The Influence of Organisational Culture on Tertiary Education:
Observations from the West Indies and North Africa
Keith Miller

Managing Post-Grad Students from the West Indies and North Africa

- Attracting overseas applicants
- Academic background from different cultures
- Cultural differences in approach to learning
- Accommodating needs of overseas students
Why am I here presenting this?

- 10 years at the University of Plymouth in the UK
- 8 years in the West Indies (including 5 as Head of Department)
- 2.5 years at the British University in Egypt
- 6 months at UTAS

Attracting Students

Entry to USA and Australia on student visa in 2009:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region of Origin</th>
<th>Country of Entry</th>
<th>Cost of Flight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>20556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English speaking West Indies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>2857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td></td>
<td>4675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td></td>
<td>106044</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To a graduate the distance and travel costs is less of a factor.
Post-Graduate students from the West Indies typically move for the duration of their study.
A post-graduate level, the cost of return flight is typically met through a grant.
Distance or Perspective

A perspective of the World, as perhaps seen by an overseas student.
Also, in Egypt the AUC, BUE, GUC, FUE, RUE all exist and Malaysia now offers a cheap alternative.

West Indian track record

From a population of 6 million, the English speaking West Indies produces about 10000 graduates annually.
Education at school level is based on UK standards.
Many degree programmes carry internationally recognised accreditation.

From one small Department:
- Of the first 200 graduates, 6 went on to obtain PhD’s overseas (2 in the UK, 2 in the USA, 1 in Canada and 1 in Australia), and 15 to MSc.
- In total, about 25% go on to higher degrees overseas and locally.
- At least two more overseas PhD’s are complete (USA), and two pending (USA and UK).
- Further MSc’s have been gained from Canada (2), USA (2), UK (10), Holland (3) and Portugal (1) and possibly more.
- Of those studying abroad all completed in a suitable time frame.
Education in Egypt is variable

From a population of 80 million, Egypt produces about 500,000 graduates annually.

Schools are based on: (i) Egyptian Thanawiya Amma examinations; (ii) IGCSE from the UK; (iii) American Diploma.

Degrees are offered by state universities and numerous private universities now selling education to the wealthy.

All universities except one are governed by the Supreme Council.

- In State universities classes are large, English language is weak and exams often consist of a memory test.
- Private universities have better resources and smaller classes, but students are buying their degree. The AUC comes closest to offering an education to overseas standard. Three others award degrees from overseas universities, but only one of these attempts to meet overseas quality requirements.
- A national quality assurance unit was established in 2008.

A Question of Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country or Region</th>
<th>PDI</th>
<th>IDV</th>
<th>UAI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World Average</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab World</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>11</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions:

- PDI – Power Distance Index. Lower value, greater the expectation for power to be shared equally within a group.
- IDV – Individualism. A high value shows that self-interest is normal within the culture.
- UAI – Uncertainty Avoidance Index. Higher value, less comfort within society for uncertainty.
Mapping Cultural to Education

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Why do West Indians perform so well overseas?

- Low PDI - Engagement in discussion is independent of hierarchical structure within the group. People are not led and are familiar with contributing to the group.
- Low IDV - Prefer to work as a team in the discussion and development of ideas.
- Low UAI - Willing to try new ideas and experiment and accept the outcome.

How might Arabs perform?

- High PDI - Expect to be directed by a few leaders.
- Low IDV - Prefer to work as a team, but under direction.
- Low UAI - Don’t like uncertainty, so direction ensures an expected outcome.

A West Indian Experience

- Students like to study as a group, and they undertake field activities jointly.
- Challenging assignments lead to investigation.
- Positive response to wider departmental activities.
- Can cope with uncertainty of a move and respond immediately to a change of working environment. Transition from school to university, and to a move overseas.

Of those obtaining PhD’s overseas, few return to the West Indies. Of the original 6 from one Department, 2 now lecture in that department and the other 4 have taken up other nationalities. Students completing MSc’s overseas often don’t return.
An Egyptian Experience

- In undertaking field work, a group will only do well if one individual takes a lead role and directs the others.
- Students like to be led through assignments so that there is no uncertainty.
- Students prefer exams that depend on a high degree of memory.
- Find the transition from school to university difficult and show signs of immaturity.
- About 10% of the students have the ability to lead. They are individuals with different social skills.

Many of my former colleagues had studied overseas, but had then returned to Egypt.

Explanation of cultural difference

The West Indies is new.
- The West Indian race has developed from a beginning in about 200 years. Identity came with independence in the 1960’s.
- The West Indian culture has developed from a diversity of immigrants.
- Classes exist within society, but there is potential for movement.
- People accept innovation.

The Arab culture is ancient.
- Particularly in Egypt, people are familiar with a class driven society.
- There is little opportunity to move between classes.
- Acceptance of procedures has become the norm.
In recruiting graduate students

Candidates from the West Indies respond well:

- Educational standards to degree level are aligned with international expectations.
- Students will quickly adapt to their new environment.
- Cultural skills incorporate problem solving through trial and outcome.
- From one department there is a track record showing 100% successful completion within the expected time frame.
- They will feel comfortable being accommodated within a research group.

Candidates from North Africa may need time to adapt:

- Educational award levels may not reflect the anticipated background of the student.
- Students may expect to be led, and will do well working on a well-defined project.
- Test for leadership skills. These students have potential for research, but they may expect to lead a group.
- Skills in investigative techniques and interpretation may require development.