

Reflections on our experience at the KTI workshop

The workshop on “Enhancing higher education” provided a positive professional experience for ATMU’s staff members. The opportunity to learn firsthand about KTI’s teaching and learning practices from the practitioners themselves proved to be extremely helpful and encouraged us to critically reflect about our own methodologies. The program was carefully designed to include all relevant aspects of the methodological novelties introduced at the KTI and efficiently implemented within a short period of the course, thanks to professionalism of the trainers (or coaches, as they would prefer to be called).

The gist of the program concerned the CDIO initiative, its core tenets and their implementation at the KTI and in other universities. CDIO was extensively commented on, as a tool for program and course enhancement, as well as a global community of educators aiming for teaching excellence. In the context of our institutional agenda, it was useful to compare the merits of the CDIO model against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, as well as ISO 9001:2015 – Quality Management System. The latter standards are currently being implemented at our institution and observations regarding the CDIO model helped us to look at their possible areas of overlap and venues for enhancement. Participants were also able to critically assess their previous knowledge of Bloom’s taxonomy in the light of Feisel-Schmitz Taxonomy of Intended Learning Outcomes. It is true that the latter approach has been designed with applied fields of science in mind, but it helped us to develop a more nuanced understanding of shortcomings linked to Bloom’s taxonomy.

We were positively surprised by the Swedish government’s requirement of SDG’s integration into local universities’ study programs. The model of education we had a chance to explore in the workshop was pioneering in terms of its vision and ambitions. While we had previously considered SDG’s policy importance at the macro level, SDG’s direct applicability and practical value in the higher education was somewhat questionable to us before we attended this workshop. The speakers’ detailed discussion of the report on “Education for SDGs: Learning objectives” gave us a solid reference point in our future efforts to bring our educational processes in line with the global sustainability agenda.

We were pleased to observe that the engineering education was so much geared toward addressing and where possible, preventing, climate change, social inequality and other aspects of the sustainability challenge. KTI’s staff members, who were acutely aware of what inaction on any one of these issues could lead to, were meticulous in their laying out of KTI’s vision for higher education that was in alignment with the call of the day.

At every stage of the workshop, coaches demonstrated examples from their day-to-day experience. It was evident throughout the workshop that the people who spoke had a first-hand experience with the issues raised and the strategies employed to address them. Their friendly, collaborative attitude and engaging methods gave us a taste of a distinct educational model, in which mutually supportive, group action was preferred over the individual, “go-it-

alone” style. This was interesting in the sense that higher education was treated as a pathway to collaborative endeavors, rather than individual self-reliance.

The learning process, as described by coaches, was challenging as well as interesting, in terms of student input it required. Students were “the master of the course” in the sense that they had to critically engage with their peers, provide and receive constructive feedback and in a way, “self-orient” themselves in the learning process. The onus was on the students, rather than the teacher, to prove they have attained the intended learning outcomes. The delegation of responsibility to students in such a way is likely to develop a sense of duty in them at a younger age and prove useful to them in their professional lives.

Diverse backgrounds of workshop participants enabled them to bring in different experiences to the discussion and speak about their unique ways of tackling common educational challenges across the globe. This multicultural setting moved Azerbaijani participants outside of their comfort zone, stimulated team members’ engagement and learning and encouraged them to explore issues they face in Azerbaijan’s higher education sphere in the global context.

The workshop was conducted extremely well and the facilitators/coaches demonstrated a high level of professionalism at all times. Their demeanor was amiable and gracious, which made our experience in the workshop all the better.