Alumni Reflections on the 101 Training Program

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Introduction

I had the privilege to participate in the 2016 International Ocean Institute (IOI) Training Program for Ocean Governance: Policy, Law and Management in Halifax, Canada. I am pleased to take this opportunity to reflect on the program and share some thoughts on the future of ocean governance in the Malaysian context and the role of training for responsible ocean governance.

Ocean Governance in Malaysia

Malaysia's institutional and legal framework for ocean governance is sectoral. There are as many policies as there are agencies involved in various aspects of ocean governance, with each agency often working in isolation in decision-making as well as in competing for federal funding and resources. As the Malaysian constitution does not explicitly provide guarantees for a healthy and clean environment, the courts are hesitant to adopt a more robust approach in upholding environmental laws, facilitating public interest litigation, and clarifying the division of responsibility for environmental governance. Having environmental provisions in the constitution would lay the foundation for the development of environmental ethics in decision-making; however, there is insufficient push towards that direction from the people and the government, as in the case with many other countries, although some have begun to address the issue. This is where education comes into play in creating a deeper awareness of and the need for ocean leadership and governance, and to initiate this important and necessary discourse.

Training for Responsible Ocean Governance

The 101 Training Program offers more than just knowledge acquisition. Given its eight-week duration and the broad scope of coverage, much of what is taught understandably touches only the surface of ocean sciences and environment,
legitimate uses of the sea, and the consequences of human–ocean interactions. Nevertheless, most contemporary issues were discussed, thus providing material for important conversations pertaining to responsible ocean governance. It is the opportunity for and emphasis on such conversations among peers from different disciplines, cultural backgrounds, and motivations that make for a uniquely personalized learning experience.

From the IOI training program experience, it struck me that the key to responsible ocean governance lies with having frequent and continuous meaningful conversations about our relationship with the ocean. Certainly, talking alone will not do, and must be followed through with actions and leadership that stresses having an ‘ocean mindset’. Those with the ocean mindset ask the right questions, are open to engaging in difficult conversations, and are guided by a strong moral responsibility towards the ocean in decision-making. The attributes of such a mindset are best exemplified by the acronym OCEAN: Optimistic, Collaborative, Encouraging, Audacious, and Noble. A champion of the oceans is optimistic that our ocean planet can and will be saved, understands that success is achieved through collaboration, encourages and inspires others to do the same, has the audacity to promote big ideas and engage in difficult conversations, and is steadfastly principled in a moral responsibility towards the ocean and environment in the choices and decisions made.

Reimagining Training for Ocean Governance

Capacity development in relation to ocean governance in Malaysia has focused almost exclusively on knowledge acquisition and neglected the moral and ethical aspects in ocean leadership. As the ocean environment and its resources continue to degrade one cannot help but conclude that there are still too few champions of the ocean, doing too little too late. Training for responsible ocean governance needs to address the means to instill an ocean mindset and to sustain the momentum post-training, and how to train as many influencers as quickly as possible, in the most cost-effective way.

How to organize people, content, and delivery to inculcate the ocean mindset and impact behaviors is a major challenge for any ocean governance training program. This is even more so the case for a developing nation such as Malaysia where the environment agenda does not feature very highly on the list of priorities. This can be addressed through a different approach to ocean governance training and strong alumni networks.

Training for responsible ocean governance in Malaysia will need to evolve and go mainstream. Parallel to the IOI Training Program for mid-level
professionals working in ocean-related fields, Malaysia will need a medium- to long-term ocean governance training agenda that will cast the net wider to include influencers from all levels and instill a deeper awareness of the importance of the ocean. This will allow Malaysia's vision for “a healthy and productive ocean, rich in biodiversity and heritage, wisely managed, safe and secure, and economically developed for the equitable benefit of all, now and in the future” to become the guiding principle towards which the myriad agendas are aligned.

Gamification is emerging as an effective tool for engaging learners and influencing behaviors. It uses game design elements to inform, create awareness, and change behaviors through story, feedback, and reward mechanisms and can be applied to the wide spectrum of ocean governance. The 101 Training Program already applies gamification by using simulation exercises to facilitate collaboration for ocean governance. To some extent, gamification is applied in oil spill preparedness and response training in Malaysia. These exercises focus on familiarity with lines of communication and standard operating procedures. Whilst gamification has been applied in various contexts it has been limited to training for the job. It is suggested that ocean governance awareness and training need to go mainstream to reach the younger generation, and gamification is the way to do it.

Mainstreaming of training for ocean leadership should target the younger generation of Malaysians and make use of the Internet and e-learning to engage with them. This can be feasible for Malaysia considering its Internet penetration rate is almost two-thirds of the population. A combination of serious and alternate reality games, such as ‘World Without Oil’, for the ocean could go a long way toward initiating conversations about future planning for and soliciting design solutions for a possible breakdown of the ocean ecosystem. This could be a worthwhile investment with numerous possible narratives and derivatives in the context of ocean governance.

Alumni Networks in Promoting Ocean Leadership

A positive consequence of mainstreaming ocean leadership training through gamification is the creation of a community of ocean leader-gamers. In *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*, Sir Ken Robinson looks at the conditions that enable us to achieve our greatest potential. Among them

1 National Oceanographic Directorate, *Malaysia Ocean Policy 2011–2020* (Malaysia: Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, 2010).
is ‘finding your tribe’ whereby a group of people is connected through a common commitment to the things they feel born to do.\textsuperscript{2}

In many ways, the IOI alumni network reflects a tribe, playing a significant role in the development of the Institute through the provision of support in bringing together participants, past and present, and in embodying the ocean mindset to sustain the momentum after the training is over. The IOI has done much to engage with and encourage its alumni to reach out and connect with each other. The alumni have volunteered as IOI Training Program facilitators and subject matter experts and have contributed to numerous publications on the subject. Perhaps, soon, the alumni could find new ways to contribute, such as launching a crowd-funding platform to back the development of gamified learning for ocean governance or contributing their expertise towards creating realistic content for an ocean governance game.

Embracing digital technology to elevate ocean governance training could be a game changer in facilitating information flow, encouraging innovation, and promoting further ocean leadership through the inculcation of the ocean mindset. In the words of Dave Logan in \textit{Tribal Leadership: Leveraging Natural Groups to Build a Thriving Organization}, the alumni could build ‘tribes that end up changing the world’.\textsuperscript{3}

\textbf{Conclusion}

Capacity building for ocean governance needs to go beyond enhancing knowledge. It requires instilling a mindset and ethics necessary for effective ocean governance. Well-intentioned and well-designed policies will remain ineffective if decision-makers lack the ethics to do what is right for the environment. There is a need to rethink how digital technology can be harnessed in training for ocean leadership and ocean governance. Now, more than ever, there is an urgent need for ocean leadership, and for that we should leverage on the influence of strong alumni networks. The call to mobilize digital technology to elevate ocean governance training should complement conventional training programs.

The IOI Training Program has created a platform for like-minded persons to meet and exchange experiences. It has had a transformational effect on my

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{2} K. Robinson, \textit{The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything} (Penguin Books, 2009), c. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{3} D. Logan, \textit{Tribal Leadership: Leveraging Natural Groups to Build a Thriving Organization} (Harper Business, 2008).
\end{itemize}
sense of identity and purpose because the meaningful conversations throughout the program provided the opportunity for testing and validating ideas, inspired action, and demonstrated the power of synergy when people work together. In this tribute essay to Professor Elisabeth Mann Borgese, I would like to register my admiration and appreciation for her foresight, initiative, and commitment to the ocean as a common heritage of mankind.