ACTION CASE FOR INFORMATION SYSTEMS
RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT
IN MALAYSIA

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the Faculty of Humanities

2011

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ABSTRACT

The University of Manchester

Zamhar Iswandono Bin Awang Ismail

Doctor of Philosophy

Action Case for Information Systems Research Development in Malaysia

31st January 2011

This PhD attempts to study and learn about issues that influence Information Systems research development in Malaysia. An Action Case was conducted to learn about how to improve research in the author's institution in Malaysia. The action case included participatory activities to promote qualitative research in the author's institution and collecting information from qualitative interviews and discussions. This thesis is presented as a story from a first-person perspective and narrative of the researcher. The first person perspective was chosen because the author wanted to present his work from his own perspective and for the reader to follow the research experience itself. The narrative also fits into many of the discussions in the thesis for action-based methods placing the researcher as the research tool and that the researcher is the 'hero' of the research story. This also ties into one of the main aspects of the thesis which is actuality. To improve IS research in Malaysia, those who conduct and administer research need to understand each other's actuality. The thesis suggests due to Malaysia's academic culture there are misunderstandings that cause IS research to be left behind in terms of research support. Despite the contextual difference of views among researchers and administrators, there are patterns of similarities that can be taken from government policies and university policies. The thesis proposes that by increasing understanding using these patterns and actuality, Malaysian IS research can be improved and developed further. The thesis proposes more Action Research in the future to improve this understanding. This thesis contributes by proposing theoretical aspects that discuss the issues related to IS research improvement. This thesis proposes the action case method as an approach for Malaysian-based IS research. And this thesis along with the author attempts to make a positive difference in improving IS research in the author's institution specifically, and Malaysia in general.
DECLARATION

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This thesis is dedicated to my late Grandmother, Almarhummah Hajjah Purwaningseh Soemodiharjo; my late aunt, Allahyarhammah Hajjah Dayang Besar Bte Haji Mohd Tahir; and my late uncles, Allahyarham Awang Anak Moin and Allahyarham Saman Moin.

May Allah accept them amongst His faithful servants. Aameen.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All praise is due to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds. I give thanks to Allah for providing me with everything in order to complete my PhD thesis. To the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), for providing me with the examples for living my life and showing me the way of living on the path of mercy.

To my mother and father, for whom without them I would not be born. I thank you both for everything. For raising me, allowing me to grow and develop as an individual, while still providing the discipline to keep me on the right path.

To my loving wife Laura. Thank you so much for being there when I needed you, sticking by me and understanding me. You truly complete me. I hope I can be as supportive to you in everything that you do, as you have to me.

To my beautiful children, Ariff and Rayyan, you two are the light up my life. When daddy needed to be cheered up, you were there. I love you both more than life itself.

To my supervisor, Trevor, thank you so much for providing me with all the support and guidance in doing the PhD. Your encouragement and friendship throughout the years have made a huge impact on me. I hope when my time comes to start supervising PhDs, I will use everything I learned from you and become the best PhD supervisor and friend I can be for my future students. Come On You Reds!

To my friends at MBS: Jin, Aumnat, Lin, Muhammad, Shahzeb, Notey, Sahar, Abdelwahab, Saranya and others who I may have forgot to mention... thank you for your friendship and support guys! And good luck for each and everyone of you in your future endeavours.

To my siblings, Zoefry, Zyasfitri and Zusriden, my extended family and my in-laws. Thank you for all of your support and prayers during my PhD. Special thanks to my cousin and best friend, Lucky, for just being himself.
I would also like to thank all my colleagues at SSIL. Without all your support and cooperation, my research would have gone nowhere. I hope I could repay all of you by helping to develop our school even more.

For my sponsors, The Ministry of Higher Education and Universiti Malaysia Sabah, thank you for providing me the means of attaining my ambition.

Finally, a special thanks to my wife again, Daniel Wheatcroft, Ezy, Mohd Sofri, Jumarni, Rosnah, Chong Wai and Hafiz for helping me out in the last minute in finishing the thesis. Cheers everyone!
### List of Abbreviations

- CEO – Chief Executive Officer
- COE – Centre of Excellence
- CIO – Chief Information Officer
- EPU – Economic Planning Unit
- ICT – Information and Communications Technology
- IS – Information Systems
- MADICT - Majlis Dekan ICT (ICT Deans Committee)
- MOE – Ministry of Education
- MOH – Ministry of Health
- MOHE – Ministry of Higher Education
- MOSTI – Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation
- MOU – Memorandum of Understanding
- R&D – Research and Development
- S&T – Science and Technology
- UKM - Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
- UM - Universiti Malaya
- UMS – Universiti Malaysia Sabah
- USM - Universiti Sains Malaysia
- UPM - Universiti Putra Malaysia
- UTM - Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
- UTeM – Universiti Teknikal Malaysia
Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Malaysian academic research is currently experiencing a period of attention and scrutiny that it never has before. In recent years the Malaysian government announced budget allocations worth billions of Malaysian Ringgit (RM) for the development of research and innovation-based projects. This focus naturally also includes Research and Development (R&D) being done in Malaysia’s public universities.

Being a Malaysian academic myself, I am also a part of this grand transformation my country hopes to achieve. As a Malaysian Information Systems (IS) academic, I have tried to play my part in studying and learning how IS research can be further developed and improved in Malaysia. Due to this motivation, my PhD is entitled An Action Case in Information Systems Research Development in Malaysia.

It has been about four years since I started my PhD research. As I look back and reflect on my experience, it makes me feel more confident of my convictions that Malaysian Information Systems research needs to move forward with the times. With the huge investment the Malaysian government has placed upon the universities, there are questions on how Malaysian universities will be able to utilise this funding for the development of R&D. At the same time, the government support and financial issues also pose an interesting question of influence towards academia. Naturally there are those who question if this is the 'right way' to develop R&D in universities, especially when we try to maintain the great traditions of academia.

Thus, in some ways I took it upon myself to learn about the situation. I always believed in empowering one's self to achieve a goal. As an IS academic, I saw great potential in utilising the support from the Malaysian government in improving IS R&D. While at the same time clutching to the ideals of a university, which is based on the pursuit of knowledge for the betterment of mankind. During my research I discovered that for this to be done, Malaysian IS needs its academics and researchers to strive in transforming Malaysian IS.
Throughout my PhD ‘journey’ I came across some of those who are currently striving to make Malaysian IS, and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) research more prominent. There are also those who have been through the process of developing research in other fields in which IS and ICT could learn from. My journey also included my own contributions to improving the research in the institution I am attached to in Malaysia. The combination of my encounters with those developing R&D in Malaysia and also my own efforts for my organisation, created a unique research experience in my opinion. In the end, I discovered that my experience could be used as a contribution to research methodology itself. As I later discovered, my research experience was similar to an Action Case approach which I have chosen as my methodology.

One of the challenges I realised as I was completing the PhD thesis was in determining the narrative I wanted to use. The narrative had to suit my research in order for the research to tell a coherent and plausible story. Since my research included different forms of activities that were done to collect data, information and also as a way to bring about some change to my organisation, I listed and arranged the different activities that were carried out. The chapters of the thesis were then shaped based on the arrangement of those activities. Shaping the chapters based on the activities during the PhD became my chosen thesis structure. However, I do concur that this structure may not be acceptable to all.

In the end, my hope is for the structure to shape the research story and enable the reader to follow my story better. Ultimately, I wanted to present this piece of IS research in a way that can stir new ideas for research presentation. I hope those who read this thesis will be able to empathise with my story as well.

1.2 Area of Concern
This PhD attempts to study and learn about factors that influence Information Systems research in Malaysia. The PhD also suggests utilising an Action Case method for developing IS research in Malaysia. The Action Case was done in my own organisation to improve the research activities we have there. My PhD first started out as a hard theoretical PhD on System Dynamics Patterns. But as time went on and with the exposure experienced by the author, the focus has shifted to learning about improving Information Systems and Information Technology (ICT) research in my school in Malaysia.
I am an IS academic at the School of Informatics Science Labuan (SSIL) located at Universiti Malaysia Sabah- Labuan International Campus (UMS-LIC). Throughout the five years I had in Malaysian academia, before I started my PhD, I was involved in a number of research projects coordinated under my school. During some of these research projects, IS academics would normally be placed in the analysis and evaluation stages. The notion of having a purely Information Systems-based research project was an alien concept in my school at the time.

Malaysian academia is currently going through a ‘revival’ in terms of support for innovation, research and development. The most recent announcement by the our government includes an allocation of RM10.2billion (more than £2 billion) for the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) under the 2011 Malaysian Budget (Ministry of Finance, 2010). A special fund of RM411 million (about £80 million) is allocated for research, development and commercialisation projects (Ministry of Finance, 2010). With the government encouraging research activities, especially those that have the potential for commercialisation, how can Malaysia’s Information Systems play a role in this surge of R&D support?

This thesis describes some of the challenges for IS and ICT research in terms of gaining prominence within Malaysian academia. Many fields related to science, technology and engineering become the main choice for funding support from the government. The area of IS in Malaysia however still requires improvement in terms of promoting the field and its impact towards academia in general.

As Malaysian public universities are governed by the Ministry of Higher Education and includes government-style administration, one of the challenges of Malaysian IS is to convince this administration on its importance. For this context, I have defined hard systems practitioners as the top-down administrators in the university system, and soft systems practitioners as bottom-up IS researchers within Malaysian academia. In order to achieve prominence and recognition of IS research contributions, there is a need to improve understanding between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ systems practitioners. Learning about the contextual difference between those who administer Malaysian universities and those who carry out research at Malaysian universities is the key to bridging the gap of understanding and ultimately enable IS research to gain more support.
The scenario of academic research in Malaysia inevitably influences IS research. Among the different stakeholders in Malaysian research, there is the similarity of wanting to develop Malaysia’s research and innovation. Universities, the Malaysian government and industry want to see Malaysian R&D move forward for the progress of the nation. How this is achieved, perceptions on R&D and issues relating to academic research however are influenced by the individual contexts of the stakeholders. Thus, in Malaysia there are shared understandings among those involved in academic research. But at the same time, the views on R&D are based on the actuality of the different stakeholders and their contexts.

I believe that Action Research and related approaches are important to instigate change in Malaysian IS. However, in Malaysia the issue of power is one of the biggest challenges in instigating change or transforming an organisation that we are doing research in. Within Malaysia’s culture, the heads of the organisations are the only ones who have a right or authority to instigate change and organisational transformation. This situation is not helped by the power distance in Malaysian organisations. Those who are at the bottom of organisational hierarchies feel they are incapable to determine the direction of the organisation.

I think of my PhD as an example of using Information Systems-related research methods, for the sake of improving IS and ICT research in my institution and (hopefully) Malaysia. What this research attempts to do is to propose a middle path or a moderate view of how to carry out action-based research within these kinds of environments and culture. For this, action case provides a method which includes participative action that can lead to smaller scale transformations, while still maintaining the hierarchical status quo. From my experience as well, those at the top seem to welcome their inclusion in transforming the organisation for the better while maintaining (and emphasising) their role towards this transformation.

1.3 Research Objectives
The main research objective of this PhD is to describe the problem situation of Information Systems research in Malaysia and propose ways to improve the situation. The thesis also proposes an action-based research approach to enable lower level transformations that can work within Malaysian contexts for post graduate research.
1.4 Research Questions

I have shaped the research questions based on ideas of the shared understandings and actuality that could be utilised to learn about, and improve the research situation in SSIL. Below is the list of research questions that came about during the PhD:

- “How can understanding and collaboration between those who administer university research and those who conduct research be improved through shared understandings and actuality?”
- “How do shared understandings and actuality be used within the context of Information Systems research improvement?”
- “What are the related issues that support the collaboration and understanding between administrators and researchers?”

The first question relates to the challenge of increasing understanding among those who manage research support in universities and also the academics who conduct the actual research-related activities. The thesis will describe the awareness among those in university administrative positions on the importance of developing academic research in universities. Their objectives in improving academic R&D in this sense have shared understandings with academics and researchers. However, their context of being administrators for government-sponsored institutions creates an actuality in which they may not be aware of certain issues that hamper R&D development.

The second question deals directly with improving the situation of Malaysian IS research. The question here relates to the perception those in Malaysian academia have of Information Systems and ICT research. From early assumptions and my experience as an IS academic, there is still a misunderstanding towards the field of Information Systems. This misunderstanding influence IS research and practice, IS research end up being compartmentalised with other ICT and Computer Science research. In many ways, IS has similar problems with other ICT-related fields in Malaysia when it comes to attaining research support and prominence. Efforts have been underway to define Information Systems academic curriculum, however IS research still needs to find its own evangelists. Thus, the second question deals with how IS research can be improved by studying the contexts of IS researchers and expressing them.
The third question deals with related issues that can increase understanding and collaboration among those who administer research and those who conduct research. To improve Malaysian IS research, this understanding and collaboration must be developed. Throughout the research, I’ve discovered certain issues that were talked about, argued and derived from my observations that increases this understanding and collaboration. These factors are mainly related to easing the communication between the two sides and potentially assist in developing research activities in a university.

1.5 Research Narrative and Approach

I’ve taken some liberties in this, what would normally be the Research Approach section. First of all, as you have read so far in the thesis, I am referring to myself in the first person, which may seem odd for a Doctorate thesis. Hopefully, in this section I will explain why this is, based on my choice of narrative and research methodology. I will also explain the structure of the thesis itself.

As I was writing up my thesis, I’ve tried to find a way to express the experience of doing the research to allow the reader an insight into that experience. One of the things I have found to be a key element in using the research method I’ve chosen, Action Case (Braa and Vidgen, 1999), is that the action-based methods require an insight on the contextual views of the researcher. I also came across a paper from Judy Burgess (2006) entitled ‘Participatory action research: First person perspectives of a graduate student’ which was written from a first person perspective and included personal insights on the author’s experience of her PhD research. Burgess’ (2006) paper motivated me that a personal story narrative to explain the experience of the PhD can work.

Action Case is my chosen research approach, as it fits into many of the conditions of the research. Action Case essentially combines elements of Action Research with the Case Study approach. As I stated previously, I wanted to improve research in SSIL and as a lecturer I did have a certain level of access to the organisation. The level of access however was also limited due to my position, in which I was not able to bring about high-level changes. My participation within the organisation however was enough to spark interest in research and this in many ways was a small change from the previous situation in the school. The data collection for the research was done mainly through qualitative interviews, panel discussions and my personal involvement in school meetings. My choice of data collection methods implies the qualitative case study aspect of my research approach.
The participation and activities done by myself, as the researcher needed to be told from my perspective as the person doing it. This also ties into Contextualised SSM proposed by Kenichi Uchiyama (2003) and the concept of actuality, which will be discussed later. In his work on actuality, he placed an important emphasis on analysing a problem situation from within the contextual environment. In other words, my position as a Malaysian academic provides a narrative which places me as a listener into the problem situation that is surrounding me. Similarly, throughout the research there have been activities I was personally involved in to achieve some changes in my organisation. In explaining how I was involved personally in the action case, I’ve actually entered the role of a 'hero' in the story of the research I am narrating.

My hope is as the reader reads through this chapter, they can also attempt to see my point of view as the so-called ‘hero of the story’ in doing my research. Thus, the contextual situations and ‘being in the situation’ will hopefully enforce my ideas for utilising the research methods I shall describe in this chapter. I believe the story narrative I’ve chosen fits into the action case research approach and the research approach enhances the expressions of the story narrative. McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1996, 2003) stated, “Stories are another way of representing action research. These stories tend to resist closure. They tell the processes of coming-to-know, and share people’s thinking, and they are generative, because they show the potential for further development. Stories may be presented both as formative progress reports (work in progress, theories in development) and also as summative reports, dissertations and theses (reports of current thinking theories in action).”

Another motivation came from inspiration from my own supervisor. During the PhD, I was supervised by Professor Trevor Wood-Harper. One of the things I was exposed to during my research was Professor Wood-Harper’s Multiview and work on Action Research which he presents as a story of the method and his experience as an academic. In comparison to Professor Wood-Harper’s Multiview ‘story’, I would attempt to describe my own research using that strategy. It is hoped that by describing my own research as a story, I would be able to shape the thesis from the Narrative, Characters and Plot that makes up my research story. These elements are important since they shape a story.
Even though the research is presented as a story, findings and recommendations are still needed. The findings of the research are shaped from a combination of template analysis with rich pictures. Template analysis is used to analyse the qualitative data gathered from interviews, panel discussions and observations conducted during the fieldwork. Rich pictures are illustrations I have drawn to explain the problem situation of my research area from my contextual point of view. The results from the template analysis and the rich pictures are the used to support the recommendations of this research. One thing I must add though, is that the analysis, findings and recommendations generated from this research are from my own contextual point of view.

I would like to stress here that the first-person perspective of this thesis was chosen due to my own need to explain my concerns on the topic of the research. Bradbury and Reason (2003) defined the core and ideal elements of Action Research as, “Action research is grounded in lived experience, developed in partnership, addresses significant problems, works with (rather than simply studies) people, develops new ways of seeing/interpreting the world (i.e. theory), and leaves infrastructure in its wake.” I believe my lived experience and cooperation with my colleagues during the fieldwork required a narrative that can better interpret that situation to the reader. In the same paper, they gave the example of Mohammed Yunus, founder of Gramin Bank in Bangladesh and inventor of micro-credit, “Action research is an inherently value laden activity. As noted above, Yunus, who ‘invented’ the practices behind micro-lending, was pained by the poverty and powerlessness of people who seemed to need less than a dollar. His motivation for action research sprang from his personal experience. This is the case with most action researchers. Some action researchers come as ‘issue oriented,’ recognizing that certain inerasable challenges simply require participation, if structural conditions which shape how we act are to change.” My personal experience as an IS academic in Malaysia shaped my values and motivations for my research. I believe the first person narrative would enable the reader of this thesis to perceive the issues within my contexts.

Reason and Bradbury (2003) also noted that, “First person inquiry is a foundation for inquiry that can liberate us from worn out ways of seeing and acting in the world. ‘I’ frames, assesses and performs. ‘I’ is the instrument of activity in action inquiry and indeed all forms of social research. This ‘I’ is analogous to the microscope or any other instrument in the physical sciences upon which large sums of money are spent to maintain precise operation. We might wonder how often
we ‘tune up’ our own capacity for inquiry or whether we have become lazy with our interpretations of the world and therefore lazy in our interpersonal performances.”

Chandler and Torbert (2003) stated, “... action research differs from most social science studies in that most social science studies are aimed at aggregating data about many individuals, organizations or events and attributing generalizable causal links among the variables studied, irrespective of the particulars. Thus, a kind of anonymous, third-person knowledge is sought, and it is then communicated to other anonymous third persons, usually in the impersonal, third-person voice of a journal article (like this one). Qualitative studies reach this end by offering rich, in-depth accounts of one or numerous case studies, and quantitative studies do so by generating statistically significant results. Although these explanatory and predictor studies are quite clearly valuable for understanding the social world, other areas of reality have been neglected. Action research methods begin to fill this void by emphasizing methods to obtain first-person, subjective data about oneself while in action that one can use in the present to act differently.”

The previous statement addressed my preference of the story narrative for needing to convey my research in a more rich and in-depth account. I believe that the third person narrative that is often used in research may not be able to properly express my viewpoint from within my actuality. I wanted to put the reader of this thesis in my situation and portray my actuality during the research, which made me choose the first person narrative. The story narrative then fits into my need to convey the progress of the research from one stage to another. In many ways this fits into the overall action-based research method I used. I wanted to express the learning I experienced from doing the activities within my PhD research. I felt that the cycles of learning I experienced during my research needed to be presented. From my literature review, to shaping the research methodology, doing the fieldwork, then conducting more literature reviews and reviewing the research methodology again, all these activities were a learning process which I felt needed to be expressed from a learning point of view.

Clandinin and Connelly (1989) argues that stories are basic phenomena of not only education, but life. They concurred that in some everyday uses, ‘story’ is thought to be the opposite of ‘phenomena’ which from my understanding, seems more suited for academic applications. However Clandinin and Connelly (1989) argue that story, and more generally narrative, names a fundamental structure
and quality of experience, both personal and social. Thus, when we link it back to action research, the story narrative provides that personal and social experience that a normal third person academic perspective would struggle to convey.

Throughout my research, I was also influenced by a number of literature which in some ways ‘pushed’ me towards using the first person perspective. Among them was Communication for Another Development, a book written by Wendy Quarry and Ricardo Ramirez (2009). This book presented the authors work experience in developing countries and how listening is more important than telling in communications with others. Kenichi Uchiyama's (1999) thesis also had the author refer himself in the first person. Eventually, these references gave me the confidence that I should not try and distance myself through referring through the third person in my thesis. I also discovered as I was writing the thesis that using the first person narrative and expressing my research in the form of the story made writing my thesis easier. I was able to articulate my ideas more by telling the story of my experience. I believe that what I am presenting is from my viewpoint and there was no dichotomy that a third person narrative would allow.

1.6 My Research Story

This section attempts to tell the story of the research taking place. Many things in the research evolved and developed as the research itself went on. Early expectations and plans for research methods had to be changed or, as I prefer to say, evolved as the researcher also grew from the experience. This evolution ties in perfectly with the personal notion of the author, where I believe that as a qualitative researcher, I am the research tool.

I started my PhD with an expectation of doing a ‘hard systems’ based Information Systems PhD. My initial proposed research topic was ‘Systems Dynamics Patterns Modelling’, whereby I wanted to develop a framework for categorising Systems Dynamics (SD) model patterns for the use and reuse of these patterns in activities that require SD modelling and simulation.

However, as time went by my interest in the initial topic started to wane. As I was also being exposed to ‘soft systems’ methods, I started to rethink the topic of my research itself and saw what appeared to be an opportunity, not only to attain my PhD but also as something I felt passionate about, improving research activities of IS in Malaysia.
During my first year of PhD, I was exposed to literature that influenced my decision to change my research topic. Two papers written by R.K. Miles in the 1980s exposed me to the hard and soft systems debate. The first was Computer Systems Analysis: The Constraint of the Hard Systems Paradigm (1985). The second was Combining ‘Soft’ and ‘Hard’ Systems Practice: Grafting and Embedding (1988). These two papers made me realise what I thought one of the missing elements we have in Malaysian IS which was exposure to soft systems approaches. Another influential piece of literature during my first year was a book by Kenichi Uchiyama entitled The Theory and Practice of Actuality (2003). Based on his thesis, Uchiyama reinterpreted SSM using the concept of actuality. His work proposed a theoretical framework for a phenomenology-based information management centred on Japanese psychologist Bin Kimura’s actuality and reinterpreted SSM as a methodology that embodies this approach. This interpretation reflected upon Kimura’s work and also Western philosophers such as Viktor von Weizsäcker, Heidegger and others, leads to a contextualised interpretation of SSM or Contextualised SSM (C-SSM). From reading Uchiyama’s work, my understanding was that the IS researcher has a tendency to ‘see’ what he believes is the problem situation, much like a typical IS analyst. This interpretation, although valid from the reality viewpoint of the IS practitioner, may not represent the actuality of those within the organisation being researched and analysed by the IS practitioner.

The exposure to Soft Systems Methodology and other ‘soft’ systems approaches deeply affected me to the point that I felt I needed to promote this to the Malaysian IS community. At the same time, I wanted to learn why Malaysian IS practice was extremely ‘hard’ in its approach and how to encourage soft systems approach within this environment. Thus, the first change in my PhD research occurred. Rather than carry on with researching on Systems Dynamics Patterns, I wanted to learn how to increase understanding between hard and soft systems practitioners, within the context of Malaysian IS research.

I believe that one way to bridge understanding among people is to find commonalities or patterns that those people can relate to. The view of patterns is taken from my exposure to IS patterns modelling. I felt that even among different analysis or design methods in IS, there are patterns within the different models that could be understood by most IS practitioner or researcher of what is being presented. My interpretation of patterns for this research however relate to similarities shared
by those involved in my school's research. This interpretation however transformed as my own understanding and research developed. The word, 'patterns' became a remnant of my old research perspective. Since the issues that I was addressing was not model-based but organisational in nature, the term 'patterns' is replaced by shared understandings. This term is more suited in this research due to its wider organisational appeal, as opposed to patterns which sounded technical.

Understanding the contextual situations is also important to ease the communication among IS practitioners and researchers. The theory and practice of actuality made me believe that by increasing our understanding of each other’s situation, those in IS can learn from each other and bridge the gap of understanding. During the research, I found that those involved in research activities and management have their own actuality which I attempt to represent in this research.

With a new research topic, I had to develop a research methodology to achieve this. The research methodology also experienced an evolution. In my literature review for the research methods, I was exposed to literary work on Action Research. Initially, I was more focused on conducting a qualitative case study at SSIL for my field work. After my first year PhD review and contemplating my planned case study, I came to the realisation that some form of participative activity would be essential.

In April 2008, the second year of my PhD, my supervisor was invited to conduct a qualitative research seminar in Kuala Lumpur. I volunteered to assist him for the seminar since I knew the organisers, who were from my Malaysian alma mater. I took the opportunity as well, to bring him to SSIL and conduct a couple of days of talks with my colleagues there on research methods. I regard these two activities as my first exploratory field work. The experience in Kuala Lumpur was quite successful, although there was a mixed reaction from the participants on the structure of the seminar. The experience in Labuan however was a near-disaster. Attendance was poor and the experience showed the overall weaknesses we had in academic research. At the time, we had inexperienced academics in SSIL who were more focused in undergraduate teaching.

I used the positive and negative experiences I had with the workshop in Kuala Lumpur and the presentations at SSIL, and started to reconsider how I was going to conduct the second field work. One thing that I was certain was that I needed something more participative from my part for the
second field work. I realised that a mere qualitative case study without a direct participation was not going to bring about the kind of results or effects I needed for the research. I also felt I could use my school to study how understanding between hard and soft systems practice and research can be enhanced within a group of ICT academics.

Within the context of my research, I felt I was able to comprehend and learn about Action Research more through ‘trying it out’ in my research field work. Since I was interested to know more about the actuality of being in the situation, my participation and actions has to be considered as the ‘being within the field and listening’ that is described by Uchiyama (2003).

I returned to Manchester in May 2008 and proposed to SSIL for organising a similar Qualitative Research workshop as part of my second field work there. The Deputy Dean of Research and Innovation at my school welcomed the idea and I volunteered to be the lead consultant for the workshop committee. The focus of my field work was to improve research activity in SSIL. I hoped the research methodology workshop would be able to start the transformation in my organisation to move towards qualitative research and research improvement.

I started my field work in earnest in November 2008. With the workshop proposal accepted, I felt confident everything was going to go well. I organised a meeting to discuss some plans for my field work, which included having the fortnightly Action Learning meetings. Unfortunately, the majority of my ideas were (diplomatically) shot down, specifically my plans for the Action Learning meetings. It was at this time, I realised I was not in a position to ask them to do the things I proposed. It was at this time, which I started to see the complexity of the issues with regards to research improvement.

I started pinning my hopes on the Qualitative Research Methodology Workshop. I felt that once the workshop is done, my colleagues would have a better understanding of qualitative research. Organising the workshop was the main participative activity I did during the field work. Other participative activities included being involved with organisational meetings and having informal discussions with the rest of the academics at SSIL on issues relating to research. In many ways I basically returned to the routine of being a member of the organisation as an academic member,
with a difference. My focus was more towards research than teaching and I consciously utilised any opportunity I had in stressing the importance of research among my colleagues.

The field work also included activities such as interviews and discussion forums. I conducted interviews with those within the organisation and senior academics in Malaysian universities. I also organised panel discussion sessions among academics for them to share their thoughts and discuss on the issues related to my research. I represented my school in a research discussion workshop organised by the ICT Deans Committee (Majlis Dekan ICT, MADICT). I also did observations and became active in highlighting how important research activity is among my colleagues.

Towards the end of my field work, I tried to justify the mix of what I thought were participative and non-participative activities in conducting my research, it was then that my supervisor noted that what I was doing was an Action Case. I also started to question whether or not some of the activities I thought were non-participative, were actually participative in nature.

Upon the completion of the second field work, I started focusing on finding literature sources which were related with Action Research and issues of academia. I needed to justify, not only my views on the situation in Malaysian academia, but also the methods that I utilised within the fieldwork. Reading about AR and academic issues made me realise how vital it is for the researcher to be a part of the research process. I also saw the potential for using academic research to not only to add to knowledge, but also practice and emancipate those in academia. I felt that research has been segregated as just another academic activity, and this has to change if we Malaysian IS academic research want to make Information Systems more prominent in Malaysian academia.

Thus, I write in this thesis my experience, findings and opinions. I viewed my contribution within this research as an attempt to instigate some change at a level appropriate for a person of my position, similarly I also wanted to understand factors that influence the situation of my research. While writing up my thesis, I carried on with some work to prepare for my future Action Research once I return to my school and university. The final two chapters of this thesis contains the proposals and recommendations for practice in the future. I believe that there is still very much to learn and do from my part in improving Information Systems research in Malaysia.
Ultimately, I regard this PhD research as a part of my personal Action Research to improve the research in SSIL, UMS and Malaysian Information Systems. All the lessons I've learned from this experience I will utilise for my academic efforts to push for improvements in IS research in my organisation and country. I hope that when I look back upon my PhD and this thesis in ten years time, it would represent a snapshot of where SSIL and I were in terms of research between the years of 2007 and 2010. God-willing.

1.7 The Research Rationale and Significance

As I’ve stated so far, this research ties in directly with my career as a Malaysian Information Systems academic. My personal motivation is to contribute, through this research, to Malaysian Information Systems academic research. I believe that my research is significant in presenting the contextual situation many IS academics in Malaysia face. By presenting this research, I hope to increase the understanding of this situation and encourage collaboration among the stakeholders in Malaysian IS research.

Looking at the unorthodox narrative of this thesis, one of the contributions I believe my thesis presents is within the presentation of the narrative itself. In my reading and understanding of the papers, theses, books and other literary documents I went through in my research, I found that action research is mainly presented by the author as the ‘hero’ in the research story. Case study research on the other hand has the researcher narrating in a way that is akin to a storyteller.

To support my choice of a story narrative, I refer to some articles that I feel enforces this within the context of my research. Broussine (2008) states, “Stories are central to processes of sense-making and identity development within organisations. As a natural part of organisational life, individuals work with and communicate their experiences by telling.”

The research itself also contains elements of Creative Dialogues that I conducted as part of my data collection. Broussine (2008) states, “Dialogue is a process of collaborative organisational inquiry. It can surface and contribute to the formation of collective meanings that frequently remain unrealised in groups. Taking us beyond a focus-group approach, dialogue as research allows new meanings to unfold as collective ‘thinking out loud’ occurs. As well as being a form of action research, dialogue methods can give the researcher access to subtle and hidden aspects of research.
The narrative and data collection of this research are justifiable when looking at my personal contextual situation in Malaysian academia. I would also like to tie the rationale for the research with my own personal situation. One of my hobbies is reading and collecting comics and graphic novels. Stories of costumed superheroes who fight crime and injustice have always fascinated me. When learning about Action Research, I made a connection that the action researcher can be considered a ‘superhero’ in helping and emancipating those who in need.

During the research, I’ve found that my role as researcher is placed in between the two positions, that of the hero and also storyteller. The research methodology I’ve chosen, Action Case, is placed between Action Research and Case Study. Thus, there is participative action from my part in the research, but the level of change is not to the level that would create a huge level of transformation within the organisation. There were other ‘heroes’ in my research story who also played their parts in instigating some of the changes, and who are probably in better positions to create bigger transformations. In some of the situations during my research, I felt that I was merely ‘there for the ride’, in other words I also saw myself as a storyteller in some ways. For this, I tried to present these parts as a part of the qualitative case study section of the research method.

1.8 Research Contributions
Peter Checkland (1985) the founder of SSM introduced a model that has been since used to describe ‘any piece of research’. Figure 1.1 illustrates this model by drawing out the different components of research. The model is based on research having the components of the Framework of Ideas (F), Research Methodology (M) and Area of Application (A). “(The model) came about as a result of trying to encourage research students undertaking action research studies to consider the theoretical bases of their research.” (West and Stansfield 2001) Thus, I will be describing my research contributions from its FMA.
The Framework of Ideas is very much related to the Theoretical Framework of the research. This framework comes from my literature reviews, information and data that were collected during the research. From the findings throughout my research, things appear more complicated than merely introducing Qualitative Research to SSIL and UMS. There are many related issues that are important and needs attention. For IS research to improve (in Malaysia and specifically my school) it requires communication to increase understanding among the stakeholders of Malaysian academia. This communication can be studied as a research in itself for IS practitioners. Political and administrative influence is important to instigate any change or transformation.

The chosen Research Methodology is Action Case (within the context of the position of the researcher as an academic member and Malaysian-based researcher). As a contribution to research approaches, I propose Action Case as an approach suitable for academic research that may require low level change and transformation, which includes participative action-based methods with case study data collection. My methodology contribution also includes proposing a story narrative for an Action Case research.
The main contribution of this research in terms of its application and its area is the improvement of research activity at SSIL. The efforts that were done during the research have made the academic staff more aware of research issues. The workshop that was organized provided them with foundations for qualitative research which could be improved in the future. The research also is also part of the institution’s learning on how to improve research within it. I also believe that my efforts during the research can be regarded as an effort in promoting more openness in university policies to promote communication among the many levels of Malaysian academia.

1.9 Summary
Based on the conceptual formulisation of a story, this chapter is summarised based on the elements that forms the story so far.

The plot of the research story is that Malaysian IS research needs to improve in an environment where the government is investing in Innovation, Research and Development sector. This improvement however requires an understanding of the issues related to research. One of the issues that is inter-related with the development of research itself is the understanding on what constitutes academic research in Malaysia. The different stakeholders seem to have different viewpoints on the definition of academic research and issues related to it.

The characters in the research story include the researcher, me. I play the role of the ‘hero’ and ‘story-teller’ of my experience during the research. Apart from me, the other characters in my research story include those in my university’s administration, academics in my school and experienced professors. In certain ways, some of the characters in my research story will prove to be ‘heroes’ themselves in what they do. Their contribution may even exceed those of myself.

As I have mentioned my role as the hero of the research, I should also point out at this time about another role in some of the stages of my research, where instead of being the 'hero', I appeared to be more of an 'emancipator'. The next chapter will hopefully shed some light to the definition of the emancipator role within Information Systems and as the thesis progresses, there will be further discussions on the differences between my role as 'hero' and 'emancipator' throughout the research.
The narrative of this research is a story from the researcher's first-person perspective. With that in mind, many of the research assumptions in this research are subjective to my own position as a Malaysian IS academic. Many other factors may influence this subjectivity, such as my background, environment and also my relationship with the organisation.

I hope this introduction chapter has attracted the reader's curiosity to read my thesis further. In the next chapter, I present the literature review I conducted before my fieldwork. The literature review became my early theoretical assumptions which developed over the time I conducted my research. The summary section of each chapter will also attempt to assess the changes as the research went on.
Chapter 2: Pre-Fieldwork Literature Review

2.1 Introduction
The literature review for this thesis is divided into pre-field work literature and post-fieldwork liter-ature. Based on the research and thesis structure, I felt I had to separate the document sources due to the understanding I had and gained during the different phases of the research. Before I started my fieldwork, I had an assumption that the literature that I needed to study was based on my goals of introducing qualitative research to my organisation. However, during the field work, I discovered that it was not as easy as merely introducing qualitative research. My post fieldwork literature hope-fully, shows that I understood the complexity and was striving to learn more on that complexity.

Before I started the fieldwork, my intention in the literature review was to convey my understanding of what is qualitative research, specifically Soft Systems Methodology (SSM), which include Sys-tems Dynamics as the ‘hard systems’ method that I was to compare with SSM, and finally discuss Malaysian work culture as the background of the research. Again, I would like to stress that the assumptions made in this literature review chapter were based on my thinking at the time, i.e. improving IS research in my organisation was totally dependent on the introduction of qualitative research there.

In this chapter, I will discuss the background of the research based on literature materials that have been written on the subjects related to the research framework pre-fieldwork. These include writ-ings on hard and soft systems approaches, patterns in Information Systems, actuality and an over-view on Malaysian work culture.

2.2 The Hard Systems Approach and Soft Systems Methodology
Before I can discuss efforts in combining of hard and soft systems approaches, it is best I look into literature that proposes both approaches within IS.

2.2.1 Hard Systems
‘Ontological’, ‘pragmatic’, ‘requirements specification’, ‘technical’, ‘systemic view of the world’, ‘positivist’ and ‘single interpretation’. These are just some words and phrases that can be used to describe methods and approaches that fall under the category of ‘hard systems’. The underlying
principle of the hard systems approach is the interpretation of the world as a system. I was also 'guilty' for claiming this interpretation by stating in my Masters thesis, “The world around us is a great example of a dynamic system.” (Ismail 2002). Even though, the word ‘dynamic’ is used to explain a certain complexity within the world, the interpretation of a systemic world still falls under the ‘hard’ category.

In the field of Information Systems, what is regarded as ‘hard’ systems approaches include three variants; 1) Systems Analysis, 2) Systems Engineering, and, 3) Operational Research. Page (1998) stated, “These three disciplines have a number of elements in common, not least of which is a mechanised approach to problem solving, i.e. the ‘system’ is treated from an ontological stance. The above ‘hard’ systems approaches possess another common element. In each case a systematic means of finding a solution to a problem is assumed... a systematic approach assumes we know what the system is. If indeed the system is clear, and the problem is obvious, then taking a hard systems approach to developing an IS may be appropriate.”

One of the most widely used systematic approaches to the analysis and design of information systems is the Systems Development Life Cycle (SDLC). “The SDLC is a phased approach to analysis and design that holds that systems are best developed through use of a specific cycle of analyst and user activities.” (Kendall and Kendall 1992). Kendall and Kendall’s version of the SDLC proposes seven phases:

a) Identifying problems, opportunities and objectives
b) Determining information requirements
c) Analysing system needs
d) Designing the recommended system
e) Developing and documenting software
f) Testing and maintaining the system
g) Implementing and evaluating the system

The seven activities although identified separately do not necessarily occur the same way. Several activities can occur separately and there might be repetitions of certain phases.
Another approach for analysing and designing information systems is Structured Systems Analysis and Design Methodology (SSADM). It is the British government’s standard for developing information systems. SSADM is regarded as a pragmatic 'requirements engineering method'. SSADM proposes seven stages that are divided into five modules. Table 2.1 shows the modules and stages within the modules of SSADM as proposed by Hußmann (Ed., 1997).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module FS</th>
<th>Stage 0: Feasibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Module RA</td>
<td>Stage 1: Investigation of Current Environment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Stage 2: Business System Options</td>
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<tr>
<td>Module RS</td>
<td>Stage 3: Specification of Definition of Requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Module LS</td>
<td>Stage 4: Technical System options</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Stage 5: Logical Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>Module PD</td>
<td>Stage 6: Physical Design</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: The modules and stages of SSADM (Hußmann (Ed.), 1997)

A simple description of these modules and stages are as follows. The first module, Module FS, conducts a ‘Feasibility Study’ to gain data on the feasibility of the system development project. Module RA includes activities for the purpose of ‘Requirements Analysis’. Module RS deals with ‘Requirements Specification’, namely the specification of definition for the system’s requirements. Next, module LS is for the purpose of ‘Logical System Specification’ where the technical specifications and logical design of the system are provided. Finally, the ‘Physical Design’ for the system is generated in Module FS.

One of the interesting things about SSADM is that its development as a methodology actually involved prominent soft systems proponents, which included none other than the inventor of SSM himself, Peter Checkland. Despite this, there are those who think SSADM has fallen into a more ‘hard’ approach. “Advocates of the soft systems approach have criticised the hard systems following for the propensity of hard methodologies, such as the Structured Systems Analysis and Design Method (SSADM), to commit what may be termed ‘errors of the third kind...’” (Probert and Rogers 1999). While more recent versions of SSADM have pointed to an introduction to softer elements into the method itself. (Al-Humaidan and Rossiter 2001)

From my point of view, one aspect that does appear to be a common trait among ‘hard’ systems approaches is the notion of ‘Requirements Engineering’. Despite SSADM’s acknowledgement of the
importance of dealing with ‘softer’ issues, the modules and phases that relate to requirements specification shows a ‘hard’ intention. This notion of ‘defining what the users want’ has been a key element under the hard approach. The hard systems approach considers the development of information systems requires interpreting the system from a single representation that is needed by the users and will enable all users to use optimally. In order to attain the ‘perfect’ representation requirements elicitation, and analysis normally takes the viewpoint of the analyst herself. Thus, this is one of the main reasons differentiating hard and soft systems approaches.

2.3 Soft Systems Methodology
Numerous definitions of Soft Systems Methodology have been given since its emergence in the 1970s from the University of Lancaster. They all carry the same theme of an approach for analysing and learning from complex or ‘messy’ situations. One definition of SSM state, “… particularly well suited to messy project situations with its emphasis on problem situations rather than well defined problems, different worldviews, models as devices for learning rather than prediction and consciously organised inquiry. SSM considers that the real world consists of complexity and confusion and hence the aim is to organise an exploration of it as a learning system.” (Gunawardena and Brown 2007).

One of the main differences between hard and soft approaches within the field of systems thinking is how each approach interprets the ‘world’. In systems thinking, the world or a ‘whole’ should be perceived as greater than the sum of its parts. (Sterman, 2000) From here, the question arises of how to interpret this view of ‘parts’ forming a ‘whole’. While those in hard systems believes there is a well-defined way to define the ‘parts’, soft systems proponents are adamant it is more complex than that. “Most literate people, asked to name an adjective from the noun ‘system’, would offer ‘systematic’. But there is another adjective... more important than ‘systematic’ if the nature of systems thinking is to be understood: the adjective ‘systemic’.” (Checkland and Scholes 1990). The difference between ‘systemic’ and ‘systematic’ is that while systemic implies that we may comprehend and analyse situations by using inter-related activities, systematic adopts a view that the interpretation of the world is that of clearly defined inter-related activities. It is a difference in scale. The hard systems approach views the world as easily definable, thus advocating direct interpretations of the world into elements that form systems. While SSM advocates the complexity of the world and prescribes an approach to view this complexity through a systemic nature.
SSM does not attempt to define ‘problems’ within a system. It would be against its principles to define individual ‘problems’ that need to be resolved directly. However, SSM believes in describing situations and the problems that may reside in it, which may include conflicts of interest, social interactions, politics and many other things that we discover to be problematic in real life. SSM is more focused on learning about the world and to achieve this, a seven point guideline for SSM implementation is suggested. Figure 2.1 illustrates this guideline followed by a description of each of the activities.

Figure 2.1: A guideline to Soft Systems Methodology (Checkland and Scholes 1990)

- The first activity is to view the situation that we perceive as problematic. There is no hard definition of the situation, but taking into account events, environment, timeline and everything related to the overall situation we have a snapshot of what the problem situation looks like.
- Expression for the problem situation can then be formed. However, the important consideration here is there will be different expressions of the situation coming from different world-views (Weltanschauungen).
- Within a problem situation, there will be people who act out purposeful activities. These purposeful activities can be derived as human activity systems and given root definitions.
However, the consideration here is that this representation is not of the real world, but a systems thinking view of what can constitute as a definable system.

- Based on the human activity systems and root definitions we can engage in a modelling process where conceptual models are formed. Again, this is merely a representation in the systems thinking world.

- Once we have some ‘contributions’ based on systems thinking representation, the next task is to compare the expressions of the problem situation with the root definitions and models of human activity. The models should be used to ask questions on the problem situation, and to start the process of proposing changes.

- The changes proposed should be systemically desirable and culturally feasible. The focus here is for cultural feasibility, where different weltaschauungen can accept the changes.

- Finally, the implementation of the changes is carried out with the intention to improve the situation. At the same time, a constant need for learning and improving will motivate the cycling of the activities to further evolve the situation.

To enable the expression of the problem situation, SSM prescribes the usage of rich pictures. A rich picture is “... a literal description of an account of the situation as a picture... In making a Rich Picture the aim is to capture, informally, the main entities, structures and viewpoints in the situation, the processes going on, the current recognised issues and any potential ones.” (Checkland and Scholes 1990). In addition, there is no strict or formal way to draw these pictures, there is no such thing as a ‘right’ picture. The drawing of the picture itself is a valuable activity where different worldviews from the stakeholders involved will produce numerous rich pictures and ways on how to perceive the problem situation. An example of a rich picture is shown in Figure 2.2, which shows a representation of a nation’s drugs trade. (Coyle and Alexander, 1997)
Figure 2.2: Rich picture for the Dystopia drugs trade (Coyle and Alexander 1997)

Based on the rich pictures we can derive the purposeful human activity systems and provide root definitions for them. This is done with the aid of CATWOE analysis. CATWOE is an abbreviation for Clients, Actors, Transformation, Weltanschauung, Owner and Environment, which can be described as such:

- Clients or Customers: the victims and beneficiaries of a system’s activity.
- Actors: the agents who carry out the activity.
- Transformation: the activity itself or the process of transforming something into something, for example, ‘input’ into ‘output’.
- Weltanschauung: the outlook or viewpoint that gives meaning to the Transformation.
- Owners: those responsible for the system whereby they have the authority to stop it.
- Environment: the external influence and elements beyond the control of the system which is imposed on the system.

The concept of using CATWOE analysis is to allow for the definition of purposeful activity through the Transformation (T) based on a Weltanschauung(W). It is useful when conducting CATWOE analysis to start with defining the T and W and building up the rest of the elements. Allow me to
demonstrate by analysing the rich picture of the drugs trade and eliciting the CATWOE for the Transformation ‘Drug Sales’ from the W of drug peddler. Table 2.2 shows the CATWOE analysis’ representation taken from Coyle and Alexander (1997).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client</th>
<th>Drug users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Drug peddler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>Drugs in stock to drugs sold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weltanschauung</td>
<td>A view from the drug peddler of selling drugs to clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Drug lords (bosses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>The police, laws concerning drug trafficking, supply and demand.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2: CATWOE analysis on ‘Drug Sales’ (Coyle and Alexander 1997)

A root definition that can be derived from this CATWOE analysis would be, “The selling of drugs which transforms drugs in stock into drugs sold, acted upon by the drug peddler who views this sale from his perspective, and tries to please his customers and also the bosses (to make sure he’s paid), while being at the mercy of supply and demand, worrying about the police and the law catching up to him.” (Coyle and Alexander 1997). Based on this root definition, derived from the CATWOE analysis, an analyst can compare this with the rich picture to suggest feasible and desirable changes that can improve the drug peddler’s task of selling drugs.

As stated earlier, in my Masters thesis my interpretation of the world was still influenced by my 'hard' stance at the time. After the exposure to Peter Checkland's work and SSM, I began to experience changes in my opinions. I became more agnostic towards the notion of systems and its representation in the real world. Checkland's view is that systems do not exist in the real world, but constructs could be used to represent problem situations to learn about them systemically. I started to see the difference between seeing the world as a systematic reality and viewing the world as a complicated structure which could be learned systemically. On the one hand, those who view the world as systematic perceive that there is one correct way to present the world. In my opinion, this is related to a logical positivist viewpoint. On the other hand, the systemic learning of the problem situation based on constructs of human activity systems represent an interpretive stance, as the rich pictures prescribed by Checkland attempts to represent the different worldviews of those in the situation.
2.4 Combining Hard and Soft Systems Approaches

Ever since SSM was introduced, there have been efforts to combine SSM with hard approaches to develop methods that possess the organisational advantages of soft systems with the ontological rigour in problem solving found in hard approaches. “Because SSM seeks to produce a high-level conceptual understanding of the problems and requirements of a business system, it needs to be combined with more conventional information systems methodologies to handle the details. In the case of structured information systems methodologies, techniques that are used in the development of systems include data flow diagrams and entity models.” (Taylor et al 1998).

Miles (1988) hints at two distinctly different approaches to combining hard and soft systems practice within Information Systems, the grafting approach and the embedding approach. In the grafting approach, a soft feasibility stage is grafted onto the front end of the conventional operating framework of ISE (usually the System Life Cycle or an established variant). The second approach entails embedding hard systems practices within the systemic framework of SSM. Between the two, the grafting approach appears to still attempt to limit the soft systems approach’s influence by deploying its ideas in a systematic framework. The embedding approach on the other hand allows for soft systems to lead the hard systems approach, by making ‘hard’ a special case for the entire ‘soft’ approach-oriented project. In comparison, the embedding approach seems to be more desirable (Miles 1988).

One method that can be taken as an example for the grafting approach is SSADM. “SSADM 4+ (1995) specifically considers how SSM outputs can be used as inputs to the SSADM requirements definition process. In the main this reference describes how the table of information categories produced by SSM can be used to derive business system requirements.” (Taylor et al 1998). The attachment of SSM to produce inputs for SSADM clearly portrays a grafting technique for linking these two methods together.

For the embedding approach, I would like to point to Multiview as a good example as to how SSM can be used to steer an Information Systems project. The next sub-chapter is dedicated totally towards Multiview and how the approach reflects a more embedded approach to integrating SSM with hard approaches.
2.5 Multiview

Based on the work of a group of prominent IS academics, Multiview is an approach that can be used in setting up an information system. The term ‘multiview’ is derived from the different or multiple perspectives the approach take into view during the process of system analysis, design and development. Both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ systems approaches possess their own advantages and disadvantages within the context of systems development. Not only that, the criticisms toward each approach seems to show that whatever one approach lacks, the other possess the means to handle that weakness. Taking into consideration the requirements from the organisation and information technology, there are issues related to both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ approaches that need to be addressed to develop a system that can fulfil the needs from all sides. Figure 2.3 illustrates the Multiview framework within its attempt to address the issues pertaining to organisational needs and information technology, along with the hard and soft issues related to each aspect.

![Multiview Framework](image)

Figure 2.3: A Multiview framework (Wood-Harper 2000)

With the Multiview approach, it is highly recommended that the analyst possesses self knowledge, which is knowledge of one’s self. “This role (of the analyst), or some parts of it, may be carried out from different positions within the organisation, or from outside it. The analyst is part of the context.” (Bell and Wood-Harper 2003) It is because of this contextual aspect that the analyst must first determine from which point of view she will analyse the system. As an individual, the analyst has her own preference, methodology, agendas and preferences and they need to be clearly understood by the analyst herself when beginning analysis in order for these personal issues to not have an adverse affect towards analysis. It can be risky for the analyst to look at the system only from her
point of view or context which may lead the system to only fulfil the needs of the analyst herself rather than the needs of all users.

Four types or categories of analyst can be identified, “the technocratic analyst, the radical analyst, the facilitator/teacher analyst and the emancipator analyst.” (Bell and Wood-Harper 2003)

- The technical analyst is mainly concerned with fixing problems with objectivity and vigour, somewhat like a doctor or any other skilled professional.
- The radical analyst acts like a warrior who tries to right all wrongs and radically change existing status quos.
- The facilitator/teacher analyst is more motivated in finding the meaning of problems and facilitating the other stakeholders in learning about their situation and to solve problems from within.
- The emancipator analyst acts as a catalyst of change who tries to change the mind set and behaviour of those within the organisation. All of these types of analysts are motivated to change the organisation for the better. Their approaches are different given their individual motivation and methodology.

Any good analyst must first address ‘which kind of analyst am I?’ in order for them to be more objective in the systems analysis process. At this stage in the research, I was hoping to be an emancipator analyst, in improving the research activities at SSIL through ‘peacefully’ bringing qualitative research to the organisation. This also fits into my belief that my narration of this research should be based from the first-person perspective of myself as the 'hero of the research story'.

The many roles/metaphors of the system analyst can be associated with the world hypotheses prescribed by Stephen Pepper (1942). In his work, Pepper describes four world hypotheses or root metaphors which leads to the categories on how the world can be interpreted. I believe that by understanding the categories of interpretation and how they can relate to the different motivations or categories of analysts, we can find some common ground to start the work for improving understanding among the different approaches in systems analysis and design.
2.6 Patterns in Information Systems

(Due to my initial PhD research topic of ‘Systems Dynamics Modelling Patterns’, I was still motivated during my first year of PhD to utilise some of the ideas I had in the proposal which were based on patterns. Patterns was subsequently replaced with shared understandings, but I felt this section's inclusion would be beneficial to see the personal transformation on myself as the researcher.)

From a ‘hard’ systems point of view reusing patterns have been a common occurrence. One of the motivations of using patterns in information systems is to enable reuse of previous solutions to new problems. This idea of reuse was introduced to handle the ever increasing complexity of designing systems. Reuse provides the availability of standard, readily available components that can be used in different situations in order to develop new products (Prekas 2000).

Proponents from the hard systems approach have contributed many patterns-related ideas and methods. PattCaR (Pattern Capture and Reuse) proposed by Isabel Seruca (2003) is an example for a method-based approach to capturing and reusing patterns within a business domain.

By using analogy, hard systems proponents believe that it is possible to retrieve knowledge from one domain and then applying it into another. They perceive that analogical reasoning may be able to support reuse across the different domains. A common factor between cognitive theories on analogical mapping is the development of an abstract knowledge structure which represents an inter-linked set of facts common to two or more domains. Analogical based reuse aims to identify abstractions, develop a matching process which can partially automate this task and then provide a retrieval process which can select appropriate reusable specifications from a repository (Sutcliffe and Maiden 1992).

As time went by, these definitions of patterns had to be altered to fit the fieldwork limitations. Eventually, the definition of patterns I chose to utilise developed into shared understandings and similarities that came up from the interviews, discussions and observations during the fieldwork. Policies from Malaysian government and university represent these similarities which are shared by the university administrators and academics alike.
2.7 The Theory and Practice of Actuality

When discussing the state of the art of IS, Kenichi Uchiyama (1999) discussed two main problems prevalent within it. The first being that computer implementation in many organisations neglected key aspects relating to human beings, like impact of usage of computers on people. The second is a lack of actuality, the practical sense in the strategy planned by specialists. Motivated by these problems, Uchiyama proposed in his thesis *The Theory and Practice of Actuality* (1999) a reinterpretation of SSM from the Japanese point of view and discussed its implications to management and IS.

Combining two areas of knowledge, Psychology and Information Systems, the two main influences of the thesis came from famed Japanese psychologist Bin Kimura and Soft Systems Methodology proposed by Peter Checkland. The aims of the thesis were to build theoretical framework of a phenomenological approach to Information Management based on the 'actuality' concept formulated by Bin Kimura, and to build the methodology for this approach by embodying 'actuality' theory into Checkland's SSM (Uchiyama 1999). The result of the thesis was a more phenomenological approach to IS.

Checkland’s SSM is one of the key theories in this thesis. Checkland’s notion of ‘systems’ can be seen as a reinterpretation of conventional ‘systems theory’ connected to ‘action research’, where he proposes new concepts such as ‘human activity system (HAS)’ and ‘accommodation’. Using these concepts, Checkland argues for SSM and for its use in various areas. Most of his successors have concentrated on the application of SSM, rather than the theoretical viewpoint. It is difficult to improve SSM further from the Western point of view (Uchiyama 1999). For SSM to improve and evolve, there needs to be a wider focus in terms of placing contextual emphasis in applying SSM.

Kimura’s phenomenological psychiatry is relatively new, originating from the philosophical works of Heidegger and Husserl. Uchiyama (1999) stated that in Bin Kimura's work, he suggested there are only two streams in the early stage of ‘psychopathology’: ‘scientific psychology’ represented by the Freud psychoanalysis school and ‘existential psychology’ represented by Jaspers (1963), who based his approach on Husserl. Kimura wanted to create an original psychiatry, based on Japanese context but with a close relationship to Blankenburg (1971). Kimura in 1982 suggested an original concept of the ‘between’, meaning not only between things but also having ‘between’ itself as a
‘between’ relationship. People can share between them, but at the same time they can share ‘between’ itself (Uchiyama 1999).

The main reason for introducing Kimura’s notion of ‘actuality’ is that the ‘actuality’ becomes a key concept in thinking of ‘humanity’ in Management and IS studies, rather than as an object or part of the mechanical systems. Uchiyama argues that introducing ‘actuality’ into Management and IS study can restore the ‘feeling of reality (i.e. actuality), or subjectivity. Checkland (1990) also says ‘Overall, the aim of SSM is to take seriously the subjectivity which is the crucial characteristic of human affairs and to treat this subjectivity, if not exactly scientifically, at least in a way characterised by intellectual rigour.’

In his thesis, Uchiyama gave the example of his experience developing a Point-of-Sale (POS) system used in a Japanese supermarket. POS data in the supermarket was not fully utilised by micro-level staff. The reason why POS data was not used at micro levels was because local managers could not read the information effectively. POS data became a mountain of meaningless rubbish due to the lack of ‘meaning’. Data belongs to a kind of ‘reality’ and action belongs to a kind of ‘actuality’, but reality and ‘actuality’ are on completely different levels. Reality is something experienced (noematic) and actuality is something experiencing (noetic). From a Japanese viewpoint, we can get any data we need for decision making by using IT, but it is usually very difficult to make sense of the data collected. The conventional argument is decision making tends to focus on the data as ‘reality’ and forget the importance of it as ‘actuality’, which must be made sense of. This raises the question of how to bridge ‘reality’ and ‘actuality’.

SSM can offer the key to solving the difficult problem of bridging between ‘reality’ and ‘actuality’ in the fields of management and IS studies. We need to reinterpret SSM from the ‘actuality’ point of view, which requires distinguishing between ‘actual’ and ‘real’ transformations (Uchiyama, 1999). In the ‘real’ transformation, both output and input has to be known before the transformation can take place. Whereas, ‘actual’ transformation, output has to be indeterminate and input has to be determined as a virtual form. For example, the transformation to produce a car is a real transformation, every specification of the product was already known previously and we only have to input the material. However, the transformation involved in the evolution of eyes is an actual transformation, in that no functions of the eyes were known before the eye’s actuality was shaped through evolu-
tionary adaptation, although there was a kind of need for eyes as a virtual input (Uchiyama, 1999). A ‘soft’ SSM ‘accommodation’ could not be designed previously, but is shaped in the process of SSM. With ‘hard’, possible alternatives are examined first and the most suitable plan is chosen based on ‘real’ standards. In the real (hard) transformation, ‘design’ is the base; whereas in the actual (soft) transformation, ‘shaping’ is the base.

In Uchiyama's book, Checkland's foreword pointed to Japanese thinking as more natural towards SSM. Western thinking copes with complexity by breaking wholes into parts, then tackling these parts one-by-one. SSM attempts to develop a more holistic way of thinking. Checkland argues that there is a need to move away from Descartes' reductionism when dealing with problems beyond the natural sciences. SSM practitioners “have adopted the stance that social reality is a complex social construction, which is continuously constructed and re-constructed as a result of actions and ideas exchanged among the people who themselves constitute social situations.” One of the most intriguing ideas from Uchiyama's application of actuality in SSM is the the distinction between reality and actuality itself. Based on Bin Kimura's work on schizophrenia, the distinction relates to patients who cannot differentiate the two.

Checkland states that, “My understanding of this concept may be idiosyncratic, but I see it as marking the difference between interacting with the reality we perceive outside ourselves, while not taking it as a given and interacting with the world while being consciously reflective about how we are perceiving it. Thus, in using SSM you are dealing not with an unexamined 'given' outside yourself (‘reality’) but with 'actuality': not simply interacting with the problem situation as a 'thing', but doing so while being conscious that you are thinking about it in a particular way – which can itself be thought about and consciously changed.” SSM entails not only thinking about a something of concern, but also thinking about your own thinking about it.

Uchiyama's PhD supervisor commended the work as something that could bring theory and practice in management closer together. The abundance of management theories which are ultimately not used in practice is not the fault of either managers or academics, it is that the theories and models lack the complexity and subtlety that managers and IS practitioners experience in the field. “Their models seem to be right, as it is based on empirical research, yet they seem 'false' in as much as
they do not account ongoing experience of managers.” The distinction between reality and actuality addresses this.

Introna chose Uchiyama's example of playing and hearing music as an example, which describes the enjoyment gained from music as listening to it as a whole, rather than the notes being produced. “Our awareness of the music is in a sort of 'time' in which the 'past' and the 'future' are always already present (and absent) in the very 'now' of the notes we are playing.” Introna then describes this example of music leads to how managerial problems are perceived, “Management is not a series of 'now' decisions, pland, models, etc. rather it is managing as a whole, in actuality. Decisions make sens, not because they are made now, but because in actuality they are wholes in which past, present and future exists simultaneously.”

Within my research, actuality became an important component and also method for me to ultimately reflect upon the research itself. From what I comprehended at the time, Uchiyama prescribed an awareness that the researcher must find himself within the research he is conducting. In my case, I had to find myself within my organisation again. By the end of the research however, there were times I reflected and found myself out of the situation in which I reflected from an external perspective. I shall elaborate upon this situation further as the thesis goes on.

2.8 The Malaysian Work Culture
The motivation behind bringing the Malaysian work culture into this research is due to the uniqueness and diversity of the Malaysian people. During this time, I needed to justify why it was significant for me to carry out fieldwork in Malaysia. I believe that Malaysia’s unique cultural diversity places a unique perspective for encouraging understanding and cooperation among those with different cultures and beliefs. I believe that there is something to be learnt when comparing a multi-racial society like Malaysia, with the multi-methodological leanings of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ systems proponents.

During the first year of my PhD, I was exposed to multiple definitions of the term culture. Brown (1998) illustrated this diversity by listing no less than fourteen different definitions of culture. Even as early as the 1950s, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) identified 164 definitions of culture. Due to
the Malaysian scope of this research, I have chosen to utilise the definition given by Asma Abdullah (2001) that, “Culture can be defined as a shared and commonly held body of general beliefs and values which define the ‘shoulds’ and ‘oughts’ of life of certain ethnic communities. These beliefs and values are learned at an early age in life, and one is usually unaware of their influence.”

The Malaysian people and specifically, workers, come from a diverse mix of ethnic groups. “Each ethnic group has a rich and distinct culture based in age-old beliefs, traditions and practices rooted in the Asian heritage. Therefore, the Malaysian work scenario is culturally diverse. Yet, in this diversity, Malaysians work in apparent harmony and unity brought about by a few unifying factors, the most important of which are values that have withstood the test of time and are common to all the ethnic groups.” (Abdullah 2001).

From my personal perspective, not only do these values allow for the tolerance among the workers and people of Malaysia, they allow for the accommodation which has been related by Uchiyama’s concept of actuality.

Accommodation and acceptance for other cultures and faiths is very much an aspect of cultural influence within the Malaysian community. However, I also believe that without a politically-based effort, Malaysian society would not be able to retain this tolerance. Historically, in the run up to Malaya’s independence in 31st August 1957, the leaders representing the different communities and their political parties agreed to an unwritten social contract which later influenced the formation of the country’s constitution. It is through the spirit of cooperation and togetherness, the social contract became the foundation to foster multi-racial harmony in Malaya and then in Malaysia. These viewpoints are supported by Dr Chandra Muzaffar, a prominent Malaysian historian in an interview by the Malaysian news agency, BERNAMA, in 2005. Prior to the fieldwork, I believed that it was this sort of ‘social contract’ that may be the key to forge better understanding and collaboration between practitioners of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ approaches, which will not only be culturally viable, but contextually acceptable.
Dr Chandra Muzaffar wrote an article regarding the issue of Malaysian society and our perceived social contract entitled ‘Challenges and Choices in Malaysian Politics and Society’ in Aliran magazine in 1989. This article was based on a speech given in April 1988.

“One of the main reasons why multi-ethnic Malaysia has held together in spite of everything, is because of a ‘live and let live’ attitude among the people. This is due to certain cultural, economic and political factors. All the cultural and religious traditions in the country value mutual tolerance and respect... Besides some form of balance and accommodation has been a characteristic of Malaysian politics... Perhaps, the ‘live and let live’ attitude is also a product of a caution in entice relations that has developed since the May 13 incident in 1969. Malaysians are now very afraid of provoking anyone from another community just in case it leads to an ethnic conflict. This caution, this fear of trouble breaking out, appears to be a crucial aspect of the Malaysian psyche.” (Chandra Muzaffar 1989)

An often quoted incident in Malaysian history is the May 13 Tragedy. On 13 May 1969, a racial riot occurred in parts of Kuala Lumpur which caused the death of 196 people. It has been defined as one of Malaysia's watershed moments in history (National Institute of Public Administration 1997). This deference to acts of provocation has been ingrained in Malaysian culture until today. This is also a reason why foreigners may think that Malaysians can be ‘too nice’.

Prior to the fieldwork, I felt that cultural issues would be one of the challenges that I can learn about in bringing the ‘soft’ systems and qualitative research methods to my institution. My idea that Malaysian culture’s accommodating values may also pose a problem in itself. Abdullah (2001) highlighted many of the underlying values from observations and surveys conducted on Malaysian work culture. They include:

- Non-assertiveness
- Respect for seniors and preserving face
- Loyalty, respect for authority
- Collectivism (‘we’ orientation), cooperation
- Harmony and face
- Preserving face
- Status, good manners and courtesy
- Respect for hierarchy
- Harmony and non-aggressiveness
- Trust and relationship building
- Third party and preserving face
- Intermediary in establishing trust and goodwill
- Tolerance and respect for differences

Abdullah (2001) also noted some additional self-descriptions by Malaysian commonly admitted by Malaysians. Malaysians consider themselves:
- “Not as articulate and assertive as foreign peers.”
- “Not as candid, open and expressive in communicating feelings and ideas to others.”
- “Tend to be very cordial and polite in making requests and conveying disappointment, especially when dealing with government authorities.”
- “Tend to be indirect when communicating disappointment for fear of hurting the feelings of the other party.”
- “Disagreements are seldom discussed in an open and frank manner as avoidance is the preferred mode for resolving conflict.”
- “Malaysians are not very expressive in verbal feedback for fear of being insincere or too direct.”

One core Malaysian value that caught my eye in my review of Asma Abdullah’s work was her assessment of the group-oriented leanings. “Most Malaysians, regardless of ethnicity, are generally group-oriented. The dimensions of ‘I-We’ is even more significant for the Malays, who believe that a person has no real identity unless he belongs to a collectivity or group. Hence, fulfilling obligations to family members, close relatives and even friends, is very important to maintain their sense of identity to a particular group.” As I try to relate this statement to explain an example of a Malaysian actuality, I find that as a researcher who is researching my own organisation I must be aware of how I will view the organisation from within. The sense of being a part of SSIL will inevitably play a role during the fieldwork itself.
2.9 World Metaphors

In addition to the aspects of information systems and some of the cultural underpinnings of this research, it was suggested that philosophy could give a meaningful contribution as well. Prior to the fieldwork, it was a bit too early to tell how the philosophical aspects of this work were to take shape. However, I was certain even then that the contribution will be extremely vital for it will provide a way for supporting some of the assumptions for the research.

For this purpose, an interesting piece of work from American philosopher Stephen C Pepper was suggested by my supervisor. That piece of work is Pepper’s book World Hypotheses in which he examines and suggests a root-metaphor theory with different hypotheses. In his work, Pepper proposed four hypotheses (excluding Animism and Mysticism); Formism, Mechanism, Contextualism and Organicism. Formism is often called 'realism' or 'Platonic idealism'. Mechanism is often called 'naturalism' or 'materialism', and by some, 'realism'. Contextualism is commonly called 'pragmatism'. Organicism is commonly called 'absolute (or objective) idealism'. (Pepper 1942)

During the pre-fieldwork stage of the research I was not able to give a longer elaboration on the hypotheses and how they will directly influence the research. My understanding at the time was that Formism and Mechanism may represent a harder and ontological viewpoint among the metaphors. While, Contextualism and Organicism maybe more associated with an epistemological approach.

An enlightening paper was written by Antonio Dias de Figueiredo and Paulo Rupino Cunha (2007) Action Research and Design in Information Systems that related Pepper's world hypothesis to Information Systems. “Stephen Pepper, a philosopher of the pragmatist tradition, formulated a metaphysical system according to which our understanding of the world may happen through four distinct 'root metaphors', or 'world hypotheses' (Pepper, 1942): formism, mechanism, organicism, and contextualism. When we take a formist view, we try to understand the world through the apprehension of its categories, identifying similarities and differences between things and placing them into categories as our knowledge progresses. If our view is mechanist, we try to understand how things work, looking for causes and consequences and decomposing what is complex into constituent parts. Organicism gives us an organic perspective of the world, concerned with the coherence between the parts and the whole in the creation of integrated visions of processes, abstractions and
entities. Contextualism makes us see the world in the complexity of its contexts and in the need to adapt permanently to its predictability and contingency.”

De Figueiredo and Cunha (2007) added, “One of the conclusions... was that society is, at present, quietly moving from a world of formist and mechanist visions to a world of organicism and contextualism.” Their claim on how research and design is moving towards a more qualitative or interpretivist stance supported my assumptions prior to the fieldwork that this has just started to reach Malaysian Information Systems. This also reflected on my own experience of being an IS academic who was just exposed to this philosophy when starting my PhD.

By the end of the research however, Pepper's work contributed to the research was my personal understanding on some of the philosophies behind the positivist and interpretivist philosophies of research methodology. My initial personal philosophical view prior to my PhD was more towards positivism, where I believed that scientific theories already existed only to be discovered. I also believed that the world consisted of systems which could be drawn and described. As my research progressed and I started to listen and comprehend other viewpoints, I started to change my philosophical view. In many ways, I became a contextualist, where I would attempt to comprehend a situation from the different contexts and represent it in a way that it occurs right now.

“By historic event, however, the contextualist does not mean primarily a past event, one that is, so to speak, dead and has to be exhumed. He means the event alive in its present. What we ordinarily mean by history, he says, is an attempt to re-present events, to make them in some way alive again. The real historic event, the event in its actuality, is when it is going on now, the dynamic dramatic active event. We may call it an 'act', if we like, and if we take care of our use of the term. But it is not an act conceived as alone or cut off that we mean; it is an act in and with its setting, an act in its context.” Pepper (1942)

Reading this description of the contextualist, I find myself drawn to ideas of re-representing events to make them alive and acting within a context. The former I interpret as the contextualist being a story teller, which eventually became my chosen narrative for the research thesis. The latter I interpreted to convey an action-based researcher working within an actuality which is my view of my role within this research.
2.10 Papers from SSIL

Another literature exercise I conducted was to review the papers written and published by my colleagues at SSIL that were available on the Internet. My initial perception prior to the fieldwork was that our research focused heavily on quantitative surveys. I felt this quantitative bias did not help in encouraging research diversity in my school.

I reviewed 22 research papers that were published by SSIL academics. 16 of them included either statistical or survey style inquiries, with 3 of the papers containing hard computer science elements. The rest of the papers included discussions on theories and issues regarding ICT.

During my review of my colleagues' work, I noticed two authors who constantly wrote papers which did not necessarily relied on surveys and statistical methods, Ms Idyawati Hussein and Mr Esmadi Abu Seman. Between them, these two academics wrote 5 papers on Human Computer Interaction. The discussions in their papers included cultural and organisational aspects, and when they did include some statistics the sample seem to be smaller and more focused on a specific group of computer users.

By the time I was about to start my fieldwork, my perception on the research situation in SSIL was influenced by what I saw from SSIL's publications. This motivated me to focus on introducing qualitative research in SSIL during the fieldwork, with the hope that introducing my colleagues to qualitative research would diversify our research activities and lead to improvement in our research output. Later on during the fieldwork, I discovered that it was not as easy as merely introducing qualitative research.

2.11 Summary

My first year of the PhD has revealed and led me to many interesting and important literature that, at the time, I felt would benefit the research. However, I realise that Literature Review is a constant activity in research and one that only ends once the presentation of the research findings is done. Even then, there might be additional literature works that can be added to enforce the post-presentation edition of the research thesis.
This chapter presents a snapshot of the Literature that I read, reviewed and I became influenced by in my first year of PhD, from January 2007 to January 2008. As the research progressed, my experience from field work and further literature reviews enhanced my understanding and my viewpoints.

This chapter also represents part of the Framework of Ideas within my research FMA. Figure 2.4 illustrates the inclusion of the Pre-fieldwork Literature Review as part of my Framework of Ideas.

![Diagram of Framework of Ideas](image)

**Figure 2.4: Pre-Fieldwork Literature Review FMA**

The literature review shaped my preliminary understanding of the situation in Malaysia and SSIL. It also shaped an early theoretical framework for which I needed to investigate in my research. This theoretical framework however, was still in its infancy. Figure 2.5 is a representation of what the framework would look like if it was illustrated.
The literature review provided me with many of the basis for my PhD research. I was influenced by my own experience as a Malaysian IS academic in SSIL. The reading materials I chose to review hinted at attempting to instigate some change in my situation. Reviewing literature on qualitative research and soft systems made me want to bring this to SSIL. However the pre-fieldwork literature only covered some of the research issues and not the method for instigating this change. The discussion on research methodology begins in the next chapter, from the pre-fieldwork stage.

At this stage of my research, my FMA included these elements:

- Framework of Ideas (F):
  - Experience from being a Malaysian IS academic
  - Pre-fieldwork Literature Review
    - Hard vs Soft Systems
    - Qualitative Research
    - Malaysian Culture
    - Patterns
    - Actuality
Methodology (M):
- Not yet determined

Application Area (A):
- Not yet determined

The pre-fieldwork literature on SSM and qualitative research influenced my selection of the research methodology. It was during this time I was exposed to Action Research. In the next chapter, I will elaborate on Action Research and qualitative case studies as this was the preliminary ‘version’ of my eventual research methodology.

My pre-fieldwork literature review was mainly done in Manchester during the first year of my research. Due to my external location, I was viewing the problem situation in Malaysia from afar even though it was based on my experience as an academic there. Upon reflection of that period of time, I felt that the initial ideas and theoretical framework were influenced by an external weltanschauung, where I was not within the situation. Even though I conducted literature reviews on Uchiyama’s work on actuality in Information Systems, the exposure to actuality at this stage didn’t affect my way of perceiving the situation from an external worldview. I was a novice at SSM when I wrote the pre-fieldwork literature review.

My research's theoretical framework at the time was also quite generic in focus and influenced by my early perception as a Malaysian IS academic, whereby I generalised my research to be associated with hard vs soft systems, qualitative research, Malaysian culture, patterns (which would then be changed to shared understandings) and actuality. These elements formed the early themes I wanted to seek out in my research which would later develop after fieldwork and analysis.
Chapter 3: Pre-Fieldwork Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction
I have separated my Research Methodology section of this thesis into two. This chapter is what I consider as my pre-fieldwork research methodology, which contains the assumptions of the research methodology I had before I did my fieldwork. In this chapter, I will discuss the background of the research methodology in the form of a story of how it all came about prior to the fieldwork. I will explain the research samples and their relevance in terms of the information needed for the research. An overview of the research design is then presented. I will then explain the data collection process and then the analysis process I have chosen. Ethical considerations as well as issues concerning trustworthiness are touched on in this chapter. The research’s contextual limitations are then discussed before I conclude this chapter with a summary.

3.2 Information Needed and the Research Sample
Normally, it is prescribed that I discuss the research samples and the information needed, based on my research questions, to lead my selection of the research methodology. This section attempts to combine the selection based on the information needed. The reason for this is that I thought it would be better to relate both the sample and also the information that is required from them, in order for the reader to view the justification for the sample’s selection.

To develop my arguments for this research, I needed to shape the problem situation within Malaysian Information Systems research, which includes the big picture of Malaysian academia itself, Malaysian Information Systems research, and, issues within SSIL and UMS, as the contextual situation for my research.

To learn and produce findings on how to improve Malaysian IS academic research, I had to gather the viewpoints on the situation affecting Malaysian research. The first major sample for the research consisted of academics and also members of university from administration. I needed opinions from those who have had years of experience within the field of Malaysian academic research, thus I interviewed senior academics in different institutions throughout Malaysia. The selection criteria for them were based on my view of how they can contribute in the arguments within the research.
To represent Information Systems, I selected a couple of IS professors with experience in not only academia, but also in practice (one of the IS professors was working in the Ministry of Health as Chief Information Officer at the time).

I also wanted to learn about Malaysian academic research in general. What were the challenges in improving this area and how do we improve things. For this, I interviewed a number of professors and senior academics with years of experience in Malaysian academia. Some of them, I selected for what I saw as ‘radical’ opinions on not only academic research but how research and universities are administered.

Another group that I had to attain views from are senior administration in my own university and also other universities. Those that I interviewed have years of experience as administrators, and the majority of them consists of academics. Incidentally, it was quite interesting for me to view some of the nuances when comparing the pure administrators with the academics who became administrators.

Since my research has chosen my school, i.e. SSIL as its context, I also needed to interview the academic members of SSIL. They represent the new generation of IS and ICT academics, since none of them have turned 40 yet. SSIL as an academic institution is not only young due to how the institution’s age (started operation in 1999), it is also young in its age of academic staff. In a way, the institution and its academic staff’s age parallel ICT and IS as fields of academic research in Malaysia. I needed to attain their viewpoints on research in their school and also on Malaysian ICT.

The interviews and discussions with those I have listed above were extremely useful in that they lead me to further reading and material that related to the research issues. Books and research papers on Malaysian academia are important sources. However, in this age of interconnectivity websites, blogs and social networking sites also became a source of valuable information for this research. Of course, the authors of all these documents and sites are those involved with Malaysian academia.
3.3 Pre-Fieldwork Research Design

My initial research design was based on how to increase understanding between hard and soft systems practitioners. During my first year, I shaped my research design based on two components, Action Research and Qualitative Case Study. As the research went on however, my research design had to be adjusted as my Framework of Ideas and experience within the Area of Application went on. My supervisor also questioned my claim of utilising Action Research in fieldwork as he saw the length of time and transformation within the organisation I was studying to not be enough to warrant the claim of a full ‘Action Research’ taking place. Thus, for this chapter I will present my initial or early research design which was based on combining Action Research and Qualitative Case Study.

I would like to refer to Checkland’s (1985) representation of ‘any piece of research’ in formulating my research design which formed the M within the FMA. Figure 3.1 shows an illustration of the components that make up a piece of research. Oates (2006) claims Peter Checkland’s work on Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) has contributed greatly to Action Research. Based on Checkland’s suggestion, an action research (or any other research) should be conceptualised based on its FMA, which are broken down as such:

- F, a Framework of ideas: The framework of ideas constitutes the sources for ideas that became the basis for the research. The researcher’s experience, observations, literature and personal ideas produce this conceptual framework that influences the motivation for the research.

- M, a problem solving Methodology: Once the researcher possesses ‘an itch to scratch’, or the ideas behind the research, the researcher must select a method to answer his research questions. This research methodology would then be used to study the framework, application and itself.

- A: an area of Application: The area of application is the organisation, people, environment or item that the researcher wants to apply the research methodology to. The application of the method is what produced the results of the research.
In the early parts of my PhD research, my initial FMA was envisioned before the fieldwork. The fieldwork revealed many more issues associated with the research and after learning from that experience, the FMA changed. However, for this chapter I would like to focus on the pre-fieldwork FMA.

Pre-fieldwork FMA:

1. F: By exposing academics to more diverse research methodologies, like Qualitative Research, research activities will improve. Motivated by my literature review, self-reflections on the situation in SSIL and preparation work during the first year of my PhD, I felt that I could improve the research activities at the school I was attached to by exposing academics there to other research methodologies, specifically Qualitative Research.

2. M: Action Research and Qualitative Case Study. My Framework also influenced the selection for the initial Research Methodologies I chose, Action Research and Qualitative Case Study. At this point, my exposure to literature on both methodologies was limited to them as separate, yet inter-related research methods. It was only after the fieldwork that I found sources relating to Action Case.
3. A: Improving research at Labuan School of Informatics Science. Inspired by my ideas, reading and exposure to the research methods, I became extremely ambitious in my goals for the research. This could be seen not only in my claim for the application area of the research, but also in my research questions.

As the thesis continues, I hope to show an evolution between the pre- and post-fieldwork FMAs. I have added a review of the FMA in my Post-Fieldwork Literature Review chapter. During the first year of my PhD, reading theses and papers on how qualitative research can improve the weaknesses of positivistic research and reflecting on personal research experience at SSIL made me believe that this was what it took to improve the research activity there. As the reader can see from my early FMA, this was the case.

My plans for participative actions hinted at an action-based research method. At the same time, I realised that due to my position the changes and transformation was not as large-scale as I hoped. Thus there were limitations of a case study within doing the field work, both in time and influence. Thus the two methods I could relate to in doing the field work were Action Research and Qualitative Case Study.

One of the more recent definitions of Action Research comes from Gill and Bhattacherjee (2009), where they defined AR as “Research in which the researcher actively participates in the situation being investigated; promotes greater integration between researchers and external clients.”

Among the characteristics of Action Research (Oates 2006):

- Concentration on practical issues
- An iterative cycle of plan-act-reflect
- An emphasis on change
- Collaboration with practitioners
- Multiple data generation methods
- Action outcomes plus research outcomes

Reason and Bradbury (2003) claim, “Action research is grounded in lived experience, developed in partnership, addresses significant problems, works with (rather than simply studies) people,
develops new ways of seeing/interpreting the world (i.e. theory), and leaves infrastructure in its wake.”

AR has three main characteristics that make it suitable for research and practice.

- First, the active involvement and collaboration of the researcher in the research can influence the research process.
- Second, the research is conducted with the express intention of bringing about change and improvement.
- Third, AR has an emphasis on learning and guiding change by using a cycle based on action, feedback and reflection on results to bring about improvement more quickly than would be possible through the more normal ‘academic’ publication of research (Avison et al 2001).

Shah, Wood-Harper and Eardley (2007a) state, “... (Action Research) combines in-depth theoretical development and improvement with the practical benefits for the participating company of managed change and organisational learning.” Based on their interpretation of the Action Research cycle by Susman and Evered (1978), I planned my research as a short series of action research cycles. The cycle is shown in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2: Shah, Eardley and Wood-Harper’s (2007a) interpretation of Susman and Evered’s (1978) Action Research cycle

Oates (2006) reiterates that Action Research is based on an iterative proves of plan-act-reflect. Using Susman and Evered’s (1978) description of the AR research process and based on my personal Action Case research experience, the individual stages can be described as such:
• Diagnosis or Analysis: At this stage, the researcher will analyse the situation which he or she is studying. It is essential to include input from those within the organisation and preferable to allow them to participate within the analysis.

• Planning: A plan is developed which should emphasise practical or applied action to instigate the transformation within the organisation. Again, participation of those within the organisation is an added bonus.

• Intervention or Execution: The action plan is then executed within the organisation with the researcher playing a part within the action-taking.

• Evaluation: The researcher along with those within the organisation must then evaluate the effects of the action that has been undertaken.

• Reflection or Learning: Based on the evaluation, the researcher and the members of the organisation capture the learning experience that they have gained based on the AR experience. This learning is then applied within the cycle again for the next iteration of the cycle. The AR cycle is repeated continuously to accommodate the transformation and evolution of the organisation.

From my first year literature review on Action Research and Soft Systems Methodology, I discovered two models being utilised to describe Action Research, Susman and Evered’s 5-step model and Checkland’s 7-stage Soft Systems Methodology. Checkland’s 7-stage SSM can be referred to in the Pre-Fieldwork Literature Review chapter. In comparing Susman and Checkland’s models for Action Research, Braa and Vidgen (1999) stated, “There are clear parallels between the 7-stage model of Checkland and the 5-step model of Susman. For example, the action planning stage of the Susman model is concerned with the identification of planned actions guided by a theoretical framework. Checkland sees the declaration of an explicit methodological framework as a vehicle for establishing the validity of action research…”.

Action Research was partially born out of a need to address some of the failures and weaknesses of positivistic research. Susman and Evered (1978) in their classic work, An Assessment of the Scientific Merits of Action Research, attempted to turn the tables on positivistic research and espoused the advantages of AR. They listed how AR corrects the deficiencies of positivistic research as:
• AR is future oriented: In dealing with the practical concerns of the people, AR is oriented towards creating a more desirable future for them.

• AR is collaborative: Interdependence between researcher and the clients system is an essential feature of AR, and the direction of the research process will be partly a function of the needs and competencies of the two.

• AR implies system development: The AR process encourages the development of the capacity of a system to facilitate, maintain, and regulate the cycling process of diagnosing, action planning, action-taking, evaluating, and specifying learning.

• AR generates theory grounded in action: In AR, theory provides a guide for what should be considered in the diagnosis of an organisation as well for generating possible courses of action to deal with the problems of members of the organisation. Furthermore, AR contributes to the development of theory and evaluating their consequences for the problems members of the organisation face. Theory may be supported or revised on the basis of the evaluation.

• AR is agnostic: The action researcher recognises that his or her theories and prescriptions for action are themselves the product of previously taken action and, therefore, are subject to re-examination and reformulation upon entering every new research situation.

• AR is situational: The action researcher knows that many of the relationships between people, events, and things are a function of the situation as relevant actors currently define it. Such relationships are not often invariant or free of their context, but can change as the definition of the situation changes.

One of the many applications of Action Research I came across during my PhD’s first year was known as ALTAR. Shah, Eardley and Wood-Harper (2007a and 2007b) in their work with British soft drinks company Britvic, proposed a variation of Action Research called Action Learning Through Action Research (ALTAR). ALTAR was derived by iterating AR cycles as a series of phases and then applying them to the different levels in Britvic. The AR project was organised, planned and managed on three levels. The levels were Strategic, Tactical and Operational. Strategic AR involved strategic managers at the company, Tactical AR included the involvement of senior functional managers from Britvic and Operational AR involved a team of managers from Britvic along with an operational research. Figure 3.3 illustrates ALTAR being applied during the project at Britvic.
My understanding of ALTAR being applied in this work was the individual AR activities at each level of the organisation lead to learning which can be shared and be useful for other levels, whether at the top of that level or at level below it. For example, the Strategic AR cycle for Strategic Collaboration will share their learning with the tactical level in the company. The Tactical AR level can utilise this learning for their AR cycle and have their AR cycle on AR Planning, the learning from this could also be brought to the Strategic AR level for their individual AR cycles. This creates a cycle of learning within the corporations which enables sharing of learning among the different levels.

I thought about utilising ALTAR as my method at SSIL. I thought about what I saw as a gap of understanding among the members at the different levels of SSIL and felt ALTAR could be used to bridge that gap. Another thing that attracted me to ALTAR was the Action Learning focus. Learning by practice or doing research was something that attracted me to ALTAR. If all members of SSIL learned how to do research, this could increase their understanding on research methods as well. However, I still needed to take some matters into consideration. Due to the difference between Britvic as a business producing household products and SSIL as a school in an academic institution of higher learning, the ALTAR method and Action Research approach that I plan to use at SSIL
needs to be adopted to the organisation’s needs and organisational structure.

Some of the differences that needed to be considered:

- Organisational structure of SSIL includes administration and academic levels, where some of the staff plays roles at both levels.
- The inclusion of a level or component which consists of research students at the bottom cycles (SSIL at the time had three Masters by research students).
- Some changes in terms of the activities at every level that will reflect the needs of SSIL.

Another challenge would then be if the case study and fieldwork can actually bring about notable improvements to the research practice of SSIL. Given that a time scale of six months had been suggested, there might be a chance that improvements may not appear in six months. If this is the case then, the contingency plan would be to record all findings and see what can be learned from the six month experience. What are the challenges of improving research practice and further work on how to refine methods for further improvement?

In the end, the most important thing is to learn from the fieldwork and case study in improving the research practice of SSIL. Any affect it may have in terms of peaking interest among the academic staff to do research or in providing a solid foundation in research methods would be seen as positive.

As I was reflecting and rewriting this chapter, one of the traits I found to be similar within the literature on Action Research is that the participative aspect of it focuses on the researcher him or herself. One of the Professors I interviewed during my field work, Professor Marohaini Yusof, who I also invited for the workshop in SSIL said that, “In qualitative research, the researcher is the research tool.” It took me a while to realise that these views correlate of being within the situation. A qualitative or action-based researcher is in essence, the ‘hero’ of the story of his or her research. An action research report can be described as the story of the research as told by the hero.

The other methodology that I placed as part of my research design was Qualitative Case Study. Since I was promoting Action Research and Qualitative Research Methods in my fieldwork, it was only right that I chose the qualitative method for my case study. At the same time, I felt that the
number of people I will be interacting with in my research will not warrant a need for a quantitative approach. I was already planning to use qualitative interviews to collect data and information for my research.

Benbasat et al claimed in 1987 that, “There is no standard definition of a case study.” It has been a few years since then and thus there have been attempts to ‘define’ case studies (including those of Benbasat et al). They did claim at the time that case studies have been used within the field of Information Systems for explorative studies and hypothesis generation, while they have seen research using case study for explaining phenomenon in IS.

I would like to refer to a summary from Yin’s (1994) book Case Study Research: Design and Methods (this was the second edition of the book, the most recent Fourth edition was published in 2009), which claims that a case study is an empirical inquiry, in which:

- The focus of a case study is on a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context & boundaries between phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident. This makes case study suitable for studying complex social phenomena
- The procedural characteristics of a case study inquiry in the situation should include: Many variables of interest; multiple sources of evidence; theoretical propositions to guide the collection and analysis of data
- The types of case studies could be categorised as explanatory; exploratory and descriptive.
- The designs for research utilising case studies can be based on single- or multiple-case studies.
- Case studies could utilise research and data collection methods which can be qualitative, quantitative, or both.

Oates (2006) states, “A case study focuses on one instance of the ‘thing’ that is to be investigated... This one instance, or case, is studied in depth, using a variety of data generation methods... The aim is to obtain a rich, detailed insight into the ‘life’ of that case and its complex relationships and processes.” She lists out the characteristics of a case study as such:

- Focus on depth rather than breadth
- Natural setting
- Holistic study
Multiple sources and methods

Benbasat et al (1987) however listed their views on the case studies as possessing the characteristics below:

1. Phenomenon is examined in a natural setting.
2. Data are collected by multiple means.
3. One or few entities (person, group, or organization) are examined.
4. The complexity of the unit is studied intensively.
5. Case studies are more suitable for the exploration, classification and hypothesis development stages of the knowledge building process; the investigator should have a receptive attitude towards exploration.
6. No experimental controls or manipulation are involved.
7. The investigator may not specify the set of independent and dependent variables in advance.
8. The results derived depend heavily on the integrative powers of the investigator.
9. Changes in site selection and data collection methods could take place as the investigator develops new hypotheses.
10. Case research is useful in the study of "why" and "how" questions because these deal with operational links to be traced over time rather than with frequency or incidence.
11. The focus is on contemporary events.

During the PhD, I was exposed to qualitative research from doctoral school sessions organised by my supervisor, Professor Trevor Wood-Harper. I was influenced by the philosophies of qualitative research and motivated to learn about my organisation through the lens of qualitative research. One of the best explanations for the motivations for the Social Sciences approach to research was presented by my supervisor during ISQualRes’08 (Wood-Harper 2008). In his presentation, he stressed that social sciences:

- search for meanings and motives of a research subject. It bases 'knowledge' on philosophical viewpoints like hermeneutics and phenomenology
- view reality as a social construction, not an objective entity. There is therefore no best or right description
- stress the importance of context in research; a research is not 'value-free', but affected by the researcher, and the social and historical 'climate' of the research
Accept subjective interpretations of a research subject as valid. It sees such qualitative data as rich, vital, and as having great depth attitudes and belief.

Professor Wood-Harper then added by explaining the distinctive characters of qualitative research (Wood-Harper 2008):

- in-depth understanding of social world,
- small scale samples are selected on the basis of salient criteria,
- interactive and flexible data collection methods,
- detailed/extensive data,
- analysis may produce detailed description or identify patterns of association or develop typologies and explanation,
- and output which tend to focus on the interpretation of social meaning through re-presenting the social world of research participants.

Based on these characteristics, I chose qualitative research as the method for my PhD. However, as I was reviewing material for case studies and seeing the proposed characteristics that were given by Benbasat et al (1987), Oates (2006) and Yin (2009), some of the characteristics appeared to be incompatible with my intention to utilise an action-based method. I questioned whether my participation will affect the ‘natural setting’ that is needed for a case study. Benbasat et al’s suggestion for no controls or manipulations also became a concern. All these characteristics point to the researcher pretending to be ‘a fly on the wall’ and I was not sure if this was what I wanted.

I mentioned before that my interpretation of how action research is presented is akin to the story from the hero’s point of view. In the case of case study, I believe a case study is told from the point of view of a story teller. The story of a case study acts as a historical note of what went on, where and during what time, but does not include the narrators’ active involvement within that situation. Thus, case studies are narrated from a story teller viewpoint.

Just before my fieldwork by the end of the first year of my PhD, I had a basic assumption of what the Research Methodology would look like. Figure 3.4 shows the simplistic view I had for combining the two research methods. Taking into consideration the issue of combining hard and soft approaches into a research method (Miles, 1988), I had to justify that I am embedding and not
merely grafting the two methods. I believe that as long as the case studies maintain an interpretivist stance, both methods would come under the ‘soft’ systems approach and its their combination can be viewed as an embedding of case studies within an Action Research.

![Simplified Research Design](image)

**Figure 3.4: Simplified Research Design**

Most of the material I have presented thus far in this chapter represents my view before the fieldwork. It took me after my fieldwork to find a way to make my perception on both Action Research and Qualitative Case Study to work together. That came after the discovery on work pertaining to Action Case. For that, I have included a Post-Fieldwork Research Methodology chapter.

### 3.4 Data Collection Methods

The main data collection methods are listed below.

- Interviews
- Discussion Forum
- Participative Observation
- Focus Group

I conducted semi structured interviews with some senior academics I came across in my research, as well as senior administration staff at UMS and also the academics at SSIL. The administrators and academic staff from UMS and SSIL are extremely relevant towards the main issue I was addressing in the field work, which was improving research at SSIL. However, my selection of experienced academics from throughout Malaysia was a bit more unique. Was there a strategy that I followed to
identify these individuals? To be honest, I started by just giving into my gut instincts. The first batch of academics I selected were former PhD students of my supervisor, Trevor Wood-Harper. Their work in Malaysian IS has been influenced by my supervisor and his work on Multiview and Action Research, and they have carried this with them to Malaysia. As for the rest of the senior academics, I came across them from my participative work. In organising the Research Methodology Workshop, I got to know two academics who have strived for the cause of Qualitative Research. In my meetings and participation with SSIL activities, I came across individual academics who have years of experience in pushing for academic research in their respective institutions and Malaysia, in general. They have also provided links to their colleagues in the field who I also interviewed.

Interviews are obviously needed to retrieve opinions on the problem situation from the points of views of those I have listed. However, for those available, I organised panel discussion forums as one way to see how these views can interact and enrich the findings for my research. I conducted the interviews and forums in a way that I tried to be participative in that conversation, as opposed to making them into simple question and answer sessions.

I regarded my participative activities as contributing to my participative observations. I took note of how my activities within SSIL would affect those around me and also the goings on within the organisation. One of the advantages of using a story narrative was that it enabled me to discuss these observations as things going around me at the time of the research activities. The participative activities allowed me to ‘listen’ from within the situation itself which I record throughout my fieldwork findings as my observations. In participating in a workshop organised by the ICT Deans Committee and organising SSIL’s own qualitative research workshop, enabled me to contribute to that change or transformation itself.

3.4.1 Interview Protocols

To ensure the validity of data collected from interviews, I followed guidelines as suggested by Oates (2006) on how to conduct interviews for IS/Computing research.
The majority of my interviews were semi-structured in its format. I had lists of topics to discuss that were targeted for different groups of interviewees and the topics were rearranged based on the flow of the interviews. A number of the interviews expanded into interesting conversations which covered many aspects which opened up new themes influencing and shaping my research findings.

I conducted my interviews by following the protocols below:

1. Selecting the interviewee based on my PhD research requirements.
2. Contacting the interviewee through telephone or email.
3. Set up interview time and venue which was appropriate for the interviewee.
4. Notify the possible usage of recording device and request early permission of their use.
5. If required, provide general summary of the topic I wanted to ask the interviewee about.
6. Conduct interview based on agreed venue and time.
7. When audio and video recording is used, notify interviewee on the presence of the device and request permission to use them.
8. During the interview, fully confer if respondent requested to ‘turn off’ recording or leave out anything that was stated.
9. When permission to use audio and video recording is not given, use pen and paper to transcribe conversation.

Many of the interviewees were updated on the progress of my research. In fact, I am still in touch with many of them. With my role as the 'hero' of my research, I felt it was important for me to provide an ethical interview protocol. From within the research situation, my interview methods and protocol also allowed me to represent the views from an internal perspective. Being the academic 'hero' from within Malaysia and my organisation provided an avenue for the expression of 'radical' ideas. In Chapter 4's Interviews and Discussions sub-chapter, there are many examples where my interviews led to comments and insights which criticised the Malaysian government and our institutions outright. Being within the Malaysian environment allowed me to be more daring in expressing these views.

However, something happened as I reviewed my interviews during write up of my research findings. I returned to Manchester to finish the writing up of my thesis. As I left my actuality as a Malaysian academic and entered an external Weltanschauung, I switched from the internally

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specific hero role to my emancipator role. The fieldwork exposed me to views which did not adhere to the Malaysian government and our universities. However, while I was outside of Malaysia I felt compelled to represent the situation from the perspectives of the Malaysian government and institutions. I also began to contextualise the views from the administrators based on documentation from the Malaysian government. The interview protocols I used for my institution's administration were similar to other groups, yet when reviewing them I needed to justify their pro-government and conservative views with their own contexts. In Manchester, I turned into an emancipator and attempted to address the interview findings to be more 'balanced', as compared to being the hero of my research.

3.4.2 Interviewee Selection

The initial list of those who I interviewed came from my research requirements of attaining viewpoints from my organisation’s academics, administrators at the university and also experienced professors in Malaysia. In the beginning there was a list of names of individuals who I made up to form the core group of people who I wanted to interview. This then expanded later as more people were found to be significant to my research and also recommended by those I interviewed.

The selection of interviewees in my organisation and universities was very straightforward. I needed to interview those who represent the administration of my institution. My Dean, the Deputy Vice Chancellor of Research and Innovation, and the Registrar were my main targets. I also added the Assistant Registrar to my school to represent an operational viewpoint of administration from SSIL itself.

For the experienced professors, I started with names of Information Systems professors who I learned to be advocates of qualitative research. These professors then gave further recommendations for my interviews. The initial list of experienced professors included Professor Rose Alias, Professor Mokhtar, Professor Marohaini, Professor Shahrin and Professor Syed Azizi. I added Professor Harith Ahmad after the MADICT workshop experience and he suggested I interview Professor Sazaly and Professor Zaini.
Finally, to show the perspective from the academics in my institution I interviewed my colleagues at SSIL. Fifteen of my colleagues were interviewed after the Qualitative Research Methodology Workshop for the purpose of my research and their insights were extremely helpful in my research.

3.5 Data Analysis and Synthesis

For this PhD, I have chosen Template Analysis as my analysis method based on the approach prescribed by Nigel King (2004). One of the reasons for selecting template analysis is due to the method allowing not only singular sources for data analysis and also what I considered as its ease and time-saving feature.

From my understanding of template analysis, I found it to be a suitable method for my research due to what I perceived ease of using it to attain ‘codes’ from related themes and issues that arise from the data. Since my data collection approach was qualitative interviews and discussions, I felt this would allow me flexibility in shaping the findings for the research. What I wanted to do was to use some of my pre-conceived ideas of the issues to shape initial templates and update the templates based on the data gathered from interviews.

The term "template analysis" refers to a particular way of thematically analysing qualitative data. The data involved are usually interview transcripts, but may be any kind of textual data, including diary entries, text from electronic "interviews" (e-mail), or open-ended question responses on a written questionnaire. Template analysis involves the development of a coding "template", which summarises themes identified by the researcher(s) as important in a data set, and organises them in a meaningful and useful manner.

My usage of template analysis is inserted in Appendix D. I have expressed the analysis in the form of a table. The themes are extracted from the various data sources from my fieldwork and literature. Each main theme has sub-themes and I have related the source for each sub-theme based on the fieldwork activity or literature.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

In terms of ethical considerations, I saw the most important ethical thing to do was for the field work was to specify my intention and attain permission to do so. In the end, my university gave me
full permission to do my field work. My Vice Chancellor provided a support letter for the field work which allowed me to have access to my organisation.

As an extra precaution, I will present the findings of the research to my school and university to attain permission prior to releasing the names of the organisation and those in it, or to hold the thesis from distribution for a few years.

On a personal level, I had to be aware of the ethical implications for my actions. I took it upon myself to be honest with my colleagues and also those who I interviewed. There were those who after being interviewed requested some of what they said to be screened, and I have obliged to their request.

I have to be aware as well of the attachment I have with the organisation. I am a part of SSIL. I have been at the organisation since October 2000. Even though those who I am studying are my colleagues and friends on a personal level, I also understand the political implications related to doing this research. This brings me to one important contention within doing the research.

As I described before, SSIL is still a young school. I can be considered one of the more senior members of SSIL. In fact, I was the third academic from SSIL to actually do a PhD. There are currently one PhD holder in the organisation, who is the current Dean of SSIL, with a further three academics who are due to attain their PhDs (myself included) by the first half of 2011. There might be those who wonder whether this research is related to personal intentions for a promotion when I finish my PhD. I must state that I have made my best effort in maintaining my integrity in doing my fieldwork at SSIL. The learning, results and recommendations are meant not to push or promote myself for any post at SSIL. I am an academic member of SSIL who wants to see it improve in terms of academic research. If I am promoted, I do hope it is not due to anything unethical but due to the organisation’s own view of my potential and ability.

For the interviews I conducted with people from outside UMS, I will contact them regarding the findings of my research and relate them with what they have stated in my conversations with them. If there are any sections in which they feel they need to be anonymous, I shall oblige to their request.
3.7 Issues of Trustworthiness
I would like to declare that I have done my utmost to attain a high level of trustworthiness in my research.

In terms of credibility, dependability and transferability, I have made sure that whatever is written or transcribed in this thesis are trustworthy in its content. All sources are genuine and I have tried my best to quote the correct sources for all references.

As I described in my interview protocols, in the activities and interviews that I was able to use video and audio recording, I gained permission from the parties involved to utilise them. I made sure they were aware of my recordings and I also gave consideration for requests to not include any parts of the recording they feel inappropriate.

In terms of research method, the researcher acts as the research tool in a qualitative research. Thus, even though the views may be contextual or subjective. It is the researcher that needs to convince himself of the research credibility, dependability and transferability.

My supervisor was also present on a couple of occasions of the fieldwork. On those occasions, I discussed with him on the merits of trust of what I was doing during the fieldwork. His advice was always to justify whatever I was doing within the context of my research. He constantly asked me to ask myself, why was I doing the research this way?

3.8 Limitations of the Study
In terms of limitations of the study, the contextual aspects must be taken into consideration. The findings and lessons learned from SSIL are still governed by the uniqueness of the school. The fact that we are a young academic institution on a distant island provides a backdrop that influences some of the study’s limitations.

Time was also an important factor, as the research had to be limited in length. However, this does present an opportunity for future full scale Action Research at the school in the future.
Ultimately, the researcher’s influence on the organisation, especially when it came to changing the organisation, needs to be taken into consideration. My position as a lecturer did not provide enough political leverage to make huge transformations in SSIL.

SSIL is also a newly established Malaysian institution (started operation in 1999). There is also a need to take in Malaysian government’s view. As a school within a public university, there were some limitations on what effect I can have on the organisation with my rank within the organisation.

Ultimately, most of the data collected in the research is interpretive in nature.

3.9 Summary
The Pre-Fieldwork Research Methodology chapter focuses mainly on my initial research design before the fieldwork was undertaken. I also pointed to the data I required for the fieldwork and the research overall and the methods I would use to collect and analyse the data. Issues of ethics and trustworthiness were also presented.

For this thesis, this chapter highlights the methodology that I planned on utilising for my research. This is extremely important as we go through the thesis as in the later chapters we will see the change in choice or definition of the research design. Figure 3.8 shows what the FMA looked like before the fieldwork.
Influenced by my experience at SSIL prior to starting my PhD and also the literature I was exposed to during my first year, my framework of ideas leads me to my choice of research methods. I have chosen Action Research and Qualitative Case Study as the research methodologies I would use for the fieldwork. My application area at the time was also influenced by the framework in which I was confident of improving research at SSIL by bringing qualitative research to the organisation by means of Action Learning and other participative activities in my fieldwork.

At this stage of my research, my FMA included these elements:

- Framework of Ideas (F):
  - Experience from being a Malaysian IS academic
  - Pre-fieldwork Literature Review
    - Hard vs. Soft Systems
    - Soft Systems Methodology
    - Patterns (which became Shared Understandings)
    - Actuality
As I reflect upon this stage of research again, I believe I was viewing the research from an external viewpoint again. There was probably an air of arrogance at my choice of research method, where I announce that it would include an Action Research-like method. Some of the initial plans at the time as well was quite ambitious as it included conducting bi-weekly meetings in my organisation to propagate SSM. When I evaluate this stage of my research and its intention, I felt that I wanted to play the role of an emancipator to my organisation in bringing about a transformation to SSIL.

The reason why I regarded myself as an emancipator at this time was due to my external view from outside the organisation during the formulation of the research methodology pre-fieldwork. In relation to the emancipator/hero roles, my definition of the emancipator was one who wanted to liberate those within an organisation or situation to carve their own path. Again, a rather bold and ambitious claim made from outside of the Malaysian environment and generating an external weltanschauung.

The choice of research methodology and my elaboration of the plan was heady and ambitious. It was only after entering the fieldwork environment that I realised the enormity of the task. It was later during the fieldwork and being within that environment that I rediscovered the contextual situation and actuality of being an academic in Malaysia. This is discussed in the next chapter on my fieldwork and early findings.
Chapter 4 Fieldwork, Findings and Preliminary Discussions

4.1 Introduction
In this chapter, I would like to present my research fieldwork, some findings from them and include some preliminary discussions based on the different activities within the fieldwork. The fieldwork was done from April 2008 until June 2009. There were two fieldwork phases; the first fieldwork was a simple exploratory study I conducted while following my supervisor to Malaysia for a research workshop and bringing him to SSIL for a series of talks; and the second fieldwork was based on my original plans for Action Research and Qualitative Case Study at SSIL.

This chapter describes the formulation of the field work and the significance of the activities in the planned fieldwork. Each activity will be elaborated with findings and early discussions based on the learning from the field work experience. As the fieldwork is explained and discussed, the learning from the activities will also change the fieldwork activities themselves. The chapter concludes with an assessment of how the individual activities influenced changes into the research FMA.

4.2 Initial Fieldwork Plan
Once I decided I was going to utilise Action Research and Qualitative Case Studies for my fieldwork, I needed to propose activities for the implementation of these methods for my fieldwork. Midway in the first year of my PhD I received an email from UMS regarding a proposed merger between SSIL and the School of Engineering and Information Technology (Sekolah Kejuruteraan dan Teknologi Maktum, SKTM). This proposal was first presented in a retreat exercise in June 2007. A study was conducted, headed by Dr Patricia Anthony of SKTM to gather the relevant information for this merger. The email I received was from Dr Anthony to gather input regarding issues on the merger.

When I received news regarding the merger and that UMS will research the idea for its implementation, I felt that I’ve found a topic for the staff of SSIL to research, as part of the Action Research activities I proposed. My plan at the time was to bring qualitative research and utilise action research to teach my colleagues in researching issues related to the SSIL/SKTM merger. I would then conduct a qualitative case study to see the effect of the Action Research in terms of improving the research activity at SSIL.
Around the same time, my supervisor was invited to be the guest speaker of a Qualitative Research seminar organised by Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) in early 2008. I volunteered to assist him during the seminar. My motivation was to join the seminar to see first hand how to ‘teach’ qualitative research from the seminar, I also wanted to expose myself to qualitative research even more and assist my supervisor at the event.

I also discussed with my supervisor if he would be willing to come to SSIL and give a few talks on qualitative research, to provide a preview of what I was planning for my school. He initially agreed even though he did not confirm it until later during the first phase of the fieldwork. Thus, my initial fieldwork plan was set. Figure 4.1 shows the simplified idea I had for the fieldwork.

![Figure 4.1: Initial Fieldwork Plan Simplified](image)

Ultimately, the initial plan unravelled as soon as the first fieldwork started. As we go through this chapter, I hope that we can see an example of how the best of intentions can sometimes fall flat due circumstances beyond our control.

### 4.3 The Actual Fieldwork

Before we go further, I think it is acceptable to peer into the future (or a section of a later chapter within the thesis). In the previous sub-chapter I showed the initial fieldwork plan I had before I did my fieldwork. Upon reflection, this plan had to be altered and changed as the fieldwork was going on and ultimately after the fieldwork finished, during my PhD writing up period. In designing the **actual** fieldwork design, I have divided the individual activities that constituted the two main parts of the fieldwork into activities that relate to the Qualitative Case study and the Action Research Cycle.
Figure 4.2 shows the activities within the fieldwork section of the research design. As mentioned before, I categorised the activities into those that are part of the qualitative case study and the main activities that constitute my action-based research activities. I imagine the action-based activities as iterative processes within an Action Research Cycle. The activities I chose to be under the AR Cycle deals directly with my participative activities at SSIL, thus they are separated from the Qualitative Case Study activities. As expected, the activities that come under the Case Study banner are activities of qualitative data collection, observation and analysis. The individual activities in the fieldwork are divided into:

- First Fieldwork: ISQualRes’08 and SSIL Talks
- Second Fieldwork: Preparation From The University of Manchester
- Second Fieldwork: Reintroduction and First Official Meeting
- Second Fieldwork: MADICT Workshop
- Second Fieldwork: SSIL Workshop and Discussion Forums
- Second Fieldwork: Interviews
- Second Fieldwork: Presentation to SSIL

In this chapter, I shall present the activities and findings from these activities based on the order I conducted the activities during the fieldwork. The first activity of the fieldwork was ISQualRes’08 and SSIL Talks, and the final fieldwork activity was my Presentation to SSIL. Figure 4.3 shows the order of which the activities were conducted.

Figure 4.3: Fieldwork activities in order

**4.4 First Fieldwork: ISQualRes’08 and SSIL Talks**

**4.4.1 ISQualRes’08**

Between the 16th to 18th April 2008, my supervisor, Professor Trevor Wood-Harper was the guest speaker at ISQualRes ’08, a workshop on qualitative research organised by Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). I was informally appointed assistant to Professor Wood-Harper due to my connections with UTM as my alma mater and because I knew some of the organisers of the workshop. I assisted Professor Wood-Harper in preparing slides for the workshop and negotiating communications between him and the organisers of the workshop.

The workshop was initially advertised as QualRes ’08, an abbreviation for Qualitative Research ’08 which focused on Qualitative research in general. This was then changed to ISQualRes ’08 to focus on Information Systems based qualitative research.
Promotional material for the workshop advertised its goals as:

1. To expand knowledge in qualitative research.
2. To activate and expedite the skills in using qualitative instruments.
3. To comprehend the importance of qualitative research.
4. To use qualitative theory as one of the approaches in research activities.

The target participants of the workshop include anyone who is interested to learn about qualitative research. As the workshop brochure states: “We are looking for participants from a wide range of backgrounds—from researchers, students and teachers. These might include post-grad students, researchers, and practitioners from a wide variety of disciplines, including social science, healthcare, social care, business and education.” This lead the workshop’s participation to be filled with people from numerous backgrounds. There were those from Information Systems, there were those from the hard sciences, and many more.

The workshops started with two days of presentations by Professor Wood-Harper. The range of topics covered during the two day presentation sessions are listed below.

- Motivation, Overview and Qualitative Research Methods
- Discussion: Qualitative Interviewing
- A PhD Qualitative Research Thesis: E-Government in Iran
- Discussion: Various Forms of Action Research and Critique
- Story of Multiview Using Action Research
- Discussion: Action Learning Through Action Research (ALTAR) and Knowledge Management in Britvic
- Doctoral Projects in Progress: Australia, Sweden and…

The third day of the workshop consisted of presentation and focus group exercises lead by Professor Rose Alinda Alias of UTM. Her sessions included:

- Framework Presentation
- Group Activities: Categorization of Themes Based on Presented Framework
- Group Activities: Develop Focus Group Instrument
- Group Activities: Conduct Focus Group
To assess the workshop, participants were distributed and required to fill out feedback forms, with quantitative elements and a qualitative open-ended question at the end. I also informally interviewed some of the participants on their thoughts of the workshop. I was planning to utilise the results of these questionnaires and interview, to provide useful information for the PhD, especially for planning my second fieldwork activities.

The diverse make up in the backgrounds of the participants revealed a rich amount of information related to issues in implementing qualitative style research and information systems implementation. Overall, I could see that there was a great interest from the participants to learn about qualitative research from researchers in different fields of study even though the workshop was titled to focus on Information Systems. In hindsight, this rich diversity among the participants may have also contributed to some of them struggling when it comes to the Information Systems-related material in the workshop.

Some important aspects that need to be studied are the participants' expectations on the workshop and also their opinions on it after the workshop concluded. One of my early observations hinted at a conflict in the method of implementation and also the content of the workshop. Even though the workshop is promoting qualitative research, the method of delivery of the material included structured lectures that generalise and summarise elements of the material. I will elaborate further upon this later.

One of the advantages (or disadvantages) I have when it came to evaluating the workshop is that I come from a Malaysian academic background having been exposed to the Malaysian academic culture and understand its norms and practices, both as a student and an academic. The majority of the workshop participants were Malaysian and I was able to mingle with the participants and extract some key observations.

The workshops started with two days of presentations by Professor Wood-Harper. From my discussions with Professor Wood-Harper, he expected the participants to have some level of experience with Qualitative Research and being academics, to be familiar with reading and studying research papers. Professor Wood-Harper’s presentation included handing out research papers to read and discuss among the participants. My observation was despite the participants' academic
backgrounds, their level of exposure to qualitative research approaches was still very low. Several who I talked to told me their motivation for joining the workshop was to 'learn' about qualitative research.

The participants were very attentive to the presentations, and from some of the questions being asked during the Question and Answer sessions showed the diverse backgrounds and levels of qualitative research experience among the participants. The presentations also included group work of evaluating and analysing the distributed research papers from qualitative research backgrounds. This exercise also showed the diverse backgrounds and low level of qualitative research experience among the participants.

On the last day of the workshop, a presentation was given by Professor Rose Alias from UTM and group work was also conducted. One of the distinct things that I observed was that participants preferred using slides and presentations. During Professor Rose Alias’ presentation session, she suggested wanting to end the slides early to begin the group work, a large number of participants expressed objection and wanted the presentation to continue. This could be due to some reasons:

1. Inexperience and a feeling that participants need more theoretical background before doing the group work.
2. A negative perception that the workshop should be more presentations than group work.
3. The Malaysian academics' tendency to expect presentation of key points, rather than conducting a rich analysis of information.

A group workshop session involving all participants took place on the final day, also facilitated by Professor Rose. The workshop was related to Professor Rose’s research on mobile phone preference in Malaysia. Participants were divided into groups whose tasks were to discuss issues relating to mobile phone preferences which included:

1. Negative impact of the mobile phone
2. Positive impact of the mobile phone
3. Selection criteria for choosing a mobile phone
4. Perceptions on mobile phone usage in Malaysia

The findings of the discussions were then presented by each group and further discussed by all
participants. This session enabled the participants to experience using a qualitative method in
discussing issues related to mobile phone preferences, as opposed to a quantitative survey-style
approach. This exercise was extremely well-received by the participants and the presentation
session was very lively with further debate during the presentations.

As the seminar wrapped up, I took the opportunity to talk to participants on their views on the
seminar that just concluded. Below is a list of some of the personal viewpoints from the participants
that the author managed to extract informally.

- The workshop could've been improved by having Professor Rose's Framework
  Presentation to give the basis of research methodology first.
- There was a big difference between the two presenters in terms of how they present their
  material. Professor Wood-Harper was more ‘ultimate’ (term used by one of the
  participants) and expected the participants to have experience in his presentation,
  whereas Professor Rose was more basic but still provided the conceptual framework.
- Qualitative research still needs to be promoted extensively in Malaysia. This seminar
  was the first seminars attended by the participants that focused on qualitative research.

The major critique from the participants of ISQualRes'08 was that the session on the third day,
where Professor Rose Alinda Alias gave a Framework Presentation on Qualitative Research, should
have been done first before going to Professor Wood-Harper's presentations. This could be
attributed to the fact that many of the participants are still struggling or not yet exposed to the
foundations of qualitative research. The author admits that this is a sad indictment towards the
Malaysian academic research community. However, in his experience and through interviews with
some senior academics in the country this is the situation facing Malaysian academia. Malaysian
academics are still lacking in terms of research fundamentals.

From the side of the invited speaker himself, Professor Wood-Harper felt that the focus of seminars
and workshops like this should be the research discussion activities. Activities that emphasised
participants reading and preparing critiques on research publications should have been the focus of
the workshop. However, in relation to the point given previously, it was highly improbable to have
this form of discussion and debates. Ultimately, their lack of research foundations made the
participants expect a more classroom style presentation during the workshop. This matter comes up again in the workshop that I organised at SSIL.

The differing viewpoints in how a seminar like this should have been arranged taught the author that the preference for classroom teaching in Malaysian academia need to be considered when formulating a research workshop or seminar in that environment. One personal viewpoint that I have is that Malaysians in general are great adopters when it comes to applying technology, policy or strategies. However, we tend to rely on carrying out the adoption by following it rigidly, in a by-the-book sort of way, without considering the contextual differences or ‘actuality’ in our own domain.

It is my opinion this can be related to a lot of the problems that we in Malaysia sometimes face when a certain technology, policy or strategy fails to bring the desired result, or causes problems from the adoption. It can be said that Malaysian culture has more of a reactionary attitude when things don’t go their way, rather than to carefully study an implementation before carrying it out.

Another observation I noticed was that a group of participants did not complete the entire workshop. There were a couple of tables in the workshop that were located at the back of the hall used for the workshop where a group of foreign (non-Malaysian) post graduate students sat. During the sessions under Professor Wood-Harper, I would view their body language in which I felt showed some disinterest. This group also left the sessions earlier and skipped some of the final sessions. It is very unfortunate for this to occur, especially in light of the wealth of discussions that were going on at the time. It was my understanding that this group may have expected a more classroom and instructional style workshop. Saying that, expecting this for an event organised to teach qualitative research is extremely narrow-minded and shows a lack of experience for qualitative sessions.

In summary, the ISQualRes'08 workshop allowed me to observe some of the issues relating to the research situation in Malaysia. One of the biggest observations was the lack of qualitative research foundations among the Malaysian academics who participated in the workshop. Another observation I made during the ISQualRes'08 was the expectation among the participants for more classroom style presentations of the qualitative research foundations. This I feel could be related to
the lack of the foundations itself among the participants. As I stated previously, I sensed a hint of conflict in the method of implementation and also the content of the workshop. My belief is that in order to inculcate qualitative research, discussions are a necessary part of the learning experience. I could be guilty as well of being stuck in my actuality of being a PhD under Professor Wood-Harper and being exposed to these discussions through his doctoral school sessions, but I believe there needs to be time allocated for such sessions in a workshop like this. Overall, one observation I can make during ISQualRes'08 is the sense that the majority of participants were averse to discussions and debates.

4.4.2 SSIL Talks

After ISQualRes’08, Professor Wood-Harper visited my school from 21st to 22nd April 2008 for two days of presentations and a mini-workshop. The visit was the second part of the first field work. Before I describe the experience, I feel it is important to recap the background of the organisation.

Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) began operations in 1994 in mainland Sabah, at Kota Kinabalu, the state capital. In 1999, a branch campus was opened on the island of Labuan. This branch campus is where the Labuan School of Informatics Science (SSIL) is located. The author has been an academic staff at SSIL since October 2000 and is currently attached to that university in sponsorship and employment.

During Professor Wood-Harper’s visit to Malaysia, he was extremely generous to spare a few days to visit SSIL and give some presentations and do a mini-workshop for the academic staff there. I was hoping that his talks on his experience and examples of opportunities for research in IS would encourage the staff of SSIL. I was extremely indebted to him for sparing the time and effort to visit my school.

The experience from ISQualRes’08 made me think about my school’s research activity situation. I felt from my personal experience as an academic at SSIL that one of the main challenges facing academic staff is improving research practices within the school. The majority of academic staff at SSIL is relatively young and inexperienced when it came to doing research. From 1999 until 2007, we only had one PhD holder among our academic staff, Dr Rozaini Roslan. Dr Rozaini held a mathematics doctorate and served as Dean of SSIL from 2005 until 2007. Another thing that I
recalled during my time teaching there was that the tendency of the academic staff at SSIL is to do survey-style quantitative research and it could be said that the majority of research is conducted this way at SSIL. There were some examples of research on human-computer interaction done through laboratory-style methods of analysis using smaller samples, but these are still in the minority.

In 2007, a merger between SSIL and the main campus’ School of Engineering and Information Technology (SKTM) was proposed. A year after the recommendation, the idea seemed to have been mooted. The breakdown in the plan for merging the schools had an effect on SSIL and its staff. There were those who believe that the merger would have allowed SSIL’s young academics to learn and improve themselves with the guidance of senior academics at the main campus. This was an especially common opinion in terms of research. This idea became a recurring theme as the research went along.

Before I go on, I must note an ethical consideration at this point. In November 2007, during my first year of PhD, Mr Muzaffar Hamzah was appointed Acting Dean of SSIL. Mr Muzaffar is not only my work colleague but also a dear friend. I believe that when he took the post of Acting Dean, he was seen as the most obvious choice within SSIL due to his position as most senior academic at the school. Before he was awarded the deanship, the previous Dean of SSIL was a PhD holder. During his tenure, the previous Dean tried his best in improving aspects of SSIL in terms of infrastructure and improving the number of staff. In aspects of research, the previous Dean admitted that it was difficult due to his academic background in Mathematics rather than ICT or IS, thus he did not prioritise that aspect during his time as Dean. My colleague who was selected as Acting Dean had a tough job ahead of him.

After his appointment, Mr Muzaffar sent out circulars to all SSIL staff. This included academic staff on study leave like myself, on his vision and strategies for SSIL. In the circular, he expressed his intention to improve the research practice at SSIL by outlining short and long term strategies. He listed his short-terms strategies as such:

- Organising regular research training exercises.
- Obtaining research funds outside of university and government bodies.
- Offering a research mentoring program.
- Increase participation in overseas conferences, workshops and research exchange.
Mr Muzaffar then listed his long-terms strategies as such:

- Setting up a research community within SSIL.
- Participation in research competitions.
- Active promotion with outside institutions and agencies.

After receiving the circular, I thought about the motivation Mr Muzaffar had in sending them out. I felt that he wanted SSIL to have focus more on research activity. Due to the overall situation of SSIL, teaching undergraduates is the main priority of the school. SSIL has a steady intake of 100+ students every year for our two undergraduate programmes, Bachelors of IT in Multimedia Technology and Bachelors of IT in E-Commerce. As stated before, most of the research done is in the form of quantitative surveys.

It was due to the situation at SSIL and also the encouragement of Mr Muzaffar’s circular that prompted me to invite Professor Wood-Harper for a series of presentations at SSIL after ISQualRes’08. Me and two other colleagues, Ms Idyawati Hussein and Madam Laura Jack organised a two day session with presentations open to all lecturers at UMS-KAL. The preparation was extremely ad hoc and due to personal reasons a lot of the notifications were done in the last minute.

To be honest, the two days talks and mini-workshop did not go very well. One reason was the organisation of the sessions was extremely informal. Due to travel and scheduling concerns, we couldn’t confirm if Professor Wood-Harper would be available to come to Labuan until five days before the event. When we were able to confirm his attendance, my colleagues who assisted me in organising the event tried their best in promoting the events in the short time that we had. Another matter that my colleagues and I did not give due consideration was the timing of hosting the talks. The days chosen, Monday and Tuesday, are the days when most classes are conducted at the campus. These were the two busiest days of the week. This affected attendance at the talks. The presentations on the first day were poorly attended and it was somewhat an embarrassing experience on the part of Professor Wood-Harper to give presentations to a half-empty room.

In an attempt to salvage what opportunity we had with Professor Wood-Harper, the second day
focused on having a mini-workshop with all academics at SSIL being given a compulsory attendance for the day. Overall, the mini-workshop on the second day exposed a general weakness not only in terms of foundations of research methods but also a general attitude towards research at the campus. Due to combination of research inexperience, the age of the academics, teaching responsibilities and administrative duties; there is a feeling that research and research-oriented activities were not prioritised by the academics.

Among this doom and gloom however, a silver lining appeared. Sometimes you need something to happen that drastically changes your perception on things. For SSIL, the experience of the talks and mini-workshop made us reflect about our research situation and we wanted to improve it. Even though it was difficult, I faced up to my colleagues in SSIL after the talks by Professor Wood-Harper and many of them had words of encouragement after the experience. Personally, I took the opportunity to reflect, as described in an action research, on the research situation in SSIL. I knew we were not that great, but I never thought that we would be this terrible! The event left an indelible mark on SSIL. The organisers of the event at SSIL felt embarrassed at the situation in front of an experienced foreign academic like Professor Wood-Harper and was open about this when reviewing the experience to him. Thus, we try and learn from our mistakes and move forward, for me personally I saw that the experience lighted a small spark that I felt could grow into a bigger fire with the right catalyst. Those who participated in the mini-workshop came out with realisation of the weaknesses of SSIL’s research and became motivated to change this.

I found after the talks, the majority of the academics at SSIL want to improve their research practice. They stated that Professor Wood-Harper’s presentation on basics of research methods and also the proposal formulation practice were extremely useful. From my recollection of my time teaching at SSIL, research methods training courses were rarely organised. The academics at SSIL had to base their research from their Masters dissertation experience and developed them from learning on their own, or attending externally organised courses. The university did provide training in teaching and learning techniques, but again this course was geared towards enhancing undergraduate teaching skills. It is due to the growing interest among my colleagues and the lack of formal training course for research methods that motivated me to bring about improvements in research activity in SSIL, by organising a research methodology workshop.
4.5 Second Fieldwork: Preparation from the University of Manchester

After ISQualRes’08 and the SSIL talks, I returned to the University of Manchester in May 2008 to reflect upon my experience. As I mentioned previously, the case for studying the merger between SSIL and SKTM was unlikely due to the university administration’s decision to hold off those plans. The SSIL talks and my own personal experience showed that SSIL needed to improve its research activities. Due to my exposure to qualitative research and SSM during my PhD’s first year, I felt that this could be transferred to my colleagues at SSIL to improve the research situation there.

The first thing I did was to change my initial plan for my second fieldwork. The main change was the focus of the fieldwork itself, from using SSM to study the merger from the perspective of members of SSIL to improving SSIL’s research by introducing qualitative research to the academics. I wrote a proposal for organising a Qualitative Research Methodology Seminar. My experience at ISQualRes’08 provided me with suggestions on how to organise a similar, and hopefully better, seminar.

One of the findings from my experience at ISQualRes’08 was that Malaysian participants normally expect classroom and instructional style sessions. At the same time, I saw the importance for activities which allowed discussions and debates to take place in the seminar. So, I shaped the seminar to try and balance both, by proposing both types of activities to be done within the seminar. So I drafted a formulation of the seminar based on instructional classes, a practical workshop and a discussion-based presentation.

Another matter that I learned form ISQualRes’08 was the need to bring diverse views and interpretations of qualitative research methods. One of my observations during ISQualRes’08 was that the invited speaker, Professor Wood-Harper and the local presenter, Professor Rose had different views on how to present the workshop. Their contextual views are based on their different backgrounds, and I wanted to utilise those differences for my proposed seminar. I invited both of the Professors and another Malaysian academic with experience in qualitative research to present in the seminar, Professor Marohaini Yusoff from Universiti Malaya (UM).

I was hoping that the seminar activities will show the different perspectives of qualitative research utilisation from the experience of the individual presenters. This would show the contextual
perspectives and nature of qualitative research. In addition, I also wanted these perspectives to interact with one another. Thus, apart from the normal seminar activities I added a panel discussion forum among the invited presenters to conclude the seminar. I felt that this forum would enrich the seminar by having the invited presenters discuss their experience of using qualitative research in their academic work, how to improve research activities and also reflect on the experience of the seminar itself.

I drafted the proposal for the fieldwork and included it in an updated fieldwork plan. The Deputy Dean of Research and Innovation at SSIL at the time, Mr Jetol Bolongkikit, was extremely supportive and encouraged my initiatives. Especially in light of the previous experience during the SSIL talks. He also saw the workshop as an opportunity to prepare many of the academics in SSIL for future PhD research.

The Second Fieldwork was originally planned to start in October 2008 and finish around March 2009. The seminar that was planned and drafted was originally slotted in January 2009. I felt that the six months would be enough for an action-based fieldwork which included the preparation for the seminar, the seminar itself and other data collection activities associated with my research. This plan however had to change due circumstances beyond my control.

4.6 Second Fieldwork: Re-Introduction and First Meeting

4.6.1 Re-Introduction

I ‘entered the field’ of my fieldwork in October 2008. The first day I came to the office in an attempt to start my fieldwork was on the 8th of October 2008. In the first week, I reacquainted myself with the staff of School of Informatics Science Labuan (SSIL). There were a group of young colleagues who just finished their Masters courses and reported for duty as lecturers. They were unaware about what happened during the SSIL talks, and most of them were enthusiastic about teaching at SSIL.

One of the things I discovered in my first week back was that the internet connection at SSIL has deteriorated since I left in December 2006. The entire UMS-KAL campus at the time shared a single 2MB connection. The reason was due to a change of Internet Service Provider (ISP). Before I started my PhD, the campus’ internet was divided into individual subscriptions for each school and
department. When I started my fieldwork, the ISP setup was a single 2MB subscription shared among the schools, different departments and student residence halls. It was shocking to see how slow the connection was, and to be expected when 2MB of internet access is shared by more than 1000 people in an academic institution was mind-boggling.

Another issue I discovered during my first week was in terms of access towards academic journals and other on-line research resource. The Internet connection at SSIL at the time didn’t have direct access to electronic journals on the Internet. One of the things that made my research work easier in Manchester was the direct access to online journal articles and papers. UMS did provide academics with usernames and passwords to access on-line journals, but most of the academics at SSIL rarely used this feature. On of the reasons was the selection of journals that the passwords were allowed to access was not ICT-friendly. The majority of journals our subscription service allows were from fields outside of ICT and IS. I remembered my personal experience when I was still lecturing at SSIL, trying to access a paper on computer games from an e-journal that was not on the list of subscriptions under the password. I was only able to copy the Abstract which did not help my research. At SSIL, not only was the Internet slow but access to journals was limited.

In my first week back, I also arranged for a meeting at UMS' Main Campus on 29th October to discuss Qualitative Research seminar and workshop for UMS-Labuan International Campus (UMS-KAL) in January 2009. The proposal for the seminar was received positively by UMS’ Centre of Research and Innovation and we were looking forward to discussing the terms of funding and support for the event.

Unfortunately, the next few weeks proved to be one of the saddest times in my life. On the 23rd of October 2008, my aunt passed away. Then a few days later, on the 26th of October, my grandmother passed away. Dealing with the family bereavement, I put my fieldwork aside for two weeks. For the meeting on 29th October I sent my wife, Madam Laura Jack who also happens to be a lecturer at SSIL, to represent me. My wife's great uncle then passed away on 31st October and both of us went back to her hometown to visit her grieving relatives. The first month of my fieldwork, apart from a few informal interviews and conversations, was not very productive due to these circumstances.
On 3rd November 2008 I returned to my fieldwork in SSIL. In earnest, I would regard early November as the ‘real’ start of my fieldwork. Everything done prior to this was more preparatory in nature. From the meeting on 29th October, I was informed that the Centre of Research and Innovation were only able to provide a specific sum of money to fund the seminar. My colleagues and I at SSIL then prepared an additional proposal to gain additional allocation for the seminar by applying through a training fund.

November was also the time I started adjusting and finalising the plans for the seminar. My initial idea was to have Professor Marohaini Yusoff and Professor Rose Alias to start a more ‘Malaysian-like’ research seminar, and then bring in Professor Trevor Wood-Harper for a ‘Western-style’ research discussion. In preparation for the seminar, I followed up on Professors Marohaini and Professor Rose Alias to discuss the training sessions they would like to do for the seminar. I arranged meetings with them to discuss their ideas for the seminar and also to interview them for my research.

During the first two months at SSIL (November and December 2008), I had valuable discussions with three senior members of the academic staff. Mr Jetol Bolongkikit, the Deputy Dean of Research and Development; Dr Awang Asri Ibrahim, the longest serving academic in SSIL who completed his PhD in 2008; and Mr Yuszren Yushak, Head of the E-Commerce Programme. Although informal, all these conversations have unearthed one point of contention, that there is a need to improve research in SSIL.

Conversations with Mr Yuszren were able to extract information regarding research funding at UMS. In terms of financial support, the university has access to funds which are sponsored by the government and the private sector. The challenge is to produce research proposals that convince the university to funnel the funding towards the individual researcher. Mr Yuszren has always been entrepreneurial in his approach to research. In my discussions with him, he always stresses his belief that the research we develop must have some form of commercial appeal to attract investment. His views could be attributed to his experience in running his own IT business. He is in his own admission a technopreneur at heart.
Dr Awang Asri, being the most senior of the academics at SSIL just returned from the University of York with his PhD on 'sonification'. My early conversations with Dr Awang Asri revolve around the difference between British academic institutions and those in Malaysia. I believe that these differences will play an important part in learning about context for quantitative and qualitative research practitioners. As time went on, Dr Awang became a very important figure to my research as he was appointed Dean of SSIL in January 2009.

One of the findings that I uncovered in my ‘reintroduction’ to SSIL in the first two months is that doing interviews in Malaysia requires an adaptability towards the culture here. Taking into account that the author is attached to SSIL and has served as an academic in SSIL for the past eight years prior to the fieldwork, the way that interviews are conducted have been informal to say the least.

These conversations although informal, have managed to enable the author in increasing his understanding of the contexts and circumstances that surround the academics at SSIL. The next phase will move on to formal interviews, where the author will record the interviews for future reference and to formalise the findings. As stated earlier, the author realised that being a member of SSIL affects the way interviews and conversations are received by the interview subjects. Thus, the preliminary conversations represent a way for the author to 'break the ice' with some of the members of the organisation.

Apart from conversing and discussing issues on research with my colleagues, I attended meetings within the organisation. A group meeting was successfully organised on 5th November 2008 among the members of Labuan University Research Group (LURG), consisting of a group of academics from SSIL. LURG is the brainchild of Dr Awang and was one of the first things he did after he returned to SSIL. LURG is a great example of the efforts going on within SSIL in improving research. This initial meeting was extremely fruitful in collecting information on current research that were on-going among the members of LURG. I was also willingly drafted into LURG.

During the meeting, I discussed and provided a short presentation on Action Research. Dr Awang was extremely encouraging and supportive with action learning.

It was overall a very useful meeting where LURG members discussed their research ideas and
progress. At the time, individual members of LURG were already doing their own research work. From their brief presentations, I saw a heavy usage of quantitative methods. When I suggested qualitative methods some of the members became extremely eager to add qualitative elements. Some of the research that were on-going at the time by the LURG members included:

- A quantitative research on what attracts users towards Social Networking Sites (SNS).
- A survey on SNS usage among UMS-KAL students.
- A related research using Technological Acceptance Model (TAM) on SNS users.

My inclusion of qualitative research made the members inquire how qualitative approach can be practically added to their research. I suggested that once the numbers and statistics are collected and analysed to recall a group of respondents for a focus group session to dig deeper into the findings. My suggestion was received positively by the researchers.

The LURG meeting also came upon a suggestion for me to give a colloquium presentation regarding qualitative research sometime in the next two weeks. I accepted the suggestion and saw this as an opportunity for a first formal meeting with the rest of my colleagues at SSIL.

Overall I saw that the members of LURG were very supportive of each other and fully cooperated with the field work. They consisted of some of the young academics I mentioned previously who just returned from their Masters with new vigour in developing SSIL. I was more than willing to contribute to LURG. From my mini-presentation they learned that research is a learning experience. Dr Awang until now plays an important role in being the senior academic that guides the rest of the academics in LURG.

During my time at SSIL, another significant session I had with LURG was on 4th February 2009, when LURG hosted a training class on SPSS with Dr Stephen Sondoh. Dr Stephen Sondoh is from the Labuan School of International Banking and Finance (Sekolah Perbankan dan Kewangan Antarabangsa Labuan, SPKAL) and at the time just finished with his PhD and was kind enough to organise the class for LURG’s benefit. One of the things I can conclude during the class was even in doing quantitative research, members of LURG still had a lot to learn and improve upon in their understanding of quantitative research methods.
4.6.2 First Official Meeting

In my first week back at SSIL in October, I was hoping to start the Action Learning meetings I planned for in my original fieldwork plan to begin in that month. However, family bereavement prevented this from happening and when I did return I discovered this plan had to be changed due to the difficulty of coordinating meetings with the academics. I accept that selecting October as the starting point of the meetings was not the best decision I made. Not only did I have to take leave for two weeks in October due to family grievances, the months of October, November and December were also the time that academics were busy with marking examination papers and taking holidays. During this time, there was never more than half of the academic staff available to conduct any significant intra-school meeting. The suggestion for holding a colloquium in January was the most viable idea.

On 19th January 2009, after a couple of months of settling into my organisation I presented my early findings and proposals for the Action Learning meetings. I planned to make the presentation as a colloquium, however due to time restrictions my presentation was attached to a meeting on issues to Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) assessment. The meeting was in the afternoon and my presentation started at 4:30pm at the end of the meeting

I presented some early findings which included issues of infrastructure at SSIL and also some of the discussions I had with the senior members of SSIL. I presented the field work’s original plan on using Action Learning to enhance understanding between 'hard' and 'soft' systems practitioners at SSIL which consisted of six main activities. The main items in my presentation were:

1) Action Learning meetings with academics at Labuan School of Informatics Science (SSIL);
2) Participating in two panel discussion forums;
3) Participating in a Research Methodology Seminar;
4) Consultation and observations;
5) Reviews of research output and progress from SSIL; and,
6) Visit and comparison with other schools/faculties.

Admittedly, the presentation didn't go as smoothly as hoped. The response I received was quite mixed in some aspects, where there was some support about certain issues and some huge questions, and soft-rejection on others. My colleagues at SSIL generally agreed on issues relating to
my observations about the infrastructure and lack of research activities at SSIL. I received the most criticism on the sections on Action Research and my plans for the Action Learning meetings. During the Question and Answer session, there were some questions that led to my own confusion. On questions from Ms Suaini Sura, my answers made it look like my presentation was to discuss the differences between hard and soft systems methodology. The main intention of the presentation was to introduce the field work, Action Research and objectives of the meetings. Unfortunately, the presentation didn’t achieve my full expectation for this. In hindsight, there were some points I presented that could have been condensed or presented in simpler terms to enable better understanding among the academics in SSIL.

Another factor that I could point to that contributed to the mixed response from my colleagues was the timing of the meeting. Just getting the majority of the academic staff at SSIL to sit down together for a colloquium was difficult due to their individual schedules and research interests. I took what I felt was the most convenient way to gather everyone, which was a compulsory school meeting. The late afternoon timing of the presentation coupled with the fatigue of the academics after an hour and half meeting, contributed to the outcome of my presentation.

My presentation highlighted the lack of foundations in research methods at SSIL, which along with the inability of convincing my colleagues to participate in the Action Learning meetings, caused me to rethink my field work plan. In SSIL, this debate cannot start until we have the foundation, not only soft systems (qualitative) but hard systems (quantitative) foundations need to be improved. So far, a handful of academics have the foundations and are aware of the debate.

Some of the original plans for the field work had to be altered during the field work due to constraints and situations at SSIL. This is an extremely significant learning experience as it taught me the 'actuality' of being in the situation and its difference with the initial plan of the field work. I started to realise it wasn’t merely a case of bringing Qualitative Research or Action Research to SSIL, there are bigger issues that affected our research in SSIL.
4.7 Second Fieldwork: MADICT Workshop

4.7.1 First Day: Project Planning Matrix Workshop

From 12th to 13th February 2009, I along with three other colleagues represented SSIL at a workshop and seminar organised by the Malaysian ICT Deans Committee (Majlis Dekan ICT, MADICT). The workshop/seminar had representatives from all 18 ICT-based faculties or schools among the Malaysian public universities. It was held on the island of Penang and hosted by Universiti Sains Malaysia. The theme of the workshop was ‘ICT Research Direction’.

On the first day, we were involved in a ‘Project Planning Matrix Workshop on Issues Dealing with ICT Research’. The representatives from the different ICT schools were divided into groups and were given a crash course on project planning matrix. We were taught to describe issues relating to ICT research that hinder research activity and develop problem trees from them. The elements in the problem trees will then be studied and solutions would be provided to build an objective tree. A logframe is then developed to suggest activities to resolve the issues relating to ICT research. However, for this thesis, I have chosen to include the logframes in the Appendix section.

The representatives from the ICT schools/faculties were divided into groups to focus on issues relating to ICT research in Malaysian universities. The groups were given the issues below to discuss:

Group 1: Expertise / Fields and Research Groups / Research Laboratories and Facilities / Centres of Excellence / Postgraduate Programs
Group 2: Research Partnership
Group 3: Innovation
Group 4: Research and Development (R&D) Achievement (Grants, Awards and Publication)

From the list above, we could see that Group 1 was given a bigger area of issues to cover. I remembered that Group 1 consisted of a much bigger number of participants due to this. The groups were required to discuss the issues they were given, develop problem trees, objective trees and logframes to propose solution, and finally create PowerPoint slides for presentation the next day.

One interesting anecdote I’d like to mention here. During the workshop, each group was given Apple desktops to use. However, the operating system installed in the Macs was Windows XP. It
was a very interesting sight to see and some of the Mac using ICT lecturers at the workshop noted this weird combination.

4.7.2 Second Day: Presentation Seminar of Yesterday’s Workshop
On the second day, the groups were required to present their findings from the workshop the day before. All groups were asked to present PowerPoint slides or whatever material they were able to produce the day before in front of the rest of the participants. After each presentation, a question and answer session was conducted. As you can see from some of the differing formats of the logframes and their focus, the respondents didn’t have one entire uniform idea of how to utilise the Project Planning Matrix. However, overall we understood how it works and presented our findings from our own points of view.

*Group 2: Research Partnership*
The first group to present was Group 2 (due to the huge area given to Group 1, they were working to finish their presentation into the second day), and their topic was Research Partnership.

Problem Tree for Research Partnership
The Problem Tree for issues relating to Research Partnership is presented as a list below.

- Non-existence of mechanism where other IPTA can harness existing networking between IPTA with a partner
  - Lack of interaction between universities
    - Don’t know where to start
      - Limited source of reference
      - No social gathering
      - Problem of meeting up academics with similar interests
    - Problem of determining expertise in IPTA
      - No who’s who directory in ICT
    - Limited Human Resources
  - Universities not pro-active to cooperate
    - Difficult to execute formalised relations that exist (MOU)
      - No funding
        - Bureaucracy
- No confidence with the resource/expertise that we have/can offer
- Local industry is not interested

From the Problem Tree, we can see the main issue that afflicts research partnership among Malaysian universities is a blatant lack of a formal mechanism for Public Institutes of Higher Learning (Institusi Pengajian Tinggi Awam, IPTA) to harness existing networks with research partners. The partnerships were divided into two kinds, partnership with other academic institutions and partnership with the industry. Partnership with other IPTAs and universities are caused due to a lack of interaction among universities, problems in determining the expertise within the universities and limited human resources. Industrial partnerships face problems due to difficulty in translating formalised relationship agreements in the form of Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) into practice, the industry also appear to have no confidence that ICT academics can offer to them and an outright disinterest from local industries themselves.

Objective Tree for Research Partnership
The Objective Tree tries to reverse the problems associated with Research Partnership by proposing objectives on how to solve each and every problem listed. The objective solutions for this issue are listed below:

- Existence of mechanism where other IPTA can harness existing networking between IPTA with a partner
  - Good interaction among universities
  - Proactive universities that want to cooperate

- Good interaction among universities
  - Initiation of work
    - Utilising source of reference
    - Social networking
    - Profiling
  - Expertise among IPTA academics are determined/recognised
    - Create directory of who’s who in IPTA

- Universities pro-active in cooperation/collaboration
  - The ease of executing existing formalised relations
    - Sufficient funds or funds available
• Transparency
  o High confidence with the resource/expert that we have/can offer
  o Interested local industry

From the Objective Tree the recommendations for improving the situation related to Research Partnership are based mainly on establishing a formal mechanism to fully harness existing networks between IPTAs and their partners. The establishment of these formal mechanisms are inter-related to improving relationships between the different universities and institutions, and also between universities and industry. Inter-university relationships need to be strengthened through more proactive efforts, social networking, profiling experts within the field and creating a directory that recognises the experts of the field. Industrial relationships would then be strengthened when we ease the execution of existing formalised relations between universities and industry by cutting out bureaucracy and making available funds for university-industry collaboration. This will hopefully bring about confidence in industry on the expertise and resources universities have to offer them, and will make them more interested in research partnerships.

I have included the resulting logframes for Research Partnerships in the Appendix section of this thesis.

Q&A session for Research Partnerships

The Q&A session for the issue of Research Partnerships was started by yours truly. I felt I had to start the ball rolling and wanted to know how Malaysian academic culture has influenced how institutions utilise their partnership with other institutions and industry. I asked, “Something was touched on academic culture (and) some problems associated with it. I was wondering if this academic culture can be changed, what are the things we can adjust to promote an improved academic culture (within the context of Research Partnership)?” The answer I received form the presenter from Group 2 was, “Our academic culture is not receptive to promote collaboration. We are not that open, we don’t want to share. We didn’t discuss how to change that culture! It didn’t come up! I’m sorry we didn’t discuss this matter. But we’ll try to open up.”

The Q&A then continued in discussing Special Interest Groups (SIG), which gather those with similar expertise. An example given was the successful strategy from the Software Engineering
(SE) interest group. In the SE group, their social networking is strong. They shared their secret of success due to their bottom-up strategy, where they didn’t wait or expect for a formalised relationship to be established but used their social networks to collaborate with one another.

*Group 3: Innovation*

Problem Tree for Innovation

The next problem tree presented was for the issue of Innovation. Following the previous issue’s problem tree approach, main problems are listed at the top while related issues are listed below them.

- Low percentage of R&D project commercialisation and patents
  
  o Individual unwillingness to innovate
    
    ▪ Software changes rapidly, not worth patenting
    ▪ Lack of awareness and knowledge on commercialisation and patent process
    ▪ Structure for knowledge creation is not there
  
  o Research is not aligned to industry/customer’s needs
    
    ▪ Knowledge gap between industry and researchers
  
  o Difficult to patent software product alone
  
  o Patent commercialisation process is tedious, time consuming and difficult
    
    ▪ Lack of support system for patenting and commercialisation
  
  o Too many tasks other than R&D given to staff

Objective Tree for Innovation

The objective tree for Innovation also lists the objectives to resolve the problems listed in the problem tree.

- Increase number of R&D projects leading to commercialisation and patents
  
  o Research tailored to industry/customer needs
    
    ▪ Bridged knowledge gap between industry/customer and researchers
  
  o Individuals inspired to innovate
    
    ▪ Multi-disciplinary effort to package software products
    ▪ Educate and groom researchers on innovation
  
  o Well-balanced job specification in practice
    
    ▪ Reengineer the structure for knowledge creation
Well-guided patent/commercialisation process

- Create support, provide resources for patenting and commercialisation

Promote software creation

Logframe for Innovation

Unlike the previous group, the group presenting the issue of Innovation presented their findings as a list. The main elements required for the logframe which are the activities prescribed to solve issue relating to Innovation are listed below.

- Overall objective: To increase number of R&D project commercialisation and patents
- Project purpose: To inspire individuals to innovate

Results level:

- Multi-disciplinary effort for packaged software packages
  - Innovative and collaborative research and academic programmes
  - Exploring intersection between CS and other disciplines
  - Establish collaboratories (collaborative laboratories)
  - Focus research proposals towards patents and commercialisation
  - Bring in expertise from industry
  - Close relationship with industry (i.e. alumni)

- Educate and groom researchers on innovation
  - Organise workshop
  - Promote awareness on innovation
  - Incentives for innovation
  - Support for researcher to gain exposure
  - Mentor/mentee programs
  - Support systems
  - Promote culture in innovation

Q&A for Innovation

During the second day of the workshop, one of the invited attendees of the event was Professor Dr Harith Ahmad from UM’s Physics Department. An expert in photonics, he contributed a lot of ideas at the workshop despite his field not being in ICT. I felt that his inclusion was extremely important to the workshop. Professor Harith commented during the Q&A, “ICT cuts across a very wide area.
But looking at this discussion, it seems very restrictive, only towards software. If you open up it will draw more attention from the ministry. You’re supposed to be coming up with ideas or roadmap for innovation, but there was no clear indication what software you want to use. ‘Halatuju’ (direction in Malay) should have a clear mapping, what and how you do it. With the new ideas, there’s no reason why you shouldn’t achieve high level research.”

His comments were then answered by the presenting group, “We are not ready yet. We might need a pre-workshop to do this! We need to determine the real ‘halatuju (direction)’.”

A workshop participant who introduced himself as Mr. Hussin then added, “I come from both academic and industry background. I work in an R&D company. It’s a gatekeeper company. Almost daily we receive representatives for industry/academic collaboration. (In terms of innovation) there is a need to work with industry. To understand what is really needed. When people come in with products, we ask them does it fulfil our system requirements? (The products or innovation) needs to fulfil standards. (Another problem is) when Professors want to align their research, (they present) some big ideas and complicated products. But the industry needs finished products.”

Prof Harith Ahmed then took the stage again, possibly due to the comment regarding Professors and their research. He stated, “I have to respond to that comment (about Professors). There are two schools of thoughts (here). We don’t restrict our ideas... if you focus on the commercial market, then you might not create (real) innovation. (Maybe) only incremental innovation. (It’s) like selling your soul to the devil. That’s not a true academic! Don’t be restrictive and think you depend on industry. You can innovate and create your own market!”

This interaction on the topic of innovation presented me with a glimpse of the different viewpoints, which I will expand later in the thesis, among those in academia and industry. While it is true that academic research wishes to be free from ‘commercial temptations’, the reality is that the industry wants and wishes to cooperate with academia as long as the research has something tangible and follows the standards set by industry.
**Group 4: R&D Achievement (Grants, Awards, Publication)**

**Problem Tree for R&D Achievement**

The next presentation was on R&D Achievement which relates to grants, awards and publications. The group presented main header of ‘Low R&D Achievement’ as the main problem associated with the issue.

- **Low R&D Achievement**
  - Number of publications from Malaysian researchers in top journals are low
  - Low awards bring low commercialisation
    - Awards criteria not parallel to commercial value
  - Low quality of publications
    - Weak research project management
    - Lack of Professors in new universities to attain grants and publish in cited journals
    - Author’s contribution in journals are questionable (Jumping on others’ projects)
  - Difficult to get grants
    - Lack of professors in new universities to attain grants and publish in cited journals
    - Not enough information on the variety of national and international grants
    - Proposals provided do not emphasise research components
    - Research grant allocation standards differ, depends on evaluators
  - Less effort in commercialising R&D projects
  - Lack of cooperation with industry
  - Publications from research not used by industry

**Objective Tree for R&D Achievement**

The group then proceeded to present the objective tree for this issue.

- **Increased R&D achievement**
  - Increase number of publications from Malaysia in cited journals
  - Commercialised research projects attain awards
    - Synchronise award criteria with commercial value
- Increase quality of publication
  - Improve research project management
  - Increase publication ethics among researchers
  - Add Professors to new universities to improve grants and publication
- Increase rate of grant attainment
  - Add Professors to new universities to improve grants and publication
  - Increase spread of information on local and international grants
  - Proposals to emphasise research component
  - Guarantee research grant allocation is standardised and transparent
- Reduce bureaucracy when spending grants (less paper work and cross examination to buy what researchers need)
- Increase cooperation with industry so research findings are utilised
- Increase industrial strategies are relevant to R&D

The logframe for Research Achievement is included in the appendix section.

Q&A for Research Achievement
Professor Harith started the Q&A session with a long assessment on Research Achievement, “My suggestion (is to) take a look at Universiti Utama Malaysia’s (UUM) ICT faculty, the money they receive is very small. Some projects can receive up to millions, but for ICT it’s 20000, 30000 Ringgits. How do we increase the total? Once we have these workshops, we can organise a committee to inform Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) and Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI), this committee would (receive) allocation to grant research grants. The committee should consist of qualified people. Grants are given randomly. The Ministries will normally allocate funding to their own agencies, and they will appoint their own evaluators and allocate within. What we see for ICT, it’s erratic. (It) doesn’t expand the field of ICT in our country. So we need to update how the money is given, so ICT gets good funding, with good funding we can do more things. You can’t expect a good (research) outcome from small funding.”

He continued, “Another thing I’d like to point out is under the Academy of Science, we have (an initiative called) Brain Gain. Through Brain Gain, we can have opportunities. The Ministry has allocated RM50million but (it) hasn’t been under utilised (and) falling short (of targets). The
problem is bureaucratic. The country is not being run by intelligent people. We all have the answers. Some don’t talk about (this issue), but I talk about it. Like between the Academy of Science and MOSTI, the money is there, RM50million as an initial fund. If we need, we ask for more. And this isn’t even spent fully. We can use it for people in ICT to invite world renowned figures, which means not just Professors, we want people of good standing that can provide you networking and bring them in to the country and expose them to people. Don’t hide people, the problem in Malaysia is we hide people. We need to move out of this self-constraint ideology, we should open up so more people benefit. The most important thing is national development. Don’t look at personal (institution) achievement. When you expose these people to a bigger group, you can get 100 (research) papers (out of it)! The country will benefit. So, you can bring all these people for a few weeks, one month and everything paid handsomely by the academy. Another funding you can tap is R&D collaboration. Through Brain Gain, R&D collaboration can provide RM 250 000. It can top up your existing funds. You can bring them in, do workshops using your facilities. (But) we don’t have any application for this. We wanted to do a roadshow, but we chose to just use our portal. But nobody (visits the portal)! All you need to do is use the forms. (But) once people saw the forms, they become lazy and skip it.”

Professor Harith’s comments prompted the presenters to agree with him. “We agree. We have under utilised Brain Gain. (We) hope we will start looking into this. About funding, admittedly ICT doesn’t fall into the huge amounts bracket. (We realise) for research under Professor Harith, RM1million grants are the minimum. It’s true we need to strategise to let more money coming in ICT.”

Professor Harith’s revelation about Brain Gain was rather worrying. The Malaysian government has actually allocated millions of Ringgit for Malaysian institutions to bring in academics and experts from abroad to enhance our research and yet the funding was not taken up due to bureaucratic reasons. I did do a bit more research on Brain Gain and its replacement Brain Share. Apart from bureaucracy I believe there are more things that need to be looked at when utilising these schemes.

Group 1: Expertise / Fields and Research Groups / Research Laboratories and Facilities / Centres of Excellence / Postgraduate Programs
The last group to present was Group 1. Looking at the issues they were given to review, it was no wonder they continued preparing the presentation. Group 1’s assessment on the issues they were given was extremely interesting. Previous presentations separated the issues in the problem tree into branches, making it look as if they are separate from one another. For Group 1, some of the issues were tied to similar smaller issues that they shared.

Their main point in the Problem Tree was that Research products were not impacting industry and society. They related this issue to many things such as a lack of facilities, research supervisor workload, quality of students, individualistic research, lack of mechanism for sharing expertise and lack of research laboratories for new universities. Group 1 connected some of these different problems to be related to three problems, the first being Centres of Excellence (COE) being very dependent of research grants, the second being the absence of a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for the COE, and third the absence of a national COE policy.

- Research products not giving impact to industry and society
  - Lack of facilities for graduate students like space, good computing facilities
    - Low salary for GRAs/RAs
      - Centre of Excellence (COE) very dependent of research grant
    - Lack of communication between faculty and graduate school
      - COE very dependent of research grant
    - No support staff available
      - COE very dependent of research grant
  - Supervisor too busy with teaching/administrative works
    - No support staff available
      - COE very dependent of research grant
  - Difficult to get good quality students
    - Experts’ accomplishment hasn’t reached global level
      - Research field not focused
    - No branding of COE (national and international recognition)
      - No CEO of COE
      - No national level COE for ICT
Research more individualistic even though many experts in the same field

- No information system on research and expertise, no coordination, no sharing
  - No CEO of COE
  - No national level COE for ICT

Lack of mechanism for sharing expertise for mutual benefit

- No information system on research and expertise, no coordination, no sharing
  - No CEO of COE
  - No national level COE for ICT

- Lack of research collaboration among IPTA and IPTS
  - No CEO of COE
  - No national level COE for ICT

- Difficult to get external/internal examiners
  - No CEO of COE
  - No national level COE for ICT

- Lack of professors/expert to mentor research
  - No CEO of COE
  - No national level COE for ICT

No research laboratories for new universities

- No funding for research lab
  - Building laboratories not a priority for university authority

Objective Tree for Expertise / Fields and Research Groups / Research Laboratories and Facilities / Centres of Excellence / Postgraduate Programs

Group 1’s Objective Tree dealt with the issues that are the cause of inter-related problems. Their recommendations however were reduced to two, appointing a CEO for COE and creating a national COE policy.

- Research products impacts industry and society
  - Supervisor focused on research
  - Get good quality students
    - Good branding of COE (national and international recognition)
• Existence of CEO to COE
• Create national level COE for ICT
  
  o Increased mechanism for sharing expertise for shared benefit
    • Good information system for research and expertise, coordination and sharing
      • Existence of CEO to COE
      • Create national level COE for ICT
    • Collaboration between IPTA and IPTS in conducting research
      • Existence of CEO to COE
      • Create national level COE for ICT

The logframe for Expertise / Fields and Research Groups / Research Laboratories and Facilities / Centres of Excellence / Postgraduate Programs is included in the appendix section.

Professor Dr Shahrin Sahib (Chairman of MADICT) Speech
The presentation session of the workshop ended with the Chairman of MADICT at the time, Professor Shahrin Sahib giving a speech to all those involved. He thanked the efforts of all the participants and the committee for organising the event.

He stressed that one of the issues ICT-based schools and faculties in Malaysian IPTAs face is how to improve research. He felt this to be one of the bigger challenges that must be addressed. Which is the reason MADICT organised the workshop. He believed it will be a daunting task is to collect and collate this information. But the workshop was the start. His hope earlier on in the workshop was to formulate a halatuju or direction. He hopes that all participants expect something that can bring all ICT-schools forward.

The key challenge in developing ICT research in Malaysia, Prof Shahrin believes is ‘remeh’ or ‘tedious’. I believe he viewed the situation as a matter of ICT academics just needing to do the required work to fully push ICT research development. Professor Shahrin is one of the people I interviewed post-SSIL workshop to get more insight on this issue.
He commented on the Malaysian government increasing the number of universities from 10 (pre-2000) to 20, with 17 universities having ICT-based programs (at the time of the workshop). He sees that the Human Resource strategy for these universities is not clear. Lecturers are just being sent out to do PhDs and slowly returning, but there’s still a gap. Thus, we still see a lack of numbers in terms of research. I believe it could also be due to returning lecturers with PhDs given posts in the ICT schools. Since most of these schools have only been established, there are a lot of administrative posts that need to be filled.

Professor Shahrin then commented and tested our awareness on initiatives that have been introduced by government agencies to assist us in our research. He stated that some of the participants only heard about Brain Gain today. He stressed that to be academics in ICT, we should know what’s happening in the country and the opportunities provided to conduct research. He lamented the fact that despite the ease of access we possess, with information at our finger tips, we are not still aware of initiatives like Brain Gain.

Professor Shahrin concluded that we all, academics in ICT-based schools and faculties throughout Malaysia, have to get our act together. And act quickly.

4.7.3 Additional findings from discussions and observations from MADICT workshop

One of the things that the participants discussed among each other was on the issue of academic mobility. There is a dire need for academics to be allowed and encouraged to not be ‘tied down’ to allow them to do research. In my conversations, they expressed that academic mobility could mean giving academics time off to participate in ICT projects outside of campus. It could also mean allowing for the industry-academic partnership to take place in earnest, by bringing in experts into academia and not having to worry if they have a post graduate degree or not. The other view of course is that academic mobility should mean the ability for the academic to choose which university he wants to serve, which has in recent times become quite difficult due to bureaucratic practices. Universities do not want to lose their lecturers to other public universities, thus create bureaucratic walls to make these transfers difficult.

Another issue that was hotly discussed was funding. All of the participants agreed that funding for research needs to be more accessible and more transparent to ICT/IS researchers. Professor Harith’s
claims of ICT research receiving a smaller amount of funds compared to other schools is the reality facing ICT and IS academic face in Malaysia. The disadvantage that ICT schools have is that due to the field being relatively new in Malaysian universities, those who administer the distribution of funds do not come from ICT. Thus, their understanding of ICT or IS research projects is limited to providing enough funding to purchase computers and software. The blame should also fall on ICT academics ourselves. We tend to focus on smaller scale research which doesn’t provide the kind of funds that are in the same class as those in pure science and engineering.

Issues related to research links and connections that were presented also became a topic of discussion. Links need to be fostered to allow ICT academics access to partnerships with other academics and industry. There were however two views on how to achieve this. There are those who believe this to be a matter of the academics just doing it. Without all the formalities, utilise social networks to foster that cooperation. There were however those who were still reserved and hope for a top-down approach, where institutions will forge the path by establishing memorandums and official partnerships. The problem is, we’ve went through this path before and we have not seen the tangible benefits of these MOUs, as presented during the workshop.

Another point of discussion was that those who manage research and funding needs to know about research. This issue actually affects not only ICT but other fields of study as well. In many research management departments in Malaysian universities, there will always be the probability the person evaluating your application for funding and research support do not necessarily come from the right field of study. I’ve mentioned that ICT research has been cruelly judged to only be provided with computers and software, but there are even worse cases. Since most academics are provided computers anyway, funding for new hardware are sometimes rejected. One personal experience I can share was when my colleague at SSIL and I applied for funding to build a computer for research related to computer gaming. At first, I listed parts to build my own gaming PC, since this was the common thing for computer gamers to do, build their own gaming machine from scratch. The initial application was rejected because the reviewer did not recognise the parts and wanted an off-the-shelf CPU to be used for the research. In the end, we compromised by applying for funding to buy an off-the-shelf CPU and upgraded its components.
This lack of understanding between academics and those who administer academic research also affects other matters. Personal experience included, there is a need for those who provide the support for research to possess a good level of experience themselves in doing research. These administrators must be those who’ve been through it to fully appreciate, understand and administer research activities. This gap of understanding eventually became an issue this research wanted to focus on due to the effect it has towards research activity. The MADICT workshop provided some supportive evidence that made me believe that this understanding needs to be improved if Malaysian IS research wants to develop.

By the end of the MADICT workshop, I gained a better understanding of the complexity related to improving research and development in the field of ICT and IS in Malaysia. The discussions during the workshop were very useful in showing me some of the similarities that ICT academics in Malaysia face. My attempts to instigate some discussion on research culture and issues on qualitative research were also well received. Although looking back, I could see the impact it had during MADICT was extremely minor due to the workshop's focus on more pressing issues of research in ICT.

4.8 Second Fieldwork: SSIL Workshop and Discussion Forum

4.8.1 SSIL Workshop Introduction

Between 10th to 12th March 2009, the Labuan School of Informatics Science (SSIL) of Universiti Malaysia Sabah – Labuan International Campus (UMS-LIC) organised a research methodology workshop and seminar. The workshop and seminar was held at the Grand Dorsett Labuan Hotel in the island of Labuan, Malaysia.

The workshop was co-organised by the Registrar's Department of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). The main motivation for the workshop was to expose the workshop participants to qualitative research and to provide them practical training on how to conduct some of the methods. The participants consisted of all lecturers from SSIL, nearly half of the lecturers from the Labuan School of Business and International Finance (SPKAL) and representative lecturers from various schools at UMS.
4.8.2 Background and Objectives

SSIL was established in 1999. It is one of the schools under Universiti Malaysia Sabah which is located at its Labuan campus, the other being SPKAL. One of the issues that is concern for SSIL is in research practice. Malaysia has 20 public universities and nearly all of them has an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based school or faculty. SSIL being one of the 'younger' schools is striving to improve itself in research.

The current research situation in SSIL shows a propensity for quantitative survey-based research. The academics at SSIL are also considered very young (in their 20s and early 30s) thus not possessing extensive experience in research. Currently there is only one PhD holder among the academic staff, Dr Awang Asri Ibrahim, the Dean of SSIL.

Dr Awang Asri himself just returned from his PhD in 2008. Since then he has taken steps to promote research activity among the academics at SSIL by forming the Labuan Usability Research Group (LURG). His effort has encouraged the academics within the group to become active in research.

With the research situation in SSIL and the efforts done by Dr Awang Asri, I saw the potential for conducting my research field work at SSIL. Initially, I believed that one way to improve research activity at SSIL was to introduce qualitative research to the academics.

The motivation behind this was for SSIL research to catch up with other more established ICT-based faculties in Malaysia, SSIL must find its own niche area. If SSIL focuses its efforts in approaches or areas that haven't been explored yet, than SSIL can leapfrog the rest of the competition by being a pioneer in its own areas. Much like the Blue Ocean Strategy, but for ICT research.

Thus, the main objective of the workshop and seminar was to expose and train the academics at SSIL at qualitative research approaches. This is done with the hope that it will motivate them in using these approaches and inspire them to improve their research activities.
4.8.3 SSIL Workshop Activities

The highlights of the workshop and seminar consisted of five main activities.

- Overview of Qualitative Research Methods
- Qualitative data collection, analysis and validation workshop
- Focus Group Workshop and Analysis
- Multiview, Action Research and Case Studies for IT/IS
- A Panel Discussion Forum on the topic “Qualitative Research Focus and Direction, Opportunities for UMS and Malaysia”

Table 4.1 shows the timetable for the first four activities that were held at the SSIL Workshop.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date and time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Facilitator / Speaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 March 2008,</td>
<td>Overview of Qualitative Research Methods</td>
<td>Professor Marohaini Yusoff and Associate Professor Esther</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00am - 12:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td>Daniel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 March 2008,</td>
<td>Qualitative data collection, analysis and validation</td>
<td>Professor Marohaini Yusoff and Associate Professor Esther</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00 - 5:00pm</td>
<td>workshop</td>
<td>Daniel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 March 2008,</td>
<td>Focus Group Workshop and Analysis</td>
<td>Professor Rose Alinda Alias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00am – 5:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 March 2008,</td>
<td>Multiview, Action Research and Case Studies for IT/IS</td>
<td>Professor Trevor Wood-Harper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00am – 12:00pm</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 March 2008,</td>
<td>Panel Discussion Forum: Qualitative Research Focus and</td>
<td>Professor Marohaini Yusoff, Professor Trevor Wood-Harper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00 – 4:00pm</td>
<td>Direction, Opportunities for UMS and Malaysia</td>
<td>and Professor Syed Azizi Wafa, Syed Khalid Wafa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Timetable for the SSIL Workshop on Qualitative Research Methods

The first activity, a presentation on “Overview of Qualitative Research Methods” was conducted by Professor Marohaini Yusoff. This session is a presentation which introduces the participants to qualitative research and its motivations. Since most of the participants are still new to qualitative research an overview would give a basic introduction to qualitative research methodology and its approaches.
The second activity was a workshop on “Qualitative Data Collection, Analysis and Validation” jointly facilitated by Professor Marohaini and Associate Professor Dr Esther Daniel. First, this session gave the participants a practical guide on how to collect data. This was facilitated by Professor Marohaini. For the analysis and validation, Dr Esther facilitated the sessions which gave allowed the participants to utilise and practice what was taught in the session.

The third activity was a practical workshop on the “Focus Group” method facilitated by Professor Rose Alinda Alias. Professor Rose brought a current research on “Adoption, Appropriation and Impact of Mobile Phones on Malaysian Society” as an example for the focus group which will be added to the research itself. The session started with an introduction to the Focus Group approach followed by the practical training using the approach.

The fourth activity was a series of presentations on Qualitative Research given by Professor Trevor Wood-Harper. Professor Wood-Harper's presentation was placed under the title “How to Produce Good Qualitative Research” which broke down into different presentations which focused on many issue pertaining to qualitative research itself. His presentation included discussions on other common qualitative methods like Action Research, Ethnography and Case Studies. The presentation also touched upon the setting up of the UK's Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills. The subject of how Doctoral research education was implemented at Manchester Business School was also presented. The presentation concluded with Professor Wood-Harper's perspective on what makes good qualitative research.

The fifth activity was a panel discussion forum which consisted of Professor Wood-Harper, Professor Marohaini and the Director of the UMS-LIC campus, Professor Syed Azizi Wafa Bin Syed Khalid Wafa. The forum was chaired by the author. The forum's topic was “Qualitative Research Focus and Direction, Opportunities for UMS and Malaysia”. Although the forum was meant to focus on qualitative research, in the end the discussions covered a wide range of topics associated with academic research and academia in Malaysia. Many interesting issues were raised which highlighted a lot of challenges facing Malaysian academic research which influence the direction and opportunities of qualitative research in Malaysian academia.
4.8.4 SSIL Workshop Sessions Review

Overall, the workshop and seminar sessions were organised to present a good flow and continuity from one session to the next. By starting with an overview, participants were able to first learn the 'basics' of qualitative research. This enabled participants to gain an understanding of the suitability and research motivation of using qualitative research. The presentation was very clear and direct where those who are just beginning to learn about qualitative research will have no problems in getting the basics of qualitative research, which was the intention of this session all along.

The next session enabled the participants to learn first hand how to collect, analyse and validate qualitative research data. A practical session like this allowed participants to get 'their hands dirty' early so they can experience for themselves how qualitative research approaches is done. The depth of the material however is not too deep, which suit most qualitative research beginners. And the way that data is collected and recorded in this session was quite systematic in its approach. However, the main goal of this session was to allow the participants to have a feel for how qualitative research approaches gather data and analyse it for the purpose of the research. Another aspect that was quite important that this session touched upon is that qualitative research deals with extremely rich data and that this richness makes data analysis more intense.

The Focus Group session which follows was set up to introduce another qualitative approach to the participants. One of the unique things about the Focus Group approach is that it can be used in combination with quantitative research approaches. In other words Focus Groups is a good example for a mixed methods approach. Participants were given the research in mobile phone adoption, appropriation and impact to practice doing the focus group.

Professor Wood-Harper's presentation rounded off the presentations and workshop sessions very well. By focusing on more 'advanced' qualitative research approaches participants were exposed further to the different approaches within the qualitative domain. Professor Wood-Harper's presentation on what makes good qualitative research acts as a motivator for participants to improve their research practice and the books suggested in the presentation will hopefully help guide the participants in their research. However, one of the things that were noticeable during Professor Wood-Harper's presentation was that the material presented opened up opportunities for further discussions with the participants. Unfortunately, apart from a handful of participants, the majority
of the participants did not take the opportunity to further share and discuss the content of the presentation further. This phenomenon although puzzling, may have its answers in the next forum session.

4.8.5 SSIL Workshop Panel Discussion Review
The original title for the forum to discuss was “Qualitative Research Focus and Direction, Opportunities for UMS and Malaysia”. However, as the forum went on other issues which were directly or non-directly associated with qualitative research started to emerge and the forum diverged slightly off-topic in certain instances. Despite the forum going a bit off topic, the issues discussed all related to Malaysian academia in general and this is extremely important within the context of finding ways to improve research activity. Some of the issues touched upon included:

- research culture,
- support for research and academics,
- the issue of Research Universities among the Malaysian public universities,
- and, how to reward Malaysian academics for their research.

In the subject of research culture, there is a sense that quantitative research dominates Malaysian academia. In the forum, this can be attributed to the fact that time is a factor when conducting research at a post graduate level. Professor Syed Azizi Wafa felt that for academics to take up qualitative research, expression and articulation of scenarios and research situations must improve among Malaysian academia. He felt that Malaysian culture is still struggling to improve its self-expression, thus we fall back on quantitative research due to its perceived 'ease of adoption' and because it is 'less time consuming'.

Professor Syed Azizi Wafa's comments may explain the reason discussions for Professor Wood-Harper's presentation was not as active as he had hoped. Though language does play an important role in this, one cannot deny that for discussions to occur people involved in the discussion must be more expressive. However, this is in contrast to the workshop sessions that were more guided and enabled expression within a closer knit group.

The forum continued by touching upon the role of the academic in Malaysian public universities and the support they receive in their research endeavours. Again, Professor Syed Azizi Wafa has
strong views on the matter that as academics, we must fight for our rights as academics. There is a sense that most academics accept a lot of the situations placed upon them begrudgingly. Within this discussion, Professor Marohaini and Professor Wood-Harper agreed that academic freedom is essential. At the same time, as Malaysian academics there is a sense of responsibility towards the nation in playing our role as developers of human capital.

Another hot topic that was discussed was the issue of Research Universities. The Malaysian academics had strong views on the advantages and disadvantages of the Malaysian government's implementation of the Research Universities concept. However, it was Professor Wood-Harper who put the issue in perspective in terms of how to promote research by stating that whether or not Research Universities are good or bad, rewarding academics for their research work should be the focus.

The issue of rewarding academics for their research rounded up the forum. This issue is linked to enabling more academic freedom, which will encourage expression and academic discussion among academics. By rewarding academics as well, the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) and university administration will provide the necessary financial support for their research endeavour. The support in this context is not only in terms of financial support but also in administrative support, whereby academics should be freed up from non-academic roles and jobs. Only then will there be a more conducive environment for research activity.

4.8.6 SSIL Workshop Feedback
In general, the feedback from the workshop and seminar were very positive. Obviously, the individual participants had their own personal favourite sessions. Participants were also asked on what they perceive to be the benefits of the event, whether it has changed their perception on qualitative research and whether it has encouraged them to try out qualitative research. They also provided suggestions for improving future workshops.

The overall opinion of the participants is that the workshop and seminar were very well organised. The participants felt that it was a success and gave full credit to the organising committee. Some of them noted that it was a great eye opener in terms of introducing new ways to do research.
In terms of best session, as stated before, individual participants had their personal favourite from the different presenters and facilitators. One thing that should be noted is the fact that a substantial number of the participants highlighted the forum as extremely enlightening. This could be due to the fact that most research methodology seminars organised before this did not include panel forums which allowed for open debate and discussion.

In terms of benefits, many participants commented that it provided them with exposure to qualitative research. Basic understanding and overview on qualitative research was noted as the main benefits of the three day workshop and seminar.

Participants’ perception on qualitative research was changed for those who did not realise the potential for using qualitative research in their areas. However for those who have already used some form of qualitative research in their work, they have already known all along the usefulness of qualitative research within the context of their field.

With regards to whether the participants will start using qualitative approaches in their research, the majority states that they will. However, there are a number who answered cautiously in saying that they will explore mixed methods first. This is still very positive in terms of causing awareness among the academics at UMS towards qualitative research. One comment stated that more exposure and guidance will encourage academics to undertake qualitative research.

As for suggestions to improve future workshops, many participants replied adding more hands-on practical training sessions. Some participants commented that the workshop could have been longer to accommodate more activities or to reorganise the activities to maximise the time. A few participants also called for opening up the seminar to post-graduate students.

In my discussions with participants some of them showed an interest to using Qualitative Research as complimentary to their Quantitative Research. After thinking about their ideas, for having qualitative as a compliment to quantitative research will lead to the question whether the qualitative method is merely being grafted or embedded?
In the end, the awareness and willingness to try out Qualitative Research is a step in the positive direction. Academics here are still new to this and taking 'baby steps'. This change will most probably occur slowly, unless something drastic accelerates it. Multiple approaches seem to be the way to go, to make the academics in UMS get familiar with Qualitative Research. The importance is their awareness that they are doing multi approaches, not pure qualitative research yet.

4.8.7 SSIL Workshop Criticisms and Discussions
Just as ISQualRes'08, the most glaring missing component of the seminar and workshop is the lack for discussions and debates amongst the participants themselves. The method of presenting materials during the workshop sessions like a ‘textbook-based’ training exercise may even affect the whole purpose for improving research at the university itself. With UMS having aspirations to be a Research University, it is puzzling that efforts to promote research use textbook methods that can undermine research improvement methods. Especially from Professor Wood-Harper’s session, it was hoped that more discussion and debate would have occurred.

4.9 Second Fieldwork: Interviews and Discussions
To collect more information for the purpose of my research, I needed to get the insights of those with experience in Malaysian academia and those within my university and school. I have categorised the respondents of my interviews into three groups. The first group is experienced Malaysian academics with the majority of them being professors. The second group are the administrators from UMS and SSIL. The third group are the academics in SSIL.

4.9.1 First Group: Experienced Malaysian Academics
This group of interviews consist of experienced academics from Malaysia with one exception, my supervisor Professor Wood-Harper. I selected some of the professors based on the needs from the theoretical framework. There were those who I then added based on recommendations from the earlier professors I’ve chosen to interview. All of the academics selected presented a diverse group of academics with many years of experience in Malaysian academia, even Professor Wood-Harper.

What I wanted to do by interviewing these academics was to find out about issues relating to research in Malaysia that may influence the situation facing my school in Malaysia. I should be careful in stating this, as I do not want to make an impression that I’m generalising that what affects
SSIL can be traced directly to the Malaysian research situation. I comprehend that my research focuses on the subjective nature of my organisation and that I cannot make any huge claims that what goes on in SSIL is true in nearly all ICT-based school in Malaysia. However, from my interviews I could hear some similarities and contextual differences that I could relate to the situation in SSIL. The bigger issues of academic research culture, qualitative research and the situation of IS in Malaysia were some of the agendas that I wanted to get some input on.

Below is the list of experienced academics who I have interviewed:
Professor Dr Shahrin Sahib
Professor Dr Harith Ahmad
Professor Dr Mokhtar Mohd Yusof
Professor Dr Marohaini Yusoff
Associate Professor Dr Esther Daniel
Professor Rose Alinda Alias
Professor Dr Sazaly Abu Bakar
Professor Dr Wan Ahmad Tajuddin Bin Wan Abdullah
Professor Dr Ir Zainal Aripin Bin Zakariah
Professor Dr Trevor Wood-Harper (my supervisor and the only non-Malaysian)

4.9.1.1 Professor Dr Shahrin Sahib
Professor Dr Shahrin Sahib @ Sahibuddin is the Dean of the Faculty of Information and Communication Technology at Universiti Teknikal Malaysia (UTeM) and was the Chairman of the ICT Deans Committee (Majlis Dekan ICT, MADICT) until January 2010. During my fieldwork he was still at the helm of MADICT and he was responsible in organising the MADICT workshop concerning the direction of ICT research in Malaysia which I attended. I got to interview him at his office at UTeM on 20 April 2009.

One of my most enjoyable interviews due to his wealth of insight and entertaining demeanour, Professor Shahrin’s opinions represents someone who has been entrusted the responsibility of steering Malaysian ICT academia through MADICT. Information Systems in Malaysia have been classified by the Malaysian Qualification Agency as one of the branches of ICT, thus the programs
and initiatives that MADICT introduces directly affect those in the field of Information Systems. I asked him regarding the role of MADICT and issues regarding ICT research in Malaysia.

MADICT is a council represented by the various deans from public universities in Malaysia that offer IT programs. Professor Shahrin stated that among the 20 public universities there are 17 universities offering ICT-related programs. He adds, “The main function of MADICT is as a meeting place where we share the experience resources, problems, like an interest group where we try to push and initiate certain changes to IT curriculum in Malaysia.”

With regard to ICT research he commented that there are a number of notable IT research activities on-going in recent years. Especially in the fields of network security, e-learning and mobile learning issues, graphical information systems, IPv6 and so on. However he lamented that “... due to the nature of work and vast area of IT itself, we are in a way spreading ourselves quite thin. Most (other) faculties have about 100 people, but IT (faculties) have 60 or even smaller than that... we don’t have a critical mass to look in-depth into (specific fields).” Professor Shahrin believes that with the new universities that have been opened by the government, it leads to challenges for research activities. For one, the critical mass isn’t there while the researchers that we do have need time to develop. He commented that a post-doctoral research structure is a luxury Malaysia can’t afford at this moment.

He commented that the aim of the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education is to generate up to 100,000 PhDs. This will hopefully fill the critical mass Malaysian R&D needs. Professor Shahrin emphasised that the Malaysian government is doing this despite a perceived economic downturn. His theory is that during an economic downturn, the job market would not be able to provide employment to fresh graduates, thus the best way to make them productive is to entice them to return to university. Providing scholarships and financial support for post-graduate students would keep them productive while producing research products that have the potential for commercialisation, and ultimately upgrade the workforce with post-graduates in the future. One on-going challenge he sees is in producing the kind of research and postgraduate students that are needed by industry. He stated, “I think in the last 3 years, there were a lot of activities, talking, happening between different stake holders, the industry, government agencies and ministries... to
see how we can work together in trying to make sure what is produced by universities is what’s needed by the industry. We have achieved a level of success. But not solving the full problem yet.”

On the subject of the field of Information Systems, he states that IS in Malaysia is still under the umbrella of ICT. “IS still has an element of computing inside it. (Based on ) international reference of recommendations, it still falls under the body of computing. Except it has a lot of business and organisational elements which are normally brought by the business or management schools.” One of MADICT’s responsibilities in the past few years was to propose a uniform standard for all academic programs under the ICT schools and faculties. In the interview, Professor Shahrin stated a document outlining the standards would be released by June 2009.

Even though Professor Shahrin believes the development of a standard and some of the early struggles of IS academia and research in Malaysia is part of ‘the maturing of the discipline in Malaysia’. He hopes that with time, there will be more understanding about the field of IS not only among the ICT community but for those outside it as well. He stresses how important it is to relate an academic field with the kinds of skill sets it provides to would-be graduates. “… when they want to recruit an IS graduate… it depends on what the skill sets (they possess). Because of the advancement in computing and ICT as a whole, it has touched all of the different side disciplines. You have the elements of IT in side management courses as well, and in accounting programs as well but what differentiates it (IS). Learning how to use the web and word processing doesn’t make them an IT expert in IS.”

Professor Shahrin himself admits that even among government agencies there is a misunderstanding on the branches of ICT and what skillsets the graduates of these programs possess. Many anecdotes could be placed here of IT graduates from one field being asked why he couldn’t fulfil a so-called ‘simple task’ which requires a different skillset from a different field of ICT. Professor Shahrin is confident however that with the framework and initial efforts MADICT has put in so far, we are moving forward quite fast. “Results have been shown, quality programs are starting to emerge... we’ll need 5 years to 10 years, (but) the public at large will have a better understanding of what IT is about. What research in IT is about and how they contribute to the country and their daily lives.”
4.9.1.2 Professor Dr Harith Ahmad

I first got to know about Professor Dr Harith Ahmad at the MADICT workshop in Penang. He was extremely active during the Question and Answer sessions which made me believe he is one of the best people to talk to regarding Malaysia’s research situation. A Professor in Physics, within the area of Photonics, he received the Merdeka Award, a national-level award for Outstanding Scholastic Achievement in 2010. He was even featured in a documentary on highlighting outstanding Malaysians. However, I interviewed Professor Harith on 21st April 2009, before all these accolades were bestowed upon him. Another excellent interview as he was extremely vocal and critical on the research situation and what he saw as the challenges for developing research in Malaysia.

I inquired upon the issue of research management and those who administer research in public universities in Malaysia. His opinion was that people who decide on the research in this country have not done research at a very high level. He compares the situation with those in developed countries like the USA, Japan and some European countries where the research administrators are themselves well-established scientists possessing many years of experience. It is this type of research administrators who know the best areas to invest the support for research. He calls many of those administrators in Malaysia as ‘scientific managers’.

One of the things that came out of the MADICT workshop was the issue of research committees. Professor Harith’s opinion on this is that the committee structure selection is mainly done by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI). He describes the process roughly, “They (the ministry) will ask names from the universities. (And) University administration will suggest names of those academics who hold administration posts. And those who hold administration post may not be good researchers. When these people are proposed and sit in the committee, they won’t understand the problem associated with the research. You need people who have done research many years, who understand the problems, so they can provide an important improvement. They can help suggest new ways of doing research and how to increase productivity.”

Professor Harith’s criticism is quite valid, although a more diplomatic tact to the issue would be that many universities reward academics with administrative posts (which includes additional financial
allowances). This situation is raised again when I had the chance to speak to ‘pure administrators’ from my university.

Professor Harith disagrees with rewarding academics with administrative posts, especially those who are still young or fresh from their PhDs. Upon my explanation on the situation in SSIL where the Dean at the time just returned from his PhD, he commented, “People are very constructive and innovative when they’re young. The most productive years are when people are 25 to 40. Why bog them with administration? The most important thing is to let them lead the research field. Let them be leaders of the research field... You may not see the benefits now. But if you put these young people in admin, they will become administrators full time. They will lose interest in doing research.” His view on this however is also influenced by what I perceive as his actuality in Universiti Malaya. UM being the oldest university in Malaysia has a bigger academic population to allow for this transition.

I also asked Professor Harith on research culture in Malaysia. He states that he has seen the changes that came about, especially during the time of former Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohammad’s administration. He traces the beginning of the research culture in Malaysia around the early 1990s, during the 6th Malaysian Plan. He commented at the time, some academics began to realise that ‘doing research for the sake of doing research wasn’t beneficial.’ My understanding from this statement was that prior to the 1990s, research in academic institutions were not as coordinated and academics were merely doing research for their CV. Issues of applicability of their research did not emerge until Dr Mahathir laid out the plans for transforming Malaysia into a developed nation by the year 2020.

With the government now encouraging academic research with commercial opportunities, Professor Harith commented that “Research now must come out with some sort of output. Most research universities have come out with a form of measurement of your performance known as Key Performance Indicators (KPI). I think that is very important to gauge a person’s performance to show that they are working when they are there (doing research). It’s a good move even though there are those not happy about the KPI. But the KPI provides a very good way to measure young people who are excellent. When they do well, get a high KPI, (it shows) they’ve performed and they can become professor at a young age. I’m a strong supporter of KPI, you can differentiate those
who work and those who hang around with their ‘masters’. It’s not a very good culture, at the end of the day, final analysis counts.”

Professor Harith believes that the investment made by the government in research needs to produce something. Professor Harith is also a strong supporter of the government’s promotion of Research Universities (RU). Although he admits the concern among the newly established universities, like UMS, of not attaining the kind of extra support that these RUs are provided. Professor Harith believes RUs can spur new universities on by encouraging them to attain this status from the government. He said, “When you have this target, every university wants to become a RU. Why? Because they get extra funding of RM100 million more a year.” He then relates how RUs encourage academic research by providing financial incentives for researchers. However he strongly believes these incentives should be introduced in other universities.

On ICT research, Professor Harith was quite critical and also hopeful of the current situation. “ICT research is not going as expected. The best way to compare research in different areas is to look at paper publications. That’s the best indicator. No other ways to measure. People can talk a lot of things, but if you want to know if it’s very good research you must provide some measurement. So looking at ICT the activity is not as welcoming as other areas. It could be they don’t have enough people. Or if they have enough people, they are too young. So they’ll take a longer period of time to achieve a certain level. I think and hope that in the next 10 years ICT will be a more dominant and important area. Especially in scientific development, services... ICT is the backbone.”

Coming from an award-winning academic, his statement needs to be taken into consideration by those in the field of ICT and IS in Malaysia. Being a Professor in photonics and being involved with the country’s R&D on fibre optics, Professor Harith’s work relies on ICT academics to produce something meaningful from the infrastructure he has helped develop in the country.

One of the things I experienced when I visited UM was how the environment feels so different to my campus in Labuan. The obvious difference is the age, as UMS only began operations in 1994 and my campus in 1999, whereas UM has officially been in existence since 1949. I asked Professor Harith, what makes UM special? His answer was, “In older universities you find people with very strong opinions. You have that culture that was set in the early days. Although we have to conform
to some government regulations and initiatives, but we should not be impotent. To me a university should have people of various backgrounds and characters. That makes university life interesting, it’s different from civil service and the private sector. The university is a universal knowledge centre. People of many characters, who wear jeans, wear t-shirts (to work), slippers, shoes, whatever they want to wear to work... so be it! University is a source of diversity. University is a place to harness creativity. Harnessing young minds to be creative. You cannot get creativity from people of common ideology, common thought. You cannot have that. You must have people from various backgrounds, different ideas, out-of-the-box thinking.”

Looking at SSIL specifically, I believe among the academic staff there are the unique individuals who will develop as the kinds of diverse academics to lead our academic culture one day. However, I think this our own growing process and it will take time.

One of the issues that I wanted to learn from Professor Harith was the perception of academic freedom among Malaysian academics. From some literature I reviewed, there have been mixed signs on the issue. Professor Harith was unapologetic for the need for academic freedom. He stated, “We have to give total freedom to the academics. You have no choice. The government talks so much about innovation, it’s on the lips of every minister. Innovation, creativity. But if you control people, prevent them from creative thinking, you’ll never get innovation. Innovation and creative thinking comes from total freedom. Even in Islam. If you look at the history of Islam’s scientific community, we have people like Ibn Sinna. We are proud and talk very highly of the Islamic scientific community then. Why don’t they look back into history and look in the era. These people had total freedom and do whatever they want. That’s how they are creative. When you start to put controls and blockers, people cannot be creative.”

I interpret Professor Harith’s viewpoint as coming from a university that is rich in its history of maverick academics. Scholars like Professor Syed Hussein Al-Atas and Kassim Ahmad have developed a specific culture in UM that is unique when compared to other universities. At UM, these academics are accepted whereas in other universities they may be labelled as ‘radicals’.
4.9.1.3 Professor Dr Mokhtar Mohd Yusof

There were a number of reasons why I chose to interview Professor Dr Mokhtar Mohd Yusof. The main reason was that Professor Mokhtar is a Professor of Information Systems attached to Universiti Teknikal Malaysia (UTeM) while also being the Chief Information Officer (CIO) at the Ministry of Health in Malaysia. He represents a Malaysian academic who is also involved in the practical implementation of IS in a Malaysian government ministry. I wanted to gain an insight on how an IS academic could bring the theoretical aspects of IS within the practice within a government agency. I came upon his book, Information Systems and Executives’ Role (2005) which focused not only on the technical aspects of IS implementation but also social phenomena as an important element for studying an organisation’s situation. It came to no surprise however, when I learned afterwards Professor Mokhtar is a former PhD under Professor Trevor Wood-Harper.

I interviewed Professor Mokhtar in his office at the Ministry of Health on the 21st of April 2009, just a few hours after interviewing Professor Harith Ahmad. I asked him about his experience in bringing in aspects of the social phenomena as an academic and in government. He states that in Malaysian terms of government process, the perception of IS implementation is still technical. He described that it started with the early days when IS was just the automation of processes and IT as the solution to solve problems that come in volume. The idea of reducing manpower and speeding up processes were the core motivation of IS in the early days, where manual process are translated into IT process. This has since moved onto Business Process Reengineering. However, this has also met with some resistance due to some territorial issues among certain government agencies. Slowly this is changing as well, with the Chief Secretary to the Government of Malaysia (head of Malaysia’s civil service), Tan Sri Sidek Hassan, encouraging the development of on-line e-government systems. However, Professor Mokhtar still believes this is an on-going process due to cultural issues influencing the situation.

When I queried him further regarding the cultural issues and how it has affected his attempts to bring methods such as SSM into Malaysian IS implementation, he explained that, “In IT, people are used to structured methodologies. This idea of having methodologies that mix, soft and hard systems, is not that popular here. In fact in Malaysia, the champions of these methods in universities are very few.”
He put himself as an example of someone who has tried to promote SSM, but in order to apply it within a Malaysian organisation takes time. Hence, how he goes around this by placing SSM in the framework of IS implementation and is not announced or declared outright. He added, “I think the problem is a problem of levels. Soft systems at the higher level is very much soft. But when you bring it down to models and tools, it becomes ‘hard’. If you have to use tools, tools must have indicators, otherwise you wouldn’t know if the tools were effective or not. That’s what people can consider as ‘hard’. You can’t change people overnight. You can encourage them through discussion, as for their opinions and the way they understand it, you have to tolerate it. You can’t simply change the way people do things. That’s why here we put up this change management approach. We try to buy in their trust first before we can promote this idea. The other challenge is the IT staff. It seems very difficult to convince them to use these methodologies because of their background, being trained in technical IT. That’s another challenge. If you can’t change the people in your own backyard, how do you change the users? Unless it becomes a national agenda, but there’s only a few of use pushing for this idea (soft IS). Now, the change agents are the researchers, the PhD students, those who read my books, these are the ones promoting the ideas.”

His statements in many ways support my perception that Malaysian IS is very much hard systems oriented, where structured methods for developing information systems have become the norm in my country. Professor Mokhtar’s method is to slowly build support for soft systems and putting it in place where he can.

The topic of whether there is a strong link between IS theory and practice was put forth to Professor Mokhtar. He answered by highlighting the different aims of the two philosophies of quantitative and qualitative research. “What is missing, the difference between qualitative and quantitative for me is the process. When you do research because you want to appreciate the process, that is qualitative. For quantitative, they will always do research to get result. For qualitative, the result is not that important. The process is more important because that is how you learn things. But this is absent (in Malaysia).”

With the perception that quantitative research dominates Malaysian IS academia, this result-oriented thinking may be related to the focus on research output and research impact. Professor Mokhtar gave the example of his university (UTeM), “To them, when you do a PhD they want a
product. If you don’t have a product, you don’t qualify for your Masters/PhD. But I come in, and say, okay you have to come up with a product, but I’m looking at the process. Make sure you understand the process and learn something from it. That’s how I contribute from promoting these soft systems approaches and philosophy.”

On the issue of whether IS is fully understood in Malaysia, specifically in terms of our research which may not necessarily lead to product-based outputs, Professor Mokhtar admits that Malaysian universities understanding on IS may not have reached that level of maturity. This could be due to the idea of ICT research producing tangible output. Professor Mokhtar explains that his main concern is in promoting the philosophy of using soft approaches by promoting the idea of recognising the process among his PhD students and those in his organisation. He also hopes for a growing community and publications in Malaysian IS to promote soft systems. My view is that Professor Mokhtar believes in bringing about change gradually over time. This could be one of the qualities attributed to Malay culture, that of instigating change diplomatically like a ‘soft emancipator’.

One question I put forth to Professor Mokhtar was regarding the difference of being in academia and being the CIO of a government ministry. He surprised me when he stated that being an academic provided him with more freedom to express himself, whereas a government ministry has many political implications that need to be considered when addressing something. In the end, Professor Mokhtar impressed me immensely at his ability to adapt to the surroundings of a government ministry. His approach to instigating the changes through more diplomatic means requires a contextual understanding of the environment he and many other Malaysian academics are in. And it does prove that in many ways, many Malaysian academics are contributing to the changes within the country itself.

4.9.1.4 Professor Dr Marohaini Yusoff
Professor Marohaini is a Professor at Universiti Malaya’s School of Education and was the Chairman of the Malaysian Qualitative Research Association between 2002 to 2008. I had the pleasure of getting feedback from her on numerous occasions. The first interview I did with her was on 11th February 2009 in preparation for the Research Methodology Workshop. During the workshop, she was also involved in two panel discussion forums.
On the issue of Research Universities, Professor Marohaini felt MOHE's classification Research Universities are good. She adds that universities that didn’t attain RU status, they can still do research although RUs will have an advantage in terms of the extra funding provided by the government. One thing she notes is that this categorisation of the universities enables choice for academics, whether they prefer to join a university more focused on research, or prefer to teach more.

On the subject of qualitative research, she notes that qualitative research cannot be too specific. I was a bit lost at first with this statement, but after her presentation in the workshop and her input during the forums I feel that she is relating to qualitative research's perceived 'minor and specific contributions'. One issue that may influence her opinion is the generalisability of qualitative research. In Malaysia, research that are generalisable and provides statistics seem to dominate the academic landscape. She adds that in qualitative research, the researcher is the most important research instrument. Thus, an emphasis on interpretive research may require further promotion among academics in Malaysia. Professor Marohaini states that, “Qualitative research is about people and learning about people.” Learning about people may include a certain amount of risk. Professor Marohaini laments that Malaysian are biased towards logical positivist research because we don’t like risk.

Her thoughts on Malaysian research culture is that it exists but it isn’t collective and obvious. She believes that most researchers are doing research for themselves. She states, “We only try to ‘fit in’ with others for research grants but most researchers live in their own world. Many do not realise how doing research can contribute to the academic community. When they publish, it’s merely for the sake of publishing.” These comments supports some of the comments from the MADICT workshop that Malaysian academics still struggle with research collaboration.

She also added that to create a research culture, university administration must be supportive. This could be interpreted to include financial support and also the general sense of the university's higher ups supporting academic activities. Through my experience with my university's administration, there has been good support for the organisation of the research methodology workshop. Funding was provided and the administration appeared to be totally behind our efforts.
In my interview, she commented on a situation affecting academics in the field of social science where there is a push for research in the field of science and technology. In many ways, this situation places social scientists at a disadvantage. In promotion, academics who publish in journals with science and technology focus seem to have it easier than those who publish in non-S&T journals. This seems to be one of the challenges facing Malaysian IS academics. With many universities rating our publications based on them being published in 'high impact journals', the Malaysian IS academic must choose the right journals to send their papers to and hope that these journals will accept them.

Professor Marohaini made a few comments based on her experience as a Malaysian academic. One of the things she commented on was academic sabbaticals under Malaysian universities. She said that sabbaticals should be made more flexible. She also believes that lecturers should do less teaching and focus more on research. At the same time, she believes academics should be freed up from administrative duties. On the issue of research grants, she still sees the attainment of research grants as being fussy. The evaluation for attaining research grants can be streamlined.

Due to her comments on these situations which I relate to the differences between administration and academics, I asked Professor Marohaini if there is a sense of mistrust from the administrators towards the academics. She answered that it's not just about trusting academics, it is also the qualification of support staff. They should know what they want from a lecturer. A clear list of academic functions regarding teaching, research and other academic-related activities should be made clear from the start. To do this, administration should be qualified in formulating the roles of a lecturer. Her comments represent a Malaysian trait that we have in relying on those at the top to 'tell us what to do'. In many ways, this bottom-up approach has been part of the academic culture. She did hope in the future, this can change. The need for some flexibility is needed in administrating academia. However, those flexibilities should be focused within our own contextual boundaries.

One of the things she was passionate about that I picked up through my interviews and discussions with her is the importance of ethics in academia. Whether it be research ethics or a general ethics in the running of a university, Professor Marohaini ethics is of grave importance. She reiterated,
“Education is a dead serious field. It is the pulse of the nation.” She explains that the ethics of contributing to society is not merely about educating the researcher and academic, but it’s also about educating the community. The community must see the ethical implementation of research, academic teaching and university culture if we are to develop our universities.

4.9.1.5 Associate Professor Dr Esther Daniel

Dr Esther is a colleague of Professor Marohaini from UM’s School of Education who was involved in the SSIL Research Methodology Workshop as a presenter and facilitator. Her contributions during my fieldwork was immense as she partnered Professor Marohaini in the early sessions of the workshop. I had the chance of getting input from her in the panel discussion session held on the 10th of March 2009. This session was held informally after dinner with Professors Wood-Harper, Professor Rose Alias and Professor Marohaini. Dr Esther gave some interesting insight on the situation in Malaysia.

On issues relating to qualitative research in Malaysia. Dr Esther stated that some academics who claim to be using qualitative research methods are not sure themselves on the fundamentals of qualitative research. This has caused these academics to pass incomplete knowledge to their students and the postgraduate researchers under them. Her statement in many ways represent the view that there still needs to be efforts to strengthen research foundations in Malaysian universities. Though, this view still needs careful study, I can make this assumption based on my personal experience as an academic in my school.

Another comment Dr Esther made during the discussion was that quantitative researchers in Malaysia are not receptive to qualitative methods. In fact, they do not want to accept qualitative research. This of course relates to the debates among those representing the two sides. Dr Esther's view also shows one of the numerous challenges for promoting qualitative research in an academic environment that has a quantitative bias.

When our discussion turned to inculcating the culture of knowledge-sharing and research, Dr Esther emphasised the importance of recognising the individual academics' work. From her personal opinion, there is a clear difference between knowledge-sharing and blatant plagiarism and this deals directly to academic ethics. She stated, “First, we have to tell academics, ‘No taking other people’s
work!’ Cite it! Say no to plagiarism! Second, I believe in training. Every 1 or 2 years they (academics) need to be trained on what is academia and what education is all about, to fire them up and motivate them. A lot of academics want to only teach postgrads! How can they teach PhDs if they can’t teach younger students?” This issue seems very close to Dr Esther's heart. There needs to be a distinction between what is shared among academics and what is stolen. In improving research and development, there should be an emphasis on enforcing research ethics. Dr Esther's notion that academics need to be reminder of what is academia, also shows an opinion that feels some academics do not know their role.

Being an educationist, Dr Esther's views shows the concerns of how a lack of academic culture and ethics can ruin the education system in Malaysia. As the government invests huge amounts of money to universities, her hope is that the fundamentals of academic philosophy and ethics will not be sacrificed.

4.9.1.6 Professor Dr Rose Alinda Alias
One of the key people I interviewed during my fieldwork was Professor Dr Rose Alinda Alias. Professor Rose is the Dean of UTM’s Graduate Studies Centre and Professor at the university’s Faculty of Computer Science and Information Systems. Being a former UTM student at the same faculty as Professor Rose, I knew her for years and have been aware of her work. During the fieldwork I had the chance of interviewing Professor Rose twice and included her in one panel discussion. In my opinion, Professor Rose represents one of the best Information Systems academics in Malaysia. Her active participation in Malaysian IS research and her ability to balance it with the rigours of being the Dean of Post Graduate Studies, is extremely impressive.

In my interview with her, I asked about Information System's role in Malaysian academic ICT, particularly MADICT. Professor Rose commented that In MADICT, IS representation is still quite small. This of course affects how IS is perceived among the Malaysian IS and ICT faculties. I believe this is one thing that could be further improved in the coming years. Professor Rose herself admitted that, “IS has a long way to go (in Malaysia).”

Asking about her research, she informed me about her current research on mobile telephone usage in Malaysia. The Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) has provided
RM400 000 (roughly GBP 80 000) for this research, in which she utilises Focus Group method for data collection. RM 400k is a very big amount when it comes to research funding in Malaysia. When we look at the fact that this research is utilising a qualitative research method and the research itself is based on the principles of Information Systems rather than a hard Computer Science project, it is an amazing achievement to gain this level of support.

On qualitative research, she has seen through her own efforts that there are changes going on in Malaysian universities to accept qualitative research. When comparing postgraduate students of 15 years ago with today, the mix of international and Malaysian students has influenced the research landscape. It has greatly had an impact on Malaysian postgraduate students. The level of awareness for research and development has become better. Malaysian postgraduate students are questioning more and no longer satisfied with 'spoon feeding'. And overall, Professor Rose is very happy that UTM which is known to be a 'hard and quantitative' technology-based university has become receptive to new and more open research methods. They have even appointed a qualitative IS professor as the Dean of their Postgraduate Research Centre.

One of the things that Professor Rose believes in when bringing in IS to the forefront of Malaysian research is that the emphasis on hard Computer Science should be balanced by those in IS academia. She commented, “We should have a part that deal with social studies (in ICT).” The current focus on producing research products has affected the way IS academics in Malaysia do research. Some attach themselves to software development research projects. However, Professor Rose believes that IS academics should be fighting for our own rights.

On the question of balancing administrative duties with academic work, Professor Rose believes in fully taking every opportunity she has to push for all the agendas she wants to fulfil. She stated, “If you have a good seed, as long as it’s good it doesn’t matter where you plant it, it will become a good tree. I think it’s irrelevant, if you are good you can do both administration and do research... I remain in administration because I think I can make a difference.”

Professor Rose discusses that even among the academic work, the balance between teaching assignments and research should find a cohesion. She believes that teaching and research should be integrated for academics to thrive. She commented, “This whole debate between teaching vs
research, I believe the two shall meet. Teaching involves a great deal of research. If you call yourself a teacher you need to continuously engage yourself in research. How and what you teach is research.” This comment from her shows a desire from Professor Rose of research and theory being applied in practice by academics themselves. As an IS academic and university administrator she has had first-hand experience of utilising what she learned from research experience into the day-to-day activities in UTM.

Professor Rose also commented on a concern regarding young academics who depend on textbooks and slides to teach. Despite the fact that she indirectly assists some younger academics by producing slides for her courses (which are then sought after by these young academics), she still carries on making the slides for the benefit of the faculty and also to maintain a knowledge management system. She stated, “There was a stage when we tried to implement E-Learning in UTM, no one wanted to share anything! If you have a subject to teach, you produce your own slides. When I was teaching Knowledge Management, I emphasised it’s knowledge, it’s not something that’s static, the slides need to increase in value. Every time you go through the E-Learning system there has to be a different version. But no one wants to start it. It’s dirty work to do slides for new subjects. They expect people with time like me, to produce slides.”

On young lecturers, she was worried about a trend of academics not knowing their role or the what it is to be an academic. She commented, “The type of academics we must inculcate is the ones who take the time, to deliver in the education process.... But it’s voluntary. Even if you impose on them, if their heart is not in it the knowledge transfer will not happen. What I do for my students is my PhD seminar, I open it up to the whole department, even invite lecturers but even the supervisors don’t attend my PhD seminar! I’ve gotten to the point, it’s their loss. I use my students as agents, transfer the knowledge to your supervisors. And this works.” But one question remains is how do we further educate and improve those who are responsible for education?

On the subject of research universities, Professor Rose's view is that research should not be viewed as something exclusive for those universities given the RU status. All universities in Malaysia should be encouraged to pursue research and development. This will enable the democratising of what research is. This is where she believes academic influence in university administration is important. If the view from the government is for certain universities to focus more on research,
then we academics with the influence should be the ones who should be changing the situation. In
utilising the position some academics have to influence matters, Professor Rose gave me the
example of the Vice Chancellor of UTM, Professor Zaini Ujang. Professor Zaini loves to use slides
and presentations in his speeches, to emphasise his ideas to the staff and students in UTM. Professor
Zaini also writes regularly in one of the national dailies on his ideas about Malaysian higher
education and have compiled his writings in a book which I reference in my literature review.

Talking to Professor Rose is always a great experience as she is an extremely enthusiastic
individual who places a great importance in empowering ourselves for making change happen. I
have been in constant contact with Professor Rose through Facebook and her posts on IS research
and academic issues have always been useful. It is people like Professor Rose that IS academia in
Malaysia need more of. Those who know how to utilise the full opportunities that are in front of us
to push IS research forward. In many ways, academics like Professor Rose show that efforts are
under way in Malaysia for IS research to gain more prominence. I personally hope that I could be
able to follow Professor Rose's footsteps and contribute to the field as well.

4.9.1.7 Professor Dr Sazaly Abu Bakar

Professor Dr Sazaly Abu Bakar is a professor at UM’s Department of Medicine and is an expert in
contagious diseases. Malaysia being a tropical country, we face annual epidemics of diseases such
as dengue fever which Professor Sazaly specialises in. I was actually encouraged to interview
Professor Sazaly by Professor Harith Ahmad. Professor Harith informed me that if I want to learn
about research in Malaysia, I should talk to Professor Sazaly.

When I went to see Professor Sazaly for the interview, I was expecting a normal exchange of
questions and answers. Instead interviewing Professor Sazaly became a very interesting experience
of reflecting upon my research based on what I perceive to be the glasses of a Malaysian academic
researcher.

Before I had the chance to ask Professor Sazaly the first question, he inquired how I have shaped
my research assumptions. I explained to him my subjective views and also my stance that my
organisation seems to require improvement in our research since I perceive our research to be of
'low impact'. He asked me to provide quantifiable proof to support my assumptions on the research
in SSIL. Since at the time, I did not have the numbers to back up my assumptions, Professor Sazaly proposed that I attempt to utilise some form of quantifiable measurement to support my claims. He asked, “For you to make the statement that your colleagues are doing research without strong impact, that’s a very strong statement. Have you got data to back it up? When you calculate impact, is there a quantitative measure to calculate the impact?”

He added, “You’re making your colleagues very upset by saying they’re research has no impact. You sound like a politician by saying that.” His comment on the political slant of my views is one of the defining moments in the research. Throughout the research, there were times when I questioned if what I was doing really bringing about real change to the organisation or is it just for my personal self gratification?

From Professor Sazaly's view, I needed more quantitative means of supporting my claims that the research being done in SSIL is not up to par. His assessment that any statement without the numbers to back it up is a 'broad statement'. I tried to argue that my methodological view is qualitative, thus contains a level of subjectivity. But he countered by saying, “As a research and academic, you can’t do that. Everything must be based on facts. Because academics cannot take any sides in any discussion.” I could see from this statement that Professor Sazaly doesn't particularly believe in an interpretivist approach to research. In fact, he even claims that my attempt to extract his views on the research situation in Malaysia could be considered 'mere chit-chat'.

Overall, Professor Sazaly attempted to test my grasp on research methods and pointed out the need for a quantitative approach in supporting my assumptions. His views and our discussion represents what I consider to be a quantitative bias among Malaysian academics. Academics like Professor Sazaly still rely on numbers and statistical evidence to support their research findings, which is understandable as Professor Sazaly is from a medical school. I the end, interviewing, or rather, being grilled by Professor Sazaly was a good experience in the research as it exposed me to that quantitative viewpoint. It also made me consider about how to justify my assumptions and findings from the research.
Professor Dr Wan Ahmad Tajuddin Bin Wan Abdullah

Professor Wan Ahmad Tajuddin Bin Wan Abdullah is a Professor at UM’s Department of Physics specialising in Particle Physics, Neural Networks and Complex Systems, just to name a few. He has won numerous scientific awards in Malaysia including the National Young Scientist Award in 1995. Professor Wan Ahmad Tajuddin is also an avid poet who published a collection of his poems *Lawatan Lain* (A Different Visit) in 1995. My interview with him was very interesting and probably one of the most enjoyable interviews during the fieldwork.

Professor WAT, has a very interesting perspective on how to manage universities and its research. A physicist, he links how the physical world works and the ‘laws’ that govern it and that these laws can be translated to govern human behaviour. He agrees that Malaysian academic administration is very procedural, however he also relates the 'randomness' of human behaviour with the random movement of molecular particles.

I found out during the interview that Professor Wan Ahmad Tajuddin was just appointed into a committee overseeing the reduction of bureaucracy at Universiti Malaya by the Vice Chancellor. He was thinking of developing a system which could define the work in an organisation and utilise a compiler to turn the defined work into an information system! Knowing that I was an IS academic, he even asked, “What are the generic functions that I need for the academic administration system?” I tried to explain the complexities from my viewpoint of just producing the generic functions itself, but he queried whether this situation could be solved if we moved to a higher level language to understand academic administration.

I totally enjoyed my discussion with Professor Wan Ahmad Tajuddin as it represented a debate between someone who believes in human complexity as an interpretive social science and someone else that believes this complexity is a natural scientific phenomena. When I argued that policies and regulations can be made more flexible and based on the individual evaluators’ interpretation he countered that it means we need solid rules and regulations that can be defined similarly by everyone. Professor Wan Ahmad Tajuddin describes organisations as messages passing from one person to another person. Thus organisations can be 'controlled' through processes and technology. I questioned if this will make things too rigid, he answered that this would not necessarily be the case. We can make the policies less rigid.
When selecting the best people for administration, Professor Wan Ahmad Tajuddin suggested, “With humans, you think they’re so complex that you need very high orders. How do you make the choice for the ‘best people’ in organisation that can make the best decisions? It’s an optimisation, combinatory organisational process. This could be done with rules. Choosing the right people can be based on combinatory optimisation. I’ve proven that satisfying rules is like a combinatory optimisation process. These are your rules which will influence your choice. We do this everyday, this is what our brain does.” However he did contend that there are examples of how one makes certain choices in university administration is not in the process but more in the humans making the choices itself.

When I asked regarding the academic culture in Malaysia, Professor Wan Ahmad Tajuddin reminisced on his time studying in London, “Maybe my perception is biased, and I was younger then... but when you walk in the halls of a foreign university like Imperial College for example, there was an ‘air of knowledge’. The culture is different, even when their ‘tiddlywinking’.” I then asked him to describe his views on related issues regarding academic culture in Malaysia.

On academic freedom, Professor Wan Ahmad Tajuddin put forth the question, “When you talk about academic freedom, what is academics? Do we have any academic activities at all?” Professor Wan Ahmad Tajuddin believes that other than the issue of academic freedom, the more pressing problem is we Malaysian academics are not doing anything 'academic' at all. I then conveyed the notion that Malaysian lecturers are more focused on teaching to prepare our country's human resource, in which he replied, “The excuse of having to teach our students as a social obligation is always used for academic to ‘serve the government’. Part of the definition of an academic endeavour is that it should be free.” I interpret his answer to mean that the academics themselves should not use this as an excuse to fight for our right in doing what we should be doing in universities, which is to be involved in intellectual pursuits. He emphasised this by stating, “Research is part of teaching and the propagation of knowledge. This should be the responsibility of the university. So, if you’re not doing this (research), then you are truly being treacherous!”

When I inquired upon Malaysia's research focus on products that have commercial potential, Professor Wan Ahmad Tajuddin had some very strong opinions on the matter. He stated, “When
research is defined by commercial needs, this is the worst thing. Even worse than research being defined by political forces. And this is what's happening to the world! It’s so much controlled by money and commercialisation. Academic freedom has been curbed by these kinds of influences rather than political. And this is also happening in the UK. The people in charge of research funding have been replaced by industrialists."

Reading this statement from Professor Wan Ahmad Tajuddin and looking at the university landscape in the United Kingdom and Malaysia today I am seeing one of the similarities that academic in both countries are facing. My belief is that the emphasis for producing research that can provide commercial opportunities, although useful for universities in attaining funds to support its activities, should not be the main aim of academic research. I can accept that research activities require funding and one way to attain is to go the commercial route. I also contend that in today's climate, university-industrial partnerships are important to maintain a healthy cooperation between these parties. However, the philosophy and foundations of a university should never be forgotten. Once the university becomes lead by commercial and industrial interests, then we have lost touch with the intellectual traditions of academia.

4.9.1.9 Professor Dr Ir Zainal Aripin Bin Zakariah

I was recommended to talk to Professor Zainal Aripin Zakariah by Professor Harith during my interview with him at UM. Professor Zainal Aripin was attached to UTeM’s Faculty of Technology Management and Technopreneurship at the time of the fieldwork. I did not know much about Professor Zainal before this. What I found was an academic who represents the 'old school' approach to academic research in Malaysia.

We started our interview by discussing Professor Zainal's experience in academia and industry. I found Professor Zainal as a unique academic in Malaysia, who operates his own business, and has had years of experience working in industry, government-linked companies, running his own business and also academia. Professor Zainal told me that he first started in industry at United Motorworks before joining academia. After a few years at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, he got bored and took a leave of absence. He joined the Malaysian national telecommunications body Telekom (Malaysia’s equivalent to BT) and joined the R&D division. He believes his greatest
achievement at Telekom was to increase the funding for the research division from RM 4 million a year to RM 100 million a year by the time he left.

Listening to Professor Zainal explain his story, it showed that during his time academics like himself were more independent in their approach to doing research and collaborating with industry. He could have stayed at UTM and received a nice pay packet, teaching and doing a little research on the side, but he chose to enter industry and test the applicability of his academic theories in industry. His opinion is that Malaysian universities are full of quality researchers who are nearly on par with those in developed nations, however the policies put in place in universities hinder their involvement with industry.

He explains, “In most technologies we are at par with them. However, in IT, advanced engineering, advanced sciences we may be 1 or 2 years behind but the rest we are at par. The problem is we don’t capitalise on this. Our strength in manpower, equipment, our exposure in terms of exposing our academics, allowing them to be in and out of the country, we do not capitalise on that. I would say it is the policy, problem with university policy. And it boils down to politics. Our politicians make policy, but the policies must be based on advised by the learned people. If we can bring all these things together, we can challenge the developed countries.” The Malaysian government's efforts in bridging this gap include overseeing Memorandums of Understanding between individual public universities and industrial corporations.

Professor Zainal added that he has never had any problems with getting politicians to support his efforts, as long as the information is presented well and effort is put in to convince them. His view is that politicians and the government in general can be persuaded as long as academics can convince them the value of their efforts. At the same time, we could see the government has its own initiatives to bring upon improvements in university research and innovation. However, Professor Zainal also agreed with some of my perception that the government may be doing too much for the academics themselves that it provides a comfort zone which can influence their research efforts.

On university-industry collaboration, I asked Professor Zainal if he felt there was a genuine understanding between them on academic research-related issues. His answer was, “There is, but it’s a very poor understanding between industry and academia. The reason is, academia in
Malaysia consists of those who start off as academics and retire as academics. How many of them really take the trouble of exposing themselves? Today exposure is not enough. To get involved in industry, they should be switching between academics and industry. At certain times there should be real efforts made to industrialise the academics. In other words, the academics should take a break to go and work in industry full-time. There should be effort by the government to encourage those in industry to get involved in academics. Take a break from industry for 1 or 2 years, work in academics, perhaps earn their (post graduate) degrees. Another approach that is missing, is engaging those in industry to join academics after retirement. There are enough industry people who actually want to go to academics. So we have two sides. One is purely academic people, and the other is industry people. And they tend to blame each other. And they think they can work together but they do not really understand.”

Due to the limitations of my PhD's research area, I felt that this topic would be an interesting issue to study for the future. However, Professor Zainal's comment does represent a concern of many misunderstandings between Malaysian universities and its stakeholders.

My conversation with Professor Zainal continued to my perceived reliance upon administration among the current generation of Malaysian academics and what made those from his generation different compared to academics today. This is where the 'old school' mentality started to emerge. Professor Zainal explained, “Our registrars were not open, but we forced them. (We also) negotiate with them. If we didn’t get it, we go to the VC. If they still didn’t understand, we made them understand... During my time, we go out and negotiate (with university administration and industry). I want to learn, so by placing ourselves (in industry) there is something to gain. The moment there are some gains that is when we negotiate for some benefits. Like for example, first you enter (industry) and they say ‘I’m sorry, we cannot provide any allocation, we are competing (lacking of funds) but we can offer accommodation (and transportation). Don’t worry about mileage. Any place you want to go, we’ll provide with transportation.’ And our academic salary is still being paid out. They try and give you something (other than financial benefits). Some private companies they are careful (but will look after you), provided they see what is your contribution. If you have good contributions, then they will pay you. So we go out each year, we discuss with these people what are the benefits that we can gain and how they benefit from us and then whatever reward can gain later. But we need to secure (some support) from the universities, like treating as
going for an official job (outstation), where you can claim mileage and other allowances. So, one part is already solved, any extras become a bonus! Why people do not want to do this anymore, I do not understand…”

I also asked Professor Zainal on the issue of research management in universities, and whether these administration posts should be given to more specialised or senior people? He replied, “To be head of research, you are managing not only the field that you know. There are still many fields that you do not know. For example, the human aspect of researchers. I’m trained as an engineer, I’m not a sociologist. To understand human beings, I need to study sociology... It’s okay for me to manage the engineering parts, but not the sociology part. And what about the rules and regulations? If you’re not in the organisation for long, how would you know all (the policies)? Inexperience is an issue. If someone is inexperienced, no wonder they fail. These things must be given careful thought by universities. Which is why networking is important (to get services from senior academics). My school doesn’t currently have a dean. Deanship is only for two years, manage it, then pass it on to someone else. Nowadays, dean appointment is regarded as something we deserve. That shouldn’t be the case. I was the dean previously, but when I finished, I found more time on my hands. I became more creative and I used the time to set up my company.” His advice on this is very important as I try to find a good balance for suggesting how my school can improve the management of our research activities.

4.9.1.10 Professor Dr Trevor Wood-Harper
I have added my supervisor Professor Trevor Wood-Harper as one of the academics I interviewed due to his contributions in the research itself. Throughout the PhD, him being invited to headline ISQualRes'08 and being a part of the SSIL Workshop made him a participant of my research as well. His views on the situation became very important as it represents someone not from Malaysia and possessing a different actuality. In the end however, I also noticed Professor Wood-Harper starting to comprehend some of the Malaysian contexts and actuality. His experience and viewpoints have always been very beneficial throughout my PhD. Our supervisory meeting sessions are always lively and we have shared and debated on many ideas. During the fieldwork, Professor Wood-Harper was involved in two panel discussions. Below are the interesting points we touched on during those discussions.
Professor Wood-Harper is a believer in providing the fundamentals of research through allowing the students to learn on their own, through discussions and presentations among the students with the guidance of the supervisor. The Doctoral School he organised during our time at the School of Informatics, and bi-weekly discussions among his PhDs were good examples of this. From his experience, Professor Wood-Harper suggested that research methods should be taught even from undergraduate level. However, he did comment on the way teaching is done in Malaysia where he sees even at Masters level is very text book-based. He believed that research fundamentals should be done differently than normal courses and be text book-based. A course on research fundamentals should reference to journal articles and other academic writings. This would allow the research students to explore literature and see how the fundamentals are applied in practice.

He related this to his Doctoral School and student presentations, where most of the learning comes from the students discussions themselves. He stated, “When you learn from other people, not just from the Professor (but) as a group. It’s actually the learning from each other. (Even) I learn as well. The Doctoral School allows the students argue among each other, let different perspectives and views to allow this learning.” Professor Wood-Harper also stressed the importance of spreading research philosophy, “(In MBS) There are research process courses. Within the first week, the first course was Epistemology. Most students didn’t like it. but in time, it became useful. Experience with individual students were fascinating. In the end, (philosophical) foundations are important.”

Another matter Professor Wood-Harper addressed was the need for publications among academics and this can only be done if academics are freed from other activities to concentrate on research. He stated, “You (academics) need to know the changes, you need to publish. Need to be given chance to do research. Then you can become expert of not only the field but also of techniques within the field. Why do you let Professors do a lot of administration? When you do research you not only possess the knowledge but also learn to be critical of the knowledge. And it requires on-going research. (I've seen) when you become a Professor here, you stop doing research.”

This appeared to be one of the viewpoints Professor Wood-Harper conveyed as a non-Malaysian. He could not comprehend how Professors and senior academics can be burdened with administrative duties and still be expected to do research. When this issue was then addressed by Professor Rose in her explanation that Malaysian academics may not have that choice of choosing
between administration and academics, Professor Wood-Harper expressed an amazement at how some academics here could balance between these two. He continued, “What it is about you, Rose? Everything you do, you do incredibly well but the work rate that you put in, maybe other people can’t do it. But when you recruit for university, it isn’t just teaching, they need to have the research background.” His concern is that if Malaysian universities do not move away from piling on administrative duties to academics, then this will hinder our efforts to develop the research here.

When I asked about his personal hopes for Malaysian research, Professor Wood-Harper's experience and personal attachment in Malaysia showed. He stated, “I’m quite hopeful. The major thing is motivation. The position I’m in now is encouragement (is important) and it works. You acknowledge (research work) and broadcast it. When you have very able people, you encourage them, but when they’re not, learn why they’re not getting this. (Research development in) Malaysia can work. But in research culture, you need to have seminars, need to bring people in and (you need to) get PhD rates up.”

4.9.2 Second Group: Administrators at UMS and SSIL
I have selected a number of administrators from my university and SSIL, and one from Universiti Malaya to discuss their views on research in the university. Among the administrators I talked to, only two were what you could call ‘pure administrators’, namely those who did not come from academic backgrounds. The rest were academics and are also involved in teaching and research in the university.

Below is the list of university administrators I interviewed:
- Professor Dr Rosnah Ismail, Deputy Vice Chancellor of Research and Innovation at UMS.
- Mr Abdullah Mohd Said, Registrar of UMS.
- Professor Dr Johari Surin and Mr Amirul Aizad from Universiti Malaya’s Institute of Research Management and Monitoring (Institut Pengurusan Penyelidikan dan Perundingan, IPPP)
- Professor Dr Syed Azizi Wafa Bin Syed Khalid Wafa, Director of UMS- Labuan International Campus (from 2007 to 2009)
- Mr Muzaffar Hamzah, Dean of SSIL (from 2007 until December 2008)
- Dr Awang Asri Awang Ibrahim, Dean of SSIL (from January 2009 until now)
Ms. Suaini Sura, Deputy Dean of Academics at SSIL
Mr Jetol Bolongkikit, Deputy Dean of Research and Innovation at SSIL (until March 2009)
Mr Mohd Yuszren Yushak, Deputy Dean of Research and Innovations (from March 2009)
Ms Nurhanizah Adnan, Assistant Registrar at SSIL.

4.9.2.1 Professor Dr Rosnah Ismail

Being the Deputy Vice Chancellor of Research and Innovation at UMS, she was one of my main targets to be interviewed. I interviewed her in her office on the 28th of April 2009. She officiated the Qualitative Research Methodology Workshop held in SSIL. She also holds the honour of being UMS’ first PhD graduate. A psychologist by training she is teaches at UMS’ School of Psychology and Social Work.

When I first asked about research activities in UMS, Professor Rosnah pointed out that the one of the main focus of doing research in UMS now is to produce products that can have commercial potential. She gave some examples and told me about UMS' policies on commercialisation and Intellectual Property which were shaped to encourage these kinds of research. The commercialisation of research is even placed as a Key Performance Indicator for the university.

UMS is still a young university and research can be developed further. Earlier on, there is a lack of research culture but since 2009, she’s seen a lot of changes and things are looking up. Since she has been at UMS for a long time, her opinion that there is growing research culture in the university is very reassuring.

Bureaucracy is an issue and understands this. She contends that giving administrative posts to academics can be difficult, but at her level she has already managed to designate a lot of the research work to those under her. This sharing of research workload could be seen as a way to train the younger researchers in doing research as well. She hoped that we could allow young returning academics to do research but again, we are limited in our capacity and have to appoint them to administration post. Suggests better time management by young academics who are placed in administration posts, utilise research groups and distribute research work among younger lecturers by guiding and leading them. Even she herself admitted she didn’t want to be the Deputy VC but had to accept it due to her seniority.
4.9.2.2 Mr Abdullah Mohd Said

Mr Abdullah Mohd Said is the Registrar of UMS. He is one of the ‘pure administrators’ I have mentioned earlier. From my interview with him, I sensed his viewpoint comes from a bureaucratic background, where he addressed many of my questions by explaining the individual functions and branches of the Registrar’s office. I feel this is not a negative thing in itself. The bureaucratic system that we have in UMS are there due to our position as a government-sponsored public university. Thus, Mr Abdullah’s reaction to answer my questions is to layout the functions of the Registrar in order to explain its role within the administration of the university.

The Registrar acts as the secretary of the board of the university, safe keeping of the university records and the administrative arm of the university. Human resource, service matters, training and even security (some aspects) are also under the jurisdiction of the registrar’s office.

Registrar may not be involved in research management but we can assist in providing training to staff whether academic or not. For example, the support given to SSIL workshop. The registrar’s role in attaining Research University status for UMS is mostly from human resource aspect. Bringing in academics with research experience and providing scholarships for those to do PhD.

Admittedly, we are short on staff so we have to appoint returning PhDs to administrative posts first. Mr Abdullah understands the struggle, but for those willing to take up the posts there are financial benefits. Hopes that one day once more academics come in this situation can change.

Overall, my interview with Mr Abdullah was extremely enlightening. As academics, we can sometimes get stuck in our actuality of trying to get support for our research activities that we forget that administration also have their own actuality and that they do try their best in providing the support for our research. I learned from talking to Mr. Abdullah that the university administration do want to see research activities flourish in UMS, however their perspective is still based on what has been provided by the government policies which they have to follow.
On how he viewed the research activities at UMS-KAL Professor Syed Azizi said, “As an academic, I feel research is still lacking. From a rating, I believe it’s on the low side for this campus... This is not the fault of the lecturers. The lecturers are young, only 5 PhDs out of 70+ academic staff. This is too low a figure. Those without PhDs are not trained in research. In spirit young lecturers have an abundance of interest to do research but with no guidance from senior professors, it becomes difficult for the young lecturers. What I’ve seen in output of the lecturers is lacking in methodology and their niche areas, they’re still confused. But I don’t blame themselves, even the Deans are still junior academics. It’s like the blind leading the blind. I’ve tried bringing senior people here, it’s a slow and difficult process to get people to move to Labuan. The distance to Kuala Lumpur and other major areas in Malaysia is one of the reasons. The service and incentives to come to Labuan is not enough to entice them to come and move here. There are loads of opportunities in Kuala Lumpur. You’re isolated in Labuan as an academic. Something needs to be done by the government in the remuneration package to get people to move here. I think some of our academics will move away once they get their PhDs.”

His honest and blunt view on the research situation highlighted his perceived weaknesses of being in the environment of UMS-KAL.

From one perspective, he stated that the academics are mobile and free. If they want to do research, to Kuala Lumpur for research or conferences, they have the freedom. But the expenses part is the limitation. Universities won’t cover their expenses. The other perspective of mobility is lecturers moving from one university to another. There’s a gentlemen’s agreement between Malaysian public universities of not pinching another university's staff. The whole system would go haywire if we allow this mass movement of academics, if academics prefer going back to their hometown. I can sense this trend. If each state has their own university with multi-disciplines, there’s a tendency to
appoint the top people only from the state, the ‘logical’ conclusion is that academics will move to universities in their home states due to opportunities for promotion.

Professor Syed Azizi stated that UMS-KAL welcomes visiting professors, but nobody has yet to arrive. Offers have been sent to many professors, but from their perspectives they have other things more important. Maybe we haven’t marketed it well. One of the things we can look at is some lecturers would move if there’s on-going research, we don’t have any on-going research that can entice academics here. If they come here their research may not develop. But the system is there although the bureaucracy might be discouraging for some of us.

Professor Syed Azizi believes some of the problems is a result of a combination of our staff not understanding their roles and not having ‘the best’ staff. We’re a young university and still learning. The learning curve is ‘not there’ yet. there’s no support to the academics and some people do not care about what’s happening. Due to the staff's perceived inexperience they don’t have an image of what they should do and what the end result should be.

Professor Syed Azizi did mention the environment of Labuan island as a factor towards research, “The environment in Labuan that is conducive for research is that it’s quiet with little disturbance. Apart from that, we have the International Offshore Financial Centre. This can bring us academics who are into offshore finances. Also, the oil and gas industry. For others, IT for example it’s not conducive. There are no big companies here. Look at the infrastructure in Labuan. The government’s strategy is the leap frog strategy (the build and they will come strategy). It works in certain ways but it takes time and the cost is great... Like UTM, placed in Skudai which had nothing previously. After 30 years, now we can see the developments. But the academics, students and staff had to go through a lot in 30 years. That is the hurdle for universities to be successful. Lecturers, academics, vice chancellors face these daily routine problems that need to be overcome which are unnecessary. They should focus on building the universities to greatness but they have to take care of problems with infrastructure. That’s not the academic’s job! The objective should be to develop a world-class university, not the area’s infrastructure. The objective has gone astray. To build a university, it needs to be built in an area with the right infrastructure and supporting industries. Once built, they can straight away focus on the core-area.”
About Malaysian universities not being listed in the top 200 universities list, Professor Syed Azizi said, “Nobody’s to blame. What went wrong was we ourselves wanted to be listed. We shouldn’t be involved in the list! Our universities are not built to compete with the world’s best, it’s built as a social structure. To provide education to the masses. We have a social obligation. We don’t have an academic obligation similar to those top universities. The universities in Malaysia are obligated to provide education to everyone in Malaysia, whether they can afford it or not. Our universities are producing workers to fulfil the country’s workforce needs. In terms of that function, we are doing our job as this is what the country expects from us. We can’t compete. Imagine a boxing match and we’ve got one of our hands tied to our back. We can’t control our intake of students, fees we charge, number of lecturers, their pay, everything is centralised. Our lecturers are more involved in teaching. Our lecturer to student ratio is 1:100. This speak volumes! And this also affects our research. With a ratio like this, when do lecturers have time to do research? Some of us are creative or merely sacrifice personal time to do research. Include university social activities, you end up working 7 days a week, then you get blamed for it when the university rankings come out, politicians shout why isn’t there a Malaysian university on the top list? They have to look at themselves in the mirror. They want us to educate everyone in their constituencies and villages, when we spend time teaching their villagers to become intellectuals they turn around and blame us for not being excellent.”

Professor Syed Azizi added that Universiti Sains Malaysia being given Apex University status will hopefully bring about some change. “We’re trying now with USM becoming an Apex university with them being allowed to choose their own student intakes. But this also risks the social obligation. Malaysian society may not like it and this causes politicians not to like it either. If they want us to be among the top universities, we can but we have to abandon our social obligation. But I don’t think the government wants this totally. We’ll see what happens with USM in ten years. They’ve got their two hands free now for the boxing match.”

On the question of academic culture in Malaysia, Professor Syed lamented, “There’s not much debate or discussion among Malaysian academics. It’s due to the acts governing Malaysian universities and also due to the culture. We Malaysians are a passive lot. We don’t speak out. If you’re too assertive in your ideas and what you say, it becomes a liability for you. I’m one of those examples... There’s the need for academics to fight for their academic rights. Malaysian culture is
based on accepting one’s fate and the adage of not biting the hand that feeds you, i.e. the government. Until this attitude changes, then things will remain the same.”

From his perspective, Professor Syed believes that UMS is a nice place to work and was hoping he could do a lot here academically, but his personal experience shows the organisational structure limits that. He expressed feeling unproductive at UMS-KAL where he was more focused on administrative work. This could be due to the difficulty of balancing academic with administrative work.

I'm a great admirer of Professor Syed Azizi who is one of the more vocal academics in UMS. I do contend however that this can rub some people the wrong way. Professor Syed stated there are some decisions in UMS made due to our ambition to become a world-class university. He stresses that for Malaysian universities to become world-class and produce excellence, politics cannot get involved. Thus Malaysian universities need to be more independent. I viewed this to be the challenge of the government ministries involved. Too many policies coming from headquarters and the ministries are announced with turning our universities into world-class institutions in mind, but sometimes without realising the ministries think they’re doing good but they’re actually doing more harm than good.

4.9.2.4 Mr Muzaffar Hamzah

Mr Muzaffar Hamzah was the Acting Dean of SSIL from 2007 until January 2009. When he was given the responsibility of being Acting Dean of SSIL, he tried to improve the research situation in SSIL by focusing on partnerships with other institutions such as the University of South Australia’s School of Computer and Information Science (CIS), in which he signed a memorandum of understanding between SSIL and CIS.

Due to the timing of the interviews, I only managed to have informal discussions and some personal observations with Mr Muzaffar. In January 2009, Mr Muzaffar started to prepare for his PhD, thus he became unavailable for interviews. However, my hope is that even though his more formal input was not collected, some of the observations from my conversations with him throughout my time during the fieldwork would still be beneficial to understand the context of SSIL.
I believe Mr Muzaffar’s decision to attract research interest by collaborating with UniSA was due to the perception of SSIL not having the experience of doing research on our own. His intentions to bring in some research experience through the partnership with UniSA to SSIL.

4.9.2.5 Dr Awang Asri Awang Ibrahim

My interview with Dr Awang Asri Awang Ibrahim is arguably the most significant interview throughout my fieldwork. Dr Awang Asri is SSIL’s most senior academic staff. Dr Awang Asri was the acting Dean of SSIL from the year 2000 to 2005. In 2005 he started his PhD at the University of York. Dr Awang Asri returned from his PhD in 2008 and was appointed Dean in January 2009. He has been extremely active in promoting research activity since his return while balancing his ambitions with administrative duties. Throughout my fieldwork, I found Dr Awang Asri as one of the other heroes in my research story. In fact, due to his position as Dean, he has more influence in carrying out most of the changes in SSIL.

When I asked him about his vision for SSIL, he commented on the what he perceived as the lack of research focus in our school while stating his intent to improve this situation. He said, “My focus for these two years will be on research. Because when I came back (from my PhD) I’ve found that, we have research activities but my expectations are higher than that. After 10 years (of SSIL being established) the school should have ‘expanded’ in terms of more research, PhD candidates, Masters students, undergraduate programs, more offices and so on. But I found that this is not the case. So when I look at the facilities, we actually have only one lab and one mega-lab (for the school). Hopefully within these 2 years I can do something for (improving) research and coordinate this with the Deputy Dean of Research and Innovation.”

Dr Awang Asri’s opinion is that research activities in Malaysian universities have been affected due to a perceived importance of attaining high results. School and examination results are often announced in the Malaysian media. This leads to the focus of schools to produce high achievers, but not necessarily stressing the importance and value of knowledge itself. This then trickles down to Malaysian universities. Dr Awang Asri commented that the focus of Malaysian universities today is to produce employable graduates. The focus on knowledge and research has been set aside. In terms of research, the policy has been in place that a specific number of papers must be published by academics. This also affects the situation as academics no longer wish to do research that he or she
is passionate about, rather produce or co-author research papers to fulfil a specific requirement for promotion.

However, I also put forth a view that research also need to be useful for the university, society, industry and country. I expressed that there are those who feel that some researchers are only producing research that are *syok sendiri* (a Malay term for self aggrandising). How do we find a middle line for this? Dr Awang Asri commented that this is one of the reasons for the government in gazetting Research Universities. The Research Universities are allowed to take less undergraduates, thus free them to focus on research activities. Thus, matters of graduate employability becomes less of a concern for these universities and they can focus more on academic matters. But he also stated some of the challenges coming from RUs, “*In research, the industry have R&D departments also working on products. I believe if the R&D from industry and universities can cooperate then we can support each other. But I’m not sure how long it will take to achieve that. One problem I heard from a Professor from one of the RUs is that it comes back to money. In universities, you have professors being paid such amount of money but having to do so many things, research, teaching and so on… and when you go to a teaching university, the payment is just like that but they do less.”*

Dr Awang believes in finding a middle path between academic research produced for commercialisation and for intellectual pursuits. The key he believes is the self motivation of the academics themselves to balance the bureaucracy of doing academic research and pursuing our personal academic interests. “*We need that evaluation (system). But the lecturers must be self motivated. That’s the problem when we’re working and we are ‘required to do things’. As opposed to, “I think I want to do this.” Of course, you have a guideline but you should be self-motivated.”*

Dr Awang also touched upon his personal concern whether some academics truly know the 'meaning' of being an academic, which is why he believes doing a PhD is essential for academics. A PhD research is a good way to steer academics to realise this or to filter those who do may not belong in academia. He stated, “*last time with the unemployed graduates, many took Masters courses. After they finish their Masters, they look for lecturing jobs. So their ‘soul’ is not in academics. So this generation is slowly being filtered through the PhD process. Through my observation, in our universities most of them joining university as tutors and so on are actually just*
to get a job. Some of them say that academics is my life, but some of them aren’t actually up there. Which is why I believe PhD is the filter, it is research training. If they cannot go through this, they cannot be academics. Seems to be that at a certain level, when they face failure to get PhD they realise that this is not for them.”

This comment was extremely interesting as it represents his view that some academics in Malaysia may not have full comprehension to what the academic career entails. Dr Awang Asri's views are similar in some regards to some of the senior professor I interviewed, where they also mentioned the need for young academics to realise the importance of research as a part of being an academic. I summarised this view as a sub-theme of 'Cultivating comprehension on the academic career'.

During the interview, Dr Awang Asri also touched upon a general misunderstanding on these academic viewpoints amongst administration. His comment was that among administrators, there is an emphasis on following the bureaucratic process. This strict interpretation of regulations has even caused SSIL to lose out in attaining the services of an experienced Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of an ICT company to be an invited academic at the school. The first question administration asked was whether the CEO had a post graduate degree! These things remain part of the misunderstandings between academics and administrative staff.

Dr Awang Asri talked about what he learned during his PhD and discussed the difference between British and Malaysian universities. One of the issues he brought up was the ease of mobility to do research in Europe, “Based on my experience during my PhD in the UK, I applied for research grants and travel grants from European-based research associations, where I can apply to these bodies to do research at different universities and spend more time gaining experience. I had one success in one application and I spent three weeks in Germany. Working under a supervisor (there), to do my research at their place and I needed to present (my findings at the university). There I mixed around with other researchers, they share their research, gave a talk and in the end I needed to produce a paper with the supervisor (there). So they have these kinds of facilities there. So, in Malaysia if we have a research body that provides funding that allow for researchers to go around universities in Asia/Malaysia, I think this should be very helpful.”
Dr Awang Asri also touched on research in British universities being more student-led than by the professors. “Most of the research actually is not done by the lecturer. They have their own researchers (under them)... Through my observation, most of the lecturers they do teaching and they supervise the students, they use their knowledge through their students and do their research through these researchers (under them). They don’t do the (actual) research. I think the best way for us is to apply for grants and use them to ‘employ’ researchers (from Masters students).” Dr Awang Asri believes that SSIL should utilise our students to spearhead research which is why at the time I interviewed him, he was proposing a 3+1 Masters program for the undergraduates. In his proposed plan, undergraduate students could choose to add another year after their 3rd year to attain a Masters degree rather than a Bachelors degree. The additional year will be used for them to conduct a Masters level research. This would enable them to attain a Masters degree and increase the research output from SSIL.

One of the things Dr Awang Asri highlighted throughout our interview was Malaysia universities situation of having to provide technical workers. This influences the curriculum and the focus of our education system. This is related again to what he stated on the result-oriented culture in Malaysian education. He personally believes that universities are not only supposed to produce workers but well-rounded human beings. “My opinion is that a university should produce educated and civilised people, and people who can think.”, summarised Dr Awang's opinion on the function of a university.

During the interview, I also asked Dr Awang Asri about the support and administrative staff in the school. My view was that we still needed staff who saw working at a university to be different compared to working at other government-related departments. He agreed that it is important to find the right people, but at the same time he believes that staff could develop over time with the right motivation and training. He totally trusts his staff and attempts to empower them by giving them responsibilities. He also noted that work guidelines have already been provided by UMS' Registrar. Assessment methods are also in place to reward excellent staff. Dr Awang Asri noted that he believes in leadership by example and hopes that all staff, academic and administrative could follow suit.
Another issue that Dr Awang Asri and I talked about was the PhD research experience itself. We shared the opinion that in doing a PhD, the learning is more important than the result in the end. “The best way is to teach how to learn and how to do research. It's not merely about doing research, getting results and finishing your PhD. I believe that the process is more important than the destination (of getting PhD) itself. Based on my experience, my supervisor let me to understand the process rather than instruct me to do things.” I shared my experience with being supervised under Professor Wood-Harper to be similar and this is what makes our views of universities different from the normal result-oriented view. It is my opinion that this learning process should be emphasised when teaching and training research fundamentals. Each individual researcher may have their own contexts, but the learning is more important than the final result.

One of the things Dr Awang Asri introduced as soon as he returned from his PhD was the establishing the Labuan Usability Research Group (LURG). Prior to Dr Awang Asri's return academics in SSIL mainly did research on an individual or informal group basis. Dr Awang Asri's LURG could be considered the first serious attempt from SSIL to establish a viable research grouping among its academics. Activities under LURG were already underway during my fieldwork at SSIL.

Dr Awang Asri's role throughout the fieldwork and in improving the research situation in SSIL cannot be denied. In fact, his influence and position places him at a higher level when it comes to instigating this transformation in SSIL. In fact, I would describe him as another hero in my research story due to his goals for research and development in SSIL. I asked him of his final thoughts and hopes for SSIL. He replied, “As I’m one of the first people to (administer and) develop SSIL, personally this isn’t just merely a place to work. SSIL is my home to develop something. Including making the people feel a part of SSIL. That’s why I’m trying to do my best and for the next two years, my focus is on research and facilities. I hope we can do that. And also get these Masters program running, that is my plan on how to improve research, get more (research) students. I don’t believe our research will improve with just research from lecturers, because in my ‘experiment’ with the lecturers in the LURG research group, I assume that I’m the (supervisor) and the other lecturers are my students. I hope that this will become their (future research work).”
He reiterated the importance for more academics in SSIL to pursue their PhDs. By the end of writing up the thesis there would be an additional four academics from SSIL returning with their PhDs (including myself) in 2011, with at least another two in 2012. God-willing by 2012, there would already be seven PhD holders at SSIL spearheading research activity.

4.9.2.6 Ms Suaini Sura, Deputy Dean of Academics

My interview with Ms Suaini highlighted the academic focus of SSIL. She gave a personal example and admitted that due to our academic focus, research had to be put aside. This could also be seen with our curriculum's focus. Ms Suaini contends that teaching research methodology is needed to improve the research among our students. However, the current curriculum focuses mainly on preparing our students for the job market. She commented, “Our curriculum is not focused on research. We try to produce students who can live in the job market. If we look at the job market, things like research are rarely focused. Normally in multimedia, e-commerce and IT, we focus on the skills. That's why when we look at our curriculum there isn’t any module specifically for research. When we ask our students to do a (proper) literature review, I don’t think they can do it!”

Being the Deputy Dean of Academics, Ms Suaini is responsible for the administration of SSIL's syllabus and curriculum. Recent Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) practice have led her to focus on skills-based modules for the curriculum of our programs.

I discussed with Ms Suaini of how our students' Final Year Projects have changed in focus. She commented that around 2007, which is the year I started my PhD, Final Year Projects were only allowed to include the development of ICT tools. The focus of the projects were to develop software or websites. I mentioned during my time as lecturer at SSIL, I had students doing case studies on ICT issues. She said that since 2007, these kinds of projects have been reserved only for postgraduate level research. Ms Suaini related the focus on producing ICT products make it difficult for her to bring about research-oriented modules in the curriculum.

In her own personal research situation, she admitted at a lack of research due to her administrative responsibilities. “In SSIL the research can be seen as slow. We’re more focused on teaching. If I was talking about my own situation, with all the work that I’ve been doing being coordinators and at the same time teaching a huge number of students it was difficult for me to focus on research.
"I'm the kind of person where, if you want me to focus on research then let me do just that. Don't disturb me with other work. I'm not a multi-tasker."

Another issue regarding research in SSIL, Ms Suaini commented on was the lack of administrative staff to provide research support. She believes that the process of preparing a research proposal, attaining funds and other administrative aspects of doing research could still improve. In terms of the SSIL lecturers, she believes that we still lack the ability in handling these aspects. She suggests finding senior research partners who not only can guide us, but also provide the proposal and funding automatically in order for us to learn from them. Her belief is that SSIL lecturers are capable of doing research directly, but just need guidance when it comes to the preparation and administrative aspects.

When I asked about the SSIL Research Methodology Workshop, she stated that it was very useful. However, her hope is that after these workshops and seminars research activity would also increase. She commented that its no use having thousands of workshops, if the research itself is not being carried out.

4.9.2.7 Mr Jetol Bolongkikit

Similar to Mr Muzaffar, data I present from Mr Jetol are based on my informal conversations, discussions and observations with him throughout my fieldwork. Due to his own preparation for PhD, I was not able to interview him formally after the conclusion of the SSIL Workshop.

Some of the findings and sharing of thoughts with Mr Jetol have been discussed in the sub-chapter on my Re-Introduction to SSIL. What we normally discuss relate to issues of ICT in Sabah. Mr Jetol comes from a rural area of the state and access to technology in his hometown is very limited. Thus, his concern for ICT implementation in areas like his hometown.

One thing that became a constant conversation point between Mr Jetol and myself was the issue of research foundations. Every encounter and opportunity when we were together, Mr Jetol would highlight the importance of providing that research foundation to our colleagues in SSIL. There were times when we would discuss his plans for his PhD and he would ask for my
recommendations on which research method he should focus on. Mr Jetol was enthusiastic to learn about research foundations, especially to prepare for his eventual PhD, and it showed.

4.9.2.8 Mr Mohd Yuszren Yushak, Deputy Dean of Research and Innovation
Mr Yuszren Yushak was given the post of Deputy Dean of Research and Innovation in early 2009. Throughout my fieldwork, he was extremely helpful and one of my favourite people to talk to in issues regarding research and technopreneurship.

Mr Yuszren's believes an important issue related to research in Malaysia is funding. Which is why he prefers research that are related to technopreneurship. These kinds of research attract the attention of university administration and government bodies. MOHE and MOSTI provides millions in funding for research that have commercial potential.

Mr Yuszren also believes that motivating academics to do research is also important. How this is done could be many ways. Monetary support would greatly help the cause, but general motivational activities could also work.

I have also seen first hand during my fieldwork on Mr Yuszren's passion for encouraging technopreneurship amongst SSIL students. I was invited to his presentation sessions for his students' technopreneur assignments. In these sessions groups of students presented ideas for ICT-based products and innovation. Under Mr Yuszren's guidance, in 2010 one of the groups managed to win third place in a national innovation competition organised by the Multimedia Development Corporation of Malaysia (MDEC). Mr Yuszren's efforts in trying to inculcate a culture of innovation has shown that SSIL have the personalities to improve research.

4.9.2.9 Miss Norhanizah Adnan, Assistant Registrar for SSIL
Miss Norhanizah is the Assistant Registrar for my school, dealing with the administrative duties mainly for academics and student affairs. When I asked her if I could interview her for my research she was hesitant and wondered how she could be of any help to my research. Being the highest ranked non-academic administrative staff in my school, I told her I just needed to gain some information from the administration's perspective. Even from the start of the interview, she appeared nervous and asked me not to ask any 'tough' questions.
The administration staff deals with the running of the school. The administration is currently more focused on teaching activities. The handling of teaching and administration activities related to the school.

To a certain extent, the administration do deal with the administration of research activities. They assist the lecturers in dealing with research administration. Their emphasis is to fulfil the needs of the lecturers and to process research applications as quickly as possible. Another matter that they may deal with is the process of attaining facilities needed for research activities, such as SSIL's computer laboratories.

When I asked her on what she felt were the challenges for UMS in attaining Research University status, she replied that it had been difficult to look for and attain academic staff with PhDs, particularly to SSIL. The university has even organised a recruitment drive abroad but there weren't a lot of potential candidates.

When asked about possible plans to pursue post graduate, Miss Norhanizah was taken aback. She did think about doing a Masters by coursework but when I told her it’s possible for her to do a part-time research Masters related to her work, she admitted she never thought about it. She was intrigued with the idea but from her body language I can tell she was not convinced.

4.9.3 Third Group: SSIL Lecturers
For every academic staff at SSIL, I asked questions on issues regarding research and the situation at SSIL. Below is the list of lecturers I interviewed from SSIL.

− Annecia Yoag
− Dinna @ Nina Mohammad Nizam
− Nooralisa Mohd Tuah
− Dayang Senandong
− Wan Aishya Wan Ahmad
− Goh Say Leng
− Ahmad Rizal Rodzuan
− Norbayah Mohd Suki
Almost all academics at SSIL comment that our research needs improvement. Some of them, like Ms Idyawati and Mr Yuszren believe the improvement has to be a drastic one. A number of my colleagues, like Mr Leau even expressed that my fieldwork and participation actually highlighted the importance of doing research among my colleagues, especially himself. All in all, there was a sense that my efforts did spark an interest in doing research among my colleagues.

A number of my colleagues commented on why research is still lagging and suggested ways to improve things. One of the main issues is bureaucracy. A number of SSIL academics stated that support staff do not understand that our jobs as academics isn’t merely to teach. One of the observations I had when seeing my colleagues at work was a sense that academics at SSIL were given administrative tasks such as preparing reports for government agencies. Initially, I asked whether that dealing with administration was supposed to be an essential aspect of our job. Upon reflection and referring the situation with Dr Awang Asri, I found that certain practices have a useful function in being given to academics. For example, requiring lecturers to prepare reports on the courses they teach for the Malaysian Qualifications Agency can be useful for the academics to learn about the foundations of the courses.

One constant theme heard many times is the need for experienced researcher to guide young SSIL academics. This comment is prevalent among the younger lecturers who have just returned from their Masters, Wan Aishya, Nooralisa and Dayang Senandong. They need guidance and wants senior lecturers to guide them. A lot have commented on pinning their hopes on me finishing my PhD and contribute in this aspect.
The issue of Labuan's location also became a topic of discussion among my colleagues. There were a few like Ms Idyawati, Madam Laura and Mr Yuszren who felt that Labuan wasn't a very conducive place for an ICT school to be based in due to a lack of research opportunities. Mr Goh and Ms Nurbayah however disagree and claim that Labuan's quiet environment and beautiful beaches actually help them to do research, by providing inspiration and a quiet environment to work in.

The SSIL Research Methodology Workshop also received rave reviews form my colleagues. All those who participated in it who I interviewed expressed satisfaction at the organisation of the workshop and wished there would be a follow-up in the future.

Everyone in SSIL were optimistic for the future of our school. A number of them attributed some early signs of research improvement from efforts by Dr Awang Asri and also my personal efforts, especially the SSIL Research Methodology Workshop.

4.10 Second Fieldwork Part 5: Presentation to SSIL

To conclude my fieldwork, I arranged a presentation of the findings gathered from the fieldwork experience to my colleagues at SSIL on 9 June 2009. My motivation was to present some of the findings I’ve found so far, specifically from the workshops and interviews with those outside of SSIL, to my colleagues and attain some feedback on what I presented. Within my presentation, I also included certain questions which I hoped could be discussed during the presentation. I wanted to encourage some debates and discussions during the presentation itself. In many ways, I wanted to show some of the actuality of what I perceived to be the issues relating to research in SSIL.

I listed some of the general issues that surround the Malaysian ICT/IS academic field which I felt are related to the overall situation in SSIL. I started by presenting Information Systems in Malaysia as being are categorised under ICT, Computer Science and Informatics schools or faculties. At the time, the MQA was working towards releasing a guideline on Information Systems programs based on the advice of MADICT. Knowing this, I announced in my presentation that no current Malaysian university places IS under Business or Organisational studies schools or faculties. However, I was corrected by Ms Chin Su Na that Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) has a Bachelors program in Business Management Information System program under its Faculty of Economics and
Business. However, there is also a pure Information Systems Bachelors program under UNIMAS’ Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology. I presented this scenario to my colleagues to attain some reaction on Information Systems’ place in an ICT-based school. Apart from Ms Chin’s comment, most of the academics in SSIL accept the place of IS within the umbrella of Malaysian ICT schools and faculties. I suggested as well that this offers an opportunity to explore this situation and for IS practitioners in Malaysia to find their relevance to the field of ICT in Malaysia.

I then discussed issues relating to Malaysian academics and our situation. From the interviews I did with a number of senior academics and professors, I tried to explain a general situation to my colleagues of what have influenced our environment. I edited a famous saying by Malcolm X and came up with, “We didn't land in Malaysian academia, Malaysian academia landed on us.” I told my colleagues that the situation we face has been constructed to us by: those in the Ministry of Higher Education (with their policies), public universities (their individual goals and competition) and also our academic culture (which has been shaped over the years). Despite the situation we are in being formed by forces that are beyond our control, I pointed out that as academics we have the opportunity to make changes to improve the situation itself. Thus, I emphasised the importance of having 'instigators for change'. In my presentation, I highlighted four important personalities that have been involved in bringing in changes to SSIL’s research situation:

1. Dr Awang Asri Ibrahim, who is current Dean of SSIL. Upon returning from his PhD in June 2008 he has since pushed for more research activity.
2. Myself, Mr Zamhar Iswandono Ismail. I returned to SSIL to conduct an Action Case, introducing qualitative research and working with SSIL to improve the research activities.
3. Mr Jetol Bolongkikit, former Deputy Dean of Research and Innovation who was supportive of my efforts, especially the Qualitative Research workshop.
4. Mr Mohd Yuszren Yushak, the Deputy Dean of Research and Innovation from March 2009 onwards who has been given the responsibility of carrying on the efforts for research improvement in SSIL.

I continued by describing what I perceived to be the situation of academic research at SSIL. From my conversations, the feedback from the qualitative research workshop and a number of interviews
with the some of the academics at SSIL at the time, I found that nearly all academics at SSIL agrees with the statement that our research needs improvement. This statement when presented was accepted by those in attendance. I then stressed that my colleagues have shared many comments on why this is happening and suggested ways to improve things. One constant theme heard many times is the need for experienced researcher to guide young SSIL academics.

I then presented what I felt was one of the most important things that the academics at SSIL lacked which was research foundations. I presented my perception that a significant number of our academic staff still lacks necessary research foundation and experience. This in turn affects our research activities and output. I then suggested that SSIL needs to improve this and the workshop that was held was part of this effort. Dr Awang and his research group have also organised a training session on SPSS during my field work. Other than the academics, I also suggested that SSIL introduce research foundation courses to students as well. My final comment on this matter was that the lack of research foundation and experience can be improved by bringing in an experienced academic to guide us.

The recommendation of bringing in an experienced academic leads directly to the next issue I presented which was ‘Research Mentoring and Research Groups in SSIL’. From my perspective it was clear that SSIL needs help in improving our research. To do this, we need an experienced professor to guide us in our research activity or at the very least advise us. From what I gathered from my interviews and conversations, it has been a struggle for SSIL to bring in someone with experience to the school. Our location on the island of Labuan has been cited as one of the factors that has made it difficult to bring someone in. In the mean time, research groups are a way to do something with what we have. Dr Awang Asri’s Labuan Usability Research Group (LURG) is the main example, although Mr Yuszren and some other colleagues at the time were starting their own IS-based group themselves. My suggestion during the presentation however was that despite the establishment of research groups, there is a constant need to improve our grasp of research methodology foundation and skills. Courses (like LURG’s SPSS class) and workshops (like the Qualitative Research workshop) are very helpful and should continue

My presentation then touched on the subject of Research Universities. UMS itself has its own ambition to attain RU status by 2013. The Malaysian government, specifically the Ministry of
Higher Education’s, decision to gazette four universities as Research Universities have actually caused other issues that could be studied. I asked my colleagues in the presentation whether RUs is the right way forward for Malaysian universities. Research universities are allowed to take less under-graduates and allocated more research funding. How do we go about achieving our university’s ambition? And more importantly, are we ready to attain the Research University status? I also inquired whether rewarding individual academics for their research efforts be better to promote research. My colleagues listened attentively to all of these questions regarding Research Universities but were not prepared to jump into this discussion.

Another issue I presented on was ‘Academic Mobility’. From some of my interviews with experienced academics, input from the MADICT workshop and also the panel discussion forums, I believed that academics in Malaysia need to be given mobility to improve their research. One of the main challenges for SSIL’s academics is that Labuan's environment may not be conducive for some of our academics to do research. Thus, our academics need to be able to do research outside of the campus and the island itself. I suggested encouraging academics to join research groups not only within but outside of Universiti Malaysia Sabah. Another recommendation is to encourage industry links that give experience to our academics. These industrial links will require SSIL’s academics to be available outside of the campus, rather than be tied up in their offices.

If our academic teaching and administrative duties make it difficult for us to leave the campus, then my next suggestion was to utilise our students to spearhead the research activities. I gave the example of universities in the developed world and in established universities in Malaysia, that students are the prime movers of research activity. In these universities, the academics play the role of the guides and supervisors to the student-led research. I then stressed on the importance of having students with strong research foundations to make them independent and lead SSIL’s research efforts. Dr Awang Asri’s plans to introduce the 3+1 Masters program is one way how we can increase the number of postgraduate research students.

The next two slides of my presentation then addressed some of the observations I had during my time in SSIL. I relate these observations with what I consider the ‘Organisational Complexity’ of SSIL. One of the questions I asked myself when observing the staff at SSIL was, ‘Do the staff in SSIL know their role in the organisation?’ This question started a small debate within the
presentation in which a number of my colleagues addressed this issue as extremely important. Those who gave their comments believe a lot of the responsibilities lie on the shoulders of support staff. My presentation highlighted the importance of SSIL’s support staff, based on my observations. Their role in supporting the academic activities of the lecturers in SSIL cannot be undermined. The academics need support from our support staff to make SSIL better. However, the support staff need to understand their role within the school. My belief was that universities should be different than normal government departments. Based on comments from experienced professors, the academics should consist of unique individuals which make up the diversity of university. The operations of a university should be unique as well, as compared to a ‘regular government department.’ My main suggestion was to strengthen cooperation between academic and support staff, and to empower our staff in their role.

I then moved to an issue which may affect the hopes for empowering the staff in SSIL, which was the issue of culture. I split the cultural issue into ‘Malaysian Academic Culture’ and ‘Malaysian Culture in General’. From my conversations with academics and also the Dean of SSIL, I was informed of their view that Malaysia’s academic culture is very much results and examination oriented. The government have also given Malaysian universities the responsibility to produce skilled man-power for our industry and workforce. When we want to strive for empowerment in universities, the challenge is to allow for a culture which would empower the individual staff and this could be difficult in a culture which emphasises results. Malaysian work culture in general shows traits of collectivism, high power distance and uncertainty avoidance. All these cultural traits influence the contexts of our work environment, thus to move towards empowering the staff in SSIL requires and understanding of the cultural influence.

I concluded my presentation by highlighting a summary of the issues that influence SSIL’s research activity and some recommendations for improvement.

- Research methods foundation: As I stressed in several parts of the presentation, there is a need for SSIL’s academics (and students) to have foundation in research methodology and enhance our research activity. Thus my recommendation was to continue training activities like workshops to further enhance this.
- Research mobility, experience and exposure: Due to our location, it would be better for SSIL’s academics to be allowed mobility for research-related activities. My
recommendation was to provide mobility for our lecturers to pursue their research endeavours and not bog them down with formalities which may require them to be in the campus.

- Research leadership: The need of a senior academic to guide us and to head the research groups is an important issue that needs to be addressed. Research groups should be strengthened by bringing in senior academics or partners from outside of SSIL.

- Administrative Support: An issue that is important and needs to be looked at for the future of SSIL is the administrative support for academics doing research. The situation in SSIL that I was able to observe was that administrative staff only focused on supporting teaching activities done by the academics. In terms of research-related activities the support staff were rarely, if ever, involved. Even the organisation of the Qualitative Research workshop was mainly handled by the academics at SSIL with the committees consisting of mainly academics. My recommendation for this during the presentation was to get the support staff involved in one way or another.

- Student research activity: Based on the ideas of Dr Awang, I highlighted the need to invigorate research among SSIL’s students. Seeing as students are one of the few assets SSIL possesses in abundance, the move towards a student-led research paradigm seems an obvious recommendation for SSIL. Issues such as research foundations and leadership would still need to be addressed though to optimise this idea.

After my presentation, I opened the floor for final comments and input from my colleagues. Dr Awang Asri stressed the importance of having more PhDs in SSIL. This in many ways was a battle cry for the rest of the SSIL academics to get their PhD plans ready and to prepare themselves for their PhD. Mr. Soffri stressed on the issue of attaining mentors for the current research groups. Whereas Mr Tamrin commented that these mentors may not always be available (if we take them from outside of UMS). Mr Tamrin suggested bringing in someone more permanent or on a long term contractual basis through whatever funding provided by the government or the university. Ms Chin Pei Yee gave a recommendation of developing a knowledge-based system to manage our research activities. The last recommendation given was from Ms Dinna, who suggested the development of a game to model and simulate the time management of research and academic activities.
The presentation to my colleagues highlights many things. The first and most important thing is that there is still a long way to go in improving our research at SSIL. However, the young academics of SSIL are getting there and we are enthusiastic to improve ourselves further. It will take time, plenty of time in light of our age and some examples of other universities (UTM took 30 years to fully develop into what it is today). But based on Universiti Malaysia Sabah’s motto the academics at SSIL must 'Strive to Excel'

4.11 Summary
This chapter attempts to describe the entire fieldwork experience from the perspective of the FMA. Figure 4.4 represents the FMA at the end of the fieldwork. I have simplified the Framework of Ideas (F) in the diagram to express the further shaping of the Theoretical Framework based on the fieldwork experience.

My framework of ideas started to shape itself even more based on my literature review and the experience from the two fieldwork. It was around the time between the two fieldwork as well that my Theoretical Framework started to solidify. Prior to this, my literature review and academic experience provided me the ideas in shaping a rough framework of ideas that I wanted to study. However, the first fieldwork taught me which key elements were important within the context of the research, to study and learn about. These elements eventually shaped my Theoretical Framework and was later supported by the experience of the second fieldwork. I include the final design of my Theoretical Framework in Chapter 7.
The fieldwork experience also influenced me to review my definition of the research methodology I utilised. In Chapter 6, I discuss what led me to choose Action Case as my methodology, however at this stage of the research, I interpreted my methods to be an 'Action-Based Case Study'.

During the fieldwork, the application area also encountered a change. Prior to the fieldwork, I chose Improving Research in SSIL as my practical area. I have to admit that I was perhaps over-confident in early assumptions as research improvement was a somewhat subjective issue. I chose to replace it with 'Efforts and Learning on How to Improve Research at SSIL'.

At this stage of my research, my FMA included these elements:

- Framework of Ideas (F):
  - Experience and Reflections on SSIL
  - Pre-fieldwork Literature Review
  - Fieldwork Experience
  - Theoretical Framework
- Methodology (M):

Figure 4.4: Post-Fieldwork FMA
The experience of the fieldwork affected my original plans for the research in such a way that I needed to add to my literature review and re-evaluate my research methodology. Chapter 5 of this thesis will cover additional post-fieldwork literature that I reviewed based on the initial findings of the fieldwork. Chapter 6 will discuss the finalised research design and methodology.

The fieldwork presented findings from the actuality of being the situation. This chapter's tone was somewhat different from Chapters 2 and 3. From afar, I felt I was going to be the emancipator of my organisation. When I entered the situation and started listening to the problem situation from within and being in the actuality, I felt that emancipating my colleagues would be more difficult than merely stating it. It was here that the 'hero' in my research story emerged. In describing the encounters and experience I gained during the fieldwork, I conveyed a perspective from within the situation rather than describing it externally.

This separation from an external weltanschauung and and internal actuality was felt during this phase of my research. However, feeling the difference did not mean I realised the importance of the dichotomy. It was only later on the research that I realised how significant the change was. Coinciding with this, I also realised the difference between being an emancipator and hero of the research later on the research.

From an actuality perspective, the experience made me reflect upon the initial framework of ideas I had prior to the field work. One of the main changes was in adapting the themes based on the fieldwork experience. As I stated before, this led to a reshaping of my theoretical framework which is further discussed in Chapter 7.

From the fieldwork, I truly felt that my perspective of the problem situation changed. This is reflected in the additions to my theoretical framework. The findings from the fieldwork supported some of the early assumptions I had based on literature review and personal experience, however the main difference came from the expansion of ideas from listening from within the problem
situation itself. It was very inspiring to be told that my early assumptions had some truth. It validated my ideas, while making me feel somewhat 'heroic' in my attempt to improve the situation in SSIL and Malaysia. I also discovered the existence of many other 'heroes' within Malaysian academia who are striving for similar things.
Chapter 5 Post-Fieldwork Socio-Political Context Review

5.1 Introduction
After the experience of the fieldwork, I realised that the situation was more complicated than I imagined. From my involvement in workshops, interviews and discussions, I learned that for Malaysian IS to improve, there are many internal and external factors that need to be taken into consideration. This chapter highlights literature that I believe relate to, enhance and supports my post-fieldwork findings. I have titled this chapter Post-Fieldwork Socio-Political Context Review to highlight the focus of literature on the socio-political issues within my research context. This was done to elaborate the actuality within the situation in Malaysian academia from the literature.

I conducted this stage of the research in Manchester, after my fieldwork in Malaysia. The majority of the literature were read and reviewed outside of the context. As I reflect again on my research, I feel my separation from being within the environment of Malaysia contributed to some differences of tone in my research. This was then corrected after the viva voce of my PhD.

5.2 Malaysia and the Knowledge Economy
Malaysia as a developing country has embarked on an ambitious plan to move towards a knowledge-based economy (K-economy) to achieve its target to become a developed nation by the year 2020. Mustapha and Abdullah (2004) stated “In the information age, knowledge is power. The k-economy is based on a paradigm that focuses on intellectual capital as a prime mover. With knowledge replacing physical and natural resources as the key ingredient in economic development, education and human resource development (HRD) policies require rethinking.”

Evers (2003) added “Knowledge has been widely recognised by economists as the most important factor of production in a new economy. The production and utilisation of knowledge are therefore essential for development. Some countries, Malaysia among others, have embarked on an ambitious plan to use knowledge as a base for economic development, by-passing earlier stages of industrialisation.” For Malaysia to establish itself as a country based on K-Economy without adhering to the gradual evolution of other developed countries is obviously unprecedented. To achieve this, the Malaysian government needs to have a solid plan of transforming a country that
still relies on export-based trade into one that relies purely on the knowledge and skill of the population.

The Malaysian Government (2006) outlined in the 9MP, which was implemented from 2006 to 2010, the need to develop Malaysia into a Knowledge Society stating, “In the Ninth Plan period, efforts will be intensified to develop the country’s human capital in order to drive the transformation to a knowledge-based economy. Programmes and projects will be undertaken to deliver the National Mission’s priorities of improving the education system, increasing innovation and ensuring holistic human capital development.” Among the steps proposed in the 9MP, two of the steps prove to be relevant in the context of developing university R&D:

- Producing Tertiary Institutions of International Standing
- Nurturing Top Quality Research and Development, and Scientific and Innovation Capability

To support these efforts, the government of Malaysia has acted and also set targets to be achieved by the end of the 9MP:

- The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) was initiated in 2006 to benchmark and rate the standards of university programs in the country.
- By 2010, the percentage of academic staff with doctoral degrees in public universities will hopefully be increased to 60%.
- The National Innovation Council was formed to formulate strategies and key policies that will lead towards the development of an innovation culture.
- The Brain Gain initiative was launched to lure Malaysian academics abroad back into Malaysian academia to help drive Malaysia’s R&D efforts, focusing first in the field of Science and Technology.
- Supporting technopreneurship efforts and strengthening the framework for endeavours that produce intellectual property.

In the 9MP Mid-Term Report published by the Malaysian Government (2008), initial targets were reviewed based on results from 2007. Related findings included:

- The MQA has already begun their task of benchmarking Malaysian university programs.
- There is a gradual increase in the percentage of Malaysian academics holding PhDs, from 26.6% in 2005 to 31.6% in 2007.
− All other efforts seem to have been underway.
− One matter that was noted from the report was a need for further improvement in the Brain Gain scheme. So far, the incentives provided under Brain Gain have not fully succeeded in luring back Malaysian academics and professionals plying their trade abroad. There has been a proposal for a Brain Share scheme (New Straits Times, 2009) to be put into place to allow Malaysian academics abroad to contribute to Malaysian academia without having to permanently move back to Malaysia.

Apart from the government’s own initiatives, the World Bank (2007) has given a number of recommendations for the Malaysian government in its report on Malaysia and K-Economy with an emphasis on developing its institutions of higher learning. Below is a selection of these recommendations to university administration which are relevant to improving R&D:

1. The attainment of world class status by Malaysia universities hinges, in part, on keeping a fine balance between two competing objectives: expanding the system and improving quality.
2. Relaxing the administrative and financial rules and controls that public universities are required to conform to in their daily management would allow them to focus on important institutional development issues.
3. The 1996 legislative framework that was designed to enhance public university autonomy as part of the “corporatisation” reform should be fully implemented, along with some strategic additions.
4. The long term vision for enhancing the capacity to become a leading knowledge-base economy and creating world class universities should be closely articulated with: (a) the country’s overall economic and social development strategy; and (b) the ongoing reforms at the lower levels of the education system.
5. To integrate its research universities into the global research community, Malaysia will need to consider several options for restructuring its research funding mechanisms.
6. Academic programs could be reformed to enhance the transparency and quality assurance mechanisms of the Malaysian higher education system.
7. To increase international recognition, the Government of Malaysia will need to determine where its system and institutions stand today (in relation to other world class universities) and what support is needed to enable them to compete at an international level.
The report then continues with findings and recommendations to strengthen the National Innovation System:

1. The Knowledge-Based Economy Master Plan states that the Malaysian economy is at a crossroad.
2. Malaysia’s quest to become a sophisticated knowledge-based economy is likely to be frustrated, unless policies to link Malaysian firms with universities and research institutes are strengthened.
3. A world-class national higher education system is a sine qua non for improving the National Innovation System.
4. The Ninth Malaysia Plan sets the ambitious target that Science and Technology activities contribute at least one-third of Malaysia’s annual economic growth.
5. Malaysia’s skills and technology upgrading policies did not have the intended effects for a number of reasons:
   a) Fiscal incentives less effective in skills upgrading and R&D.
   b) R&D grants effectiveness were limited.
   c) Lack of skilled personnel.
   d) Differential treatment of domestic firms and multinational corporations.
6. Besides support to the university system to achieve “world class” status, and the policy to ensure continued growth, prosperity, and rising standards of living, Malaysia must move towards becoming an innovative knowledge-based economy.
7. Policies to reform the Malaysian science and technology policy framework should include four dimensions:
   a) Role of state to be reoriented.
   b) Adopt innovation system thinking in policy making.
   c) Care in formulating economic development strategies for each region.
   d) The government, scientific community, universities and business community agree on a mission statement.
8. A variety of complementary policy reforms can help to improve the efficiency of the Malaysian national innovation system in which universities will play a major role.
All the plans, strategies and recommendations given in this section represent the efforts of the Malaysian Government in transforming Malaysia into a Knowledge Economy. As the major universities in Malaysia are gazetted as public bodies under the government, these directives were propagated among the public institutions of higher learning with the hopes that Malaysian universities will implement R&D improvement throughout.

5.3 The Malaysian Academic Viewpoint, Power Distance Index and Malaysian Professoriate

As a Malaysian academic, I have followed developments in Malaysian academia that have been influenced by my country’s move to K-Economy. One of the key aspects that will push towards this goal is improving university education and research and development (R&D). There have been a number of steps that the Malaysian government has introduced to achieve this and they have all influenced the situation in Malaysian public universities.

On the 27th of March 2004 the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) came into existence when the Malaysian government separated the higher education branch of the Ministry of Education (MOE) into a full-fledged ministry. At the time there were only 17 public universities and public university-colleges in Malaysia. Today, a total of 20 full-fledged public universities are under the jurisdiction of MOHE. This increase occurred when newer universities were established throughout the country and the eight university-colleges were given full public university status.

The government has since been allocating huge amounts of money in improving universities, with the recent Budget 2011 giving MOHE RM10.2 billion for Malaysian universities (Malaysian Ministry of Finance 2010). The government has stressed the importance of development in key areas of R&D. On 11th October 2006, the Malaysian government gazetted four public universities as Research Universities (RU). The list includes Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), and recently in October 2010 Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) was added to the list. The criteria to be given RU status are (MOHE 2010):

- Research-focused learning
- Competitive student and staff intake
- Quality of lecturers
- A 50:50 ratio for undergraduate and postgraduate
As stated previously, government directives related to the Malaysia's push for establishing a Knowledge-based Economy and improving university research were distributed among Malaysian academics and universities were required to act upon them. The steps that were taken have shown an impact on Malaysian academia. Publications such as the Tenth Malaysian Plan Document from the Economic Planning Unit (2010) stress the huge investment the government has put into developing universities. Government ministers have also spoken about the development of R&D among university academics in Malaysia to steer them into potential fields of research. Individual universities also possess self-produced strategic plans do highlight the concept of developing R&D in their respective institutions. However, I have seen very little mention of academic culture and how to cultivate a more open academic environment from the government, despite some individual universities mentioning the term ‘instilling an academic R&D culture’ in their own charter.

These guidelines and documentation presents the wishes and in some ways demands of the universities and generally the Malaysian government in improving R&D among Malaysian academia. The author relates this to a hard view that those within Malaysian academia need to adhere to. The policies and guidelines to achieve R&D improvement based on the government’s investment and objectives. The soft view, from the perspective of the author, is from the individual academics themselves. They are the ones who face and are actualising the plans for improving R&D in Malaysia. Their views can represent an organisational-based perspective.

Zaini Ujang, the Vice Chancellor of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) in his book Mengangkasa Pangajian Tinggi (Elevating Higher Education, 2009) stated, “The importance of R&D is more pressing in the era of globalisation. R&D can increase the competitiveness of a country and corporation, also increase the reputation of a university... Whatever strategy and action plan that is formulated... the basis of a university's existence and excellence is fortifying the human resource... Currently there are too many rules and work regulations that has caused the innovation-friendly dynamism found in renowned universities around the world unable to be fostered here.”

While citing America's approach to developing academic R&D, he adds, “...one of the problems that arise which complicates efforts to realise the American model is caused by the definition of
'success' in the context of R&D in public universities. 'Success' seems more focused and measured by acclimation and awards. Undoubtedly these two are important, however they are not the principle and norm within the intellectual and R&D traditions in institutions of higher learning throughout the world. In America and most European countries and Japan, the pinnacle and highest success of R&D in the context of universities is the publication of research findings in prestigious journals and appointment of a professor as an editorial panel member in a top journal or series of publications.”

From this description, I can derive that there is a misunderstanding of what 'success' means to the different stakeholders when it comes to academic research and development. The government and management agencies rate awards and return-in-investment as the key indicators for R&D success. The academics on the other hand, view recognition by their peers and publications as the success indicators.

I believe some of the challenges in developing Malaysian academic R&D is based on Malaysia's academic culture. It is widely known that Malaysia ranks as one of the top two countries (along with Slovakia) based on Hofstede's Power Distance Index (Hofstede 2001) with a score of 104. The Power Distance Index “was derived from country mean scores on three survey questions. These questions dealt with perceptions of subordinates’ fear of disagreeing with superiors and of superiors’ actual decision-making styles, and with the decision-making style that subordinates preferred in their bosses.” (Hofstede 2001)

From his website, Hofstede (2009) explains Malaysia’s PDI situation as such, “Power Distance Index (PDI) is the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. This represents inequality (more versus less), but defined from below, not from above. It suggests that a society's level of inequality is endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders. Power and inequality, of course, are extremely fundamental facts of any society and anybody with some international experience will be aware that 'all societies are unequal, but some are more unequal than others'. “

Hofstede (2005) summarises that “PDI scores inform use about dependence relationships in a country... In large-power-distance countries, there is considerable dependence of subordinates on
bosses, Subordinates respond by either preferring such dependence (in the form of an autocratic or paternalistic boss) or rejecting it entirely, which in psychology is known as counterdependence - that is, dependence but with a negative sign.” Speaking in broad terms, it would be an alarming situation if this counterdependence exists in an institution of higher learning. When I reflect back on my fieldwork experience, I did observe some of the traits of PDI among my colleagues at SSIL and among Malaysian academics in general. In SSIL, many of the efforts to improve research in the organisation depended on the Dean’s actions and a top-down implementation. The MADICT workshop in February was an effort with an intention of attaining bottom-up feedback on issues regarding ICT research, however the fact that it was instigated by a top-level committee showed that its implementation needed to come from the top of the hierarchy. I wonder whether Malaysia's power gap is the main factor that hinders efforts in encouraging empowerment among academics themselves. As culture influences everything in Malaysia, the academic environment is not immune to this influence.

Other researches have found a similar pattern concerning the Malaysian professoriate. Tierney's (2008) survey to outline the opinions and backgrounds of Malaysian academia discovered certain traits from the answers given by Malaysian academic in describing their situation:

- Malaysian academics are generally satisfied with their work conditions.
- There is little desire to teach doctoral students, preferring undergraduate teaching.
- Respondents stated to a considerable degree that power and decision making lie in the hands of external agents to the university.
- On the question if the respondents believe university administration supports academic freedom, the most popular answer was they neither agreed nor disagreed.

From the results of Tierney’s (2008) survey, I feel there is a concern that Malaysian academics have become 'too comfortable' in their government-provided jobs. My fear is our perceived preference to teach undergraduates rather than supervise post graduate research is a huge concern when the country wants to move towards developing R&D. Within the context of academic freedom and administration, it seems Malaysia's high PDI has shackled academics, leaving them powerless (or lethargic) to determine for themselves what they should demand from their respective institutions' administration. This cultural situation also makes academics, especially young lecturers more reliant on being told what to do by the university administration.
I would like to reflect on my personal experience as a Malaysian academic and in my field work research in the university I am attached to. When interviewing the lecturers at my school, I asked the question on how to improve academic research activities. The one frequent answer heard was ‘Having an experienced researcher or academic to lead the research.’ This answer was not surprising given the relative youth and research inexperience among the academics interviewed. However, I feel there is something deeper than that. Somehow, due to our Power Distance, the Malaysian academic does rely heavily on some form of leadership to guide us in our activities.

A bleaker picture is painted if we read upon some of the restrictions that are placed among Malaysian academia. Lee (2003) suggested in Altbach’s *The Decline Of The Guru: The Academic Profession In The Third World*, that university bureaucracy has had an adverse affect towards Malaysian academia. During a period of time, the government’s influence to administer and manage Malaysian universities has had an impact towards the autonomy of universities. At the same time, Lee argued that academic research in Malaysia endures censorship and heavy controls that affect research activity and culture. Academic participation and activism has lied dormant in Malaysia due to this. Student activity is also limited under the Universities and University Colleges Act, or its more popular Malaysian synonym, *Akta Universiti dan Kolej Universiti* (AUKU) where they are only allowed to join associations in their respective universities.

The AUKU was first introduced in 1971 as a reaction to university activism by students and academics alike. It essentially limits student and academic participation beyond those of academia. University students and lecturers were not allowed to join political parties or participate in political activities. Activism among academics started to wither. The heyday of the outspoken professor ended after the introduction of the AUKU. Academics were only allowed to speak of matters related to their field of study, with the permission of the Vice Chancellor and through government-controlled media. In campuses, political debate and discussions were not encouraged among students for fear of provoking the ire of the government. The Malaysian university became a place of learning but not intellectualism. And this is what I believe has lead to the decline in Malaysian academic culture.
Ujang (2009) lamented that “Rationally, we have to admit that at this moment local universities are not ‘ivory towers’. The ivory tower is a status of being at the pinnacle, possessing an aura and academia that is elite, possessing quality assurance that is difficult to question… Ultimately, universities not only in Malaysia but also in many developed countries today have become ‘factories’ that possess the role of producing graduates in many fields.” This comment from the Vice Chancellor of a public university shows that the concern that Malaysian universities have lost its intellectual elitism is not merely a fabrication by the Malaysian academia.

To its credit, the Malaysian government has taken note of the academic culture situation and has recently changed some of the legislation to allow more autonomy of the universities. Several amendments were proposed to the AUKU in 2008 which attempted to free up student and academic activities. The amendments however were not seen to have changed much from the viewpoint of academics. Students are now allowed to join organisations outside of campus excluding political parties, illegal organisations and those deemed to be ‘inappropriate for students’ by the Ministry of Higher Education. However, The Malaysian Academics Movement (MOVE) in its statement on 18th August 2008 has expressed its doubt for the amendments to have any significant changes. They highlighted four elements that must be in place for Malaysian universities to improve to the “world class” standard touted by the government:

- Academic freedom for staff to teach, conduct research and disseminate research findings and opinions, without fear or favour.
- Student autonomy to associate and express opinions in a free and open manner in order to expand their intellectual and social horizons thus ensuring graduates who are worldly, and intellectually mature.
- A university culture based on intellectual integrity and academic merit.
- Autonomy of universities to make decisions in the best interest of academia and society and not political interests

From the point of view of the academics, it is highly unlikely that academic research and development can flourish within a culture that limits academic activity and imposes a power gap. The author believes, however that the blame cannot be placed totally towards the government. What the government has done is being reactive to the situations that led them to introduce the legislation that governs academia. The government views its responsibility to administer and manage the
country’s resources requires such policies being enforced. There is a gap of understanding from the two points of views. The author believes the Power Distance between those who govern Malaysian academia and the academics themselves have led this to occur.

It is understandable that with limitations from legislation, the cultural power distance influence and also a limited medium for academics to express themselves (with Malaysian mass media being heavily censured and controlled by the government), Malaysian academic activism was heading to a downward spiral. However, this situation is changing and Malaysian academics are starting to find their voice again in the digital age. Other than MOVE’s blog, there are other individual academics in Malaysia using the Internet, specifically blogs and social networking applications that are expressing their views more openly.

The previous Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and our current PM, Dato' Sri Najib Tun Razak, have expressed their support for more openness in universities and society. Both leaders have pushed for ways on attracting Malaysian professionals working abroad to return to Malaysia and contribute to developing the K-Economy. One of the biggest efforts that they have supported is the Brain Gain initiative mentioned in the 9th Malaysia Plan, where the government provides incentives for academics from abroad to return/come to Malaysia to steer science and technology-based R&D.

5.4 Professor Syed Hussein Alatas and Malaysian Intellectualism
Due to the experience during my field work, I wanted to understand more about what I consider as the state of Malaysian ‘intellectualism’. I believe that Malaysian universities should espouse the notion of intellectualism and other idealisms associated with knowledge. Yet, my fieldwork showed me another side to academia that was worrying. That being an academic was ‘just another job’. This sub-chapter hopes to highlight what I feel is a very important piece of work that relates to academia as more than just a career choice, but as an emancipator for a society (within the context of Malaysia).

One of the most prolific academics in history of Malaysia is Professor Syed Hussein Alatas. Clive S Kessler (2008) in a tribute to the late Professor Alatas calls him “... an exemplar of Islamic rationalism and a pioneer of the project of ‘cultural enlightenment’ in modern Nusantara (South
Alatas is most famous for his work, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977) which argued with Western-based orientalists in the 1950s and 1960s of their view on the issues relating to developing countries and their people. Orientalists at the time were generalising on what they thought of as ‘lazy natives’ in countries that were colonised by Western powers which is the cause of their underdeveloped status. Alatas in his work utilised Western-based methods and arguments that this was not the case, that Western colonialism is as much to blame in the state of developing countries and its people. He also defended that among the people of these countries, there are intellectuals and reformers who strive to develop their motherland.

Alatas’ defence of the natives in developing countries also relate to his argument for the establishment of an intellectual community within these societies. In his book, *Intellectuals in Developing Societies* (1977), Alatas discussed at length on the importance of having a community of intellectuals in a developing society. His views of what was going on at the time of his work are something that should be read, understood and contextualised for this time. This book became a very influential piece of literature for this research, not only for its relevant content, but also its idealism that I strive to emulate.

Alatas discussed of the state of Malaysian universities at the time, “For one thing, the educational institutions of the country... had not been geared to produce creative individuals, but rather to provide the certificates and qualifications needed to fill government posts.” This statement, even though written in the 1970s still rings true today. As I have quoted previously, this situation of Malaysian universities focused more towards producing human resource than intellectuals has not changed much since then.

Alatas discussed that the opposite of the intellectual is the fool and that even though certain parties may possess the paper qualifications to make them think they are not fools, their own action and words when it comes to their affairs may represent those of the fool. Even worse, Alatas describes them as ‘intellectual fools’. “It is usually in times of crisis that the fool is exposed. We are not here
speaking of ordinary simpletons but the covertly disguised fools, the members of parliament, the cabinet minister, the lawyer, the physician, the historian, the economist, the sociologist, and other, whose membership of the species of fool is somewhat camouflaged by the training and education they receive.”

Alatas also coined the term *bebalisma* (doltishness) (Kessler 2008) to define the anti-intellectual way of thinking. “Bebalisma is a modern Malay construction invented and used for the first time here; it is derived from the Malay word ‘bebal’ which means ‘stupid, indolent and stubborn’. Bebalisma is an attitude composed of several traits and whose end manifestation includes ignorance, persistent stubbornness instead of persistent effort, indolence and indifference... Bebalisma is not a conscious ideology or belief system and can co-exist with ideologies and belief systems as diverse as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam or Communism. It is trans-cultural, trans-spatial and trans-temporal.” Alatas’ description of the ‘transcendent’ nature of bebalisma related to Malaysian society emphasises that those who adhere to its thinking can consist of any member of society without regard to race, background nor religious beliefs. In other words, you can find *bebalians* in ever fabric of Malaysian society.

Alatas attacks *bebalisma* further by describing it as ‘not original or creative’ and not possessing ‘substantial rationality’ nor ‘functional rationality’. He laments on what he saw as scholars who thought that they were doing scholarly activities by being drowned in books, yet not possessing inquiring minds.

“*Syed Jamaluddin Afghani has furnished us with an example of a bebalian claiming to be a religious sage. These sages had an uninquiring attitude and would sit from evening to morning studying traditional classics with a lamp placed before them without ever asking why smoke came out of the lamp when the cover was removed and disappeared when it was put back. This lack of desire to expend effort applies not only to scientific but even to the effort involved in a war... For more than a century Muslim reformers and intellectuals have been earnestly trying to awaken interest in science, and the same can be said of other Asian societies... The effort is there but the resistance of bebalisma is great.”* (Alatas 1977)
This situation of scholars who choose to see scholarly activity as merely trawling through scriptures and academic text is against Islamic teaching. For knowledge to be truly useful, scholars must practice the knowledge they have gained, whether by practical action or through debates and discussion with other scholars. I have devoted a sub-chapter for this discussion in this chapter.

The greatest danger which hinders intellectualism further comes from bebalians who are in positions of power and shape the policies of a country. In addition, the traits of bebalisma do not enhance the minds of those who adhere to it, thus creating a vicious cycle of anti-intellectualism. “Bebalisma is authoritarian, non-reflective and non-experimental. It is characteristic of bebalisma to expect others to believe in what is suggested without giving ample reasons or explanation when referring to subjects which are outside the ordinary range of acceptability.”

Debates and discussions on issues are also abhorred by bebalians. “Bebalisma has no love for order and rational argument and attaches no value to it. When bebalians do behave in a rational fashion it is by force of habit not rational insight but implanted in them by religious ritual or external force. When they do ask question, they reveal a lack of understanding of principles and consequently irrelevant.”

It would be extremely brash (not to mention dangerous) for me to state that there are traits of bebalisma in Malaysian universities. I would not want to lay claim to statements that may prove to be weak or under-supported (not to mention endangering my career as a Malaysian academic). However, I believe we should not wait or allow ourselves for this attitude to flourish or even take place in the ivory towers of Malaysia. Anecdotes of university administration adhering too closely to bureaucracy that it affects academics in institutions are commonly heard all around the world, not only in Malaysia. My hope for the Malaysian context is that it is not a sign of bebalisma but merely the lack of administrative creativity due to the power distance lack of empowerment.

In my view, there have been signs that bebalisma exists in Malaysian society in general. Whenever issues relating to our society’s multi-cultural or multi-religious make up are raised, there will always be naysayers who claim that issues like these should not be discussed nor studied. One example is the Economic Planning Unit’s (EPU) regulations for granting foreign research partners research access into the country (This document is attached in the Appendix section). Citing
‘sensitive issues’ and warning against inciting ‘racially-motivated actions’, there are those who believe that multi-cultural relationships of Malaysian society should remain stagnant and any form of discussions on them is ‘dangerous’.

The EPU’s definition of sensitive issues is stated as “any issue that can cause prejudice, hatred, enmity or contempt between or towards any ethnic or religious group and can affect public safety, national security and/or the integrity of the Government”. Contextually, it could be understood if the EPU takes extreme caution allowing foreign researchers to study certain issues that can compromise the country's security. Despite their best intentions, foreign researchers may not fully understand the complex situation in Malaysia. A Malaysian-based academic would probably be better in 'self-censoring' some of these research so that the results would be more useful to Malaysian society rather than provoking negative sentiments. The biggest misfortune is that even Malaysian academics are not motivated to study these issues. There are even those in Malaysian academia who are still clinching on the ideas of the racial status quo as indomitable, and never acknowledging the simple reality that the only constant in the world is change.

As a Malaysian, I have seen and read about racial tensions and disagreements since Malaya gained independence from British rule in 1957. These challenges have always been tempered with a combination of proactive political leadership, responsible media and mainly the goodwill of Malaysia’s multi-racial communities in ensuring peace in the country. Malaysian academia was freer in the 1960s and contributed to the debates and discussion on Malaya/Malaysia's racial solidarity. However, around the time I was finishing my fieldwork, Malaysian news reports on a heightened uneasiness and tensions among the members of Malaysia’s multi-racial communities.

Groups like Pertubuhan Pribumi Perkasa Malaysia (Invincible Sons of the Soil Association of Malaysia, PERKASA) which claims to fight for the rights and privileges of the Malays, and also the notion of Ketuanan Melayu (Malay Supremacy) became more prominent in the public eye. The Malay media, particularly the daily newspaper Utusan Malaysia have also been presenting ‘news’ that they claim non-Malay communities are starting to make ‘demands’ to change Malaysia’s policies and even its constitution. Utusan’s headlines such as “Bangkitlah Melayu!” (Arise the Malays!) (Utusan Malaysia headline, 14th April 2009) have been criticised as provocative in nature. As a comparative example, imagine if British newspaper The Daily Mail published a headline that
reads “Wake Up, White Britain!” Without delving too deep into this situation, it is my view that things would not have become this bad if only Malaysian intellectuals were encouraged to study, discuss and debate on issues relating to this situation earlier. In Malaysia’s progress as a nation, I believe there were many missed opportunities for intellectualism to lead the evolution of Malaysian society. Our intellectualism was constrained in matters of academics, rather than developing our society.

The reason why I highlight the challenges of Malaysian society and intellectualism is to describe the background which the Information Systems academic in Malaysia reside in. Many of the issues discussed previously are actively debated through the medium of the Internet. This in itself provides not only an area for IS academics in Malaysia to conduct research, but also to put forth IS-based ideas on how this is affecting our society as a whole. The opportunity is there for IS academics to utilise our intellectualism in contributing to the evolution of Malaysian society, yet I have not seen many of our ranks taking up this challenge. I truly hope that this is not one of the signs of bebalisma being present in IS academia. If we are to heed Alatas’ calls for enhancing intellectualism in our society, IS academics should start debating, and discussing issues on how the Internet and technology has affected Malaysian society.

5.5 Views from the Malaysian Government

When discussing the previous issues of Malaysian academia and intellectualism, it would be unfair to say that the Malaysian government has not encouraged for the development of an intellectual community in Malaysia. The Malaysian government’s efforts to move towards the K-Economy show that they encourage the development of higher education and the growth of a knowledge-based society. It is worthy of discussion, however, to what extent the government wants this level to be. This subchapter will include statements that represent the views of the Malaysian government in terms of its hopes for higher education and university-based research in Malaysia.

For years, the government has shown great concern on issues related to the production of Malaysian university graduates. Statements from Government ministers appear to show support for Malaysian universities within the context of nation building and the development of an educated society.
Former Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, in presenting the 9th Malaysian Plan on 31st of March 2006 stated, “The rakyat (citizens) are the country’s most valuable assets. The development of human resource and the people’s shift in mindset and thoughts represent one of the most enormous challenges. If we are to step into an era of knowledge-based economy, if we want our country to be developed and maintain in that position, developing human resource should take top-priority... The approach for human resource development should be holistic, stressing the development of knowledge, skills, intellectual resource which includes knowledge in science, technology and entrepreneurship, and also the cultivation if progressive attitudes along with high ethical and moral values. This is what is meant as human resource with first class minds.”

Tun Abdullah listed three main strategies in the creation of the ‘first class human resource’:

- First, Developing Knowledge Capability and Empowerment
- Second, Strengthening Scientific Capability, R&D (Research and Development) and Innovation
- Third, Cultivating a Society that is Cultured and Possessing Strong Morals

The current Prime Minister, Dato' Sri Najib Tun Razak, has continued many of the policies and strategies of his predecessor and these traits can be seen in his own policies, such as the New Economic Model (NEM), which emphasises the shift towards a knowledge economy which is more industry-focused with productivity from the private sector, rather than government-sponsored investments. One of the main purposes of the NEM policy is stated as ‘Increase local talent over time’ (NEM Executive Summary, 2010). Under this purpose, possible policy measures were listed:

- Review the education system – shift educational approach from ‘rote learning’ to ‘creative and critical thinking’
- Increase emphasis on reintroducing technical and vocational training colleges
- Identify and nurture talent through a demand-driven process
- Improve autonomy and accountability of educational institutions
- Encourage R&D collaboration between institutes of higher learning and industry
- Enhance English language proficiency
- Deliver high quality education, within reach of all localities

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The policy measures proposed in the NEM Executive Summary appear to be in line with the need of improving Malaysian academia for the purpose of producing the ‘right’ kind of graduates and also in focusing on R&D in universities.

The Malaysian government have constantly reminded academia to produce graduates who fit the needs of the industry. In an article published by Berita Harian newspaper dated 28th July 2010 Datuk Seri Khaled Nordin, the Minister of Higher Education, stated, “The relationship between universities and industry is not new in Malaysian higher education. It has gone on for a long time especially in the past 10 years. For example, in the era of the New Economic Model (NEM) this relationship becomes increasingly more important as the country needs highly skilled workforce... To produce graduates with high quality and skills, universities need to cooperate with industry in providing comprehensive industrial training... University-industry relationship is also important in efforts of enriching the teaching curriculum in universities. In this matter, input from industry is important so that the level of knowledge is dynamic, also for the content of teaching not to be separated from the outside world but strengthening the preparation of would-be graduates for employment... In this issue, we have to admit that the process of knowledge-creation doesn’t just occur in universities, in fact it is also generated by those in industry... We believe, the process of knowledge creation always occurs in industry and it should be benefited by those in university especially in shaping teaching content which is fresh and dynamic... Aspects of commercialisation towards research that are conducted by universities also require the role of industry for its realisation.”

The government has recently emphasised the importance of university, industry and society to collaborate with one another for the development of the nation. The Minister, in the same article, discussed the introduction of a new strategy. Closing the gap of university-industry relationship based on clusters. A total of 19 clusters of fields of study were determined, whereby strategic approaches will be shaped and instigated through discussions among targeted groups lead by the Chairman of the Deans Committee within each individual field and industry cluster. The hope is by clustering the industries and placing those from universities in positions which has a great influence in those industries will improve university-industry relationships. 13 Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) were signed between the MOHE and industry, and universities and industry on the day the clustering strategy was officially introduced. In terms of university relations with
society, Datuk Seri Khaled chose to link how commercially viable research products can contribute to the development of businesses within the society. His perception is that R&D products from universities can benefit the public through income generation from these products.

From his role, the Minister of Higher Education has emphasised the development of research and innovation as one of his agendas in moving Malaysian universities forward. In his annual address at the beginning of the year (delivered on 12 January 2010 at MOHE and beamed through Malaysian Students Departments around the world), he emphasised the practice and implementation of a culture based on Quality, Innovation and Collegiality. In discussing the culture of innovation, he stressed the role of the higher education sector and academia as the instigators and the main players in bringing about an ecosystem which is conducive for innovation, along with implementation that is comprehensive and total. Implementing a culture of innovation also ties directly to the enhancement of research and development in universities.

Some chosen statements from Datuk Seri Khaled’s address, “R&D activities have a place and role of great importance in the higher education sector. Our main aim is to develop and strengthen the country’s research and innovation capabilities. To enhance our abilities in research activities we require a ‘critical mass’ that can become the engine to accomplish those goals… Based on reports from studies conducted by some agencies, the number of our researchers, scientists and engineers (RSE) (including those in industry) is about 30 for every 10,000 members of the workforce... We target by the end of 2010 we can reach a rate of 35 RSE to invigorate the country’s research and innovation activities.”

Other than the mentioned ‘critical mass’, Datuk Seri Khaled also added the role of funding in supporting research activities in his address. “Efforts to invigorate research and innovation activities will be continued with the restructuring of R&D funding whereby they are not only important for research activity, but also encourage the commercialisation of research products through cooperation of public institutions of higher learning, research institutes and commercial corporations. The potential for commercialisation is huge as the country only commercialises 3.5% of research outcomes as compared to 10% at international level. Research universities were gazetted with the intention of invigorating research and development in institutions of higher learning... The government has provided a variety of funding to assist researchers produce high impact and commercialisable research. Among the research grants that are distributed by the
government are Intensification of Research in Priority Area (IRPA), Sciencefund, Technofund, Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) and Research University Grant Scheme (RUGS). In 2010, MOHE will introduce a new initiative in the form of a fund that will increase research activities further in institutions of higher learning.”

Reading through the statement of the Minister of Higher Education, I find that the ministry is doing all it can to spur growth in the R&D field. Their focus on research, especially those with commercial potential (something I would touch upon later in this subchapter) has been commendable and no one can fault their efforts to convey the desire of the government to see Malaysia’s R&D develop. Similarly, the government has also mentioned that research is being done by Malaysian universities and relationships with industry have been established. Knowledge creation and products development in industry is also happening. The question is, where do universities fit in with the research going on in Malaysian industry? At the same time, do the cooperation we have and still fostering with industry enable us university academics, to share this with the rest of the academic community. MOHE has attempted and continues to play the role of bridging the relationship between universities and industry in Malaysia to foster R&D. However, there is still a lack of informing these two parties and also the public in general on how this cooperation can be useful for the country. Ultimately, one of the issues that have not been touched upon by the government is in terms of intangible expectations both parties have of their cooperation. The Malaysian government prefers placing quantifiable targets in their policies for fostering university-industry relationships. The fear is that the focus on numerical values can steer away the focus of encouraging university-industry relationships based on other grounds, such as providing good-will and a sense of national responsibility among the partners.

MOHE has also encouraged the nurturing of ‘soft skills’ among university students to make them more prepared for the competitive job market and also in nurturing what has been mentioned as first class human resource. A module was published in 2006 by MOHE which was distributed among Malaysian academics, entitled Modul Pembangunan Kemahiran Insaniah untuk Institusi Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia (Development of Soft Skills Module for Malaysian Institutions of Higher Learning, MOHE 2006). The intentions of the module was very noble and produced at the right time, when the government was concerned about the lack of graduates employability due to them ‘lacking soft skills’. The Executive Summary of the module emphasised that Malaysian institutions
of higher learning need to revolutionise education to strengthen human resource development for the development of the country and to fulfil the needs of industry. The module proposes systematic methods for calculating Key Performance Indicators to gauge how the students can develop their ‘soft skills’ through curricular and extracurricular activities. In relation to the emphasis of developing human resource to fulfil the needs of the nation, the module states, “With this, institutions of higher learning can generate graduates that possess balanced and all-encompassing skillsets whether from the aspect of intellectual as well as human qualities that include aspects of behaviour, morals etc. Thus, institutions of higher learning need to provide major attention on the issue of ‘soft skills’. These skills aim to generate graduates that possess Skills in Communications; Critical Thinking and Problem Solving skills; Team Skills; Continuous Learning and Information Management; Entrepreneurship Skills; Morals and Professional Ethics; and Leadership Skills.”

What the executive summary attempts to say is that Malaysian university graduates are deemed not possessing the qualities that make them employable by industry. They are knowledgeable in their field and possess the paper qualifications, but they lack the values that make them extra valuable to companies that aim to employ the best kind of people. One of the main concerns addressed by the module is the inability of our graduates in communicating and interacting with the outside world. They have lost the ability to express themselves and their ideas, instead, choosing to only focus on what is written in textbooks.

Anecdotally, the publication of the module and the governments’ highlighting of the soft skills issues came a few years after Malaysian universities started to provide full boarding for its students. I remembered in the 1990s, during my undergraduate years at UTM, students were not guaranteed room and board at universities. I was one of the few fortunate enough to be able to attain boarding at one of the university hostels during my entire duration at university. At the time, I was one of the few exceptions. The huge majority of my classmates lived outside of campus and had to deal with the realities of paying rent and bills. Upon self reflection, this actually made my colleagues more independent than me. One of the reasons why I was able to attain boarding was my active participation in my college's English Language Club, the university's radio and involvement with the college basketball team. In many ways, I feel this was what the government saw as campus participation in developing our students. This form of participation and activities, even though useful, still places the student within the confines of the campus and its regulations. The contexts of what is deemed ‘the real world’ is still a mystery to the average university student. How can these
‘real world’ realities be exposed to students when they only know lodging attainment through hostel offices, and not through negotiating rent with landlords and arranging monthly bill payments? This was also one of the matters highlighted by Professor Syed Azizi Wafa during my interview with him.

In many ways, there are signs that MOHE’s focus on developing soft skills and other qualities among Malaysian university students is an attempt by them to fix things that have been caused by the ministry itself. Apart from the provision of student housing, there are numerous other examples of policies introduced in the past that have contributed Malaysian universities producing the kinds of graduates they are producing now. AUKU is definitely the elephant in the room, and despite its introduction more than 30 years ago, it cannot be denied that the systematic ban on political student activism has to a certain degree contributed to university students who only see universities as a place to attain a university qualification, and not much else.

There was also a period of time when Malaysian universities were adjusting the length of study for certain programs and courses. In my personal example, I was in the final batch of students from my alma mater to take a 5-year degree program. The batch of students that came after were given 4-year degree programs. Lengths of study were shortened by a year in 1996. At that time, this was deemed necessary to fulfil the needs of the industry, which required more skilled workers. However, the shortening of length of study also lead to sacrificing courses that provided the kind of knowledge and skillsets relating to communications and ethical issues. I used to remember taking courses of this nature at least every semester, but my juniors would take only 3 courses within their entire program at university.

Another development in Malaysian academia is the increase of the number of universities in the country. In 2000, there were 10 public universities around the country. By 2009, the number has doubled. Again, the increase in numbers can be attributed to the needs of the country for more skilled workforce. However, it cannot be denied that the increase in the number of government-run varsities have an effect on not only the quality of students, but also the quality of academics. The term ‘spreading ourselves too thin’ is the best way to describe the situation. School leavers who would probably have been rejected from entering public universities and would either opt to join private colleges, study abroad or join the workforce, are welcomed to fill the empty spaces in these
new universities. Young post-graduates are also taken in these universities to fill in the empty teaching positions. What happens when inexperienced lecturers teach students who barely make the grade in universities? As one of those fresh graduates who joined a new university as an academic, I can tell from first-hand experience the struggles I had in teaching some of my students who were not at the expected level. At the same time, due to my youth and a lack of senior academics guiding me, most of the things I did were self-taught which became an experience for my students as well. In the end, it was challenging and despite it all, I hope that the graduates I helped produced came out from my university with the right kind of attitudes and qualities that can make them useful members of society. However, this challenge is being faced by countless other young academics in new universities. Despite the initial problems that arose from earlier decisions on the part of the ministry, MOHE’s attempts to solve the issue of ‘soft skills’ is commendable.

In my literature review of government efforts in promoting research, two ministries have been taken upon the responsibility of improving the situation in the country; i.e. the Ministry of Higher Education and also the Ministry of Science Technology and Innovation (MOSTI). From their websites, I have highlighted a number of initiatives from MOHE and MOSTI to spur the growth of Malaysian universities and its research. These initiatives can be listed as such:

- Brain Gain and Brain Share
- the establishment of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency
- gazetting Research Universities (RU) and an Apex university
- MyBrain15

Brain Gain and Brain Share are programs under MOSTI designed to attract Malaysian talents abroad to return to the country and develop their specific field in Malaysia. The focus of Brain Gain and Brain Share are to bring back Malaysian scientists and academics who are currently working abroad to return to Malaysia by providing research-based incentives.

The Malaysian Qualifications Agency is a body that is responsible for evaluating academic programmes in all institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. Their focus is to maintain the quality of programmes, which includes the modules taught in the programmes to be of acceptable standard.
The gazetting of Research Universities and the Apex University is considered one of the highlights of MOHE's push for university-lead academic research. Five public universities have so far been given the title of Research Universities where these universities are given more funding and support for research activities. The RUs are also encouraged by the government to focus on research-oriented activities rather than undergraduate teaching. The Apex University status, which is currently held by Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), affords similar RU advantages while adding the extra administrative incentives, such as freedom of hiring policy.

MyBrain15 is a programme which the Malaysian government, through MOHE, provides financial sponsorship to those who want to pursue postgraduate degrees in academic fields deemed important by the government. These fields are mainly focused within science, technology and ICT, while social science research that focus on issues related to science and technology can be considered. The funding ranges from full fees payment for the programmes for those working in the private sector, to full fees payment and living expenses for those from the government sector.

Amongst all government statements, they have made it clear that they want Malaysian universities to be more progressive, yet they always allude to issues relating to the autonomy of Malaysian universities, or present vague statements that implies support merely for autonomy on an administrative level.

The government has been aware of an alarming brain drain happening in the country. Among those who have left for greener pastures include our academic communities. Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin touched on this matter which concerns not only Malaysia, but other Muslim countries around the world during the Pre-Forum and Exhibition of the 6th World Islamic Economic Forum on 18th May 2010 and stated, "To reverse the brain drain, we need to create the right liberal ecosystem to stimulate creativity and put a fair reward system to encourage hard work in our societies." He pointed to strategies of modern developed countries which shaped their immigration laws to draw intellectuals and professionals from all over the world to add value to their economy. "They have succeeded with various 'pull factors' such as an intellectually stimulating environment and effective reward and recognition system," Muhyiddin said. Muhyiddin also touched on 'push factors' such as lack of intellectual liberties and fair economic opportunities in some Muslims nations which also contributed to the brain drain (MSN Malaysia, 2010).
The previously stated initiatives such as Brain Gain and Brain Share were introduced to attract these academic back home, thinking it was merely a matter of financial support or remuneration. One aspect they have not recognised (or wish to ignore) is the status of academic freedom in Malaysia. The brochure for Malaysia’s Brain Gain and also the EPU’s scholarship funds include statements that discourage research that may criticise government policy and also matters pertaining to the Malaysian constitution.

As I read through government statements on research and development in Malaysian universities, one word I constantly see is ‘commercialisation’. This emphasis on strengthening Malaysian university R&D and university-industry relationship instigated by the government has always taken a commercial viewpoint, whereby the main intention is to produce financially lucrative outcomes. It is understandable that the government’s intention for academic R&D to produce products that can be made into commercially viable products, since this is also the hopes from industry. Industry itself looks for research that can provide something lucrative for them to produce. Research products with commercial value seem to be able to strengthen university, industry and also government relations. However, we must also question if the role of universities is merely to produce research with market potential, or also to produce research with intellectual quality. Again, when I reread government statements, even though they often discuss innovation, they seldom touch upon intellectualism in its purest form. Barring a couple of individual ministers, the government seldom relates university research to intellectual idealism that fosters debate and discussion and leading to a more transparent society and responsible governance.

In general, the government of Malaysia have been proactive in its approach to resolve issues relating to R&D and the development of its human capital. As most governments do, they tend to tiptoe around issues that would place the blame of some of these problems on themselves. Still, their context should be understood and cannot be ignored. Governments selected from democratic processes have a tendency to be reactive, even when they do things proactively. The bottom line is that the Malaysian government wants to be involved and needs to be involved in the development of R&D in the country. They are the ones who hold the public’s trust in administering the country and its resources to provide a better life for its citizens. Within the context of Malaysia, academia needs
to inform them of what we need regarding issues relating to R&D. We rely on them to provide policies and strategies that will enable us to develop Malaysian academia further.

5.6 Islamic Perspectives

Islam is the official religion in Malaysia. Even though the country’s constitution is secular, Islam still plays an important part in influencing government policies (Allés 2010). We can see how Islam has actually been used as the focal point for many government policies and strategies. We start from Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad’s tenure as Prime Minister, where he inculcated ‘Islamic Values’ and ‘Asian Values’ in Malaysian governance. His successor, Tun Abdullah Badawi introduced Islam Hadhari (Civilisational Islam) as an interpretation of the progressive values of Islam in developing Malaysian society. To the current Prime Minister, Dato' Sri Najib and his 1Malaysia policy which contains values compatible with Islamic teaching.

The Malaysian government also promotes and highlights, whenever the opportunity arises, the contributions of Islam towards science and knowledge. Programs that highlight this are given numerous support by the many ministries under the Malaysian government.

As a Muslim growing up in Malaysia, I was taught Islamic Education throughout my primary, secondary and undergraduate tertiary schooling. Whether as a primary school, secondary school or university student, I was exposed to one of the key principles of knowledge in Islam, that knowledge goes hand-in-hand with practice. In Arabic, which is the language of the Qur’an, ‘ilm (knowledge) and amaal (practice) are inseparable for scholarship.

As I was reminiscing upon statements that link knowledge and practice in Islam, I needed to find the valid textual source that can verify this emphasis in a more meaningful way. I stumbled upon a translation of a treatise written by a historically significant Muslim scholar, Abu Bakr Ahmad ibn ’Ali ibn Thabit ibn Ahmad ibn Mahdi al-Shafi`i, who was more commonly known as al-Khatib al-Baghdadi. Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi was a Muslim scholar in the field of Hadeeth (the sayings and examples from the Prophet Muhammad) who died in 1071AD. The text was entitled ‘Knowledge Mandates Action’ (‘Iqtida ul Ilm al Amaal’ in Arabic). In the text, al-Khatib al-Baghdadi reviewed several hadeeth that related to knowledge and action. Many of the hadeeth he reviewed contend that for knowledge to truly benefit humankind, it must be practiced in the form of an action.
The translator of the text, in his ‘Introduction to the Treatise’ stated some of the main points that could be derived from the treatise:

− It has also been stated: "Knowledge is a parent and action is its offspring" and 'Knowledge comes with action, while narrating comes with investigating."

− Knowledge leads to action, just as action leads to salvation. So if the action falls short of the knowledge, then the knowledge becomes a burden upon the one who possesses it. And we seek refuge in Allah from knowledge that turns into a burden, brings about humiliation, and becomes a shackle on the neck of the one who possesses it.

− Some of the wise people have said: "Knowledge is the servant of action" and "Action is the main objective of knowledge - so if it were not for action, knowledge would not be sought, and if it were not for knowledge, action would not be sought. And if I were to not follow the truth out of ignorance of it, that would be more beloved to me than if I were to not follow it out of intentionally abstaining from it."

During and after the fieldwork, I was also exposed to the Islamic concepts of Tajdid (reformation), and ijtihad (self reflection). One of the most prominent Muslim scholars in Malaysia, Associate Professor Dr Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin has been a strong proponent of these two concepts in reinvigorating Islamic practice and the conceptualisation of knowledge. He is one of the new breed of Malaysian ulamas (Muslim scholars) who are using Web2.0 technology, particularly his blog (http://drmaza.com), to promote his ideas for Islamic revivalism. One of the key aspects that he believes needs to be encouraged more within the field of Islamic knowledge is debates and discussions among the Islamic scholars to pursue more modern interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence.

As a former mufti of the state of Perlis in Malaysia, Dr Mohd Asri tried to usher in modern contexts in the fatwas (Islamic decrees) he produced. One such fatwa was the allowance for the usage of the term Allah with reference to God by non-Muslims (posted 15th March 2010). Dr Mohd Asri has also been extremely critical of what he perceived as the hegemony of Islamic authorities under state governments in Malaysia in curtailing debates and discussions among the scholars. In an article posted on 22 November 2009, entitled ‘The Danger of Repaying Arguments with Blood’, he gave a stark assessment on what he saw as religious authorities answering the arguments from Muslim
scholars with authoritarian actions such as claiming these scholars as deviants. He stated, “When we look at the apprehension of certain groups with religious revivalist movement in our country, this group attempts to attain favour by becoming ‘heroes’ of certain groups that feel threatened (by the revivalists).” Dr Mohd Asri’ views for more open discussions and debate is a refreshing viewpoint compared to what I perceived to be the classical authoritarian approach of conservative Muslim scholars.

Dr Muhammad Afifi Al-Akiti, a fellow of Islamic Studies in Oxford University who hails from Malaysia also states that knowledge should reach beyond mere book learning. Dr Afifi came into prominence, particularly in the United Kingdom when on 23 July 2005, days after the bombings that occurred on 7 July in London, he published a document entitled ‘Defending the Transgressed by Censuring the Reckless against the Killing of Civilians’. This document was later described as a "fatwa or 'response by a qualified Muslim scholar against the killing of civilians" by Islamic scholar Shaykh Gibril Haddad.

In an interview in the Malaysian television channel Astro Awani on 31st July 2009, Dr Afifi mentioned on the importance of Muslim scholars to be well-versed in not only their field of study but to also engross themselves with other areas of knowledge. He contends that Muslim scholars should become polymaths who are able to master more than one field of knowledge. This is similar to many early Muslim scholars who contributed to the rise of Islamic civilisation. He connects this with the quest to find knowledge as a duty of every Muslim, “(From the movie Star Trek’s tagline) ‘To boldly go where no one has gone before’ is a very Islamic ideal embedded within the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Wisdom according to the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) is the lost ‘camel’, the lost item of a believer. He says in another hadeeth, ‘Seek knowledge until the final frontiers of knowledge’. This is an attribute that we must regain in order for us to see things as they are. One has to nampak panjang (view a great distance) and be able to not be held hostage to our (Muslim) text alone but to have that courage to also be able to believe in things that may not have the immediate (textual) proof.”

On the question of whether Muslims in Malaysia have become too judgemental and moving away from differing opinions and discussing about ideas, Dr Afifi answered, “There is a difference between knowledge and information. Perhaps we have a lot more information today but not a lot of
knowledge. Knowledge is something where, if you have it, it would be something that is internalised (and) something that takes years to mature. Information is something you memorise. Imam Shafi’ee says ‘knowledge is what benefits, not what is memorised.’ In order to rise up to this challenge, the classical tradition of the pre-modern age of Islam is to have debates. We have among the ulamas and academes we have the freedom to argue their case but in an adaab (civilised) setting, (which is) the right way of debating. This is one of the traditions of Oxford which is ‘Islamic’. That is why I always say to my students that the Western tradition has the enlightenment period at the end, and the dark ages before (that). We (Muslims) on the other hand had our enlightenment period (first) followed by, perhaps we are in our dark ages. But we believe in the fact that behind every museebah (tragedy) there is a silver lining. God-willing.”

As a Malaysian Muslim, I personally feel a sense of gratitude at the efforts of the government to promote the rich heritage of knowledge Islamic civilization has brought to the world. The implementation of Islamic-based policies in the government is part of this as well. However, I am somewhat disappointed when the translation of Islamic values and fostering of knowledge only scratches the surface in its implementation. Government sponsored programs, such as television shows, exhibitions and books focus on the physical contributions Muslim scholars have given to the world, but rarely emphasise the progressive thinking these scholars possess. The action of certain state Islamic authorities which undermine attempts for more debate and discussion is one of the signs of this dichotomy. It is a very interesting matter for me to explore in the future, as the limits of this PhD does not go beyond acknowledging that there is a growing movement among some of today’s Muslim scholars to partake in debates and discussions. For the sake of advancing knowledge in Malaysia, this area must be explored further.

5.7 Action Research Revisited
After the fieldwork ended, I realised I needed a way to convey the experience of my research to present my participative contribution to the organisation that I did fieldwork in. I revisited the topic of Action Research (AR) in my literature review to support my claim for action-based contributions within the research. This time, my literature review focused on finding an acceptable ‘representation’ of Action Research which fits into my contextual research situation. What I found was that Action Research itself possesses diversity in interpretation and implementation. This
enforced my notion that AR emphasises the researcher’s contextual notions within the research, and also empowers the researcher’s own research interpretation and implementation. This empowerment is essential when describing the research story from a first-person perspective as there are different ways to express AR. I then link this sense of empowerment with the situation in Malaysian Information Systems academia in which there are have been calls to utilise AR in revolutionising academic structures.

As part of revisiting AR-related literature, I attempted to look again into several definitions of Action Research.

Heller (2004) states, “Action Research is not a single method of knowledge acquisition and change. It can be described as a family of methods distinguished by having several identifiable objectives and characteristics.”

Eden and Huxham (2006) state, “A myriad of terms and approaches are used in connection with action research.” They added, “The field is confused and, despite the numerous attempts to differentiate the approaches, precise interpretations of each seem largely to depend on the user or author and the audience they are playing to.”

Cassell and Johnson (2007) state, “For nearly 70 years scholars have been discussing the characteristics of action research and it is apparent that there is an increasingly wide range of forms in which action research takes in practice.”

My personal preferred definition of Action Research, comes from Reason and Bradbury (2001), “a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes . . . It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.”

Burgess’ (2006) expressed her participatory AR experience from the first person perspective of a graduate student partaking in action research. Her paper argues the AR researcher cannot separate
or compartmentalise the roles that he or she plays. It is all within us. The first person perspective in AR is related to the researcher being the research tool, and in some cases, the research subject as well.

Within Action Research, there are also representations of how AR is expressed from different perspectives (Chandler and Torbert 2003). First-, second- and third-person perspectives in AR are suggested when expressing findings from an AR research. In connection to the narrative of my Action Case, I needed to find an explanation for my choice of narrative. The story narrative I have chosen has actually been utilised within the context of educational research. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state that “Although narrative inquiry has a long intellectual history both in and out of education, it is increasingly used in studies of educational experience. One theory in educational research holds that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world.”

My fieldwork's efforts to transform my school and improve the research activities was basically an action-based participative activity to instigate change within a university environment. I came across two papers written by Davydd Greenwood and Morten Levin. Greenwood and Levin (2001) stated, “We argue that action research, both as a form of multidisciplinary knowledge generation and as a form of stakeholder-centred organisational change, is the best hope for successful university reform. Put another way, we see the way out of the dilemmas of contemporary universities to revolve around the practices of pragmatism in teaching and learning and democratization in the organization of university teaching, research, and administration.” In many ways, my research suggests reforming Malaysian public universities although in smaller and lower levels.

Greenwood and Levin (2008) added to their previous work by arguing for the application of Action Research to reform the field of social sciences and of universities themselves. They state, “One of the major challenges facing modern universities that are funded with private or public money lies in making visible their contribution to important social and technological challenges in the larger society. This cannot be done unless research and teaching are clearly aligned to extra-university needs... Although such argument is often heard, little progress has been made at mediating university-society relationships... Action research meets the need for this kind of mediated
communication and action. (Action Research) deals with real-life problems in context, is built on participation, creates mutual learning opportunities for all, and produces tangible results.”

The focus of my post-fieldwork literature review on Action Research provided me with literature support for what I was trying to do in utilising an Action-based methodology, a first-person narrative for writing my thesis and exposed me to radical ideas of using AR to reform universities themselves. Exposure to the AR-related literature ultimately led me to the choice of Action Case as my research methodology, which I will discuss further in Chapter 6.

### 5.8 Debates and Discussions on the State of Information Systems

Information Systems is a field that has been influenced by a broad spectrum of other fields of study. Within the Malaysian context, I still claims its position as a branch of ICT. Among the 20 public universities in Malaysia, 18 of them have ICT based schools and Information Systems is either a program or taught as a module within these schools.

This situation is somewhat different when comparing IS university programs in the United Kingdom, the United States or other countries in the West. IS academia are mainly placed under business schools and faculties in these countries. One of the main reasons I believe is that the field of IS possesses a rich diversity of methods, application, practice and theoretical connections. The social and organisational aspects of IS moves it closer to business-based than IT-based institutions. Some may argue that this is one of the fluidity and flexibility traits of IS as a field.

There is an on-going debate (Shah, Wood-Harper and Pritchard, 2009; Gill and Bhattacherjee, 2009; Myers and Baskerville, 2009) on the issue of Information Systems as a field of study and its relevance as an individual academic field. Cuts and decreasing student uptake are issues that have sparked this debate. Malaysian IS is ‘safer’ since our centralised university enrolment system assures us a steady flow of students. But what if things were different and our system changed to demand-based? Are we confident enough to say Malaysian IS contributions will entice students to choose the field?

Avison and Baskerville (2002) have made the claim “The conventional wisdom amongst information systems (IS) researchers is that information systems is an applied discipline drawing
upon other, more fundamental, reference disciplines. These reference disciplines are seen as having foundational value for IS. We believe that it is time to question the conventional wisdom. We agree that many disciplines are relevant for IS researchers, but we suggest a re-think of the idea of "reference disciplines" for IS. In a sense, IS has come of age. Perhaps the time has come for IS to become a reference discipline for others.”

One of the more recent discussions has actually questioned IS’ relevance as a field and draws upon concerns whether it can maintain itself as an individual field of study. Gill and Bhattacherjee (2009) argue that there is a gap in MIS (Management Information Systems) research and practice. They propose assessing MIS through Informing Science.

The management information systems discipline today faces several major challenges that can potentially undermine the value of our research activities and our continued growth as an academic research discipline. These challenges can be divided into three categories (Gill and Bhattacherjee, 2009):

1. **Research challenge**: What should we be researching and how should we be conducting such research?

2. **Informing challenge**: How do we ensure our research gets out to our potential clients?

3. **Resource challenge**: Where do we get the funding necessary to support our research activities?

There are those who feel that this has been going on for years and has become quite cliché. The widely used metaphor when discussing on the direction of IS debate is ‘being at the cross roads’. Somers (2010) suggests, “A better metaphor for IS seems to be that it is ‘in a hole’ that gets a little deeper every day. This new/metaphor offers the more sombre view that the pluralism and associated debate within IS is an indulgence that, at some point, is going to become too expensive.”

There are questions as well whether there is a genuine cause for extreme concern. Even though they have expressed a troubling trend in Western academic institutions, Gill and Bhattacherjee (2009) have also commented that MIS is still thriving in the Asia-Pacific region, while growing in the two future economic super powers, China and India.
As I was finishing my thesis, a paper from Alan Lee (2010) entitled 'Retrospect and Prospect' caught my eye which I extracted some key points from it. In his paper, Lee (2010) touched upon IS perceived relevance in academia. He states that IS research does not need to depart from, but needs to supplement, its 'applied theory' view in which knowledge is first developed by IS researchers and then subsequently applied by managers, executives, consultants, and others. The starting point of IS research need not be the existing theory (episteme) located in the IS discipline’s own (or any other) research literature; rather, the starting point could be the techne and phronesis of IS professionals, managers, executives, and consultants (‘natives’) themselves, where action research or design research conducted by IS researchers (‘anthropologists’) could build on the techne and phronesis which they observe and interpret. Furthermore, they could be doing this not only for the purpose of crafting episteme, but also for the purpose of documenting the techne and phronesis in ways that other IS professionals and managers could appropriate.

Lee (2010) proposed that to improve theories-in-use, about 'how to do research' will require more than just the cognition that some change is needed. The research that a member of the IS research community is allowed to do is mediated by the opportunities and constraints that the community’s social structure makes available to or imposes on the researcher. No single individual or even collection of individuals who are members of the IS research community can be expected to have the power needed to effect such change. However, the inexorable shift in academic and economic power and prestige away from the western nations of the world, creates an opportunity and even the necessity for such change. The initiation and nurturing of IS research in nations where it is young need not be beholden to the structures of ‘old world’ ideas and institutions. Just as immigrants to a new land can leave behind oppressive traditions and establish emancipatory ones, IS researchers in places where IS research institutions have not yet become entrenched can choose to retain what they like in old IS research, leave behind what has not worked, and innovate new research traditions.

Richard Baskerville (2010) wrote a commentary paper to support Lee's ideas entitled, Knowledge Lost and Found. Baskerville comments that the evolution of Information systems can be seen from general systems theory providing the philosophical ground for the development of IS, and this progressed through work from Peter Checkland (1981) by melding it with action research to create a systems approach to the study and development of organizational systems. This was further propelled into solid form for IS development by Avison and Wood-Harper's development of
Multiview (Wood-Harper et al 1985). It is not clear how later generations have built significantly further on this stream. Baskervill referred to Lee's argument that the kinds of knowledge being produced by the IS research community is not necessarily unusable, but the basis for choosing the subject matter is faulty. These are very appealing points. Newer professional academic disciplines seem anxious to ‘science-ify’ their fields. But older professional disciplines seem more comfortable accepting both their science facets and the arts facets. Baskerville believes that knowledge cannot easily cross such a gulf. To a certain degree, the general IS preoccupation with science may have created just such a gulf. Lee’s suggestion of anchoring future scientific studies to problems in practice is indeed needed progress. But to eliminate the gulf, we need to anchor bridges on both sides of the gulf.

Lee and Baskerville's papers describe a call for IS research to return to its applicable roots in industry in order to find our relevance again. I would like to think that my PhD research is an attempt to make IS research methods relevant in the context of research improvement in an ICT-based school. Later on in my thesis I propose not only to link ourselves with industry but with the government as well. Through my experience of doing my research in Malaysia, support and cooperation between academics and the government cannot be taken lightly.

When proposing IS academics in the West to look East for new opportunities in increasing this relevance. My warning in the case of my own country is that in Malaysian Information Systems, IS academics are still working towards making IS relevant to the K-Economy and our shift to product-based research. In this regard, Malaysian IS academics need to be more pro-active in stating the uniqueness in our field.

I personally believe that IS academics should be the polymaths of the field of Information Technology and Management. Motivated by the opinions of Muslim academics on bringing back the values of Muslim scholarship, believe that the Information Systems academics could be the new multi-talented scholars that Malaysian public universities are looking for. It’s time to ditch the tagline, ‘Jack of all trades and Master of none.’ We Malaysian IS academics should claim that we are the Masters of many trades relating to ICT and Management.
Despite some of the ‘doom and gloom’ that we have heard from Information Systems in the West and in Asia, perhaps its time to look at the glass half full. The debates and discussions occurring are for the good of Information Systems. It keeps academics ‘busy’ in a sense. If we can present this diversity of opinions positively, the industry might see the value of Information Systems and our methods in practice. One thing is for sure, Information Systems academics are passionate in our debate and discussions. If we can focus this passion to more applicable practice in our research, this would be more productive for promoting the field of IS.

5.9 Summary

Figure 5.1 shows the FMA and the transformation in the Framework of Ideas upon reflection within the additional literature reviewed after the fieldwork. The focus of the literature review was the social-political contexts which I did not discover until I was back within the actuality of Malaysian academia. I have added to the Framework of Ideas (F), Post-fieldwork Review as it shaped my final Theoretical Framework for the research.

Figure 5.1: FMA after taking into account the post-fieldwork socio-political contexts review

At this stage of my research, my FMA included these elements:
Pre-fieldwork, my research's literature and assumptions on research methodology were influenced by an externally viewed weltanschauung from outside of the research situation. Due to this separation, I 'thought I saw' what needed to be reviewed in terms of literature and documentation for the needs of my research. It was only during and after I conducted my fieldwork that I was able to 'hear' what was needed to support my research from within the situation.

When comparing Figure 5.1 to the framework of ideas shaped in the end of Chapter 2, the addition of the post-fieldwork review plays an important part in the formulation of a more solid Theoretical Framework. Figure 5.2 illustrates the updated theoretical framework for the research. framework was for explaining the situation. My chosen functional interpretation within the context of my research is that 'theory that attempts to provide a lens for explaining the world' (Gregor 2006). The motivation for such a theoretical viewpoint is that I wanted to understand the situation within the research. The theoretical framework for my PhD was not one that would prescribe solutions but merely explain the situation.
I will elaborate the Theoretical Framework further in Chapter 7 based on the analysis from my fieldwork findings. At this point of my definition of research methodology was nearly determined based on the further exposure to Action Research literature. However, there were still some lingering issues that needed to be studied further and in the Chapter 6, I reveal Action Case as my final choice of research methodology.
Chapter 6 Post-Fieldwork Research Methodology (Action Case)

6.1 Introduction
This chapter will discuss the transformation that affected the Research Methodology of this research. My initial ideas for Action Research and Case Study had to be altered somewhat due to experience learned during the fieldwork. The discovery of literature on Action Case also influenced these adjustments upon reflection on how to justify the fieldwork and activities done. This chapter concludes with the final FMA.

6.2 Post Fieldwork Reflection on Research Methodology
Going through the fieldwork, there were many issues that made me reflect upon my research methodology. My plans for participative actions hinted at an action-based research method. At the same time, I realised during the fieldwork that due to my position, the changes and transformation was not as large-scale as I hoped. There were limitations of the scale of the research both in time and influence. Still, the two methods I could relate to in doing the fieldwork remained to be Action Research and Qualitative Case Study.

During the fieldwork, I participated and lead activities that caused a small transformation to SSIL. Even though the first meeting with members of SSIL did not go as well as planned and actually caused the main methods in the fieldwork (the Action Learning meetings) to be scrapped, my colleagues began to think about research after the meeting and became more interested in research. I believe my presence at the school and the first presentation itself started that.

The main activity within the fieldwork was organising the Qualitative Research Workshop. For this activity, I ‘lead’ the organisation committee (due to university regulations, the Deputy Dean was credited as the chairman of the committee and I was placed as Secretary), formulated the activities for the workshop and invited the presenters. I received full cooperation for the organisation of the SSIL workshop from my colleagues. They all pitched in and I was extremely proud of our efforts. All of the participants gave positive reviews of the workshop. My colleagues as well said that after the SSIL workshop, they became more motivated to do research. They also have a better understanding and grasp of qualitative research methods.
My personal review of the fieldwork at SSIL is that it was extremely positive. From my experience and the interviews I conducted, I found material that supported and shaped my ideas. My colleagues also gave constructive criticisms to aid my further analysis. By the end of the fieldwork, I started to see the small changes that could be attributed to the workshop and some of my personal activities at SSIL.

However, I wondered if it was only me, or was it due to the influence of Dr Awang as the Dean? In my final presentation, I listed the two most influential people to change the situation at SSIL to be Dr Awang and myself. As the Dean of the school and most senior member of SSIL, plus the only one with a PhD, Dr Awang also conducted his own activities to encourage research activity. Dr Awang’s setting up of Labuan Usability Research Group (LURG) within SSIL and also his emphasis on research in school meetings were his main contributions to transforming SSIL’s research. In many ways, my fieldwork actually supported Dr Awang’s role as the Dean in transforming SSIL’s research.

This is why I cannot discount the influence of Dr Awang and his position as Dean within this research. It has to be said we both played our part within this organisational transformation. It may have been a case of happenstance that Dr Awang took the leadership helm at just the same time I was about to conduct my fieldwork, or the other way around. However, there is no denying that the support he gave, representing administrative influence as an important factor, contributed to the fieldwork and the workshop’s success.

In reshaping the Research Methodology upon post-fieldwork reflection, constant reading exposed me to literature that assisted in formulating what I can deem as the final version of the Research Methodology. The previous chapter, Post-Fieldwork Literature Review, reflects on the materials that contributed upon the Research Methodology. Incidentally, it was also after the fieldwork when I found an important piece of research on the Action Case method which I used to complete my Research Methodology.

6.3 Updated Research Design (Action Case)

My initial idea for an Action Case Study was based on the assumptions below:

- Combining Action Research with Case Study
• Active Participation in the situation and organisation
• Cycles of learning, but limited due to time constraint and position
• Case Study comes into effect due to data collection from case study methods
• Planned continuation into Action Research post-PhD

The research design presents a combination of both Action Research and Case Study. In the initial stages of my PhD, I felt this could become a research contribution on its own. Formulating a combination of both methods and providing a framework on how to use this method within this context. Basically, I wanted to ‘introduce’ my own mixture of action-based method with case study method. My exposure to such techniques was limited pre-fieldwork due to a lack of references on action case. As my pre-fieldwork Research Methodology can attest, I initially focused on the two main research methods that I attempted to combine, Action Research and Case Study.

Upon returning to Manchester, I was lead to works from Kristin Braa and Richard Vidgen on Action Case. Their work on action case is motivated by what they felt as a need for a research framework that utilises organisations as the primary ‘laboratory’ for Information Systems researchers. “We propose an IS research framework for the organisational laboratory in which research approaches- intervention, interpretation, and reduction- are matched with the research outcomes- change, understanding, and prediction, respectively. We place the traditional research methods appropriate to an in-context investigation of IS- action research, case study, and field experiment- within the proposed research framework and describe the use of this framework for design, control, and explanation of IS research initiatives.” (Braa and Vidgen 1997).

In their assessment, Braa and Vidgen believe that IS research is unique where organisational and technical aspects are studied in tandem. “A major strength of IS research is its potential to maintain a view of organisation and technical artefact in specific organisational contexts. Indeed, we go further and suggest that the primary laboratory for the IS researcher is the organisation, in which specific context of development and use of technical artefacts can be investigated. However, although the theory of IS research may provide rigorous and separable methods, in practice IS researcher may find themselves situated in an uncomfortable space in which a variety of methods are needed to account for both the soft, social interests of organisations and the seemingly hard interests of technical artefacts.”
As I was assessing my own choice of methodology, I thought about the alternatives that I could have chosen in doing my research. Within the context of Information Systems research, the choice that plays a significant part in leading the research and also its narrative is whether the researcher chooses to be an active participant or not. Active participation in itself also leads to questions regarding power and influence within the organisation. In choosing an action-based research method, within my organisation to boot, I was opening up myself to politically-related opportunities for myself. My comments and criticisms of matters pertaining to my organisation also needed to be aware of these political issues. Within Information Systems, research based on intervention can be done without taking a critical perspective which could influence the power structure of the organisation.

Braa and Vidgen (1997) stated, “It is, of course, possible for a researcher to make an intervention without taking a critical perspective. For example, the aim might be to test and develop further a new system development technique or a new CASE (computer-aided software engineering) tool. An intervention is made in functionalist terms, such as reduction in development life-cycle time of cost-savings. Not surprisingly, action research and participatory action research have been criticised for perpetuating the prevailing power structure and systems of control.”

For my research, since I have chosen an action-based method, I had to be aware of the issues surrounding my research and its impact towards my organisation. At first, I viewed the contextual views of those within an organisation as something that can be resolved through the use of language. I believed statements can be shaped, with permission of those involved, by using ‘more diplomatic terms’ to produce more generalised statements that could minimise notions relating to power. But this is part of the great debate between subjectivist and objectivist research. To choose more functionalist terms in describing something would take away the subjective and contextual nature of that situation. However, I still believe that there must be a way to find a more ‘diplomatic’ way to describe some of the issues in my research. I hope that by reading through my thesis, I have shown an attempt to use more diplomatic language in describing the situation facing IS academics in Malaysia, or at the very least provide the differing viewpoints to enable self-assessment by the reader.
One of the ethical considerations that relates to my choice of an interpretivist action-based method is related to the issue of my position within the organisation that I research. The proposed choices described previously by Braa and Vidgen (1997) for a more functionalist approach in conveying the problems in my organisation, would have fulfilled an expectation for a more neutral IS research. Unfortunately, I believe that this form of interpretation would hinder attempts to commit to a more complete transformation within the organisation. Braa and Vidgen’s criticism of action research that it ‘perpetuates prevailing structures of power’ is not without merit. My understanding is that the choice of this method should also take into consideration the contextual position of the researcher. Being one of the more senior members of SSIL, I have seen the role of the existing university administration and the choices they have made for my school. Diplomatically, the reasons behind their actions and administrative choices are justifiable within their context. It can be easy to claim futility in challenging or attempting to change the administration in a meaningful way and to just resolve to accept the choices that have been done for the organisation. This can be attributed as well to the Power Distance we have among academics and administration. However, this is the reason why I chose action-based research in the first place. My choice of action case can be made as an analogy of the situation in Malaysian academia. Academics in Malaysia seek to transform academia and universities in our country, but are bound by the limitations of influence and power we have within the administration of Malaysian higher education, so we choose to instigate an evolution (as opposed to a revolution) from within our restricted capabilities through our research and graduates.

Another issue that needs to be addressed as well is the potential for this research to influence my position at SSIL. Without a doubt, the research provides ample opportunity for promotion as the findings are meant to improve SSIL’s research activities. In my defence, I would like to refer to my position as one of the most senior members of SSIL. Among the academics, I am the third longest serving member of SSIL having been at the school since October 2000. I was also the third lecturer given study leave and sponsorship to pursue my PhD at the school. There is an inevitability that in the future, the university administration will offer me an administrative position at SSIL. My hope is that my approach in doing this research has been as transparent as possible, in case I do attain promotion in the future. Similarly, I also hope to continue my research and participation in improving SSIL’s research activities, not with the intention of ‘perpetuating the powers I may attain in the future’, but as a contribution to transform the organisation to become the best it can be.
Some of the assumptions mentioned previously proved to be true when referring to the Action Case method prescribed by Braa and Vidgen. “We argue that the case studies were not ‘pure’ interpretations since they contained an element of intervention, while the testing of the IS quality and priority workshop methods did not lead quite to the scale of change that one might expect in full-scale action research. We suggest that the research cases can be better categorized as action case rather than as case study or as action research.” (Braa and Vidgen 1999)

In announcing the name of this methodology, “We coined the phrase ‘action case’ to reflect a method that is a hybrid of action research (intervention) and soft case study (interpretation).” (Braa and Vidgen 1999)

Braa and Vidgen (1997) relate research with three main knowledge interests, change, prediction and understanding. Their choices were influenced by work from Habermas (1972) who identified technical, understanding and emancipatory interests in knowledge. They state, “The technical interest is concerned with explanation, prediction, and control; only when the world is regular can one achieve control and repeatability. The interest of understanding is concerned with the interpretation of data and history. The emancipatory interest is concerned with criticism as a basis for change and is founded on the view that power is distributed unequally.”

Figure 6.1 represents “graphically individual and holistic views of the knowledge interests” and is helpful to explain the existing gap between research theory and research practice.

Figure 6.1: A research methods space (Braa and Vidgen 1997 and 1999)
In their explanation of the research method space triangle, Braa and Vidgen (1997) stated, “The points represent intended research outcomes and are aligned with the knowledge interests of Habermas: prediction with a technical knowledge interest (the scientific approach); understanding with an understanding interest (interpretive approach); and change with an emancipatory interest (the critical approach). The points of the triangle should be viewed as ideal types in the Weberian sense... these ideal type approaches to research are unlikely to be attainable in practice, which is represented by the constrained space of the triangle... The dotted lines inside the triangle represent movements towards the ideal type. As the researcher moves towards the prediction point through a process of reduction, there should be greater explanatory power, predictive power, and statistical generalizability. Movement toward the understanding point through the process of interpretation is associated with greater in-context understanding of IS in the organisational laboratory. Movement towards the change point is achieved through a process of intervention, the results of which should be evaluated from an emancipatory viewpoint.”

Figure 6.2 attempts to place the different forms of IS research in positions within the research space triangle. The methods are placed based on their motivation for knowledge interests. If the research method is meant to increase understanding, for example, it would be placed near the triangle edge which represents understanding. There are also methods that will be placed ‘in between’ separate edges in the triangle. These methods would represent an attempt to achieve two kinds of knowledge interests. For action case, Braa and Vidgen suggested the method to be placed in between the triangle edges representing change and understanding. Looking at the triangle, we see action case being squashed between action research and soft case study. From this view, we can surmise that action case combines elements from these two research methods to produce a method that attempts to instigate some form of change, while underlining the importance for interpretive understanding within that situation. There are also other ways to describe the two mixes of methods, but the basic elements are for a form of intervention to take place with the intention for emancipation, and that the method emphasises the formulation of a subjective interpretation of data and history.
During the fieldwork, I discovered that things were more complicated than my initial plan. My initial choices for research methodology also taught me to adjust my expectations for claiming the research methods I used as Action Research. The application area itself had to be adjusted in light of the experience from my fieldwork. A total improvement became a huge task to fulfil. However, my contribution can be regarded as an effort towards improvement and the lessons I learned from the experience is part of the application which could be reapplied for future research. I also viewed the application area to be wider as the efforts and learning could possibly cover Malaysian IS academia.

One of my earlier assessments of my research made me think I have experienced two cycles of action research. I separated my fieldwork into activities I did before the SSIL workshop in March and activities done afterwards. The limited number of cycles however puts forth the question of whether what I was doing was actually Action Research. The field work that I did included participative activities which hinted at an action-base approach, however due to time constraints I was not able to fulfil a ‘full’ action research. There were also elements similar to a qualitative case study that was carried out during my field work. Interviews, discussion panels and observations were carried out during my field work, thus I felt my research method mixed both action research and qualitative case study. Figure 6.3 showed an initial design of my research.
However, I felt that the AR cycles could have been represented as a single cycle. The reason for this was that I could not clearly define the individual activities within the field work into the AR cycle. Thus, I listed the activities and placed them as iterative activities that contributed to the overall Action-based research.

I also need to address that the AR cycle activities are viewed from the researcher’s view. There were times when the activities were shared with my colleagues at SSIL, but for this research’s
context, all activities are carried out myself. Figure 6.4 represents the updated research design. The research design is split into three sections, Pre-Fieldwork, Fieldwork and Post-Fieldwork. The sections contain activities that are broken down further broken down:

- **Pre-Fieldwork Preparation:**
  - Literature Review
  - SSM Preparation

- **Fieldwork**
  - Qualitative Case Study
    - ISQualRes and SSIL Talks
    - Preparation from MBS
    - MADICT Workshop
    - Interviews
  - Action Research Cycle
    - Re-Introduction and First Meeting
    - SSIL Workshop and Discussion Forum
    - Presentation to SSIL

- **Post-Fieldwork (activities are either still underway or will be done after the PhD)**
  - PhD Write Up
  - Proposals for UMS and Malaysian Government
  - Further Action Research
  - Returning to Academia

Upon reflection, one of the things that I need to be aware of is the way the two methods of Action Research and Case Study were being integrated. In my initial literature review, I discussed the views of Miles (1988) which prescribed that any combination of methods should be based on embedding hard methods into soft systems methods. In announcing the fieldwork activities, my views are that since the case study were done using qualitative methods, its integration into the action case was an embedding of activities to extract input and feedback within a participative action-based research method. This is my justification and hopefully my interpretation of Action Case would not be seen as a mere 'grafting' of Action Research and Case Study activities.
6.4 Comparison between Susman and Evered’s 5-Stage Model and Checkland’s 7-Stage Model

During the PhD, I have referred to the Action Research model as proposed by Susman and Evered (1978). Similarly, I have also utilised Peter Checkland’s SSM and utilised rich pictures in explaining the problems situations that reside within the research area. Similarly, it is SSM which is the basis for Uchiyama’s actuality-based Contextual SSM, and I have brought in the importance of contexts and the differing weltanschauungen is the cause of misunderstandings of those in the research.

There have been many discussions of the area of AR on the best definition for Action Research and which model represents the best practice for it. For this issue, I have taken a more moderate view as Cassell and Johnson (2006) have discussed the diversity of AR. I also have prescribed to their view that the definition should not be limited and that the diversity is actually a good thing. The diversity stems from the different philosophies and contexts of the research undertaken, and since most AR researchers advise upon understanding the contexts, encouraging and empowering them, I do not see why this should not be the case in my research.

I can foresee criticism towards me that this looks like a case of a PhD researcher who is only picking the ‘suitable bits’ of the different representations of AR and placing them in his research. In my defence, after contemplating my own context and also the situation I was put in, I believe that the diversity of the methods I have utilised, which come from mainly similar roots of AR, as representing the diversity of Malaysia and its society. I did not merely pick ‘the most suitable bits’ of the different AR methods. I believe the diversity stems from choosing the most appropriate one for the context.

Susman and Evered’s AR cycle is more ‘simplified’ in the sense that the focus are the activities within an Action Research, whereas Checkland’s SSM takes into consideration the real world and the systemic view of the world. In representing the AR as done through Susman and Evered’s representation, I have chosen to express a simpler description of how the activities in the AR were carried out. However, when it came time for me to reflect upon the problem situations, I took Checkland and Uchiyama’s contextual approaches in assessing the different viewpoints of
representing them. Which was why, I used rich pictures to illustrate the differing views within the problem situations.

1. Enter the problem situation
2. Establish roles
3. Declare M, F
4. Take part in change process
5. Rethink 2, 3, 4
6. Exit
7. Reflect on experience and record learning in relation to F, M, A

Figure 6.5: The process of action research (from Checkland and Holwell 2007)

Figure 6.5 illustrates the process of action research based on Checkland and Holwell (2007). Their recommendation for action research shows that when we enter the problem situation, the framework of ideas and methodology may change. After the researcher leaves the problem situation, the research can reflect on the experience of the research and record what he/she learned in relation to the FMA. This is what I have been trying to do in my research and throughout this thesis.

6.5 Action Case and its Narrative

My belief is that Participatory Action Research is based on the author of the research acting as the ‘hero’ of the story. My exposure to the first person narrative from literature (Broussine 2008; Bradbury and Reason 2003; Chandler and Torbert 2003; Clandinin and Connelly 1989; Quarry and Ramirez 2009; and Burgess 2006) supported a unique narrative would prove to be useful for my research. These examples show the attachment the researcher has and his/her role in bringing about the transformation.
The first person perspective of the research thesis hopefully highlights this view. Normally Case Studies portray the researcher as a ‘story-teller’, reminiscing in how the research went with descriptions of the situation as someone who was there but not in a participative capacity. My participation and 'hands-on' activities to try and bring about research improvement in the school hopefully portrays a first person perspective of what happened during the research.

Action Case resides in-between Action Research and Case Study. While there is participation and examples, due to the limitations, the transformation may not be as huge as that of a ‘hero’. The description does resemble a ‘story-teller’ but there is a participative element as well to how the story is told. Through my experience, there are also other ‘heroes’ to my research story who played just as significant, if not more significant roles, in the IS research situation of SSIL and Malaysia. Thus, at certain times during the research, I felt more like a ‘side-kick’ than a hero.

6.6 Summary

The final FMA for this research is described in Figure 6.6.

Figure 6.6: This research's 'final' FMA

Explanation of the FMA:
Framework of Ideas: A combination of experience and reflections on SSIL, pre-fieldwork literature review, the fieldwork experience and post-fieldwork literature review (socio-political context review) shapes the eventual Theoretical Framework of my research.

Methodology: Action Case

Application Area: Efforts and learning on how to improve research at Labuan School of Informatics Science and Malaysian Information Systems

At this point of this research, I have come nearly at the end. By determining the Action Case as my research methodology, I could claim to have completed the FMA for the PhD. The only part that needed further elaboration was the Framework of Ideas, as the information collected during the fieldwork needed to be analysed further, while taking into account the pre- and post-fieldwork literature reviews. After reviewing my PhD, the term post-fieldwork literature review became socio-political context review due to the focus on the social and political contexts that influenced the research.

The discovery of the Action Case method also justified the motivation for my theoretical framework. Residing between the motivations of understanding and change within the research methods space, my action case could choose one of the motivations for theoretical contributions. In the end, I chose a theoretical framework for explaining the situation rather than propose transformations. The next chapter shows how the literature reviews and information collected from the fieldwork are combined to produce my research findings and then utilise them for recommendations.
Chapter 7 Discussions from Findings and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This chapter adds further discussions and recommendations in addition to the fieldwork findings presented in the Chapter 4. After adding and reflecting upon the post-fieldwork literature review and research methodology, I needed to apply the findings I had with the problem situation in SSIL, UMS and Malaysian Information Systems to propose certain ideas that may assist in the improvement of research. As I reflect on the fieldwork findings, literature review and methodology, I needed to organise my findings based on the focus of my research and on which parts lead to answers for my research questions.

7.2 Shaping the Themes from the Fieldwork

From the initial pre-fieldwork preparation, there were a number of issues that I needed to study and learn about. These issues came from my early perception based on personal academic experience, the literature review I did and also the first fieldwork done in March and April 2008. The main themes were:

- Qualitative Research Situation in Malaysia
- Malaysian Academic Culture
- Malaysian Academic Actuality
- Issues Regarding Malaysian Information Systems

These main themes are part of the Theoretical Framework for the research. During and after the fieldwork, the framework evolved into the final version show in Figure 7.1. The fieldwork experience and my choice of Action Case as my research methodology influenced how I perceived the theoretical framework. I found Gregor's (2006) work on The Nature of Theory in IS which substantiated my view of the theoretical framework I shaped to be 'one for explaining' the situation within the research. To explain the motivation of the explaining theory Gregor(2006) quoted Schwandt (1994), “understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it. This goal is variously spoken of as an abiding concern for the life world, for the emic point of view, for understanding meaning, for grasping the actor’s definition of a situation, for Verstehen. The world of lived reality and situation-specific meanings that constitute the general object of investigation is thought to be constructed by social actors (p. 118)."
In Chapter 4, I have provided preliminary findings from the fieldwork activities. In this chapter I will attempt to provide a more systemic description of these findings through my analysis and shaping themes from the findings. I have also provided illustrations to show where these themes have emerged and to visualise my contextual viewpoint being within the situations throughout my fieldwork. These illustration is also my attempt to portray myself within the actuality of my fieldwork activities and me 'listening from within' these situations.

Moving from the themes I outlined prior to the fieldwork, the next set of themes came from the individual activities within the fieldwork. The prior themes became a guideline of what were related or expanded themes that would be beneficial to fulfil the theoretical framework. As the fieldwork went on, some of the original themes had to evolve to accommodate some of the findings from the fieldwork activities. One example is the focus on ‘Issues Regarding Malaysian Information Systems’, which had to evolve to ‘Issues in Malaysian IS/ICT Research’. Two main contextual themes also emerged during the more internal activities which focused on SSIL and UMS. The result is the addition of two main themes, 'Situation in SSIL' and 'Situation in UMS'. A third new main theme emerged after I was exposed to information regarding 'Malaysian Government Policies'
that were related to academic research from my interviews and post-fieldwork literature review. Below, I have provided figures to illustrate how these themes were shaped from the individual activities. After reflecting on the illustration, I discuss sub-themes and other themes that came out from those activities and listed these emerging themes under the individual activities.

Figure 7.2: Hearing and observing from ISQualRes'08 and shaping the themes

Activity: ISQualRes’08
- Qualitative Research Situation
  - Exposure
  - Promotion
  - Perceived quantitative research bias in Malaysia
- Malaysian Academic Culture
  - Result-oriented
  - Challenge of encouraging debates and discussions
  - ‘Textbook’ mentality

The theme of qualitative research situation in Malaysia is expanded to include related sub-themes I surmised during ISQualRes'08. Exposure is a very important sub-theme as the workshop itself was
an exercise in exposing the participants to qualitative research. The workshop was also a promotion exercise to promote qualitative research methods to Malaysian academics. Another sub-theme that emerged was on a perceived quantitative research bias in Malaysia. The organisers of the workshop shared this view along with a number of participants in informal discussions with them. I was told that this was one of the 'hidden' objectives of organising ISQualRes'08.

Under Malaysian academic culture, I was able to extract from the workshop a result oriented culture among Malaysian academics. Some of those I talked to during the workshop agreed that for many Malaysian academics, the end result of research seems to be more important than the learning. This could be tied into how Malaysian academics are assessed by their universities whereby they are required to publish a number of papers in 'high impact journals' to gain promotion. This sub-theme is then further supported by my interviews with senior academics and members of university administration. Another sub-theme that emerged was what I could interpret as an adversity to discussions which makes it a challenge to encourage debate and discussions among Malaysian academics. As I described in Chapter 4, during the workshop the discussion sessions was not as expected. Looking at literature regarding Malaysian culture (Abdullah and Low 2001), we are not very articulate or expressive in our communication which can be related to our avoidance of debates. Another sub-theme that emerged was a perceived 'text book' mentality in Malaysian academic culture. The participants I talked to in general was expecting a more rigid classroom style course. This was further supported with my interviews with senior academics that this culture of 'spoon feeding' exists even among Malaysian academics. I tried to use the experience I gained from ISQualRes'08 to organise an improved workshop along the same theme of promoting qualitative research in my university.
Figure 7.3: Hearing and observing from the SSIL Talks and shaping the themes

Activity: SSIL Talks

- Qualitative Research Situation
  - Exposure
  - Perceived quantitative research bias in Malaysia
  - Lack of research foundations
- Situation in SSIL
  - Lack of PhD holders
  - Perceived lack of research focus
  - Lack of general research foundations

The SSIL Talks brought about one of the new main themes which focus on my organisation, SSIL. The main theme category I have chosen is 'Situation in SSIL'. Before we go through this new theme, the SSIL Talks highlighted similar themes from ISQualRes'08 associated with the qualitative research situation in Malaysia. My colleagues at SSIL showed a lack of exposure to qualitative research fundamentals and a reliance on quantitative research methods such as surveys. Professor Wood-Harper's talk also revealed a lack of general research foundations, even in the quantitative research produced as the research were very generic surveys. I also described in Chapter 4 the less than enthusiastic reception the talks received which gave me a perception that SSIL lacked research
focus, where at the time many of the members of SSIL didn't view research as a priority. This however I could attribute to another sub-theme which is the lack of PhD holders in SSIL. In fact, during Professor Wood-Harper's visit we had zero PhD holders in our staff at the time. Again, these themes highlighted SSIL's weaknesses at the time and motivated me to think about how to improve the situation.

Activity: Re-Introduction and First Meeting

- Situation in SSIL
  - Dean encouraging research
  - Lack of PhD holders
  - Research group
  - Lack of general research foundations
- Qualitative Research Situation
  - Exposure

My first official meeting with colleagues at SSIL enforced many of the previous themes on the qualitative research situation and the situation in SSIL. My colleagues overall agreed with these preliminary findings I presented. However, one addition to my themes was the sub-theme on Dr
Awang Asri as the newly re-appointed Dean of SSIL who has started encouraging research activity in the organisation. From my first two months back in SSIL, through my reintroduction and discussions with those in my school I have discovered Dr Awang Asri placing research improvement as a high priority agenda for SSIL. In improving the research, Dr Awang Asri has set up a research group and organised a mini-workshop on SPSS, the statistical research software. In many ways, the first meeting became a starting point of seeing some of the transformations in SSIL, whether they were instigated by myself or Dr Awang Asri himself.

Figure 7.5: Hearing and observing presentations during MADICT

Activity: MADICT Workshop
- Malaysian Information Systems Issues
  - Expertise
  - Fields of Research and Research Groups
  - Research Laboratories and Facilities
  - Centres of Excellence
  - Postgraduate Programs
  - Research Partnership
  - Innovation
  - Research and Development (R&D) Achievement (Grants, Awards and Publication)
Lack of clear direction
Perceived need for a centralised approach

- Malaysian Academic Culture
  - Perceived reliance on policies and administration to lead the way
  - Perceived dependence on administrative and government support
  - Research collaboration issues

- Government Policy
  - Brain Gain

The sub-themes I created were based on the topics discussed during the MADICT workshop. All of these issues are related to research in the field of Information Systems but more broadly, Information Communications Technology (ICT). Expertise, Fields of Research and Research Groups, Research Laboratories and Facilities, Centres of Excellence, Postgraduate Programs, Research Partnership, Innovation, and Research and Development Achievement were all discussed and from there I also added a number of sub-themes.

Throughout the workshop, some participants touched upon the lack of a clear direction in ICT research. The Chairman of MADICT at the time also stated this during the closing speech and also in my interview with him. The reason for the MADICT workshop was to highlight this and as a starting point for something more 'focused'. I perceived that in Malaysian IS and ICT research, there is a need for a centralised approach. Two sub-themes emerged relating to Malaysian research culture due to this, 'Perceived reliance on policies and administration to lead the way' and 'Perceived dependence on administrative and government support'. During the presentations on the topics, rarely was there any mention of getting away from this dependence of government support. Research funding still focused on those provided by the government and government-related bodies. This became an important actuality within Malaysian academic culture itself and is the reason behind a sub-theme under the Malaysian IS/ICT research situation, 'Perceived need for a centralised approach'.

Another sub-theme that emerged was related to research collaboration. One of the presenters in the workshop commented that there are many challenges to research collaboration and this affects ICT academics having their knowledge and expertise for research-related activities. One experienced
academic I asked regarding this agrees there are issues that influence research collaboration which needs to be resolved if we are to open up more research opportunities.

It was also during the MADICT workshop when I was exposed to one of the government policies in place to develop research and innovation is the Brain Gain policy. The Brain Gain policy is an initiative under the Malaysian Academy of Science with the goal of attracting Malaysian and non-Malaysian academics to come to Malaysia and do research. For the Malaysian academics and professionals based abroad, this policy is an incentive to return to Malaysia and contribute to the country of their birth. For the non-Malaysian academic, their experience and ideas would greatly contribute to Malaysia's growing research and innovation.

Figure 7.6: Rich picture of the SSIL Research Methodology Workshop

Activity: SSIL Research Methodology Workshop

- Malaysian Academic Culture
  - Challenge of encouraging debate and discussions
  - Textbook’ mentality

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• Qualitative Research Situation
  ◦ Exposure
  ◦ Lack of foundations
  ◦ Perceived quantitative research bias in Malaysia
  ◦ Seen as suitable for certain fields
  ◦ Need for a change in attitude towards qualitative research
  ◦ Perception on qualitative research as time consuming
  ◦ Perception of Malaysian researchers lacking interpretive abilities

• Government Policies
  ◦ Support for research and academics
  ◦ Research Universities

• Situation in UMS
  ◦ Rewarding academics through administrative posts and salary increment

The SSIL Research Methodology Workshop was an extremely important activity in the fieldwork. In retrospect, it provided numerous findings through the organisation of the workshop, the workshop sessions, the panel discussion forum and also feedback from the participants themselves. To further elaborate and analyse the themes and sub-themes I have listed above, it would be good to divide them based on their sources from the individual parts of the workshop.

During the organisation of the workshop itself, my colleagues and I attempted to attain funding from the relevant departments in our university. In the end, we were given full financial support from the registrar's office for organising the workshop. The backing from the UMS registrar represented a positive support to academics and our research activities. I felt this could be related to an overall awareness by the UMS administration on the importance of research in universities. Encouragement from the Ministry of Higher Education and the Malaysian government in general has highlighted this fact and the registrar's cooperation emphasised this awareness.

The workshop sessions showed there was good interest among academics in UMS to learn about qualitative research and this exposure was still something new to many of them. The sessions themselves are part of teaching qualitative research fundamentals to the participants.
The panel discussion was a great opportunity from my view to encourage debate and discussions among the panellists which I hoped would trickle down to the participants. The discussion was very lively among the panellists which was what I hoped and the participants also got into it during the question and answer session as well. The sub-theme that I wanted to relate to this activity in the workshop was the challenge of encouraging debates and discussions. Earlier on during the Professor Wood-Harper's presentation, he tried again to spark some discussions on qualitative research, the participants did ask some interesting questions but overall were still hesitant. This was probably due to their inexperience with qualitative research. The panel discussion forum however saw some of the participants come out of their shell, asked more questions and contribute to the discussion itself.

Feedback from the participants were tremendously positive. The organising committee distributed forms for the participants to express their views on the workshop and almost all of them were full of praise.

Figure 7.7: Issues and themes coming from the interviews and discussions

**Activity: Interviews and Discussions**
- Situation in UMS
  - Rewarding academics with administrative posts and salary increments
  - UMS ambition to attain Research University status
- Research management
  - Administration is not directly involved with research activities
  - Administration supporting academic activities through management, human resource and funding
  - Rewarding academics through administrative posts and salary increment
  - Emerging research culture
  - Grants for research in UMS
  - Motivating UMS lecturers to do research
  - Encouraging research groups/clusters
  - Research must have impact
  - Encouraging research with commercial value
  - Rewarding research that wins awards
  - Lack of international collaboration for research

- Malaysian Academic Actuality
  - Academic freedom
  - Bureaucracy and protocol
  - Malaysian universities focus on producing human resource
  - Academics in industry
  - Academic mobility

- Malaysian Information Systems Issues
  - IS representation in MADICT
  - There is still a long way to go for Malaysian IS to achieve prominence
  - The ICT Deans Committee (MADICT) and its role in ICT/IS in public universities
  - There are still misunderstandings on IS (and certain ICT programs in general)
  - The Malaysian IS community needs to speak out and be counted
  - Lack of a critical mass of ICT/IS researchers
  - Research impact from IS/ICT not visible outside of the field
  - Need for collaboration in research with industry and government
- ICT is sometimes seen as the 'dumping ground' for university student intake
- The academic perception of IS as ICT for non-programmers
- Interest in IS academically and research was on the wane
- Dominance of structured methodologies
- Trying to integrate soft systems through the different levels, using soft in higher level

- Malaysian Government Policy
  - Malaysian government support for R&D
  - Brain Gain
  - MyBrain15

- SSIL Situation
  - Research guidance
  - Lack of PhDs
  - SSIL's location in Labuan
  - The academics need to realise the meaning of being an academic – many grow into it but PhD is the barometer
  - Research groups – leading the lecturers to do research
  - The lecturers do the research work themselves – students rarely used
  - Need for post graduate research students – proposes an integrated Masters program
  - Getting the right support staff – you hope, if not training and motivation can develop this
  - Perceived lack of research focus
  - Focus on improving research and facilities by Dr Awang Asri

The interview findings and preliminary discussions from this part of my fieldwork is discussed at length in Chapter 4. The list of the themes and sub-themes above are basically the result of analysing the transcripts of the interviews and discussions that were done during that time.
Activity: Final Meeting at SSIL

During the Final Meeting, I presented the preliminary findings of my research to my colleagues to validate some of the findings throughout my fieldwork. The session presented findings based on the main themes of my research:

- Malaysian Academic Culture
- Malaysian Academic Actuality
- Malaysian Information Systems Issues
- Qualitative Research Situation
- Situation in SSIL
- Situation in UMS

My colleagues agreed with the majority of my findings and emphasised a number of them as key aspects of my research. The following are individual comments expressed during the Final Meeting at SSIL from my colleagues:

- The need for more PhDs, which is of utmost importance.
- The need for mentors in research groups.
• In the case of lack of mentors, there is a need to bring someone more permanent or long term. Government programs and policies such as Brain Gain could be used. UMS' Centre of Research and Innovation also needs to have a presence at SSIL.

• Potential to conduct research in knowledge systems to improve research situation in Malaysian IS/ICT.

• Potential for developing computer games to improve our research with academics and time management.

7.3 Malaysian Academic Actuality and Culture

Before we move further in utilising the findings from the fieldwork into further discussions and recommendations for improvement, there is one issue regarding what can be seen as similarities between the Malaysian Academic Culture and also Malaysian Academic Actuality.

I would admit that during my fieldwork, these two themes became inter-related with one another. In fact, some of the views and opinions on these themes I collected during the fieldwork had similar sub-themes that could be categorised under these two themes. There might be those who feel that these are very similar entities. However I felt that despite the similarities of these themes being expressed, the contextual viewpoints that interpreted these themes were different and this produced a more contextual interpretation of these themes. I attribute the differences of interpreting these themes to the actuality of those within the fieldwork. Recognising this difference becomes important in the later discussions and recommendations stemming from the themes. I also believe these differences are important due to how they affect Malaysian academia from micro and macro-levels.

How do I differentiate the Malaysian Academic Culture and Malaysian Academic Actuality in the context of this research? I define Malaysian Academic Culture as the shared and commonly held body of general beliefs and values among Malaysian academics. Being shared by all academics, I present Malaysian Academic culture as a one of the shared understandings I have found during the research. Elements of Malaysian academic culture are seen to happen (externally seen).

I define 'Malaysian Academic Actuality' as something that is felt from within (internally heard). In my fieldwork, there were many instances of similar issues being defined differently by those I
interviewed and from my observations in the fieldwork. These differences were influenced by the individual contexts of those interviewed and the environment which the observations took place. One of the things I notice among the themes I highlighted as actualities, is they consist of issues which are difficult to change directly. This could be due to the contextual issues or perceptions involved. When we look at 'IS representation in MADICT' for example, the way that this change could happen is only if IS academics would fight for more representation in MADICT. Even then, other contextual issues would probably make it complicated for this transformation to be achieved quickly.

To answer my research questions, I needed to take the themes that have emerged and apply them within my concept of shared understandings and actuality. As I stated before, there were general themes that were shared among those involved in my fieldwork. I interpret these general themes as the shared understandings that I needed to address for my research questions. Since I interpreted the Malaysian Academic Culture as something that is ‘seen to happen’ from an external viewpoint, which many people could share, I translated these Malaysian Academic Culture themes as one of the shared understandings. More general themes that arose such as the situation in SSIL, the situation in UMS and Malaysian government policies, also became shared understandings generating themes that relate to the general view of what goes on in these environments that are felt by those in the environments.

Shared understandings

- Similarities in the themes found in data analysis.
- The goal of developing research activity in SSIL, UMS and Malaysia.
- Government policies that support research activity.
- Financial support for research activity.

Again, looking at my research questions, I needed to then bring forth the idea of actuality to specify the different contextual differences from the themes that emerged. I listed the actuality from themes that highlighted the difference of contexts from those involved in my fieldwork. One such difference of actuality that emerged was the comparison between the experienced academics from Universiti Malaya and the young academics from SSIL. Their contexts influenced how they perceived certain issues and matters regarding academic research.
Actuality

- Contextual viewpoints on issues found in the themes.
- These viewpoints were extracted from interviews and fieldwork activities.
- Malaysian academics in public universities.
  - Representing the academic actuality became one of the main focus of the research.
- Malaysian public university administrators.
  - Included academics who were given administrative posts.

7.4 Shared Understandings and Actuality

Based on the data templates from the literature review and fieldwork experience, I have categorised what I believe to be the patterns of similarity along with the contextual actuality under these shared understandings to explain how to improve them and provide suggestions for future work that could learn more on these situations. A more thorough future work plan is suggested in Chapter 8.

7.4.1 Shared Understanding and Actuality 1

- Shared Understanding: Academic Research Development
- Actuality:
  - Requires academic freedom, mobility and the support of administration
  - Research as a Key Performance Indicators (KPI)
  - Research Universities
- Recommendation
  - Increase the understanding between academics and administration
  - Get the administration involved with research activities and encourage administration staff to do post graduate studies through research
- Future Work
  - Encourage Action Research at school, university and ministerial level.

Since the main objective of my research is on IS research development, the more macro-level Academic Research Development was chosen as the first Shared Understanding I wanted to tackle and address. My interviews with experienced professors and university administrators showed that
this general theme was very popular and almost all of those who I interviewed agreed its importance as an issue in Malaysian academia.

The actualities that came from the interviews however showed different perspectives on how this similar issue was interpreted. A number of experienced academics I interviewed stated clearly that research development in Malaysian universities requires academic freedom, mobility and the support of administration. Apart from my interviews, my literature review picked up numerous viewpoints on matters like the Universities and University-Colleges Act (AUKU) which determines the level of freedom academics and university students have in conducting research. There were also those who felt that academic freedom is less of an issue, and this came from those in university administration. University administrators also claimed that they have been providing necessary support. The SSIL Research Methodology Workshop was a good example of support from UMS' Registrar in organising a research-related activity.

A number of professors I interviewed addressed the issue of making research activities, particularly publications as one of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for academics in Malaysia, as part of that research development. Two viewpoints arose. One viewpoint supported publications as a KPI as it enables an easy way to assess Malaysian academics during our annual work assessment exercise. However, there were also concerned voices on how the KPI was implemented. A university may emphasise certain publications over others and give priority over these types of publications. One example was given where a university may only choose to acknowledge papers published in Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) rated journals. This would obviously put social scientists at a disadvantage during their assessments.

Another actuality which Malaysian academics face in our context is the gazetting of Research Universities among five public universities by the Malaysian government. This practice was introduced by the government in order for the chosen universities to focus their efforts on research and innovation. There were different opinions on this actuality based on the individual contexts of those who commented on it. Those in administration generally viewed Research Universities as an aim for them to achieve, as it will enable research focus to be increased. However, there were a number of academics who had an agnostic view of RUs and those who perceive it to cause further problems. One professor believed that RU status should be given to all because all universities
should be focusing on research. There were also questions on how being an AUKU academic can be more rewarding financially compared to a 'conventional' university. A fearful view was also expressed that it would dichotomise public universities in Malaysia.

My recommendations in relation to this shared understandings and actualities include focusing on the communication and understanding between academics and administration. Throughout my fieldwork, our communication with the Registrar allowed us to attain a higher grant for the organising of the SSIL Workshop. I truly believe and recommend an increase in communications efforts to bridge the understanding between academics and administration. This leads me to my next recommendation of getting the university administration involved with research activities, especially by encouraging administration staff to do post graduate research courses under the university. As I have presented, there are misunderstandings between academics and administration due to our own contexts that make us view research differently. Where academics view research from an intellectual perspective, administration view research as an activity which brings products. Academics need to pull in our administrators to see research from our perspective through our viewpoint and perceive the intellectual value of research. Being a university, this should be achievable with the right planning and implementation.

As part of the recommendations, I suggest further Action Research at school, university and ministerial level which I will elaborate more later in this chapter, and also in the final chapter.

7.4.2 Shared Understanding and Actuality 2
- Shared Understanding: Information Systems Research in Malaysia
- Actuality
  - IS is grouped together in ICT-based schools in Malaysia
  - IS (and ICT) research still not reaching prominence in Malaysia
- Recommendation
  - IS academics need to be visible and heard (my discussions with professors, administrators and people in the ministry is an early start)
  - Utilise MADICT and research initiatives to improve situation
- Future Work
Carry on work with promoting IS to university administration, MADICT and the ministry

The next Shared Understanding that my research addresses is Information Systems Research in Malaysia. My research topic itself deals with Information Systems Research Development in my country. Even though my research's focus has been mainly in my own organisation, I believe there are lessons here to be learned by any ICT and IS academic in attempting to improve research activity.

Two important actualities emerged in my analysis of research findings. I believe these actualities have influenced IS research in Malaysia as IS academics face these situations in our public universities. The first actuality is that the field of Information Systems is grouped together in ICT-based schools in Malaysia. This contextual situation, is due to the categorisation of Information Systems as a field under the ICT schools and faculties by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency. The MQA has released documentation in outlining Information Systems under Malaysian public universities, our curriculum and proposed learning outcomes. Thus, academically IS is a part of ICT academics. With regards to this, my research has found certain pros and cons towards this actuality. The advantages which were supported by my interviews include a level of support for research due to being categorised with ICT. As the government's policies focus on ICT as an important field of research, IS also benefits from this focus. Another advantage as well, is if we take Lee's (2010) recommendation of retrospect in IS, going back to some of IS's ICT roots may allow IS research to be more linked to practice and technical aspects of ICT. Reflecting upon my research findings from interviews, observations and literature review, I find that IS academics in Malaysia still maintain a connection to technical ICT. However, even with the advantages there also exist shortcomings. One of them is again related to the technical link between IS and ICT. I have noticed in IS academics papers I reviewed there was hardly anything to differentiate them with papers from technical ICT. In many ways, the organisational aspects of IS had to be embedded deep and more technical aspects of systems development were highlighted. Upon asking about this situation to the IS and ICT professors I interviewed, they relate this to a misunderstanding on what makes IS different to other field of ICT as the factor, even among IS academics themselves.
The next actuality is related to the previous point. Even though ICT research has been highlighted by the government as a field with high potential, there isn't much to be gained when there are those who view ICT research to still not reach its full potential. In other words, IS being classified under ICT still has not attained the benefits from the ICT/IS connection. My research revealed the majority view from ICT, IS and even natural science professors that ICT research is still not reaching prominence in Malaysia. Thus, IS research which is categorised under ICT is still awaiting for something big to happen for it to attract the necessary number of students to enroll in IS programs in Malaysia.

Conceptually, my recommendations is for Information Systems academics to take the bull by its horns and steer towards a better understanding of the field of IS in Malaysia. IS academics and researchers need to be visible and heard. Throughout my PhD research, my discussions with professors, administrators and eventually people in government was my own personal attempt at highlighting issues that I saw to be affecting IS academic research. My communication with these groups also enabled me to listen to the views of those outside of IS and how they perceive us. As long as IS academics do not take the opportunity to present ourselves and represent our field, this issue of prominence would not be resolved.

Another recommendation I would give is to utilise MADICT and research initiatives to improve situation in Malaysian IS research itself. One of the statements given by a professor in my research was that Information Systems still lacks representation in MADICT. I believe this should not be the case. When we look across the field of ICT, IS academics should be the most qualified among the rest when it comes to leadership and management of all the ICT schools and faculties. Our links to organisational, management and social sciences within the context of ICT should have made us the perfect candidates for leading ICT committees. Unfortunately, our representation is still lacking, but this could be improved as long as IS academics play a more prominent part in MADICT.

As a brief description of how I perceive to be a potential future work, I propose carry on efforts of promoting IS to university administration, MADICT and relevant government ministries. A more complete proposal of future work is given in the next chapter.
7.4.3 Shared Understanding and Actuality 3

- Shared Understanding: Qualitative Research Situation in Malaysia
- Actuality
  - Perception of quantitative research dominance in Malaysia
  - Perception of qualitative research being time consuming
  - Perception of Malaysian researchers lacking interpretive abilities
- Recommendation
  - Promote Qualitative Research through workshops and seminars
  - Promote discussion and debates
- Future Work
  - Continue the work in SSIL and UMS to promote qualitative research and improve research foundations

The next Shared Understanding I extracted from my research was the situation concerning qualitative research in Malaysia. At the beginning of my PhD, I was influenced by the literature I was reviewing concerning interpretive and qualitative research methods in Information Systems. Alongside my experience as an academic in SSIL and viewing the lack of utilisation of these kinds of research methods, I was led to believe that qualitative research methods would help diversify and improve research in SSIL. By the end of the research, I discovered it wasn't as easy as introducing qualitative research. However, the main similarity I saw during the research was a general view of issues relating to qualitative research among Malaysian academics.

I extracted three actualities that were related to qualitative research in Malaysia. The first is the perception of quantitative research dominance in Malaysia. My academic experience would be the first source for this perception and my personal review of research work from my colleagues at SSIL seem to support this stance at least within my organisation. There was also support from my interview experience. Not only did a number of professors I interviewed agreed with this stance, there was also one professor who wanted to test my research based on his own quantitative view. Another actuality was the perception of qualitative research being time consuming. A number of professors made this comment as a reason why qualitative research has not been 'picked up' by Malaysian academics. However, the professors who did use qualitative research methods disagreed
with this and argued that qualitative research could be adapted to consume less time. In similar vain, the third actuality is the perception of Malaysian researchers lacking interpretive abilities that are needed for qualitative research. Again, this is argued as some Malaysian academics have shown to be able to interpret qualitative data utilise qualitative research methods. During the research methodology workshop, practical exercises were conducted and showed that the participants were able to utilise the methods taught in collecting, analysing and presenting qualitative research data.

The shared understanding shows a generic awareness concerning issues related to qualitative research, while the actualities present these individual issues from differing views. Ultimately, I believe that interest in qualitative research is growing among Malaysian academics. The ISQualRes'08 and SSIL Research Methodology workshops showed that support for qualitative research exists in Malaysia. Malaysian academics are eager to learn more about these research methods. Which is why, my recommendations are to continue efforts in encouraging and promoting qualitative research methods. The first recommendation is to organise more workshops and seminars. One of the key things that my research could have focused more on is the questions of which philosophical viewpoint qualitative research should take in Malaysia. This research is still agnostic when it comes to linking qualitative research directly to an interpretive philosophical stance. The reason for this was within the context and limitations of this research, there was not enough time to go through this debate. This is the main motivation for my next recommendation, which is promoting discussion and debates on this issue. During the SSIL Research Methodology workshop, the panel discussion forums enabled me and those who participated in the workshop to learn from a rich variety of views on the issue of qualitative research. I believe more discussions and debates should be encouraged. One reason is to start that debate for Malaysian qualitative research's philosophical stance, the other reason is to promote qualitative research to Malaysian academics. Debates and discussions may provide Malaysian academics a view of qualitative research as an enabler for more intellectual discourse, which would entice many academics who are looking for more articulate methods for doing research.

As for future work, I plan to continue promoting qualitative research in SSIL and UMS and to the improve research foundations for these methods. Of course, this plan is based on my recommendations that I have mentioned previously.
7.4.4 Shared Understanding and Actuality 4

- Shared Understanding: Malaysian Academic Culture
- Actuality:
  - Perceived textbook mentality
  - Our academic culture is still result-oriented
  - Understanding towards academia
- Recommendations:
  - Cultivate a positive Malaysian academic culture
  - Promote academic ethics and philosophical aspects of academia
  - Promote creativity and innovation
- Future Work
  - Collaboration with Ministry of Higher Education for more studies into Malaysian academic culture
  - Organising more research methodology workshops

The next Shared Understanding that emerged from my fieldwork is a rather huge topic in itself, thus I have to be careful in attempting to summarise what I have learned from my research findings. First of all, I must emphasise that my interpretation of 'Malaysian Academic Culture' is contextual to my research. I view Malaysian academic culture as a commonly held body of general beliefs and values shared among Malaysian academics. However, the literature I reviewed, interviews I did and personal observation shaped my understanding of what constitutes Malaysian academic culture. Within this, includes an actuality itself of my personal viewpoint based on the exposure I experienced to shape my interpretation of academic culture. Thus, my reference to Malaysian academic culture within the context of this research is based on my interpretive viewpoint from my research experience.

The actualities that I managed to attain through my research include a perceived 'textbook' mentality among Malaysian academics, a perceived result-oriented academic culture, and understanding towards academia.
The perceived 'textbook' mentality first became prominent during my first fieldwork, where my supervisor was presenting at ISQualRes'08. His attempts at encouraging discussions among the participants of the workshop highlighted the Malaysian academic's aversion to open discussions and debates. My pre-fieldwork literature also supported the notion of Malaysians being less articulate and assertive. Thus, Malaysian academic culture prefer utilising textbooks in teaching and guiding their students. Throughout the other activities in my fieldwork, I also saw this situation being supported by those in Malaysian academia. Producing slides and following them has become the norm for teaching in Malaysia. This also influences how academics themselves learn about things from workshops and seminars. A reliance of slides and 'textbooks' shape this actuality. From our context, Malaysian academics may not have the time to produce and present our individual work as materials for teaching. What with trying to balance the number of hours teaching, doing research and doing administrative tasks, the easy way to prepare course material is to use slides provided by textbooks and senior academics.

The next actuality, may be related to the first which is a perceived result-oriented culture in Malaysian academia. Several professors and academics I interviewed seem to agree that this is an issue. That Malaysian public universities are focused on producing results. Whether they be in terms of graduates, research output or anything else academic-related there is an emphasis on the final product of what comes out. Tying this to social studies and qualitative research as well, the final result takes precedence over the actual learning experience. So, whether an academic is learning from his research takes a backseat to the number of papers the academic publishes, the number of patents the research produces or merely the amount of funding the research has attracted. While there were a number academics I interviewed who view this as an issue that needs to be dealt with, there were those who claim that the numbers is an easy way to determine that academics do their job. Research output and results have become a Malaysian academic's Key Performance Indicator (KPI). This seems to be the situation that Malaysian academics would have to live with for the time being.

The third actuality that I found from my research was on-going attempts to promote understanding towards academia. From my research, I found some examples of those who tried to promote an understanding of what it means to be an academic. This might sound strange by those who do not reside in the context of Malaysian academia, but there is a sense during my research that there are
still those who struggle to know what being an academic means. This understanding is needed for both sides, those who are academics need to learn more about the 'job description' and those outside of academics (particularly administration) need to to know what academics should only be doing. SSIL is an interesting example, as my fieldwork showed that our relative youth and lack of experienced guidance forced us to learn about the academic world on our own. The majority of academics at SSIL first job was at SSIL itself, either as tutors or lecturers. With an abundance of inexperienced 'career academics' there was bound to be early misunderstandings which required a learning period to get to know what the academic world is about. During SSIL's early days, academics were seen to only conduct lectures and some administration duties. This slowly evolved as awareness on the importance of research grew among the academics. Again, this is an on-going and gradual change that is taking place at SSIL. During my interviews and discussions with experienced academics there were comments that this situation is happening elsewhere in other schools or institutions in Malaysia. However, for the context of this research, these claims merely support how I interpret the situation only in SSIL itself.

In light of the issues I discussed throughout this sub-chapter, I believe this area should be delved into further by all those involved. My main recommendation is for the powers that be to cultivate a positive Malaysian academic culture. The Malaysian academic actualities of possessing a 'textbook' mentality and having a result-oriented culture are influenced by the perceived lack of understanding of academia. As academics in SSIL or in Malaysian public universities in general grow, they must learn to comprehend the uniqueness of being an academic and scholar. The idealistic view is that scholars are those who love knowledge and seek it to the ends of the world. My review of Islamic principles literature showed that knowledge should also be practised. This academic culture still needs to be cultivated among Malaysian academics. This is related to my other two recommendations, promoting research ethics and philosophical aspects of academia; and promoting research and innovation.

The promotion of ethics and philosophical aspects are important to develop a more mature academic culture in Malaysia. My discussions with several senior academics highlighted the importance for research and academic material to be free from plagiarism. They feel that some academics may not see the philosophical importance of doing things ethically, and this causes some of the 'misunderstandings' of academia. The link between ethics and philosophy from my
perspective is that the philosophy of knowledge helps to produce more ethical academics. One of the on-going work that I was doing post fieldwork was communicating with those in the Ministry of Higher Education, particularly one of the Deputy Ministers, Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah. Our communication through social networking site Facebook have been very encouraging and he himself has shown concern over the issue of philosophical relevance in Malaysian public universities. His vision is to see more ethical and knowledge-led environment, not only in Malaysian universities but in Malaysia itself.

Promoting research and innovation is my last recommendation for this group of themes. I perceive from my research that the problem with Malaysian academic culture and our actualities is that there is that lack of utilising our knowledge in practice. Within the context of SSIL, I am yet to see how our research activity has actually benefited the Labuan society at large. I believe research and innovation is an embodiment of knowledge at practice, and that it should bring about a level of benefit seen and felt by those around. A couple of developments in the last six months of my PhD has encouraged me to promote this aspect. The first development is a proposed plan by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI) to open an innovation centre on the island of Labuan. The other development is the ever growing interest among my colleagues at SSIL to do research. I have been in contact with them to conduct more socially-relevant research for the benefit of the island's population. So far, a number of my colleagues have shown interest in collaborating ion these activities.

Ultimately, I believe there is more research needed from an Information Systems perspective associated with Malaysia's academic culture. Which is why my proposal for future work includes collaborating with the Ministry of Higher Education for more studies into Malaysian academic culture. I believe this is a viable research area for IS academics to conduct, especially in light of how technology and polices have influenced the academics in Malaysia itself. Another related future work is to organise more research methodology workshops to promote research ethics, philosophy, and general research and innovation.

7.4.5 Shared Understanding and Actuality 5

- Shared Understanding: Lack of Research Foundations
- Actuality:
The fifth Shared Understanding that I could derive from the themes collected from my research is the 'Lack of Research Foundations'. My fieldwork itself, contained two research workshops which focused on teaching foundations for qualitative research. In SSIL's context, Professor Wood-Harper's visit along with research improvement efforts by Dr Awang Asri highlight that SSIL academics still require improvement in research foundations. There were also a number of senior academics who shared the view that research foundations still need to be improved among Malaysian academics.

I identified two actualities which are related to this shared understanding, 'Mentoring system for researchers' and 'Lack of research experience'. The idea of introducing a mentoring system for researchers appeared during the MADICT workshop. One of the issues affecting ICT research discussed during the workshop was the need for research mentors and a mentoring system for ICT academics in Malaysian public universities. It was argued during the MADICT workshop that ICT research and its products were not giving impact in Malaysian society and industry. One of the reasons was a lack of mechanisms for sharing our research work for the mutual benefits of ICT academics. This in turn is cause because of a lack of mentors and experienced academics in ICT research who actively promote this sharing. This could be perceived to tie into the second actuality which is a perceived lack of research experience among the Malaysian ICT academics. In SSIL, I saw the lack of a senior academic limited our research experience. With young lecturers still trying to find their way, we struggled collectively. Our research experience had to be improved on our own and this was a gradual process which took time and effort.
Based on the shared understanding and actualities, I propose organising more research methodology workshops and seminars in SSIL and potentially outside of UMS itself. I believe as part of an academic's lifelong learning is to enhance and improve their grasp of research methods. The SSIL Research Workshop received great reviews from the participants and a number of those participants asked if there would be a follow-up workshop. I have discussed organising other workshops in the future to my colleagues in SSIL and UMS. They have shown support and application for funding has even been drafted. Hopefully another workshop will go ahead within 2011 or early 2012. Another recommendation I propose is to introduce an ICT Research Methodology Module for SSIL students. This recommendation was inspired by the idea that students should be more involved in research, thus we should also provide research foundations to our students, whether they be undergraduate or postgraduate research students. I was also inspired by some work done by our undergraduate students in research and innovation competitions in Malaysia. I believe SSIL's students have the potential to contribute to our research activities and output. However, we need to provide them with research foundations as well if we are to maximise their contribution to SSIL research. I have attached a copy of the proposed Research Methodology module in the appendix.

For my future work, as I stated some of them are already underway. I have sent the proposed ICT Research Methodology module to the Dean of SSIL and hope that once everything is accepted, it could be added into the student curriculum and be improved further once its introduced. Another future work is to improve the research workshops for the future by working with the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) and MADICT. I feel that the emphasis on relating teaching with research is important and this must also be reflected in how we organise our research workshops. Their input would be valuable to make sure that research by ICT/IS academics fulfil the needs of these bodies.

7.4.6 Shared Understanding and Actuality 6

- Shared Understanding: SSIL’s Research Situation
- Actuality
  - Lack of PhDs
  - Young and relatively inexperienced academic staff
  - Labuan as a location of SSIL
The final Shared Understanding my research was able to uncover is SSIL's research situation itself. During the fieldwork, I attempted to collect information to best describe the situation in SSIL when it comes to issues related to research. My personal experience was the starting point as it was my reflections on my organisation's plight which provided me with the early ideas, and also the motivation for improving the situation itself. By the end of the research, I discovered that there are differing views on certain issues on SSIL research. However the similarity shared by those who expressed these differing views is that they were all influenced by the general research situation in SSIL.

The first actuality I perceived from looking at SSIL's situation is the lack of PhDs in the school. On its own, this is a similar situation that would hinder everyone from doing research. However, even among some of the members of the organisation the lack of PhDs did not stop them from conducting research. One example was Ms Idyawati Hussein who didn't wait for SSIL's PhDs situation to improve, but focused on doing research with senior research partners outside of UMS. For Ms Idyawati, her research was only hampered by the location of SSIL in Labuan. I will go back on this point a bit later.

Another actuality which I derived from my fieldwork and experience is the relative youth and inexperience of the academic staff. I have mentioned this before previously as a perceived issue that has rendered SSIL without the guidance needed to conduct research. However, again with Ms Idyawati's example she found a way to collaborate with senior academics outside to assist and guide her research. Another matter that I discovered was that with youth comes a n idealism to try new things and also the advantage of growing as an organisation together. Even though there were early trials and tribulations in improving research in SSIL, I have seen that the organisation's members
are growing and maturing within this area. However, for those academics who have just came back from their studies during my fieldwork, they still require time to mature themselves. I hope that the more senior academics would help this batch along and so far, I have seen some developments that show there is progress in this.

The final actuality is Labuan island, as the location of SSIL. During my fieldwork, different views were expressed in relation to whether Labuan provided a suitable backdrop for doing academic research. Those who relied on outside cooperation for their research work saw Labuan's location as an obstacle to conduct research. Whereas there were those that say the island's natural beauty and peaceful backdrop is perfect for concentrating on research and provides inspiration for conducting research projects. In the end, these differing views portray that Labuan can influence the research work of SSIL academics and for those who find the island constricting, they do eventually find ways around it.

Looking at the research situation in SSIL which are influenced by our youth and location on the island of Labuan, I propose several recommendations. These recommendations are based on some of the developments in SSIL and Labuan itself. The first recommendation is to encourage SSIL in improving the number of PhD holders among the academic staff. Luckily, this is currently being done and Dr Awang Asri has been active in encouraging the academics in SSIL to take study leave and pursue their doctoral degrees. The estimate for SSIL is that there would be at least five PhDs among the academics in the year 2011, with an additional three more in 2012. The organisation of research related workshops and seminars should also continue to enhance the research experience of academics currently in SSIL and I have touched upon this in previous recommendations.

My final recommendation is quiet revolutionary in itself but as a local boy from Labuan, I believe Labuan should be transformed to accommodate academic research activities. There have been the announcement in October 2010 from MOSTI of the opening of an InnoSpace innovation centre on the island. I believe that this innovation centre would provide the transformation needed to change Labuan and SSIL's research situation. Cooperation must be cemented between SSIL and the centre so we can foster a new culture of research and innovation for the island.
Finally, future work for improving the SSIL research situation should be self-explanatory based on the recommendations I proposed. Further research and improvement on the situation in SSIL and Labuan should carry on. I believe that the future is bright and that my own actions will hopefully benefit my school and my hometown.

7.4.7 Further Recommendations
The shared understandings and actuality I listed in this part of the chapter has shaped some conceptual recommendations for implementation. I have listed the further recommendations for SSIL, UMS and Malaysian Information Systems in the appendix. In the appendix I organised the recommendations based on these specific targets of these recommendations, provided a general theme of the recommendation and elaborated the recommendation by listing the important points.

7.5 Action Research and its Significance for Malaysia
Throughout my research, I was able to see how action-based research had the potential for bringing positive transformation to an organisation. I feel that action research needed to be encouraged more in Malaysian academia, hopefully by Information Systems academics. As I was reviewing my work and how this could be carried on further I came back to the gap of understanding between academics and university administration. I believe that this gap of understanding could be improved further if we allow for a participative research methodology that is based on collaboration and learning. This is where I felt that action research could be the significant method for improving the understanding between academics and university administration.

One of the biggest challenges facing this situation is the top-down culture of Malaysian academia. This situation however is not exclusive to Malaysia, there are similar traits of it in Western universities as well. What makes Malaysia unique however is the influence of what is perceived as power distance among those who administer universities and those who carry out the activities within. The examples below illustrate the separation between the government which administer the universities and academics.

I was influenced by Quarry and Ramirez's (2009) Communication for Another Development and their interpretation of planners and searchers. In their book, they credited the source of the terms planners and searcher from the book White Man's Burden (Easterly 2006). “Easterly divides the
development world into 'planners' and 'searchers'. The 'planners', he maintains think they can come up with the 'big plan' to end world poverty. In contrast to this, 'searchers' try to find small ideas that might actually work in pockets to alleviate a specific problem. Searchers, he maintain, will know if something works only if the people at the bottom can give feedback – that is why successful searchers have to be close to the customers at the bottom, rather than surveying the world from the top.” Does this situation sound familiar?

I felt these ideas fit in with how I perceived as what the Malaysian government has been trying to do to spur research and development in Malaysia. The implementation of government policies and provision of financial support from the government represent Malaysia's big plan. While down at the bottom, academics are the ones who are solving the small pockets of problems that deal with research and conducting the research itself.

Figure 7.9: The Power Distance Rich Picture

Figure 7.9 is a rich picture showing that between the government and academics there are misunderstandings in terms of their perception of issues relating to research and development. The government views successful R&D to lead to commercialisation. The government is driven to
transform Malaysia into a Knowledge Economy. The Malaysian government has even requested
guidance from the World Bank, asking for proposals on how to move towards this goal. Their input
has resulted in an emphasis towards supporting scientific R&D that has commercial potential.

From the perspective of the academics, their view of R&D success is different. Being in an
academic and intellectual environment, the recognition one receives from peers is the goal that
academics strive to achieve above anything else. Publications and propagation of academic findings
measures the contribution of the academics in their field. This will lead to recognition among peers
and place them as experts which the academic world refers to when new knowledge is introduced.

From the government documents and speeches I have reviewed during the research I could see that
the government views their role as the authority in laying out policies and structure to lead R&D
improvement. They have been given the democratic right by the people to lead the nation, thus the
government devise strategies and enforce legislation with the hope that this will lead to R&D
improvement. The 9th and 10th Malaysia Plans outline the strategies towards developing Malaysia
into a K-Economy, while the University and University College Act is legislation to improve the
management of universities under the government.

The academics view controls to be the problem that stifles R&D. In my interviews, I came across a
number of vocal Malaysian academics who believe that a more open academic culture is what is
needed to improve academic R&D. This can only be achieved if the government frees academia
from legislation and policies that limit their research activities.

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<tr>
<th>The Government</th>
<th>Academics</th>
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<td>• The ‘Planners’</td>
<td>• The ‘Searchers’</td>
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<td>• Left Brain thinking</td>
<td>• Right Brain thinking</td>
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<td>• Forms and procedures (How to do things)</td>
<td>• Process focus (What to do)</td>
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<td>• Predictable and Linear</td>
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<td>• Top-Down approach</td>
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<td>• Uses Mass Media</td>
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<td>• Tells and orders people</td>
<td>• Listens to people</td>
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Table 7.1: Difference between the Government and the Researchers

Table 7.1 is my summary of what I perceive to be the 'great divide' between the Malaysian government and Malaysian academics. In Figure 7.10, I included an area in the middle which based on Quarry and Ramirez (2009) represents the grey area of those who reside in between the government and academic world. In my research, I have pointed to university administrators as those who reside within this grey area.

![Figure 7.10: Rich Picture Presenting Divide Between the Government and Academia](image)

As I stated, there is a gap of understanding between academics and university administration. Even though the university administrators I interviewed in my research also consisted of academics, I also saw that the influence of the government and the emphasis on achieving Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in their administrative duties may have influenced academic-turned-administrators to perceive the situation from a bureaucratic view.

Shah, Eardley and Wood-Harper's (2007a and 2007b) Action Learning Through Action Research was one of the action-based research approaches that I discovered in my research. Their suggestions of allowing different organisational levels to learn and share this learning through action research...
was extremely intriguing and due to its ability to cater to multiple levels within an organisation, makes me feel that it could be adapted to the situation in Malaysian academia.

Figure 7.11: Possible ALTAR for Implementation in Malaysian Academia

Figure 7.11 illustrates a possible modification of ALTAR that could be implemented in Malaysian academia. This is of course a suggestion, however I think that this design would be an extremely interesting way of not only utilising action research to increase the understanding among those different levels in Malaysian public universities, but also to promote action research as a significant method for research and transformation.

In recent times, the Malaysian government has expressed concern in the kind of graduates Malaysian universities are producing. Many employers in Malaysian industry feel that Malaysian graduates are lacking in essential ‘soft skills’ or life skills that are required to be employable. Communication skills, problem-solving ability, the ability to socialise and work in groups have been mentioned as some of the skills that graduates in Malaysia have not fully grasped from their tertiary education. This also reflects upon what the industry sees as the maturity of our graduates.

My research deals with the issue of academic research improvement and there are those who I interviewed who stated that university students should play a more important role in our research activities. A comparison that was made was in Western countries, research activities are mainly done by students, with academics being their supervisors and providing guidance. It is my belief
that university academic research in Malaysia plays an important role in maturing our young students.

From individual course assignments, final year projects and full-scale post graduate research, all these provide an opportunity for students to go out from the protection of the ivory tower and interact with the outside world. The simplest example is doing a survey among locals on an issue. However, since my research utilises action-based research methods, my emphasis would be to encourage these kinds of methods and show how they can assist in the development of more well-rounded students with the life skills clamoured by the industry.

Action research in itself requires the researcher’s participation in the research process and emphasises the researcher as the research tool. Positive change is the aim of action-based research methods and the learning process for the researcher is emphasised over final results. For this change and learning to occur, the action researcher must be in communication with the research area and those within it. The researcher will be exposed and interacts with environmental and social influences. As opposed to a quantitative survey, which currently can be done on-line without any physical field work, action research requires the researcher to go down in the field.

Reflecting on findings and attempting to understand the contextual views of those being researched are also additional features within action-based research that can develop the researcher. The qualitative aspects of action research require the researcher to analyse findings and comparing them within the context of the situation. Compare this with quantitative approaches, which focus on retrieving results based on the data collected, the process of thought and reflection about the situation has been minimised.

And as mentioned previously, quantitative methods deal mainly in the end result. The growth of the researcher and what he or she has learned throughout the research experience is not as important compared to the final finding of the research. In action-based research (and qualitative research in general), the experience of the researcher is just as important, and in some cases more important, than the actual findings of the research. Because of the experience, further expansion and new ideas can be developed from that research. The research itself continues for the researcher to constantly
improve the situation and also enhance the researcher’s understanding. This fosters a researcher with the hunger for life-long learning, and it is this trait that creates a more well-rounded individual.

Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), like many public universities in Malaysia is under the Malaysian government. The most proper term is 'semi-government agency'. This situation affects how universities in Malaysia are run. All public universities in Malaysia report under the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). MOHE is the government ministry with the responsibility of laying out policies related to higher education that affect universities and tertiary-level colleges.

Another context that must be considered when learning about SSIL's situation is its location. Labuan is a small island off the west coast of Borneo, near the state of Sabah. This island and its inhabitants have a culture which is 'laid back' and very relaxed, without any hustle or bustle. People on this island tend not to rush things and you can feel it in the way we drive, go about things and do work.

More recent findings show that Action Research activities exist and are active to a certain extent, especially in the field of primary and tertiary education. Educationists in Malaysia have utilised AR in their teaching and for its improvement. The question is to what extent has AR been successful and how has it been applied within the education context. One anecdote I can share from my personal experience is that I was reading a relative’s Bachelors thesis and in it, she proposed that her research was based on AR. My relative is a primary school teacher in a rural area of Sabah who did a part-time Bachelors degree. Her research topic was on the usage of interactive learning tools for the course she taught. The methodology section was thin, but included an AR cycle where she claimed to utilise AR in assessing the usage of the e-learning tool. Speaking as someone who has been exposed to AR in a different way, I felt that there’s something that needs further study and opportunities for further development. Primary school teachers in rural areas in Malaysia could be utilised to enhance our own usage of AR if they can contribute to sharing their experience with others. Similarly, they can enhance their understanding of AR and also develop as educationists when this informing is done.

7.6 Summary
At the beginning of this chapter I attempted to relate how all the work I've done during fieldwork
were able to bring about themes that came from those I interviewed and talked to, and also from observations. I used the themes that emerged to shape my findings for this research based on shared understandings and actuality. I then recommended steps to address these issues and proposed future work that deal with these recommendations. Further elaboration of the future work are included in the final chapter. Figure 7.12 is an illustration on how the initial ideas in the research shaped the theoretical framework, which was then updated from my fieldwork and further literature review. From the theoretical framework, fieldwork experience and literature review, I shaped the shared understandings, actualities, recommendations and proposals for future work in this research.

Figure 7.12: Shaping the Shared Understandings, Actualities, Recommendations and Future Work

In the next chapter I will answer the research questions posed in my research based on my research findings. This chapter's recommendations proposed future work which I will elaborate further in the final chapter by relating it with some on-going work have already started since the end of my fieldwork. The next chapter also attempts to answer the research questions of my PhD and provide my PhD's contributions.
Chapter 8 Conclusions and Future Work

8.1 Introduction
This chapter concludes my thesis by attempting to answer the research questions put forth in my PhD, elaborating future work I intend to do post-PhD, demonstrate what I perceive to be the contributions of my research and summarise many of the experiential learning I have went through in my 4 years of doing the PhD.

As my PhD journey was coming to an end, I reminisced and thought how I could describe this experience within the context of my academic career. I’ve come to the realisation that the PhD can be seen as a snapshot of myself as a maturing academic and research, and also SSIL as a growing informatics institution between the years of 2007 and 2010.

8.2 Answers to Research Questions
Earlier in the thesis, I have listed out the three research questions. This section will attempt to answer these questions.

8.2.1 First Research Question
The first research question is, “How can understanding and collaboration between those who administer university research and those who conduct research be improved through shared understandings and actuality?”

I would like to present the answers to this question more conceptually based on what I have learned in my research experience.

Shared understandings in this context are defined as policies or strategies that the organisation has put in place. Everyone in an organisation shares the same policy or strategy given from the top. Actuality are the contextual viewpoints of the different groups in a university. The administrators, the researchers and university management. There needs to be more activities of collaboration between academics and administrators to enhance the communication which will allow each other to remember our similar goal (shared understanding) and comprehend each other’s contexts (actuality). There is also a potential for web-based tools to assist in these collaborations.
The major activity during the fieldwork was organising the SSIL Research Methodology Workshop. During the organisation of this workshop, I discovered that university administrators were extremely supportive for an activity that was meant to improve research activity. I attribute their collaboration and support for the workshop to the organising committee's focus on the benefits from the workshop. We utilised the university's aims of attaining Research University status and referred to Malaysian government policies in making our case to organise the workshop. The UMS Registrar's office were able to understand the importance of the workshop because of this. This became the similarities of understanding that the workshop committee, comprising the SSIL academics, and the Registrar's office, representing UMS administration, shared with each other. The shared understanding that this workshop needed to be organised to train participating lecturers on the fundamentals of qualitative research was the unifying element. In our actuality however, I still discovered some issues that could still be improved. Beyond the government policies and UMS' strategy to attain RU status, I could sense some differences in our contextual views on what research is and issues related to research. One of the differences that I noticed is the emphasis on research products and research that have commercial potential. Due to the government policies, the emphasis on these kinds of research have dominated university research support. Another actuality I derived from the organising of the workshop was that even though the Registrar's office provided the organising committee with the necessary funds, in the organising of the workshop itself they chose to stay back and allow the academics to do the work. Even we invited them to participate and be present to the workshop, no representatives from the Registrar's office were present. This was a shame, because their presence would have been useful to convey and allow for the academic discussion to be heard by those representing UMS administration.

One of the patterns of success that I’ve seen throughout my fieldwork in universities outside of UMS is that the academics in universities like UM, UTM and UTeM consist of individuals who are not afraid to speak their mind. One glaring difference is obviously the years of experience that these universities possess among their academics, while their administration has also gone through evolution and changes. What SSIL needs to do is to take these patterns of successful implementation in established universities and apply it within our own actuality. SSIL is still a growing school and the staff are relatively young, there is potential for our academics and administrative staff to grow as time goes by. The most important thing is we take what we can learn
from established universities. These patterns of success along with our own adaptation to SSIL’s actuality will be vital to improving our research situation.

Another difference between an established university like Universiti Malaya and a newer university like Universiti Malaysia Sabah is that those who administer research in UM also consist of those involved in research itself. During my visit to UM's Research Management and Consultation Centre, I saw first hand the effect of having an experienced researcher administer research activities. The contexts of researchers and academics are understood easily and the research management system they utilised assist researchers at UM to just focus on doing the research. An understanding among academics and administration appear to have an effect on the research there where the academics in UM have won awards and merits, while the university itself has attained Research University status. If UMS wishes to attain this status, academic and administrative collaboration and discussions should be inculcated into our practices. This will hopefully lead to better understanding.

Another thing that this research shows is that understanding and collaboration between administrators and researchers can improve when we allow for communication between them. During the fieldwork, our links and communication with the registrar's office was vital in attaining the support for holding the SSIL Research Methodology Workshop. During my interviews post-workshop with the Registrar, I took it upon myself to personally thank the Registrar's office for their support. This is one of the important aspects of Malaysian culture in showing this gratitude as well.

Eventually, I see the potential of using web-based tools to improve communication between academics and administrators. After the fieldwork ended, I stayed in touch with many of the academics and some of the administrators through the social networking site Facebook. Even though the majority of our communication was personal in nature, I believe these tools provide a way for administrators and researchers to share their thoughts and opinions on work-related matters that involve research management. Social networking's ease-of-use and integration of numerous forms of media allows for communication to be more dynamic. Herein lies an opportunity for further research. How can social networking sites be utilised to enhance the communication between administration and researchers?
8.2.2 Second Research Question

The second research question is, **“How can shared understandings and actuality be used within the context of Information Systems research improvement?”**

If we look at ICT and IS research development as a shared understanding shared among academics in ICT faculties and schools in Malaysia, we find that even though this similarity is shared, academics from the different branches may possess different actualities on how this research development can be achieved. In the case of the field of Information Systems in Malaysia, since we are grouped together within ICT, there are also other challenges that we face. One of the actuality that I saw was the low representation of IS in the ICT Dean's Committee (MADICT).

Another related shared understanding that I perceived from my research was that there was still **misunderstandings** towards the field of Information Systems in Malaysian academia. This statement was made by three experienced Professors in the field of IS and ICT who I interviewed during the fieldwork. The actualities related to this misunderstanding include a lack of research foundations among IS/ICT academics. If Information Systems wants to be better understood in Malaysian academia, IS academics have to invigorate the idea of IS as a reference discipline, especially for ICT-related research methods.

From the fieldwork that I conducted, one of the main shared understandings that emerged was IS and ICT research improvement. During my participative activities, I attempted to present the actuality and contextual aspect of what makes Information Systems research different from the other branches under ICT. My colleagues and I all had our personal actuality based on the fields of ICT that we represented. Gradually I saw some of my colleagues from outside of IS understand the difference and the uniqueness of IS research.

During my reintroduction to SSIL and first meeting with colleagues, I received some puzzled looks and was asked questions on what my research was about. Some of my colleagues from a 'harder' ICT background were initially puzzled that my research did not deal with developing a system, ICT product or theory on ICT. My presentations attempted and discussions with my colleagues at SSIL slowly made them realise on the variety of research that could be classified under Information
Systems. The Research Methodology Workshop further exposed my colleagues to a different view of how ICT-related research could be done.

The participative actions during the fieldwork, like meetings, discussions and holding workshops, were my ways of communicating my context as an Information Systems researcher to my colleagues. My experience showed me that through these communication activities, those from the field of IS like myself could share their context and challenges with other ICT researchers for them to better comprehend the field of Information Systems.

In Malaysia, it is apparent that those in the field of ICT and IS share similar situations when garnering research support. Through more research collaboration, these similarities can be shared while the contextual issues of IS can be proclaimed to those outside of IS. This concept collaboration for learning about these shared understandings and actuality could then be extended to academic and industry collaboration.

With the current focus on research that will lead to the development of products, IS academics must find a way for them to contribute to these efforts. Embedding ourselves in the systems development and ICT projects have enabled IS academics to contribute, even though we may not be at the forefront of such efforts. The hope is that this will gradually change and the contributions of IS academics will be more important. But this can only be done if IS academics and researchers are more vocal and dare to lead the charge of these ICT projects and systems development. Inevitably, we may need a more top-down approach to our communication. Based on the current situation in Malaysia, I believe that IS academics need to play a more major role in MADICT for the field of Information Systems to grow in our public universities.

If one criticism could be made, it is that my attempts to communicate the context of the IS researcher was more focused on other ICT academics and not those from administration. However, my focus of communicating with those in administration was to improve the understanding between a general academic research context which is under Research Question 1. There is future opportunity for IS researchers and academics to enhance our communication and understanding with those who administer research which will allow IS researchers to garner more support for their efforts. Again, there is an opportunity to study the utilisation of social networking sites in increasing
understanding among those in IS with our research administrators. Constant learning and improving how we can use these tools to improve research overall can provide numerous opportunities for IS research.

8.2.3 Third Research Question
The third question is, “What are related issues that support the collaboration and understanding between administrators and researchers?”

Within the context of Malaysian academia, support from university management and the government is required for developing our research and innovation activities. From what I gathered in my research, inevitably something needs to be introduced from the top. The government and university administration need to introduce policies to improve and foster positive communication. I hope that this is not interpreted as a statement of dependence towards our administrators, as I also propose a bottom-up approach to improving this understanding. However, there needs to be a top-level contribution and leadership to promote this.

On the bottom-up approach I propose, the research community to fight for their rights and privileges. The issue of academics staying quiet and accepting our situation in Malaysian academia need to change. We need to start have civilised discussions with administration within our culture contexts to make them better understand our contexts. At the same time, I believe an academic's best weapon is his or her research work. The research we produce provides us with the academic credentials and leverage to speak out.

Another issue that I found in my research to be important in supporting administration and academic collaboration is research management. One way for administration to contribute to the development of Malaysian research is to excel in managing and supporting research activities. This way, academics could focus on doing the research itself without having to utilise time for the bureaucracy and formalities of research.

Throughout the research, I find that there is a huge potential for Action Research to be utilised to support the collaboration and understanding. The issues Transforming Malaysian universities require involvement from all levels in academia from the government all the way to students and
Action Research can be used to transform and study this situation. This is related to my recommendation for utilising ALTAR in all levels of Malaysian public universities. This will hopefully lead to the empowerment of both administration and academia, and this can only be done if those in Malaysian universities cooperate constructively, based on the philosophies of academia, with those in power.

8.3 Contributions
The following is my summary of my research contributions in terms of theory, methodology and application.

8.3.1 Theoretical Contributions
Based on my personal academic, literature review and experience from the fieldwork, I have shaped my theoretical contributions and attempt to converge these ideas from the different sources into my research. My initial theoretical stance was that research activity in my school could be improved with the introduction of qualitative research. During and after the fieldwork I discovered things appear more complicated than merely introducing Qualitative Research to SSIL and UMS. There are many related issues that are important and needs attention.

My theoretical focus was inspired by the realisation for Malaysian IS research to improve, requires communication to increase understanding among the stakeholders of Malaysian academia. Interviews, observations and further literature review enhanced my theoretical framework. This communication is related to many issues that influence academic research development in Malaysia. I have tried to propose a theoretical link between the issues and how they contribute to the development of academic research in my school.

From a purely theoretical perspective, my contributions from this PhD are categorised from the main themes that this research has presented. These themes are:

- Qualitative Research Situation in Malaysia
- Malaysian Academic Culture
- Malaysian Academic Actuality
- Issues Regarding Malaysian Information Systems
I believe that the research experience itself has provided one important contribution of knowledge, which is the juxtaposition between Weltanschauung and Actuality. During the research, there were times when research activities and my environment influenced whether I 'saw' or 'heard' the problem situation. One major difference between utilising Weltanschauung and Actuality is the ability to experience the cultural context. From outside of Malaysia, during my preparation work and post-fieldwork activities, I felt separate from the cultural context and became quite protective in my assessment of the situation in my own country. When I was back in Malaysia, being surrounded by my own allowed me to be more expressive in my criticisms towards the situation.

8.3.2 Methodology Contribution

I believe the main methodological contribution is the Action Case that I utilised for the research. I propose this method could be adapted by individual action researchers to fit into their own contexts. For my Action Case the context was from my personal position of a PhD researcher who is an academic member in the organisation I studied from a Malaysian environment. I propose for anybody who wants to utilise Action Case to adapt it based on their own contexts and focus on the participative activities within their research. I would even propose an adapted Action Case for lower level academic research at undergraduate or Masters level. However, this is something for the future.

Another methodological contribution I could see was in the way I have shaped my thesis, using a story-based thesis from a first person perspective to tell the reader about my research experience. I believe this narrative is extremely useful for Action Case and Action Research as these research portrays the researcher as the 'hero' of the research story. As Action-based research methods require full participation, the researcher to be fully immersed in the research situation, and potentially have a personal stake in the research itself, the story narrative plays a powerful role in conveying the importance of the research.

The Action Case I believe is a useful moderate research method when we want to bring transformation to an organisation. From my research, I found political and administrative influence as important to instigate any change or transformation. My suggestion for those who want to instigate this transformation through an action-based method is to look at Action Case as a viable
methodology. Action Case resides between Action Research and Case Study, where some level of change is the preferred outcome while still maintaining a limited political involvement. Action Case also enables a more participative learning of the situation being studied, where the researchers is not merely a 'fly on the wall' or storyteller, but also a participant of the research itself.

One of the issues that were discussed in my thesis defence which resonates throughout this thesis is on the findings as they were presented in my thesis. As a methodological contribution from my thesis, I felt I needed to address the contextual situation from my own experience of using action case. Due to the nature of action case being placed in between intervention and understanding, a researcher must be careful in presenting his or her research findings. In the thesis defence, my examiners pointed to me a difference between the tone of early chapters and the final findings chapter. The final findings appeared to generic in its form, lacking some of the focus in presenting the specific problems discussed within my research.

Action case as a research methodology that resides in between transforming and elaborating, requires the researchers to explore how far he or she needs to go in addressing the issues within the research area. In my personal case, the early parts of the thesis presented findings in a more radical tone as they were presented by those with years of experience in Malaysian academia. Ultimately, they became my 'shields' as I presented their opinions on the Malaysian academic situation. Within this situation, I played the role of a 'hero' in presenting my own story from within the context of the situation which were supported by other 'heroes' in my research.

However, in analysing the findings towards shaping the final discussions, I left my 'hero' role and addressed the research as an 'emancipator'. Part of the reason for this could be due to my location outside of the situation during this period. The analysis were made from outside where I attempted to comprehend the situation from an external weltenschauung and finding a moderate view describing the problem situation. Another reason could be my personal trepidation towards presenting something that could be detrimental towards my organisation and myself. Thus, I tried to convey a situation which became generic due to bringing in multiple viewpoints coming from externally derived perspectives. Without 'shields' an emancipator must resolve to present his findings which accommodates the views of many people.
I personally believe that this isn't a weakness in the action case method itself. In fact, it addresses what I believe to be an advantage of action case. Despite my personal experience of action case of leading towards more generic findings, it could actually be a stepping stone for future action research which will focus more on transformation. Within the context of Malaysian work culture, I believe this would be a positive approach, as a researcher with less influence could attain more influence by conducting an action case. After attaining more influence and control, the researcher can then move towards addressing bigger and more specific problems through action research.

The difference between the research 'hero' and 'emancipator' roles also plays into the balance between understanding and transforming in the Action Case method. In Chapter 6, I discussed the narrative for Action Case should reside in between storyteller and hero of the research. The storyteller narrative focuses on attempting to understand the problem situation, whereas the hero attempts to bring about transformation to the problem situation. After careful consideration, the emancipator role could be an amalgamation of both of these roles. In terms of understanding, the emancipator is motivated to free those within the problem situation by first learning about the situation and gain understanding. The emancipator is also motivated to bring about a level of change, the motivation for freeing those within the problem situation will cause a level of transformation within the situation.

From my personal perspective from doing the research, the hero of the research and emancipator possess many similar traits when it comes to utilising the Action Case method. However, from the thesis itself we can see some of the differences between these two roles. Even though I attempted to free those within the problem situation, the emancipator's external viewpoint separated me from the contextual complexity of the situation. This occurred during the pre-fieldwork and post-fieldwork activities of my research. My attempt to comprehend the problem situation from an external emancipator role affected what came out from these research phases more generic in its content.

During the fieldwork, my most 'radical' phase was during the fieldwork itself. Being within the situation gave me an insight to the actuality from within. The activities themselves were part of the transformations I tried to bring about to my organisation. In the end the level of transformation was significant but not major. This could be one of the trade-offs of not only utilising Action Case but being an emancipator. My definition of the role of an emancipator is to cause a change within an
organisation that includes concessions and tolerance towards the contextual limitations of those within the organisation. Keeping in mind the cooperation of my university's administration, some things cannot be done without affecting them and there are sections where the language of criticisms had to take into account their own contextual limitations.

8.3.3 Application Area Contribution

By the end of the fieldwork, I saw a transformation taking place in SSIL. Before I started my fieldwork, research was considered more of a personal activity among my colleagues. This affected our focus on our academic research efforts. My communication with my colleagues throughout the fieldwork emphasised an importance of research as a part of being an academic. The SSIL Research Methodology Workshop helped to provide exposure and training in qualitative research fundamentals. I cannot overlook the contributions of my colleagues in organising the workshop, and also personalities like Dr Awang Asri Awang Ibrahim, Mr Jetol Bolongkikit and Mr Yuszren Yushak in improving the research in SSIL through their administrative efforts.

After the fieldwork, I received letters of commendation from Dr Awang Asri as the Dean of SSIL and Mr Yuszren as the Deputy Dean of Research and Innovation for my efforts in improving the research in SSIL. Mr Yuszren stated the increase in research grants application and publications as a sign that our research situation has started to improve. Their encouragement has motivated me to return to SSIL and do more for improving research further in my school. All the efforts and learning from this research is essential for the next phase of my lifelong Action Research for improving research in SSIL and Malaysian Information Systems. One matter that I have already recognised as my potential work is to promote more openness in university policies, to improve communication and lead to a more egalitarian academic community in UMS.

Other than the transformation of SSIL, I also saw my own personal transformation in this research. Before I started my PhD, I had a different research philosophy and based on my own research track record, could do better in research. Doing the PhD, the learning, the reading, the interviewing, the organising of the fieldwork and everything have made me love doing research. So much so, that I can't wait to do more research. I've fallen in love with doing research and I can feel this change in my academic life. Finally, one of the aspects of interpretive and qualitative research is that the researcher is the tool, through this PhD I believe 'this research tool' has undergone an upgrade.
8.4 Research Limitations

I would like to state that the findings from this research are contextual and subjective in nature. The environment of the research, SSIL provides an actuality in which I myself had to be aware of. There were times when I thought this situation was happening elsewhere in other ICT and IS based schools in Malaysia. However, from an interpretive stance this generalisation cannot be made. To summarise, the first major limitation of the research is the contextual nature of the research findings itself.

Another major limitation was in terms of time. The length of my fieldwork, even though considerably long is still not sufficient for a full Action Research. This could be the reason which led me to choosing Action Case as my research method. During the 9 months, family matters and personal issues also played a part. The research workshop was also delayed from an initial plan of hosting the event in January to March 2009. Since my intention was to interview my colleagues after the event. Interviews to those from outside my school also had to be rescheduled. Despite that, I tried my best to be involved with encouraging my colleagues in research when I can. This included simple activities such as discussing and highlighting research issues when any opportunity came, such as in school meetings and chatting with my colleagues.

Another limitation or change in the research that I must touch upon is what appears to be the lack of utilising Soft Systems Methodology during and after the fieldwork. My initial plan for the fieldwork was to organise SSM mini-workshops for my colleagues in regular meetings. However, this initial idea did not materialise due to organisational limitations. However, my personal learning and comprehension on SSM was extremely influential to my perspective on the research. As I stated before, I changed from being a 'hard' systems positivist prior to my PhD, to someone who is more interpretive. I have also utilised some of the aspects of SSM, specifically drawing rich pictures, as a way for me to convey the contextual nature of the situations I was in during the fieldwork data collection.

On actuality, Uchiyama's (2003) work on actuality and Contextual SSM were very influential in my learning and understanding as a researcher. Uchiyama's work focused deep into Japanese psychology and was based on theories from Japanese psychologist Bin Kimura. However, in this
thesis I have chosen a more general interpretation of actuality. The contextual focus of Uchiyama's work inspired me to find an acceptable level of actuality based on my personal context as a Malaysian academic. This became the defined limitation of the actuality within this research.

Ultimately, due to the narrative I chose, most of the findings in this research are based on my own viewpoint and weltanschauungen. My viewpoint is that SSIL, as a young Informatics school on the tiny island of Labuan needs to improve the research activities that we have. Although some might say my viewpoint is political, I hope that the thesis proves shows some signs to substantiate my claim and that my efforts have made a difference in bringing upon some transformation to SSIL.

One of the contributions of this thesis is on actuality, the contextual situation that IS researchers reside in within Malaysian academia. Initial confidence of making a contribution to my organisation, based on the actuality of hearing my colleagues praise my efforts but the reality of others may not see that contribution. Lee (2010) argues that IS researchers tend to take for granted some key concepts in doing research, where there is a difference of our 'theories in use' and our 'espoused theories'. The actuality of being in my organisation has led me to be placed in a comfort zone that may have affected my research.

My choice of using the first person perspective and story narrative in my PhD thesis is related to the actuality I wanted to convey in the research. However, the choice of narrative also had an effect and creates within it certain limitations to my research.

Returning to Malaysia to do my fieldwork in promoting qualitative research was an eye-opening experience in the hegemony of quantitative research in my country. I was questioned on the scientific validity of my research itself. During the final stages of writing my thesis, I started to have retrospection on this again and find myself wondering if I was so stuck in my actuality that I couldn't justify my research findings from a reality point of view.

Relating these issues which had to view again in retrospect, I summarise that the actuality I wanted to convey through my choice of first person and story narratives posed issues when I wanted to look at my research from a positivist viewpoint. I believe that from this viewpoint, questions regarding rigour and validity could arise. By expressing my research in the form of a story raises one
positivist question, “Where is the scientific phenomenon being presented in the research?” A positivist scientist may view my research and seek to find this scientific phenomenon that should be uncovered by my research. Unfortunately, the story narrative disables the need for conveying the phenomenon and instead focuses on my lived-in experience of doing the research.

One personal worry that I have when I plan to present my research in Malaysia is that the story narrative and interpretive stance of my research may place me in a disadvantage. As Malaysia's quantitative leanings and result-oriented academic culture influences how research is perceived by those in university administration and government ministries. If I were to present my work in its current state, questions on generalisability and statistical proof would potentially cripple my research. However, I believe this is why this research is important and the story narrative choice is essential. This is part of the change I plan to promote in Malaysian IS academia.

Another criticism I could imagine coming from my choice of narrative is that the personal tone of the narrative may imply my research work as being too 'fun'. In my defence, even though I admit at enjoying conducting my research, I believe this is what is slowly missing amongst PhD researchers in general. PhD researcher should be having 'fun' in doing his or her research. I am reminded of the term 'Peter Pan syndrome' where an individual still retains some level of child-like curiosity and fun-seeking attitude. I think having a Peter Pan syndrome which makes us want to have fun (while balancing it with the seriousness of doing the PhD) is an advantage for PhD researchers. It extends to having an enthusiasm for your work, enhances your energy when doing your PhD and provides you with the drive to ultimately finish your PhD research. I have personally experienced times during my research when due to my choice of narrative and my personal passion towards the subject, it pushed me to try my best in finishing my research. I even feel somewhat addicted to doing research and presenting it this way as my personality of being articulate and possibly possessing that Peter Pan syndrome drives me to become an academic researcher.

My chosen narrative also posed another situation. While a more traditional narrative may allow for a final summary of the entire research and a simpler thesis. My story narrative included my personal learning experience thus included two chapters on literature reviews and two chapters on research methodology. In a more traditional thesis narrative, I would only need to provide one chapter of each of them. This would have probably allowed me to 'creatively cheat' my research story, that the
literature I reviewed and my choice of research methodology were all determined before the research fieldwork. However, I felt that being honest about the progress of the literature review and shaping the research methodology was more important. The story narrative provided a way for me to progressively show the actual learning taking place during my PhD. The research story may have shown some of my earlier mistakes in doing the research, but in retrospect this is what makes my research different and more valuable.

8.5 Future Work and Additional Contributions

As I have stated previously, I view this PhD as a part of a bigger personal Action Research in improving the research in my school, university and Malaysia itself. In my research design, I have organised my Action Case as a cycle which leads to a further Action Research cycle which encompasses my planned future work. Figure 8.1 shows my final research design and at the far right of it is a box containing what I surmise as the current and future work for my future Action Research. Under current and future work, I have listed:

- PhD Write Up
- Proposals for SSIL, UMS and Malaysian Government
- Further Action Research
- Returning to Malaysian Academia

Figure 8.1: The Research Design

My research although not a full Action Research, is still an Action Case which contained Action Research elements of entering the field, participation and reflecting on the actions itself. Taking a
description of the AR process in human situations provided by Checkland and Holwell (2007), I adapted my own version to show the progression from the beginning of the research and leading to findings, and potential future research work.

Figure 8.2: My adaptation of Checkland and Holwell's (2007) cycle of AR

In preparation for my future work, I need to analyse the findings and recommendations from my research into workable plans and proposals which I will be involved in.

8.5.1 List of Future Work from Shared Understandings and Actuality

Shared Understanding 1: Academic Research Developments

Future Work:

- Encourage Action Research at school, university and ministerial level.

As part of the recommendations in Chapter 7, I suggested further Action Research at school, university and ministerial level. I elaborated a proposal for utilising ALTAR to include all levels in Malaysian public universities in improving research activities. I have submitted a draft document of
this proposal to the Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Higher Education, Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah in August 2010. He has provided some positive input on my proposal and hope to push this forward further. I have even arranged to meet him in February 2011 to interview and discuss promoting Action Research in Malaysian public universities.

At school level, I have already begun discussing with my colleagues at SSIL on using Action Research in our research activities. One of the more potential research that has emerged is an Action Case to learn about, and hopefully improve the situation within, an illegal immigrant's camp on the island of Labuan. The Deputy Dean of Research and Innovation, Mr Yuszren Yushak has been involved in a creative photography project in that camp. Our early discussions have been extremely fruitful and we plan on organising a larger scale research using photography to collect data and some form of action-based research method to instigate some changes to the situation. We see this project as having something that can have a tremendous impact for SSIL.

At university level, I plan on promoting Action Research through future workshops or seminars that will include academics from all schools at Universiti Malaysia Sabah. The SSIL Research Methodology Workshop included representatives from the majority of schools at UMS and I think this was one of the reasons why the workshop was a success. Bringing in those from outside of SSIL allowed for ideas from different academic fields to flow during the workshop. I have discussed organising an Action Research workshop to my superiors at university and they have given some positive feedback on my plans.

Shared Understanding 2: Information Systems Research in Malaysia's Future Work:

- Carry on work with promoting IS to university administration, MADICT and the ministry

I propose as my personal future work to carry on efforts of promoting Information Systems to university administration, MADICT and relevant government ministries. At university administration level, I plan to follow up with my communication with those in administration on the relevance of Information Systems as a field. I learned during the SSIL workshop that university administration are supportive of activities that aim to improve research in general. I plan to utilise
the research activities at SSIL to present to UMS' administration Information Systems as a reference field for research.

I also hope that this effort could be extended further to national level with MADICT and relevant government ministries as my target. As I have learned during my fieldwork, IS academics in Malaysia seem to stay in the background or do research in 'harder' ICT fields due to the misunderstandings towards the field of IS. I believe it is time to change that. I have seen efforts done by Professors like Rose Alias, who are indoctrinating some of those outside of IS to the ideals of the field. I plan to contribute to this efforts through my own research and communications with MADICT and the Malaysian government.

As Malaysia is transforming itself to become a developed nation, my personal Action Research include comprehending and translating government policies on research and innovation from Information Systems perspectives. I plan on utilising my contacts with senior IS/ICT academics and Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah to carry out these activities. Hopefully, this will contribute to to increasing awareness towards the field of Information Systems.

Shared Understanding 3: Qualitative Research Situation in Malaysia
Future Work:

- Continue the work in SSIL and UMS to promote qualitative research and improve research foundations

I plan to continue promoting qualitative research in SSIL and UMS and to the improve research foundations for these methods. This plan is based on my recommendations that I have mentioned previously through further workshops and my own personal research efforts. My fieldwork in SSIL was only the beginning in the promotion of qualitative research. I hope to improve future workshops and propagate the method even more at school and university level.

Shared Understanding 4: Malaysian Academic Culture
Future Work

- Collaboration with ministry of Higher Education for more studies into Malaysian academic culture
• Organising more research methodology workshops

By the end of the research, I felt there are still some unanswered questions and issues relating to Malaysian academic culture. What I provide in this research can be considered only the tip of the iceberg. I believe there is more research needed from an Information Systems perspective associated with Malaysia's academic culture.

My proposal for future work includes collaborating with the Ministry of Higher Education for more studies into Malaysian academic culture. I believe this is a viable research area for IS academics to conduct, especially in light of how technology and polices have influenced the academics in Malaysia itself. Due to our cultural context, I believe the Ministry of Higher education must be pulled into efforts to comprehend and instil a positive Malaysian academic culture. This is where my communication with the Deputy Minister of MOHE will hopefully beneficial. In my discussions with him through social networking site Facebook, I have seen his desire for Malaysian academic culture to be based upon the principles of knowledge. I believe inculcating Islamic principles, ethics and the philosophy of knowledge is important for Malaysian academia and hope that this would provide a way for myself as an IS academic to contribute to the country.

Another related future work is to organise more research methodology workshops to promote research ethics, philosophy, and general research and innovation. The workshops I have proposed previously on Action Research and qualitative research methods should emphasise these aspects. It is hope that the participants of these future workshops would also be a part of developing a positive Malaysian academic culture.

Shared Understanding 5: Lack of Research Foundations
Future Work
  • Conduct and improve the ICT Research Module in SSIL.
  • Work with MQA and MADICT

As I stated some of the future work I have listed above are already in progress. I have sent the proposed ICT Research Methodology module to the Dean of SSIL and hope that once everything is accepted, it could be added into the student curriculum and be improved further once its introduced.
My most recent communication with my school administration however revealed that one hurdle from implementing the module is the 3 year length of our undergraduate programs. However, I am continuing discussions with administration of how I could present the essence of this module to the undergraduate students in some form.

Again, the planned future research workshops are part of strengthening the research foundations among academics in SSIL, UMS and hopefully among the ICT academics in Malaysia. I would like to include the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) for this. The directive from MOHE is that Malaysian public universities are required to submit their programs for MQA approval. The MQA has long promoted Malaysian academics to link their research with their teaching and vice versa. I feel that the emphasis on relating teaching with research is important and this must also be reflected in how we organise our research workshops. By involving the MQA, we can attain valuable input to make sure that research by ICT/IS academics fulfil the needs of the MQA and hopefully link the relevance of our teaching with practice through research.

Shared Understanding 6: SSIL's Research Situation

Future Work:

- Further research and improvement on the situation in SSIL and Labuan

Finally, future work for improving the SSIL research situation should be self-explanatory based on the previous recommendations and future work I have presented so far. Further research and improvement on the situation in SSIL and Labuan should carry on. Government-based plans and developments on the island of Labuan should be fully utilised by SSIL. The proposed innovation centre in Labuan should include the involvement of SSIL's academics.

SSIL itself is undergoing transformations. Our facilities are in the process of upgrading, and so are our staff. The number of academics with PhDs, will hopefully rise in the next two years and this would bring more focus towards research. The island of Labuan itself is ever-changing. I recommend that SSIL look into the future opportunities in Labuan, with the added infrastructure, government-sponsored projects and also its youth population to work with for developing our research.
I believe that the future is bright and that my own actions will hopefully benefit my school and Labuan. I believe the utilisation of Action Research is extremely suitable for this, as eventually my own position in the school would improve and further transformations could be instigated in SSIL. God-willing.

8.5.2 Additional Contributions from Weltanschauung and Actuality

One of the issues that the thesis touched upon, although did not address directly, is the difference between Weltanschauung and actuality. The exposure to actuality and Contextual SSM from Uchiyama provided me with a different perspective, on how the Japanese perceives a situation.

In my life experience, I have consumed numerous Japanese popular culture products such as videogames, anime, manga and television programs. As an academic, I've been fascinated to how 'different' they are to Western media. We have had this viewpoint of the Japanese being extremely disciplined and functioning as more of a collective society. However, there exists a quirkiness to their culture that cannot be explained unless one experiences it first-hand.

With regards to the difference between weltanschauung and actuality, it is my interpretation that weltanschauung attempts to address the different viewpoints from a visual perspective. Where there is an 'attempt to see' the situation as an analyst from the different perspectives available. Thus, I believe there is still that separation of trying to explain a problem situation from the viewpoint of an outsider.

Actuality on the other hand 'attempts to hear' the problem situation from within. Through lived in experience and also listening from within, there is an inherent difference of the role of the analyst. For the analyst must also be a member of the organisation to perceive this actuality. This sense of not only being 'one with the natives', but actually 'being a native' is what differentiates the two perspectives.

This ties into the whole concept of hero and emancipator as well. Throughout the PhD research, my fieldwork allowed me to be a native within the research area. However, after fieldwork concludes, I am back as an analyst researcher trying to make sense of the collected data from an external
perspective. It could have been geography that was the cause of this dichotomy, however if I reflect upon the initial findings and writing of my thesis I discovered a duality in my tone of criticism.

Within the actuality of being an academic in Malaysia, I was able to derive many critical aspects of the challenges for Information Systems research development. I was extremely bold in my assessment and criticisms due to being within that environment, surrounded by like-minded academics who support my views. Within the Malaysian academic environment as well, I was able to stress on the challenges we faced without fear of criticism or reprisal from my organisation. Because I was still within the problem situation, listening to the problems and presenting them. In essence, I was a 'hero'.

When I was summarising the findings from my fieldwork and presenting them from analysis, I became more careful of what I was writing. I wasn't in Malaysia anymore, I changed my perspective into a weltanschauung of the situation in Malaysia. I discussed, somewhat generically, the issues that were related to IS research development but with less boldness and with more diplomacy. From the outside, I viewed the problem situation as complex and chose to not be too critical. The worry of facing critiques or reprisals from my organisation crept in. Similarly, my cultural leanings of trying to present the situation as diplomatically as possible can be attributed to our sense of 'preserving face'. I became an emancipator. Viewing the situation from afar and assessing the situation through a less critical lens to improve the research situation without having to 'step on anyone's toes'.

One question remains. How would I attempt to present the findings in a way which would not be 'hurtful' or negative towards my organisation? Balancing the weltanschauung and actuality can present the situation from external and internal perspectives, thus being both critical of the situation while empathising with those who reside within the problem situation.

The practice of being negative towards perceived 'failures' or unsuccessful implementation of research projects within academia. I view this as a defence mechanism among academics not to show what could be perceived as the weaknesses of their theory, method and application. I also find a similarity of this screening to the Malaysian culture of 'preserving face'. When we look at Action
Research itself, we must ask, “Have we been selective in sharing the negative experiences of utilising this method in academia?”.

All these provide an opportunity for future work not only for myself, but hopefully for other IS academics. I hope to bring many of the ideas presented in my thesis back to Malaysia and will inevitably undergo the actuality of doing research within the Malaysian IS academic situation. In parallel from my own on-going work presented in the next sub-chapter, I hope to present work on the actuality of Malaysian IS in the future.

8.6 On-going Work
During my writing up of the PhD thesis, I had the opportunity of doing some on-going work for my post-PhD. One of them is to increase my communication with my university's administration.

On 17 June 2010, the Vice Chancellor of UMS came down to Nottingham to check up on the academics who were pursuing their studies in the UK. I took the opportunity to attend the meeting with not only the Vice Chancellor but also the registrar, Mr Abdullah Mohd Said. Some relevant issues came out of the meeting.

The VC highlighted that there were 48 UMS academics doing their postgraduate degrees in the UK in 2010. 47 of them doing PhDs with one solitary academic doing Masters. The VC highlighted the shift of university policy in which the individual Deans of the schools are now responsible for the process of ‘green-lighting’ academics who want to pursue their PhDs.

One big blow that the Vice Chancellor revealed to us was a reduction of government-funding for the university. This was however rectified in the Budget for 2011. However, at the time the VC encouraged the academics to return as quickly as possible to do research that can help UMS look for outside funding. The VC reiterated his ambition to see UMS attain Research University status although his projection is now more modest with a view to attain the status in the year 2015.

During the meeting, the VC specified that the university may send less academics to do their PhDs in the UK. I gave a comment that the European-based PhDs offers a rich diversity in research methods. I argues that in the field of Information Systems for example, the qualitative methods
preferred in Europe has been an eye-opening experience and something that I plan to bring back to UMS and Malaysia. A good number of the academics in attendance supported this view.

I also took the opportunity to highlight one of the concerns I had regarding new PhDs returning and being given administrative posts. I argued that if UMS really does want to improve our research and attain the Research university status, I suggested that this practice should be reviewed as many of us who just returned would like to focus our efforts on research rather than administration. This comment was given further support by the rest of my colleagues.

After the meeting, some of my academic colleagues approached me to congratulate and support my suggestions. One of them acknowledged the fact that these feelings have been bubbling among many UMS academics pursuing their studies in the UK, however, it took someone like myself to have the courage to speak about them.

At the end of the meeting, I provided a copy of some of my ideas based on some work done by my supervisor and adapting it to UMS' needs. They received the recommendations, however until today they have not gotten back on the issues with me. I was later told by Dr Awang Asri that the Vice Chancellor requested more elaboration for some of my ideas from more senior ICT academics in my university! I did explain that the documents were more generic in its ideas rather than a 'hard' ICT proposal. Thinking about this situation again, I find this encouraging and amusing at the same time. However, I cannot discount the fact that the Vice Chancellor of my university accepted my recommendation document and was willing to spend time on trying to understand it.

Communication with the Deputy Minister at MOHE is also part of my on-going work. There is a need for support at ministerial level if my work is to be of any value to Malaysian IS academia. So far, my personal communication with Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah has been extremely fruitful in shaping my ideas for the thesis. At the same time, my contributions to his Facebook page on discussing and debating the issues he bring forward have been helpful in supporting the minister's personal initiatives. The next step would be to improve my interaction not only with Datuk Saifuddin, but also others in MOHE to push for my agendas in making Malaysian Information Systems academics more prominent.
Another on-going work is writing academic papers based on my PhD work. So far, I have not had anything published from my PhD. This I admit is my fault and weakness. I have submitted one paper on the SSIL Research Methodology Workshop experience to a UK-based journal in 2009. But even though the paper was accepted to be presented at a related conference, it is yet to be published. Since then the writing up of my thesis has taken a lot of my effort and time that I have not had the time to publish anything since. I have written many documents based on my ideas and presented them to the Vice Chancellor of my university and the Deputy Minister at MOHE. I plan to expand these documents into academic papers to be submitted to IS academic journals.

8.7 Themes for Future Action Research
Based on my fieldwork during this research, I was able to extract additional themes which I felt could prove to be very useful for future work. My proposed future work of conducting more action research would hopefully begin to deal with these extra themes. I have also touched upon these future themes in individual recommendations in he previous chapter. I have listed the themes below:
- Integrating Action Research into Malaysian academic research development (knowledge and practice)
- Deeper insight into Malaysian academic viewpoint
- Rethinking government involvement in academic research and development
- Academic and industry collaboration
- Debates and discussions on the State of Information Systems in Malaysia
- Islamic perspectives on knowledge and practice could be further expanded.

All these themes, emerged during my PhD. From early impressions, they appear to be quite substantial and deserves further investigation. However, due to my research limitations, I have put them aside for the time being and choose to explore them in future work.

8.8 Conclusion
Ultimately, this thesis can be regarded as a snap shot of SSIL and my research between the years of 2007 until 2010. As an academic who, in many ways, is still learning the ropes of research I hope that this thesis could be appreciated by the reader as an acceptable PhD document.
I hope I have shown in this thesis that I do deserve a Philosophical Doctorate degree. I have shown through this research that I am competent in:

- Formulating a valid inquiry for research
- Proposing a valid method for answering this inquiry
- Reviewing relevant literature for the purpose of the research
- Successfully creating a research plan and carrying it out
- Adapting and changing this research plan when the situation required
- Collecting the information which would aid in answering the research questions
- Analysing the information and relate them with the research questions
- Produce recommendations for improving the situation related to the research
- Propose relevant future work
- Shape all these ideas and present them in a coherent thesis

I have learned so much during my PhD. When I first started, I was a Malaysian Information Systems academic with limited research experience. The first year of the PhD exposed me to new methods for doing research. This motivated me to bring this to my school with the hopes of improving research there. I conducted an Action Case fieldwork to learn about Information Systems research development in my country. I learned so many things from the participative actions I conducted and from the people I interviewed. Through reflecting upon my experience after the fieldwork, I learned more about the problem situation and the related issues. On-going work and the thesis write-up added to my personal development as an academic.

The thesis defence was also a major part of the learning within my own personal Action Research. The thesis defence enabled me to receive ideas from my examiners for improving my research and my own personal development. My man aim coming into the defence was to learn from my examiners assessment on my research. And I did. The thesis defence was a wonderful intellectual discourse between my examiners and myself which allowed me to reflect upon my research. The examiners provided useful commentary and opinions on my thesis that has helped me in improving it further, particularly in the area of theory and highlighting the uniqueness of the weltenschauung/actuality dichotomy. They also made me reflect upon my announced role as hero and emancipator within the context of my research.
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APPENDIX SECTION
APPENDIX A
Logframes from MADICT Workshop
Logframe for Research Partnership

The logframe for Research Partnership highlights the related issues discussed previously. The overall objective/goal and purpose section outline the main targets to improve research partnerships in IPTAs. Results/outputs list the kind of outcomes we hope to see. Activities are suggestions for how the outputs can be practically improved.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall objective/goal</th>
<th>Intervention Logic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Existence of mechanism where other IPTA can harness existing networking between IPTA with a partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>- Good interaction among universities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>- Universities are proactive in cooperation</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results/outputs</th>
<th>1.1</th>
<th>1.2</th>
<th>1.3</th>
<th>2.1</th>
<th>2.2</th>
<th>2.3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>- Initiation of work (to know where to start)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>- Expertise in IPTAs can be determined</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>- Sufficient human resource</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>- The ease of executing existing formalised relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>- High confidence with the resource/expert we have or can offer</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>- Interested local industry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>1.1.1</th>
<th>1.1.2</th>
<th>1.1.3</th>
<th>1.2.1</th>
<th>1.3.1</th>
<th>1.3.2</th>
<th>2.1.1</th>
<th>2.1.2</th>
<th>2.1.3</th>
<th>2.2.1</th>
<th>2.3.1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1.1</td>
<td>- Utilising source of reference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1.2</td>
<td>- Social networking</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1.3</td>
<td>- Profiling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.1</td>
<td>- Create directory of who’s who in IT</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.1</td>
<td>- Distribution of resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.3.2</td>
<td>- Roadmap of human resource in ICT</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1.1</td>
<td>- Sufficient or available funds (right allocation from government)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1.2</td>
<td>- Balance distribution of work load</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1.3</td>
<td>- Establish transparent system/procedures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1</td>
<td>- Acknowledgement of knowledge, talent and expertise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1</td>
<td>- Create platform for academia and industries to interact in research</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Logframe for Research Partnerships Part 1
The table below is part of the logframe which specifies the parties responsible for the activities suggested in the logframe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - Utilising source of reference</td>
<td>MADICT members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - Social networking</td>
<td>MADICT secretariat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - Profiling</td>
<td>UKM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - Create directory of who’s who in ICT</td>
<td>UiTM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - Distribution of resources</td>
<td>MADICT secretariat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - Roadmap of human resource in ICT</td>
<td>UTM, UMP, UUM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 - Sufficient/available funds</td>
<td>University admin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 - Balanced distribution of work load</td>
<td>UIA, USM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 - Establish transparent system/procedures</td>
<td>University admin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - Acknowledgement of knowledge, talent, expertise</td>
<td>University admin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 - Create platform for academia and industries to interact in research</td>
<td>MADICT secretariat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Logframe for Research Partnerships Part 2
### Logframe for R&D Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall objective</th>
<th>Intervention Logic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project purpose</strong></td>
<td>Increased R&amp;D achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>- Increase grant application success rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>- Increase publication quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Results level</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>- Increase spread of information on local and international grants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>- Proposals to emphasise research component</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>- Add Professors to new universities to improve grants and publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>- Guarantee research grant allocation is standardised and transparent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>- Improve research project management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>- Increase publication ethics among researchers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities level</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.1</td>
<td>- Organise workshop introducing grants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.2</td>
<td>- Spread information through many mediums.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.1</td>
<td>- Organise project proposal workshops that emphasise research component.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.1</td>
<td>- Encourage expert mobility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.2</td>
<td>- Import experts from abroad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.1</td>
<td>- Grant providers create websites and documents with clear information on grants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.2</td>
<td>- Grant providers deliver complete feedback on grant rejections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.3</td>
<td>- Proposal valuation criteria explained by evaluators.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Logframe for Research Achievement
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Purpose</th>
<th>Intervention Logic</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>- Get good quality students</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>- Increased mechanism for sharing expertise for mutual benefit</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>- More experts to evaluate theses</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results Level</th>
<th>Intervention Logic</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>- Good branding of COE (national and international recognition)</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>- Good information system for research, expertise, coordination and sharing</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>- Collaboration between IPTA and IPTS in research</td>
<td>MADICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>- Easy to attain external/ internal examiners</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>- Increase in number of professors/ experts that become mentors in research</td>
<td>MADICT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities Level</th>
<th>Intervention Logic</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1.1</td>
<td>- Sending CEO/ researchers for sabbatical, training, attachment</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.2</td>
<td>- Recruitment of recognised researchers</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.3</td>
<td>- Propose that ICT be given priority like biotechnology</td>
<td>MADICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.4</td>
<td>- Attain funding exclusively for COE</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.5</td>
<td>- Produce publications/ patents/ products with high impact</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.6</td>
<td>- Synchronise all COEs in IPTA and IPTS</td>
<td>MADICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1</td>
<td>- Strengthen Malim Sarjana, the MOHE’s academic expertise directory</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.2</td>
<td>- Promote/ Activate/ Connect Malim Sarjana to all universities</td>
<td>MADICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.3</td>
<td>- MADICT publish directory of ICT expertise and research every year</td>
<td>MADICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.4</td>
<td>- Strengthen information dissemination system</td>
<td>MADICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.5</td>
<td>- MADICT plan a research project with high impact that involves members of MADICT totally</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1</td>
<td>- Joint research activities (IPTA/ IPTS) which involve many universities in a national grant</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2</td>
<td>- Increase promotion and cooperation among universities</td>
<td>University</td>
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<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3</td>
<td>- Multiple researchers and universities for one research grant (joint research) – compulsory to get grant</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.4</td>
<td>- Create portal advertising intake of PhDs/ researchers/ post-doc that includes information on research, years, grant total and candidate requirements</td>
<td>MOSTI/MOHE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.1</td>
<td>- Increase number of experts in fields that need more examiners</td>
<td>COE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.2</td>
<td>- Create information system about field of expertise</td>
<td>MOSTI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1</td>
<td>- Hire contract professors from renowned universities through special funding</td>
<td>Prof/mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2</td>
<td>- Increase expertise of junior staff</td>
<td>Prof/mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.3</td>
<td>- Provide good support staff to assist Associate Profs and senior academics</td>
<td>Registrar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Logframe for Expertise / Fields and Research Groups / Research Laboratories and Facilities / Centres of Excellence / Postgraduate Programs
Logframe for Expertise / Fields and Research Groups / Research Laboratories and Facilities / Centres of Excellence / Postgraduate Programs

Group 1’s logframe then lists the activities and the ones responsible to implement them to improve the situation within ICT research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Purpose</th>
<th>Intervention Logic</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>- Get good quality students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>- Increased mechanism for sharing expertise for mutual benefit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>- More experts to evaluate theses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results Level</th>
<th>Intervention Logic</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>- good branding of COE (national and international recognition)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>- Good information system for research, expertise, coordination and sharing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>- Collaboration between IPTA and IPTS in research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>- Easy to attain external/internal examiners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>- Increase in number of professors/experts that become mentors in research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities Level</th>
<th>Intervention Logic</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1.1</td>
<td>- Sending CEO/researchers for sabbatical, training, attachment</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.2</td>
<td>- Recruitment of recognised researchers</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.3</td>
<td>- Propose that ICT be given priority like biotechnology</td>
<td>MADICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.4</td>
<td>- Attain funding exclusively for COE</td>
<td>MADICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.5</td>
<td>- Produce publications/patents/products with high impact</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.6</td>
<td>- Synchronise all COEs in IPTA and IPTS</td>
<td>MADICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1</td>
<td>- Strengthen Malim Sarjana, the MOHE’s academic expertise directory</td>
<td>MADICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.2</td>
<td>- Promote/Activate/Connect Malim Sarjana to all universities</td>
<td>MADICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.3</td>
<td>- MADICT publish directory of ICT expertise and research every year</td>
<td>MADICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.4</td>
<td>- Strengthen information dissemination system</td>
<td>MADICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.5</td>
<td>- MADICT plan a research project with high impact that involves members of MADICT totally</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1</td>
<td>- Joint research activities (IPTA/IPTS) which involve many universities in a national grant</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2</td>
<td>- Increase promotion and cooperation among universities</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3</td>
<td>- Multiple researchers and universities for one research grant (joint research) – compulsory to get grant</td>
<td>MOSTI/MOHE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.4</td>
<td>- Create portal advertising intake of PhDs/ researchers/ post-doc that includes information on research, years, grant total and candidate requirements</td>
<td>COE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.1</td>
<td>- Increase number of experts in fields that need more examiners</td>
<td>MOSTI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.2</td>
<td>- Create information system about field of expertise</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Logframe for Expertise / Fields and Research Groups / Research Laboratories and Facilities / Centres of Excellence / Postgraduate Programs
APPENDIX B
SSIL Research Methodology Workshop Proposal
PROPOSAL

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY WORKSHOP AND TRAINING
10-12 MARCH 2009
COORDINATED BY
LABUAN SCHOOL OF INFORMATICS SCIENCE

PREPARED BY
LABUAN SCHOOL OF INFORMATICS SCIENCE
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH
KAMPUS ANTARABANGSA LABUAN
Introduction

This proposal is meant to apply for allocation from the Universiti Malaysia Sabah. The allocation will be used to conduct a research methodology workshop and training for academic staffs and students of Sekolah Sains Informatik Labuan (SSIL).

Below are the proposed date for the workshop and training.

   Workshop Date       : 10th – 12th March 2009
   Location            : UMS-KAL

Background

Labuan School of Informatics Science and Its Research

On 25th July 2008, the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi stressed the importance for Malaysian universities to focus on research and development. During the officiating of the National Academics Award, Bernama quoted him as saying "Let's give more attention to R&D and other fields that lead us to greater excellence. This is our hope and that is why we are willing to provide a huge allocation for the purpose as human capital development is the best investment we can make for the country’s future."

The National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010 proposed by the Ministry of Education also emphasise the importance of research and development. In the plan, two important aspects should be focused upon by Malaysian universities:

1. Building the critical mass of researchers, scientists and engineers (RSEs).
2. Inculcating the right culture to ensure passion, dedication and commitment towards research.

With the Prime Minister himself taking a keen interest and encouraging research and development in Malaysian institutions of higher-learning, Labuan School of Informatics Science (SSIL) should take heed and make efforts in improving our own research and development. For this purpose, this proposal for holding academics discussion forums and a research methodology workshop is presented.
Invited Workshop Facilitators' Backgrounds

Professor Trevor Wood-Harper is one of the most sought after academics in the field of Information Systems in Europe. He has been in the field of Information Systems (IS) research and academic practice for 30 years. He has graduated more than 30 PhDs, where 7 of his former PhDs are currently full-time professors and holding important posts in their respective institutions. His work with other IS luminaries like the late Enid Mumford, Guy Fitzgerald and Rudy Hirschheim produced the seminal book, *Research Methods in Information Systems* published in 1985, started the revolution in IS which broke away from conventional Computer Science. This book has since been regarded a classic piece of Information Systems literature and referred to by top academics. Professor Wood-Harper is also one of the pioneers of Multiview, a methodology that incorporates multiple perspectives when analysing, designing and developing information systems. It combines a soft systems approach to analysis which leads the harder process of systems development.

Professor Rose Alias is a highly experienced academic in the field of Information Systems and one of the first, if not the first, full Professor in the field in Malaysia. Her research methods are more qualitative, but she is extremely aware and has been exposed with the quantitative bias of IT/IS research in Malaysia. She is currently the Dean (Engineering) at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia’s (UTM) School of Graduate Studies.

Professor Marohaini Yusoff is one of the strongest proponents of qualitative research in Malaysian academia. She was previously the President of the Qualitative Research Association of Malaysia from 2002 to 2008. Even though she’s not from a purely IT/IS background, she has been involved in a number of qualitative research pertaining to the usage of ICT in Education in Malaysia. She is currently a Professor at Universiti Malaya’s (UM) Faculty of Education.

Associate Professor Dr Esther Daniel is another academic from UM who specialises in qualitative research. An experienced science teacher, she has written many papers on science education in Malaysia. Her experience will be very valuable in terms of learning why qualitative research has a low take up among Malaysian scientists. Being a close colleague of Professor Marohaini at UM, they have written many joint papers on the state of qualitative research in Malaysia.
Goal

The overall goal of the workshop and training is to contribute to the improvement of research practice at SSIL specifically, and UMS-KAL generally.

Research Methodology Workshop and Training

Introduction

This research methodology workshop and training coincides with Panel Discussion Forums that will be held at SSIL among the invited academics. As stated before, the intention of this workshop is to introduce/reintroduce the academics of SSIL and Labuan School of International Business and Finance (SPKAL), the two schools at UMS-KAL’s campus with the numerous forms of research methods, with an emphasis on qualitative research. Some of the academics may have already been through research courses dealing with research methods and for them, the course acts as a revision exercise. This workshop is one of the activities that specifically cater to the needs of SSIL in terms of research improvement for the school.

Objectives

- To introduce/reintroduce UMS-KAL’s academics, especially SSIL’s, on the different research methodologies and approaches associated to the field of IT and IS.
- To expose and train UMS-KAL’s academics in qualitative research approaches.
- To allow UMS-KAL’S, especially SSIL’s academics to reflect on their own research practice for the purpose of self improvement.

Plan and Relevance

As stated, the workshop and training sessions will coincide with the Research Panel Forums at UMS-KAL. It is essential for the academics in UMS-KAL to participate in this workshop, thus attendance will be made compulsory for lecturers, tutors and post-graduate research students at Labuan School of Informatics Science and Labuan School of International Business and Finance. The workshop will be used to expose participants to the different research methods and approaches in the hope that they might expand their knowledge in research methods. Only after the workshop will the Panel Discussion Forum take place, to summarise the workshop’s
The workshop will have the invited experienced academics to give presentations on research methods, trends of research in academia and their experience in doing research. There will be a more qualitative leaning in this workshop. Most of the academics in SSIL are already familiar and adept with quantitative research methods in the field of IT/IS. Exposure to qualitative research methods will expand the participants’ awareness on other methods of research.

Below are the list of topics for presentations and workshop exercises.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date and time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Facilitator / Speaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 March 2008, 10:00am -</td>
<td>Overview of Qualitative Research Methods</td>
<td>Professor Marohaini Yussof and Associate Professor Esther</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td>Daniel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 March 2008, 2:00 - 5:00pm</td>
<td>Qualitative data collection, analysis and validation workshop</td>
<td>Professor Marohaini Yussof and Associate Professor Esther</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Daniel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 March 2008, 9:00am – 5:00pm</td>
<td>Focus Group Workshop and Analysis</td>
<td>Professor Rose Alinda Alias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 March 2008, 9:00am – 12:00pm</td>
<td>Multiview, Action Research and Case Studies for IT/IS</td>
<td>Professor Trevor Wood-Harper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The workshop and training sessions will be videotaped and kept as reference for UMS-KAL.

Hence, below is a tentative schedule of the activities including the forums and workshop:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date and time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 March 2009 (9.00am – 10.00am)</td>
<td>Short Opening Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 March 2009 (10.00am – 5.00pm)</td>
<td>Research Methodology Workshop Part 1, UMS-KAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 March 2009 (9.00am – 5.00pm)</td>
<td>Research Methodology Workshop Part 2, UMS-KAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 March 2009 (9.00am – 12.00pm)</td>
<td>Research Methodology Workshop Part 3, UMS-KAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 March 2009 (2.00 – 5.00 pm)</td>
<td>Closing Forum at UMS-KAL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Benefits**

UMS-KAL will benefit greatly from this workshop. On a whole, there is always room for improvement in whatever we are doing. In UMS-KAL's case, the academics and students must
always 'Strive to Excel' in all their endeavours as academics. This includes their roles as researchers.

Based on past experience UMS-KAL's overall research work have been mainly based on quantitative methods. Although, there is nothing wrong with this, it would be a shame if UMS-KAL research does not open up to other methods and approaches to enrich our research output. From this workshop, academic staff and post-graduate research students from SSIL and SPKAL will gain from a more in-depth workshop which will expose them to the qualitative methodology of research.

This workshop will focus not only in presenting materials but also in practical training. The practical aspects in the workshop will allow for participants to quickly pick up and 'learn from doing' what is taught in the workshop. The workshop sessions will hopefully be beneficial in giving a 'real-life' example of implementing the research methods taught in the workshop.

Learning about different research methods will develop the research skills of academic staff and our research students, which will enable for a wider range of research work. Our position as an academic institution will only benefit from more variety of research that we can conduct.

Inviting experienced academics from outside of Malaysia also allows for the sharing of ideas between the academics at UMS-KAL with those from outside Malaysian academic circles. Some wonder why Malaysian academia do not produce high impact research that affects International academic circles. An outside view will expose UMS-KAL academics to what the academic world is moving towards, and this will enable academics in UMS-KAL to focus their energies on producing research work that the entire academic world can benefit from.


**Budget**

For each invited academic, there will be an allocation for their travel, lodging and contribution to the workshop. Since all of the invited academics are from Malaysian public universities, Malaysian government rates apply. The table below lists the details of the budget for every individual invited academic.

*Participants Budget*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Budget Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Professor Trevor Wood-Harper | Travel budget, Business Class return flight Manchester to Kuala Lumpur and Labuan = about RM25,600 (depending on exchange rate)  
Lodging for 5 nights, at Labuan = RM1,850  
Daily food allowance = RM500  
Gratuity payment = £1,000 (about RM6500, depending on exchange rate) |
| Professor Dr Rose Alinda Alias | Travel budget, return flight Johor Bahru to Labuan = RM3,000  
Lodging for 4 nights, at Labuan = RM1,480  
Daily food allowance = RM400  
Gratuity payment = RM1,000 |
| Professor Dr Marohaini Yusoff | Travel budget, Business Class return flight Kuala Lumpur to Labuan = RM2,206  
Lodging for 4 nights, at Labuan = RM1,480  
Daily food allowance = RM400  
Gratuity payment = RM1,000 |
| Associate Professor Dr Esther Daniel | Travel budget, Business Class return flight Kuala Lumpur to Labuan = RM2,206  
Lodging for 4 nights, at Labuan = RM1,480  
Daily food allowance = RM400  
Gratuity payment = RM1,000 |

**PARTICIPANTS BUDGET**  
RM 50,502.00

The workshop and forum will be held at the Grand Dorsett Labuan Hotel. For this forum, a
ballroom will be booked to cater to the workshop and seminar sessions. Below is the predicted budget for the venue.

**Venue Budget**

| Grand Dorsett Labuan Hotel's Meeting Package | RM 80.00 net per person per day, inclusive of:  
|  | ● Two coffee / tea breaks with three snack selections per break  
|  | ● One buffet lunch at Victoria's Brasserie  
|  | RM 80.00 X 80 participants X 3 days = RM 19,200.00 |

**VENUE BUDGET**  
RM 19,200.00

**OVERALL TOTAL BUDGET**

| OVERALL TOTAL | RM 69,702.00 |

**Academic Forum and Research Methodology Workshop Committee**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chairman</td>
<td>En Muzaffar Hamzah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Chairman</td>
<td>En Jetol Bolongkikit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>En Zamhar Ismail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Secretary</td>
<td>Pn Laura Jack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>Cik Nurhanizah Adnan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urusetia</td>
<td>Cik Dinna @ Nina Mohd Nizam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJK Food</td>
<td>En Jonathan Likoh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJK Souvenir</td>
<td>Cik Chin Su Na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJK Technical</td>
<td>En Tamrin Amboala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJK Transportation</td>
<td>En Ahmad Rizal b. Ahmad Rodzuan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJK Residential</td>
<td>Cik Ainnecia Yoag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJK Promotion</td>
<td>En Ryan Macdonnell Andrias</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

We would like to ask for consideration on approving this proposal. It is our hope that everybody that is involved in the forums and workshop will greatly benefit from it, thus increasing the level of quality and knowledge amongst the academic staff and students not only in Labuan School of Informatics Science, but also Universiti Malaysia Sabah.
APPENDIX C

Selected Interview and Discussion Transcripts
Discussion Forum, 12th March 2009: ‘Qualitative Research Focus and Direction: Opportunities for Universiti Malaysia Sabah and Malaysia’

Chairperson: Zamhar Iswandono Ismail

Panel: Prof Trevor Wood-Harper (Manchester), Prof Marohaini Yussof (UM) and Prof Syed Azizi Wafa (UMS)

Prof Syed admitted before the forum he’s more quantitative. But we’ll try and focus the questions to include quantitative, their perspective on qualitative and more general issues about research in Malaysian academia.

Q: Based on your personal opinion and experience how would you place qualitative research in Malaysian academic institutions?

Maro: Qualitative research should be regarded as a stand alone research. Should be like any other research methods. Most of us see quantitative as the main methodology. It’s time for us to see qualitative at the same status as quantitative, not something you do for fun, or something you do compliment your quantitative data. Universities should put the effort to put qualitative method in its rightful place in the mainstream.

Syed: Qualitative research like any other methodology would be a strong methodology to be used by certain fields, favoured by certain fields in university, but some schools haven’t embraced qualitative research. Earlier in my studies, I didn’t choose qualitative but I understand its need for certain fields. Some people have embraced it fully. Maybe, like in the MBA program that I’m teaching it’s too short where it’s a one year program and students have to do research in a period of one semester, like a final year project. I’ve been a proponent of quantitative approach because it is much shorter. The rigours of qualitative research require time. Might be too long for the MBA to complete. Where does it stand? I think it’s equal to any other methodology. It depends on the field and subject matter and the area of the objective of the research.

Trevor: It’s a very difficult question. I don’t have the (in-depth) experience in Malaysia. It’s particularly useful, in IS, IT and business, qualitative research enhances and compliments the other research methods. When doing research you need to know the broad range of the methods. You need to argue quite strongly of your choice. Whether you have the time or not, I’ll bring that back. But generally, people should have a broad range of methods and argue strongly why they do it. I’ve found a lot of Malaysian universities, they haven’t argued anything. Secondly, for MBAs there’s a lot of learning experience. My first degree was in Maths and Computer science, but now I’m moving to UMIST and now MBS, things are changing. In terms of the MBAs, we are finding that qualitative research can be done within 6 months, doing a lot of it, but depending on the staff, the experience and teaching and helping in terms of the project. More within intensive case study. Perhaps they look at an organisation. There are different types of MBAs. Our new Dean was brought from USA and executive education. Within executive education you need to bring qualitative research. I’m also teaching a DBA course, another executive education course, I give them an overview of Action Research and also qualitative research. They then go back into their organisation and actually carry out an intensive action research study. I can’t say it was good or not, but the reaction from DBA is very attractive, and people want to do that, It’s a balance but you need to justify. Happens not only in Malaysia other places as well, but you must argue.
Q: Time. Do you think it’s the reputation of qualitative research that it is time consuming?

Maro: Yes and no. Depends how you understand and apply the research method in your area of research. If you do a case study and create your topics to suit your time, you can go deeper, make it small. To encourage students to do qualitative research we need faculty members and administration of university should take into consideration, be more flexible when giving time to students. Of course, some topics can be done in 6 months, some 1 year, some 2 years, but depends on the interest of the student. If you give students 3 years to finish their PhD a lot of students will shy away from qualitative methods. Another obstacle is not so much the time, it’s the understanding the students have or bring to themselves. In qualitative research, you are the research instrument. It’d very important to understand what is qualitative research. What does it take to be a qualitative researcher? If you understand that well, within the time, context of your research you will be able to negotiate yourself, you are the one who will make the decision when you’re doing field work. If you’re skilful in negotiating yourself, then I think it can be done. Even though there are many challenges, but as a researcher you must be able to solve the problems. But support from the faculty is still important, when you have viva the argument is not between students, it’s between supervisor and examiners and committee members! It shows, understanding is not there even among faculty members, so it’s very difficult to carry out qualitative research when the staff themselves are not competent in the methodology. It’s very demotivating for the student. In Malaysian scene, I see there’s a lot to be done to make qualitative research to be acceptable to the academic community. There has to be a change in attitude, more openness, there is no debate on whether to choose quantitative or qualitative. Depends on your objective. It’s your choice!

Q: The issue that can be picked up from that is there needs to be support, in terms of getting people at the top, in registration to understand that it is complicated. As the Director of UMS-KAL Prof Syed, you may have thought of ways to get support for academics not only for qualitative research but any kind.

Syed: Because of time dimension, we choose quantitative. But more than that, the issue of competency and also perception. There is a strong perception within the Asian context concerning the ability to crunch numbers, being strong in statistics. Especially in the field of business. Those who are strong in statistics do quantitative research and vice versa. Those researchers who are weak in the quantitative research are not that strong in the management area, that is the perception. As a result, most academics try to do quantitative research. However, for Malaysians to do qualitative research they lack another competency in the area of language. Qualitative research requires strong competency in the ability to express, describe, communicate, to link variables with each other and this is where Malaysian academic doesn’t have the strength. As a result of that, they go for the numbers, rather than go out on a limb and describe with a limited vocabulary and coming up with good research is quite a challenge. Imagine yourself trying to use Bahasa Malaysia (Malaysian language) and trying to describe things with flowery Malay language. That’s the challenge faced by Malaysian academics, easiest way is to use the number, that way people look at the numbers and figures, and try and understand what your doing in the paper. I believe it’s these two things, along with perception as I mentioned just now, has brought use to this stage. In my area, it’s difficult to find a PhD, I’ve gone through, it’s very rare to find a research that claims doing qualitative research. Very few, less than 10%. I’ve seen in UK, Australia using combined approach in their PhD, when I went through some of them, I find them pleasing and very strong in their ability to get at the answers in their PhD. I believe slowly we’ll get to the approach where it’s not wholly quantitative but we tend to mix it up, later in the long term quantitative research will be looked at more positively especially in the business area in this country. In the social science, humanities, the arts, I find their research is more qualitative. It is time plus competency. For our program of Masters and PhD we do require them to take a course on statistics and within the taught courses of DBA and
MBA, part of the exposure to statistics we expect to test them to see how they’re used within their final theses they do.

Q: It’s quite interesting about perception. This matter that qualitative research is about language, and researchers being able to express themselves is quite important. The experience from Europe, universities have more academic freedom rather than having to follow a strict guideline from university administration.

Trevor: I’m not going to answer this question. I’d like to go back to the Director’s view. Most of my PhDs are non-English (as a first language) speakers. The question is that when you immerse them with the literature and reading, it changes. In some ways, you can be so stuck with statistics and they’re not reading the literature. When I was talking about creative cheating this morning, there are other variation in MBS. But reading makes them immerse in publications and other theses and they learn from that. Perhaps you need to break away from that. I’m very happy with statistics, but do other things as well! I understand that you have four research universities, you want to become that kind of university part of that is research, people have to understand what are the academic debates, what’s happening in the world. Unless people have a broader education in their research and they make a choice, that is quite important. There is a culture problem, a language problem, but if you start teaching, I don’t make the debate where you teach necessarily in science in English, but in some ways business could be taught in English as well. And yet a lot of teaching is from American text. Using American text, you pick up the slides, could be more dangerous. Because the reason for doing it within research. Most of my PhDs, they hate me… eventually. LOL But it is the work, I’ll come back to the question of academic freedom later on… which I think is very important. But it’s that you immerse what is actually happening, and if that’s not happening it makes a difference. This morning when we talk about qualitative research. When we talk about qualitative studies in top papers it’s very difficult to get them in the top. But if you’re stuck in a rigid PhD, you’re not going to produce academics. You need to meet those challenges. The only caveat is we do both, there is still a debate quantitative and qualitative. Most of the quantitative journals are at the top, like MIS Quarterly. That journal does change from purely quantitative to a balanced view, but the idea was to take one of my papers, one of the most cited papers in IS research. But it even changed some of the American system, that particular paper. I talked about one of my real heroes, Michael Myers. One of the best paper ever arguing for qualitative research. You need to do it. I think it’s an excuse. If you want to publish in ISI using qualitative research, I think ISI will reject it. And they require us to publish every year and ISI takes 2 years for papers to be published. For those in science, sometimes just needs 1 or 2 pages, but those in social sciences we need pages and pages to convince the reader of what we are writing. My experience in UM it’s quite messy right now. Despite the

Q: So, I think the issue is diversity and allowing for that discussion and debate. Which is related to our academic culture. Since we have an educationist, we’d like to ask Prof Marohaini… What is our academic research culture in general, in Malaysia? Is it active based on her point of view…

Maro: I think it’s not very right to say that most qualitative researchers are in the faculty of social sciences. Nursing and Medical faculty doing it. The irony is that social sciences are not really into it. They are still adopting quantitative methods, I don’t know for what reason but observing from number of participants, but a lot of people from the sciences get themselves involved. Even though I think it’s not qualitative study. I think they get stuck but at least they’re doing it. In UM, most of the funding is given to sciences than social science. As a research university, we have to write in journals accepted by ISI. This is a big dilemma especially for social sciences people, even for sciences it’s not easy to get into ISI. If you want to publish in ISI using qualitative research, I think ISI will reject it. And they require us to publish every year and ISI takes 2 years for papers to be published. For those in science, sometimes just needs 1 or 2 pages, but those in social sciences we need pages and pages to convince the reader of what we are writing. My experience in UM it’s quite messy right now. Despite the
problems, the VC of UM has taken a good move. We have to start somewhere. I welcome this challenge. Is it very important to be a research university? All universities need to do research! What is important is you have a community of academics that are able to conduct research and produce good piece of research. We cannot be too rigid in our requirements. Sponsored students are pressured to finish early, but there’s no room for creativity. In a way it’s good to monitor the students, but the majority will go abroad and learn. But the management should be more tolerant, look at their work and what they’re doing with their supervisor. Rather than have a blanket ruling. But USM have done it well! By 2nd year of PhD they will evaluate your progress, no progress they’re fired.

Q: Prof Syed, wears two hats. Not only as Director and also as an academic. What are his ideas on research universities and the support from universities for individual academics in Malaysia. How would you view this issue?

Syed: Issue of Research University, I see it as a wrong move by the government to label certain universities as such. It’s going to destroy the academic culture in a way. Academics in non RUs feel demoralised. We’re hired to teach, do research and publish. Now you’re saying that we’re not that standard and these older universities get the RUs. What about the researchers in the RUs? They don’t have a mechanism in place. Suddenly they have an added responsibility, accountability within RUs but the structure of reward remains the same. Most of the lecturers in RUs are asking, ‘what are we doing here?’ Given more money to do research but not into own pockets. Pay scheme is the same as non RUs. We’re working ourselves to death but the same ‘rewards’ as the non-RUs. This is the thing about Malaysian university system. We are hired 80% of the time to teach. We can’t afford the luxury like Trevor, of spending time visiting different places. None of us have it. Students are waiting in line to see us, our classes have 200+ students. Some of us teach 3-4 courses and during holidays we are expected to attend meetings after meetings. The ratio of students to academics ae beyond those in the West, even in a lot of Asian countries. In a way we are teachers! Rather than lecturers when you look at our workload. Doing research is a luxury. I think the universities labelled as RUs, I think are not ready to be RUs. Unless they change the ratio between students and lecturers. I used to be at USM, you say it’s an Apex university. It’s the same situation, the only difference is that the VC was able to sell it well to the ministry. I pity those in RUs. This is the idea of people in the Ministry, they do a lot of things without thinking. What I believe is more freedom should be given to universities to chart a path, freedom of universities in terms of intake of students according to capability of universities so we can provide a good education. But I don’t blame them entirely. We only have 20 universities in the country, and our role is to provide at least a decent education. Not QUALITY education, haven’t reached that yet, as long as we can provide a decent education for the population, the government will be happy. Its just that they tend to confuse themselves when we don’t make the Times higher Education ranking and they make a lot of noise when we aren’t in the top 200 or top 50. we can’t compete with universities in the west who don’t have a social role to play, with one of our hands tied behind our backs we are expected to fight a professional boxer… you can’t do that. We are expected to do 101 things in the university. We are academics, and asked to be ranked in the top 50, yet our hands are tied.

Q: Recently, Datuk Khaled Nordin Minister of Higher Education that don’t think too much of our international rankings. Would you like to come back on that?

Trevor: A few things you have to think about. Socially, what you’re doing with students is that you’re providing education. In the UK, we’ve got so many universities that we’ve lost some real skills. My son who’s trained as a lawyer, might as well have become a plumber. He’ll make 3 times as much money! Important thing, is how would you rank universities? Two things that are complex. 1) By changing that ranking is difficult. We need a longer term to assess quality of research. RAE. It’s not
ranked individually, but each institution will have a proportion of 4 star, 3 star, 2 star, 1 star and this helps. For example, two of my recent papers collaboration with academic from University of Staffordshire, the university has some real quality researchers and this means that money does flow, not only to the top institutions. The other thing is when we assess, is that you choose your best publications and grants, and give yourself time to do it. The real problem is that it can help a lot of research but you still have got the ranking. It’s not much change. If you go to Oxford, it’s going to be very different compared to University of Cheshire. What I was trying to convey this morning was in terms of snobbery. Even myself, I’m becoming a ‘snob’. I was very worried that when I was switching from Salford to UMIST and being from a research leader. But what made me not retire is that I’m learning, especially from my PhDs. So that ranking is complex.

Q: What we’re seeing is that there is a similar views coming from the academics on research universities. So, how do we adapt to this to make things better? How do we convince people that RUs is a concept that may have to be rethought. What is our role as academics to convince our government for them to rethink this?

Maro: Just be yourself. Just teach and do research. It depends on you. How you want to take charge on your own self. How you want to be responsible to oneself. I see my students as my own children, they are the future. Every lecturer has that freedom even though it’s not written you can write it for yourself. There’s a lot you can do. There are rulings, but within that ruling there is room for you to be creative, to do something that you think is right. You still have that responsibility to your students. What you do has to benefit your students. Just do research and impart your knowledge. Be more tolerant and more accommodative to your students. When you think like this, the reward will come on its own. Don’t do things because you want to achieve this, then your life becomes miserable. Requirements will change with change of head of university, what remains unchanged in yourself. Do something and be happy with what you have. And take charge.

Q: I’d like Prof Syed to wear his administrative hat in answering this. Have you seen anything positive from our administration and MOHE in terms of improving our research and academic culture in Malaysia?

Syed: That’s a difficult question to answer. The intention of the Ministry, a lot of change has happened in academic community. Sometimes MOHE is more pro-active than universities. Like gathering university heads and having walk-in interviews for lecturers. A few thousand people walked in but university officials didn’t take it seriously. Very few universities actually hired, but this is the pro-active role I applaud. UMS still has 100 posts vacant. Until we can fill those posts we can’t ask for more from the JPA for more posts. On one hand, we say we are under-staffed but we have close to 100 positions open. We say that there isn’t any qualified people who apply, but people apply and we take a long time to make a decision. These are internal stories within UMS. SPKAL have 1600 students but 30 lecturers. Another school in UMS have 70 lecturers with same number of students. So what happens to issues of publications and what not, the school with double the ratio are better in terms of producing research. Our lecturers are accused of being lazy, not involved in research but yet this sort of things are not taken care of. When we complain they say that we just know how to complain. The two Deans here are trying to improve things. We are trying to improve things, but still more could be done in terms of support, especially the administrative part. The Ministry does monitor these kinds of things, some things are done well but some things need to be thought out first before it’s applied. Going back to qualitative research, one thing about Malaysian culture is the issue of getting access. Getting access to the institutions especially companies. A lot of companies have something to hide. There’s a lot of hanky-panky going on, as a result, any attempt to enter to do case study and anything like that, the answer will
be direct ‘No’. Its easier like going to Tenaga (Malaysian energy company) and they refused us. But they accept a colleague of mine from Indiana University, so they feel unthreatened from someone from overseas but Malaysian we have roots and leakages. So it’s easier for non-Malaysians.

Trevor: Interesting. For every situation, you have certain constraints so you bring people in and do it within that. I think coming back to this idea, I’m beginning to appreciate that you do have problems. In terms of lack of stuff. But maybe your ministry or university can provide rewards for people to do research. For example, why would you promote somebody? Would you have a very active researcher or someone who’s very good in administration? Second is in terms of salary. In Manchester you get rewarded for that. You have to react. Between RUs and non RUs, it’s the same! But you should not lose anybody (to administration) once they come in. They should be encouraged to do research. You need to reward this.

Syed: … good teachers are not rewarded, only good researchers. We don’t use the feedback about lecturers from students because we don’t trust the students’ evaluation. It’s not realistic to do this because we do a lot of teaching. Another reason why this is happening is because we are a complacent lot. Most of lecturers currently I can observe, are unwilling to complain, quite and compliant to authority. When people don’t complain, it’s business as usual. Then your wishes are not taken care of. I think Malaysians academics have to have a strong back bone and have principles, when you feel something’s wrong you have to be strong and brave enough and speak out your mind. This is not happening. I’ve seen how Deans of schools can suppress their lecturers. Come up with outlandish and even stupid decisions. Then lecturers are compliant, when they go to the canteen, they talk about it, make a huge hue and cry over it, outside of the meetings, but inside the meetings there is nothing. They complain yet they follow. They should just speak out, what’s right is right and what’s wrong is wrong. But based on our Malaysian culture, the choice of words have to be right. You must do it, if not things will not improve! Don’t think you’re putting yourself on the chopping block for doing so, and you won’t advance (promotions), just continue doing research, teach, be an excellent researcher, publish. But when things are wrong, say it politely but don’t keep quiet! You’ll still survive! Of course, there are instances when you need to move universities! LOL like what I did! When you can’t fight a battle, it’s time to move, I moved because I have a big mouth. But I do expect academics, I studied in US I learnt to speak my mind, when I got to USM there were a lot of senior colleagues who actually did that. I followed that, in Sabah, I’m saddened by the situation who don’t have a backbone. I’ll say that outright. I view academics very highly, as the pillar of society. If the pillar of society is not strong, we can’t move. Most of you are young you still have to hold on to certain things. Start in school meetings, speak your mind. Your views are important as well. The school meetings can endorse anything, with a consensus. I’m not dissing the deans, I myself am director. Dissension is good, arguing about things is good. From there only with arguments on issues will the best answers and directions of what you want to do will materialise. This is what I hope for Malaysian academics, so far I’m seeing a downward trend. I hope that will be reversed.

Trevor: It’s a very interesting story. The Malaysian context. Why I was so frustrated because of my technology was not working. I bought a 3G dongle to get wireless internet. It was printed on the box it works with Mac computers, I use a Mac. But it didn’t work. So, I had to go back to get money back from it. And poor Zam’s face. You’re too nice sometimes! You really need to argue. You might be wrong, sometimes the emotions come in. But part of being an academic is you’re there and you argue in terms of the changes. That’s why the research is not just in the way of the publications (ISI and ratings) but you learn from other people and your argue. And you’re changing yourself.

Q: In terms of the skill of debating and arguing, we are still learning. I especially remind myself regarding this matter. I agree that we need to stand up for our rights. I’d ask Prof Marohaini from an
education background if this has anything to do with our education culture. Having that skill of debate and argue for ourselves.

Maro: If you look at research done among Malaysian context, you can put the blame on culture and people. But I think with the informed, that Malaysians are like this or that, and you as an academic, you shouldn’t succumb to that. We should be different and not use that as an excuse. What Prof Syed, said that there’s no backbone. I truly agree with that. It concerns your life, yet you want other people to lead and speak for you. In this world, don’t speak about university life, in everything, you can’t change others, but you can change yourself. That attitude should be inculcated first in lecturers, then we can do that for students. It’d be good if we can do that. I don’t think we should surrender ourselves, that Malaysians are not talkative. Malaysians ARE talkative and like to talk a lot, but on different things! Especially when you’re fighting for your own self, you feel embarrassed because people don’t take it very well when you’re fighting your own battles. That’s our culture, but I see that as very brave and in Islam, if you talk about other people, its not right. So you should defend your case, when you fight for something. In a way, I share your experience and I’m also now very rebellious and one thing if you want to speak up, you have to face the consequences. So farm I’ve survived. I didn’t get professorship in my 30s or 40s, but I survived, one thing I subscribe is to do well for your students. Everywhere, be it university or school where there’s teaching and learning your students are very important. I find it sad looking at these children especially in primary school they are born with good minds, but how we raise them and we raise them like robots. How we labelled them, and for me, education today is only for those with the right answer but not wrong answer. If your child likes to think and give wrong answers then you won’t survive. Here, we’re looking only for the right answer. Even Robert Kiyosaki said that’s why he didn’t do well in school, because teachers aren’t tolerant to wrong answers. But there’s no explanation. To me as an educationist, you learn more from your mistakes. That is why, other students when they outgrown that stage, they feel afraid to voice their opinion. Because they feel whatever they voice out is not right. Because our society is like that. So how do we change that? We have to change ourselves first before we change other people. If you prescribe to these values you cannot go wrong.

Q: How do we actually debate? Maybe there should be a platform. Do we need a platform or do we already have a platform to invigorate debates among academics?

Syed: I don’t think we need a platform. I think it’s probably the younger academics having to take the cue from senior academics. The platform could be the school system, in the school meetings, within your programs and sections to discuss and argue objectively about the issues. Our problem is when we start arguing is it becomes personal. That’s the problem, humans are always looked at as a person, clash of ideas. Unlike how it’s being practiced in the West where you stick to the issues, you don’t attack personal. The lines are very clear. We have to learn how to do that. Most academics here are still young, I hope they mature and be strong academics in their own right in the future. Senior academics like Trevor would be good sources of advice. But we are not civil servants! We are academics. Which is different, just because we are lumped in the civil service together it doesn’t mean we behave like civil servants and follow all directives from the top. I joined academia because of the independence in terms of time management and what I want to do. I love being an academic, actually I hate becoming an administrator but there’s no one else who can do it at the moment. I’ve seen how things can happen, how the wrong people holding administration they can destroy the academic institutions, they can destroy schools. When the wrong people lead schools, programs, universities. We don’t need a platform, just learn to be a good academic.

Trevor: Just to remind a story. The first sabbatical I had was in Copenhagen, Copenhagen Business School. One day at 9 o’clock on a Monday morning, there was a presentation 70 with people sitting
around an oval table. Being nervous. After the presentation, they attacked me. Every idea they attacked me. After 45 minutes of being attacked, time’s up they stopped. They gave me a beer. It’s not me, it’s the ideas (they’re attacking). And you learn from that. Of course, it’s difficult emotionally. Attack the ideas, and you need to respect that person.

Q; I think we’ve come full circle. We started by discussing about research and how we can improve, especially qualitative research, in terms of opportunities. Then we discuss things that matter and issues regarding becoming an academic. Now we’ve come full circle. All Profs, the importance of having seniors, guidance and also enabling debate. Can the generalisation be done that by enabling debate we can improve our academic and research culture?

Maro: Definitely. When we discuss debate, it doesn’t need to be verbal. When you write, debate can happen within yourself. With your students, peers, there’s a lot of debates. When we have conference and seminar, another way to debate. It’s good now we invited Prof Trevor who presented to you his perspective. Another thing to empower people to come together to debate, not just superiors. Even participants, I’m sure we can learn something from you. Maybe in the future we can organise a workshop there will be room for participants to contribute. I’m sure Trevor will agree with me, when you’re just giving and not taking, it’s boring to us. It’s good to have an exchange of ideas. Debate is not just between political parties, can be among ourselves and our community.

Trevor: Just an observation. You’re (starting) to change your views. This morning I was talking about qualitative, and also numbers and text. And a participant, an engineer told me numbers in a sense is text. And the meaning and background behind engineering. Maybe I should be careful in phrasing this, because in engineering, it’s different. One of the things being an academic is arguing against yourself. That is part of it. You’re arguing, but you’re learning, from people, and really think about things. That’s a great opportunity in life. You have a privilege to think. You have an opportunity to do this and that’s what’s important. You’re in a job that’s safer as well.

Q&A: Any questions?

Assoc. Prof Dr Mahmud Sudin, School of International Tropical Forestry:
In my perception, we have dragged away from research methodology to governance of university. LOL Forestry is about habitat, about natural resources, it is about everything in our life. There are natural resources, commodities and people. Quantitative and qualitative are important. But so far the quantitative are more perceived rather than qualitative perspective. I think qualitative are interpretive and very useful for policies for decision making. What’s needed is balance between qualitative and quantitative. Because from one side, some decisions are not wisely made. For example, the import of workers from Bangladesh may not been studied qualitative and quantitative enough. When the government decided diesel would be given to certain parties, and there’s some qualitative and quantitative issues. Science and mathematics (being taught in English), there’s only one side rather than balanced. There needs to be a time for qualitative and quantitative to convene, need for balance between the two. For Prof Maroehaini, you’re from the Malaysian Association of Qualitative Researchers, is there a quantitative as well?

Maro: Yes, there is one but I forgot the name of the association. They’re not active anymore. They invited us to join them but because I foresee that they weren’t going to be active, so I decided not to join them. The Qualitative association first initiated by UPM lecturers. I was invited me to be a member of pro-tem committee, 6 years down the road, nothing happened. When I came back from my PhD, I contacted them and gave them 2 months to respond so I went ahead with my planning. In 2
months I set up the association. Reason was I thought it’s important to have a platform for qualitative researchers. At the time not many people were into qualitative research, in fact in my faculty I was the second person who did my PhD using qualitative approach. That’s why we had the association. Anything else you’d like to know?

Mahmud Suddin: If not many people doing qualitative research, it seems that’s what justifies why our policies seems distorted from what they should be. Quantitative should be many people because science, numbers are very important for the government for inputs in their strategies.

Maro: You see, again, during the PPSMI (teaching of math and science in English) I was involved in the project. Even now I don’t know what happened. See the problem with the ministry is that they asked us to do the research but they’re not using the data to inform their decision. They’d rather have the decision based on what the foreigners, so called consultants from overseas. I’m sure they’re very good in their area but they don’t know the Malaysian scenario. That’s the problem, that’s why in our research community we are not taking research very seriously. We do research just for the sake of doing it, because we have to do research. Why? Because unlike other countries, our data is not used! In Australia, any recommendations go through committee of universities to study but not the Malaysian government! You don’t necessarily need a huge qualitative researcher to study diesel subsidies, in qualitative research it’s you as a human. It’s just that with qualitative research skills we learn we are more aware and do it more systematically. As a human that skill is natural to all of us. Everyday, we see and listen to something, just that how do you observe and make do with (interpret) what you’re observing. And relate what you’ve observed with those done before, the review literature. If we want to make research activity flourish and taken seriously, I think the Ministry and other organisations must take data we produce seriously, but we as academics need to do good research. Prof Syed said organisations didn’t want to take Malaysian academics in for research, two possibilities. One, they don’t trust us. Because the way we talk to them, way we talk to them are not convincing enough. We think just because we’re lecturers we know everything, but when we go to the real world and show we are not grounded, then they don’t want us to come in. Some researchers studying nursing and medical field through qualitative research, why is it their data is not taken seriously? Looking at their procedures, there is no rigour in their research. They look at it as mere journal reporting. We need to be more committed to the research method we choose, not just because we don’t like statistics. I wasn’t very good in statistics, but I got through and knowing and understanding statistics actually makes you a better qualitative researcher.

Assoc. Prof Inon Shaharuddin, School of Arts: Naturally the School of Arts is qualitative. LOL but this question is not about qualitative or quantitative. There is such a thing as mixed methods. WE use both methods at School of Arts. At the school, we deal with art, theatre, literature, music, paintings, of course appreciation is qualitative. But we also do music business, industry, film studies, these deals with numbers. So we use both. But as the Prof said, we must be well-versed with both There’s no argument at all. That’s my comment.

Assoc Prof Norazah, SPKAL: I’d like to expand my understanding about qualitative research. In quantitative research we can check the internal consistency of our variables, but we go for qualitative research maybe the panel can help me to expand how we can check the internal consistency when we go for qualitative research.

Trevor: It’s the debate whether you believe in triangulation or not. There are at least two to three interpretations to do that. When you’re using quantitative, people like it because it’s safe in a sense. When you’re trying to think that there are different views, that is the problem with triangulation. The
assumption is when you’re looking at different methods, you think you’re seeing the same thing, but you’re not. The argument you need to look at as a piece of research is when they use those methods, why are they doing it? Recognise that written piece of work is they’re actually they’re reasoning what are the differences and the debate. It’s not inconsistency, but you need to know the debate and what they are. In Salford, media studies with the move of Granada TV and BBC there, Salford University playing a part. They’re inconsistent, but you need to understand why they’re inconsistent. It depends on your position. The on-going debate we have is do you have meaning in data, or not? My personal view is that you do not have meaning in data. It’s when you put on those theoretical glasses you see it differently. But there are those that argue strongly there is meaning in the data. But there’s no clear answer, yes or no.

Dr Awang Asri, SSIL:
I’m actually more interested on freedom as a lecturer/academia. Does that mean personal interest is over and above than organisational interest? Like when teaching and research interest? What if my interest changes, and doesn’t fulfil the school’s objectives. Can I get some comments on that.

Syed: Freedom per se is not total freedom. It is the academic freedom accorded to the lecturers. You do not have a boss looking over your shoulder and telling you what to do, how to teach a class. Of course, you are compulsory to teach the curriculum but how you teach your students to understand the subject matter it is up to your skills and your belief how it should be done. As long as your objectives are achieved. I think you misunderstood that if you want to teach something else, you can jump and teach something else. That’s taking it out of context. My explanation is independence, not freedom. You can relate that to freedom but the independence is form the perspective of an academic is to do research what area he feels he is interested in. We always assume when you choose IT, you have chosen that field to be your field and within that field when you feel you want to focus on a particular niche within that field then that is your choice. But if the department feels it is necessary for the department to focus on an area not unlike your area then you need to oblige to do research to support the niche area your school embark upon and still not leave the area that is your choice. This is what is meant by academic freedom in a way. I used to work in a real estate company and the forestry department and the challenges working in private sector and government public sector is very different than becoming an academic. Because here, you have a responsibility towards the students. You must ensure by the end of the semester they get what you’ve been trying to push on to them. Ensure to produce a fair exam, those who do well, average and those who didn’t pick up what you taught. This is the independence that I mean, not the freedom of doing whatever we like. Of course always within boundaries.

Trevor: I have a slightly different view on that. Yes, we have teaching and have to deliver certain things. My wife’s teaching medical ethics and because of the on-going discussions. What is the most important thing for her is that the students learn to understand, argue and know the debates there are. If you think my field, IS changes, when you look at medical ethics… you’d have every week an issue in the headlines. So you can’t ignore it! So you try and deliver the syllabus and you also try to do things are important. Our areas are changing so fast. Which is why if you’re not in tune with what’s going on in research, that is part of the problem. If you could produce good students and they can understand and further learn from that, from me it’s more useful. There are many different views. When I become external examiner for new degree schemes, we have a panel of experts from different views. But for me, I prefer having people to teach people how to learn.

Wrap up: I apologise that the forum has swayed a bit from the original topic. However, one thing I’ve learnt as an academic and Trevor’s student is as long as you learn something useful and we get
something, it’s all right. I hope we’ll view it that way as well.
Q: We start with a very general question. What is the role of the registrar in the university’s administration?

- The registrar of UMS’ main function is as the secretary to the board of the university. At the same time, the registrar is also responsible for the safe keeping of the records of the university.
- Records are anything pertaining to the student report, for example, as well as records of the staff, and documentation of the minutes of meetings, board meetings, top management meetings, all this documentation has to be kept by the registrar.
- The only sole officer responsible for the safe keeping of the record of the university. Not other departments.
- The third one is that the registrar is responsible for the human resource management of the university. What I mean, human resource, involving 3 important aspects of the human resource activities. First one involves the recruitment of staff, recruitment of staff can be divided into two divisions, one is academic, the other one is non-academic staff. I don’t think I’ll need to clarify anymore on that…
- The second one is service matters. Service matters is also one division responsible for the confirmation of the staff. And the promotion of the staff and the leave aspect of the staff, and also remuneration. The payment of monthly salary of all staff is under the supervision of the service department.
- The third one is training. Training is a big department under the registrar’s office. Also involving two group of staff, the academic and non-academic training for staff. Those who are pursuing their studies in Masters and PhD, the academic staff, are under the supervision of the training department. Also not only the academic staff, but the non-academic staff, the supporting group of staff, the management and professional staff, the assistant registrar, until the registrar himself, who are in the non-academic group, also need to be trained.
- This department is a very important department under the human resource department. If you were to look at the circle of human resources taking place, starts with the recruitment phase. Once they are recruited, they have to go for the training department, meaning to say like they have to go for induction course. And for the lecturer they have to go for teaching and learning courses and then they have to be confirmed (in their post). That will be taken over by the service department, after they go for training. The service department will confirm the post of that staff, and once they’re confirmed, they can do whatever they want. They can apply for housing loan for example, promotion, and what not. Until they retire.
- Retirement is also another aspect under the jurisdiction of the service department. So it’s a complete circle. Recruitment, training, until they retire. This is the responsibility of the human resource department headed by one deputy registrar. And it is under the supervision of the registrar’s office.
- So, again the three functions, as secretary to the board, the record keeping of the university, responsible to the human resource aspects, as well as other aspects of the university function. Apart from the human resource, the registrar has to take care of two big departments, one of them is the security department, the other one is the academic service department.
- The security department is responsible to take care of the safety and security of human and non-human (assets of the university). Non-humans include buildings and other assets. There is one officer in charge of the security department and they report directly to me as registrar.
- The other one is the academic services department this is a very important department. Under normal procedures, the head of this department reports to me at the same time, in terms of daily operations, they report to the Deputy VC of Academics division. The academics services division is responsible for the recruitment of students. Once the students come in, they have to
register them officially and make sure they come for the courses and programs, as schedule, attend the necessary programs as well as the time frame given to them, and they have to go for examinations which are also handled by this department.

- From recruitment, to examinations, then they get the results, the transcripts and then the scrolls for them and finally convocation. From when they first register until the student leaves. All under the student service department which also fall under the supervision of the registrar office.

- Once again, the registrar, first role is as the secretary of the board of directors of the university, second is record keeping for university, third is responsible for human resource, fourth is responsible for the security of the university, and fifth responsible for the academic services of the university. So that’s the overall function of the registrar.

Q: What is the role of the registrar in supporting academics and also their research efforts?

- Registrar office may not be directly involved with the research and development activities. Because it has its own department responsible to take care of this, the Department of Research and Innovation headed by one Director and this director also reports to the Deputy VC of Research and Innovation, Professor Rosnah.

- My part is only in maybe provide training, which is not much… we don’t do research and innovation, maybe providing the staff to do research work and also if there are any fellows or visiting professors or adjunct professors. These people are appointed by the registrar.

- And also external examiners for evaluation of programs, you’ll need external examiners. The appointment is issued by the registrar office. That is my department’s responsibility.

- Not sure about the research, we only provide human resource (administration) and maybe providing the training… but not much.

Q: Actually, we just concluded a research workshop in Labuan. Mr Darwis was the representative from the registrar, and he helped get your support. For that, we really thank the registrar. Initially, we received some support from the Research and Innovation department, but they were only able to provide RM 20 000 for the research seminar, but when we approached the registrar with Mr Darwis, he said if you change it into a workshop and include UMS lecturers from KK as well, we can provide better support. Alhamdulillah (Thank God) we got RM 60 000 to do the workshop. And it was very, very beneficial. We got a lot of positive reviews for that. I think that is one example of cooperation that academics and the registrar can do. As long as the research initiative is a research workshop or training-based, that’s the way to go. (Correct.) Do you have any other comments of how we can improve this kind of effort?

- You’re right. We do have this. I told you earlier on we have this training department headed by Mr Darwis.

- In the training department itself, I may like to elaborate more, it is divided into several divisions. Responsible for the induction courses, responsible for the Penilaian Tahap Kecekapan (Efficiency-Level Evaluation, PTK), responsible for the normal in-house programs, this is where the research activities are involved. Meaning to say, not only in providing normal required training for the confirmation and promotion of staff, as well as providing for ‘normal-type’ training. Like you said, we may be responsible for the training of young lecturers to be involved in research, we do have that.

- And then, apart from that we have training in fire safety, for example. Which doesn’t fall into the scope (of post-related training). We also have health and safety training.

- We also have facility-related training. Speech training for lecturers. Under teaching and learning training program.

- Lately, we also want to give training for the trainers. How to use presentation tools, how to
improve your presentation skills to the students etc.
- And there are two types of training approach. One is that we send our staff for training outside
  of university area. At the same time, we can call them in. In Labuan, we called them to bring
  their expertise and give a talk on research approach and activities pertaining to that. So, I think
  we do quite a lot. But only thing is that the training covers all aspects of university activities. we
  may have to be selective. Upon request, if there is a need then we will give support.

Q: Our VC’s main goal is to turn UMS into a Research University. So what is the role of the registrar in
trying to achieve this ambition?
- It’s a very straightforward question. So, I’ll give you a straightforward answer.
- This is nothing more than human resource. We have a policy laid down by the Ministry of
  Higher Education giving us the authority to employ expertise from outside the country.
- Foreign academics to help our university level to a much higher level, to achieve the RU status.
  So, we have that.
- We may not follow the scheme according to normal government procedures. But we really have
  to be careful in doing this, ensuring the academics are of standard close to Nobel laureates. We
  are looking into that.
- At the same time, we have this MyBrain15. (I’ve heard of Brain Gain.) MyBrain15 is a policy
  by MOHE which targets by 2015, we must have at least 70% lecturers with PhD. So this is our
  policy.
- So this is another important role that the registrar office is playing. So we are pushing our staff
  hard that this is the role of the training division of the registrar, that we must make sure
  academics who failed in their PhD must be supervised. Make sure some of those who did fail,
  our VC has called them to focus and drop any appointment (posts) pertaining to administration
  jobs.
- One example is the former of PLUMS who had to relinquish his post to concentrate on his PhD.
- Second is to recognise good students who we take in as tutors and we send straight them to do
  PhD. That is another method we use, but it’s not easy.
- So that is the role of the Registrar office. So with that. we hope to increase the number of PhDs
  lecturers in UMS. And eventually attain the status of RU.
- And of course, another aspect of that in human resource is the supporting group. We do have
  three centres of research excellence. We in the registrar support these centres by providing the
  right candidates, the right staff and sufficient staff to make sure that these centres are operating
  effectively. That we do.
- If I were to look at other school’s aspect… but the research centres are to be given priority so
  that we are moving in-line with making UMS an RU one day.
- At the moment we are categorised as a comprehensive university. There are 3 types of
  universities, one is Apex university (USM), second is RUs and we are categorised as a
  comprehensive university.
- So, we are supportive of the effort to become an RU. From the human resource as well as the
  training aspects.

Q: One final question. Regarding the issue of rewarding our academics for their research efforts. You
stated just now, that the registrar is supportive of our PhD and research efforts. However, there is a
tendency that once we finish our PhD we come back and given administrative tasks (posts). When we
are given administrative tasks it hinders some of our research efforts. So, can I get your opinion on
what is the challenge? Is it a challenge for the academics to handle on their own, or is the registrar
supportive in finding ways on how they can find a balance? So academics who have just returned, who
are given posts can also balance it with their own research efforts as well.
- Thank you. In fact what’s happening now in UMS. We are short of staff to handle purely research work and purely administration work.
- That’s why you see a lot of people with PhD coming back they still have to serve as Dean.
- But we don’t have a choice. And of course, the Dean and any leaders must have a strong academic background to be respected in their particular school.
- So because of that, we don’t have a choice.
- But at the same time, we are giving credit for promotion, we do give allowance, which is RM800 if they are Dean.
- But recently the university’s Association of Academic Staff (PERISAI) presented one proposal for the annual evaluation of academic staff, which they propose has to be changed. And include the administration work as a factor, one of them is holding these positions, provide them credit so they can be promoted based on the (salary) scale.
- And we cannot deny the importance of research and publications. That’s what we did. So it’s quite fair.
- But we cannot totally give room for academic staff to be purely involved in administration alone for their promotion. We still putting up academic activities as a priority. Second, administrative.
- But I guess for academic staff, if they have the opportunity for them to hold administrative posts, it’s also good. Because eventually they become very important people in the university. For example, the Deputy VC or eventually a VC. So they have to be exposed to administrative duties. Because otherwise, everybody becomes research but nobody becomes administrators. (LOL) So we have to be balanced.
- I’m hoping one day, if we have enough staff we can have academics purely doing research, like what they have in other universities. And some people are involved in administrative posts. When we have more people to choose to take up both.
Q: Start with general question. What is MADICT and its role?

- MADICT is Majlis Dekan ICT. But we often joke, this is Mad ICT! LOL Some truth to it because in a way we in ICT are a bit ‘crazy’. Overambitious and like to try new things.
- It’s a council represented by the various deans from public universities in Malaysia that offer IT programs.
- Among the 20 public universities we have 17 offering ICT-related programs.
- The main function of MADICT is as a meeting place where we share the experience resources, problems, like an interest group where we try to push and initiate certain changes to IT curriculum in Malaysia.
- Main activity in recent years is to look at undergraduate programs. We feel there are a lot of problems namely because there is not professional body for IT or CS in Malaysia. As such the offering of IT programs are rampant in a way. This caused problems where at the end of the 1990s and early 2000s a lot of graduates produced didn’t meet the requirements of industry. Knowledge and skill sets.
- This is the role MADICT played in recent years, to propose to the government the direction and key strategic thrust for IT education.
- We started with that and moving on starting from late last year, we see a bigger role in trying to put Malaysia in a more strategic location or status, MADICT is now contributing towards coordinating research activities, focus and direction for the country.
- The way we see it, ICT is quite broad. It is a convergence in terms of discipline from computing, communications, telecommunications, broadcasting, media and so on. The use of computers today have got into various disciplines, engineering, science, you name it, all has been touched by computing. A lot of people think by using IT they’re already expert in computing. Because of that people come up with different ideas.
- What we see in Malaysia, even when someone comes up with core priority areas, agencies like MIMOS, Academy of Science (who provide funding), Multimedia Commission, MDEC, and MOHE themselves.
- What we feel is that there is no real coordination. Even though we have a council, National IT Council set up by Tun Mahathir previously but it is only overseeing deployment of IT as enabler for the progress of the country. Not so much into IT curriculum and research direction. But it does give a broad overview of what Malaysia needs as a country.
- Coming back, that’s why MADICT starting this year have coordinated some discussion among ourselves, having workshops in trying to get ideas. In a way, what we’ve done is for stock checking, do some analysis, what we have in terms of strength and key weaknesses we have. The next stage is to look for what are the opportunities, trends we have in IT in Malaysia.
- Interesting enough, IT is not given a serious focus from funding agencies. From our last workshop, IT in public universities as a whole is drawing less than 1% of overall developmental research grants and budget. It’s quite shocking for all of us. But we feel this is an opportunity rather than a problem. So we’re coming back to the people and authority to get the due focus to highlight IT as a field that we can’t leave behind or put aside.
- In short MADICT is a coordinating body, sharing solutions and problems, in trying to propel the IT institutions in Malaysia.
Q: Regarding the role of MADICT as a representative body, representing ICT schools and faculties in Malaysia and trying to push for ICT research. You play two roles, as an academic and MADICT chairman, in your view what is the current situation with IT and especially IS research in Malaysia?

- IN Malaysia people have picked up different areas of interest. Free flow kinds of choice, happening in university. There are certain groups with dominance of certain areas in Malaysia. You can find certain areas with extensive research. But there are areas that have been neglected.
- There are IT research activities on-going in recent years. Like network security, e-learning and mobile learning issues, we have a group on graphical information systems, IPv6 and so on. But due to the nature of work and vast area of IT itself, we are in a way spreading ourselves quite thin. Most faculties have about 100 people, but (IT) have 60 or even smaller than that. So in some universities, for specific areas only 1 or 2 persons looking into it. So we don’t have a critical mass to look in-depth into it.
- The coordination and linkage among the different organisation is quite weak. So not only are we spreading ourselves too thin, the working relationship among academics from different institutions are very minimal or non-existent.
- So these are the 2 issues we are looking at. Being a country with a population of 26 or 27 million, we need to give focus of what we need as a country and these are the expert we have in Malaysia and how do we pull them into an are there will be a very high impact.
- When I was given the opportunity to chair this council, after settling the curriculum issue, now we are looking at what we are doing with concern to ICT research. Initial find is that its sporadic, people doing bits and pieces here and there. There is no one master document that governs the way things are going, in a way it’s good, it’s free flow. But we can’t afford that in a country like Malaysia is concerned. We need focus and strengthen the energy into something that will have high impact, to ourselves, the economy and the entire country.
- The academics, the professors, associate professors, they’re still doing their thing, publishing papers in ACM, in journals… those things are happening but what you see the actual impact, that is the question.

Q: I’d like to ask whether or not if it’s because of our governing bodies, MOSTI, MIMOS, MDEC etc. are realising the situation. My view is that, over in the West, they can do these things without governing bodies. But your approach is that we need these bodies. Can you elaborate more on why we still need these bodies.

- That’s why I said, as a country Malaysia is not too small and not too big, but we are now competing around the region. If my stats are correct Malaysia is the 2nd or 3rd largest in the ASEAN region in term of economy. But at the same time we are competing with the giants, specifically India and China, with their 1billion plus population.
- Countries like US, they’re quite advanced compared to Europe, in terms of the education system their governments don’t have to dwell with the nitty gritty details of trying to coordinate the whole country. One thing, it’s too big, second, the competition between the different universities, universities which are 200 plus years old, with senior academic.
- Malaysia in contrast, there are only 20 public universities. And in these 20, half of them are very new. UTeM itself was established in late 2001 and barely 9 years old. So what do you expect from us and other new uni colleagues. And these universities are struggling to establish their own academic faculty. We don’t have the luxury in Australia and Europe where upon graduating, the practice in the US , upon PhD completion you would do your Post Doc. And you do that for a few years. Gain more experience in doing research, getting grants, being supervised by somebody more senior. But in Malaysia we can’t afford to do that. Because if we do that, it’d take a longer period.
- Coming back to your question, we are enjoying a free flow, this is what the country needs so
now everybody should be doing their job and tasks. On your own. Everybody does what they want to do in their own labs and departments. They do research, look for their own grants, own PhD students and get something churned out of it. As I said, people are doing that already. But as a country we don’t have a critical mass.

- That’s why under MOHE one the key thrusts is to churn out as many PhD holders as we can. And the number is quite scary, about 100,000. Which to me is not ridiculous. If you look at Korea, and smaller European countries, Israel etc. The number of PhDs per population ratio, we are very far behind.

- That’s why what Korea did, during the last economic downturn is to train and produce more PhDs. With incentives. In 3 or 4 years, they would have finished, and you have a workforce with skills, knowledge and ability to do R&D. So that’s why around 2003/2004 you find a lot of different gadgets and products coming from Korea. New designs, prototypes. And these are the fruits of their initiative.

- Korea in terms of size, isn’t much different than us. But they have done something right. These are the things that we should be doing in Malaysia. If you ask me if that should be directed or not, the top-down approach is needed at a very critical stage, like now. Trying to pull people together and moving into a clear direction.

- But once that is happening, then the hand-holding should not be there. Because people would then realise, there’s the need, this is the direction we should be going and these are the areas of focus and what we should be doing as a country. Otherwise people will be doing small things, bits and pieces here and there. Would still contribute to the overall body of knowledge in terms of academia. But benefit to Malaysia as a country is quite minimal.

- This is why there is a need for some form of a master plan or whatever you want to call it.

Q: I’m seeing that MOHE, during the economic downturn introduced incentives for students to go back to school. Doing their post grad and giving scholarship. But is there any similar action from different agencies as well? Do they see this, in supporting students back to school, indoctrinating them with research, do they see that or is it only MOHE? Should there be more collaboration between the governing bodies?

- I think in the last 3 years, there were a lot of activities, talking, happening between different stakeholders, the industry, government agencies, ministries, frequently we had different feedback. To see how we can work together in trying to make sure what is produced by universities is what’s needed by the industry. We have achieved a level of success. But not solving the full problem yet.

- But the question you’re not asking is, because of the economic slowdown, the government is looking at this as a great opportunity to upgrade the whole workforce. And from the industry’s point of view, they are also realising this. So we are not only amounting the entire research program, there are two approaches to this.

- One, they are giving the scholarship because the students are coming out to the job market, and of they go out now and no jobs there, they will be unemployed. The first strategy is to hold these students back. The only way to do that is to give them some form of funding. And they are only sponsoring research students! Course work students are not sponsored because they do not contribute to research and innovation. That is done on purpose.

- The other approach is coming from what you’re saying, from the industry. On one side, there is funding from MOHE. There is also funding from MOSTI. Of which this fund is made available to all (in a way) of good people who (if they’re already working) they can come back and further their studies in research.

- So you have the two groups coming together within the higher learning institutions and hopefully within 2 years and when they go out from there, God-willing, you will have people
with a different skill set of doing research, producing innovation and contributing to the growth of the country.

- So, the working relationship is there but there are a lot different discussions and mechanism put in place. I’ve attended meetings chaired by the Minister of MOHE himself, and other members of Ministries. Meetings where they make people ‘toe the line’ if I may use that term, government initiative done by the government to get industry to also play their role and provide incentives. So within the government there is also certain leeway. Like the future RVF Human Resource Fund where the company needs to contribute back money to the government if they train their staff and then get back the money. So these are the ways that industry can stimulate this.

- What is happening now is that industry like manufacturing, previously they are working 7 days a week, but now 5-6 days. So what do they do in the 1-2 days they have? They go back to university do part time courses, at the same time get some rebate from the government. This in a way tries to stimulate the learning process at a higher degree.

Q: I’m starting to see this. Before this I was seeing, when the government was promoting going back to university and doing research, I thought it was a good thing. But I wasn’t able to connect them. It’s probably a matter of promoting this. I hope MADICT has played a role in promoting this among the ICT schools. Has it been discussed in the MADICT meetings as well? Do you see the role of MADICT in trying to promote this, not only among schools but also among the public as well.

- What we have done, the key agenda is to promote ICT as a career of choice. We’ve discussed that since a couple of years back.
- We’ve approached MOHE, and MDEC is doing part of the promotion.
- Within the council, everybody has to contribute and pitch in whatever way they can. Like appearing in local radio stations, go to schools, matriculation college, sending their staff for some talks, to convey the future potential IT graduates have. The previous agenda is on undergraduate education.
- Starting from this year, we are looking at the higher level, Masters, onwards.
- God-willing in our next meeting we shall continue to discuss this, what was discussed in Penang is not final.
- We will continue to do that and come up with strategic activities and action.
- Another key action is to draw in students and those from industry to be retrained in IT.
- The other initiative is for MADICT to contribute to the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) in standardising ICT curriculum. From certificate, Diploma, undergraduate, Masters to PhD. We’re even making it compulsory, the type of academics you have in your faculty. Because IT is so vast. What’s happening now for example, a person has a first degree not in IT, second degree not in IT but you still enrol doing a PhD in IT. Somehow for better or worse, this person can graduate with a PhD in IT without doing a basic or second degree in IT. Whether it’s right or wrong, people are debating.
- The side effect of this is that now you have people, who may have a window of exposure in IT who enter the workforce but do not possess the full knowledge or skill set of the field itself. Compared to a person with a 1st degree in IT, Masters and then PhD in IT.
- These are the things or standards we are promoting. We are focused on this.
- And we are also trying to bring an element of, not elitism, some novelty into the area. Because what’s happened before this, if someone can’t do anything else, they do IT. If you can’t get admission into any other program, do IT. Which is the wrong concept. Because we need the best.
- (We’ve become the latch key.) LOL Yes! The dumping ground.
- Because what’s happening in India and China because of the lucrative industry out there, those
who go to IT and CS are the top. The best students coming out. In Malaysia is the reverse.
- MADICT is doing something about it. The next level of focus is in the post graduate level. We now are trying to attract these good brains and students, whether they are fresh or already working to come back to university and do research. Come out with niche areas and contribute to the country. We’d like if they can come out with something and solve a local problem. Home grown technology.
- For example, we don’t have our own Malaysian anti virus, which technically is not that difficult. But we haven’t done it. Why? Because everybody’s busy doing their own things.
- Using the analogy of Proton, before we did that people thought we couldn’t do it. But 20 plus years down the line, everything the engine, the chassis is now home grown.
- So we don’t have a lot of our own operating system, security tool etc, the fact is not we cannot do it. We can do it, it’s just a matter which one shall we do first?
- So, let’s get together and do it. And hopefully we can attract better students and once the strategic direction is clear, people see the novelty of the approach, I’m sure we can attract good people.

Q: Currently we do have individual academics doing their own things at the same time… Is an ideal approach using both a bottom-up and top-down approaches? We try to converge somewhere in the middle and find that we are cooperating. Would that be an ideal situation or is that too utopian in your opinion?
- Yes! (for the double approach) That is exactly what we are doing. In the workshop you attended, every university has to provide a profile. We are not telling, we are only asking what are you doing? How many people do you have? What are your professors and PhDs doing now? What have they been producing for the past few years?
- This is to produce a profile. Now you have a profile, UMS has this strengths in terms of how many people, and their levels. Doing what. USM, same… what patents have you produced? What awards have you won? How much money do you have? Those are the key questions.
- If you look at the profile questions, they are similar to the most university profile questions. This is similar to if you go abroad and look at how people rank universities and with similar criteria.
- These are the data collected. Our first attempt to see where people are, bottom-up information. Based on this information, at MADICT level, we are trying to see what we have. So this is what we have, and we know what we don’t have! LOL So let’s not try to do what we don’t have!
- Or we have small pockets of people doing work on non-critical areas and we don’t have many people in this section, why don’t we pull them and focus more.
- At the same time, with the info we can find there are groups with similar interests, but why are they not talking?
- So, hopefully… if you look at a country like Australia they even have Centres of Excellence. We also have this concept under MOHE, but the way we are doing it is very much… UKM has one Centre of Bio-tech Excellence or something, fully run by UKM. So those who’s area is bio-tech from other universities, they are out of the picture. The way they do it in Oz is that you have 3 universities, supporting this Centre of Excellence. You have a group of people in Sydney or another group in Brisbane working for one common research area. They work together collaboratively to build what the country needs on a whole. Hopefully we can do that. Even now when we apply grants, Science Fund for example, we’ll have people working together. So hopefully we’ll have relationships working at the personal level.
- So this is the meeting point. So this comes from bottom to the top, and later at MADICT level we can coordinate something we can push it back down.
- But whether we succeed or not depends on these individuals and groups we have in universities.
So hopefully what we have done in Penang is for the first time, we’ve assembled a group of people. And for some of them it was the first time they’ve met other researchers from other universities. Despite we having all these conferences locally but we have a common cause and we sit down and see how we can work together. Which is a good start.

- Now, in this, what you said is quite utopian. Of course there will be hiccups here and there. But theoretically this is what we’re trying to do. And this a bottom up type exercise. And from the top we are seeing where as a country we should be heading and that should be pushed back down and find a meeting point somewhere in the middle and hopefully by doing say everybody will be quite happy. Because they are part of the collective effort and decision making, and they don’t feel this is totally top-down and people at the top level, government ministries don’t see this is a totally bottom-up approach where people are free-flowing and not doing anything.
- (You need to ease some of the egos.) Yes! This is one of the trade off, need to give in a bit.
- (My Professor says managing academics is like herding cats.) Oh yes! I’ve heard that quite a lot.

Q: You said that sometimes the problem with Malaysian academics when we want to do research is that we don’t know where do we start? Is that part and parcel of Malaysian academia?
- It goes back to culture in higher learning institutions. This is specifically true due to the age of a lot of universities in Malaysia.
- Even in UMS and UNIMAS, in terms of that culture… for most of us, the research culture is not there or absent.
- So people don’t see the need of why they have to do research. One thing is because they’re bogged down with teaching undergraduates. Second, the infrastructure that we have, we don’t draw in a big chunk of population to do post grad studies.
- So the majority of our students are undergrads. You only have a handful of post graduate students. With that limited resources in the university, the RAs and whatever, we can’t do much. So this is what we’re trying to turn around, the whole culture. It’s not easy, it’s going to take years.
- For those who just came back from doing their PhDs overseas, universities like USM gives something called seed funds. You are given a small amount of money RM5000 to RM10000, to get you started. Some universities have not done that. Some universities only give what’s referred to as short term grants. (Or ask them to apply for FRGS.) Yes.
- The same issue is that since you’re a young university, you only have so many professors, you don’t have the research hierarchy structure. No senior researcher, intermediate, low-levels.
- Even in universities like ours, we’re quite new, we only have 108 academic staff and about 30 of them are doing PhD abroad. With 10 of them who’ve just returned. So now, the few senior academics that we have not only have to supervise the PhD students but they also need to guide, as a mentor these new academics. In terms of the issues that you raised. They wonder which area I should go into. Some of them lack confidence, I couldn’t supervise PhD students yet. Thus some guidance is needed.
- The older universities enjoy a culture that’s already been there. But even that, my experience with some of them, without naming anyone is that they have this mentor-mentee structure of research. But it’s not working because the culture is not there. The other thing, is even now, the ministry is discouraging some of us from doing Masters by taught courses. What’s happened before, you enrol a lot of people through your taught Masters program, so the lecturer are busy teaching like undergraduate programs. And they like to do it, because universities give compensation for teaching extra hours. So they’re busy lecturing but not doing research.
- These are the things that need to change. Coming back to the overall issues again, culture is something you can’t change overnight. You need to do it gradually. Now as far as MADICT is
concerned try and stimulate changes within different institutions, try to get more experienced, older institutions to help out young institutions. Hopefully this will bring up research in the country.

Q: Currently, one of my main assumptions is that there’s a pattern. Our teaching, undergraduate education, influences practice, which influences our research and that’s why we are stuck in a rut in some ways. One of the criticisms of my supervisor is that, in Malaysia we seem to like to use text books, open the book, follow a structure that is easy to use and then we don’t try to think out of the box or criticise, or debate on these kinds of things. Do you think this is true as well in how we do our research? Sometimes, when we want to fill in an FRGS form, can I borrow a colleague’s successful FRGS application form? So we follow a pattern, try to play it safe… so, do you see that pattern from our undergrad, to our research, to our practice?

- With regard to the culture as a whole, not just academic culture (the Malaysian culture)… if you start at education at a primary level, these are the things that the government right now wants to change. Right now we are so structured, just like what you’re saying. But if we come up with a blueprint governing what people should do or not do, it’s the dilemma in itself.
- We are trying to break that culture, trying to simulate innovation, and the only way to do it is to allow people to think independently.
- I wouldn’t agree that academics couldn’t think out of the box. There are good research happening in Malaysia. Only now, we are concerned about the way undergraduates are being taught. It’s so structured. So these are the things we need to get out from. One example, in what we’re trying to do is using the MQA, before this for you to run an IT program you should do this, (list out courses)...1,2,3,4,5. Now what we’re saying is you should have minimum of this (courses). The rest is up to you, when learning outcome is concerned. Likewise, when we are training our students, we should give them the basic fundamental know-how.
- From that basic which has brought level, students should pick up basic knowledge and apply to whatever domain that thing is appropriate based on their own innovativeness. Hopefully this breed of people are moving forward in terms of hierarchy at work and change their community at large.
- I also face the same problem, being a new university, we have to recruit new academic staff and I can’t find anybody (with experience) ready out there to be recruited. So we have to take in somebody who’s fresh. They are also from the university system locally or abroad. They also carry the same symptoms. Of which we need to break. And change this different culture.
- Even some of the new ones, who just have their Masters degree and asked can you write a paper that you can publish in journals? They answer I don’t have a PhD, how can I write a journal paper? I told them you don’t need a PhD to write a journal paper. You need good research. If you have good research with good findings, some novel approach or some new analysis that you come up with, you can get your paper published in good journals.
- Of course, initially they feel it’s so difficult. But when a few of them start doing it, they start thinking it’d doable. And other people follow. If this guy can do it… so hopefully this culture will rub off each other.
- And hopefully, like in my university we say that ‘these are the general areas that we are working on’. We are not telling them, ‘you should be doing this, or that!’ No. So long as you’re working within this overall domain, like for example we are working on Intelligent Systems, so long as your contributing within that domain, don’t go and work with something else that you can’t work with anyone here, because we don’t have the group of experts within the university. So this is the balancing act, which is difficult.
- At one time, you cannot dictate them but at the same time, if you let them free flow then you lack focus. That is the difficulty that we face.
- So to come back, do we suffer from that text book syndrome, in a way yes. But that’s why when I teach, I don’t use textbooks. Students are very uncomfortable. (Same with me! They ask, no slides, Sir? Then you automatically go, okay I’ll make slides… then everybody just follows. It’s the culture)

So there is from primary education, but in the Ministry of Education is trying to change with Pelan 2010.
- Yes, there is that as well.

Q: One thing I remembered during the workshop in Penang, is that we were given this methodology the Problem Relations and converting Problems and then finding Solutions from there. I was looking around and thought, we’re talking about academics with different methodologies with experience in System Analysis and Requirements… I wondered, if MADICT had the time and resources for a bigger, longer workshop, which allowed for all the academic to use their own methodologies… what do you think about that? And then trying to express and find a convergence of ideas on how to improve research based on our different perspectives and methodologies. Do you think it is possible?
- It is possible. The only things is that for that particular workshop we are really constrained with time. By the end of the second day we had to produce some documents that highlights what are the key strengths and problems we face and perhaps ideas on how to move forward. And we didn’t complete the whole exercise.
- But this is the start. People can still come back and the group leaders with the initiative can come back to the group members and collect whatever information they can through whatever methodology. At the end of the day, you will have certain analysis, the key strengths we have, problems we face, and how to move forward and how to identify the resource to conduct those activities.
- For example from what you suggest, we need to promote more people to go to post graduate programs. What can be done? What are the resource that we need to have? What are the activities that can be conducted? What are the key targets for us to put into that area?
- If you asked me if you want to use any of these strategic planning techniques, SWOT analysis or whatever, but at the end of the day everybody should be going to one direction which is you need to produce one coherent and practical plan to move research. That is the main target. Whether you do it differently, people are more comfortable doing it this way. It’s up to you, so long as we do it scientifically with proper analysis with the correct data and everybody should arrive to similar conclusions.

Q: Can we change our tact, because my research area is Information Systems. As the Chairman of MADICT, what are the things from IS-based programs research-wise that Malaysian schools and faculties of ICT have contributed to Malaysian research? Do you see if there’s anything that can be improved from IS contribution?
- IS in general in Malaysia has suffered some blow, in a way. Because the IT progresses in Malaysia. In late 1990s, there were a lot of different initiatives involved with IS. There were also a lot programs produced by them. Programs like MIS and Business IS. But IS as a discipline is married to two main domains, the business domain and computing domain.
- The problem we face in Malaysia is that most programs that produce IS graduates, normally they don’t have the basic fundamental of what the CS students have or the IT students have, who go to the job market. Because of that, these are the syndromes that we receive where students who graduate with a degree in IS when they go to interviews they will say that, ‘I’m not that good in programming’. (Yes.)
- Because of that syndrome, if you ask me then those students have failed to see what IS is all
about. Secondly, the potential employer also failed of what IS graduates are capable of doing. So you now you have a symptom of what I describe as a mismatch. Which actually is not a mismatch, it’s just a misunderstanding. (Yes.) It’s a miscommunication.

- From that moment, there was a downward trend in terms of interest in offering IS programs in Malaysia. Having said that, even at the research level, similar scenario was also happening. A lot of different research going into IS initially in late 1990s, there were a lot of initiatives, people looking into knowledge management, organisational learning, but that interest is dying. But as far as MADICT is concerned, we proposed the new standard of IT. we specifically mentioned, that IS should be there. Because as a whole, we still need expertise in these areas.

- As the country progresses economically, there will be that requirement. Even though at the moment people are more focused on the technical and algorithm, programming and software engineering side (of IT) but as far as the discipline is concerned there is still a need for the country to continue to offer this discipline. What we’re left to do as far as MADICT is concerned, and also working with the MQA, actually is to educate students and parents of students going to this program as well as the industry and potential employers, that this is the menu that we have. We have software engineers, IT technologists, computer scientists and IS professionals. Which one do you want?

- Likewise, the universities, this is the menu that you have, which one do you want to offer? Because before this people got confused, they’re all offering IT with the name of IT but referring to the ACM body of knowledge, they are not offering IT, but offering IS, with the name of IT.

- So the institutions are confused, and they are confusing the students and the public at large. So these are the sort of things we are trying to solve. Hopefully by carefully defining and based on people’s expectations IS should claim back its dominance from the academia, researchers, as well as students… because of the soft nature, if I may use this word (Yes.) of this discipline. Because it is a very high level, organisational type of structure. We need to have this set of people when dealing with multinational companies coming into Malaysia and they’re using systems SAP and so on. You need people with IS background.

- Those people who come from CS might not comprehend, they were not exposed to this in their curriculum about financial systems, about human resource systems and so on. They may be able to solve some of the algorithm problems but not in the actual design (and the human aspects)… Yes!

- Potentially, to wrap it, the potential is there, but interest is dwindling. Hopefully with the new activities, IS will get more attention again.

Q: I believe the responsibility falls on the shoulders of the IS academics themselves. (Yes.) Another thing, when I was doing my undergrad I majored in IS from UTM. Thank God, I was able to ‘GET IT’. I understood that IS is soft IT and organisational-based. But it is still an important part of IT. But some of my colleagues didn’t get it, and they think IS is just remembering theories and not doing a lot of programming. (LOL) Hey! I’m taking IS, I want to major in IS too! And I was exposed more when I did my post grads in Manchester, actually IS normally falls under business schools. (Yes.) I’m not sure if it can be adopted in Malaysia, because we’re still under ICT schools. So it is our responsibility as academics to work things out.

- My view won that is hopefully with this new standard document we are producing we are also drawing a very clear line. If a university is referring to what is known as the IT-conversion program, Masters of IT. To me, some of them belong to the school of business. This should be conducted under MBA program rather than IT program.

- IS still has an element of computing inside it. as far as these international reference of recommendations it still falls under the body of computing. Except it has a lot of business and
organisational elements which are normally brought by the business or management schools.

- In Malaysia we should also clearly draw that line. If you’re offering technology management, is that still management or is that under IS? So this is where we need to draw a line. How much computing component should be there? To make IS in Malaysia still belongs to computing and if there’s only one or two subjects, then that should be a totally management program rather than IS program.

- The management students they are not able to comprehend the technicalities we have within IT overall, in terms of computer architecture, network design, things like that. Understanding that doesn’t mean you will be able to do your own network or assemble your own PC. No. (You have the basic the knowledge of what can be done by these technologies. But not too in-depth.) Yes!

- To me this is again, the maturing of the discipline in Malaysia and hopefully the public will understand, when they want to recruit an IS graduate, when they want to recruit a BBA student in management, it depends on what the skill sets. Because of the advancement in computing and ICT as a whole, it has touched all of the different side disciplines. You have the elements of IT in side management courses as well, and in accounting programs as well but what differentiates it. Learning how to use the web and word processing doesn’t make them an IT expert in IS. Okay? LOL

- You need the specially trained to fully understand when you’re talking about Information Systems, what actually do you mean? (I’m starting to learn it’s starting to mean a whole lot of things!) LOL (Even about culture, ethnography, but then you need to relate it back to ICT.) Yes!

- It can be simple issues like certain cultures are sensitive to certain colours. (Yes!) So you design the HCI depending on the different groups and culture of your audience.

Q: But that sometimes gives problems, leading to my next question. Do you think MOSTI, MDEC and other governing bodies understand that IS is unique within the ICT field?

- If you ask me, as of now I’ve been doing a lot of explanations, in fact I normally would carry around my slides wherever I go. In trying to preach this. This is IS, this is IT, this is CS, this is computer engineering, this is ICT, this is multimedia programming, this is multimedia content development, this is creative multimedia. Because a lot of people get confused.

- I always tell this joke. What happens to most people, they expect that those who build a car can also be expert car drivers. You can get a world class mechanic to maintain a Formula 1 car. But he’s not the driver, and if you asked to drive the car to win a race, he can’t. Even though he can build a car form the ground up. Likewise in IT, computer scientists can design algorithms, can design computer systems, information systems, but they themselves are not the great users.

- When this guy produces rendering software for computer graphics, if you ask him to make an animation cartoon, he may not be able to do it. But he understands the overall math and algorithms behind it.

- So that is again the confusion that people have. For example now, this is the truth in the field of graphics and multimedia, I want great animators, people who can do virtual reality and cartoons. These should be IT students… Nooo… these are not IT students. (They are artists!) Yes! They are artists! Who use computers.

- Likewise goes for IS. I want somebody who can use SAP with financial systems with this particular business process. No, they are not IT students. They are either accountants or management students. But if you want to design a whole information system for your business purposes then you need an IS student. (Yes. That’s where we fit in.) LOL

- So these are the things that if you ask me again the question that if these people get it. Not to undermine anybody, but because of the complexity of IT and the various disciplines it encompasses it tends to confuse a lot of people.
- Another simple analogy I tell people, if I’m an engineer people knows what sort of engineer I am. There is a clear distinction between the subdomains of engineering. Likewise in ICT, when you train somebody in computer engineering, don’t expect them to be an expert in IS! LOL But the public at large think, hey, you have a degree in CS or IT, you should be able to do this! LOL
- So this is the major misunderstanding and we are trying to educate everybody in Malaysia. Hopefully when people understand the different sub disciplines, the different knowledge sets… like I said it’s a cultural issue and it takes a while. But hopefully we’re getting there.

Q: I just hope that they start realise that IS don’t produce products. One of the things, I get the stigma that when I say I’m from IS/IT, they ask ‘do you produce software?’ I study people and organisations. So do you think that’s also a problem? When MOSTI wants to give funding, is there going to be a product?
- Like I said, this misunderstanding is rampant and at all levels. Even at the decision makers level. So hopefully, with this crusade (LOL) or whatever you want to call it. I hope eventually we’ll be able to educate everybody, all the various stakeholders. So that when people meet you and ask what area you’re in. You can answer I’m in IT, they can further ask are you in IS, IT or CS?
- Hopefully we can reach that level. That once you say you’re in IS they understand you’re into organisational, business processes, working with people to come up with business solutions. They can immediately relate to what IS is about. Which is not happening yet, sadly.
- If I may add, people can also get confused between Information Systems and Information Science. Which one is which, some people say it’s the same thing, some say they’re different. Information science is what people used to call as library sciences, looks into cataloguing, database… which use an element of IT as well. But they are not IT experts. (They deal with how information can be managed.) Yes, the very specific use.
- These are some of the issues we face. And coming back to research, hopefully when people have understood. I’ve had one student working with organisational learning, he just finished his PhD. So there is interest in IS. So hopefully in due time, when people see the need for this skillset and experts in this area. Because every sub-discipline have something to contribute. (We need each other.) Yes!

Q: Final thoughts. Anything you’d like to share? Hopes, what is MADICT doing to achieve all this and your personal opinion?
- I really hope… MADICT is a rotational chairmanship we rotate the whole council. My own term ending in the end of this year. God-willing someone will take over by then.
- As far as the framework and initial work we’ve done so far, we are moving forward quite fast. Results have been shown, quality programs are starting to emerge. Standards of IT programs hopefully by June will be produced by MQA, so in the long run we’ll need 5 years to 10 years the public at large will have a better understanding of what IT is about, the programs offered at undergrad level. What research in IT is about and how they contribute to the country and their daily lives.
- At least people will be able to distinguish this is telecommunications, belonging to the engineering body, this is data communications sitting at the layer between these two disciplines. Etc. etc.
- Until we reach that stage, we have to suffer and push through the misunderstandings and continue to educate and make people understand. What is this whole scheme and idea is.
- Just to share one last story, when you want to come up with standards in computing. Because ACM defines computing as a body of knowledge that covers computer engineering, computer science, IT, CS and IS. In Malaysia we want to use the term ICT. Initially we were in favour on
that. But after analysing this confusion, no we have to get away from this term ‘ICT’ because it
confuses people. Because ICT is a merger of Information Technology (IT, CS, IT etc.) and
Communications Technology (broadcasting, media, telecommunications etc).
- So we pushed away this term but we claim this group of people. We still can refer to the term
ICT. But the schools of IT and computer science, we are only dealing with the computing part,
the computer-specific part of ICT. That is the term I’m using! LOL THE COMPUTING-
SPECIFIC PART OF ICT!
- And as far as IS is concerned is the computer-specific part of management! LOL (Yes!) Or the
business side or business system.
- So now, you can draw a line that whatever we do is computing-related.
- So that’s my contribution to define this. By training, my first degree is in computer engineering.
But my PhD is in computer science. That’s why people say because of my background, I’m
biased in defining this. (The 0s and 1s.) Yes. Not so soft about it.
- Again within this scenario, we have to accept different views and like it or not, we have to
move forward.
Professor Dr Rosnah Ismail, Deputy Vice Chancellor of Research and Innovation of Universiti Malaysia Sabah. 28 April 2009.

Q: In general terms, how is UMS’ research going-on lately?
A: Our research is going well compared to previous years. We received more grants, not only from the government also from outside, private and international research grants. Our vision is to be a RU, accordingly to our strategic plan by 2015. We hope to achieve that. We are trying hard, in fact we motivate our lecturers to at least have a (research) project and be a projects leader in their niche area. We don’t want them to do research at an individual level. We want them to be in a group or have mentors with experience in research in their niche areas. We like to encourage our researchers to do multi-discipline research and in clusters, not individual. Some of the young lecturers they need mentors to help them in their research. Those young lecturers doing it on their own end up only half way and not fully utilise the grants we give them. But in groups or clusters, they can help each other (added) with a mentor there. So we want a focused research area, no individual research… there is no impact. Another thing, the research must have an impact. Either publish (your research) or develop a prototype and have products that can be commercialised. We don’t want research that end up only with articles or presentations at seminars. We want to see impact from the research. We want to be blunt on this.

Q: In terms of clusters, what kind of clusters are we talking about? Do we want senior researchers leading the research in a school, or do you want clusters that combine different schools? For example UMS-KAL we do joint research between SSIL and SPKAL. Is that the kind of cluster?
A: When talking about clusters, its multi-discipline. For example, you’re in IT (and) only work with IT researchers. You can also cooperate with researchers in the School of Engineering, School of Science and Technology, and even in the School of Social Sciences. Multi-disciplinary research allows crossing into other schools and even with other universities, in national and international level. What I did, collaboration in my research area not only in (the schools of) psychology but also with the School of Social Sciences. Other science-based schools and also other universities, UKM (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, National University of Malaysia), UPM (Universiti Putra Malaysia, Putra University Malaysia) and also international universities. It would be good rather than doing research on your own, it (becomes) very narrow (in scope).

Q: Relating to that, when you stated the products… I visited the UMS gallery and the thing that stood out was when visiting the (display) for the School of Psychology and Social Work, and I saw words
very familiar to me… I come from a branch of ICT where we take a lot of organisational studies and human factors. When I saw ethnography (research) being done, I knew about this. But the findings of research are more intangible. From your perspective as a psychologist and your role as the Deputy Vice Chancellor promoting product-based research, do you think this is where we should encourage working together? For example, combining ICT with psychology in developing psychology-based systems?

A: Yes. Do you know, most of the psychological research, the results can produce modules. Training modules or software. The School of Education produces (learning) kits and software for teachers and teaching aids. That needs IT to collaborate with their research. But the thing is, researchers in the social sciences, they only do (research) on their own! They don’t see this collaboration, that’s why when they finish (their research) it doesn’t go forward into products and commercialisation, they just finish (their research papers) and publish. But if you can develop software, we were in the Geneva International Invention Competition. Of course, there isn’t much social science products, but areas like engineering, biology and medicine, you could see all the products are there. These are products of research. It’s very interesting and they are marketable and commercialise (these products). And this is one thing we need to explain to researchers, “No more doing research with ‘nothing’ at the end.” Of course you publish, but we want to see products that can generate income for the university, or rotate income from research to use for (future) research.

Q: I think, the most important thing is trying to incorporate awareness among academics that we need to collaborate so we can produce these kinds of products. Regarding the products, is this one of the direction from the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE)?

A: One of the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for the university and the Vice Chancellors is the commercialisation of products and Intellectual Property (IP). After your research, you need to register them as IP and then commercialise your products. And there’s a percentage the university needs to achieve. Of course, we are still a comprehensive university, so the percentage is not that high yet, maybe 1 or 2 percent. But if we wish to achieve the status of RU, at least 10% of products must be commercialised. That’s the reason, we are moving towards that. We have to fulfil the university KPI. We have to be at par with other universities in Malaysia. We don’t want to be last among universities in Malaysia with now commercialised products. We have to move towards this, like it or not. This year we can identify one or two products for commercialisation and we hope we can get more after this. We want to encourage our researchers, from the beginning, when they apply for grants they must have that (aim to produce product with commercial potential). The proposal must (show) what (research) they want to has to have (commercial) potential or not. It’s not like before, when anybody can apply and
write a proposal. But now, from the beginning we have asked the researcher to push for this, (state) the value of their research for commercialisation.

Q: As Deputy VC of Research and Innovation, do you see if we have a research culture in UMS? What are the challenges in cultivating a positive research culture in UMS?
A: It is a big challenge. It is a big challenge when I was appointed last year (2008). In the past, when I was still doing research as an academic in UMS, I see that UMS as a university that is neither new or old, but we still have many young lecturers. That’s the reason the research culture is not there yet. Furthermore, most of the young lecturers are bogged down with administration. That’s the reason the culture in the past is not there. But starting this year, I’ve seen that everyone has that motivation to do research, by looking at the questions they ask about research and the amount of grants (applied for), and motivated from the grants they receive and the (research competition) medals they’ve won… I could see the culture is slowly building up among our researchers. I’m sure next year, this will increase more and more.

Q: I think one of the key elements in promoting research is having experienced academics, with PhDs especially. In SSIL, I’ve seen that with Dr Awang coming back last year, he’s pushing for research. We’ve developed our own cluster in SSIL, a research group. But another challenge I see is that, when someone like Dr Awang comes back to UMS, being the most senior academic, he is given the Deanship (of SSIL). Do you see this as a challenge?
A: If you are given an administration post, you have to divide your time between doing research and administration. I have three research grants at the same time, while holding (administrative) post. But at my level now, I’m the project leader for the three research. I don’t go to the field anymore, but I develop the young researchers to be in my research group, so they can learn from me and execute the research which grants I’ve secured for them. In a way, I help young researchers by cooperating with research under me. So what I’m trying to do is guide and develop young researchers and motivate them to do research. I think Dr Awang can also do that, he can be the project leader and ask the young researchers incorporating them in his research and guide them. It’s a matter of how you juggle and divide your time. If you’re systematic and know how to manage your time it should be no problem.

Q: Dr Awang is doing this, he’s set up the research group and leading us. Mentoring is very important in Malaysian academia. Because (culturally) we respect our elders and experienced members of organisation. Other than grants and opportunities to win (research competition) medals, are there any
other ways to motivate research? For example, by giving financial incentives…
A: We give incentives now. In fact, last year we gave (research) seed money to young researchers. The university has spent nearly half a million Ringgit to give this research seed fund for those who haven’t received a grant but want to start their research. This means that nearly 80% of lecturers have grants already. We did this last year and among the universities in Malaysia, I think we’re the only ones who did this. The amount of the money is not big, but it’s something to get the young researchers start doing research and motivates them. The senior researchers are also rewarded to, if they win medals or publish in high impact journals, we put an amount in their research fund and if they want to do further research or go to conferences, they could use the money from that fund. So, we’re trying to give incentives now, like awards in university ceremonies. And for those who win medals or publish in high impact journals, they are allowed to go to international conferences every year rather than once every 3 years (as the norm).

Q: How about for the schools themselves? One other idea is if a school’s research cluster, develops a product and becomes a commercial success, what in terms of percentages do they earn?
A: We have an IP policy. We also have commercialisation policy, so there is a percentage for the researchers and inventors, and a percentage for the university. This money can be ‘rotated’ (into further research funding). So, we have an IP policy.

Q: Because you represent the university in Research and Innovation, and you deal with foreign academics… do you get asked questions regarding academic freedom and also the discussions and debates within Malaysian academia?
A: On research? Not much… because our researchers only a few go to international level, most go to national level. They don’t really socialise (beyond Malaysia). Only a few… (this issue) we should encourage.

Q: When my supervisor came here, he asked regarding the debates (among Malaysian academics). Why are the Malaysian academics are being led by the ministry and university? Why is it top-down and not a bottom-up (research) approach? Do you think this is due to Malaysian culture?
A: Maybe it’s because we have restrictions. If the politicians say its okay, then we go for it. All the direction is from the top. If we the researchers want to fight for something, it still needs to be in-line with the rules and regulations. Not many of our researchers are outspoken. Those who are, normally get ‘shot down’. It’s political…
Q: Well, the Prime Minister has expressed his hopes for a more open society, with open media, so hopefully Malaysian society can change…
A: Hopefully… If a renowned scientist in the US or Germany says something, people (in those countries) listen to what they say. But in Malaysia, one example is Professor Ungku Aziz. But it’s still difficult in Malaysia. Hopefully, we’ll have a hero to fight for research and development.

Q: What is your hope for UMS research and UMS-KAL research?
A: You’re a part of us. Even though you’re a small portion, you can find your own niche area for research for the university. We want to see that. We are identifying the niche research areas for the university. We hope that UMS-KAL can come up with one of the niche areas and one day become world known, like our Marine Biology centre. Like in your area, we hope when people talk about IT they can relate it to Labuan. We want to see that. I’m going to retire (soon) and I hope the young generation will make UMS into a research-based university. We really depend on the young, vibrant and dynamic academics in UMS. We’re here to guide and lead, but you need to pick up (the work). My generation will retire soon. Technology has enabled fast information transfer and this should be used.
APPENDIX D
Data Analysis Using Template Analysis Method
## Template Analysis Tables

### Pre-Fieldwork Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Theme</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Qualitative Research</td>
<td>- Literature Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Hard vs Soft Systems</td>
<td>- Literature Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Malaysian Culture</td>
<td>- Literature Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Personal Experience</td>
<td>- Literature Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Patterns (Shared Understandings)</td>
<td>- Literature Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Actuality</td>
<td>- Literature Review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Post-Fieldwork Template Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| A. Malaysian academic culture | 1. Result-oriented  
2. Challenge of encouraging debates and discussions  
3. ‘Textbook’ mentality  
4. Perceived reliance on policies and administration to lead the way  
5. Perceived dependence on administrative and government support  
6. Research collaboration issues | A1) ISQualRes’08  
A2) ISQualRes’08, SSIL Workshop  
A3) ISQualRes’08; SSIL Workshop  
A4) MADICT Workshop  
A5) MADICT Workshop  
A6) MADICT Workshop |
| B. Malaysian academic actuality | 1. Academic freedom  
2. Bureaucracy and protocol  
3. Malaysian universities focus on producing human resource  
4. Academics in industry  
5. Academic mobility  
6. Malaysian Government Policy (becomes a Main Theme) | B1) Interviews  
B2) Interviews  
B3) Interviews  
B4) Interviews  
B5) Interviews  
B6) Interviews |
|   | 23. Trying to integrate soft systems through the different levels, using soft in higher level | C22) Interviews  
C23) Interviews |
|---|---|---|
| D. Qualitative Research Situation | 1. Exposure  
2. Promotion  
3. Perceived quantitative research bias in Malaysia  
4. Lack of research foundations  
5. Seen as suitable for certain fields  
6. Need for a change in attitude towards qualitative research  
7. Perception on qualitative research as time consuming  
8. Perception of Malaysian researchers lacking interpretive skills | D1) ISQualRes'08; SSIL Talks; SSIL First Meeting; SSIL Workshop  
D2) ISQualRes'08  
D3) ISQualRes'08; SSIL Talks; SSIL Workshop  
D4) SSIL Talks; SSIL Workshop  
D5) SSIL Workshop  
D6) SSIL Workshop  
D7) SSIL Workshop  
D8) SSIL Workshop |
| E. Situation in SSIL | 1. Lack of PhD holders  
2. Perceived lack of research focus  
3. Lack of general research foundations  
4. Dean encouraging research  
5. Research groups  
6. Lack of general research foundations  
7. Research guidance  
8. SSIL's location in Labuan  
9. The academics need to realise the meaning of being an academic  
10. The lecturers do the research work without student help  
11. Need for post graduate research students  
12. Getting the right support staff | E1) SSIL Talks; SSIL First Meeting; Interviews; SSIL Final Meeting  
E2) SSIL Talks; Interviews  
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APPENDIX E

Further recommendations for SSIL, Universiti Malaysia Sabah and Malaysian Information Systems
Recommendations for SSIL

The recommendations given in this section are based on some of the current plans for SSIL as well as newly developed recommendations based on the findings of this research.

Empowering Research Groups

− Utilise our research groups and increase research activity. The groups and its members should be empowered to do research.

− Push our student participation in research. Let them join in on our research activities. Students under the supervision of lecturers who are members of the research groups at SSIL should also be brought into the research groups’ activities. This also requires empowerment for the students to fully be a part of the research activities.

− Through our Technopreneurship program, SSIL could utilise the ideas from our students to conduct ICT research and development activities. This has been proven successful when one of the assignments from this program was subsequently entered into a national level innovation contest and won third place.

− Even though there are questions regarding the kind of financial and administrative support SSIL can attain for its research activities, one asset that SSIL always has in abundance is its students. This asset can still be utilised to assist lecturers at SSIL’s research activities.

Introduce Research Methodology Module at Under-Graduate and Post-Graduate Level

− There should be a module teaching ICT/IS Research Methodology for final year undergraduate students and post-graduate students undertaking research.

− The module is elaborated in the Appendix and the description is based on the requirements of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA).

Empower Students to do Research

− Students are our asset. When the chips are down, they’re the only ones we have who we can utilise in improving SSIL’s research.

− Student inclusion in the research groups and also the proposed research methods module are part of the student empowerment.

− Academics should also play a role in encouraging their students to use their time at university to do something ‘academic’, like utilise research as a means to improve their surroundings and
environment in campus.

Improve Academic-Administration Staff Communication and Understanding

- One of the biggest, if not the biggest, hurdle in improving research at SSIL, and UMS-KAL in general, is the gap of understanding among academic and administrative staff on the ‘definition’ or issues related to research and development.
- This miscommunication and misunderstanding can be alleviated through more discussions to expose each other on issues relating to R&D.

Empower Support Staff and include them in Academic Activities

- Support staff also need to be included or embedded in our academic activities, specifically those that deal with communities and the development of the university itself. This enables a sharing of responsibilities in achieving the goals of the university, while giving a sense of contribution and satisfaction among the support staff. Activities such as R&D that is connected to the community in Labuan can embed certain support staff.
- One example of a support staff that has played a vital role is Mr Azri Onn, a support staff under the Media, Technology and Equipment Unit. Since his employment at UMS-KAL, he has acted as the informing agent of UMS-KAL through the press and on-line, being a freelance reporter who covers the goings-on of UMS-KAL, its academics and students.
- During the Qualitative Research Workshop in March 2009, Mr Azri was instrumental in reporting on the workshop to the local press and also inviting other journalists to cover the event. Mr Azri believes his contribution is small, yet by reporting academic activities like this, it does put UMS-KAL and its activities in the public eye.
- In terms of research and development, the inclusion of support staff can always be upgraded. Not merely as respondents to student research projects, but also inclusive research activities that require participation and assessment from the staff themselves.
- Propose utilisation of Facebook to enable improved informing of goings-on and R&D within the school.

Upgrade Academic Staff Research Experience

- The current academic staff needs an upgrade in terms of research experience and ability.
- The research methods module could include lecturers who are interested to join in the
discussions and seminars.

- SSIL needs more PhD holders within its rank. The plan is to have at least four academics with PhDs in SSIL by the end of 2011.
- Those with industrial experience should also be encouraged to join SSIL at some capacity. Either as seminar presenters, research partners or be employed as academics themselves.

Use whatever advantages we have in Labuan.

- Look at the positives and use the negatives as opportunities.
- Easier said then done, but the Internet has allowed for the young community in Labuan to have a presence.
- Content-production based on ICT is a possible avenue for research. The government is setting up an Innovation Centre in Labuan, so this must be utilised.
- Engage the youth community in Labuan and find out what they are doing. Find opportunities for creative collaboration between SSIL and the youths of Labuan.

Additional Recommendations

- Push for the integrated Masters program and introduce a course on ICT/IS Research Methods.
- Improve communication among the academic and support staff in defining and elaborating what is academic research. There is a sense that those in administration think that research only constitutes to producing output with commercial potential or ‘award winning’ products.
- Allocate support staff for research management in SSIL.

Recommendations for Universiti Malaysia Sabah

UMS as a university needs to move forward in its ‘research thinking’. Currently I feel there is an emphasis that academic research should lead to the development of commercial products. Even though the School of Social Science and Social Work has shown many developments in research, the results of their research work have also been shaped into a form of product. On the onset, this may not appear to be a bad thing. Products will enable the research to gain funding from the commercialisation of the research products. However, the commercialisation should not be the motivation for the research. It should be a indirect benefit rather than the objective for research.

- Proposal for utilising Original Thinking Applied and Action Research within UMS.
- On the issue of academics being given administrative duties, at SSIL at least, there has been a
feeling that lecturers are given too much of this which affects their ability to do research. Taking everything into consideration, the administration might feel that this is necessary due to the limitations of support staff in terms of man-power and overall qualifications. One method we can address this is by utilising SSIL’s students to partake in activities organised by SSIL and being given some administrative duties. There have been suggestions for students to be included in university administration by Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah, this could be utilised to lessen the burden among academics in doing administrative duties. School-organised activities such as conferences, seminars, academic workshops, visits of dignitaries and other activities which don’t include high-level strategic policy making (although this could be a possibility in the future) should include student participation. These activities would allow for students to learn from them and gain much-needed experience. The academics would then be allowed to focus their attention to academic activities such as teaching and research. The students can also incorporate what they do in their resume and these activities with the right approach can be considered as action learning-based activities.

- Propose how to ease administrative posts to returning academics. If UMS has no choice but to appoint returning academics to posts, propose joint-deanship.
- IS research on improving research management. Not merely automating the process of research funding and management but a study on policies and systems thinking-based approach to transform it.
- In the end, we need to emancipate those at UMS. Policies and rules should still be introduced and enforced to ensure that this emancipation is not ‘misused’, but we need to start discussing and researching this agenda now.

Improve upon Informing Method to Spur Research and Innovation: Utilise Web2.0 to Enhance our University Website

- The website still leaves a lot to be desired when it comes to informing visitors of the goings-on in the university and our achievements.
- This is not a knock on the staff members who maintain the website. They need an easier and faster method for updating information on the website.
- Utilise Facebook to update the activities. Similarly, use it to enhance the communication among UMS community when dealing with issues.
Propose a policy for the utilisation of Facebook, Wikipedia and other Web2.0 tools, so that the communication can be done professionally and ethically.

Improve Academic-Administration Staff Understanding on Academic Issues

- We are, above all, an academic institution. Not merely a government body. It is limiting, not to mention insulting, to specify academics as government servants.

- Propose ways on enhancing communication among academic and administrative staff. There is still a separation of understanding. Urge our support staff to take in-campus studies, attain part-time degrees at UMS. Especially at post-graduate level. We still have a gap of understanding. The basis for increasing the understanding should be academic based. We are a university after all. We can include administration into research, encourage them to contribute by participating in research. Those partaking post-graduate research courses within UMS should be exposed to research methods and the ‘other side’ of the coin, the academic view.

- This gap of understanding is also the root cause of negative attitudes among the two groups. There have been numerous anecdotal examples of the administrative staff thinking that lecturers have it easy. Those in administration have even asked questions like, ‘What’s so hard with being an academic? You ONLY teach classes and get paid loads of money. And some of you aren’t even doing research.’

- The definition of ‘doing research’ from the perspective of administrative staff could have been distorted due to some of the universities research achievements. In previous years, some of the research produced by UMS have won awards at research exhibitions like the ones in Geneva. These awards although significant should not be the true barometer for research activities and success. Any academic would know that academic research is ultimately evaluated based on how it impacts the academic community. Citations of our papers and publications by other academics, invitations to journal editing boards and other academic-based promotions are what academics strive for. Awards and medals are all well and nice, but an academic’s true worth is based on how useful his work is to other academics around the world.

Appoint support staff for research and innovation at every school.

- The current system places administrative support for research at the Centre of Research and Innovation at UMS main campus. For the schools in Labuan, specifically SSIL, the academics are on their own in terms of research management. The support staff in SSIL are more focused
on managing the academic programs rather than research.
− Support staff that deal with R&D bureaucracy will free up the hands of academics in SSIL, and possibly in other schools to just do research. Research management is an important learning experience for many academics, but this should also be supported by specialised administrative staff.
− These administrative staff should consist of those with a level of academic research experience. If they don’t, they should be encouraged to take up a part-time post graduate by research program under UMS. We could utilise Action Research to improve the management of this.
− I am planning upon my return to SSIL to make a formal application from UMS’ Centre of Research and Innovation to attain at least two administrative support staff for the purpose of research management.
− I also plan to utilise government funding to make the process of research management in SSIL as a post graduate research for those employed. Even if the Centre of Research and Innovation is not able to bring the staff needed, the research grant would enable employing post graduate students for this project.

Upgrade the Internet connection for access to research journals and articles.
- Conduct a study on access to ICT and IS journals in SSIL.
- Propose network framework suitable for connection.
- Implement plan.

Recommendations for Malaysian Information Systems
IS research in Malaysia needs to be closer to industry. There needs to be more sharing of knowledge with practitioners and more practice among academics. One of the motivations of using the current narrative for this research is to produce a thesis that can be easily read by those in IS industry. This will motivate them to view academia as a friend rather than as an inapproachable entity. There is a fear that IS academics get stuck too much in academic language that we are not making our expertise and knowledge attractive enough for IS practitioners.
- Learn from the debates going in Information Systems abroad. Malaysian IS academics and research must bridge theory and practice to become relevant.
- Use new techniques and methods. Barcamp and Web2.0 for information collecting, dissemination and sharing. Research the impact of using these new techniques and tools. Be
self reflective in studying the application of these tools in our research and practice.

- Participate in social debates and contribute to society and university. We are the bridge between hard technical ICT and the people who use them. Let’s play our part. For example, Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah’s cause to liberate student politics. We can contribute from a systems perspective. The Internet provides a way for us to evaluate student activism. Share how our research methods could be used to study the situation.

- Based on Gill and Bhattacherjee (2009) Recommendations for US MIS, Malaysian IS needs to consider these recommendations as well and place it into our own context:
  - Recommendation 1: Establish Discipline-Level Priorities for Engaging Practice
    - Statement of intent by IS community to push for industry and academia to work together.
    - Conduct joint-studies for industry and academia.
  - Recommendation 2: Encourage Hybrid Academic–Practitioner Doctoral Programs
    - UTM’s Doctoral program is a start, but we need to look into how other institutions can join in.
    - In Malaysia’s context, doctoral programs could be difficult for the majority of ICT schools. But, Masters research programs could be a short-term solution.
  - Develop Programs for Placing Researchers in Practice
    - Professor Zainal Aripin’s experience showed how Malaysian academics have to be ‘brave’ enough to leave the comforts of the ivory tower.
    - The reality is Malaysian academics will still need an incentive to pursue activities like industrial sabbaticals. But we must explore this as an option.
  - We need to ask questions of our situation. In the West, departments are established, closed, merged and change due to market needs. Malaysian IS is lucky in a way that everything is centralised. But once Malaysian universities achieve full autonomy, it would be wise for us to rethink our position in Malaysian universities. Some choices:
    - Do we still want to remain under ICT schools?
    - Do we need to move to Business-based schools?
    - Become distributed among the different departments in a university?
    - Establish our own systems departments in our universities?
  - Look into Informing Science as a field that we can contribute to for Malaysia.
• Looking at Gill and Bhattacherjee (2007) work on Informing Science, we must look at the choices Malaysian IS academics make in their research, whether it is more disciplinary participation or institutional participation. All this influence how IS as an academic field will be seen in the eyes of Malaysian academia. The contextual issues are ripe for research, discussion and debates, to lead Malaysian IS into the future.

• One of the motivations I have in using my story narrative is to promote ‘a new way’ for research to be presented, especially in IS. Gill and Bhattacherjee (2009) pointed out that those in industry prefer stories and anecdotal examples when reporting on their industrial experience. In the world of teaching, story narratives are also a popular narrative in expressing the experiences of teachers and research in the field of education. I believe that we learn from doing, but that learning is enhanced when we tell our stories to others about what we did. In education, teaching is an act that encompasses many other aspects of life, and one of them is the empowerment of an individual to fulfil his or her potential. Thus, to fully IS education itself must be open to new narratives to empower those in IS academia in telling stories and examples that will entice those in industry to do the same.
APPENDIX F
Supporting Letters from Dean and Deputy Dean
Reference : UMSL/SK6.11/P18/2
Date : 22nd December 2010

Professor Trevor Wood-Harper
Manchester Business School
MBS East
University of Manchester
Booth Street West
Manchester
M15 6PB
United Kingdom

Dear Prof.,

Assessment on Mr Zamhar Iswandono Bin Awang Ismail’s Fieldwork

With reference to the subject of this letter, I would like to provide an assessment of Mr Zamhar’s fieldwork at the Labuan School of Informatics Science (SSIL) between November 2008 and June 2009.

It is my opinion that Mr Zamhar has done an excellent job in bringing about positive changes to our organisation in terms of research activity. When I was first appointed as the Dean of SSIL in January 2009, my focus was to improve Research and Innovation (R&I) activities within SSIL.

Mr Zamhar’s fieldwork and participation came at a very opportune time. One of the biggest challenges I saw at the start of my tenure was improving the foundations of research among the lecturers in SSIL. The Qualitative Research Methodology Workshop in March 2009 was an extremely useful event in training our lecturers on qualitative research methods. In my view, it has opened up the lecturers of SSIL to do research using the methods that were taught in the workshop.

Throughout the fieldwork Mr Zamhar was also in constant conversation and discussion with everyone in SSIL on the issue of research. In meetings and school activities, he helped in raising the awareness among lecturers on the importance of research in an academic institution. I saw this as one of Mr Zamhar’s indirect contribution and believe that it has rubbed off among his colleagues.

Since Mr Zamhar’s fieldwork, SSIL has moved forward in our research activity. The lecturers and our research groups have started a number of research projects and organised a conference on IT and Society in June 2010.

I believe that Mr Zamhar’s contributions through his fieldwork assisted in bringing upon these positive changes. Even after his fieldwork ended, Mr Zamhar was still in constant contact with me and the lecturers at SSIL. His enthusiasm has not only helped us, but changed many of the attitudes of the lecturers at SSIL on research.

It is with great pleasure that I give a positive assessment of Mr Zamhar’s efforts during his fieldwork. Without his contributions, I strongly believe it would be difficult for me to achieve the goals I have set as Dean in improving the research activity at SSIL.

‘STRIVE TO EXCEL’

Sincerely,

DR. AG. ASRI AG. IBRAHIM
Dean

SSIL
Multimedia Super Corridor
Towards MS ISO 9001:2008 Certification by the Year 2010
Jalan Sungai Pagar, 87000 Federal Territory of Labuan.
Zamhar Iswandono Bin Awang Ismail  
Room 2.23 Crawford House  
Manchester Business School  
The University of Manchester  
Manchester  
M15 6PB  
United Kingdom  

13th December 2010

Dear Zamhar,

Supporting Evidence of Research Improvement
As you requested, I have gathered some evidence regarding recent SSIL activities that will help you support your research.

Since your fieldwork from November 2008 to June 2009, SSIL lecturers have published a number of research papers for publications in journals and presentation in conferences. We maintained a steady 10 published research papers both International and local for 2009 & 2010, an increase in 50% from the previous years.

We have also made progress in attaining research funding for a number of research projects. A total grant of RM 100K was obtained in both 2009 & 2010 as compared to only RM 20K in 2007 and 2008.

In June 2010, we organised a conference on IT and Society, held in Universiti Malaysia Sabah main campus. The IT & Society Conference is a collaboration between SSIL-UMS and The University of South Australia, Adelaide.

As Deputy Dean of Research and Innovation at SSIL, I believe your fieldwork has contributed greatly to our organisation. Your participation was extremely needed in SSIL. Your organisation of the Qualitative Research Workshop last year was one of the highlights of SSIL’s research activities.

All the best in your PhD and hope to see you return to SSIL soon.

'STRIVE TO EXCEL’

Sincerely,

YUSZREN

Mohd Yusuren Yusak  
Deputy Dean of Research and Innovation