Consulting Higher Education in Africa: A Strategic Case Study

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Abstract. As part of a research project grant from the Mervin M. Dymally African-American Political and Economic Institute, this paper is a case study of US College (USC), a new entrepreneurial private college in Ethiopia, and its developing relationship with California State University Dominguez Hills (CSUDH). USC is struggling to create sustainability in an underdeveloped but rapidly growing economy and CSUDH is assisting it in incorporating world-class curriculum and standards. The challenges of developing an entrepreneurial twinning relationship between the two universities, to the mutual benefit of both, are explored. How will CSUDH faculty help a struggling Ethiopian college entrepreneurially develop the ability to deliver a first-world level of education; in a reciprocal relationship that also enhances CSUDH?

Keywords: Africa; entrepreneurship; business education; developing economy, educational entrepreneurship, transferring capability.

1. Introduction

During a recent visit to Ethiopia, President Obama made the following observation: African economies should embrace the US over other world powers, because America's approach is not to simply give aid, but also to build the country's capacity to flourish on its own. "Now, the United States isn't the only country that sees your growth as an opportunity," Mr. Obama told an audience in Addis Ababa. "But economic relationships can't simply be about building countries' infrastructure with foreign labor or extracting Africa's natural resources. Real economic partnerships have to be a good deal for Africa -- they have to create jobs and capacity for Africans" (Lee and Vogt, 2015).

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The purpose of this paper is to analyze the case study of US College (USC), a new entrepreneurial private college in Ethiopia, and its developing relationship with California State University Dominguez Hills (CSUDH), a campus in the largest public university system in the U.S. The Ethiopian college is struggling to position itself and create sustainability in an underdeveloped but rapidly growing economic environment and CSUDH is attempting to assist it in incorporating world-class curriculum and standards as well as high impact educational practices. A case study, according to John Creswell, is an in depth study of a bounded system with broad interdisciplinary implications (Creswell, 1998; Stake 1995). The use of interviews and observations is central to many of the traditions of qualitative research. Data collection in a case study is achieved through interviews, observations and documents (Creswell, 1998, p. 135).

In this case there are two bounded systems, an Ethiopian University and an American University, which must integrate and function on some level as a single system. This study explores the development of a relationship between two bounded systems and the use of a consulting model developed by one of the authors in order to bridge the existing barriers between the systems to create a twinning relationship between the two universities. The paper will refer to the Katzenstein Inter-Culture Consulting Model (KICM), known as the KMM model in previous work, that has been published in journals (Chrispin and Katzenstein 2006; Katzenstein and Chrispin, 2011) and a book (Katzenstein and Chrispin, 2005). The process of twinning will also be referred to as a means of providing systemic boundaries around both systems and the need for strategic management to accomplish the combined goals of each university.

California State University Dominguez Hills, a campus that serves a highly diverse, lower income, and first-generation educated student body, has previous experience with developing twinning relationships with African Universities. CSUDH's strategic plan embraces diversity in all its forms, as well as leveraging technology to transcend educational boundaries, both locally and globally. The authors, who are faculty at CSUDH, have extensive experience in Africa and Asia. CSUDH's partnership with US College, based in Shashemene, Ethiopia, was formalized, first in 2011 with HealthSpan International Foundation (HSI), a nonprofit organization dedicated to healthcare and education development in developing countries and founded by Dr. James Katzenstein. HSI functions as a facilitator, developing a variety of health and education based projects in Tanzania, Ethiopia, Cameroon, India and South Africa during the past 18 years. The relationship between CSUDH and USC was further formalized in 2012 with the signing of a memorandum of understanding, and an implementing document.

The KICM Model is being used to upgrade the educational system of US College, an institution headquartered in Shashemene Ethiopia. In addition to the main campus, the institution operates a number of satellite campuses throughout Ethiopia. US College founded in 2007 by an Ethiopian diaspora member who was born in Ethiopia, migrated to Portland Oregon and then returned to Ethiopia to

start US College. His motivation in part, was to introduce American educational value systems in a country where Chinese foreign direct investment is everywhere.

US College is situated within the private tertiary education system of Ethiopia and contributes to the massification (scale of increase) of tertiary education on the African continent (Ashcroft and Rayner, 2011). It's education level targets young people who are looking to acquire skills that can used directly in the workplace. As a result, they offer courses of study in subjects including construction, plumbing, surveying, computer technology, bookkeeping and retail. With the help of the authors, US College has added management and organizational behavior classes and programs to address Ethiopia's shortage of skilled managers. The college has expanded to include Baccalaureate Degrees in Accounting and Business Management.

The institution's business model utilizes a low-cost provider strategy that maintains profitability by offering low-cost tertiary education to over 3,000 students. This is accomplished by offering ground-based and distance learning classes using adjunct faculty through the main and a number of remote campuses. USC faculty, staff and management, along with this study's principals, used the KICM model with an evolving client consultant system infrastructure (CCSI) to modernize US College without changing the fundamental low-cost business model. Textbooks, syllabi, and pedagogy were transferred, a demonstration project utilizing an online learning management system was tested, and blended management classes with students from both CSUDH and USC were conducted.

The college is located in a country, which along with most of Africa, has risen in global prominence largely due to increased demand for its natural resources leading to their extraction and exportation. Ethiopia is also currently benefiting from attention from the global business press describing Africa as the last frontier of capitalism to be integrated into the global marketplace (Carmody, 2008).

How will faculty from CSUDH help a struggling Ethiopian college (USC) develop the skills and resources to be able to deliver a developed-world level of education across a range of undergraduate and Masters programs; while at the same time obtain something from this relationship to enhance specific management courses and programs at CSUDH? Underlying issues include significant economic and technological disparities that separate the two countries and make collaboration difficult. Physical barriers such as language and time differences add to the difficulties. From the American perspective, students from CSUDH could in some way interact with African USC students to obtain cross-cultural experience and learn about comparative management. From the African perspective, USC could integrate American pedagogy, technology, and content into their program in order to raise the quality of education offered.

2. Methodology

The Katzenstein Inter-Culture Consulting Model (KICM) was first developed in 2000 (titled KMM model) as part of a qualitative dissertation concerning MMH hospital, located in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. In Tanzania it was used to integrate disparate cultural systems (Katzenstein, 2000). The model has also been used to introduce American Telemedicine into MMH (Katzenstein and Chrispin, 2005) and was further refined in 2011 as an approach to international social entrepreneurship (Katzenstein and Chrispin, 2011). The authors are utilizing the model as a means of integrating strategic management concepts in an Ethiopian college to raise the standards of operation concurrent with the development of a twinning relationship with CSUDH.

KICM consists of five elements: a) the Client Consultant System Infrastructure (CCSI); b) Structural Coupling as the means by which the CCSI evolves out of a disparate group of individuals; c) rules, resources and member characteristics that continually reproduce the CCSI as a social system. Giddens (1984) called this process structuration; d) the Action Research (AR) process by which the members of the CCSI perform meaningful work; and e) the context of the overall system within which the CCSI functions.

First, the consulting model is driven by a structure that can be called the Client Consultant System Infrastructure (CCSI). It is an extension of Susman and Evered's (1978) Client System Infrastructure, which they defined as, "an infrastructure of ad hoc and permanent face-to-face groups…developed within a client system to conduct action research". Susman and Evered's definition is extended by first adding the consultant to the infrastructure and second, describing the use of electronic communications, e.g., phone, e-mail and telecommunications to augment the face-to-face aspects.

This structure is called a client-consultant system infrastructure (CCSI) to distinguish it from the standard consulting model in which the consultant functions as an outside expert. Rather than having a consultant with a privileged outside position, the CCSI is a flat horizontal structure of equals with empowered roles, shared information, collaborative strategy making, and, most importantly an adaptive learning culture.

The CCSI is conceptualized from Maturana and Varela's (1987) concept of organization as an abstract concept that distinguishes a class of objects or relationships by defining what must be present for members of the class to exist. Structure, according to these authors, is the physical embodiment of an organization. The CCSI, as structure, is the physical embodiment of the abstract organization that defines the CCSI.

Second, Maturana and Varela's concept of "Structural Coupling" is the reason for the success of the CCSI. Accordingly, when two or more unities interact with each other in a recurrent manner, over a long period of time, structural changes take place in the unities and in the environment so that structural congruence

occurs. "The result will be a history of mutual congruent structural change as long as the unity and its environment do not disintegrate: there will be structural coupling" (Maturana & Varela, 1987, p. 75). When applied to a social structure such as the CCSI, Structural Coupling is the force that allows the participants to achieve, over time, structural congruence with each other and with the environment in which the intervention is taking place. It becomes the glue that holds the CCSI together as a structure. Structural Coupling has to do more with rhythms and patterns and relationships than with physical structures.

The third component of the KICM describes the ways in which members of the CCSI control their individual actions within the group and the actions that the group takes. This part of the model is drawn from Marshal Scott Poole's discussion of Anthony Giddens (1984) theory of Structuration, which he defined as an ongoing and continuous process of "production and reproduction of social systems through the members' uses of rules and resources in interaction" (Poole, 1996, p. 87). Poole's and Giddens' concept of Structuration takes into account not only rules and resources but members' characteristics and outside influences such as culture, geography and history in a series of complex interactions that constrain the structural development of the CCSI. The CCSI develops stability as a dissipative structure using rules, resources, member characteristics and outside influences while developing structural congruence through recurrent interaction with members and environment.

The fourth element of the KICM is the process of Action Research (AR) by which the CCSI identifies environmental needs and the means of satisfying those needs. AR is defined as when researcher and client system collaborate to set up an experiment (Susman & Evered, 1978, p. 589). In the KICM, the consultant is an equal member of a structurally coupled group, the CCSI, using AR to solve problems within the context of the client system.

Susman and Evered (1978) implied that without the interaction of a client system infrastructure there can be no AR, even though a number of AR phases may be carried out in collaboration with an outside researcher. The reverse may also be true; without AR the CCSI may cease to exist. In that sense, AR is a crucial component of the consulting model as opposed to being a framework in which the model operates.

The fifth part of the KICM is context specific and may vary depending on the context in which the consulting takes place. This research takes place in an international setting between people in Ethiopia and those in the U.S. This part of the model may well change if the context changed, perhaps to a government owned university or a church oriented environment.

The process of "Twinning" describes a desired result of the CCSI, which pairs individuals, organizations or networks with other individuals, organizations or networks of similar function in order to transfer knowledge and build capacity. Twinning can be a highly effective capacity building tool that offers numerous benefits to both the recipient and provider. Specific twinning activities include:

staff exchange; short and long term placements; advice or consulting services; information sharing; study tours; sponsoring of attendance at conferences and workshops; periodical visits; mentoring; training and/or the provision of specific services. Twinning programs differ from other approaches to capacity building. They are dynamic and success is dependent on the strength of partnerships. These partnerships then provide the basis for establishing and sustaining strong bilateral and multilateral cooperation into the future. Twinning succeeds in capacity building because it is simple and harnesses current structures. It is sustainable because it is partnership based" (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, 2008). The methodology of this case study uses this consulting model to bridge the barriers between two bounded systems. Twinning, to transfer knowledge and build capacity of both entities, then becomes possible.

3. Case Description

The project began in 2011 with a phone call from President Tolla Gada, of US College, to Dr. Jim Katzenstein, the Executive Director of HealthSpan International and a CSUDH faculty member. Mr. Gada had heard about some of the work done in Africa by HealthSpan, and wondered if there might be some common interests. Some initial evaluation of potential opportunities resulted in a visit by a team from HealthSpan to Ethiopia in 2012.

During that first visit, the team, collaborating with local healthcare workers, government officials, and USC officials, developed and implemented a healthcare sanitation and maintenance program for two hospitals in Shashemene, and developed and delivered a Principles of Management short-course to USC students. The visit began the structural coupling process and the development of the CCSI as well as the problem identification in the Action Research process.

During the interlude between first and second visits, USC faculty members used Blackboard to shadow an upper-level CSUDH management course taught by Dr. Katzenstein. The goal was to introduce the USC faculty to pedagogy and technology used in the United States to deliver university education. Course content was transferred through the process and USC modified the course to fit the needs of their students. Learning management systems technology was also demonstrated to USC faculty. Plans were made for a second visit by CSUDH faculty.

The President and Provost of CSUDH adopted as a university strategic goal the development of international programs for the benefit of CSUDH students and faculty. The business faculty saw an opportunity that would benefit USC and CSUDH with both institutions recognizing their goals through a collaborative effort. The USC President traveled to the United States to further develop relationships within the CCSI, as well as to develop specific plans for

collaboration including a second visit to Ethiopia. A Letter of Intent was prepared and signed by the CSUDH Provost and the USC President.

The second visit was accomplished during June 2014 with a team of CSUDH business faculty who traveled to Ethiopia for the purpose of negotiating the implementation of the Letter of Intent. During the visit they also developed a joint process to include technology transfer, course transfer, student exchange and faculty exchange. CSUDH faculty agreed to develop a Certificate of Organizational Leadership consisting of six courses, which would be transferred to USC faculty via a mentor relationship between faculty from both schools. Plans were discussed to allow Ethiopian students to utilize Blackboard or Moodle learning management systems making the online CSUDH MBA program available in Ethiopia. Both groups of faculty also co-taught an international management course to a class consisting of both Ethiopian and American students using the Blackboard Learning Management System. The USC administration provided a rich, in-depth experience in Ethiopia for the members of the CSUDH team; which facilitated the development of the CCSI.

The planned Certificate of Organizational Leadership was approved by CSUDH in Spring 2015 and is now available to be offered collaboratively in both the US and Ethiopia. In Summer 2015, twenty-six US students at CSUDH and ten Ethiopian students from USC participated in a collaborative online International Management course taught by two CSUDH professors via Blackboard.

A third visit by CSUDH faculty took place in Summer 2015. It became apparent that a significant difference in the level of academic development existed between the two universities that would impede the development of a twinning relationship. The most significant differences existed in technology development and in the academic qualifications of the faculties. The difficulties traced back to cultural differences, possibly going back to colonialism. The African college administration perceived themselves to be poor and unable to afford Ph.D. faculty, Western pedagogy, and advanced technology. However, a financial review revealed that USC had a sound business model with significant cash flow. The CCSI concluded that upgrades to technology and faculty were possible. The group also concluded that a generic Low Cost strategy would not allow USC to compete over time. The CSUDH team conducted a strategic analysis for USC. The resulting strategic plan emphasized a differentiated strategy with a goal of raising the level of academics and building capacity. The CCSI also agreed on an upgrade to the IT system and adopted a plan to recruit several PhD professors who would form the nucleus of an upgraded faculty. Classroom pedagogy would be up-graded with the addition of PowerPoint and projectors to supplement blackboards and chalk. The CCSI also agreed to explore the addition of an online distance-learning capability, using Moodle as the enabling technology.

3. Discussion

The KICM Consulting Model bridged the barriers that separated the two bounded systems-CSUDH and USC. This international, college to college, consulting would not have been practical without this means of communication and collaboration. The CCSI and its use of Action Research uncovered structural weakness in USC that would have prevented the development of a Twinning relationship and has given USC the opportunity to upgrade its infrastructure. The equal partnership facilitated by the KICM model in which the Africans are truly equals in the relationship should foster sustainability to the project.

Higher education is an important component of development in African countries. It provides the underpinnings of business development, without which a trained cadre of managerial and technical employees must be imported from outside the country. A look inside African higher education at the grassroots level shows wide variation in quality. This results in a consequent variation in the skill level of graduates from African institutions. Twinning allows both universities to raise the level of quality, each gaining value from the other.

Fundamental differences in strategic approach may also cause the quality of university education in African countries to vary. As noted by Mellahi and Mol (2015), examination of strategic management in Africa is timely. The existing literature is focused on human resource management, social responsibility and the impact of African culture on management. Furthermore, few of these studies focused on Ethiopia. While some work has been done on concrete and operational concerns, strategic questions should remain foremost in discussions of Ethiopia's future. With respect to this case study, the selection of generic strategy, either low-cost or differentiation, sets the course of a college's organizational development, determining size, the quality of students, the quality of faculty, and the framework of physical and technical infrastructure. These variables, in turn, determine the quality of graduates, and the profitability and sustainability of the institution. The quality of a college's graduates contributes to the overall national economic development. Our contribution is an examination of a new venture in Africa which fits into the category of a small and medium sized enterprise (SME). This SME named US College is shaking up the public sector's status quo in higher education and is an example of Africapitalism (Amaeshi and Idemudia, 2015).

A low-cost strategy might maximize an institution's access to private sector higher education but may also minimize the quality of the education provided. A low-cost approach will also greatly reduce the institution's opportunities for international collaboration. Differentiation, on the other hand, will raise the quality of education and will also facilitate collaboration with institutions worldwide. The managerial challenge for private educational institutions in developing countries is to find adequate levels of differentiation that meaningfully increase the quality of education, while at the same time controlling the cost-benefit relationship to keep the institution economically viable. As the

state of national development progresses, there will be increasing competition based on quality and an institution's competitive stance will determine its long-run sustainability.

Studies show that a large number of new small and medium enterprises (SMEs) fail in the early years of operation (Cant et al., 2015) often due to a lack of strategic planning (Cant & Wiid 2013). SMEs develop strategies differently than larger firms, have fewer resources, and fewer qualified managers. Strategy in SMEs is mostly aligned to the owner-manager's opinions who tends to engage in informal and short-term decision-making (Gomes, et al., 2010). SMEs need to create and implement clear strategies to survive and if they have a clear strategy are more likely to successfully exploit opportunities (Sharma, 2011; Hagen, et al., 2012). A small private business college would encounter many of the same issues and risks as other SMEs.

Western performance management techniques, which favor a quality differentiation strategy, have previously been found to work in a developing African country. A Tanzanian business college implemented a SWOT-based program of improvement to deal with issues including: a shortage of teaching facilities, inadequate quality of instructors, lack of support staff, and increased competition for both students and instructors. Five-year strategic plans were designed and implemented with strategic objectives that included: increasing enrollment, hiring more instructors with masters and Ph.D. degrees, increasing the number of computers, the improvement of physical facilities, and the offering of new certificate and degree programs (De Waal, 2007).

The African Management Initiative, a group of nonprofits and foundations, set a goal of creating a million middle managers in Africa by 2023, to manage accelerating growth on the continent. The group found there is a shortage of as many as 4 million skilled indigenous managers in Africa and a shortage of quality business schools capable of training MBAs to fill the need (Damast, 2013). Upgrading the level of higher education within Ethiopia will give Africans the tools to develop their own cadre of indigenous managers to fill the shortage of managers on the continent.

The CSUDH-USC twinning process is facilitating educational capacity building in Ethiopia, while at the same time providing challenging international experiences for American students and faculty. A twinning relationship with American universities gives African universities access to modern learning management systems, upgraded technology and pedagogy and the latest courses as well as collaboration with American faculty on an equal basis. American faculty and students obtain access to African culture and markets on a relatively equal, non-colonial basis, enriching their own research and education.

4. Conclusions

African countries cannot depend on foreign government and NGO's to drive their development and must instead assume a partnership role. Africa has a serious shortage of educated managers (Douglas, 2012). Business within Africa cannot function and grow without skilled managers and the shortage of managers must be resolved internally. This can only be done if Africa develops quality educational institutions that educate the future managers.

Foreign institutions can help transfer technology, pedagogy, management structure, strategic planning and courses if the cultural boundaries that separate the institutions and faculties can be overcome. The KICM consulting model and twinning may prove effective in building the necessary relationships to spur development from the grass roots level.

Significant technological challenges to international collaboration between universities exist. The difficulties of communicating between Africa and the United States on a consistent basis cannot be over-emphasized. Although African internet access has become much more ubiquitous in recent years, it still lacks the bandwidth and consistent availability that will support a robust Blackboard or Moodle-based collaborative education program. Inconsistent access to electrical power also exacerbates the problem, making asynchronous programs the only real option at this time.

This challenge is in many ways a mental one. The twinning relationship used by the CCSI enables change in the mindsets of the participants. African institutions have always worked with substandard equipment and infrastructure; and the low-cost strategic approach is ingrained in the paradigm through which they see development. The attitude has always been, "We can't charge more because our customers are poor; we can't find modern computers because they cost too much; and we can't deliver online courses or collaborate with overseas universities because our Internet doesn't work." Bureaucracy, just as much in the Western university as well as in Africa, may also create barriers that interfere with the CCSI's efforts.

Finally, disparities in economic development creates barriers, making educational upgrades difficult. Government-sponsored higher education in Ethiopia costs an individual a total of US$2000 for a bachelor's degree. US College charges $10 per course to students who mostly earn less than $20 per month. Without significant outside support, access to online US college courses is not feasible.

Although this is an ongoing project, much has been achieved in the way of educational capacity development. A robust and active CCSI has been created that continues to grow and collaborate. The CSUDH-USC CCSI has implemented a six-course Certificate of Organizational Leadership that has been approved at CSUDH and is now being considered for adoption by the Ministry of Education in Ethiopia. An online course in International Management has been developed

that can be simultaneously delivered to students at CSUDH and USC via the Blackboard learning management system. Mentorships of faculty at US College have been implemented by CSUDH faculty. A student-abroad program has been initiated, and has already immersed a number of CSUDH business students in African culture. The introduction of the Blackboard learning management platform has potentially made US MBA programs available to students in Ethiopia and other African countries. Continuing activities will include the upgrading of academic quality at USC to ensure that students from both colleges can eventually study at both institutions to enhance education and obtain priceless intercultural experience.

A business model has still to be developed that will provide quality education to Ethiopian students, while at the same time providing an adequate return on investment for CSUDH. This will require support, possibly from the Ethiopian government whose high-growth economy will gain a significant educational return on its investment. The Ethiopian government has made electric power generation a key national strategy; and as power and internet access become more consistent, collaboration between CSUDH and USC should become more fruitful.

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