

Chapter 66

A Study of a Federally Funded Project between Higher–Ed Institutions in the U.S. and Pakistan: An Intercultural Academic Project Management

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the technical and intercultural challenges involved in a Department of State (DoS)-funded collaborative research project between a Mid-Sized Regional Public University in the U.S. and an International Research Institution in Pakistan. The collaborative research project on which the study is based is particularly significant as the groups from each institution face the central communication challenges that are the hallmark of distributed teams, namely physical separation, multiple organizations, and different time zones. This manuscript highlights the importance of intercultural factors in shaping the institutional relationships and examines expectations for collective responsibility in the given context.

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OVERVIEW

We conducted this initial case study analysis of an international, cross-cultural academic project to determine the unique challenges participants faced in this complex initiative. Central to this inquiry is the US Department of State's (DoS) "grant program linking Pakistani universities with US institutions in 2012 under the Fulbright-Hays act, with the mission to promote mutual understanding through educational and cultural exchanges between American citizens and citizens of other countries."¹ In investigating this initiative, we focus on the management of a three-year grant starting in fall 2015 between a Mid-Sized Regional Public University in the United States (hereafter the US public institution) and an International Research Institution in Pakistan (hereafter the Pakistani research institution). The USD1 million grant awarded to the US public institution fulfills two missions, one academic and the other diplomatic: 1) developing a "collaborative model of professional development in teaching, research, and community engagement" between the US public institution and the Pakistani research institution and 2) "expanding and strengthening the relationships between the people of the United States and citizens of the rest of the world" (www.state.gov). To advance these goals, the DoS has empowered the US public institution's Departments of English and Public and International Affairs to facilitate cross-cultural understanding among international publics, focusing on people in Pakistan; the initiative emphasizes humanities and social science areas including American literary and cultural studies, writing studies, US political science, and public administration to establish and enhance global cultural participation.

Importantly, the current collaborative venture, with significant cultural implications involving two institutions of higher learning and a federal agency, has been characterized as a *project* with six defined actionable goals. Notwithstanding the fact that the project is in its early stages of implementation, we contend that its structure and goals make it appropriate for study using a theoretical framework informed by a postmodernist perspective on project management (hereafter PM). Our resulting analysis of this project is organized as follows. The first section provides a brief overview of PM, focusing especially on a discernable historical shift from modernist frameworks influenced by engineering and military operations toward postmodernist thinking that recognizes the social sciences' importance in conceptualizing PM. The second section focuses on the study's methodology and data collection practices. In the third section, we discuss our findings in the context of four central PM challenges outlined by a recent and thorough meta-analysis of the field and identify additional concerns specific to this project. Finally, we conclude with a brief assessment of this study and directions for further research into PM between academic institutions.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT PM RESEARCH

PM has emerged as a conscious choice to administer complex organizational systems from conception to completion involving social, cultural, and technological factors. Defined by Turner (1996) as "the art and science of converting vision into reality," PM's impact on the global economy can be estimated from World Bank data compiled in 2009, which show that 22% of gross capital formation resulting from the USD48 trillion of global gross domestic product (GDP) involved projects (Bredillet, 2010). Interestingly, PM's starting point was far removed from a global implication of this magnitude.

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