



Heads of Department Programme – Leading Across the Business



Company Overview

AirAsia is the largest airline in Malaysia by fleet size and destinations as well as being Asia's largest low-cost airline by passengers carried. AirAsia, and its subsidiaries, operate scheduled domestic and international flights to more than 120 destinations spanning 24 countries.

Tan Sri Anthony Francis "Tony" Fernandes, CBE, a Malaysian entrepreneur, took over AirAsia – an ailing government-linked company - in 2001, and turned it around with the tagline "Now Everyone Can Fly". In doing so he transformed AirAsia into the world's best low-cost airline; proud recipients of the 'World's Best Low-Cost' Airline Skytrax Award for 8 consecutive years.

AirAsia's Vision is to be the largest low cost airline in Asia and to serve the 3 billion people who are currently underserved with poor connectivity and high fares.

The business issues

AirAsia's Heads of Department (HODs) play a critical role in the organisation's success, leading day-to-day operations and also driving the company's strategy. The HODs also play a key part in managing a growing workforce which is very young, with staff attrition high at all levels.

AirAsia's rapid growth has not provided enough opportunity to develop people across the business. Operationally the company has managed relatively well, however a sense of real connectivity between the different parts of the AirAsia Group is much needed.

Most of AirAsia's management are enthusiastic young managers and AirAsia's rapid growth now requires them to develop their non-technical, 'soft' skills in managing and leading others.

Collectively, many of these HODs represent AirAsia's senior management though individually, the majority are still transitioning from a functional leadership role and mind-set to general leadership roles. HODs are however now expected to step outside of functional roles and contribute to AirAsia's growth elsewhere.

The development challenge

'Leading across the Business' is designed to support AirAsia and their HODs in particular, through this journey of transition and future growth.

Moving from a leadership role based largely on technical expertise, to one that is less concrete and defined,

requires discretion, agility, resilience, empathy and courage. AirAsia requires that its leaders take this 'leap of faith' into the unknown, in order that they are developed and prepared for, assuming greater role responsibility in the future.

The programme

The HODs - Leading Across the Business Programme is a highly practical, interactive programme, closely aligned with the AirAsia operating environment and delivered in the (ASEAN) Region.

Cranfield's collaborative approach taken during interviews with HODs during the programme's Discovery Phase helped to secure the buy-in and support of these leaders and broader engagement from across the organisation as a whole. Furthermore, the flexible and adaptive co-design philosophy ensures the programme remains organisationally aligned and value-adding.

The programme provides a global overview across the whole AirAsia business (from commercial to operations to HR) and facilitates individual leadership growth and development across these areas.

Module 1: World-Class Safety

This module is delivered by faculty from both Cranfield School of Air Transport Management and Cranfield School of Management, providing a unique blend of technical, as well as management and leadership oriented input. The module covers:

Building a safety culture

- The leadership role and contribution of the Group and Operational HODs in ensuring that safety is in the DNA of AirAsia
- Clarity around how we behave as a collective at a time of crisis
- Shared and common aims across divisions and units.

Understanding the regulatory context

- ICAO safety obligations and how they are interpreted in state regulations and airline policies
- Safety regulations and the concept behind them
- Safety Management Systems.

Module 2: Leading for Performance

This module follows the 'inside-out' approach to effective leadership, starting with self-awareness, followed by team and then organisational performance.

Awareness of self, style and impact

- Leadership purpose & role map
- Myer Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI)
- Transactional Analysis.

Influencing Behavioural Change

- Influencing skills
- Feedback skills
- Situational Leadership
- Coaching for performance
- Domain Analysis.

Leading Cultural Change

- Leading cultural change in your context
- The 'To-Be' Culture as an enabler of safety and operational performance.

Why Cranfield?

Cranfield University was selected for this partnership with AirAsia due to its strong post-graduate development solutions and experience in aviation and safety leadership.

Wan Ezrin Sazli Bin Wan Zahari, Head of Group People Strategy at Air Asia adds, "It's an opportunity to see how an external development provider, that has experience in the industry, approaches development, as opposed to purely relying on our internal solutions.

Cranfield have proven to be professional, detailed and long-term focused throughout the programme."

Making a difference



The programme has been widely endorsed by the many participants. Some of the comments from delegates include:

"Strong personal insights, practical tools, delivered in bite-size chunks – very relevant"

Attila Emam; Group Risk

"An excellent programme by excellent facilitators..."

Devinderjit Singh; Ground Operations

"It provided insight on how to...build a successful (organisational) culture and achieve best results"

Celia Lao; General Manager, Greater China

"It's all about understanding people – and using their strengths to get the best out of them in achieving company goals."

Nadzri Hashim; Head of Engineering, Malaysia