

Do Local Trainee Pilots of UAE Suffer from More Stress than their Counterpart International Students: Case of an UAE Airline

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Abstract

Many previous studies have analysed the level of task and relationship orientation of different cultures and their affect on stress (Sikander, Mujtaba and Akhtar 2012). Although Stress is quite normal at workplace and influences the level of performance of individuals, however, it becomes much more important when sensitive professions like Flying have to be analysed. Cultural differences of students perhaps could influence the stress perception. There is dearth of studies in this area. The sample for the study included students undergoing aviation courses as sponsored and self-paid and to analyse the various relationships. It was expected that the difference in results will be a contribution to the literature and will also provide useful input to design the courses for aviation students belonging to different cultures. This study focused on the differences of 40 Emiratis and 20 non-Emiratis (expat) aviation students. It appears that the expat students focused more on task orientation than relationships. They also had higher level of stress scores from work overload. In this paper, literature on the country of survey, stress influence on flying and workload of pilots and recommendations for subsequent research is included.

Keywords

Aviation, Stress, UAE, Pilots, Task

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1. Introduction

Culture plays an important role in developing the personalities of people. Many authors agree that human behaviour is seriously influenced by culture (Sikander, 2012; Mujtaba, 2011, Habib, 2011). Communication protocols also differ from context to context and culture to culture. Besides the culture background of individuals, organisational culture also plays an important role in defining the behaviours. This study explores the perception of stress and orientation of students towards tasks and relationship could help identify managers to effectively manage a multicultural workforce, besides developing a shared value system in the organisation.

This research attempts to determine the orientation of stress, task orientation and relationship orientation between the

sponsored and non sponsored aviation students at a University. A similar study was conducted by the author to compare the behaviours of Australian and Pakistanis (Sikander, Mujtaba & Afaza, 2012). It is suggested to undertake future research to compare the results of these two studies.

2. Literature Background

In 1992, Neil Howe and William Strauss theorized that each generation contains their own common characteristics. These authors idealized that the millennial generation will have a strong sense of community on both the local and global front

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(Howe & Strauss, 1992). More recently, educational sociologist Andy Furlong described this new generation as optimistic, engaged, and team players in a larger context applying this to both the workplace and their personal lives. (Furlong, 2013) Commentary on the millennial's performance in the workplace argues that the millennial generation shares a lack of manners and morals, and they are incapable of effectively communicating in a multi-generational workforce (Payment, 2008).

For the purpose of this review, we will define the millennial generation as "motivated to contribute on a global scale to the good of humanity, whilst remaining optimistic and placing value on relationships and team work". Due to this desire to help that is held by this recent generation, we can theorize that an effective and well-executed CSR program will impact the attraction to a company both from an employment perspective however also an investor's perspective as well.

In May 2006, Cone Inc. and AMP Insights collaboratively developed a study into the insight of the millennial generation which included a survey of 1,800 participants who were born between the year-range of 1979 and 2001. This study indicated that 61 percent of the respondents were inclined to add something to the society. A heavy majority also indicated that their organisations also have to play a role in this achievement. A substantial number showed unwillingness to work with firms which do not care for the society. This provides us with a tangible result with an early indication that going forward a company's CSR program should be continuously developed and a key component of a company's culture (Cone, Inc & AMP Insights, 2006). In addition to these comments, millennials, as consumers, have an expectation of business operators to demonstrate significant contributions to society, a community or a philanthropic cause. Failure to do so may result in this generation detaching itself away from a corporation and using a competitor's service (Maignan, Ferrell, & Ferrell, 2005). It is assumed through this research that the millennial generation focuses less on the monetary value of objects or services, and more on the contribution to society as a whole, hence, consumers may one day be capable of holding a company responsible for the ethical decisions it makes through lack of trust in the brand and slowing profitability.

Despite Organisational Culture being a popular topic of debate in the recent decade, we must first recognise that there are many differing views in the academic community surrounding this topic and as such, there is no formalised agreement in the definition on what function Organisational Culture does or should do. For example, Davis (1990) argues that a culture is simply the values and beliefs of an organisation. More recently, Schein recommends that a more

complex definition should be used to describe Organisational Culture that includes values, symbols, tacit understandings, rites, rituals, shared assumptions, shared understandings and traditions (Schein, 2006). Other researchers in the field argue that by definition, an organization would have multiple cultures or sub-cultures which broken away from the overall culture which they sit within (Trice & Beyer, 1993).

Low context cultures mostly the Western ones rely more on formal and documented words in the context of communications. This study relates to a high context culture to determine stress overload, tasks and relationships orientation. A similar study was conducted to compare the behaviours of Australian and Pakistani (Sikander, Mujtaba & Afaza, 2012) which will used to compare the results of this study for future research.

3. Expat Community

The expat community in Emirates is dominated by people from the Indian subcontinent and nearby middle-east countries. There are westerners as well but occupy a smaller slice in the work force. The expat community usually migrate for either greener pastures or as part of company relocation. In Emirates, most of the expat community send their children to local universities as it is cheaper to do that. As such in the universities also the major dominance of expat students is from the countries mentioned above.

4. Orientation

Optimization of performance at workplace is a constant challenge confronting many managers. Besides providing motivational attractions, a knowledge of culture of people at work could go a long way in influencing their behaviours as well as increasing productivity. Focus on organizational culture alone or the national culture would do no good. There is a dire need to address both these cultures simultaneously in order to enhance performance of individuals and of the organization. A win-win for each of these approaches could go a long way in meeting the social responsibilities of many organisations – the concept of shared value. The dominant personalities and task and relationship orientation of people should also be a concern for the managers of today (Mujtaba and Alsua, 2011, p.2). Equally important is the role of the leaders (Kagitcibasi, 1994, Watkins and Liu, 1996). The context of the culture also influences the behaviours of people. It is expected that besides the context, other variables like, age, gender and management experience should also play a role on both task and relationship orientation. This study will touch on the gender effect as well.

5. Stress Overload

Besides the task and relationship orientation, stress overload also influences the performance of individuals in an organization. Stress could be described as a feeling of tension or exhaustion associated with work overload or overly demanding work (Iqbal and Kokash 2011, p. 137). Afza, Mujtaba, and Habib suggest that stress affects both individual and organisational performance (2011). In a competitive environment, stressors can shape the decision making abilities of leaders in an organisation (Nguyen and Mujtaba 2011, p. 238).

Similar to an organisational setting, stress could influence students in educational institutions. This has been a subject of interest to researchers. Each student will experience some stress while undergoing a course (Robertson and Ruiz 2010, p. 115). Some stressors have been identified sources of stress for college students and include scholastic achievement, academic work load employment needs, financial pressures time management and social readjustment as they transition to college life (Robertson and Ruiz 2010, p. 115). There is a multitude of moderating variables that may impact the level of stress but this study attempts to assess whether Expat aviation students report low to severe levels of stress associated with academic task overload.

6. Study Methodology

It was decided to explore the responses of Emirati aviation students on their task and relationship orientation and also their perception on stress. The students were broken down into two samples: one those who were sponsored by ABC Airways and other fee paying expat students. Peter G. Northouse's (2007) Style Questionnaire was selected to be offered to the students. The ratings extended from 1 "never" to 5 "always". The ranges were defined as follows:

SCORES	DESCRIPTIONS
45-50	Very high
40-44	High
35-39	Moderately high
30-34	Moderately low
25-29	Low
10-24	Very low

The Stress Variables were adapted from Hyde and Allen's conceptual analysis of overload (1996, pp. 29-30). The questionnaire included ten variables, and for each of them the respondent needed to indicate the degree to which it indicated their behaviour. A rating of 1 means "Strongly

disagree" and a rating of 5 means "Strongly agree". Following ranges were used to determine the level of stress (adapted from Hyde and Allen's 1996 book):

40– 50	severe stress from overload.
30– 39	high stress from overload.
20 – 29	moderate stress from overload.
19 and below	low stress from overload.

The major research question for this study was to determine whether Expat aviation students are stressed and whether they score high on the relationship orientation or task orientation. Another aspect of this study was to determine whether Expats have higher or lower scores on the relationship orientation or task orientation when compared with their local Emiratis counterparts. The hypotheses developed for this study are as follows:

H 1: Expat aviation pilot students will have similar scores for relationship and task orientations.

H2: Emirati aviation cadet pilot students will have similar scores for task orientation as expat aviation students.

H 3: Emirati aviation cadet pilot students will have similar scores for relationship orientation as expat aviation students.

H 4: Emirati aviation cadet pilot students will have similar scores for work overload stress perception as expat aviation students.

For the purpose of this research, after seeking approval, the questionnaires were distributed in the class to all the 80 aviation students undergoing a Bachelor in Flying course at a local University in UAE. The respondents were the entire cohort of aviation students at the University. Most of the local Emirati students are already employed by a major airline, whereas, some locals and all the expats are self funded students. A good portion of the population was made up of the students in their teens. It was decided to use the entire population for the survey. The respondents were asked to voluntarily complete the questionnaire and return it to their class representative, the researcher was not present in the class during this activity. Out of total surveys distributed, a total of 60 usable surveys, comprising a response rate of 74%, were used for analysis in this study. Of the subjects, 10% are female respondents and 90% are males.

7. Task and Relationship Results

The average scores of Expat pilot students for task orientation falls in "high range," and their relationship orientation average also falls in "moderately high range." Similarly, the average score of Expat respondents for stress

perception score (30.10) falls in the “high stress” range.

Table 1. Task and Relationship of Expat students

		No of respondents	Mean score	Std. Dev.
1	Task	20	15.75	0.234
2	Relationship	20	10.32	0.317

t = -50.75; p < 0.00; reject.

The hypothesis “Expat aviation cadet pilot students will have similar scores for relationship and task orientations” is rejected as the mean task orientation score is significantly higher than their relationship orientation (see Table 1). As such, Expat students appear to be more focused on their tasks than relationships.

The hypothesis stating that “Emirati aviation cadet pilot students will have similar scores for task orientation as expat aviation students” cannot be rejected as no significant differences were found in the responses between the two cultures (see Table 2).

Table 2. Task Scores of Expats and Emiratis

		No of respondents	Mean score	Std. Dev.
1	Emiratis	40	23.77	0.322
2	Expats	20	18.26	5.42

t = 0.34; p = 0.613; cannot reject.

The hypothesis stating that “Emirati aviation cadet pilot students will have similar scores for relationship orientation as expat aviation students” is rejected as there are statistically significant differences in the responses between the two cultures (see Table 3). Expats appear to be more focused on their relationship orientation than Emirati respondents in this study.

Table 3. Relationship Scores of Expats and Emiratis

		No of respondents	Mean score	Std. Dev.
1	Emiratis	40	28.55	0.236
2	Expats	20	16.82	6.31

t = -5.03; p = 0.000000137; reject.

The hypothesis stating that “Emirati aviation cadet pilot students will have similar scores for work overload stress perception as expat aviation students.” is supported since the mean score of these Expats and Emirati respondents for stress perceptions appear to be similar (see Table 4). Both groups reported a moderate level of stress in this study.

Table 4. Stress Perceptions of Expats and Emiratis

		No of respondents	Mean score	Std. Dev.
1	Emiratis	40	19.28	0.511
2	Expat	20	17.32	6.18

t = -0.9345; p = 0.2903; cannot reject.

The hypothesis that Expat respondents will have similar scores for relationship orientations and task orientations was not supported by this study. Compared to Emirati respondents, Expats are more task-oriented. Both Expat and Emirati groups appear to be in the moderately high rank on their task orientations with no significant differences among the two cultures. Furthermore, the level of stress amongst Expats and Emiratis was moderate and with no significant differences between them.

8. Implications and Limitations

The results of this study indicated that Expat aviation students are more focused on their tasks than their relationships. Like other Asian cultures, Emirate too is a high context culture. Relationship between the employee and employers is a very important aspect of the work life. This relationship is considered more important than the task orientation. It is also expected that the task relationship is severely influenced by this relation and at times become even weak. Most Asian cultures follow this practice. Contrary to this, the Expats also representing the Asian cultures (being a high-context culture), it was expected that relationship will overshadow the task orientation. However, this study did not support this and shows that Expats respondents are more task oriented than the Emirati counterparts. It also supports the study where Americans focused more on the relationship orientation than their Thai counterparts (Mujtaba, 2008). The results of this study open discussions on the previous outcomes about the relationships of people in high and low context cultures. However, the results pertain to the sample related to this study only but could be compared to a similar study by the authors done earlier (Sikander, Mujtaba & Afaza, 2012).

It could be concluded that the Expats while working on their relationship with supervisors consider task as vital but the reason behind this could be explored in future studies. It could be due to the type of demand placed on these expat students by their parents who struggle to make a living. It could be assumed that the nature of placement in a country (expat vs. local) might have played a role in these results. The mix of people in the workforce in a high-context culture might have imported the task aspect from the traditionally low-context cultures. This is a wonderful area to explore.

Expat respondents reported a higher level of stress which is also unusual. It was expected that Emiratis would have high level of stress while at work as they are sponsored and have serious repercussions in case they fail a course. The work environment in the West is very demanding since many performance measures are in place and thus there is less chance to avoid or delay work. On the other hand, work can be dragged and delayed based on the relationships with the

superiors in a high-context culture, but this was not the case with expat students as the results of this research indicate.

There are some limitations of this study. This research was conducted with a student population undergoing an aviation course at only one university in Emirate. Future studies can compare populations with similar backgrounds (aviation) and demographic variables such as comparing sponsored local vs. non-sponsored local students. Another limitation is the number of respondents in each group was small due to convenience. The time of questionnaire administration could also have influenced the results as it was done when both students and staff were busy teaching and learning. The level of stress would have been influenced by that particular environment.

9. Conclusion

After reflecting on the behaviours of people from the groups of Expat and Emirati aviation students, we can say that Expat aviation students are highly task oriented. Expat reported a high level of stress from work overload compared to their Emirati counterparts. The results of this research should provide good knowledge as to the mix of expat and local aviation students from similar cultures and how management can utilize those through the reflections from the survey. Contrary to the popular belief that high-context cultures have weak task orientations, this study highlights that Expats pay more importance to this task orientation compared to their Emirati counterparts. Since Emirates is a society with more expat population than the locals, this study suggests that cultural shifts due to inflow of workers has influenced the work behaviour of individuals and even in high context societies one could find a heavy focus on task orientations compared to relationships.

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Biography



Arif Sikander, PhD, is Lecturer of Management at Murdoch University's Business School in Australia. Arif has a local and international experience in aircraft design, aircraft maintenance engineering, entrepreneurship and innovation, strategic technology management, training, lecturing, business planning and H.R.M. He is a highly skilled change facilitator, and has extensive experience in the design, delivery and evaluation of aviation and technology management, strategic management, organization development, transformation and management development programs. His areas of research are technology management, strategic management, strategic human resource management, aviation technology, human factors in aviation and engineering management.