

Michael Fung's challenge: pioneering the education of the future



Michael Fung has worked as a higher education professional at universities and organizations in Singapore and Hong Kong.

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Alejandro Salazar

*"After **forging a complete skills development system in Singapore**, I was ready for a new challenge. My wife and I agreed that it was time for our next international destination."*

That's how **Dr. Michael Fung**, Executive Director of the [Institute for the Future of Education \(IFE\)](#), recalls how his **passion for tackling challenges** and **making an impact on higher education** brought him from **Singapore** to Mexico to join [Tec de Monterrey](#).

*"**Coming to the Tec has been another great challenge in my life:** moving to a completely new part of the world, with a language I have to learn little by little, discovering its culture, and building relationships with people in a new setting."*

Fung, who has lived in several countries around the world, shares the challenges of his career, including his most recent one in Mexico: **pushing global education toward the future.**

Dr. Fung recently joined the Tec as Executive Director of the Institute for the Future of Education.



Coming to the Tec with the challenge of making an impact on the education of the future

One of the areas that the IFE focuses on is **Lifelong Learning**, and Fung has become Executive Director of this institute in order to replicate the **SkillsFuture** strategy and his achievements as a university leader in Hong Kong.

The aim of the **SkillsFuture movement**, from the Singapore Ministry of Education, is to develop skills for industry within the educational system. Fung promoted this as

Founding President of the Higher Education Planning in Asia Association.

Previously, Fung worked at the [Hong Kong University of Science and Technology](#) (HKUST), the [Singapore University of Technology and Design](#) (SUTD), and the [Singapore Management University](#).

*"I was at HKUST for 6 years. In that time, my team worked with different schools and teachers, addressing academic and research issues to move the institution to a **new model of education**,"* he says in an interview with [CONECTA](#).

*"We managed to take first place in the university rankings in Asia for three years running. That's what we want to do at the Tec: **make an impact on the education of the future with the Tec21 Model**. I'm looking forward to making another noteworthy achievement here,"* he says.

The **Tec21 Model** is based on **challenge-based learning** with flexibility, **inspiring professors**, and a memorable student experience.

The director wants the IFE to implement aspects and strategies of the education systems in Asia and the Americas.



His challenge of obtaining electronic parts to play with

Fung remembers being a boy in his **native Singapore** and beginning to take an interest in technology when reading books about electronics. That's where his **passion for technology** came from.

To build what he saw in books, he had to figure out how to obtain parts from **garbage dumps** and **build circuits** with them, extracting components from **televisions** that people threw away.

*"At that time, people were switching from **black and white** televisions to **new** color ones. So, I'd go to the **garbage dump** to look for **printed circuit boards**, resistors, and capacitors."*

*"**I grew up building circuits and playing with technology.** That's how I realized that if you're motivated in one area, you can **pursue it and learn about it**, finding resources to take your knowledge and abilities to the next level," says the director.*

"That's what we want to do at the Tec: make an impact on the education of the future with the Tec21 Model. I'm looking forward to making another noteworthy achievement here."

His first international challenge: studying in the United States

His love of technology led him to study computing at high school, and then to study computer engineering at **Carnegie Mellon University** when he chose a degree course in the **United States**.

*"I had a teacher there who was doing research on **Microelectromechanical sensors (MEMS)**, and he gave me the opportunity to work with him on designing*

and building some of them, as an undergraduate student.

*“That made me feel that I wasn’t different. I mean, he was the expert and I was a young student, and he discussed the problem with me as if I were an expert on sensors too. **It made me feel that anything could be possible,**” he recalls.*

Passion for new challenges leads him to the education sector

After he had completed his bachelor’s and master’s in electrical and computer engineering and went to work on **MEMS sensors** and robotics systems in the United States, **Fung returned to Singapore**, where he became interested **in the area of education.**

*I started working in the **information and communication technology industry** when computers and internet access were just starting to take off. (Then I went) to the field of education when **I saw that higher education was receiving more and more investment** from countries.*

***“I like the challenge of discovering new things.** Going from the information and communication technology industry to higher education was an important and very swift change. It worked for me because **I understood that education is fundamental and very relevant,**” he says.*

Dr. Fung has forged a career as an expert in education and information and communication technologies.



His experience for making an impact on the education of the future

In order to achieve his goal of making an impact on the education of the future, Fung recalls that, just like assembling an electronic circuit, he has to apply the **lessons** he has learned as a **professional on the global stage**.

He points out that **educational models** tend to reflect the developmental stages of different global regions.

*"For example, educational models in Asia tend to have more content and are **rigorous about science, technology, and mathematics**; while there's more room for **creativity and innovation** in the U.S. and the Americas, with a focus on liberal and artistic education."*

He proposes offering **teaching methods** that strike a **balance between Eastern and Western learning styles**.

His challenge for the future: pioneering the future of learning

When asked **how he'd like to be remembered**, Fung pauses, smiling while he finds the words to answer the question.

"Personally, I'd love to be remembered by my family as a loving father, as a devoted father, and that my family can remember the impact I had on their lives."

*"(Professionally,) what I'd really love to leave behind is a legacy of taking the Institute for the Future of Education and **working with the team on earning recognition**, as well as being remembered for **pioneering education** based on everyone's skill sets. That will be very gratifying for me," he says.*

This is how he emphasizes **his new challenge in Mexico**.

*"**I want to pioneer the future of learning**. The IFE is a great place to be because it adopts and embodies this spirit of innovation in education. I'm happy to make this transition because I see that the institute and the Tec have ambitions to **make a global impact on education**," he concludes.*

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