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32

## PUTTING KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

The business of institutions of higher learning is to facilitate learners' acquisition of useful subject-matter knowledge for career building and advancement, and/or for self-fulfilment. That, in itself, is already a massive undertaking that demands from learners investments of time, effort and scarce financial resources. Be that as it may, should universities be content with only facilitating knowledge acquisition? Is subject-matter knowledge by itself sufficient if learners are unable to put it to work in real-life situations? If not, then whose responsibility is it to ensure that learners are able to apply the knowledge they have learnt? Lastly, what strategies can we employ to ensure that learners are able to put knowledge to work? These constitute some of the key questions interrogated in TCX32 in the general and ODL contexts.

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## ABOUT TCX

TCX (Tutor Connexions) is a non-profit OUM e-newsletter that provides a dedicated link between the University and its tutors. It serves as a channel for news and updates on tutor-related events and as a platform for the sharing of views, experiences and tips on best practices in university teaching and learning.

TCX is published electronically once every semester.

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

TCX returns in the new year with yet another new issue that we hope you'll enjoy reading. We're keeping to the tradition of having each issue themed but there are a few changes.

First, having re-rationalised the resources we have at our disposal and the frequency at which the

university needs to communicate with its tutors through TCX, we have decided that TCX will appear once a semester instead of twice. Now that the newly established Institute of Teaching and Learning Advancement (ITLA) is up on its feet and has its systems in place, TCX's role will lean more towards stimulating intellectual discourse on best practices in teaching and learning, although it will continue to remind tutors about certain policies and important dates which ITLA would have previously communicated to tutors online or via SMS or telephone.

Second, TCX is in the midst of including more articles by tutors, as well as subject-matter experts (SMEs) in each issue. In TCX32, for instance, almost all features were submitted by tutors (and an SME). We hope to make it standard practice to email all tutors on our mailing list to inform them about the thematic framing of the forthcoming issue of TCX, and to invite all tutors to contribute their articles on subjects related to the focal theme. So do look out for the next email invite which should land in your inbox in late February or early March this year, giving all ample time to contribute their pieces to TCX33, which is scheduled to appear in May 2011.

Third, and this is rather good news, the publisher, McGraw-Hill Malaysia, has kindly agreed to sponsor two new books as prizes for each issue to be published this year. The best article submitted by a tutor or SME will win these two books! This, we hope, will go some way in encouraging tutors and SMEs to contribute to TCX, and to encourage Malaysians to read more. Look out for its 'advertisement' in this issue.

All the best in 2011 and happy tutoring.

Dr David CL Lim  
Chief Editor







## ON TUTORIAL ATTENDANCE AND ONLINE PARTICIPATION

I have been a tutor with OUM for nearly three years now. I would like to say a few words on the issue of learner participation in both face-to-face tutorials and online forums. During the initial stage of my teaching at OUM, learner participation and involvement was very encouraging. There was almost full attendance in face-to-face tutorials; although some admittedly attended grudgingly, given their other commitments.

But the situation has changed. Correct me if I am wrong, but this is probably because it is no longer compulsory for learners to attend tutorials or to participate in online forum discussions. We do know that marks are no longer given for online participation. This may have some dire consequences.

The message we seem to be sending to learners is that tutorial attendance and the role of face-to-face tutors have become less important, and that it is alright if they do not attend tutorials. These days some tutorials are practically empty! Ask any tutor and he/she would wish that classes had full attendance. Good attendance means that the tutors are appreciated and that they are a major part of the learning process.

While we acknowledge that adult learners may have certain constraints that prevent them from fully participating in tutorials and online discussions, we cannot deny the importance of regular contacts, real or virtual, between learners and their tutors.

*Selvarajan Velu*  
*Shah Alam Learning Centre*

Dear Selvarajan,

*We appreciate your concern. However, the final measure of importance is whether or not learners have learnt from the various avenues of learning we have provided for the various courses constituting the building blocks of their respective programmes.*

*From the very first day of our operations, we have defined the load of credit hours in terms of learning hours rather than lecture hours. This reflects our relative emphasis on learning rather than on attendance to class, as is the conventional measure.*

*Further, we offer our learners a blend of three delivery modes: self-managed learning, face-to-face (F2F) tutorials, and online learning. It is to be noted that, of the three, self-managed learning constitutes the pillar of our delivery mode. The F2F and the online sessions could be regarded as complementary modes. Thus in principle, to OUM, class attendance is not mandatory. (It is to be noted however, that although it is not mandatory to OUM, we do monitor class attendance where such is the requirement of our major learners' sponsors).*

*Though in the past we have been delivering through a rather fixed blend of the three modes, we are gradually shifting to a more variable blend. Ultimately, our wish is to offer a continuum of different blends, from total independent learning to a full blend as we have done in the past. We would like to see ourselves empowering learners to learn rather dictating them to do so.*

*As for the online forums, what we have done is to decouple them from the F2F sessions. This has enabled us to add value to our learners' experience. As I have noted in TCX31, the availability of qualified and experienced tutors varies among localities. By decoupling the forums from F2F tutorials we have increased the avenues for learning. Learners' peer-to-peer networks have now expanded well beyond the confines of their F2F classes to wider groups, at times even nationwide. Additionally, learners now have the benefit of interacting with an additional resource person, the e-tutor.*

*Also, since the number of combined virtual classes is now smaller, we can afford to be more selective in appointing e-tutors from among those who are better qualified, who have more extensive experience, and who have proven track records. What we are aiming now is for more meaningful discussions to take place in the forums.*

*The decline in learners' attendance in tutorial sessions has been anticipated by some of our tutors, upon seeing the development that is taking place with respect to our online learning materials. For a large number of courses now, learners have the privilege of downloading the HTML version of the modules. Try to view some of the modules whenever you have a chance to do so. Some tutors have enriched the learning experience of learners by utilising these modules in their F2F sessions.*

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*My word of advice to tutors at large is this: the facilities that we have provided to learners through self-managed learning and online learning have gone through a lot of improvements. Tutors are encouraged to improve the conduct of their F2F sessions to remain relevant.*

*Thank you.*

*Prof Dr Shaari Abd Hamid  
Deputy Vice President,  
Institute of Teaching and Learning Advancement (ITLA)*

## **IMPROVEMENTS IN THE E-TUTOR SYSTEM**

I refer to a letter titled “E-Tutors: A Good Idea?” in last semester’s issue of TCX.

Jennifer Duarte from Perak Learning Centre wrote that the new e-tutor system at OUM is causing hardship to learners. I have to agree with her. I have received complaints from my learners that responses from their e-tutors have been very slow, which frustrates them and makes them reluctant to participate further.

According to Prof Dr Shaari Abd Hamid, Deputy Vice President, Institute of Teaching and Learning Advancement (ITLA), as a result of the new e-tutor system, the quality of online discussions has improved. This may be true in some areas but not all of them.

I hope Prof Shaari would monitor these online discussions, paying particular attention to the rate of responses given by the e-tutors. Hopefully, some improvements will take place.

*Thank you.*

*Hj Ali Sabri Kamaruddin  
Kuala Terengganu Learning Centre*

*Dear Haji Ali,*

*Many thanks for your feedback. The e-tutor system is relatively new, so some teething problems are to be expected. Hence, while we have seen increased peer interactions and discussions in some forums, we have also found that some tutors had not been as regular in other forums.*

*We are continuously trying to improve the monitoring of our e-tutors and F2F tutors as well. E-tutors are sent reminders to be visible in their forums and to respond to questions and requests for help from learners within 48 hours. They will be contacted via sms if necessary. We hope in time to come our e-tutors will realize the importance of their commitment to be constantly available to provide support and immediate*

*help as and when required by learners.*

*Prof Dr Shaari Abd Hamid  
Deputy Vice President, ITLA*

## **OVERCOMING CHALLENGES IN TEACHING ADULT LEARNERS**

I have been tutoring at OUM since 2008 in Human Resource Development (HRD) and I have to say that tutoring adult learners can indeed be challenging. As a relatively young-looking tutor, some of my more senior learners may regard me as lacking in experience to teach them. I believe a number of other tutors have faced a similar situation too.

When you are dealing with this type of learners, there are two possible classroom scenarios: one, a few of them may constantly argue with you during tutorials, or two, they may not be very cooperative.

How have I been able to overcome these issues? Well, for the argumentative ones, I always try to lead the discussion with facts. Adult learners tend to be very accepting of factual statements and this is usually the best way to end arguments. However, if a learner has personal experience related to the topic, I will give him/her the chance to share this experience with the rest of the class. Nevertheless, it is my job to keep track of the time and bring an end to the discussion if it becomes too lengthy.

Then there are the uncooperative learners. Usually, I resort to adapting the principles of adult learning. I try to reason with them when they refuse to participate in the classroom or are undisciplined. In andragogy, there is no such thing as coercion. Forceful ways only work with children or teenagers.

I hope my suggestions will be useful for OUM tutors, especially those who are new to teaching adults.

*Nor Asiah Mahmood  
Bangi Learning Centre*

*Dear Nor Asiah,*

*Thanks for sharing your experience and tips! It is great that you are using TCX as a way to connect with your fellow tutors. Tutoring adults can certainly be a challenge because one cannot use the same teaching principles that apply to younger learners. Being relatively young-looking yourself, I am sure that developing a deferential and civil tutor-learner relationship requires some ingenuity. I do hope that others who have had a similar experience have learned a thing or two by reading your views. Keep up the good work!*

*Prof Dr Shaari Abd Hamid  
Deputy Vice President, ITLA*



### Important Dates

TUTORIAL 1	28-30 January 2011
TUTORIAL 2	11-13 February 2011
TUTORIAL 3	25-27 February 2011
ASSIGNMENT DEADLINE	1-7 March 2011 (Tutors should remind their learners to use the special assignment template and to submit their assignments online. This applies ONLY to courses that require learners to submit their assignments online.)
MID-TERM EXAMS	5-13 March 2011
TUTORIAL 4	18-20 March 2011
FINAL EXAMS	1-26 April 2011

### On Face-To-Face Tutorials

1. The number of face-to-face tutorials is now fixed at FOUR per semester. This applies from the January 2011 semester onwards.
2. Starting from the January 2011 semester:
  - ITLA will notify tutors about their appointments by email and SMS.
  - The administrator of each Learning Centre will personally contact tutors to inform them of their tutorial dates and time slots.
  - Learning Centres will no longer provide hard copies of offer letters. Tutors can now access these letters through the system.

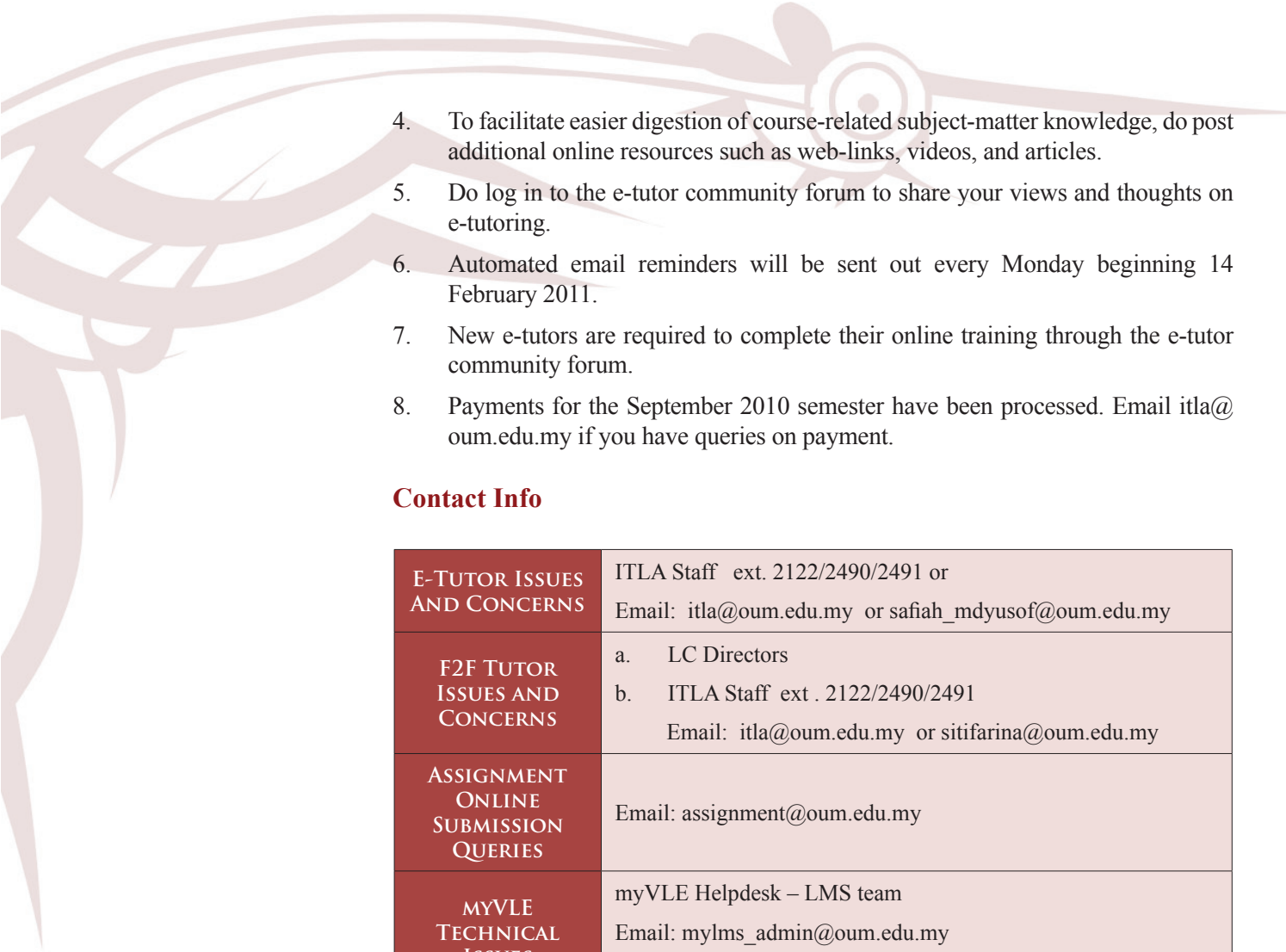
### On Assignments

1. Assignments, Assignment Rubrics, and the Assignment Template for learners are now accessible on myVLE.
2. Please advise your learners that the last date of online assignment submission is 7 March 2011. Late submissions will be rejected.

### E-Tutoring Updates, Reminders and Tips

1. E-tutors are advised to log into their online discussion forums at least THREE times per week.
2. Learners' requests for help should be responded to within TWO working days.
3. To encourage active discussions, e-tutors should post and redirect questions where appropriate.



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4. To facilitate easier digestion of course-related subject-matter knowledge, do post additional online resources such as web-links, videos, and articles.
  5. Do log in to the e-tutor community forum to share your views and thoughts on e-tutoring.
  6. Automated email reminders will be sent out every Monday beginning 14 February 2011.
  7. New e-tutors are required to complete their online training through the e-tutor community forum.
  8. Payments for the September 2010 semester have been processed. Email [itla@oum.edu.my](mailto:itla@oum.edu.my) if you have queries on payment.

### Contact Info

E-TUTOR ISSUES AND CONCERNS	ITLA Staff ext. 2122/2490/2491 or Email: <a href="mailto:itla@oum.edu.my">itla@oum.edu.my</a> or <a href="mailto:safiah_mdyusof@oum.edu.my">safiah_mdyusof@oum.edu.my</a>
F2F TUTOR ISSUES AND CONCERNS	a. LC Directors b. ITLA Staff ext . 2122/2490/2491 Email: <a href="mailto:itla@oum.edu.my">itla@oum.edu.my</a> or <a href="mailto:sitifarina@oum.edu.my">sitifarina@oum.edu.my</a>
ASSIGNMENT ONLINE SUBMISSION QUERIES	Email: <a href="mailto:assignment@oum.edu.my">assignment@oum.edu.my</a>
MYVLE TECHNICAL ISSUES	myVLE Helpdesk – LMS team Email: <a href="mailto:mylms_admin@oum.edu.my">mylms_admin@oum.edu.my</a>



Each issue of TCX is themed.

The theme of each forthcoming issue of TCX is announced via email to all tutors at least a month before the issue is due to be published.

**All tutors are invited to submit their original articles based on the pre-announced theme.**

The best article will win two new books, courtesy of McGraw-Hill Malaysia.

Check your inbox for the announcement of the thematic focus of the next issue.



# PRODUCING ROUNDED GRADUATES FOR THE MODERN WORKPLACE

By Basil Jude Surin (bjs@oum.edu.my)

## What Employers Want

Many employers vex over graduates who speak English poorly, lack communication skills and leadership qualities. They bemoan also how some graduates today seem to lack personality depth, exploratory and connectivity skills, as well as other soft and hard skills.

Employers today want to hire skilled individuals who are able to achieve high performance targets and attain set company goals. Thus, employers tend to look for people with particular knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviours. They want employees who are proactive, creative and flexible, who have integrity and a sense of urgency, who are able to work in a team, and who have the requisite subject knowledge and skills. Understandably, it is a cause for concern for all stakeholders when graduates fall short of any or all of these.

For universities, there are no shortcuts but to focus on facilitating learner acquisition of knowledge as well as three other key areas: developing learners' discipline-specific attributes, communication skills, and self-reflexivity.

## Discipline-Specific Attributes

Discipline-specific attributes encompass the qualities and skills which learners must develop in their academic programmes. These qualities and skills will directly shape learners' preparedness for the workplace as well as determine their ability to contribute positively towards realising their employers' goals.

University courseware developers and instructional designers should pay close attention to where and how discipline-specific attributes can be developed. These attributes must be made apparent in each learning unit or module, as well as across different modules of study.

Currently, it can be said that the programmes offered by OUM are highly subject-matter focused and tutors are keen to stick to them as much as possible. It would be helpful to tutors if they are made clearly aware of the discipline-



***“For universities, there are no shortcuts but to focus on facilitating learner acquisition of knowledge as well as three other key areas: developing learners’ discipline-specific attributes, communication skills, and self-reflexivity.”***

specific attributes embedded in these programmes so that they would be fully able to cultivate them in learners through systematic guidance.

## Communication Skills

Communication skills represent another area that needs serious emphasis in higher education as they are vital for professional success. Across the board, written communication is already

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well-covered in most undergraduate programmes. Writing assignments enable learners to work on their writing skill which includes systematic thinking, planning before writing and proofreading. Consistent stylistic presentation of ideas and adherence to proper academic conventions are also given extensive focus.

The same, however, cannot be said for oral communication. Communicating ideas effectively, and sustaining and extending oral discourse, too, should be given due attention, especially during tutorials. Tutors need to be proficient and articulate if they are to serve as model speakers-communicators. This is especially crucial where English is concerned. It would be ironic if tutors, although very knowledgeable in their disciplines, lack the confidence to communicate well in the target language and yet expect their learners to be good communicators.

In order for learners to truly benefit and improve in both oral and written communication, they would also need, apart from model tutors, module writers, editors and courseware designers to be highly meticulous in ensuring that language errors are eliminated and subject-matter content is clearly communicated in the university's modules and assessment papers.

### **Self-Reflexivity in Professional Development**

Beyond facilitating knowledge acquisition, the third area that universities should focus upon is inculcating in learners the habit and skill of self-reflexivity.

Undergraduate programmes should try to incorporate self-reflection as a tool for identifying useful strategies for meeting the dynamic requirements of the modern workplace. It can help to improve productivity and give the individual professional satisfaction. In encouraging reflection through scaffolding activities, learners can learn to analyse problems and look into various plausible solutions. This also encourages learners to assess their own knowledge as well as that of others.

At the end of the day, self-reflexivity can lead to improved learning and deepen learners' understanding of themselves and their surroundings, enabling them to respond more productively to worldly demands, including the demands of professional work.

To encourage self-reflexivity, the university can introduce various tools for reflective inquiry in modules and other learning materials. It will also be useful to model the process

of reflection consistently through portfolio assignments, action research, self-observation, reflective journals and other such materials.

### **Conclusion**

Today's workplace calls for graduates with first-class mentality, namely, those with the right knowledge and skills in multiple disciplines who are furthermore independent and able communicators.

As university educators, we must critically evaluate the extent to which we are striving to produce such rounded graduates. After all, the role of higher education institutions extends beyond conferring degrees. **TCX**

**\* Basil Jude Surin is an OUM tutor at the Kedah Learning Centre.**

# LEARNING “HOW BEST TO LIVE”

Veronica Somasundram (kinabalu29@yahoo.com)

The history of education is the history of teaching and learning. Since the beginning of human existence, every generation has sought to pass on cultural and social values, traditions, morals, religions and skills to the next generation. Education was what made this possible, and over time it became associated with wealth, authority and power. It was in the pursuit of these things that people came to fully realise the importance of knowledge and philosophy, the latter being a branch of study that dates back to the ancient times of Socrates.

Socrates, who believed that self-development was more important than material wealth, stated that there were different kinds of knowledge; some important and others trivial. He acknowledged that most of us know many trivial things. For example, while a craftsman possesses important knowledge, i.e., the knowledge of his craft, this is important only to himself. This kind of knowledge is not what Socrates considered important knowledge. In his opinion, the most important knowledge is knowledge on “how best to live.”

As educators, do you think we have been successful in imparting this important knowledge to our learners? How much have we done to really give our learners the knowledge they need in and out of the working world? Do our learners indeed know “how best to live”?

As educators, our job is to teach our learners the rudiments of how to think. We have to show them the way to think for themselves. By learning how to think, learners can acquire new knowledge and develop conceptual-analytical skills. And this is how they can put whatever knowledge they have gained to work. Simply put, universities and educators can teach learners what a bicycle is, but it is up to them to figure out how they can put that bicycle to good use. **TCX**

\* Veronica Somasundram is an OUM tutor at the Sabah Learning Centre



*“By learning how to think, learners can acquire new knowledge and develop conceptual-analytical skills.”*

# SO YOU THINK YOU CAN DANCE?

Selina Marie Rogers (nselina@hotmail.com)



Could one claim to know how to dance by merely memorising a set of dance steps? The answer is, of course, no. This analogy could very well be used to address the issue here: is the acquisition of knowledge by itself sufficient for learners to survive in the real world?

It is undeniable that many learners pride themselves in scoring straight A's in quizzes and examinations, only to find themselves in a dilemma because they do not seem to be able to apply what they have acquired at the university.

It is also a fact that employers are getting more and more disillusioned with the "half-baked" candidates they face at interviews. Supervisors and managers are bewildered at employees' inability to simply perform at work. After all, aren't graduates expected to be able to apply their subject matter knowledge at their workplaces?

In learning how to dance, a novice should not merely know a set of dance steps, she must also be given the opportunity to practise those steps. Similarly, a learner should be given tasks and exercises that allow her to apply the acquired knowledge. In other words, these tasks should require the learner to think and apply, not merely recall and regurgitate. For example, in the case of Business Communication skills, knowing the importance of empathy in customer relations

does not necessarily mean the learner is able to demonstrate empathy when speaking or writing to an irate customer.

Every learner-dancer is aware that taking the first steps can be a daunting task. Motivation from the dance teacher can do wonders for the self-esteem of the learner. Tutors have the same role to play.

At the initial stage, learners could face difficulties as they attempt to put their subject matter knowledge into practice. Remember, a significant number of them would have spent years of their school life being spoon-fed by teachers who adhered to an education system that is very much exam-oriented to this very day. It is a challenge to step out of that comfort zone and to start thinking out-of-the-box! So, it is really up to tutors to inspire, motivate, and challenge learners to *apply* what they have learnt. The best way to do so is to help them relate their knowledge with situations and experiences at work and in life.

***"It is really up to tutors to inspire, motivate, and challenge learners to apply what they have learnt."***

Ultimately, however, a well-equipped dance studio, hours of dance lessons and an encouraging dance teacher are only useful to a learner-dancer if he or she has the will to succeed. Learners should realise that no matter what the university or tutors does to facilitate learning, it is their own initiative that will drive them to put knowledge to work. They are the ones who have the power to make their own learning meaningful and worthwhile.

So perhaps it is time for tutors to ask this question when they meet their learners in the next tutorial: "So you think you can dance?" **TCX**

**\* Selina Marie Rogers is an OUM subject matter expert (SME) in English and TESL.**





# INNOVATE OR PERISH

Teo Chuen Tick (chuentick@oum.edu.my)

Of late, the purpose of acquiring university education has been the subject of much debate. As new universities continue to crop up and the chase for qualifications intensifies, there have been concerns as to what roles universities and degrees actually have to play. “Academic inflation” – when the inflation of minimum job requirements leads to an excess of people with lower degrees who are unable to gain employment – is a common issue these days. Not all graduates produced by universities have been met by a welcoming job market. This begs the question of what a university’s responsibilities really are.

Modern society runs on the functional and practical applications of theoretical knowledge. If learners are unable to apply what they know in real-life situations, then any subject-matter knowledge acquired can have no greater value than the piece of paper that acknowledges their graduation from an academic programme.

The real problem with universities in the context of this issue surfaces when graduates fail to gain employment because of a mismatch between the skills that are in demand and the skills that graduates actually have. This is not a new revelation, and we know that many universities have taken corrective steps by trying to realign their courses with the actual requirements of the job market.

The crux of the larger issue at hand is how do we ensure that learners really are able to put their knowledge to work. For a start, I believe there must be a revamp of the education system and the practices in teaching and learning. As a nation, we must encourage creativity and an inquisitive culture through education. It is high time that we stop drawing on spoon-feeding and rote learning alone. We should also stop promoting the regurgitating of facts during examinations.

School-based assessment that encourages initiative and exploration should be extended to the projects and research that take place in institutions of higher learning. Learners must learn to actually think out of the box and troubleshoot for solutions so as to acquire enough problem-solving skills that can provide some leverage in today’s demanding job market. Innovation is the keyword in this process, and universities must help to inculcate innovation as an inherent



***“Innovation is the keyword in this process, and universities must help to inculcate innovation as an inherent quality.”***

quality. This is how learners can really put their knowledge to work.<sup>TCX</sup>

\* Teo Chuen Tick is an OUM tutor at the Penang Learning Centre.

# COMPETITIVE (TECHNICAL) INTELLIGENCE: AN AGENT FOR MODERN DEVELOPMENT

Prof Dr Henri Dou (douhenri@yahoo.fr)

Globalisation has brought together more than 200 countries that can simultaneously partake in and benefit from international exchange and open competition. This new scenario is a rupture from the past, because for more than a century only a group of 20 developed countries grounded their development on the exploitation of natural resources from other countries. Today the situation is dramatically different, calling for the development of a new discipline that can help countries, companies and institutions to increase their competitiveness and build competitive advantage.

This new discipline is known as Competitive Intelligence (CI) or Competitive Technical Intelligence (CTI). CI is designed to provide key decision-makers with valuable insights, recommendations or alert indices by careful retrieval, management, analysis and understanding of strategic information and its impact upon institutional objectives and visions.

CI concepts, methods and tools are now used by many countries, institutions and companies all over the world, e.g. the American Strategic and Competitive Intelligence Professionals, France's national programme for CI, as well as South Korea and Thailand that have aggressive policies for clusters development.

For any country, building CI can be difficult. While governments invariably provide funds to create competences and knowledge, this is only the first step. The second step is to actually transform these competences and knowledge into money. This can be achieved through public and private partnerships (PPP or Triple Helix) that involve governmental institutions, research laboratories and universities, as well as industries. The intersection of these three entities provides the best condition to cultivate innovation; a measure that calls for the development of specific clusters.

## Using CI to kick-start development

Universities that offer academic programmes in CI provide students with the knowledge to develop or integrate themselves



***“Competitive Intelligence is designed to provide key decision-makers with valuable insights, recommendations or alert indices.”***

in a CI team or within CI units in companies or institutions, some even at the regional level.

CI has a big role to play in regional development. Regional clusters take part in a CI cycle that is, in fact, involved in the retrieval of elaborate information and its analysis by experts. This will, in turn, provide recommendations and alert indices to key decision-makers in the region.

There are various examples where CI has been applied. At the international level, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) has developed a programme to increase innovation in the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) of developing countries. This programme uses intellectual property information combined with the methods and tools of

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CI, to aid regional development, including in pre-clusterisation and improve existing processes as well.

At the national level, the French National Competitive Intelligence programme is one example that involves both large and small companies, e.g. EADS (airplanes), AREVA (nuclear energy), SEB (household appliances) and et cetera. In this programme, basic and expert CI techniques and methods are provided, e.g. information analysis, patents, information security, influence and et cetera to help these companies develop and innovate.

Some of the outcomes from this programme include the establishment of an SEB branch in China via a joint venture between SEB and SUKO, a similar outfit in China and the procurement of 180 Airbus A320 aircrafts by the IndiGo, a private domestic low-cost airline in India. The latter has been the largest jet order in aviation history.

In South Korea, strategic technologies were developed via the consultation of several thousand experts using CI concepts and methods to determine the future direction of technologies in the country. In this project, South Korea resorted to the DELPHI method as a means to organise and make sense of all the information and analyses.

At the regional level, Thailand has produced some particularly interesting results. Using Michael Porter's cluster concept (a famous business concept for economic development) and the APA Automatic Patent Analysis, different clusters involving various areas, e.g. tourism in Phuket, nanotechnologies, coconut products and et cetera, created a patent map of all the technologies and applications available in each field, to help experts form competitive ideas to the Governing Board of the clusters. This is a simple way of applying CI concepts and methods to cluster development and to establishing private and public partnerships.

Morocco presents an interesting local example, whereby CI methodology (including patent analysis, international contact with experts and development of proper governance) was used to pre-clusterise domains for cacti commerce. This resulted in the establishment of "cactopoles", which are industrial quarters that involve various areas of the Moroccan cacti industry, e.g. nutrition, pharmaceuticals, fruit processing, animal feed production and et cetera.

In laboratories or universities, it is now also commonplace to have a CI team whose objectives are valorisation (i.e. increasing value of capital assets) as well as betterment of the whole institution by providing researchers with some insights to develop industry links, institutional partnerships, thus helping

these researches to use their competences and knowledge to innovate through the development of new products.

The University of Aix Marseille (France), the University of Coventry (United Kingdom) and the University of Stanford (the United States of America) make for some interesting examples.

## Conclusion

CI and CTI are two rapidly developing fields and are a must for many countries, companies and institutions. Many advanced countries have adopted a national programme for CI as a means to drive innovation and create new incentives for regional development.

At the moment, CI is still a new phenomenon and many people speak about it without knowing the fine points of this discipline. This is the reason why short and specialised CI courses have been developed, and there is still plenty of room for universities to take up CI as a field of study. Today, increasing competitiveness is an inevitable process, and CI is one of the best methods for any party to fulfil this objective. Your company or institution must bear in mind that even if you do not practise CI, your competitors probably do; making the gap between your company with the "best in class" dramatically wider.

The use of CI is now so extensive that various areas are directly concerned, e.g. regional development, sports, law, tourism, social cohesion and et cetera. Many international institutions, such as the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (ONUDI) and WIPO have also set up different programmes in this area.

Even if the number of people involved in CI is not necessarily large (this calls for a selected number of institutions teaching this discipline), it is very important that they are well-educated in this area, and are equipped with the most current methods and tools, as this is a discipline that moves rapidly and concurrent with the progress in information and communication technology.

The examples in this article have provided some real world results, encompassing many things from new joint ventures to the consolidation of different industries. What is evident from each of these instances is that CI has proven to indeed be a useful agent to encourage innovation in modern development. **TCX**

**\* Prof Dr Henri Dou is Director of Atelis (ESCEM), Research Professor (Beijing University), and Professor Emeritus (University Aix-Marseille). A WIPO Expert, Prof Dou is also a facilitator at the Centre for Graduate Studies, OUM.**



# MYTH OF THE SMART TYPIST

Prof Dr Mohamed Yusoff Ismail (yusoff\_ismail@oum.edu.my)

Typing classes are now as extinct as dodo birds. In the good old days, a certificate in typing was most desirable in getting a job. Many people went to typing schools and practised very hard on those massive Remington, Adler or Olivetti machines. Students were not only tested for speed and accuracy, typing schools were also sticklers when it came to the conventional rules of typing. Students were required to master the techniques of keyboarding with each finger assigned to specific characters so that their hands did not crisscross each other when hitting the keys at speed.

A typist would have to be meticulous too, because one just could not afford to make too many mistakes. One or two “typos” were quite alright although you had to make the corrections manually. If there were too many of them, the typist had to retype the entire page, a tedious and time-consuming task, no doubt.

With the advent of computers, typing schools died a natural death. Today, we are expected to learn how to type on our own, with no one around to teach us even the most rudimentary rules of keyboarding.

Hence, it is common to see all sorts of self-styled documents that violate the conventional rules of typing. Typical of these is the appearance of punctuation marks and spaces in all the wrong places. Many people tend to ignore the simple rules either out of sheer ignorance or because they have never received proper coaching.

One of the rules is to never put a space where it should not be. A space is technically a separator for words or for alphanumeric characters. If the space happens to be in the “hot” zone at the end of a line, it can also function as a line breaker (we seldom use hyphens nowadays).

For instance, if you type a monetary value such as “RM240.00” with a space immediately after “RM”, the Arabic numerals (240.00) following it may be shifted down to the beginning of a new line, leaving the “RM” sign hanging by itself right at the end of the previous line. Even if such a phrase is not in the hot zone, there would be a big gap between the ringgit symbol and the numbers when the text is justified.

This phenomenon is called a “widow” because the “wife” (i.e., the numerals) is now “divorced” from the “husband”



***“Remember this simple rule: a space between a ‘husband’ and the ‘wife’ simply means that you are giving opportunities for another person to squeeze in and take advantage of the estranged relationship.”***

(i.e., the “RM” sign). When this happens, how do you read the value? Imagine how awkward it would be if you have to read the two in one single breath when the “wife” and “husband” are not sitting together on the same line! It would be even worse if “RM” appears at the end of one page while the numerals continue at the beginning of the next page.

In banking practices, a space between the ringgit sign and the numerals may spell trouble because someone may insert another number or two in the space, thereby altering the cardinal value by the tens or thousands. Therefore, to be on the safe side, remember this simple rule: a space between a “husband” and the “wife” simply means that you are giving opportunities for another person to squeeze in and take advantage of the estranged relationship. The rule of thumb is, “Do not put a space in between two things that should not be separated from one another.”

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Another worrying trend nowadays is the habit of using spaces instead of commas to indicate thousand, hundred thousand or million. For instance, the self-styled typist may often write “one million” like this: “1 000 000”, instead of “1,000,000.” (Note the two commas after every third digit from the right).

Writing like this may look very fashionable but it violates the fundamental rules in mathematics; worse still if the last cluster of zeroes on the right happens to be at the end of the line. The trio may be shifted down to the beginning of a new line. The “million” is now broken into two non-cohesive clusters of numbers, a catastrophe caused merely by trying to be too trendy.

Had you used commas in between the zeroes, the numerals in the “million” will stick together as a single entity. If it needs to be shifted to the beginning of a new line, all seven digits plus the commas will move down *en bloc*. They will not be broken up nor will they be hyphenated.

Another rule is to never put extra spaces between words. Some people have itchy fingers. They simply like to press the space bar just for fun. Running the spell checker on a word processor will highlight this violation; the spell checker will change the font colour of badly-spaced words or underscore them with jagged lines.

If your fingers are itchy for extra spaces, nothing disastrous will happen to your document or file, but the particular line where the “crime” has been committed will appear to have uneven spacing between words. It will not look professional enough for an A-grade essay, will it?

Another unfortunate thing is that we have ignored, rather unknowingly, the rule for spacing after a full stop at the end of a sentence. The rule is, “There should be at least two spaces after a full stop at the end of a sentence before you begin with a new one.”

Most people will find this quite trivial. Nevertheless, this rule is not without basis. In the old days of traditional printing, extra spaces after a full stop at the end of a sentence provided edges for the typesetter to manoeuvre with alphanumeric characters so that the text line will come out nicely with well-spaced words in between.

I guess you may wonder if this rule is still relevant today. Bear in mind that the two-space rule after a full stop has some hidden blessings. One is that the paragraph will look less cramped because the extra space provides an “eye-break” and makes reading less stressful. Imagine yourself



***“If you have too many ‘widows’ and ‘orphans’ in your text, you will not create a good impression to the individual who is evaluating your work. So be nice and humane to those who have the power to decide your grades.”***

writing a thesis; would you want to torture your examiner with page after page of cramped paragraphs that have no “eye breaks” at all? Just as long paragraphs are broken up into shorter ones, well-spaced sentences will help for less stressful reading.

Another formatting disaster is when a punctuation mark like the comma, full stop, question mark, opening and closing bracket suddenly appear at the beginning of a new line when it rightfully belongs to the previous line.

This phenomenon is called an “orphan.” It happens when you insert a space just before the punctuation mark. As mentioned above, a space is both a word separator and a line breaker. Hence, if you put a space just before the question mark in a sentence (e.g. “What is this ?”), chances are that the question mark will become an “orphan” if you are in the critical zone at the end of a line. If there is no space between “this” and “?”, the question mark will never become an orphan. The two will stick together regardless of where they are pushed to.

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If you have too many “widows” and “orphans” in your text, you will not create a good impression to the individual who is evaluating your work. So be nice and humane to those who have the power to decide your grades.

Many people do not bother with proper keyboarding techniques. As long as they get the document to look somewhat right, it is fine with them. For this reason, they do not make full use of the text formatting features on their computer.

For example, many people still use tabs and carriage return (ENTER key) to format their bibliography in a way that is reminiscent of bygone eras of the manual typewriter. Because of this, the right-hand side of the document can never be justified.

Starting a new page in a document is another interesting chore. Many people choose to repeatedly press the ENTER key until a new page appears on the screen. The real problem starts when you add more text on previous pages and the first line of the text on the new page shifts farther down, making it necessary for you to delete some of the carriage returns to bring the first line back to the top of the page. This is an unwise (read: ignorant) way of doing things even though the printed page still looks like what you want. Actually, all you need to do to generate a new page is to invoke the “INSERT” menu and choose the “Break” and “Page Break” options.

Many people do not even know the format of their document. Most of the time, they format on a default letter-size paper, yet print them on A4-size paper. This is when you get a lot of white spaces at the bottom margin of the document while the margin on the right-hand side gets squeezed in by at least 0.5%. (For your information, letter-size is shorter but wider than A4-size paper). To make things worse, letter-size paper is rarely available in Malaysia. It is widely used only in America.

Today, despite the fact that typewriters have become extinct, the rules remain as important. Some examples of good formatting that comply with conventional standards can still be seen in letters and documents prepared by senior generations of secretaries of some established ministries. Most of them have gone through rigorous training on the traditional typewriter keyboard. Will their style ever be emulated by their younger successors? I am not sure, but I certainly hope that there will be smart typists to carry on the proper traditions. **TCX**

**\*Prof Dr Mohamed Yusoff Ismail is a consultant anthropologist with OUM's Faculty of Applied Social Sciences..**



***“Today, despite the fact that typewriters have become extinct, the rules remain as important.”***

## **FORMATTING TIPS**

### **Interpreting a Full Stop**

- A full stop preceded and followed by any numeric symbol without any space in between is technically a decimal point.
- In e-mail addresses, we use full stops without any space before or after each word. Putting a space before or after the dot will invalidate the address.
- A full stop is also used for distinguishing values, e.g., the ringgit versus the sen. Try putting a wide space before or after the full stop the next time you write a cheque; the bank officer will give you a weird look. In banking practices, remember not to put a gap between numbers, otherwise other people may insert something in the blank space.

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- A full stop after a capital letter followed by a single space is meant for abbreviation of a person's name, like A. B. Dunlop.

### Some Typing Tips

- After every punctuation mark, insert a space except for a full stop at the end of a sentence. In this case you need to insert two spaces before you begin a new sentence in the same paragraph.
- For a full stop that is used as part of a person's abbreviation, only one space is needed (e.g. J. W. W. Birch). If there is no space, the full stop is not part of the abbreviation, but a decimal point!
- Never insert a space before any punctuation mark such as full stop, comma, colon, semi-colon or question mark. (You may have problems with an "orphan" later on).
- In the case of parentheses or brackets, do not insert any space after the opening bracket and also before the closing bracket. However, you need to insert a space before the opening bracket and also after the closing bracket.
- Do not insert extra spaces between words. A word processor like Microsoft Word will issue a protest note by underscoring the text with a green line when you run the spell checker.
- Never put a space between anything that you do not want separated. For instance, "RM50,000" should not be written as "RM 50 000" (with a space between "RM" and the numerals). Remember to insert a comma, instead of a space, to separate the thousand.

### Full Stops with Inverted Commas

Where do you put a full stop when the sentence ends with words in inverted commas or quotation marks? The answer is, "The full stop is placed within the quotation marks."

Consider the following examples:

*The title was an allusion to a phrase in Goethe's "Earl-King."*

Note where the full stop is placed. Although "Earl King" is in inverted commas, the full stop is not placed outside these inverted commas, but enclosed within them.

*He said, "One example can be found in Whitman's 'Song of Myself.'"*

The above is a classic case of inverted commas within inverted commas. Note the cluster of inverted commas at the end of the sentence and where the full stop is placed. (The two examples above were taken from William F. Imscher (1972), *The Holt Guide to English: A Contemporary Handbook of Rhetoric, Language, and Literature*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, p. 510).

### Full Stops with Other Marks

If a sentence ends with a question mark or an exclamation mark, do not put a full stop after these marks.

If a sentence ends with a word that is already abbreviated, e.g. "Osman Brothers Sdn. Bhd.", the full stop after the last abbreviated word already serves as the end of that sentence:

*To do the job they have hired Osman Brothers Sdn. Bhd.*

# ON THE IMPORTANCE OF GRADUATE EDUCATION

Interview by Dr David CL Lim with Prof Dr Mohd Ghazali Mohayidin,  
Dean of the Centre for Graduate Studies

**Dr David:** Tell us something about yourself - your background, and work at OUM presently.

**Prof Ghazali:** I obtained my PhD in Agricultural Economics from the University of Hawaii in 1981. I have since conducted research with such institutions as the World Bank, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada, and the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). Today, I am Dean of the Centre for Graduate Studies (CGS) at OUM.

**Dr David:** On “putting knowledge to work”, would you say that this is something the Malaysian higher education system should particularly emphasise? Why?

**Prof Ghazali:** Sure. To find innovative solutions to the economic challenges facing many countries including Malaysia in the 21st century, we will be dependent on a creative, knowledgeable, and highly skilled workforce. Putting or applying knowledge and skills to work on these challenges will help sustain our country's future economic prosperity and growth, foster social well-being, protect the environment, and ensure that we will continue to be competitive in the global economy.

**Dr David:** To what extent is “putting knowledge to work” accented at CGS?

**Prof Ghazali:** Undergraduate education is important to create a stable economy because it provides students with foundational knowledge and work skills, and prepares them for a wide range of employment options. But it is graduate education that provides students with the advanced knowledge and skills that will secure our future sources of intellectual human capital, and drive innovations in the knowledge economy.

At CGS, most of our post graduate programmes provide students with opportunities to “put knowledge to work” through research and development in their respective fields of study. The emphasis has always been on applied or action research. CGS is currently developing industrial



***“It is graduate education that provides students with the advanced knowledge and skills that will secure our future sources of intellectual human capital, and drive innovations in the knowledge economy.”***

masters and doctoral programmes. These programmes will allow students who enrol with OUM to carry out applied and action research at their work places.

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**Dr David:** *Assuming that a particular learner graduates after spending several years doing a degree programme, but is unable to put the knowledge acquired to work in the field in which he/she was trained, who do you think should bear responsibility for that?*

**Prof Ghazali:** I hope this does not happen with OUM graduates. If it does, then either we have failed to attract talented students or we have failed to deliver our products effectively. This is of course assuming that our products are relevant to what the market needs, and that the students know exactly what they want to achieve from higher education.

**Dr David:** *Arguments have been made about how universities have become too utilitarian, for instance, in producing workers for the work force, instead of educating the learner holistically in ways that cannot always be translated into working skills. What would be your response to that?*

**Prof Ghazali:** If there is merit in the arguments, then, universities have only been producing workers, not knowledgeable workers. Of course, we want workers who are practically-oriented and useful. However, what is more important is to have workers who are creative, knowledgeable and skillful.

Yes, we produced mostly workers in the 80's and early 90's when the economy was booming and the demand for workers increased significantly. However, things are changing, especially when employers found that many graduates could not perform as expected at the workplace. Many universities are shifting from teacher-centred to student-centred education; and emphasis is now given to not only academic achievement but also the ability of the graduates to master soft skills such as communication, problem solving, teamwork, and so on.

**Dr David:** *Where would you like to see CGS in the next 5 years or so?*

**Prof Ghazali:** I would like to see continuing efforts to identify and attract talented students to CGS. Improving programme completion rates is also important. In addition, we should provide the appropriate training and mentoring to students so that they are aware of the copious career opportunities in and out of the academe. We should also ensure that they acquire transferable skills so that they can function in a larger array of jobs.



***“At CGS, most of our post graduate programmes provide students with opportunities to ‘put knowledge to work’ through research and development in their respective fields of study.”***

Preparing future faculty is critical. We need dedicated faculty members who can shape our graduates to be creative, knowledgeable, and highly skilled individuals.

**\* Dr David CL Lim is Programme Coordinator of OUM's Bachelor of English Studies, Master of English Studies and the forthcoming Diploma in English for Professional Development.**



# THE THREE STONECUTTERS

A man came across three stonecutters and asked them what they were doing. The first man replied, “I am making a living.” The second kept on hammering while he said, “I am doing the best job of stonecutting in the entire county.” The third looked up with a visionary gleam in his eye and said, “I am building a cathedral.”

What can we learn from this simple tale?

The first stonecutter is simply doing a day’s work for a day’s pay; for the material reward he receives in exchange for his labour. To him, the substance, purpose and context of his work does not matter. The only thing that does is for him to get the job done.

The second stonecutter has higher aspirations. He wants to be the best. He is an unshakable individualist. He believes in the power of the human mind, and its capacity for reason, in the drive for quality and results, and in having pride in his work. His world is competitive and meritocratic; he measures himself against the “whole county” as the story has it – even the whole world.

Yet somehow the vision of the second stonecutter is also incomplete. The focus on the task, the competition, the virtuosity, is a kind of blindness. Consumed with individual ambition, the second stonecutter misses the fundamental interconnections between people and the societies and economies we all live in. He fails to see that there would be no need to cut stones if there was not a community that wanted to build something with them.

The third stonecutter embraces a broader vision. The very menial work of stonecutting becomes part of a greater undertaking, a spiritual as well as a physical construction. His aspiration transcends many obstacles – building a cathedral does not take months or years, it takes centuries. He knows that his work can make a small but essential contribution to a structure that can unite the past with the future and connect human beings across generations for reasons that are far larger than any single person.

We know we must do better than to create a society of stonecutters who are like the first man. The second man is more admirable – he fits into our beliefs and way of life and is indeed commendable in many ways, but we know that we must surpass him too.



***“We must want to make a difference in and for the world.”***

The third stonecutter reminds us that the individual is not enough, that we must want to make a difference in and for the world – as it is today and as it will be in the future. **TCX**

Adapted from <http://harvardmagazine.com/breaking-news/three-stonecutters-the-future-business-education> (Accessed 25 January 2011)



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