

DEVELOPING AGILITY AND RESILIENCE AMIDST COVID-19 OUTBREAK

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It is barely the end of the first quarter for 2020, yet everyone is in crisis mode. Many countries are still grappling with managing, containing, and minimising risks of vulnerable communities from contracting COVID-19, as well as the economic implications that came along with the global epidemic. Organisations are forced to adopt flexible work schemes that enable employees to work from home. Government agencies have issued travel advisories to the public, encouraging everyone to reduce non-essential cross-border travels. There are reports of panic buying among communities, triggered by misinformation and lack of understanding on current developments related to the epidemic.

Despite the various challenges brought about by COVID-19, it is argued that this is a prime opportunity for the higher education community to develop agility and resilience of the overall sector. The word “crisis” is commonly invoked in management- and motivation- speak as being composed of two Chinese characters, “危”, signifying danger, and “机”, signifying opportunity.

COVID-19 prompts us to review our practices and processes across a wide range of areas. At UTMSPACE, we are currently monitoring the COVID-19 situation closely, and is committed in ensuring that the experiences of its students and staff are being taken care of. The following presents three areas that UTMSPACE is currently exploring for implementation:

Teaching and learning. Universities have transferred instruction online, through the use of learning management systems (LMS) and mobile learning applications. Faculty members must be creative in attracting and sustaining student engagement throughout their instruction. Various forms of formative assessments, such as quizzes, tests, and assignments can be fully conducted online. It is also possible to conduct final examination online, through proctored facilities and guided instructions.

Curriculum structure. As campuses are put under short term lockdown, it might be good to unpack the academic calendar structure, and consider a more flexible calendar that assesses student mastery of a subject matter. Internships and attachments, which are commonly done physically, can be converted into simulation sessions in laboratories and controlled environments, minimising the risk of students contracting COVID-19. Should a long-term campus lockdown becomes imminent, microcredentials may provide flexibility to students to complete their programmes beyond the confines of the campus.

Work arrangements. Flexible working arrangements with the aid of automated systems and online platforms would appeal to employees caring for young children and senior citizens, as these population are more at risk of contracting COVID-19. Administrators are advised to reduce local and international travel for conferences and meetings, moving face-to-face meetings online through video conference facilities such as Skype and Zoom. In sectors where high levels of confidentiality are required, such as procurement management, systems with enhanced security features can be introduced in order to reduce unintended risks on institutional governance and development.

All things considered, everyone has a role to play in mitigating the adverse effects of COVID-19. The higher education sector is not spared from the global pandemic; that said, the higher education community is able to sail through the challenges, and strive to uphold the nation's educational aspirations.