

Review

The expatriate professor: Lessons from teaching management in Africa

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Drawing on the experience gained by an American teaching undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate student in three different African settings, this paper shares some key lessons learned and makes recommendations for other non-Africans who or will be teaching management in Africa. Pedagogically, it is important to utilize business cases that are relevant to the African context. Communicatively, it is recommended that the professor recognize some of the subtle variations between English as spoken in North America, Europe and Africa. Personally, professors are encouraged to delicately leverage their local context to enhance the learning experience.

Key words: Management pedagogy, African business education.

INTRODUCTION

In his discussion of the 2002 United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development, America (2003) makes the following provocative statement:

"The delegates discussed the policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the legacy of colonialism, slavery in Sudan, and land redistribution in Zimbabwe. In all their discussions, however, very little attention was paid to the issue that may be the most important to the development of African nations – modern advanced management education".

It is widely recognized that improving the quality and availability of management and business education will have immeasurable impact on strengthening Africa's

economies. However, more than 30 years after Safavi (1981) published a model to improve management education in Africa, there are still challenges across the continent. Yet, Bisoux (2008) argues, "Unfortunately, most African business schools are not yet up to the challenge of providing that much needed training...they are hindered by political instability and lack of public funding." Symonds (2012) asks, "...what is the business education community doing to help Africa to fulfill its true potential?" Pfefferman (2005) calls for increased donor support for African business schools.

However, there are some bright spots on the African continent and increased reason for optimism. America (2003) notes, "With the right partners and support structures, some scholars say, many of Africa's 60 full- and

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part-time Master of Business Administration and executive Master of Business Administration programs can improve their teaching, research, community service and consulting." Damast (2012) spotlighted partnerships between American, German and Chinese business schools and their African counterparts. This short communication is designed to assist some of those would-be partners, particularly professors from non-African business schools who either through partnerships or faculty exchange programs will temporarily become "expatriate professors" teaching management courses in Africa. In this paper some of the lessons learned from my experiences teaching management across the African continent will be shared. First, the various educational settings will be described. Then, some tools and techniques found to be effective were articulated.

BACKGROUND

Three teaching experiences provided the context for this paper. The first experience and the author's first exposure to African business education came at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA). At Ghana, classes were taught both in the Executive Masters in Business Administration (EMBA) and the Masters in Business Administration (MBA) programs. In each case, the course was administered during a 3-week summer intensive. After teaching in Ghana, the author was invited to participate in a continuing education program for graduates of the Lagos Business School.

This alumni gathering included a cross sample of Nigeria's public and private sector elites. Lastly and most recently, the author served as a guest lecturer for the Faculty of Management and Administration at Africa University established in 1992 by the United Methodist Church. Africa University is a private, international institution located near Mutare, Zimbabwe.

Accordingly, the teaching experiences that motivate this paper resemble the diversity of the African continent: West and Southern Africa, undergraduate students, graduate students, post-graduates, urban and suburban campuses. While each experience was different, here are some key takeaways.

LESSONS LEARNED

One of the major concerns about African business schools is pedagogical diversity and quality of teaching. Bisoux (2008) writes, "Many professors have had little exposure to modern business education, as a result, they still teach via the traditional lecture format rather than via case studies and hands-on projects."

In an article by Richard (2003), George Harley, a

former minister of transport in Ghana adds, "There are a few masters in business administration programs here, but most are mediocre. The teaching is still too theoretical and relies too heavily on textbooks and lectures. Pedagogy needs to move more toward hands-on consulting experiences and cases."

However, it is important to note that not all cases are uniform in quality or applicability. Accordingly, it is critical that the professor, especially the expatriate professor, select cases without cultural biases or where the cultural presuppositions are accessible by the African student.

There are growing numbers of publishers who produce cases with African settings. These include Harvard business publishing (United States), Ivey publishing (Canada), Darden business publishing (United States), IBS Case development center (India) and the European case clearing house (United Kingdom). Table 1 presents a list of case publishers and the various African nations represented in their case collections.

In addition, many management textbooks include mini-cases or short cases. However, these cases are often placed in the setting of the author. Accordingly, there is an abundance of American and European based case studies. Yet, these cases may be modified to become more relevant to the African social, cultural, and political environment. If teaching graduate students, students may be asked to provide a brief description of an issue that they are facing in their current positions or faced at a previous employer. These personal narratives can then provide the baseline for short cases or vignettes.

There is also a skill to teaching cases. Poorly implemented cases are just as ineffective in the classroom as poorly executed lectures. It is important to develop techniques to engage students in the case discussion. The professor must also pay careful attention to connecting the case to the core theoretical models so that students may extend the lessons learned beyond the particular setting of the case.

Since traditional lectures are the dominant pedagogical model in many African settings, one may need to include a sample case purely for the purpose of introducing the case study model. This will familiarize students with the technique and enable future case sessions to be more productive. To refine one's skills, organizations like Harvard business school's Christensen center for teaching and learning provides videos and documents for learning and using the case method. Understand that English (or French or Portuguese) is not always English (or French, or Portuguese)

It is critical and this is especially so for Americans to recognize that there can be major differences in English expressions. This goes beyond the basic differences between the seemingly odd way Americans spell words like "organizations".

Accordingly, it is equally important that one minimize native colloquialisms when lecturing or leading case

Table 1. Business case publishers.

Publisher	African nations	
Harvard Business School Publishing (USA)	Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe .	http://hbsp.harvard.edu/
European Case Clearing House (UK)	South Africa, Mauritania, Nigeria, Kenya, Botswana, Ghana, Zambia, Chad, Cameroon, Rwanda, Congo.	http://www.ecch.com/educators/
IBS Case Development Centre (India)	Egypt, Ghana, South Africa, Zimbabwe.	http://www.ibscdc.org/
Darden Business Publishing – University of Virginia (USA)	Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria, South Africa.	https://store.darden.virginia.edu/
Ivey Publishing (Canada)	South Africa, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, Kenya, Sudan, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Zambia, Botswana	https://www.iveycases.com/

discussions. This includes acronyms, or “generally accepted” abbreviations. Always clearly define any acronym before frequent usage and utilize class discussion as a vehicle to assess student apprehension. If a student can summarize a concept in their own terms, it is more probable that they have acquired the concept.

However, while the use of one’s native colloquialisms is discouraged, the acquisition and utilization of local colloquialisms is a useful mechanism for building rapport with students and for making the classroom feel more accessible for all. For example, one should attempt to learn basic greetings in the African languages. Students were both amused and pleasantly surprised to hear their visiting professor use the common Twi greeting, “Akwaaba.” By selectively inserting local expressions, the lecturer can make the conversation more engaging and interactive.

LEVERAGE (DELICATELY) YOUR PERSONAL CONTEXT

As stated earlier, it is important to focus on the managerial context of your students. However, one should be willing to supplement the learning experience by integrating your personal context and experiences. In a session on the impact of the legal and regulatory environment on organizations, the discussion focused on the significance of political parties and their relationship to business climates.

While the initial teaching goal was to highlight some of the philosophical differences between Ghana’s National Democratic Party (NDP) and New Patriotic Party (NPP),

the Masters in business administration students were more excited to discuss the then-upcoming United States presidential election featuring republican Senator John McCain and Democrat Senator Barack Obama, the son of an African immigrant to the United States. So, instead of having the students assess the comparative business friendliness of the more left leaning, New Patriotic Party versus the more conservative National Democratic Party the discussion shifted to analyzing the impact of the election of either McCain or Obama on business in the United States. Drawing the parallels between the two major political parties in the United States and those in Ghana brought the conversation full circle and accomplished the original learning objectives.

Expatriate professors bring a wealth of unique experiences to their African setting. Thus, while the need to ground pedagogy in the African experience has been stressed, one should not completely ignore your personal context. The key is to avoid treating one’s personal experience (especially for those professors from Europe and the United States) as the only experience. Instead, leverage one’s personal context to better train a new cadre of African managers who will be comfortable in a variety of cultural environments. At the conclusion of each teaching engagement on the African continent, it can be affirmed that the students will teach the professor lessons that may be as valuable as the lessons taught by the professor.

CONCLUSION

Teaching management in Africa can be a rewarding and

professionally fulfilling experience. While it is important that African business schools continue to develop indigenously, there remains a critical role for expatriate professors. These individuals can provide new perspectives not just for students but also for African faculty and administrators.

Expatriate professors can share global best practices and begin to dissolve some of the many cultural barriers that unfortunately still exist. However, the expatriate professor should not just export his or her current course without adaptation to the African context. Just as American made car with the steering wheel on the left hand side will generate a less optimal driving experience in Johannesburg, a course that fails to appreciate the uniqueness of Africa will provide a disservice to students.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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