



## **LEARNING EVENT: A Field Course in Human-Centered Research Skills for students from Mandalay University, Mawlamyine University, and the University of Zurich**



This learning event consisted of three components: a two weeks course, two weeks field research, and a three day analysis and closing section, which were held in October and November 2016. The two weeks course was held at Mawlamyine University (Mon State, Myanmar) and provided teaching sessions on human-centered research skills. Human-centered research focuses on understanding the behavior, needs, attitudes, beliefs and motivations of a target population. The aim of this learning event was providing insight in human-centered research, which focuses on understanding human behavior — what people do rather than what people say — with the goal of inspiring new ideas and providing context for existing ones which might elicit positive behavior change. In addition, it was explicitly the aim of this learning event to let the participants experience empirical research as well – beside the theoretical input. Each participant had to design his or her own small scale research, which was conducted in the two weeks research part individually or in small groups — in total 30 participants (14 Mandalay and 16 Mawlamyine) created 8 research teams. These teams worked on field research in a wide range of topics from health issues concerning traditional Buddhist stone carvers in Mandalay to practices of artisanal and small scale fisheries along the coast to work safety of smallholder rubber farmers in Mon State. Finally, the results were presented in the closing section, which was held at Mandalay University (Mandalay Region, Myanmar).



The learning event was conducted by trainers of Point B<sup>1</sup>, an international NGO located in Mawlamyine, and trainers from the University of Zurich. It was open for PhD students and Master students of all subjects from Mandalay University and Mawlamyine University (Myanmar) and for Master students and Bachelor students from the University of Zurich (Switzerland). The 39 participants made an international and interdisciplinary group of undergraduate and graduate students.

The learning effect was so high because:

- Participants benefited from international teachers of diverse backgrounds (design thinkers, social anthropologists, and linguists from the US, Switzerland, and Myanmar).
- Interdisciplinary learning was concrete in the combination of participants' backgrounds (English, Geography, Chemistry, Physic, Maths, Zoology, Botany, Marine Science, Geology, English, and Anthropology). In addition, research teams with mixed levels of senior teachers and fresh masters students showed significant progress towards increased understanding, collaboration and participation.
- Participants gained skills, mindsets and dispositions in human-centered research including user needsfinding, contextual inquiry, observation, participatory research methods, questioning and interviewing.
- 8 research teams worked together to co-create research toolkits and participatory research methods; conducted field research in Mandalay and Mawlamyine regions; synthesize and analyze research findings; create user personas with key behaviors, needs, attitudes and motivations; and present research at a Final Project Expo held at Mandalay University.
- The co-work of two Myanmar universities was a new and very fruitful experience.
- Beside theory, the focus of the learning event was on carrying out empirical research.
- And finally, the learning event was designed to give a maximum effect for Myanmar participants in carrying it out in Myanmar with international trainers using translators.

Feedback of participants:

- "This is so practical! We learn and then we apply what we learn immediately. Sometimes it is challenge for us because we feel afraid. But by doing, we come to have more confidence and we feel we can really know more deeply."
- "I learned how to be able to think from a new perspective — how to create and analyze data deeply."
- "I feel I am starting to understand the importance of collaboration in a group. By doing research together in a group, I come to know my team member's mindsets and if I am a leader, I learn how to organize different people in different positions."

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<sup>1</sup> [www.pointb.is](http://www.pointb.is)



- “I feel inspired to learn English more and I built my confidence in speaking with others, especially foreigners. As we are doing research on the topic of education, I feel I can use what we learned to improve the quality of education in our university. By doing research, it is useful for my classroom because I can learn and reflect on my own weaknesses and strengths.”
- “The most important for me was learning how to find insight or meaning from my interviews.”
- “I know how to change our mindset, how to do systematic research, to take feedback from other people and think about a process using six thinking hats.”
- “I loved using art and creativity to make research tools that connect with our community.”
- “From this workshop we learned practical skills in doing research. We are thankful to all the partners for giving us a chance to learn and do practical work.”
- “Teachers and students truly collaborated and worked together as teams in their projects. In this course they broke through the usual hierarchy.”

Lessons learned/recommendations:

- 39 PhD, Masters, and Bachelors participants from Mandalay, Mawlamyine, and Zurich Universities will continue to engage and collaborate to conduct research within academic institutions in Myanmar. In addition, participants who are teaching staff at these universities expressed enthusiasm for teaching human-centered research skills to their students. It is recommended to follow-up with support to teaching staff to increase capabilities and confidence in teaching and applying human-centered research skills within national universities in Myanmar.
- Engaging University of Zurich and Point B partners in the collaboration and design of this learning event strengthened effectiveness, relevance and innovative outcomes. It is recommended that future funding could be used for partners to provide follow-up support, create small grants for research, develop a curricula/manual for teaching Human Centered Research Skills and support ongoing activities within national institutions in Myanmar.
- It is recommended to expand on this Learning Event in 2017 to increase learning exchanges between Myanmar academic institutions and the University of Zurich with the opportunity for participants from this learning event to visit University of Zurich for a learning exchange.
- Within this Learning Event as participants moved from the classroom to engaging with communities in field research there was increased collaboration, willingness to learn and understanding between teachers and students in mixed teams. It is recommended that future Learning Events are designed to maximize interactions between faculty and graduate students.
- The learning event achieved the goal of strengthening collaboration between two national academic institutions — Mandalay and Mawlamyine Universities — and between University of Zurich, an international academic institution. Moreover, the learning event has begun the process of creating a culture of research within



Myanmar academic institutions. Participants have requested a second iteration



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