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# Continuing Education For ASEAN Communication Educators And Trainers

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The communication education and training programs is highly competitive relative to other social science programs in the ASEAN region. This is the impression I gathered when I visited some universities in the ASEAN in 1992. However, the rapid changes in the region suggest that we should strive to make our communication curricula more responsive to the realities in the area.

The rapid socioeconomic, geopolitical and techno-cultural changes that we have increasingly experienced in the ASEAN community suggest the urgent need to re-tool our communication programs in line with the emerging cybercommunity.

Communication educators and trainers in the region are mainly responsible for ensuring the continuing relevance of our communication programs in this part of the most economically dynamic region in the world. But are we prepared to perform this role? To answer this question with confidence, we need to have a continuing education program for ASEAN educators and trainers.

This paper suggests some leads on the development of a continuing education program for communication educators and trainers that will continuously attune us to the never ending development of ASEAN-sensitive communication curricula, training programs and teaching learning materials.

To be truly relevant to the Information Age, I propose to start a project on Continuing Communication Education Program (CCEP) which, if proven useful, can be institutionalised as a regular program of ASEAN. The proposed CCEP can be conceptualised and developed into a project proposal in

consultation with a core group of highly respected communication educators, trainers and entrepreneurs. Bilateral or multilateral funding agencies can be tapped to fund the project. The project should utilise the best existing manpower resources on communication and available facilities in the ASEAN, and in the world.

This program should adopt new orientations which I feel is not given much importance in existing communication instruction programs in ASEAN. In the proposed program, we should learn the dynamic process of shifting from the existing orientation to the more responsive orientations needed by the rapidly changing environment in the region.

Based on my limited observations and impressions about the communication education and training programs in the ASEAN, the new orientations that we need to consider in upgrading our communication instruction programs are:

**1. Technical orientation to managerial orientation.**

We urgently need training on communication management. We need integrative courses that would piece together our compartmentalised course offerings. For example, we are developing Communication Management as a concept that would integrate research, staffing/organising, directing and coordinating, and monitoring and evaluation. We have found this concept very useful in managing large scale communication projects in China and Sri Lanka.

**2. Conceptual orientation to operational orientation.**

Much of our curriculum contents are conceptual. Thus, these ideas remain difficult to implement. We need skills, not only in developing new concepts but also in operationalising them down to the doable level. As communication specialists, we must excel in this activity.

**3. Action planning to strategic planning.**

Traditionally, communication practitioners do not plan. But if we want communication to be recognised as a major component of national and regional development plans, we must be skilled in planning. Now is the time to shift our knowledge and skill from action planning (short-term) to strategic planning (long-term). Basic to this shift is understanding of the concepts of vision,

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mission, mandate, goals and objectives. We should understand and apply these concepts to our field.

### **4. Data generation and accumulation to data synthesis and utilisation.**

In this Information Age, one of the problems that often confronts us is information overload. How to analyse, synthesise and utilise voluminous research data for developing communication models, approaches, methodologies and tools in communication should be among our most important concerns.

### **5. Concept critiquing to concept development.**

We academics are known for our skill in critical review where the purpose is "to tear ideas apart". With the increasing new ideas that are available, we need to develop our skill in piecing together scattered but related information and data into programs and projects. As communicators, we must strive to be the best in developing "soft technologies" that guide action. These include new models, principles, methods and tools that are useful to the social sciences and practitioners in the field.

### **6. Producing independent researchers to developing team researchers.**

Thesis writing courses are generally designed to develop highly skilled individualistic researchers. We need now more highly skilled team oriented researchers. To develop this group oriented researcher, we should encourage more thesis students in communication to work on research problems that require teamwork.

For our continuing education in Communication Research, we need to focus on these subject areas for investigation:

#### **1. Management and operation of communication offices.**

The studies are designed to document the processes of managing and operating both government and private media organisations.

#### **2. Communication curricula studies.**

These studies focus on the objectives, contents, methods and evaluation of communication curricula in the different schools of communication in the ASEAN member countries.

#### **3. Communication institution building.**

These studies investigate the strengths and weaknesses of communication organisations and identify needed resources and activities to strengthen them.

#### **4. Communication policy and planning studies.**

These studies review existing communication policies and plans and identify gaps that need to be filled.

**5. Communication effects and impacts studies.**

Much of the studies in this area look into the effectiveness of different packages of information and various modes of delivering this information in improving knowledge, attitude and skills of target audiences. Impact studies of communication in organisations and communities should also be explored. Effects are personal changes while impacts are social changes brought about by communication.

**6. Communication graduate tracer studies.**

These studies trace the job placement of communication graduates so that they can be tapped to contribute their ideas in providing clearer direction and needed resources to the communication programs of the schools where they graduated.

**7. Manpower demand and supply studies.**

These studies are designed to determine the communication manpower demand for and supply of communication graduates in the ASEAN countries. Thus, guiding the schools in producing communication graduates based on needs.

**8. Research and development program studies.**

These studies explore the viability of existing research and development units in communication and other social sciences. The purpose is to explore the possibilities of strengthening them and establishing networks among them so that the network can contribute more to informed decision making.

We also need skills training on faster ways of gathering, processing and reporting research data such as the rapid project appraisal and rapid participatory monitoring and evaluation.

Skills on developing social research data into social technologies should be given high priority. Social technologies include new concepts, models, systems, methods and tools that could improve communication efficiency and effectiveness.

Short term training courses offered by select international and national training organisations that operate in the region could provide excellent opportunities to continuously update ourselves on recent developments in Communication. We should also expose ourselves to training that cover both communication software and hardware to help us see their relevance to our discipline. Some of the training courses that I feel are relevant to us are:

**1. Managing communication and advocacy campaigns.**

This course should deal with the theory and practice of managing, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating

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communication campaigns for enterprise and other development concerns.

**2. Communication and social mobilisation.**

This course should analyse and integrate various old and new interrelated concepts into a unified whole. For example, social mobilisation can consolidate the concepts of communication, advocacy, lobbying, empowerment, participation. This course should also demonstrate how to operationalise these concepts and use these in developing integrated communication plan of action.

**3. Communication research monitoring and evaluation.**

This course focuses on the concepts and practice of using research, monitoring and evaluation as feedback systems and tools of management in ensuring the success of programs and projects.

**4. Hardware and software integration and utilisation.**

This course should expose communication educators and trainers on the interrelationships between communication hardware and software in planning and improving literacy, productivity, income, standard of living and quality of life of the ASEAN people.

Hopefully this proposed project will help develop top quality communication educators and trainers who will consequently produce professional leaders who are dynamically responsive to new developments in the region. ■

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