

THE PARADOX OF EMERGING UNIVERSITIES

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Knowledge industries are a significant element of 21st Century economies. Over the last 25 years, Universities, the original knowledge industry, have become increasingly important engines of growth and indeed economic enterprises in their own right (National Governors Association, 2001; Ysuf & Nabeshima, 2007; Lane & Johnstone 2012; Shaw, 2013; Breznitz, 2014). Many countries are trying to restructure and re-invigorate their higher education sector in order to ensure pertinence, wealth creation and social cohesion. As we move further into the Asian Century (ADB, 2011; Blumenthal et al, 2015) the understanding that improvements in the higher educational system facilitates economic growth (Jayasuriya, 2012; Lane, 2014; Boys, 2014) has resulted in a wide range of new university models being implemented (Yang, 2014; Arab News, 2015).

These universities vary widely in form, content, and context; some emulating directly established models and others emboldened to create distinctive models which reflect the regional imperative (Haynie, 2015; Kamel & Kazi, 2015). As a result there has been marked growth in the number of new universities especially in the MENA, Central and Southern Asia regions (Havergal, 2015; Plackett, 2015). These universities, at least in the initial stages, are largely staffed and led by expatriates. Often they are from the English speaking world and encompass a mixture of first-time expatriates, the wider diaspora, and self-declared citizens of the world. The challenge such institutions face is building a real system out of the imaginations of many different stakeholders. Universities, like many knowledge industries require bricks and mortar but it is the ethos, insights, and impact of the individuals who inhabit these spaces that produce value.

This contribution reports on the experiences of building *ab initio* Nazarbayev University, a 5-year old research university in Central Asia (NU, 2015). Like many new universities, it has a largely expatriate faculty and a largely local non-academic workforce. The development of such an institution requires the leadership team of the institution to understand the dynamics and efficiencies of such a cross-cultural workplace in order to meet its goals.

After outlining the institution, the following sections address four specific examples of where the cross-cultural interactions impact the building of the organization and when and how the leadership of this largely expatriate faculty needs to take action. Finally some tentative conclusions about the nature of expatriate leadership in knowledge-intensive enterprises are made.

The Case Study: Nazarbayev University, Astana, Kazakhstan

The Republic of Kazakhstan is almost 25 years old. One of the *Commonwealth of Independent States* (CIS) formed when the former Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, it has a large land mass (the 9th largest country in the world) and a population of around 18 million (CIA, 2015; KZ Embassy in US, 2015). Its main economic activity is based around oil, minerals, and agriculture. It is considered an upper-middle income country. By the standards of the region, it has managed the transition from a collectivist economy well and is peaceful and productive (Aitzhanova, Katsu, Linn, & Yezhov, 2014). The Kazakhstani 2050 Strategic Development Plan (Nazarbayev, 2012) has education, research and innovation as key elements. The reform of the education system is an important aspect of that (Ministry of Education and Science, 2011) and the creation of a new model university as an exemplar of best practice is one of the ways this will be delivered.

Nazarbayev University aims to create a research university in Central Asia fit for the challenges of the 21st Century (NU, 2015). It incorporates a University, Science Park, Innovation Hub, and closely-integrated national research centres. It is based on the concept of partnership; in this case involving 6 of the top 30 universities in the world. Each partner is aligned with one of the

Schools of the University and the institution is broadly but not exclusively focused on STEM-based subjects and the professions (NU, 2015).

The partnership model allows each school to have access to outstanding support within their domain area. Typically partners in the initial stages provide comprehensive support including visiting faculty, curricula, graduate students admission, and faculty recruitment advice. Over a period of about three years this evolves in such a way that the University partner develops into an equal in the relationship rather than as a service provider. This partnership model is intrinsic to the project of building a new university in the Republic of Kazakhstan. We did not wish to create an overseas branch of a campus nor did we believe the academic city model such as found in Qatar (Kumon, 2014; Neil, 2015; TAMU, 2015) to be right for Kazakhstan. The goal was and is to create an in-country capability shaped by the needs of the nation and a lasting part of the on-going transformation of Kazakhstan's economy and society.

Wealth creation, knowledge generation, and education are given equal importance in the model. The bulk of the funding in the early stages comes from central government but over the longer term, it is anticipated that costs will be met broadly by an equal mixture of fees, endowment income, and research work.

Nazarbayev University is an aspirational institution. It admits 9% of those who apply and commits over a hundred million dollars a year in research projects and infrastructure. In 2015 the University has 3 large schools and 4, smaller, graduate-only schools. The University currently offers 16 majors, 15 master's programmes, 2 PhD programmes, and 1 MD programme. All this has been put in place by the local staff together with 229 Faculty, 7 Deans, and 2 Vice-Provosts recruited over the last three years from around the world. It now has approximately 3000 students and graduated the first cohort in June 2015.

Nazarbayev University is uniquely independent of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Authorized by an act of the Kazakhstan Majilis, it has independent authority to award degrees. Its charter is remarkably similar to many western institutions, with a high board, a supervisory board, and a guarantee of institutional autonomy (NU, 2015). The University Charter has created Academic and Research Councils. These are faculty-led top-level bodies with powers to define and approve the university research and education missions. They provide a best-practice and unique in Kazakhstan model that balances the academic and executive governance of the institution. They also guarantee the relevance and independence of our teaching and research. Governance as defined by the charter is similar to that of a typical North American University with faculty involvement and separation of powers among the President and Provost.

The Cross-Cultural Perspective

This contribution adopts a practitioner view of the implications and challenges of cross-cultural leadership. It tries to articulate these issues and challenges by highlighting four specific examples which are germane to new institutions and where a mixture of policy, HR, academic needs, and local requirements all intermix. Each example is introduced within the context of Nazarbayev University and the challenges facing its employees.

An Example: Tacit Assumptions

Higher education institutions like many other organizations in the creative and knowledge sectors, operate on a vast array of tacit assumptions that 'everybody knows' and therefore nobody needs to communicate (Trowler, 2008). These are built up over a long period and sometimes reflect the stability of their mission and the certainty of their purpose. For example, Oxford University was up and running long before the Aztec Empire was established.

They operate in a devolved manner, where practitioners or 'creatives' are permitted significant autonomy in what they do and how they do it. Merit is recognized by peer review and change

managed by a sometimes lengthy process of reaching consensus. It is all worked very well where time, tradition, and institutional culture has permitted it. Also such institutions are selective and it is often highly-competitive to obtain a faculty position there. As a consequence, they tend to admit those with a track record of effective working and a high level of alignment with their own tacit assumptions. New universities in emerging economies are less able to do this.

What about new institutions and indeed those in regions where those traditions either never existed or where they are quite different? Cardinal Newman's (in Newman Reader, 2001; Mongrain, 2013) vision of a university of self-governing scholars doesn't play well in a region where population is hungry for knowledge, where private and public sector requires systematic reform, and where the expectations for research are for going from zero to hero in less than a generation. It's too slow, too solipsistic, too expensive, and just too obscure for the rapidly expanding economies of the east and the south.

New universities need new models and new management. Emerging institutions in emerging regions need models of culture, values, and expectations that are articulated more explicitly than elsewhere and a leadership structure capable of implementing it. A frequently made mistake is to assume that transplanting an American or European model will succeed because it has succeeded elsewhere (Salmi, 2010). People involved in transplantation surgery will tell you the problem is not the donated organ: that's usually been chosen because it is healthy and strong. The challenge is in managing the recipients' response and the tendency of its own immune system to reject the graft. This analogy seems applicable to higher education.

Without being explicit about institutions' values, chaos can arise even when the individuals involved have an outstanding track record elsewhere. Entropy increases because tacit assumptions are not mutual, hence suddenly people are vexed by other's behavior and unless clear intervention occurs, in the worst cases it can turn into something resembling *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954) with Ph.D's. So one of the ways of addressing this is by being explicit about the values of an institution right at the start and taking more time than one might imagine necessary to repeat and reinforce those values through individual, collective, and administrative words and deeds.

Of course the first thing is to define those values. Surprisingly, in many other areas such as collegiality, excellence, and inclusivity, a new university with culturally diverse, multinational faculty will have at first sight few shared tacit assumptions. For example, and perhaps reflecting the author's role, age and cultural background, civility seems a natural tacit assumption. If you have worked at an uncivil organization you will readily appreciate it. However, it's not universally accepted; the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) considers civility as incompatible with academic freedom (AAUP, n.d.; Euben, 2002; Thorne, 2013). This seems a good example of the gap in mutual understanding that can be faced. One might be tempted at this point to throw ones hands up in exasperation and tackle something less Sisyphean but perseverance can pay off. Working in groups with people will get you to see that it is not the values themselves that are askance so much as the motivation for those values and the way they are articulated. It is slow work but careful debate and dialogue can steadily take you to a place where a new institution can state with clarity, 'this is who we are and this is what we believe in'.

Without talking this talk, institutions constantly stumble over themselves as beliefs and the expression of those beliefs continue to be misunderstood. It is a conversation that has to be had, yet too often we skip over it in the rush to lead expatriate-intensive organizations. The Nazarbayev University experience has been the dynamic between three different constituencies. Each of them valid and at the start at least, each of them adhering to their own perspective.

The first is the western model of universities as being autonomous bodies of scholars and that if you give scholars freedom, then the maximum utility will be derived. The second is the Kazakhstani model of universities being centrally organized and the education ministry having close control over the academic delivery. Furthermore, as context, in the former USSR, which

defines the heritage of the local Kazakhstani higher education system, universities teach: they do not research. So the linkage of research and teaching is both new and challenging. In an attempt to address this, a suitable first step some institutions are considering the co-location of research centres and academic schools on the same campus. The third perspective is of the leadership of the university who are there to represent the government's interest. An institution such as Nazarbayev University is a symbol and source of national pride.

Indeed, travelling through the regions, I am humbled by the trust and faith local populations have in my colleagues to deliver something of pride and value. It is expressed regularly and unabashedly. The university leadership perspective is to ensure political and consequential financial support for the institution by being responsive to the needs of the government and civil authority. This perspective can often result in mission creep, sudden changes, and unexpected intervention at multiple levels.

It is little surprise then that these beliefs interact with each other in both productive and less-productive ways. For example, there is a view that faculty should do research within a research centre and subject to the organizational constraints of that centre. Most typically this would include the centre selecting the project. That is an unusual approach for some faculty. Another example would be the desire of faculty to work with faculty from other universities without obtaining the endorsement of the leadership of the institution.

However there are also extraordinarily positive, not always serendipitous events. One example of this is the way in which research in the university can be directly communicated to senior governmental leaders and approval for further work very rapidly reached. All these examples constantly test the tacit assumptions that faculty, administration, and leadership have. The better organizations trust to the skills and flexibility of their people to deal with this. The best explicitly acknowledge these issues and actively manage it.

An Example: Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is a topic regularly discussed by faculty at universities. It is a term that is used loosely and is sometimes meant whatever it is convenient to mean. Given its importance to successful universities, this section contextualizes the way in which academic freedom is articulated by expatriate faculty and the ways in which it is of most utility to the wider stakeholders of a university.

Academic freedom as defined in the 19th Century Newman-ian, Humboldt-ian, or US-led liberal arts models (Rothblatt, 1997; Anderson, 2006), namely a notional, arguably mythical University is in practice a culturally defined concept. This means that the unthinking application of this at best partial, transitory and at worst mythical model to nascent institutions in very different regions can easily be misconstrued.

For newly emergent institutions in rapidly developing regions, the notion of academic freedom needs to be explored in a more nuanced way if it is to provide the bulwark and lodestone of excellence as it can often do in more settled circumstances. Institutions and especially their faculty representatives can bind themselves in lengthy debate on this topic but fundamentally academic freedom in the 21st Century is better understood in its original incarnation (Menand, 1996; Nelson, 2010) as the ability of an institution to chart its own course without undue influence from outside bodies. Like it or not that's the academic freedom most pertinent to emerging institutions.

Whether a university has academic freedom or not is a topic regularly brought up in faculty-administration debate. It is true in both settled and emerging universities there may always be the case that at the outer edges of scholarship and pedagogy, there may be constraints on approaches that can be taken and topics that are difficult to teach or study. This is always a topic of intense debate and individuals will legitimately adopt different positions depending on their

background and role. In practice, the complications occur when those who perhaps have elevated the position above its utility argue that since one topic cannot be explored therefore academic freedom does not exist. It is an argument that is at best puerile and at worst corrosive. To use an analogy you have the freedom to cough but you do not have the freedom to cough in my face. I would argue it is pertinent to focus on what can be addressed and the utility it permits.

When expatriate scholars talk of academic freedom, they sometimes bundle together two distinct concepts. The first is the notion that researchers should be able to address any topic they like without fear or favor (but with adequate funding). The second is faculty governance. This undoubtedly works well for the elite universities of the world where top-class researchers and outstanding students work in a resource-rich and mission-sympathetic environment. Less selective, more nascent institutions may experience different outcomes.

Most universities are by definition not elite. New universities in developing countries are especially dissimilar from the top 40 world-ranked institutions. It is difficult to persuade funders of the proposition that scarce research money, in a country with so many other pressing needs, should be spent on expatriate researchers who are perceived of uncertain fealty and insufficiently aware of the needs of the country. Research agendas will be tightly defined and the institution will be expected to comply with this framework. In addition it is certainly possible that the cultural and or religious context defines boundaries of debate and challenge.

The second element of this unbundled academic freedom is faculty governance. It is important. It is so important it needs to be implemented systematically through the structures and processes of every institution. The question then is given very different institutions, in very different circumstances, and at very different stages of development does a single size fit all? The answer to this rhetorical question is No. A well-established institution rich in tacit assumptions, settled in its operation and with a regular and incremental pattern of development is quite different from an 18-month institution yet to graduate its first students and only half its schools operating (as was, for example, Nazarbayev University in 2012). The balance between the consultative, the executive, and the participatory elements of faculty governance clearly needs to reflect this.

Academic freedom is undoubtedly advantageous. The challenge that expatriate leaders have is to frame the abstract notion within a specific context to permit free thinking and doing in a new and still evolving University and region. This freedom has to acknowledge the investment the host country has made, the pride with which the citizens of the nation have in such a bold endeavor, and the hope that through the creation of new knowledge, economic growth will result, employment opportunities found and prosperity generated. Those are the freedoms the host nation is seeking.

An Example: Administrative Misconceptions

It is not unusual, indeed sometimes expected, that in new institutions administrative procedures do not go smoothly. This is compounded by the fact that in expatriate institutions the employer plays a larger role in the housing, childcare, healthcare, and travel arrangements for faculty. Such issues can matter a lot to individuals especially when in a novel environment. So when it does go wrong, people feel upset, insecure, and sometimes angry. In a contemporary western-environment people are expected to acknowledge their own mistakes, apologize, and learn from them.

The act of apologizing usually brings the matter to an end in western cultures. In contrast, in Central and Southern Asia where there is a culture of 'face' (Drake, n.d.; Kim & Cohen, 2010) it is hugely painful and embarrassing for people to lose face by apologizing and they can sometimes go to lengths to avoid this. Furthermore, in such parts of the world there often exists a formal bureaucracy and a member of staff who has to apologize may have disciplinary sanctions or a financial penalty against him or her as a result. So for both practical and emotional reasons an apology is avoided.

It is possible to see an illuminating sequence with an expatriate member of faculty, more and more intensely seeking a specific apology and the (usually more junior and likely less well paid) staff member evading this with increasing anxiety. One does not realize that an apology can end the matter and the other that an apology can imply much more to the apologizer than temporary embarrassment. It's a dance you may see repeated time and time again.

Part of the leadership response is the well-established recognition that a multi-cultural environment should be flexible, tolerant of ambiguity, and not over-reacting. That's certainly a right thing to do as it will mitigate the effects. There is a bigger challenge beyond this, however. Many international companies prepare their staff for expatriate employment well in advance before the start of the contract. The initial cross-cultural talks from HR and others deal with the issue from a practical first day perspective (Chew, 2004; Vance & Paik, 2015). In some organizations, including universities, it tends to end there. What is needed to see the task of adjustment as an on-going one and a central part of the employees' duties and responsibilities. Regular workshops will help; buddying with local employees will help. However for this to succeed the individual employees need to be personally accountable for this as an integral part of their duties and in their continuing professional development. Consequentially their competencies in inter-cultural conflict resolution may need to be appraised in terms of their progress for example through the annual performance review. Many institutions are some way from this today.

An Example: Organizational Development

Faculty at a university have 3 types of duties: teaching, research and service. Teaching and research activities usually are similar to faculty member's prior experiences. At Nazarbayev University we expect faculty to spend some 20% of their time providing service so it is a not a minor component of their responsibilities. Moreover, service in a new university involves contributing to the management or development of the institution's administrative activities. Given the nascence of the institution the balance of activity is towards organizational development not administering any existing system or process.

The faculty of Nazarbayev University originates from 43 different countries as indicated by their current passport. While some represent the regional diaspora of the last 20 years, the bulk of the faculty have been trained in established universities based on the traditional western model. Furthermore, as is common with new universities in developing regions, the faculty tend to be at the start or end of their career. Independent of background or longevity the unifying characteristic of our faculty is that the bulk of them come from time-honored universities that have long established their tacit and implicit values and exist in a society with a reasonably settled view as to what higher education should be like and look like. As a consequence, few of them have any experience in building an institution *ab initio* and consequentially lack insight to do so. Furthermore not all are equally inspired to do so. This sets the scene for a particular organizational dynamic.

The dynamic commences with the legitimate request for a faculty governance model. To this is added the circumstance that there is often insufficient administrative capacity during the start-up phase. As a result faculty, sometimes even the most junior, need to undertake service that involves designing and implement core administrative processes of the institution. Some see this as part of the excitement of a new institution. Some do not. Whatever their predisposition or enthusiasm, it is not the usual role that faculty service plays in a university but is unavoidable in start-up institutions. Moreover the faculty of new institutions are mainly junior and while enthusiastic mostly, they naturally lack experience. The cross-cultural element informs all this: people arrive from different institutions with differing management ethos. Ideas about accountability, deference to authority, and communication will vary widely.

The service element of new institutions with a multi-cultural faculty continues to be an unresolved challenge for my own institution and I suspect some others. Core administrative processes were designed and operated by those we had appointed to different roles. The consistency, quality, robustness, scalability, and interoperability of the processes we design are challenged by the rate of growth in student numbers and the stakeholder-requested broadening of our mission. There is no straightforward solution to this other than acquiring leadership and management capability faster than one acquires faculty. Some startup universities have explicitly created the management team prior to admitting a single student or appointing faculty, hopefully eliminating or mitigating the above issues (ISIS-Innovation, 2014; Yachay University, 2015). We could not. Even in the circumstances of having a fully formed management team in advance, cross-cultural issues will continue to impinge. The balance between the executive and the consultative, the ways in which agreements are negotiated and implemented, the style of communication, the perceived separation between the authority of the post and that of the post-holder all vary widely.

Particularly pertinent here is that the typical US University model is towards one end of the continuum. It is effective in that setting but it is designed to maintain institutions not construct them. Many emerging institutions are in regions without that tradition and almost always expect results quickly. It seems typical that a more managerialist view emerges from new institutions. This conflicts with the more devolved models many faculty are familiar with. Sadly, this can sometimes result in conflict between faculty and administration. A deal of distrust can emerge from an administration which is genuinely trying to build the necessary core processes and a faculty used to considerably more autonomy as permitted and enabled by a well-established and robust system.

To the author it is most remarkable that even seasoned higher education specialists genuinely believe that faculty can create a new university. It is a little like believing surgeons, nurses, and osteopaths are the people best placed to construct a hospital. Over the longer term this can settle down. Once adequate processes are in place, the institution feels more settled and the requirement for this managerialist approach can slowly diminish. Furthermore the type of faculty that join an established university is different, they are mid-career, experienced yet still willing to learn new methods. This helps too. The initial stages however, are certainly full of passion.

Concluding Remarks

Rapidly developing knowledge-intensive institutions with predominance of expatriate workers face challenges different in scope and scale compared to their more established equivalents. These challenges include firstly, the work environment not being underpinned by a set of well-established tacit assumptions. Much of the effectiveness of the traditional informal, unstructured work-environment of many knowledge-based institutions relies on these shared assumptions as a means of ensuring order and progress. Secondly, the traditional academic culture of deferment to subject expertise and the subsidiary role of service means that the rate of change needed by new institutions is not deliverable by models of faculty or shared governance. Thirdly, the need to build new structures rather than evolve existing ones requires conceptually different skills and markedly greater effort than the well-established collegial consensus-based model can provide.

These three challenges leads to the paradox of expatriate leadership in knowledge-intensive industries, namely that the very things which are argued by faculty to provide the creativity, flair and insight in universities, are not compatible with the structures, processes, and timescale necessary to deliver that model. The challenge of expatriate leadership is therefore to resolve this paradox or at least acknowledge and manage its consequences. Leading expatriate-knowledge intensive industries requires a much more formal and project-oriented mindset than faculty are sometimes comfortable with. Furthermore, it is not entirely frank to claim that this is a temporary set of affairs and once fully-developed the institution will resemble a traditional university

model. Firstly this is because rapidly developing regions want a university fit for their needs not one that fits an abstracted model. Their needs tend to be specific, short- or medium-term, and subject to revision or extension. This requires an action-oriented and directed approach. Secondly the timescales to create a university that is considered internationally competitive is lengthy. Pohang University of Science and Technology (POSTECH) in South Korea (POSTECH, 2015) was founded in 1986 but took 25 years (and the shortest time on record) to break into the top 100 universities in the world, ranked as 66th in 2015 (TimesHigherEd, 2015). So it will be quite some time before an institution is considered research-intensive. Thirdly, such entities usually require significant governmental resources which imply scrutiny by media, political bodies, and governmental apparatus. This too increases pressures to have a more project-oriented and accountable organization. All these factors run counter to the collegial system where the balance between the consultative and the executive is strongly predisposed to the former.

So what has to be done to resolve or manage this paradox? It is important to acknowledge and accept it rather than behave as it were temporary or peripheral. Be clear and be public about this and encourage a debate around its implications at all levels of the institution. Moreover, the nascence of the institution, the faculty skillset and the regional expectations require a much more explicit and managerialist approach to the construction, leadership, and operation of the institution. This will incur significant internal pushback from faculty and other academic stakeholders but it needs to be done in order to maintain the positive growth path of the institution in a manner and timeliness that satisfies national and regional stakeholders. Finally, the leadership of the institution has to try and build as much of the organizational processes, leadership, and management teams before recruiting faculty or admitting students.

Leading expatriate universities is a race. It's a race to acquire faculty faster than you acquire students, acquire leadership faster than you acquire faculty, and acquire the organizational processes and methods faster than you acquire leadership. Experience at Nazarbayev University has shown if you win that race, your other problems won't matter much. And if you don't win, your other problems won't matter at all.

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