

Detoxify academia so that it is future-proof

By [Dzulkifli Abdul Razak](#) - July 20, 2022 @ 12:53am



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WITH the possibility of the Omicron subvariant(s) bringing another wave of Covid-19 infections, the world is placed under threat again.

Following the previous episodes, many people have been working hard to make up for lost income. Some have experienced burnout.

Others have highlighted that those who experienced burnout did not even appreciate any sense of joy or accomplishment for whatever the effort is intended for. Instead, the burnout was deemed something to be proud of, rather than to be avoided.

The pandemic has somehow opened a different window about being burnt out. This is mainly by way of work from home (WFH), where flexibility is introduced to allow for some "freedom" from the daily toxic routine. Hard routine work is now being tempered by the home environment.

For example, there is no rush to travel to the workplace, thus reducing cost and hassle, no direct supervision or micromanagement, and eventually the ability to de-routinise the work processes and procedures without altering the output or outcome.

In fact, the isolation forced during lockdowns was seen as an opportunity for deeper self-reflection or being in touch with the state of wellbeing, which was otherwise missing or neglected. It is, therefore, imperative to fill the void for the "soul" to return, in an otherwise "soulless" workplace environment.

If not to the co-workers themselves, where it rightly belongs. Those who are said to have failed to do so will more likely face the threat of emotional disruption, where toxic experiences like burnouts seem to be inevitable. Meaning, at a greater risk of impacting on their precious lives in threatening ways.

This has often been associated with the failure to nurture trust that is important not only for the sake of life itself but more so the meaning and purpose of life in a balanced manner.

The latter gives a deep sense of belonging to a person and the community that has been disconnected by the "soulless" work culture, which is frequently equated to a dehumanising corporate culture ruled by numbers and figures.

This implies the need to enact values, spirituality and consciousness by bringing back the "soul" in the work culture.

Notably, that of the corporate type that celebrates unbridled greed and excessive power. Instead of "values" that would nurture meaningful relationships based on a strong bond of trust and wellbeing collectively.

It is about rooting for values that sustain engagement and accountability, reinforcing the "soul" of the workplace among the co-workers, as well as the community. Ultimately, bringing it back to "life".

One such workplace much affected is the education sector that has been influenced by "soulless" cultures that do not belong there. As fashioned by the industrial revolutions of the 18th century onwards, education has lost its innate values and rendered "soulless" as an institution that is supposed to nurture "life" and wellbeing for humanity.

Unfortunately, this is not the case anymore. The wake-up call came when there were lockdown after lockdown, with Malaysia's educational institutions being among the most affected relative to their counterparts globally.

And, in the process, demonstrated how the academic culture of trust, collegiality and autonomy was eroded by other toxic cultures as advocated by the human capital theory, for instance. Resiliency was literally absent, responding to future challenges was sluggish, if at all, and vital intangible humanistic values were grossly overlooked.

Only activities that can be measured count in a reductionist way (read the ranking game). It turned "soulless" almost instantly until today.

It was not until the threat of mental health emerged that the importance of socio-emotional intelligence — figuratively, the "soul" based on moral-spiritual nexus — is seriously pushed forward once again. It is now regarded as a vital missing link in the academic ecosystem.

To instil the missing link is to deconstruct the toxic cultural workspace that has long served as huge barrier. In other words, education needs to be remodelled and (re-)humanised so that the educational "soul" can be fully detoxified to be future-proof.

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