyone on board the plane, where everyone can be the co-pilot, flying the plane towards the vision “Being in the top 100 universities”.

### **...Strengthening Academic Career Path**

The primary plan was to strengthen the academic career pathway via a differentiated career pathway for talent excellence in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025. Firstly, there is a need to establish a sustainable and adaptive ecosystem in which talents can thrive and excel. Secondly, specialisation in roles comes with the challenging and changing landscape of higher education. Thirdly, recognising different attributes for the different levels of excellence with equal merit. And lastly, aligning talent aspiration to motivate staff to contribute in their best areas of expertise, while ensuring the university aspirations are met.

So what’s the plan? The idea is to give the right support for the different groups by nurturing difference be categorised into:

- 1) The inspiring educators –
  - a. Exhibit creativity and innovation in teaching and learning and assessment.
  - b. Introduce innovation that impacts learning contributions.
  - c. Engage in scholarly activities/ research or innovation in their subject area.
- 2) The innovative researchers –
  - a. Demonstrate excellence in research and produce original work which has a significant impact in their subject area.
  - b. Significant contribution to the body of knowledge through research of international standing
  - c. Research that impacts the community and society
- 3) The experienced practitioners –
  - a. Demonstrate excellence in professional practice.
  - b. An authority in the field of specialisation and contributes to the field of practice at both the national and international levels.
  - c. Show evidence of national and international recognition of excellence through consultancy activities
- 4) The future university leaders
  - a. Lead and empower the institution to serve the community and the nation to achieve national agency.
  - b. Demonstrate leadership sustaining best practices and in a leading change where necessary.
  - c. Demonstrate an overall understanding of key aspects of management as well as rules and regulations.

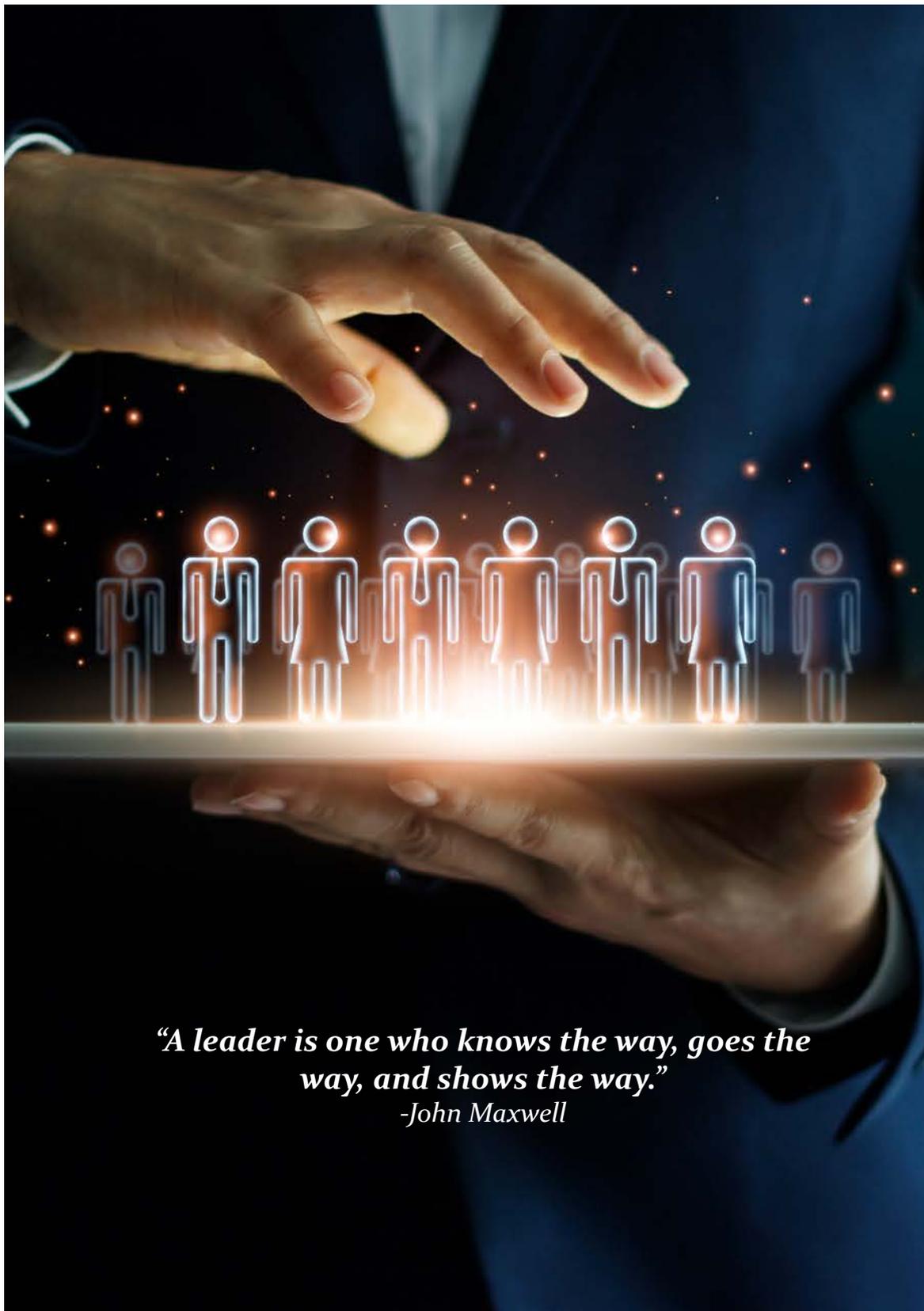
## Epilogue

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Professor AB has translated his ideas to all his people and what is left now is for them to bring the ideas into practice. He highly hopes that the key change in role specialisation will bring about career satisfaction, enhanced professionalism, and a motivated performing workforce among the academics which leads to an agile high performing university. Of course, the concern is always there for Professor AB as he must defend the multitrack paths and overcome the upcoming objection, protests, and hostility from other stakeholders.

“I would be accused of wanting to do the impossible, being self-centred”.

However, Professor AB is certain that it is of high importance for him to turn around this animosity and clan culture to his advantage and consequently promote a higher level of loyalty, morale, commitment, collaboration, teamwork, and participation among the university members. “I understand the personal value of each academician in the university, that is why I am changing the frame of the collective mindset towards the vision”. At last, Professor AB is ready to meet and inspire his comrades for a brighter future of the University of Malaya, being in the top 100 universities in the world.



*“A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way.”  
-John Maxwell*

# 03 CASE STUDY

# Leadership in Action: Founder of CEO@ Faculty

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## PROF. TS. DR. ARHAM BIN ABDULLAH

### Prologue

Tonight, the sweat and tears shed during the gruelling six months taste sweet. Prof. Dr. Arham was beaming with confidence and pride. His team's hard work had paid off, and everyone congratulated them on the success of an almost impossible task to achieve. Being in the limelight, Prof. Dr. Arham made a mental summary of the questions poured by the crowd on the secret to his success:

"As the founder of the CEO @ Faculty programme, you and your team have made the programme a success. To achieve such a great achievement, we know that it needs a lot of effort and good leadership skills. I am curious to know your experience throughout the whole preparation and execution process. You made it within the limited time constraint. I believe that you must face a lot of issues. Do you mind sharing with us about the challenges you faced and the ways you tackled all those problems?"

Prof. Dr. Arham smiled and relayed his experience to his anticipating audience.

### AN EXAMPLE

Prof. Dr. Arham Abdullah completed his Bachelor of Civil Engineering in 1998 and obtained his Master of Engineering from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) in 1999. He accomplished his PhD from Loughborough University, United Kingdom, in 2003. From 2014 to 2018, he was appointed as the director of the Industry Relation Division in the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Higher Education. Currently, he is the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Research and Innovation, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK). Throughout his entire career, he has demonstrated exemplary leadership skills and possessed many success stories. One of the remarkable stories is the founder of CEO @ Faculty, in which he organized this programme, which is the flagship programme of the Ministry of Higher Education.

### Take the bull by the horns!

Outside, the sky was pitch black. The leaves rustled. Strong wind gushed in, breaking the window glass. "Was it a bad omen?" Said Arham to himself before brushing the idea off. The phone rang. It was a call from the Chief Secretary to the Ministry of Higher Education, "We need to bridge the gap between industry and academia. I entrust you and the Industry Relation Division team to come up with a solution to this issue. You have six months to work on it."

The content of the phone call lingered on his mind but not for long. He did not have the luxury of time to waste. Arham understood the heavy responsibility he had to shoulder, and he was adamant about rising to the challenge.

### Dealing with the challenges

Prof. Dr. Arham was confident that collaborations between the two entities were the to-go effort to bridge the gap between industry and academia. His head was racing with questions: What type of collaboration? Where will the collaboration take place? How should he convince the players to participate?

Was it feasible to achieve the objective within such a limited time? Prof. Dr. Arham had no answer to those questions yet, but he knew he would soon.

### Problem-solving skills

Prof. Dr. Arham Abdullah gathered his Industry Relation Division team to discuss the new Ministry of Higher Education assignment. He informed the team that the project's objective was to develop a program that acted in concert with the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025, including Shift 2- Talent Excellence and Shift 7- Innovation Ecosystem. During the meeting, the team realized that the most challenging part was the small time frame. They had about six months to deliver the task assigned. After some brainstorming, Prof. Dr. Arham came up with an idea: CEO @ Faculty Programme (CFP), with the motto "Learn from the Pros". The task at hand was not a walk in the park. Prof Dr Arham knew that he had to delegate well.



**We need to bridge the gap between industry and academia. I entrust you and the Industry Relation Division team to come up with a solution to this issue. You have six months to work on it.**

"Frankly speaking, it is not easy for me to deliver all these activities by myself. I don't have any guidelines to follow. It is from scratch, and to try and error is the only solution. Indeed, great effort in a team is necessary for every success story. It would be difficult to solve the problem if we view it as a giant task, but I always break the task into manageable chunks to control it within our limit. I believe this strategy works well to alleviate workload among the team members and achieve better outcomes. Of course, we need to work in an intelligent way to speed up the process and get more resources to solve the problem". - Arham



## Networking skills

Prof. Dr. Arham Abdullah was also acutely aware of other challenges faced by his team. First, what should they do to convince the CEO from the industry to buy in the CFP plan and contribute to the collaboration? Gaining industry trust was one of the biggest challenges a leader needed to address. The challenge stemmed from academia and industry, which did not understand each other. Without knowing each other well, it was hard to develop trust. The Chief Secretary was aware that there was no suitable platform for academia and industry collaboration at the national level. Therefore, the ministry tasked Prof. Dr. Arham Abdullah to bridge and enhance industry-academic linkages through their proposed CFP. The higher education ministry aimed to improve university offerings and technology sharing programmes with the industry.



**To achieve a high number of stakeholders' participation from both corporate and university for this program, I need to have resources to help me. So, I have to use my existing networks in the current ministry office, and I was with UTM to outreach to all the corporate's CEOs and the university's VCs. I am glad most of them respond to me in a short time.**

- Arham

## Resilience

Despite the assistance received, the team struggled to convince the CEOs to buy the idea. The CEOs could not see the benefits of joining the programme. They considered the programme as a volunteering job, which would not lead to income generation. Besides, the CFP program was the first project of its kind. Since the programme had no previous success story, participating in it might be a risky endeavour. Prof. Dr. Arham did not give up. He tried to persuade the CEOs to join the programme by highlighting some advantages they could gain from the programme. The involved CEOs would get recognition at the national level, and the respectful Prime Minister would make the appointment. Prof. Dr. Arham's unwavering efforts and the rewards promised finally managed to spark the interests of the targeted CEOs to join the programme.

## Persuasion skills

Prof. Dr. Arham and his team were ecstatic about winning the first half of the battle. However, they were yet to win. They need to win over the university's Vice-Chancellors. Again, Prof. Dr. Arham played a vital role in achieving the objective. He asked the team members to foresee the possible factors that might hinder the Vice-Chancellors from agreeing to participate in the programme. From their brainstorming sessions, they listed the following factors. The Vice-Chancellors might be worried about the turnover issue, where the university staff might resign and move to the industrial workplace. The universities might face human resources problems if the quality staff were not around. There was only one way to encounter the issue: highlighting the significance of sending the young lecturers to the industry.

*"It is time to open the door for them to have some exposure from the industry. To be a future university bullet-proof leader, they need to learn how to manage the university like a corporation's CEO. Of course, I had seriously considered all the possible risks, such as turnover rate and the university's image. On the other hand, I foresee the outcome for the nation will be much greater than the risk" - Arham*

Prof. Dr. Arham also presented different significant benefits to the Vice-Chancellors should they decide to join the CFP. Among the benefits presented was that the Vice-Chancellors would have a golden opportunity to directly collaborate with the top CEOs of Government Link Companies and multinational companies, enhancing the visibility of their university. The Vice-Chancellors could see the profits far outweigh the loss. Therefore, they too look forward to becoming a part of the programme.

## Success Stories of CEO@Faculty Programme

The CFP has created many positive impacts. The participants were taught different skills in the boot camp and a series of training in AKEPT, including communication, stress management, entrepreneurship, and creativity/ innovativeness.

Various activities in the programme equipped the participants with varieties of soft skills. Through exposure to industry experience, they broadened their viewpoint, strengthened their relationships with industries, and increased their business skills through the CEO case study.

There were many success stories of the program. As Figure 1 shows, a total of 157 projects worth RM50,248,995,000 and 119 different activities were conducted. The achievements included 73 CSR projects worth RM3,188,000; 89 collaborations worth RM14,151,865; 39 MOU/MOA and 12 grants worth RM1,213,000.

Finally, in 2015, 24 CEOs joined the programme, and the number kept increasing ever since.



## SUCCESS STORIES



Figure 1: Success stories of CEO @ Faculty programme

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Prof. Dr. Arham stopped sharing, took his cup, and drank a little bit.

An audience stood and said: "Prof. Dr. Arham, allow me to congratulate you on your awesome achievement. To me, you have demonstrated what it means by leadership. It is the capacity to translate vision into reality".

# 04 CASE STUDY