Chapter 4
Organizational Metaphors and the Evaluation of Higher Education Programs, Management Practices, and Change Processes: A UAE Case Study

Melanie Van Den Hoven
Emirates College for Advanced Education, UAE

David R. Litz
Emirates College for Advanced Education, UAE

ABSTRACT

Utilizing a conceptual framework based on Morgan’s (1998) organizational metaphors, this chapter reports on a qualitative study conducted with faculty members to evaluate their experience of a new program and influence change processes in a teacher-training higher educational institution in Abu Dhabi, UAE, during a period of major educational restructuring. With respect to metaphors generated in response to overall perceptions of organizational dynamics, management practices, and change processes, the study demonstrates tensions surrounding access to channels of communication and decision making within the local educational context; however, no overt concerns on culture shock are found. Moreover, many metaphors are consistent with Morgan’s original constructs, whereas a number are unique to the localized context. Organizational metaphors may thus be used as a feedback mechanism to guide systemic decision making around change initiatives within this institution, and to stimulate management research in this region and other higher educational settings.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0457-3.ch004
INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the major transformation of the K-12 and tertiary education sectors in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) by reporting on an exploratory study on an important dimension of the internationalization of higher education: the experience of foreign instructors.

Since the 1970s, the UAE has increasingly invested in English-medium federal colleges and universities, as well as international branch campuses. Consequently, the UAE has developed a great need for mobile, foreign academics (Knight, 2011, 2013, 2014). The present study targets perceptions of organizational change in a higher educational institution from the perspective of international faculty members who have sought limited-term employment in the UAE as expatriates. Previous studies have examined the individual experience of transitioning to a new academic institution in terms of culture shock (Schoepp, 2011). The current work thus addresses perceptions of managerial practices and organizational change to offer insight into a feedback mechanism relevant for leading an educated, multicultural workforce through change processes in the education sector.

Academic employment in the UAE is framed by rapid educational reform and different management practices, which shape the organizational culture of higher education (Kirk, 2010). Hired on limited-term contracts, foreign academic faculty from a range of countries are at the coalface of educational change (Knight, 2011). For academics in UAE higher educational institutions, a limited-term contract could mean making the most of a short-term commitment. Challenges include pressure to research and publish with a relative lack of academic freedom (Chapman, Austin, Farah, Wilson, & Ridge, 2014), high faculty turnover rates (Schoepp, 2011), Emiratization policies perceived as limiting promotion (Chapman et al., 2014), and students with insufficient English language proficiency (Martin, 2003). More recently, this sector faced restructuring of university programs owing to intensified accreditation processes (Smith, 2009) and threats to job security (Chapman et al., 2014). Arguably, within such a dynamic work environment, the texture of power relations amplifies the need for feedback mechanisms that can reach key decision-makers from the bottom up.

Drawing on Morgan’s (1998) conceptual framework of organizational metaphors based on machines, organisms, brains, cultures, political systems, psychic prisons, flux and transformation, instruments of domination, as well as insights from change theory and the social construction of reality, this chapter examines feedback on change and decision-making processes via the metaphors generated by multicultural faculty at a teacher-training educational institution in Abu Dhabi, UAE, during a period of rapid societal transformation. This study aims to draw attention to the insights offered by one feedback mechanism that can benefit educational leaders who must not only contend with organizational change in educational institutions but also the myriad ways that academics respond to the change process.

RATIONALE

The rationale for the study is threefold. First, it targets an under-researched population. Despite the recent draw of international academics to Gulf States (i.e., Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, all members of the Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC]), few scholarly publications in educational management have investigated expatriate academics and their experiences related to the internationalization processes of higher education organizations in the Gulf. Despite massive investments into developing this sector, research on the impacts to academics has been limited. Further, examina-