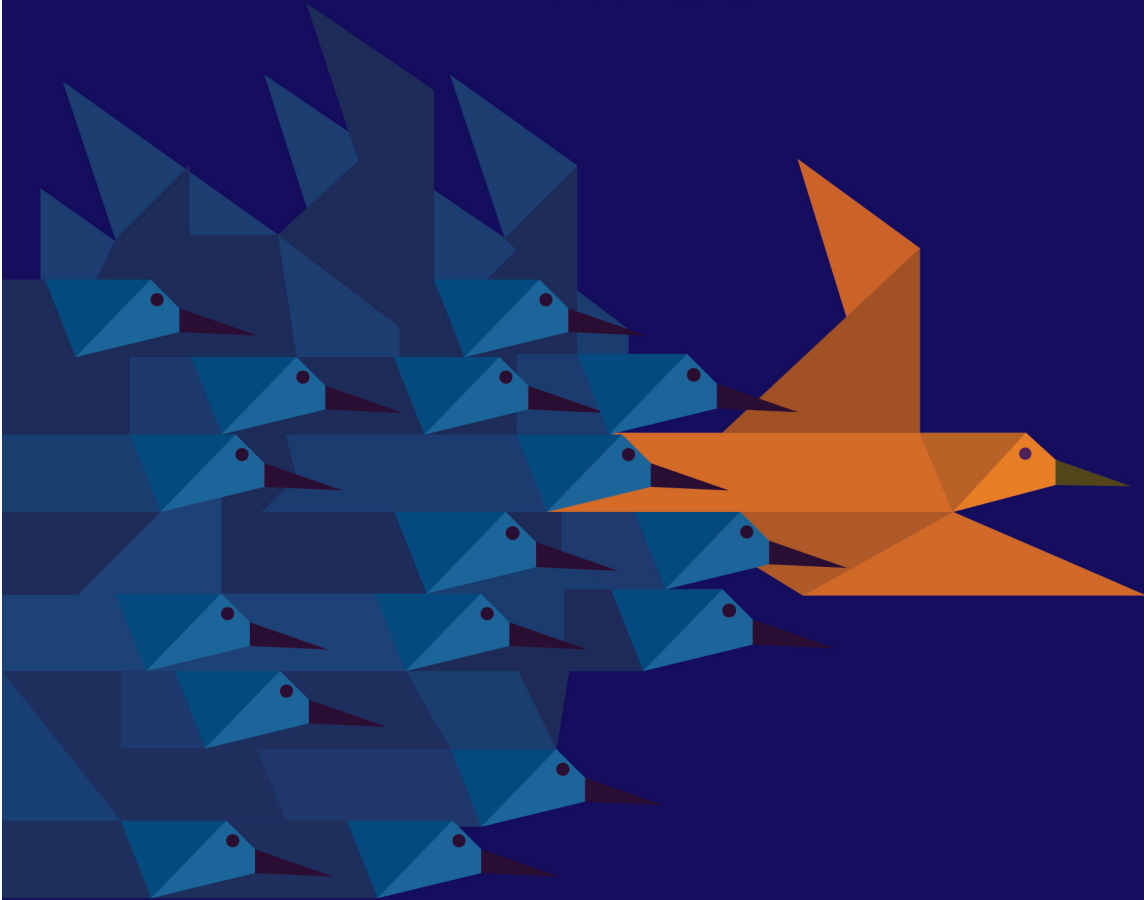


LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE PANDEMICS: UNDERSTANDING CRISIS FATIGUE



EDITORS
WARDATUL AKMAM DIN
SUYANSAH SWANTO
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**LEADERSHIP THROUGH
THE PANDEMICS:**
UNDERSTANDING CRISIS
FATIGUE

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Topic:

LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE PANDEMICS: UNDERSTANDING CRISIS FATIGUE



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20 August 2021 (Friday)

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PREFACE

The AKEPT Global Series webinar gathering brought together some of the most revered leaders in the realm of higher learning institutions (HLIs), including scholars from both national and international domains. The focus of our deliberations was on fortifying authoritative prowess amidst the daunting challenge of crisis fatigue, a complex issue that has plagued academic institutions throughout the relentless pandemic.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic undeniably ushered in unparalleled challenges for universities and their leadership cohorts. Amidst this myriad of challenges, crisis fatigue emerged as a pivotal concern. This term encapsulates the mental and emotional exhaustion experienced by individuals enduring prolonged periods of stress and ambiguity.

Within the domain of universities, crisis fatigue has manifested in multifaceted dimensions. Faculty, staff, and students find themselves inundated by the incessant alterations in campus policies and pedagogical methodologies. Coupled with the perpetual uncertainty surrounding the trajectory of the pandemic, this has resulted in a discernible decline in motivation, engagement, and productivity among these stakeholders.

Addressing this crisis fatigue demands a multifaceted approach. First and foremost, there is a need to prioritize the dissemination of clear and consistent communication. Regular updates concerning the institution's response to the pandemic serve as a cornerstone, mitigating confusion and allaying anxiety within the academic community.

Moreover, leaders must proactively provide resources and assistance to those grappling with pandemic-induced mental health issues. Offering access to

counselling services, support groups, and other therapeutic interventions proves instrumental in aiding individuals to cope with the escalating stress and anxiety.

Additionally, fostering a sense of camaraderie and belongingness within the academic community is imperative. Virtual social interactions, active engagement in extracurricular pursuits, and the celebration of noteworthy achievements among students and faculty collectively contribute to sustaining a profound sense of connection and purpose.

In essence, the imperative task of assuaging crisis fatigue stands as a linchpin of effective university leadership in the throes of the pandemic. By championing transparent communication, extending robust support for mental well-being, and nurturing a vibrant sense of community, leaders can substantially mitigate the adverse effects of prolonged stress and uncertainty on their constituents. This strategic approach not only ensures the well-being, of the academic community but also fortifies the very foundations of higher learning institutions.

Associate Professor Dr. Wardatul Akmam Din

Universiti Malaysia Sabah

Editor-in-Chief

FOREWORD

Professor Dato' Dr. Nasrudin Mohammed

Director

Higher Education Leadership Academy (AKEPT)

I express my heartfelt gratitude to be in your esteemed presence today. Our deepest thanks are extended to Allāh Subhānahū wa Taālā, for His boundless mercy. First and foremost, I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to the management of Akademi Kepimpinan Pendidikan Tinggi (AKEPT) and UMS for the gracious invitation. I commend the organizers for their unwavering dedication in fostering thought on leadership, especially during these challenging times amidst the ongoing pandemic.

As we are all acutely aware, we find ourselves amidst a crisis of unprecedented magnitude. The global shockwaves caused by the pandemic have spared no industry, including education. As of March 23, over 124 countries have shuttered their educational institutions, affecting more than 1.25 billion learners worldwide. History teaches us that the most formidable challenges, such as the current COVID-19 crisis, often pave the way for the emergence of innovative and successful leaders.

In this context, forums like the one we are partaking in today assume paramount importance. Such occasions provide a platform for influential leaders to share their ideas and insights, as eloquently stated by the 6th President of the United States, “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader.”

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on recent and upcoming graduates' employability has reverberated globally, posing crucial questions about the challenges these graduates face in the evolving job market. We had anticipated a return to normalcy, but many find themselves more isolated than ever before. The

balance between work and life, envisaged to be restored by now, remains elusive for many, with prolonged hours of work and an uncertain future casting a shadow over our realities.

I have been apprised that the focus of the second series of forums is “PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE POST COVID-19 GRADUATES LABOUR MARKET.” Hence, it is timely for leaders in higher education to contemplate the way forward, enhancing graduates’ employability and ensuring a strong start as they step into the job market. I am confident that the esteemed experts gathered from across the world today will share their invaluable thoughts, knowledge, and perspectives with us.

The anticipated outcomes from this forum are groundbreaking best practices in the field of education on a national and international scale. These practices are meant to be embraced, leading to the improvement of our students and institutions. I urge all participants to actively engage in the online discussions, contributing meaningfully to the discourse.

Lastly, I extend my gratitude to all the panelists, participants from our global partners, as well as those from Malaysia. My heartfelt appreciation goes to the diligent hosts and committees for their tireless efforts and contributions. To all participants, participate earnestly, and I wish each one of you a successful, safe, and fruitful forum.

I wish to extend my sincere thanks once again to both AKEPT and UMS for orchestrating this program. This webinar stands as a testament to the invaluable platform it provides, enabling leaders to share their ideas and insights, thereby enriching the discourse for the betterment of all.



INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the unprecedented global crisis brought forth by the COVID-19 pandemic, not only has the world grappled with a severe health emergency, but also education systems across more than 200 countries have borne the brunt of substantial disruptions. Nearly 1.6 billion learners worldwide, constituting over 94% of the global student population, have been affected by the closure of schools, universities, and other learning spaces. In response to the virus's rapid spread, educational institutions have implemented extraordinary measures, prompting the convening of this webinar. The objective here is to facilitate a gathering of academic leaders hailing from both local and international universities, with the purpose of sharing insights and discussing best practices amid these unprecedented circumstances.

The reverberations of this pandemic have been felt far and wide, and the educational sector has not been exempting from its far-reaching impact. To ensure the seamless continuation of education and its associated services, academics and staff swiftly pivoted to online teaching and remote work. Surprisingly, this shift to virtual platforms showcased the extent to which tasks could be accomplished remotely. In the initial stages, the collective response was characterized by high energy and a shared belief that “we can get through this together.” However, as the crisis endured, the initial fervour waned, giving way to a pervasive sense of pandemic fatigue. This fatigue has not spared educational institutions or their workforce, becoming an unfortunate reality for many.

In light of these challenges, it becomes imperative for leaders in higher education to strategize innovative approaches to rejuvenate both the institutions and their weary workforce and students. This rejuvenation is envisioned as a transformative process, one that fortifies our collective resilience and enables us to emerge from these trying times stronger and more cohesive. Educational leaders, in particular,

bear the responsibility of fostering hope and optimism amidst adversity. They must create a sense of understanding regarding the current situation, delineate appropriate responses, and guide actions with measured optimism. Significantly, it is within the realm of exhaustion and other natural responses to stress that adaptive and resilient skills are honed, emphasizing care, connection, and overall well-being. The unleashing of energy necessitates a paradigm shift in organizational operations, involving a reimagination of the workplace, the workforce, and the organizational structure toward enhanced flexibility and agility.

With these considerations in mind, AKEPT, in collaboration with Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), has orchestrated this global initiative, drawing upon the expertise of esteemed panelists. These experts, including Professor Dr. Nor Hisham Hamid from Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS (UTP), Professor Dr. Rasid Mail from UMS, Professor Amir Mahmoud from Western Sydney University, Australia, and Dr. Sharifah Faridah Syed Alwi from Brunel National University of London, have delved into the challenges faced by educational institutions during this pandemic. The objective is to share their invaluable best practices in the field of education on an international scale, envisioning a collective improvement for the benefit of both students and institutional management during times of crisis, however unforeseen.

May these shared insights and practices serve as guiding lights, illuminating the path toward a more resilient and adaptable educational landscape.

The questions that were reverberated are:

1. Does your institution have a predefined response plan for the pandemic?
2. How did the university management re-energize the exhausted workforce at the institution?

The followings are the panels' answers to the question.

FIRST CHALLENGE

**RESPONSE
PLANS FOR
THE PANDEMIC**

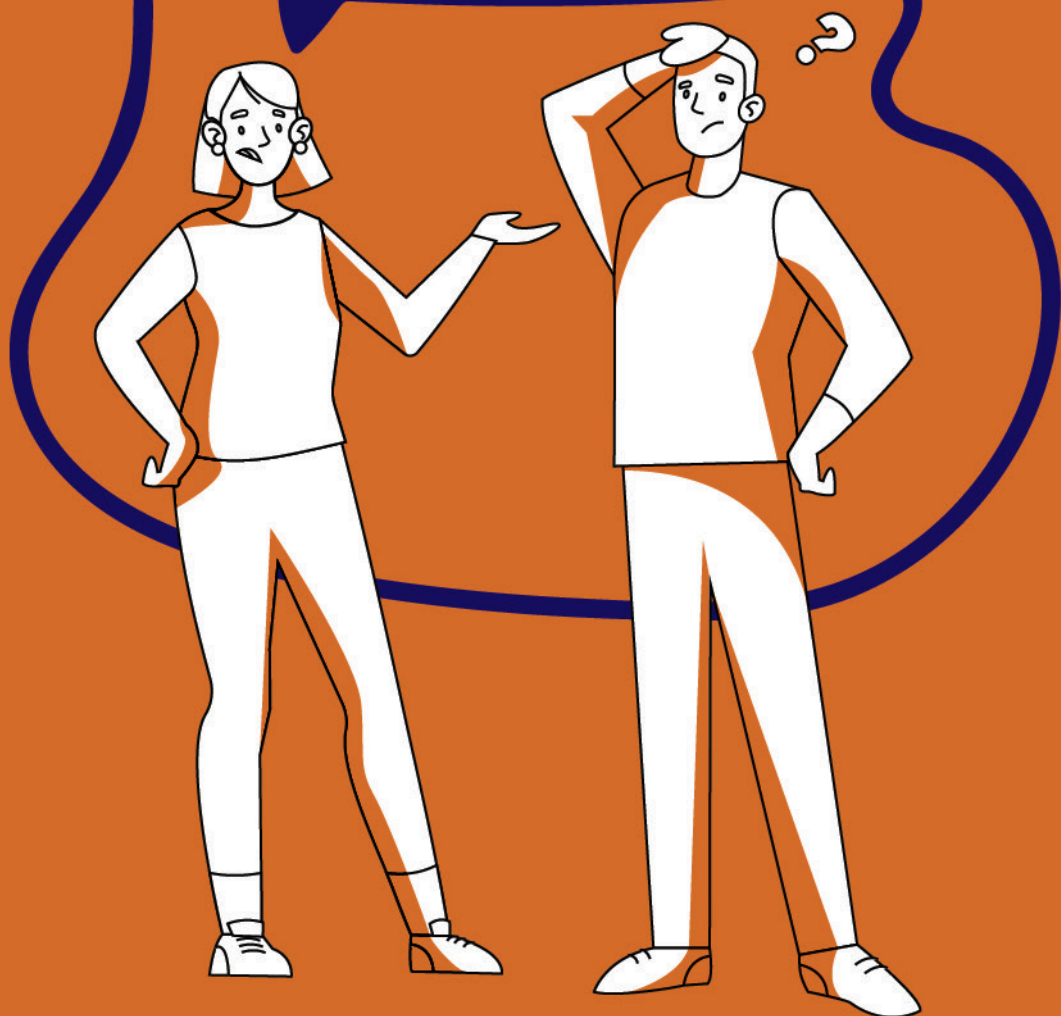


**“THERE IS NO HARM IN
HOPING FOR THE BEST
AS LONG AS YOU ARE
PREPARED FOR THE
WORST”**



Question 1

Does your institution
have a predefined response
plan for the pandemic?



Professor Dr. Rasid Mail

*Deputy Vice Chancellor of Academic and International,
Universiti Malaysia Sabah*



Before addressing the question at hand, it is imperative to provide an overview of our university. Notably unique, our institution stands out as the most distant university from our capital city, Kuala Lumpur, spanning approximately 1600 kilometres away. Moreover, a significant aspect of our student body, constituting 60%, belongs to the B40 group, denoting the lower-income bracket. This demographic detail is crucial, as it directly correlates with the challenges we encountered during the pandemic, encompassing issues such as accessibility, data connectivity, logistical constraints, transportation hurdles, and various other economic concerns.

Returning to the question posed, it is essential to acknowledge the initial phase of the pandemic, which unfolded around March 2020. At that time, news of the outbreak in Wuhan, China, did not presage the magnitude of the impact we would soon experience. Many perceived it as a serious health issue akin to past outbreaks like Ebola and H1N1. However, the subsequent repercussions on the education sector were vastly underestimated.

As a public university, operating within the framework of a public entity, we adhered to government regulations and ministry directives. Initially, our approach to dealing with Covid-19 in early 2020 mirrored a ‘business as usual’ (BAU) attitude.

During this period, there was considerable excitement in Malaysia's industrial landscape, with discussions revolving around IR 4.0, educational transformation processes, and industry-based education initiatives such as 2U2I. Simultaneously, there were mounting pressures to cut costs, optimize resources, achieve key performance indicators (KPIs) related to rankings, enhance return on investment (ROI), commercialize research products, augment international student numbers, ensure timely graduations, among other objectives. Despite the rush of adrenaline to transform education, we maintained a stable footing initially. However, as the situation escalated, anxiety permeated all levels of the education structure, including ministerial levels, governing bodies, education institution personnel, stakeholders, teachers, parents, and, naturally, students.

During the second semester of the 2019/2020 academic session, around March, we began comprehending the gravity of the pandemic, particularly concerning university operations. Challenges emerged, encompassing online teaching and learning, online examinations, adherence to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), requirements set by professional bodies for physical assessments, and restrictions on local and international student movements. In Sabah, we navigated the dual jurisdictions of federal government directions and state SOP requirements, necessitating alignment and reconciliation.

As we progressed towards the end of 2020, initiating the first semester of the 2020/2021 academic session, we became more organized after approximately 7 to 8 months of coping with Covid-19. We started discerning the multifaceted impact beyond health and safety issues. It extended to various facets of life, including psychological and emotional effects on stakeholders, economic ramifications, political dynamics, technological shifts, and alterations in social life, far beyond health and security concerns. Consequently, we gained momentum in learning, responding in a more structured manner, albeit amid high uncertainty and mounting community anxiety. Over time, we developed a clearer understanding of the pandemic and its potential effects on nearly every aspect of our lives.

In this context, we assert that crises often breed opportunities. Facing reality, we have observed that efficient coordination among stakeholders generates synergies within society. This coordination has enabled us to comprehend, prepare for, and strategize on how to manage this pandemic more effectively. Within the academic sector, there has been a discernible improvement in policy formulation and directive measures from authoritative bodies. Similar situations are being encountered worldwide, emphasizing the necessity of adhering to instructions from authoritative bodies to sustain educational operations. This pandemic underscored the significance of unity and mutual understanding, even as the pandemic's trajectory has yet to exhibit a declining pattern. In Sabah, the escalating trend in new cases persists, indicating that we cannot revert to business as usual or return to a normal situation within the academic sphere.

With a positive outlook permeating our university, coupled with a more structured and responsive plan, we find ourselves better equipped to handle the crisis. While the situation remains far from perfect due to the prevailing high levels of uncertainty, a comprehensive understanding across all levels is pivotal in managing the university effectively. Flexibility, a sense of urgency, a responsive attitude, and mental and physical preparedness have proven beneficial for University Malaysia Sabah. Ensuring the holistic functioning of every department and unit within the university has been paramount. We have fostered a cohesive workforce that remains sensitive to the prevailing situation, well-informed, and equipped with a structured response plan. Consequently, our university is now in a significantly improved position in its response to the pandemic.

Dr. Sharifah Faridah Syed Alwi

*Reader in Corporate Brand Management, Research Head for Marketing
and Corporate Brand Management Group, Brunel University London*



Nobody had a predefined plan; it simply didn't exist. The turning point occurred on March 18th when the UK announced its first lockdown. At that moment, all our classes were canceled, coinciding with the final week of lectures where around 50% to 60% of coursework had already been submitted.

What remained were our exams, usually scheduled for May. Initially, there was a collective moment of silence among us. However, on the same day as the government's announcement, the university sent a top-down email to our deans, subsequently reaching the module leaders. The message was clear: the classes were suspended indefinitely, but communication channels would remain open. Thus, the word "communication" became pivotal.

We initiated slow and steady communication with our students to prevent panic. Though regular classes were halted, we, as lecturers and members of the institution, were actively devising a plan, gradually transitioning to online exams. Before

the pandemic, our university had conducted occasional online exams, but now, everything had to move online. We established a three-tiered communication system. First, the vice chancellor communicated with all of us in the university through online platforms. Then, we organized “coffee catch-up” sessions with the deans, taking place once every two weeks. Additionally, at the division level, we held regular meetings with both staff and division members, occurring biweekly. These interactions proved invaluable and instrumental in navigating the challenges we faced.

The process was undeniably challenging, primarily because no predefined plan existed. However, the emphasis was always on communication. Regular updates were issued gradually, providing information in manageable portions. Communication, I believe, played a pivotal role. I echo what Prof. Rasid previously mentioned about the emotional and psychological aspects of dealing with the pandemic, particularly in situations where uncertainties abound. This was especially crucial for our students, who were just as uncertain as we were. Effective and consistent communication, reinforced at every step, not only alleviated anxiety but also instilled confidence, aligning with the insights shared by the esteemed panel.

Professor Dr. Nor Hisham Hamid

*Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Student Affairs,
Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS, Malaysia*



We have been living in a volatile world marked by uncertainties, complexity, and ambiguity, demanding leaders and organizations to be prepared and agile. The key term here is ‘agile’, and it applies not only to leaders but also to organizations. This is an infinite game; there are no winners, just the question of whether your actions are sustainable or not in facing these challenges.

University Technology PETRONAS (UTP), as a private institution, has diligently worked towards sustainability. As previously mentioned, one cannot excel in areas one is unfamiliar with. To brace for an uncertain future, our regular activities at UTP include scenario planning and risk assessment initiatives focusing on the business community, disaster recovery, and crisis management. However, despite these preparations, no amount of scenario planning or risk assessment could fully equip us for the impact of this pandemic. Most of us lacked the experience, having never lived through a pandemic before. Yet, our prior scenario planning did enable us to devise practical strategies to face this crisis.

Allow me to share some of the initiatives we undertook as a private university. Following Prof. Rasid's point, the pandemic began in early March 2020 when the first 18 cases were reported. Initially, we continued university operations but with heightened vigilance. As global events unfolded, we became acutely aware of the pandemic drawing closer to our doorstep. UTP's management team promptly executed the Emergency Response Protocol by activating the Emergency Management Team (EMT). This was clearly outlined in our SOP. In the event of any crisis, the Emergency Management would be invoked, comprising the top management.

The EMT played a pivotal role in enabling swift decision-making, ensuring accountability, closely monitoring events, and disseminating coherent messages both internally and externally. The team focused on maintaining consistent messaging, be it for internal stakeholders like staff and students or external entities. This involved aligning our communication with directives from the World Health Organization, KKM, Ministry of Higher Education, state government, PETRONAS, and local authorities. Maintaining consistency in messaging was vital; we couldn't address the pandemic in isolation.

Now, let me spell out some specific actions taken during the initial phase of the pandemic. Our guiding principle was a "people-first" mindset. Despite being a private university, we prioritized the public issue over business interests. The safety, health, welfare, and well-being of our students, staff, and the surrounding community became our top priority. Our focus shifted towards implementing health and safety policies, procedures, and protocols to shield our community members from the pandemic's impact. Once we had ensured the safety and health of our students and staff, our attention turned to enabling students to continue their critical functions—learning and studying, and ensuring staff could execute their duties effectively. A specific budget was allocated to support these plans.

Secondly, we recognized the dynamic nature of pandemic issues. Thus, we emphasized the importance of collecting and analyzing data to make informed

and accurate decisions. Data from various sources, including WHO, Ministry of Health, MOHE, state government, PETRONAS, and local authorities, were meticulously collected and analyzed. We streamlined this information and used it as the foundation for all planning and decisions made by the EMT and the COVID response team. Our approach was data-driven, guiding our planning and decision-making processes.

Thirdly, we invested significantly in technology and infrastructure to facilitate remote and virtual collaboration. The pandemic abruptly altered the way we learn, teach, and work. In February, we conducted face-to-face classes, and by early March, we transitioned to online teaching. This sudden surge in remote access and connectivity posed challenges. Fortunately, due to our strategic infrastructure upgrades since 2018, we managed to avoid major disruptions. This foresight and investment allowed us to navigate the shift to online learning and remote work smoothly. We constantly monitored our access and assessed our current bandwidth, ensuring students and staff could work remotely without significant interruptions. Even now, we continue to operate online, conducting stress tests to confirm the effectiveness of remote operations.

The fourth aspect is engagement and communication. In the age of rampant misinformation, controlling the flow of information became critical. False, inaccurate, and conflicting news flooded in daily, particularly via WhatsApp. To prevent confusion and fear among students and staff, we implemented effective engagement and communication strategies. During any crisis, maintaining transparent and clear communication is paramount to sustaining the trust of students, staff, and community stakeholders. We established robust communication protocols, ensuring consistency and transparency in all our interactions. Reassurance was key, emphasizing that the health and safety of our students and staff were our top priorities.

Lastly, collaboration emerged as the cornerstone of our response. Acknowledging the public nature of the pandemic, we prioritized collective efforts over individual

interests. Public and private sectors joined forces to mount a comprehensive response. Throughout the pandemic, UTP collaborated closely with the Ministry of Higher Education, PETRONAS, the pandemic prepared response team (PPRT), other institutions (IPTs), local authorities, NGOs, students, staff, and parents. This collaborative approach was essential. Isolation could not win this battle; unity and cooperation were imperative.

In conclusion, UTP's response to the COVID-19 pandemic showcased its agility, commitment to community well-being, reliance on data-driven decision-making, technological readiness, effective communication strategies, and collaboration with diverse stakeholders. These elements empowered us to navigate the challenges posed by the pandemic, enabling us to provide a sustainable response.

Professor Amir Mahmood

Dean of School of Business, Western Sydney University, Australia



Good morning, esteemed colleagues from Malaysia and around the world. I am honoured to be here and participate in this timely and significant discussion hosted by the University Malaysia Sabah. I express my gratitude for the opportunity to contribute to this dialogue. My esteemed colleagues have covered a wide range of topics, so I will avoid repetition and instead focus on the weaknesses that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed in the Australian higher education system and among our academic leaders.

Before delving into the Australian experience, allow me to provide a brief overview of Western City University. As a comprehensive institution, we serve approximately 50,000 students, employ 3,000 academics and professional staff, and boast an international student population of around 50%. International students represent a substantial revenue source, not only for our university but also for the Australian education system, amounting to an industry worth approximately AUD 40 billion. Hence, the implications are far-reaching.

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare our vulnerabilities and shortcomings. Prior to the pandemic, there was a prevailing belief within the university sector and among academic leaders that the good times would perpetually continue. This mindset influenced our research structure, internationalization efforts, and teaching and learning practices, leading to a different approach.

Additionally, there was a reluctance to challenge the status quo in various aspects, such as maintaining programs or processes that had been running for years simply due to inertia. However, the pandemic has compelled us to confront the status quo and pushed us to undertake initiatives that would have otherwise been unlikely to come about. I refer to these as “covert dividends.”

Allow me to outline some pressing issues within the Australian context that have become evident during this period. Firstly, our heavy reliance on revenue from international students has had profound consequences. This reliance had been instrumental in funding our research endeavours, as government funding alone fell short. However, the equilibrium has been disrupted, emphasizing the need for a more sustainable funding model.

Secondly, Australian universities exhibit a high-cost structure, with vice-chancellors earning significantly higher salaries compared to the Prime Minister. Addressing this cost structure and reassessing its sustainability are imperative considerations. Furthermore, the pandemic has highlighted our lack of preparedness in terms of digital education. While some schools, like the School of Business, were better equipped, others faced disparities within the university. These disparities in digital readiness were unforeseen, and rectifying them became an urgent task.

Despite these challenges, the pandemic has also catalyzed positive changes. It compelled us to challenge the status quo and embark on endeavors that were previously unimaginable. For instance, we have initiated the shift toward micro and alternative credentials, promoting lifelong learning instead of a singular focus on traditional degrees. Moreover, there is a renewed emphasis on diversifying our

international market and placing greater importance on employability, recognizing that students' success extends beyond academic excellence to encompass professional competence.

In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic has not only exposed our weaknesses but also forced us to critically assess our circumstances and envision a new path forward. As academic leaders, we have undergone transformative changes in our approaches and styles, transitioning from micromanagement to empowerment. The significance of connectedness and effective communication has become increasingly apparent. While positive changes have emerged, there is still much work to be done.





SECOND CHALLENGE

RE-ENERGIZING THE EXHAUSTED WORKFORCE



**“THE PERSSIMIST
COMPLAINS ABOUT THE
WIND; THE OPTIMIST
EXPECTS IT TO CHANGE;
THE REALIST ADJUST THE
SAILS”**



Question 2

How did your university management re-energize the exhausted workforce at the institution?



Professor Dr. Nor Hisham Hamid

*Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Student Affairs,
Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS, Malaysia*



When the pandemic began, many colleagues expressed high spirits, determination, and a promise to remain positive, proactive, and responsive to the unprecedented challenges. Talking to colleagues in the department, their positive outlook on responding to the pandemic was relieving. During MCO 1.0, numerous colleagues stepped up to the challenge, approaching tasks differently and making decisions swiftly. Many fully embraced the novelty of working from home, and like myself, were pleasantly surprised by how much could be accomplished virtually.

Initially, this high-energy and positive response characterized our collective approach to the pandemic. However, as months passed without a clear end in sight, the initial enthusiasm waned, and individuals began to experience pandemic fatigue. Colleagues' responses shifted from resilience to feelings of anxiety, burnout, and a

loss of optimism, reflecting the prevalence of stress and anxiety worldwide. Instead of the expected responses like “I’m fine, I’m managing through it,” some colleagues expressed, “I’m anxious, overwhelmed, and lonely,” “I’m completely burnt out,” “I’ve lost my sense of optimism,” and “I’m not sure how much longer I can keep going like this.”

This phenomenon, known as pandemic fatigue, presents significant challenges for organizations and underscores the need for proactive measures to address mental well-being.

The recognition of pandemic fatigue underscores its impact on both organizations and employees. More individuals are reporting poor mental health, indicating an urgent need for support systems. Despite the provision of mental health advice, the rising numbers of individuals experiencing mental health issues emphasize the severity of the situation. Employees are grappling with exhaustion, worry, anxiety, and even depression, demanding swift action to stabilize and rejuvenate the workforce.

At UTP, acknowledging the necessity for greater empathy and compassion, the organization has proactively engaged with staff at various levels to foster connection, focus, positivity, and hope during these challenging times. Whether employees work from home or in-office settings, the potential for growth and development remains significant. Bearing this in mind, UTP has introduced impactful initiatives aimed at supporting employee well-being and transcending crisis management.

UTP management has approved several intriguing initiatives, one of which I’d like to share with the members here. We have introduced financial assistance for those working from home to create a better working experience. Working from home may be easy for a short time, but over an extended period, a more comfortable and conducive environment is necessary. Therefore, we introduced the New Way of Working (NWoW) program, providing financial assistance to employees to establish a home office, making remote work more conducive. This

initiative enables employees to create a home office that promotes a comfortable and productive working environment. Recognizing that the initial excitement of remote work diminishes over time, UTP aims to support employees by creating comfortable environments that enhance productivity and well-being.

Acknowledging the importance of reliable internet connectivity for remote work, UTP offers monthly connectivity assistance to employees. This support ensures access to fast and dependable internet services, facilitating efficient remote collaboration and reducing potential work-related disruptions. By addressing connectivity challenges, UTP aims to enhance employees' overall work experience and reduce associated stressors.

Understanding the vital role of mental health in overall well-being, UTP's Psychology and Counselling Department extends its services to staff and their family members. By offering consultations and advice, this support initiative provides a valuable resource for addressing mental health concerns, fostering emotional resilience, and promoting a healthier work-life balance.

UTP's proactive measures and emphasis on employee well-being set an example in mitigating pandemic fatigue and nurturing a supportive work environment. By recognizing the unique challenges posed by prolonged remote work arrangements, UTP's initiatives, such as the NWOW Program, monthly connectivity assistance, and psychological counseling support, demonstrate a commitment to employee welfare. These efforts contribute to cultivating a sense of appreciation and trust among staff members, fostering their potential for growth beyond crisis management.

In summary, these initiatives serve as valuable examples for organizations worldwide seeking to address the impact of pandemic fatigue on employees and establish a supportive and resilient work culture.

Professor Dr. Rasid Mail

*Deputy Vice Chancellor of Academic and International,
Universiti Malaysia Sabah*



The most intriguing aspect of our discussion pertains to leadership issues during the pandemic. The unprecedented challenges brought about by the pandemic have exposed organizations to new and unexpected situations. Within the realm of higher education institutions, managing the workforce and navigating the complexities of running an educational institution have become increasingly daunting. It is evident that a clear and direct approach is crucial to address these leadership issues, with the mental well-being of the workforce emerging as a pressing concern during the 20 months of pandemic management.

Comparing the philosophies of public and private universities provides valuable insights. Public universities, as institutions serving the public, often face unique challenges. The idea of something being “public” implies shared ownership, where responsibilities may become diffuse. In this regard, understanding the sources of

authority and directive instructions, which became challenging during the pandemic, is crucial. Balancing the requirements from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Higher Education, and other authoritative bodies caused confusion. Moreover, public university managers are often accustomed to risk-averse decision-making, making it difficult to navigate uncertain situations.

The mental pressure experienced during the pandemic outweighs the physical stress for the workforce. This necessitates effective leadership capable of maintaining control and composure under pressure. Public sector workforces typically follow standard operating procedures (SOPs) in their day-to-day operations, based on an organic organizational approach. However, when faced with panic and chaos, leaders face significant challenges. Decision-making, situation analysis, and prioritization become paramount. Leaders must be willing to take risks and shoulder responsibility to inspire and mobilize the workforce. However, the risk-averse nature of public universities presents a challenge in adapting to crisis situations.

I firmly believe that public university leaders must adopt a more agile and adaptable approach when managing daily uncertainties, such as the influx of fake news. The reliance on information from external sources, including friends in other universities, underscores the importance of teamwork and collaboration within universities. The spirit of collaboration among deans, deputy deans, program coordinators, and deputy vice-chancellors has proven crucial in navigating the challenges posed by the pandemic. Engaging in regular discussions and seeking updates fosters effective managerial decision-making. This ensures that subordinates, including lecturers and administrative staff, have a reliable source of guidance and support during times of crisis.

The leadership challenges faced during the pandemic underscore the need for effective leadership in both public and private universities. While public universities may grapple with their risk-averse organizational culture, the pandemic has provided an opportunity to learn and adapt. Embracing a more agile approach to decision-making and fostering collaboration among university leaders and staff

can help overcome the uncertainties and pressures associated with the pandemic. By recognizing and addressing these challenges, higher education institutions can enhance their resilience and effectiveness in managing future crises.

Professor Amir Mahmood

*Dean of School of Business,
Western Sydney University, Australia*



Let me begin by saying that there's a difference between a sprint and a marathon. When you are preparing for a sprint, your diet, expectations, and mindset are different. After a sprint, you celebrate, reward yourself, and move on. The first phase of COVID was like a sprint.

Effective leadership plays a pivotal role in energizing individuals and fostering resilience, especially during crises like the ongoing pandemic. Leaders must inspire those around them and prioritize self-care to ensure their ability to support others. This highlights the significance of inspirational and transformational leadership during the pandemic, emphasizing the need for clarity, honesty, decisiveness, emotional intelligence, and timely communication to alleviate anxiety and stress.

Uncertainty prevails during the pandemic, making it imperative for leaders to provide a sense of clarity to colleagues and employees. Inspirational and transformational leaders prioritize honesty and transparency, ensuring that their words align with their actions. Decisiveness in action is equally crucial, allowing leaders to navigate challenges and instill confidence in their teams.

Leaders must possess emotional and social intelligence competencies to effectively support their teams. By recognizing and understanding their own emotions and those of others, leaders can respond empathetically and provide necessary support. Timely and effective communication, delivered with emotional intelligence, minimizes stress and anxiety within the organization.

Communication should extend beyond talking; it requires active listening with purpose and intent. By creating forums for discussions and providing opportunities for questions and feedback, leaders can foster a culture of open communication. Regular meetings and accessible channels of communication contribute to effective information sharing and knowledge exchange.

Acknowledging and expressing gratitude to individuals who contribute to the well-being of students and staff is essential. Regular recognition events and awards can boost morale and motivate employees. Rewarding efforts and achievements, such as providing paid leave for vaccinated staff members, demonstrates appreciation for their hard work during challenging times.

Leaders must genuinely prioritize the physical and mental well-being of their staff, recognizing that their own well-being sets the tone for the entire organization. By creating an environment that supports well-being, leaders can mitigate the negative impact of anxiety, stress, and other mental health challenges. Initiatives such as wellness programs, counseling services, and fostering work-life balance contribute to a healthy and resilient workforce.

Lastly, individuals must have something to look forward to and a higher purpose. A higher purpose provides motivation and a sense of direction. Leaders should communicate and reinforce the organization's values, which act as an anchor during difficult times. By aligning the organization's purpose with individual goals, leaders inspire their teams and foster resilience.

In other words, inspirational and transformational leadership is vital for nurturing resilience and well-being during the pandemic. Clarity, honesty, decisiveness, emotional intelligence, effective communication, active listening, acknowledgment, gratitude, recognition, and a genuine focus on well-being are key components of effective leadership. By fostering a sense of purpose and adhering to a strong set of values, leaders can empower their teams to navigate uncertainties, adapt to challenges, and thrive in the face of adversity.

*“Clarity, honesty, decisiveness,
emotional intelligence,
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leadership.”*

Dr. Sharifah Faridah Syed Alwi

*Reader in Corporate Brand Management, Research Head for Marketing
and Corporate Brand Management Group, Brunel University London*



In addition to the insights shared by Prof Hisham, Prof. Rasid, and the analogy of a marathon sprint provided by Prof Amir, effective leadership and organizational support play pivotal roles in promoting resilience and well-being during the pandemic. The experiences of Brunel University, a public university in the UK, underscore the importance of infrastructure, continuous training, welfare support, effective communication channels, and human connection in fostering a supportive environment for both staff and students.

Brunel University places a strong emphasis on providing consistent support and necessary infrastructure to its staff, conveying the message that they are not alone in navigating the challenges of remote work. Lecturers are equipped with essential tools and technology through comprehensive training sessions, enhancing their proficiency in utilizing online platforms like Zoom or Collaborate Ultra. Additionally, the university ensures access to laptops or desktops for staff working from home and allows those facing difficulties to work from the office after conducting thorough risk assessments.

The university maintains a continuous focus on welfare support, recognizing the pandemic's impact on both staff and students. Various communication channels, beyond website updates and emails, are employed to disseminate information effectively. Module leaders play a vital role in providing psychological training, offering support and guidance to students, and connecting them with relevant departments for additional assistance. To simplify communication and offer targeted support, Brunel University not only shares distress alleviation methods but also engages in conversations about enjoyable experiences, fostering psychological well-being and strengthening staff relationships.

Brunel University actively fosters human connection and bonding among staff members. Division leaders utilize WhatsApp groups as informal platforms for communication and support, enabling staff to share both distressing and pleasant experiences. This digital space encourages personal connections and stronger relationships, enhancing overall well-being and motivation among staff.


Furthermore, Brunel University emphasizes empathy and acts of kindness in its approach to remote work. Leaders promote understanding and flexibility, accommodating interruptions during meetings caused by personal responsibilities. This compassionate atmosphere ensures that staff members feel valued and supported, creating a nurturing environment for well-being.

From my perspective, Brunel University's experiences offer valuable insights into promoting resilience and well-being during the pandemic. Through infrastructure provision, continuous training, welfare support, effective communication channels, and the cultivation of human connection, the university creates an environment encouraging staff and students to face challenges with confidence. The emphasis on empathy, acts of kindness, and a supportive culture enables individuals to cope with the demands of remote work, fostering resilience. By sharing these lessons, this forum contributes to the international academic discourse on nurturing well-being and resilience in educational institutions during times of crisis.



THIRD CHALLENGE

HANDLING RESTRICTIVE AND NON-DYNAMIC POLICIES



**“UNITY IS STRENGTH...
WHEN THERE IS
TEAMWORK AND
COLLABORATION,
WONDERFUL THINGS CAN
BE ACHIEVED.”**

Since there's still time,
shall we continue to discuss
another relevant issue:



How does your institution handle restrictive and non-dynamic policies, both the country and institution change of leadership, budget cut and snail pace and advancement of technology?



Professor Dr. Nor Hisham Hamid

*Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Student Affairs,
Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS, Malaysia*



This question delves into a high-level perspective, reflecting the current realities in Malaysia. As a private university, we emphasize our commitment to compliance with government regulations and adherence to ministry guidelines. Our approach is rooted in the understanding that aligning our practices with the Ministry of Health (KKM) and the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) serves as the foundation for managing the complexities of the ongoing pandemic. Staying updated and compliant with these references is pivotal, ensuring the safety and well-being of all stakeholders involved.

Initially, our sphere of influence was limited, allowing minimal involvement in decision-making processes. However, recognizing the necessity of expanding our impact, we proactively took steps to integrate ourselves into decision-making

bodies. This proactive approach enabled us to actively contribute to shaping decisions that directly impacted our operations. By doing so, we enhanced our capacity to influence policies and initiatives effectively.

The introduction of new programs in a private university often encounters challenges due to the stringent criteria set by accreditation bodies. To navigate this complexity, we actively sought collaboration with entities like the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) and the Engineering Accreditation Council (EAC) for engineering programs. By engaging in the decision-making processes of these bodies, we gained valuable insights and streamlined our ability to implement changes that meet accreditation requirements. This collaborative effort has significantly improved the efficiency of our program development and accreditation processes.

A critical factor in our success lies in UTP's ambition and persistence in pursuing our goals. By establishing clear objectives and a well-defined path forward, we overcame numerous obstacles and navigated potential roadblocks. Instead of confrontational approaches, our strategy focused on effecting change from within the system, adopting an idealistic yet cooperative mindset. This strategic approach has enabled us to cultivate strong partnerships with government agencies and other institutions, resulting in substantial and meaningful transformations.



How do you ensure that students remain motivated, and their well-being and mental health are taken care of?



Professor Amir Mahmood

*Dean of School of Business,
Western Sydney University, Australia*



Taking Western Sydney University as an example, it's crucial to recognize that although there might be connectivity and online education options, not every student possesses the necessary connectivity or an environment at home conducive to studying, akin to the facilities available in university residences or libraries. This aspect holds significant importance.

During the initial phase of the pandemic, a notable issue arose: students who lacked part-time jobs found it challenging to pay rents and faced difficulties obtaining financial support from their home countries. In response, we established a student hardship fund amounting to AUD\$2.5 million. Contributions from various stakeholders funded this initiative, providing assistance to students both onshore and offshore. We introduced the Western Success Program, assigning each University of Western Sydney student a dedicated student advisor. These advisors not only addressed academic concerns but also provided support for students' welfare, mental strength, anxiety, and adaptation to changes in exam structures. This holistic approach reflects the university's commitment.

It's imperative to acknowledge that the pandemic has significantly impacted the economic and psychological well-being of our students' parents, elevating their levels of anxiety and stress. In response, we adapted university policies. We embraced a policy framework I term "flexible-rigidity." This approach maintains the integrity of academic programs while offering flexibility within those boundaries. The objective is to safeguard not only students' academic health but also their emotional well-being, ensuring we cater to their welfare comprehensively. As Steve Jobs aptly said, "You cannot connect the dots by looking forward. You can only connect them by looking backward." This retrospective approach guides our actions, enabling us to navigate these challenging times effectively.

Concluding Remarks

by the Moderator

The COVID-19 pandemic has undeniably posed unparalleled challenges to the global education sector, compelling institutions to swiftly adapt to ensure the continuity of education and provide necessary support to their staff and students.

This webinar facilitated a profound exchange of insights among panelists representing diverse universities, illuminating the pivotal role of structured response plans, effective communication strategies, flexibility, and institutional unity. By disseminating best practices and recounting experiences, educational institutions stand to enhance their preparedness for future crises, cultivating resilience and adaptability among their workforce and student body.

In extending our gratitude on behalf of UMS and AKEPT, I wish to express our profound appreciation to each panelist for their invaluable contributions to our online discussion. Your expertise, profound insights, and thoughtful perspectives significantly enriched the discourse, transforming it into a truly enlightening and engaging experience for all participants.

Your willingness to disseminate your knowledge and actively participate in this intellectually stimulating dialogue underscored your dedication to advancing the field and nurturing a collaborative learning atmosphere. The diverse range of expertise and perspectives you brought to the table provided our audience with a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, leaving a lasting impression on all attendees.

Additionally, we wish to acknowledge your professionalism and adaptability in seamlessly navigating the virtual format of the panel discussion. Your smooth

transitions, articulate presentations, and engaging delivery captivated the audience, rendering the online event personal and interactive.

We are profoundly grateful for the time and dedication you invested in preparing for and participating in this panel discussion. Your eagerness to share your knowledge and engage in meaningful discourse exemplifies the spirit of knowledge-sharing and intellectual growth that we strive to foster within our academic community.

Once again, please accept our heartfelt gratitude for your invaluable contributions. We eagerly anticipate the prospect of future collaborations with each of you and extend our best wishes for your continued success in all your academic pursuits.

Thank you.

Panelists Profiles



Professor Dr. Nor Hisham Hamid



Professor Dr. Nor Hisham Hamid holds the position of Deputy Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS, Malaysia. His association with UTP began in 1999 when he joined as a lecturer in the Electrical and Electronic Engineering Department. Over the years, he climbed the academic ranks, attaining the position of Full Professor in 2019. Prior to his current role, he served in various administrative capacities, including Head of the Electrical & Electronics Engineering Department and Director for Nanotechnology Mission Oriented Research, before assuming his current position in April 2016.

In his role as Deputy Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Professor Dr. Nor Hisham is tasked with providing leadership and guidance in the formulation, development, implementation, and monitoring of strategic initiatives, programs, and activities aimed at enhancing the student experience and fostering student development.

He holds a BSc degree in Electrical Electronics Engineering from the University of Rochester, USA, an MSc degree in Manufacturing System Engineering from the University of Warwick, UK (1993 and 1994 respectively), and earned his PhD in

Electronics Engineering from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, in 2006.

Professor Dr. Nor Hisham's research interests primarily revolve around nano-devices modeling, fault-tolerant architectures, microfluidic lab-on-chip technologies, reliability and testing of sensors, as well as MEMS and microfluidics systems. He is a prolific researcher, having successfully secured and completed 26 projects with a cumulative funding exceeding RM15 million from various industries and government agencies. Additionally, he holds credit for seven (7) filed patents, supervised twenty-one (21) PhD and twenty (20) MSc students, authored two (2) books, three (3) book chapters, and published forty-four (44) articles in high-impact journals. Furthermore, he has presented his research findings in over one hundred papers at both local and international conferences.

Professor Dr. Nor Hisham has also contributed significantly to the academic community by serving as a reviewer for esteemed journals including IEEE Transactions on Circuit and System, Neuromorphic Engineering, IEEE Sensors, and Sensors and Transducers. In addition to his academic achievements, he holds certifications as an MBOT Certified Professional Technologist and is recognized as a Chartered Energy Engineer under the Energy Institute.

“At UTP, acknowledging the necessity for greater empathy and compassion, the organization has proactively engaged with staff at various levels to foster connection, focus, positivity, and hope during these challenging times.”

Professor Dr. Rasid Mail



Dr. Rasid Mail holds the esteemed position of Professor and Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic & Internationalization) at Universiti Malaysia Sabah, where he had also served as the Dean of the Centre for Postgraduate Studies. He earned his Ph.D. in Accounting from Universiti Teknologi Mara, a Master of Accounting from the University of Dundee, and a Bachelor of Accounting (Hons.) from University Utara Malaysia. Dr. Rasid Mail is a distinguished Chartered Accountant (CA) and has been a member of the Malaysian Institute of Accountants (MIA) since 1996. Additionally, he holds the esteemed title of Fellow Accountant of the Federation of Royal Institute of Accountants in Singapore.

Prof. Rasid Mail's scholarly pursuits encompass a diverse array of topics within the realm of accounting. His research interests include privatization and organizational changes, public sector accounting, budgeting, critical accounting, accounting history, accounting for poverty, social and critical accounting, and qualitative research in accounting. He actively contributes to the academic community by serving as an editorial board member for several esteemed journals, including the Journal of The Asian Academy of Applied Business, The Borneo Review, Borneo

Journal of Business and Economics, and International Journal of Business and Management Review.

Throughout his academic journey, Dr. Rasid Mail has been recognized and celebrated for his exceptional research contributions. He is the recipient of numerous awards and scholarships, underscoring his dedication to advancing knowledge in the field. These accolades include the prestigious National Book Award, a Gold Medal in the Research and Innovation Competition, a Bronze Medal in the Malaysian Technology Expo, and study awards from the NAM Institute for The Empowerment of Women and the Malaysian Public Service Department. Dr. Rasid Mail's outstanding achievements and contributions exemplify his commitment to the academic and scholarly advancement of accounting knowledge.

Professor Amir Mahmood



Professor Mahmood, a distinguished scholar with a Master's and PhD in Economics from the University of Manitoba, Canada, assumed the role of Dean of the School of Business at Western Sydney University in 2018. His impressive academic journey includes serving as Pro-Vice Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer of the University of Newcastle (UON) in Singapore, where he notably led UON Singapore to receive the esteemed 'Higher Education Institution of the Year' award in 2018.

Professor Mahmood boasts a robust research background in economics, business, and management. His scholarly endeavors have delved into various critical areas, including Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), mental health and productivity, microfinance, disaster management, and international trade in services within the ASEAN region. With a wealth of knowledge and expertise, he has made substantial contributions to the field of international higher education. Professor Mahmood's instructional prowess extends across undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral levels, spanning multiple countries and institutions.

Moreover, Professor Mahmood has played a pivotal role in shaping academic landscapes. His leadership extends to curriculum design, program development, and accreditation processes. Additionally, he has served as a Visiting Professor at several esteemed Malaysian universities, further enriching the academic discourse through his valuable insights and expertise. Professor Mahmood's multifaceted contributions underscore his dedication to advancing education and research within the global academic community.

***“The COVID-19 pandemic has
laid bare our vulnerabilities
and shortcomings.”***

Dr. Sharifah Faridah Syed Alwi



Sharifah Faridah Syed Alwi currently holds the esteemed position of Reader in Corporate Brand Management and serves as the Research Head for the Marketing and Corporate Brand Management Group within the Marketing Division at Brunel Business School. In addition to her significant role at Brunel, she holds a visiting appointment scholarship as a Professor in Brand Management at Università Cattolica in Milan, Italy, where she has dedicated six years of expertise with a specialized focus on corporate branding within the luxury sector.

Her academic journey in the realm of branding and corporate brand management commenced at Manchester Business School, where she earned her PhD. Following the completion of her doctoral studies, she spent six productive years as a Senior Lecturer at the University of Malaya before joining Brunel, where she has made significant contributions over the course of nearly a decade. During her tenure, she has cultivated impactful research partnerships with various institutions and businesses spanning diverse industries and sectors in the UK, Italy, and Malaysia.

Scholarly pursuits drive her passion, particularly in assisting small business owners and managers in differentiating, communicating, and marketing their businesses' skills to a multitude of stakeholders. Her recent research endeavors have revolved around the development of firm strategic branding and Community Branding in Sabah.

Furthermore, in her impressive academic career spanning seven years, Sharifah Faridah Syed Alwi has assumed several key leadership positions at Brunel. These roles include serving as Deputy and Chair for the Postgraduate Examination Board, Program Director for MSc Corporate Brand Management, and Director for Undergraduate Studies. In the latter role, she undertook the responsibility of overseeing the educational journey of more than 2000 Business School Undergraduate students. In this capacity, she adeptly mediated between Module Leaders, Senior Management, Academic Office Administration, College, UK Quality Assurance (UK-QAA), and students, ensuring the smooth functioning of academic processes and maintaining the highest standards of quality education.

LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE PANDEMICS: UNDERSTANDING CRISIS FATIGUE

"Leadership Through the Pandemics: Understanding Crisis Fatigue" stands as a pivotal work that delves into the real-life experiences of university leaders and managers across diverse regions – Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and Australia – as they navigated the intricate challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. This monograph, blending authentic anecdotes with rigorous analysis, provides intricate strategies and guidance for academic leaders and faculty members, offering valuable insights into effective institutional management amidst turbulent times. The text conducts a profound exploration of 'crisis fatigue,' a psychological construct often overlooked, shedding light on its various manifestations among administrators, academic and non-academic staff, and students. It goes on to provide evidence-based recommendations for its early detection and mitigation. Through a blend of compelling narratives and scholarly perspectives, the book enriches our academic understanding of the unique leadership challenges triggered by pandemic conditions. Consequently, it establishes itself as an indispensable resource not only for university leaders, administrators, and educators but also for students and professionals engaged in the broader field of crisis management.

