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DBAs for GCC citizens: A call to acknowledge cultural origins and supervisors' impacts on nation building, Dr Julie Davies

UK Doctorates in Business Administration attract significant numbers of students from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. Amongst these students, some occupy highly influential roles in their home nations. While literature on management research frequently acknowledges the Americanisation of business education and research, as far as we know, no studies to date have explored how we might transcend the Anglo-American model inherent in DBA curricula in relation to GCC citizens.

In this exploratory paper, we call for DBA supervisors to guard against neo-colonial mind sets. Moreover, we stress the need for responsible supervision in supporting GCC nationals in completing theses that affect policies and practices that shape nation building in developing and emerging economies. Firstly, we highlight critiques of geocentric models of management research. Secondly, we reflect on management education in the Arab world. Finally, we discuss solutions to adopt more inclusive approaches.

Murphy & Zhu (2012) note the heavy irony in claims by North American and European management scholars to be “world leading” yet their journal articles mainly represent a dominant model of developed nations in the northern hemisphere. As a consequence, Ibarra-Colado (2006: 476) argues that “the Anglo-Euro-Centric narrative becomes insufficient and useless” outside its original geographical context. Furthermore, Barkema et al. (2015: 461) recognise that 60% of the world’s population lives in Asia, however, they state that “Our review of the literature from the East suggests that there is scant new theory or understanding about management in the Middle East, India, Singapore, Philippines, Indonesia, or other Eastern countries, particularly in our leading management journals.” Clearly, this presents a significant opportunity to expand our knowledge base in terms of informing and being informed by professional doctorates amongst students outside North America and Europe.

In the specific context of the Arabian Gulf, Juusola et al. (2015: 348) observe how the emergence of business schools in Dubai since mid-2000 was based on a “practical, utilitarian, and economic growth-driven university environment.” They conceptualize the Americanisation of UAE business schools in five forms of ‘imitation, transmutation, compromization, imposterization, and immunization.’ Burden-Leahy (2009: 530) acknowledges that in the UAE: “higher education can be seen within the modernising debate, signalling the new nation-state’s intention to emulate the best practice of the developed world (with, perhaps, implications of civilising the citizens) and to ensure that the new state can take its place in the world arena.” As a counterpoint, Donn & Manthri (2010: 156) warn of the loss of indigenous knowledge through Westernisation of education in the GCC region (where there is high local unemployment and high reliance on expatriates); they are concerned about the creation of a “magistracy”, i.e. “a cohort of people, key players, policy makers who travel between countries and create options, define agendas and deliver product” based on G8 nations’ perspectives. As a result of this ideology, Branine & Pollard (2010) suggest that local management in Arab and Islamic countries is hampered by an excessive focus on Western business practices. It is interesting that in their study of Lebanese business students, Neal & Finlay (2008) explored issues of equity, tolerance, accountability, consultation and transparency advocated in American management textbooks and liberal education and how these were understood by Middle

Eastern students in a patriarchal society. Instead of direct harm, they found evidence of passivity and non-application with many students simply failing to critique American management concepts or to use them in their own contexts.

Given these flaws in existing paradigms, we suggest a need for greater contextual sensitivity amongst DBA supervisors. For instance, from a South African viewpoint Nkomo (2015) emphasizes the importance of adapting education to support nation building for states undergoing transformation. Davis (2015: 186-187) argues that business school researchers must demonstrate their sense of responsibility beyond producing novel and counterintuitive articles: "Businesses and governments are making decisions now that will shape the life chances of workers, consumers, and citizens for decades to come. If we want to shape those decisions for public benefit, on the basis of rigorous research, we need to declare ourselves." Several commentators offer potential solutions. Schwabenland (2011) recommends that the management educator should remain open to surprises and build into learning activities opportunities to be surprised by indigenous managers. Tsui (2004) proposes strategies to carry out high quality indigenous research which generates contextualized knowledge and also contributes to global knowledge. More specifically, Abuznaid (2006) argues for consideration of the national backgrounds of Arab student, including religious influences on management while Meleis (1982) advises that western educators appreciate Arab students' particular needs such as for affiliation.

Based on our experiences of working with managers in the Arab Gulf, we are currently designing and piloting a survey and series of one-to-one interviews with supervisors, students, and employers that seek to understand how greater cultural sensitivity can be embedded within the DBA curriculum. The purpose is to provide (un)successful case studies that illustrate an appreciation of the impact of professional doctorates in UK business schools on capacity building in the GCC region.

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