

As part of my Leadership in Action (LiA) project this summer, I worked with an NGO named Leaderonomics based in Malaysia on running workshops on responsible energy consumption for primary and secondary school children. The core objective of these workshops was to teach students how to calculate their electricity bills and how they can use energy more efficiently to reduce these bills and externalities on the environment. My project was split into two halves, which I completed in June and September respectively.

During the first half, I focused on understanding how these programs are conducted, accompanying the NGO team to the target schools, observing the style of communication, structure of the workshops – what worked well and what could be improved. I assisted the team in running various segments of the workshops, from demonstrating some of the gamified simulations we had to helping students with their bill calculations. These initial weeks helped me understand not just how the team and workshops worked but also why what we were doing was so important for the school children.

I played a significantly more active role in the second half of my project. Now that I knew how the programs were run, I was able to take more charge of the facilitation of the workshops and simulations – also reducing the workload for the rest of the team members. I also designed and helped implement new segments to some of the workshops. For instance, one of our games involved students building their dream house and buying the electrical appliances they would need for this house, and I suggested that we allow them the option to purchase solar panels to reduce their energy consumption. This was an interesting addition that we could easily action, improving the quality of the simulation. By the end of my project, I was therefore able to take good ownership of the work we were doing and made meaningful and lasting contributions.

Through my work with Leaderonomics, I take back great learnings and memories. A key experience for me was learning how to work with young kids. Given that the kids we usually worked with were between the age of 12 and 15 and studied at public schools, it was crucial that we were patient with them and sensitive to their needs. Being patient was initially a challenge for me, but I gradually taught myself to be more understanding and clearer when giving instructions, for example. This is a different style of leadership than I was perhaps used to, but equally important to learn and hone. Working at schools in remote areas of Malaysia such as Seremban and Johor Bahru also provided me great exposure to the local culture, food, and so on, which was very insightful. At some of the schools, students also spoke very little English, which was another obstacle for me to overcome since I did not speak Malay. However, over the weeks, I was able to pick up the language a little bit and adapted my style of communication to be more understandable. Finally, I saw firsthand the power of working well as a team. I was

fortunate to have a great set of team members and we were able to harness our individual strengths to deliver high quality workshops. For example, our lead facilitator noticed my strength with working with data, and I was able to help significantly with the data collection and technological backend of our workshops. At the same time, when I struggled with communicating with the students due to the language barrier at times, other team members were able to step in and assist. In this manner, we were able to build on our strengths and cover our weaknesses to provide the children with the best experience and guidance possible.