

PATHWAY to TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Wawasan Open University (WOU) has set up the WOU Academy to provide certification and professional training for career advancement.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

WOU has set up an innovative academy for talent development to nurture leaders and professionals.

The WOU Academy aims to bridge the gap between professional academic learning and real-world application, offering training initiatives to equip learners with practical skills and industry insights to excel in their chosen fields. This underscores the University's aspirations to empower the workforce with knowledge and skills to navigate the ever-evolving job market.

A shining example of WOU's commitment to talent development was its participation in the inaugural National Training Week. Invited experts shared pertinent topics to help develop competent professionals.

Another is the University's award of scholarships to deserving individuals in Penang to take up higher studies, through its strategic collaboration with the state government and the Penang Women's Development Corporation.

We applaud the recent engaging dialogue with industry leaders, which served as a crucial platform to deliberate on pressing US-China tensions and technological opportunities for Penang. The University community was also privileged to have a globally-renowned archaeologist share her adventurous journey, fuelled by a passion for prehistoric findings.

We also witnessed the signing of the agreement between WOU and a leading logistics professional body. WOU students will be able to gain valuable perspectives into real-world challenges, enhancing their employability and contribution to industry.

Moreover, WOU contributes to industry and the community at large through the theses of its Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) students. The theses covered illustrate that research conducted in the University can potentially benefit the people.

Knowledge-sharing through free online talks further keeps WOU connected with the community. The presentation by a successful entrepreneur of his journey, showed the importance of steadfast perseverance in carving one's path of entrepreneurial success. Other talks encompassed topics like self-love, dispute resolution, and private equity investments.

Last but not least, WOU unveiled a new master's programme in system design engineering for the September 2023 intake to prepare learners for the technological landscape.

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WOU OFFERS RM700,000 IN SCHOLARSHIPS FOR TALENT DEVELOPMENT

WOU is offering 12 full scholarships worth up to RM700,000 to help develop a highly skilled workforce in Penang.

“The effort is in partnership with the state government and the Penang Women’s Development Corporation (PWDC),” WOU Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Lily Chan said at an event in the main campus on 28 August 2023.

As part of its strategic engagement with PWDC, WOU will fully sponsor tuition fees for three eligible women currently residing in Penang to undertake any WOU undergraduate or master’s degree programme of their choice.

Additionally, the University will award full scholarships for nine students born and currently residing in Penang - six are for students pursuing bachelor’s degree programmes in the School of Digital Technology (DiGIT) and three for those enrolling in other WOU programmes.

In thanking the Penang government and PWDC for their support to learners so as to nurture a future-ready generation, Prof Chan said, “These efforts will increase their participation in the workplace and in the development of the state and nation. Together, we are committed to capacity building, particularly empowering women and fostering talent development in vital sectors.”

She noted the growing demand for skilled talents in Penang with the increasing influx of foreign direct investments (FDIs) into Penang. “We can bridge the gap by equipping individuals with the right skills and knowledge, so that our graduates can help innovate and drive socio-economic growth in the state,” she said.

She said WOU's commitment to upskill TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) talents also aligns with the Penang2030 Master Plan’s initiatives to invest in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and TVET education. This will help to future-proof local manufacturing industries for the digital economy.

“WOU applies digital knowledge and technological skills to upskill, reskill and empower those working in Penang to stay ahead in the fast-evolving technological race,” Prof Chan asserted.

Meanwhile, State Executive Councillor for Social Development, Welfare and Non-Islamic Religious Affairs, YB Lim Siew Khim, said WOU is playing a vital role in enhancing the welfare and contributing to the overall social development of the Penang community.

“Keep up your good work, WOU, as you are a valuable

▼ Prof Chan (2nd from right) symbolically presents the cheque to the Penang Chief Minister.



partner for us to better serve the people of Penang,” she said.

She shared her aspiration to “work with esteemed higher learning institutions such as WOU on a multitude of educational initiatives to boost the skills of the workforce, elevate their socio-economic status, and contribute to the community”.

Penang Chief Minister, YAB Chow Kon Yeow, in lauding the collaboration, said: “This partnership between WOU, the state government and PWDC highlights our collective commitment to provide equal educational opportunities and fostering the growth of our state’s human capital.”

He stressed that in the era of technology-driven transformation, graduates must not only obtain degrees but also gain profound skills that align with industrial requirements.

“The paradigm shift necessitates continuous upskilling and reskilling, which means micro-credentials and short professional courses play a pivotal role. Education is more than just acquiring knowledge, it is about transforming lives, creating opportunities and shaping a brighter future for our state,” he pointed out.

He urged individuals to seize the opportunity to embark on a journey of growth and contribute to the advancement of the state, in line with the Penang2030 Vision.

EXPLORING EXPERTISE AND JOURNEYS

WOU recently launched the "Conversations with Thought Leaders" series which aims to gather industry experts at the forefront of their fields. The two recent sessions offered valuable insights and key takeaways that will surely benefit both the University community and the people of Penang.

UNVEILING TECH OPPORTUNITIES FOR PENANG AMIDST US-CHINA TIES

The global semiconductor industry is a US\$500 billion business annually, underlining the importance of the technology sector for Penang and Malaysia.

WOU's George Town Institute of Open and Advanced Studies (GIOAS) chairman **Tan Sri Andrew Sheng** spoke on *Global Semiconductor Industry Geopolitical Impact: Tech opportunities in Penang* during the gathering hosted by GIOAS.

More than 30 industry players and fund managers participated in the discourse at the main campus on 7 July 2023. They explored the implications of the escalating US-China geopolitical tensions and the opportunities for the advancement of Penang's technology industry.

Tan Sri Sheng said, "US is a longstanding leader in semiconductor design. There is a huge shortfall of design engineers in the US and elsewhere, and we need to reskill workers in the tech sector."

He noted that the US houses 32% of the world's semiconductor design engineers, contributing to 46% of the total global revenue. In contrast, China accommodates 28% of these engineers, responsible for generating 7.4% of the revenue worldwide.

He said the US containment of Chinese semiconductor and tech prowess is only going to increase, with sanctions, policies, and increasing protectionism. He further remarked, "The US depends on international students. As the US-China tension increases and the Chinese students return to China, the US will face a critical shortage."

Tan Sri Sheng said the US-China tensions have caused an influx of foreign direct investments into Malaysia, adding, "More influx of production will cause a shortage of engineers and skilled labour."



▲ Dato' PY Lai.

He highlighted that Penang's semiconductor industry has evolved into a thriving ecosystem comprising over 3,000 local tech companies and 350 multinational companies (MNCs). Additionally, the state boasts the highest share of manufacturing contribution to the GDP. "Penang has the best ecosystem to develop the tech industry, but it does not have that much talent," he lamented.

Dato' PY Lai, GEM chairman and former president of Motorola China, proposed the setting up of a Blue Chip Venture Capital Fund to spearhead the IC design industry in Malaysia.

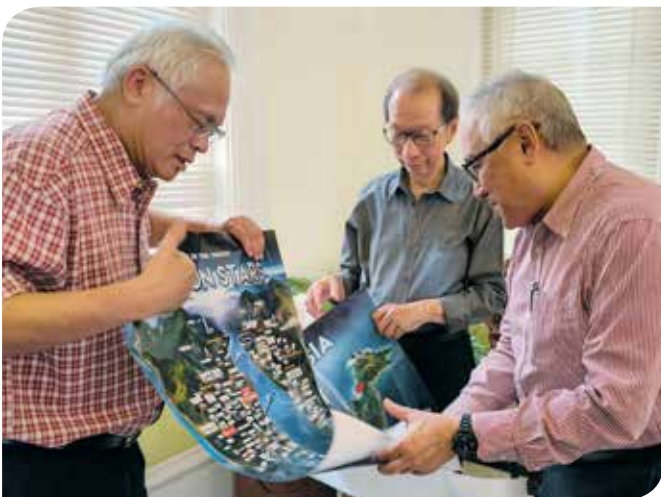
He said Malaysia could assume the role of a strategic partner, helping to build the semiconductor and technology facilities for China. This collaborative effort, in turn, would aid the advancement of Malaysia's IC design industry.

Fung Group deputy chairman **Dr William Fung** noted that tariffs and protectionist policies imposed on China are rooted in the notion of country of origin. He therefore proposed transforming a product from 'made in China' to 'made in Malaysia' by value-adding in Malaysia.

He believed that Penang's comparative advantage lies in creating a sustainable ecosystem through financing and skilled talent, given the constraints of its small consumer market.

InvestPenang chief executive officer **Dato' Loo Lee Lian** said priority is given to investments and projects that promote IC design in the semiconductor industry. "But we need talent. We are continuously engaging the universities to make them understand industry needs," she said.

Malaysia Semiconductor Industry Association president **Dato' Seri Wong Siew Hai** urged the government to permit foreign students studying in Malaysia to work a few years here after completing their degrees, to bridge the talent gap.



▲ (From right) Dr Fung, Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon and Dato' Seri Wong looking at industries in the Silicon Valley.

UNEARTHING THE PAST TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

▼ Prof Zuraina showcases excavated finds from Lenggong, Perak. (*The Star pic*)



When **Emeritus Professor Dato’ Dr Siti Zuraina Abdul Majeed** returned to Malaysia after completing her PhD at Yale University in 1978, archaeology was not widely recognised as relevant. Nevertheless, this did not deter her from pioneering and developing Malaysia’s archaeological research and academic programmes, blazing a trail for future generations.

WOU hosted Prof Zuraina, Malaysia’s first archaeologist and internationally acclaimed historian, at its main campus, where she addressed academics, professionals and industry leaders on 12 September 2023.

ARCHAEOLOGY PROMOTES INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING

In her presentation titled *Lessons from Archaeology for 21st Century Education*, she noted, “Over time, the education landscape has transitioned from specialised, cubby-holed subjects such as geography, history, and biology, to a more holistic and integrative approach that encompasses interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary learning, as exemplified in fields like biochemistry.”

She further emphasised, “Archaeology has embraced this approach for years. We are not confined by disciplinary boundaries; we merge the boundaries between the sciences and the arts.”

Prof Zuraina pointed out that modern archaeology, which fosters problem-solving, analytical, and critical thinking skills, holds relevance for any profession. She stated, “You can do anything because you possess the skills, tools and mindset to apply to any job. It’s a beautiful subject that links the arts and the sciences.”

Her groundbreaking discovery of Kota Tampan, a 74,000-year-old Palaeolithic stone tool workshop in Lenggong Valley, Perak, and the 11,000-year-old Perak Man, Southeast Asia’s oldest, most complete human skeleton, stands as a testament to decades of interdisciplinary collaborations.

“When I studied the contour maps of Lenggong, I worked together with geologists. It’s interdisciplinary and no longer bound by a single discipline. This is the kind of mindset we hope to instil in today’s learners,” she said.

“Don’t set boundaries,” she advised, highlighting that when fellow researchers from zoology, physics, chemistry, and biology joined her, they too “blurred their disciplinary boundaries”.

“This merging of knowledge and technology is very useful for students when they confront real-world problems. You’re not just solving problems for yourself, but also contributing to other disciplines,” she explained, adding that excavations of certain animals help zoologists in updating their extinction data.

THE ROLE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS

She also revealed how her findings of the Perak Man and Niah 1977 skeletons which exhibited significant congenital deformities still observed today, provided the earliest evidence and clues that are useful in medical science research.

Prof Zuraina’s discovery of Kota Tampan in Lenggong Valley filled a huge vacuum in Malaysian prehistory, providing crucial evidence that Peninsular Malaysia served as one of the migratory routes for early humans from Africa to Australia.

For over two decades, she devoted herself to excavating the sites at Lenggong Valley. In 2012, Lenggong Valley was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and continues to serve as a significant reference site for archaeologists.

“We are detectives of the past; we solve problems, so we work with a clear knowledge of what we want to solve,” she said.

Her demonstration of archaeology blurring and merging boundaries reinforces the importance of universities integrating knowledge from various disciplines to produce competitive graduates.

Prof Zuraina also played a pivotal role in helping the Penang state government prepare for the successful joint inscription of George Town and Melaka as UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2008.



◀ Prof Zuraina expounds the interdisciplinary approach in archaeology.

DBA STUDENTS DRIVE REAL-WORLD RESEARCH TO IMPACT SOCIETY

Three Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) candidates at WOU share how they combine academic methodologies with insights from their professional fields. This enables them to develop research projects that serve to improve organisational performance and yield benefits for both the industry and the public.



ESSENTIAL FACTORS FOR SUSTAINABLE HOTEL PERFORMANCE

Jimmy Chow, a veteran hotelier, has a deep affinity for the hospitality industry. Driven by his passion to contribute to the industry's growth and to continuous learning, the 67-year-old joined the DBA programme in 2019.

His doctoral thesis, *An Empirical Study of 5-star Hotels' Sustainable Performance*, focuses on five elements that impact a hotel's long-term growth and profitability. They are: the general-manager; cohesiveness of the management team and employees; customer satisfaction; a continuous improvement system; and conceptualising financial KPIs (key performance indicators) to measure business performance.

Chow, who holds a Master of Science in Tourism Management and Planning, highlighted that creating a balance between strategy, leadership and customer experience are essential for enhancing organisational performance and achieving sustained success.

"Organisations that effectively align their employees, leadership, organisational culture and customer service with their strategic direction tend to perform better financially," he said. His research findings can help hotels identify areas for improvement, initiate transformative changes, and develop the right strategies to elevate performance.

With a career spanning more than 35 years, Chow has held various positions and ascended to become the GM, director, and senior vice-president in international-standard hotels, both domestically and internationally. Among his notable achievements was the successful launch and management of The Prestige Hotel, a luxurious 5-star establishment in Penang.

For the past eight years, he has been a consultant director at Hotel Concept Consultancy, where he provides advisory services for hotel start-ups and rebranding initiatives, and conducts training programmes on hotel management.



COMMITTED TO ADVANCING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN PENANG

A woman entrepreneur for more than 10 years, Penangite **Yusnidar Abdul Rahman**, 57, hopes her doctoral thesis will create a better understanding and support for women entrepreneurs in the state.

Titled *Framing a Strategic Approach towards Sustainable Livelihoods: A Phenomenological Study of Women Portfolio Entrepreneurs in Penang*, the thesis focuses on portfolio entrepreneurs, i.e. women who opened second or multiple businesses simultaneously. She is particularly interested in women from the B40 category who managed to improve their earnings and come out of poverty.

Her research looks into the challenges faced in creating new ventures, and the support women entrepreneurs receive for business development. She aims to know "what and why women opened second businesses and how they are able to succeed".

The thesis findings can offer ideas to the state and federal governments in encouraging second businesses by providing rebates and grants to women who have successfully managed their businesses.

Yusnidar is currently the operations manager of Seal Dimensions Sdn Bhd, a company she founded in 2013. She ensures the smooth and efficient operations of the private school she manages.

She enrolled in the DBA programme in July 2019 to gain professional knowledge. She holds the Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Accounting (BBAC) degree and the Commonwealth Executive MBA (CeMBA), both from WOU.

She has been in education for about 30 years, and is actively involved with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including WomenBizSense, a registered women entrepreneur organisation based in Penang.



BOOSTING TRAINING IN JOHOR'S MANUFACTURING SPHERE

Jayakumar Raj, 61, believes that integrating stakeholders into the training needs analysis (TNA) process can significantly influence training success by aligning training programmes with the goals of organisations.

The corporate trainer and director of Optimum Professional Training Academy, Johor Bahru, is doing his thesis on *The Importance of Stakeholder Involvement in Johor Manufacturing Companies' Training Needs Analysis*.

He said stakeholders, including managers, supervisors, employees, customers, suppliers and industry experts, could offer diverse opinions derived from their extensive skills and experience.

"The input from stakeholders will enable firms to identify industry-specific training requirements that are in line with a company's strategic goals and industry standards," he further explained.

He added that companies that prioritise stakeholder participation "are well-positioned to produce a skilled workforce, improve performance, and contribute to the growth of Johor's manufacturing sector".

He said the study findings can therefore help Johor's manufacturing companies enhance their training strategies. This in turn, will lead to improved employee performance and organisational outcomes.

Jayakumar, who holds WOU's Commonwealth Executive MBA (CeMBA) degree, aspires to see more organisations engaging with stakeholders. "This will pave the way for collaborative opportunities and foster a mutually beneficial relationship between academia and industry."

He said the DBA programme had empowered his personal and professional growth and enhanced his critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and overall skills.

Amassing three decades of experience, he specialises in crafting and conducting training programmes on improving soft skills such as communication, leadership and time management. He also delivers training for specific tools, systems or technologies used within an organisation.

WOU LAUNCHES MASTER OF SCIENCE IN SYSTEM DESIGN ENGINEERING



WOU is offering a new master's engineering degree accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), from September 2023. The Master of Science in System Design Engineering (MScSDE) degree is tailored for individuals seeking a career in the fast-evolving technological landscape.

School of Technology & Engineering Science (STE) Dean **Assoc Prof Ts Dr Sean Tan Koon Tatt** said: "The MScSDE provides a comprehensive knowledge of contemporary theoretical and practical dimensions of system design, advanced computing technologies, and their real-world applications in semiconductor electronics, power electronics, IoT (Internet of Things) and mechatronics."

Students will also develop the ability to effectively tackle complex engineering challenges within the industry.

The programme, recognised by industry, will be delivered via the flexible, part-time, open distance learning (ODL) mode.

Among the core courses are: Embedded System Architecture and Design; Industrial Power Electronics; Advanced CMOS Analog and Mixed-Signal Circuit; Mechatronics System Design; and IoT Technology.

The MScSDE will open up job opportunities in engineering and technology, research institutes, and manufacturing. Graduates can work as a FPGA, Circuits, Analog or Digital Circuit engineer, Power electronics engineer, Instrumentation and Control engineer, or IoT specialist.

For entry, applicants must have a recognised bachelor's degree in engineering/engineering technology or its equivalent (including BSc or BTech), and possess a minimum CGPA of 2.5.

For international students, they must demonstrate a TOEFL score of 500 or IELTS score of 5.0, or its equivalent. Alternatively, WOU will offer English proficiency courses to help students meet the proficiency requirement of the programme.

Candidates aged above 30 years with relevant experience can apply through APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning).

WOU ACADEMY EMBRACES TRAINING

▼ Dr Balakrishnan.

▼ Dr Mohd Hushnie.



EMBRACING ESG PRIORITIES

Certified ESG analyst **Elysia Teh** explained that ESG integration encompasses environmental impact (e.g. pollution, carbon footprint, water usage), social responsibility (e.g. treatment of employees, impact on local community), and good governance (how a company is managed) in day-to-day operations.

"For the successful integration of ESG, individuals at all operational levels and decision-making tiers within an organisation must adopt an ESG mindset," she said in her talk titled *What is ESG Integration?*

ROUTES FOR EMPLOYEE DEPARTURE

WOU's School of Business & Administration (SBA) **Assoc Prof Dr Balakrishnan Muniapan**, in his webinar on *Termination without Violating the Law*, described the proper procedures that employers should follow when managing termination. He also discussed other forms of employee exit, including retrenchment, resignation, retirement, and the conclusion of a fixed-term contract.

BECOMING A SKILLED ONLINE LEARNER

WOU's Centre for Foundation Studies (CFS) head **Jasmine Emmanuel** highlighted how online learning has proven to be a convenient way to learn new skills for self-development or to gain professional qualifications.

Speaking on *What Makes a Successful Online Learner?*, she mentioned the skills and characteristics required for effective online learning.

VERSATILITY OF 3D PRINTING

School of Technology & Engineering Science (STE) Dean **Assoc Prof Ts Dr Sean Tan Koon Tatt** spoke on the basics

WOU Academy, the University's training arm, offers micro-credentials and short professional courses related to business and technology in the real-world environment.

In conjunction with National Training Week (NTW) organised by the Human Resources Ministry and the Human Resources Development Corporation (HRDC) from 22-27 May 2023, the academy conducted a series of eight free webinars for professional development and career advancement.



of Additive Manufacturing (AM), the different types of processes, and the materials used in each process.

In his talk titled *What is Additive Manufacturing (AM)?*, Dr Tan outlined the advantages and limitations of AM for prototyping and production, such as creating complex geometries, reducing material waste, and customising designs.

He also mentioned the latest developments in AM technology, including the use of biodegradable and metal materials, 4D and 5D printing, and the potential for mass customisation.

SMART APPLICATIONS OF IoT IN DAILY USE

STE lecturer **Dr Mohamad Hushnie Haron** spoke on *Mechatronic Systems with IoT (Internet of Things)*.

The application of IoTs in a mechatronic system can provide improved efficiency and cost savings, enhanced safety and security, and the freedom to customise device capabilities. This technology is being used in various industries, such as transportation, healthcare, robotics and manufacturing.

WIDE USE OF PYTHON PROGRAMMING

STE senior lecturer **Dr Mohd Hezri Marzaki**, in his talk titled *Introduction to Python Programming*, shared how Python was widely used for various applications, specifically web development, data analysis, AI and machine learning.

GUIDANCE FOR ACCA STUDENTS

Head of WOU Academy, **Steven Khor**, shared *Techniques to Pass ACCA SBL Paper* to help ACCA students with their Strategic Business Leader (SBL) examination.

MASTERING THE ART OF BUSINESS NEGOTIATION



▲ Dr Anbalagan Krishnan.

Negotiation is about cooperating to achieve a mutually-beneficial win-win situation and is surely not a game intended to defeat the other side.

According to WOU's School of Business & Administration (SBA) Deputy Dean **Assoc Prof Dr Anbalagan Krishnan**, "Negotiation is a process in which one pursues favourable terms and conditions from those who

seek something in return. Additionally, negotiation serves as a means to resolve conflicts by reaching an agreeable compromise."

Speaking at an online seminar on *Business Negotiation: Yay and Nay*, organised by WOU Academy, Dr Anbalagan offered tips on negotiation, such as learning to read the other person's body language, including hand gestures, facial expressions, and how they speak or move their body.

"Remain calm, even when confronting destructive behaviour. Do not match or react to such behaviour," he said, stressing that the goal was to achieve a win-win situation that satisfied the interests of all parties involved, while maintaining the relationship.

He also spoke on the power of silence and understanding culture as techniques in negotiation.

"By aligning one's behaviour with the acceptable cultural norms, it is possible to gain the other party's confidence and trust," he said.

FOUR PHASES OF BUSINESS NEGOTIATION

Dr Anbalagan outlined four stages of a business negotiation: Preparation, Debate, Proposal and Bargaining.

For effective preparation, he suggested, "Do your homework, gather information. Be clear of what you want, and keep these objectives in mind as you enter into the negotiation."

The next is Debate, which involves uncovering what the other side wants. "Ask questions. The more questions you ask, the more insights you gain about the other party."

After Debate, follows the Proposal. "Stress the conditions first before presenting what you can offer them." He said this approach will allow the other side to clarify what they can

offer in return and the accompanying conditions.

Lastly, the Bargaining takes place. "You want to conclude the deal, or finalise the negotiated items, such as pricing or project completion timelines," he said.

KEY FACTORS IN NEGOTIATION

Dr Anbalagan said negotiators are categorised into two types: "red" and "blue". Red negotiators are aggressive and competitive, resorting to ploys and tactics as they want to "win everything". Blue negotiators are kinder, accommodating and cooperative, willing to modify their demands.

"Achieving a compromise requires one to be willing to adapt. While one may adopt a red mindset at the outset of the negotiation, but through discussion, both sides should ideally reach blue-blue for a win-win situation," he added.

He highlighted two common terms in negotiation: The best alternative to a negotiated agreement, (BATNA) which refers to a backup option a side has if negotiation fails; and the worst alternative to a negotiated agreement (WATNA).

Dr Anbalagan said it was important to understand the best and worst alternatives during the preparation stage, in case negotiations become deadlocked.

He also identified five essential skills in negotiation: leadership, communication, persuasion, conflict handling, and decision-making.

"Leadership here involves traits like beliefs, values, ethics, character, knowledge, and skills," he asserted.



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LOGISTICS AND SUPPLY CHAIN PROGRAMME EARNS PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION

▼ Prof Chan (2nd from right) and Prof Chang (2nd from left) do the honours as Prakash and Leong (left) look on. ▼ Prof Chang from LogM.



WOU's business degree programme in logistics and supply chain management (BBLC) has received the stamp of approval from the Society of Logisticians, Malaysia (LogM), the leading professional body for logisticians in the country.

The approval is a testament to the programme's quality and its relevance to the needs of the industry.

The strategic alliance was officially sealed with the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) by WOU Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Lily Chan, and LogM President Prof Log Ts Chang Kah Loon, at the WOU main campus on 17 July 2023.

Under the MoA, LogM will facilitate the admission of BBLC students as student members of the body. Both parties may also organise events, and collaborate on research projects so as to equip students and professionals with the relevant knowledge and skills to thrive in the dynamic logistics industry.

Prof Chan said, "The degree opens up opportunities to a lucrative career in the logistics industry, such as in logistics planning, supply chain management and warehouse management." In encouraging students to seize the networking avenues offered by LogM, she elaborated, "Our students have the prospect to connect with the logistics students of other universities."

She stressed the need for Malaysia to urgently address the shortage of skilled logistics workers, especially in Penang. "We can benefit from the input of LogM into our degree programme so that it matches the needs of industry for skilled logistic professionals," she said.

Prof Chang of LogM noted that the logistics profession has a rich history spanning more than 100 years. He said, "A logistician is responsible for commanding the movement

of ships and the entire world's transactions, planning the production and international trade, and driving economic growth for organisations."

Furthermore, logisticians bear significant responsibilities in guaranteeing the seamless execution of international trade and global businesses without disruptions. He reassured LogM's commitment to ensuring a sufficient number of qualified logisticians to meet the country's demands.

Prof Chang also announced two special awards for outstanding students who demonstrate exceptional academic achievements.

The WOU-LogM Best Student Award grants a cash prize and medal to the highest-achieving BBLC graduate during WOU's convocation ceremony. Additionally, deserving students will receive the LogM President's Award medals at LogM's event.

Founded in 2010, LogM serves as the professional body that confers the title of "Logistician" or "Log" to recognise qualified logisticians in Malaysia. They include academic and practising logisticians in the fields of logistics, transport and supply chain.

The signing of the agreement was witnessed by then Dean of the School of Business & Administration (SBA), Prakash V Arumugam, and LogM Secretary General, Log Leong Kin Wah.

Local statistics indicate that in 2022, Malaysia's logistics industry constituted 3.5% of the nation's total gross domestic product (GDP), valued at RM62.20 billion. The domestic logistics sector is projected to reach RM66.25 billion in 2023 and further expand to RM87.57 billion in 2027.

The logistics industry is regarded as the backbone of Malaysia's supply chain ecosystem.

PATHWAY TO SUCCESS: THE UNFOLDING OF AN ENTREPRENEUR

Despite careful planning, one cannot foresee external events. Therefore, it is important to have the heart and belief when embarking on a business venture.

Goon Koon Yin, the chief executive officer of TT Vision Holdings Bhd, was sharing his 22-year entrepreneurial journey, highlighting the highs and lows of his business.

Addressing an online talk on *Building a Sustainable Business*, organised by WOU's School of Business & Administration (SBA) and School of Technology & Engineering Science (STE) on 25 June 2023, he advised, "Proceed and test your capabilities in the market in a chosen field."

In 2001, merely a week after leaving his seven-year job as an engineer, Goon founded TT Vision as a private limited company. This unfortunately coincided with the 9/11 terror attacks, but undeterred he forged ahead, commencing with a small team and a handful of customers to sustain his nascent business.

"If you have the aspiration and motivation, and you know your abilities, then that becomes the most appropriate time to proceed. Despite the challenges, this is when you are most fired up and ready to go," he shared.

TT Vision, a pioneering vision inspection equipment company, initially served multinational (MNC) clients from the electrical and electronics (E&E) industry in Penang, before expanding within the state and Malaysia. Over a span of three years, he ventured into the international market, exporting to countries like Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, China, Japan and South Korea.

"We leveraged on the presence of major MNCs in Penang which had set up factories here. Through referrals, we talked to MNCs which have sites in Malaysia, and, from there, engaged with their international sites," Goon said.

The company recorded a revenue of RM600,000 in 2001, which rose to over RM12 million in 2009 and RM30 million in 2010. In 2005, he lost half of his workforce to customers who wanted to produce the same products. Despite the setback, the company continued to grow.

In 2009, the company started sourcing for external funding, exploring avenues such as venture capital and government grants. They raised nearly RM9 million for R&D, enabling the creation of high-value products.

From 2010-2014, the company suffered losses as it transitioned from tailoring solutions for a limited customer base, to producing standard products for the mass market.

▼ CEO Goon Koon Yin.



With the raised capital however, they expanded their workforce and enhanced their facilities.

The introduction of a new product line took several years for testing and market validation. During this interim period, they generated revenue by selling their existing products. They also allocated resources to protect their intellectual property, including cybersecurity and filing patents in Malaysia and other key markets.

"When starting a business, two critical aspects are to develop your product and to safeguard it, including your talent," Goon emphasised.

The company upped its profits with the sale of its new products starting in 2015. By 2019, the company became listed on the LEAP Market of Bursa Malaysia to raise capital for the expansion of their facility to accommodate larger-scale projects. Further upgrades followed throughout 2020 to 2022.

A significant milestone was achieved in January 2023 when it was officially listed on the ACE Market, having earned RM50 million the preceding year.

Goon's aim is to expand into European and US markets, targeting RM100 million this year and a few hundred millions in the near future. The ultimate goal is to get listed on the MAIN Market.

EMPOWERING WOMEN LEADERS FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Women leaders in higher education have an important role to play in shaping a sustainable world for future generations. Regrettably, they are often marginalised in pivotal decision-making roles despite their well-established competence and expertise in the educational realm.

"Women are under-represented in positions of leadership in higher education institutions, particularly in developing countries. It seems men are often preferred for these roles as they are perceived to be tough," WOU's Centre for ODL Experiences (COLE) head **Assoc Prof Dr Dewi Amat Sapuan** said.

Offering her viewpoint on advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5) on gender equality, Dr Dewi also provided valuable insights from the 2022 Pan-Commonwealth workshop titled *Women Leaders: Shaping the Future for a Sustainable World*.

This conference, a collaborative effort between WOU and the Canada-headquartered Commonwealth of Learning (COL), proved to be a platform for enriching discussions.

Dr Dewi outlined four crucial elements necessary to bolster women leaders in higher education as they strive to create a more sustainable future: mentorship, networking, ICT knowledge, and engagement in climate change action.

"Women leaders must be provided with mentoring opportunities. Such mentorship not only gives a safe space for personal growth but also grants them access to networks and helpful connections," she highlighted.

She stressed that women leaders need to create robust networks in order to enact meaningful change. "Additionally, empowering women with skills in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is another important aspect," she said.

▼ Dr Dewi Amat Sapuan advocates for more women leaders.



She urged women leaders to equip themselves with skills to effectively leverage on new technologies and social media platforms to accelerate the progress of their initiatives.

Dr Dewi also felt that more women should be provided the opportunity and occasion to champion climate change issues. She pointed out that numerous past studies have consistently accentuated that women leaders exhibit heightened concern regarding climate change and its potential impact on future generations.

On a related note, she reflected how the Covid-19 pandemic had magnified the pivotal role of women in the workforce, as they bravely stood at the forefront in their professional responsibilities while managing their domestic duties.

"No doubt women continue to encounter long-standing structural inequalities across various sectors. But the pandemic has undeniably acted as a wake-up call for economies around the world. It underscored the importance of positioning women at the heart of recovery and post-pandemic management efforts," she added.

She also cited evidence of gender inequality, drawing attention to the findings from the UN Women (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women) report on the global gender response tracker for Covid-19. She mentioned that out of the 206 countries worldwide, 20% had not implemented any gender-sensitive measures at all.

Dr Dewi was among the panel speakers during a recent online session organised by DISTED College. The event coincided with this year's Earth Day themed "Invest in Our Planet," which calls for intensified conservation efforts towards a more sustainable future.



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THE POST-DEAL DIFFERENCE: DRIVING INVESTMENT VALUE

▼ Sathis Manoharen.



Post-deal teams within private equity (PE) firms are proving instrumental in not only adding substantial value to portfolio companies but also in generating heightened returns on investments.

According to **Sathis Manoharen**, Vice President of Group Strategy at MR DIY Malaysia, private equity firms use funds from investors, with the post-deal team, also referred to as the value creation team, delivering value to the targeted company.

"After the deal is signed and the PE firm acquires a controlling or minority stake in a company, a post-deal team is typically deployed to operate within the portfolio company," he explained.

"They actively engage with the CEO and management, offering suggestions that add value to the product, boost revenue, and expand the company's market share," he continued. The team also provides guidance to the portfolio company, recommending the disposal of underperforming business segments that drag down its earnings.

He noted, "The post-deal team's entrepreneurial mindset empowers them to be more efficient and pragmatic in decision-making."

Sathis highlighted that the post-deal team ensures thorough operational analyses and due diligence are conducted before formulating and implementing sustainable changes to the company's operations.

Given the PE firm's engagement across diverse industries, the team effectively cross-pollinates ideas, applying data and insights gathered from other portfolio companies to benefit a particular company.

The post-deal team's entrepreneurial mindset empowers them to be more efficient and pragmatic in decision-making.

He emphasised that the post-deal team takes charge of project implementation, selects key personnel to drive initiatives, and recruits and trains talents. All these actions are designed to strategically propel the company in the right direction.

"The over-riding purpose of a post-deal team," Sathis added, "is to deliver value to the shareholders who have invested in the business, particularly when the time comes for the PE firm to exit the deal."

He cited a case study in which the post-deal team managed to increase a retail company's profit margin by 11% while simultaneously reducing inventory by nearly 50% in a one-year period.

"We got rid of certain products that had low margins and low sales or transactions. We also focused on implementing individual incentives for the sales team" he said.

Sathis was speaking at a webinar on *Why You Need a Post-Deal Team in Private Equity*, organised by WOU's School of Business & Administration (SBA) on 20 May 2023 to kick off its Leadership Talk Series.

He shared data from Private Equity International that indicated that the PE sector is showing a significant growth globally. The global PE dry powder, an industry term denoting capital, surged three-fold from US\$1.2 trillion in 2011 to US\$3.4 trillion in 2021.

He said that private equity firms, especially in North America, were raising record amounts of capital for investments in the PE market. "The capital craze in the PE industry even exceeded the GDP (gross domestic product) of certain countries. Over the last five years, a total of US\$716 billion in funds were successfully raised by 25 private equity firms," he observed.

He stressed, "More and more private equity firms are recognising the value of having a post-deal team to generate substantial returns."

NAVIGATING DISPUTES IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Disputes often arise in the construction industry because of differing perspectives, priorities, objectives and interests of the contracting parties.

When a dispute occurs, it is important to understand what the concerned parties want before an informed decision can be made on the appropriate resolution method.

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) Construction Law senior lecturer **Dr Zul Zakiyuddin Ahmad Rashid** said it was important to assess the disagreement and its potential impact on the project. "Those who put the success of the project above their interests and rights indicate their willingness to evaluate their options to create a win-win situation for all," he stated.

Dr Zul was addressing a webinar on *There is a dispute. So, what's next?* organised by WOU's School of Technology & Engineering Science (STE) on 28 May 2023.

He said disputants must take into account factors like privacy and confidentiality, legal enforceability, and cost implications when deciding how to resolve the dispute. Other considerations are the availability of resources and expertise, the nature of the dispute, preserving the relationship, control and involvement, as well as speed and efficiency.

Dr Zul cited six common reasons why parties choose to resolve disputes - seeking a fair resolution; protecting their rights and interests; preserving professional relationships; minimising costs and time; achieving a sustainable solution; and preserving the reputation of all the parties involved.

The alternative dispute resolution (ADR) techniques of negotiation and mediation, and arbitration and adjudication, are discussed below.

"The suitability of each method selected for any dispute resolution depends on the needs of the parties involved", he stressed.

NEGOTIATION AND MEDIATION

Negotiation and mediation methods promote mutual understanding between both parties.

He said, "Negotiation and mediation require collaborative problem-solving, direct communication, and voluntary agreement between the parties involved."

"Negotiation seeks to achieve an outcome that is acceptable to the parties concerned," he pointed out, stressing, "It is important to formally document the negotiation decision. If you fail to make it official by way of a mutual settlement agreement, the decision is as good as lip service."

▼ Dr Zul Zakiyuddin (USM pic).



Dr Zul said that though mediation was a powerful dispute resolution tool, the challenge was in choosing the right mediator and knowing when to use this recourse.

"Mediators do not solve disputes but rather guide parties to gain a better understanding of the dispute and available resolution options. The role of the mediator is to offer perspectives to both parties in understanding the stakes, the potential benefits, and the best and worst options," he highlighted.

ARBITRATION AND ADJUDICATION

Dr Zul said arbitration and adjudication methods were more confrontational in nature and involved a neutral third-party to make a legally-binding decision in resolving the dispute. The arbitrator's decision, called an award, is a final and binding resolution to the dispute. Arbitration decisions made in Malaysia are enforceable in over 160 countries.

He explained, "When signing a contract that contains an arbitration clause, the signatories have no choice but to follow the arbitration process in the event of a dispute, unless they agree to waive the clause and proceed with litigation."

In fact, the Construction Industry Payment and Adjudication Act (CIPAA) 2012 provides for a statutory adjudication process to resolve payment disputes. "This process typically takes about five months, and the losing parties have the option to challenge the CIPAA decision in the High Court to seek a deferment of payment," he noted.

EMBRACING SELF-LOVE: KEY TO A MORE FULFILLING LIFE

The path of self-love is a lifelong voyage, complete with its ebbs and flows. Yet through patience and consistent effort, it is possible to nurture a deep love for oneself, paving the way for a more fulfilling and joyful life.

Licensed counsellor **Adrienne Siew**, an alumna of WOU with a degree in psychology (BAPS), emphasised the importance of cultivating self-love through intentional actions that foster physical, psychological and spiritual growth.



► Siew is a licensed counsellor.

CULTIVATING SELF-LOVE

Essential habits for cultivating self-love are: engaging in self-reflection; practising self-compassion; addressing negative self-talk; setting boundaries; prioritising self-care; surrounding yourself with supportive people; embracing self-discovery; and seeking professional support.

Siew was speaking at a public webinar on *Self-Love*, organised by WOU's School of Education, Humanities & Social Sciences (SEHS) on 15 July 2023.

"Self-reflection enables you to recognise and intercept negative thoughts as they arise. Forgive yourself when you make mistakes or do not do something well. Learn from it and move on.

"Delve into the reasons behind any negative self-talk so that you can deal with it. And when you have a supportive social circle, this will give you added strength. Embrace self-discovery, especially when you find things you do not like, and seek professional help for deeper issues," she added.

She said self-love allows one to recognise and value his or her own needs, desires and boundaries, and to treat oneself with kindness, compassion, and forgiveness.

"Self-love also involves recognising your strengths, celebrating your accomplishments, and accepting your flaws and imperfections without judgement or self-criticism," she highlighted.

OBSTACLES TO SELF-LOVE

The barriers to self-love are negative self-talk, past trauma or conditioning, comparison and social media influence. Siew listed others as perfectionism and high self-expectations, external validation and approval-seeking, and a lack of self-care.

"We should be aware of negative self-talk, like "I am not good enough", "I cannot do it" or "I am too old", and do what is needed to remove such thoughts. Past trauma may also make one feel unworthy," she explained.

She said that social media promotes comparisons and has its influences, especially when they see others posting themselves on holiday, having fun, or being perfect.

"No doubt everyone needs some external validation, particularly from parents or bosses, but if the approval-seeking becomes detrimental for us, then that is not helpful," she warned.

She encouraged adopting self-care for overall wellness. "Have time for self-reflection, listen to music, and do things that make you feel good. Exercise, eat well."

SEVEN SEGMENTS OF SELF-LOVE

According to Siew, the seven facets of self-love are self-awareness, self-exploration, self-kindness, self-respect, self-growth, self-care, and self-esteem.

She said self-awareness makes you aware and thus responsible for your thoughts, emotions and behaviour.

"When you are angry, that does not mean you can lash out at others. Instead, it prompts you to take accountability and to recognise the need for personal space to dissipate that anger," she elaborated.

She shared that self-exploration involves learning about yourself and embracing your weaknesses.

She also stressed the need to be kind towards oneself and refrain from imposing excessive personal expectations like "I should do this and that".

"Self-respect encourages you to be brave and advocate for yourself," she said, while adding, "Establish boundaries in order to prevent burnout."

Finally, self-esteem, she clarified, reflects how you view yourself and acknowledge your self-worth.

UNSTOPPABLE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE AND GROWTH

Twenty-six-year-old **Chong Juk Khai's** zeal in life is for continuous learning and accumulating knowledge, which led him to WOU.

The lad from Kuching, Sarawak, will receive his MBA in Construction Management (MBACM) in November 2023. He obtained the Bachelor of Technology (Hons) in Construction Management (BTCM) degree from WOU in 2021 and holds a recognised real estate negotiator licence.

He started working as a contractor's quantity surveyor at R&D Construction Sdn Bhd in March 2023. He has been involved in the development of two public schools, a housing development in Kota Samarahan, a Salvation Army project, and a factory expansion.

"I want to promote social housing and public housing development in Sarawak so as to help the less privileged and make a difference in the community," he said.

As part of his work, he does cost estimation for projects, assists in tendering, and deals with procurement, including liaising with the contractor and suppliers. Other responsibilities are contract management, cost control, value engineering, and handling final accounts.

Chong previously worked as a contractor's junior quantity surveyor at Pembinaan Dirgahayu Sdn Bhd for a year. He has vast knowledge of the construction industry and is especially well-versed in technology, methodology, management and contract. His grasp of the uniform building bylaws and ordinances, government policies, and local authority requirements have proven handy in his job.



The MBACM enabled me to assume leadership roles, make informed decisions, and drive construction projects...

He appreciates all that he has learnt from the MBACM programme, such as managing human resources, projects, costs and procurement. It helps him to effectively manage teams in the construction industry and ensure the success of a project.

"The MBACM enabled me to assume leadership roles, make informed decisions, and drive construction projects while addressing the needs and interests of the various stakeholders," he added.

In line with his zest for lifelong learning, he is determined to pursue international professional qualifications on accounting (e.g. CISA, CGMA, ACCA), property surveying, quantity surveying, occupational safety and health, human resource management, and the Project Management Professional (PMP) certification.

"The MBACM is the passport to help me pursue all these professional papers and certifications," Chong asserted.

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