



**INTERNATIONAL
UNIVERSITY OF
MALAYA-WALES**



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Educational Imperialism? Reflections on working with Asian colleagues.

**Wales NEXUS
Conference 2017**
annual learning and
teaching conference

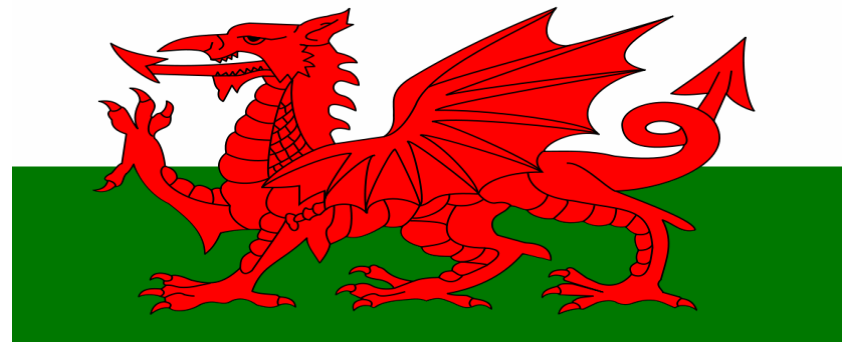
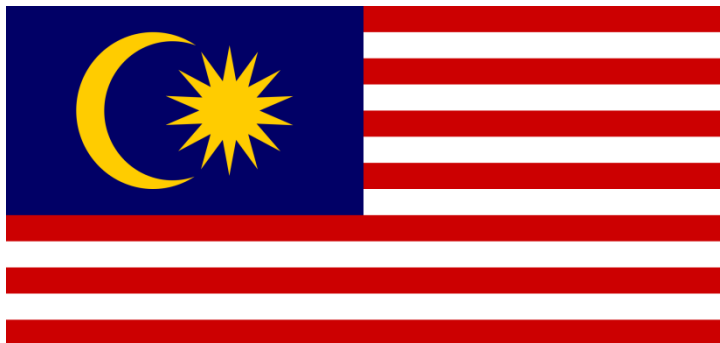
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NEXUS Cymru 2017**
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Steve Griffiths

Vice President

International University of Malaya-Wales (IUMW)



IUMW Kota Campus overlooking KLCC



Graduating STEM students Nov 2016



INTERNATIONAL
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2ND CONVOCATION CEREMONY 2016

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What this paper is not!

Imperialism is a value laden concept, with generally negative connotations. This paper does not seriously expose educational imperialism of an aggressive, intrusive and domineering style. More it observes an aspect of Western (UK) influence and collaboration with an Asian (Malaysian) partner.

However in often robust discussion with Malaysian colleagues, the author sometimes fears that his strongly held opinions and defense of organizational features of university policies may be perceived as “imperialistic”.

<http://screenrant.com/star-wars-reasons-galactic-empire-darth-vader-actually-good-guys/?view=all> (Accessed, 12 March 2017).

SCREENRANT

SR EXCLUSIVES

MOVIE NEWS

TV NEWS

REVIEWS

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LISTS

Star Wars: 15 Reasons The Galactic Empire Was Actually Good

7.1K
SHARES



By Michael Graff 11.11.2016 30 Comments



STAR WARS: REASONS THE GALACTIC EMPIRE
WAS ACTUALLY GOOD

The Asian Way?

Danger of cliché and generalisation.

Unfortunately it is more complicated than this.

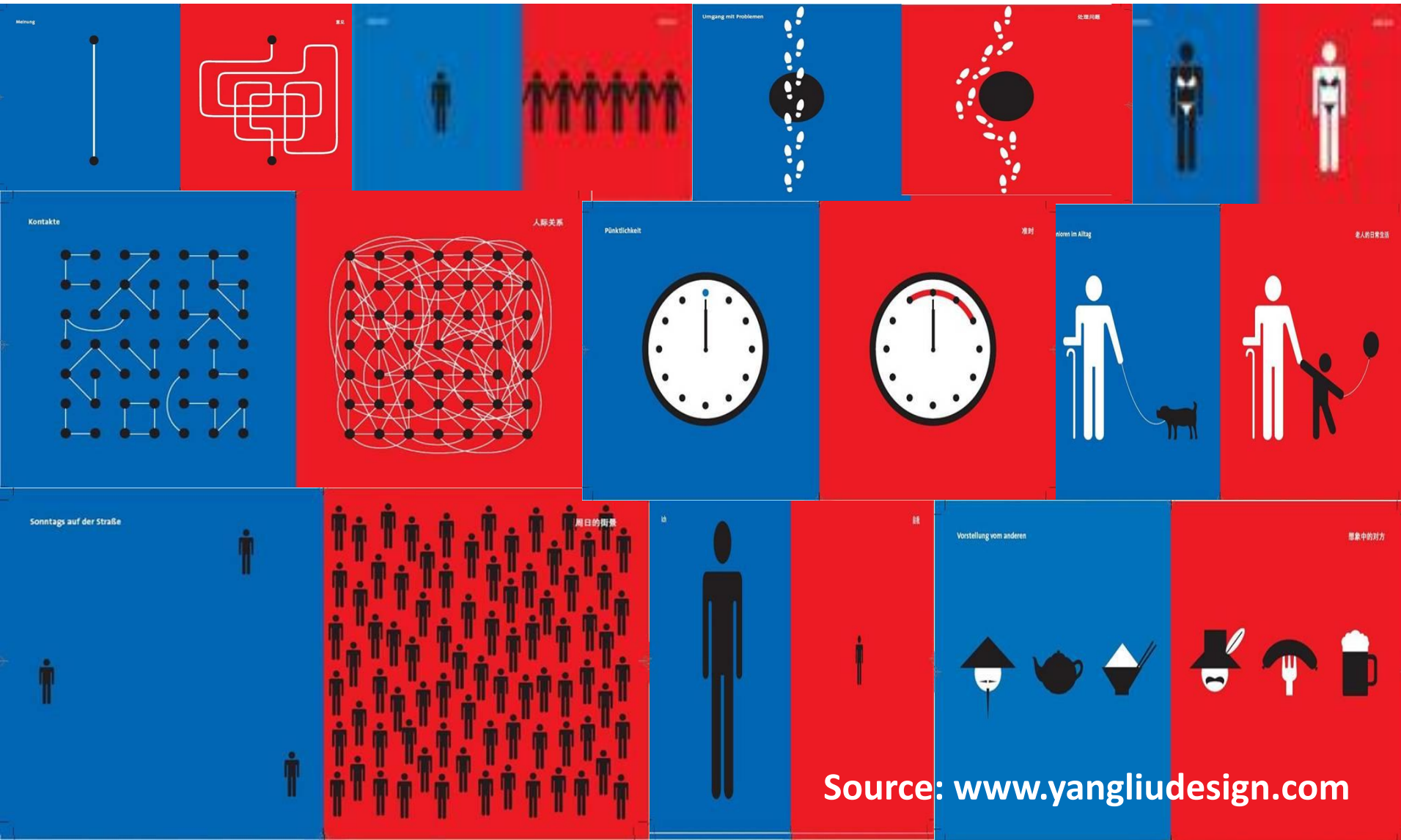
Malaysia is an emerging but also complex nation.

There is much that is familiar. There is much that appears familiar but which is really different.

Is the West and Wales actually that much different?

Everything is changing.

West v East



Source: www.yangliudesign.com

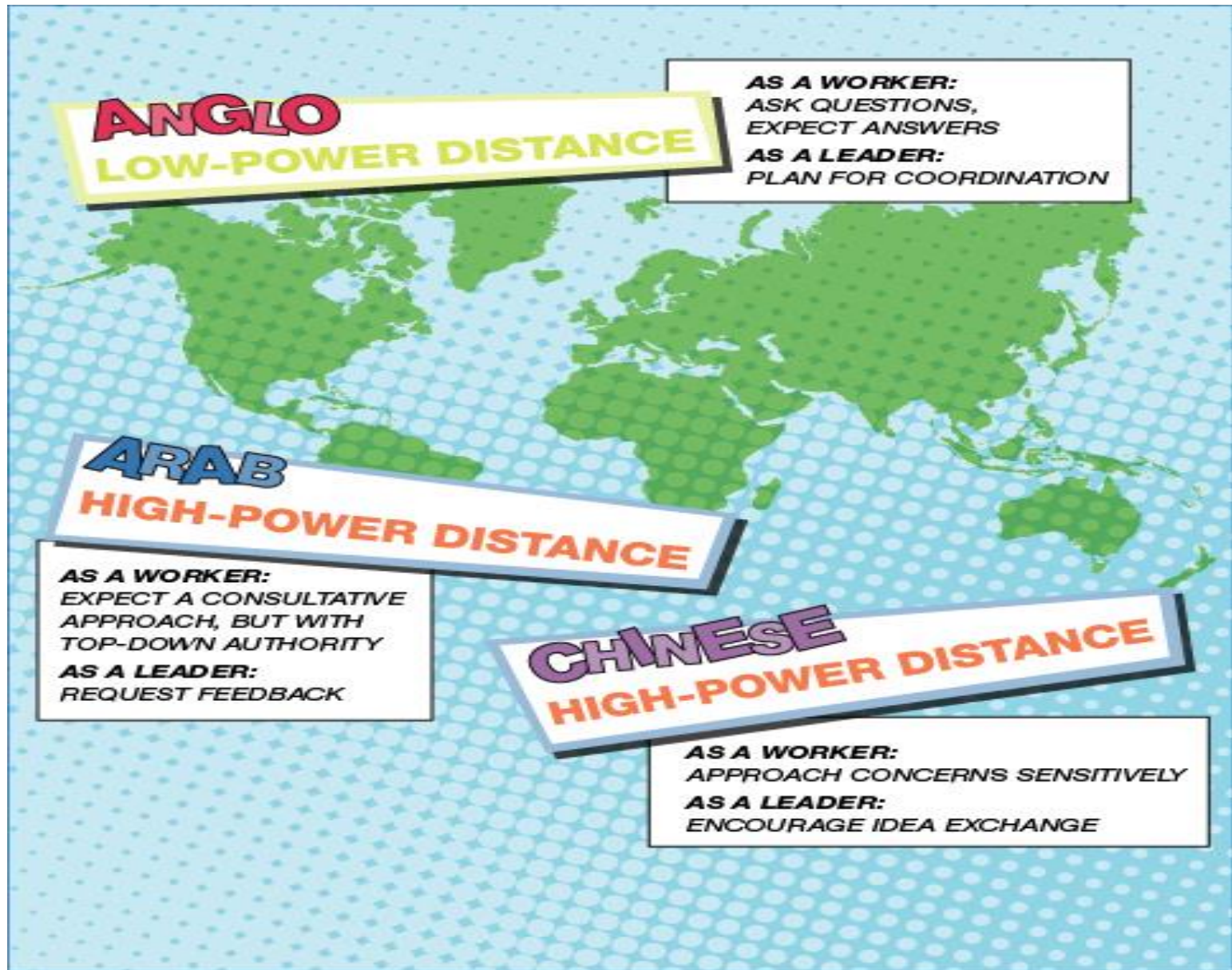
The Malaysian HE context.

- Malaysian society is reflected in the university sector.
- Strong planning Vision 2020, Blue Ocean Strategy, People at the heart of policy
- Private HEI development.
- Racial, class and cultural mix. The Malay Bumiteras ('Sons of the Soil') policy.
- Private v Public sector universities.
- Corruption.

IUMW HEI context.

- Bureaucracy and regulation-MQA/MoE.
- Malaysian management systems tend to be hierarchical, with **High Power Distance**, rather than the **Low Power Distance** associated with Anglo American norms (Hofstede, 2000 and Peterson, 2017). This has implications for misunderstanding and confusion of roles. UK/US team members expecting (encouraged) questioning, demonstrating professional skills and personal values. Leaders should manage challenges to authority, coordinate teams and coordinate to achieve corporate goals. Asian approaches, tend to be more top-down, where workers rarely challenge authority, more collectivist approaches predominate. Leaders must straddle the need to ask questions to get information and monitor, but not too many or else there is a danger of undermining legitimacy and collective action.

Peterson(2017)



Malaysian irritations: Litter and bad parking



Operational Factors 1.

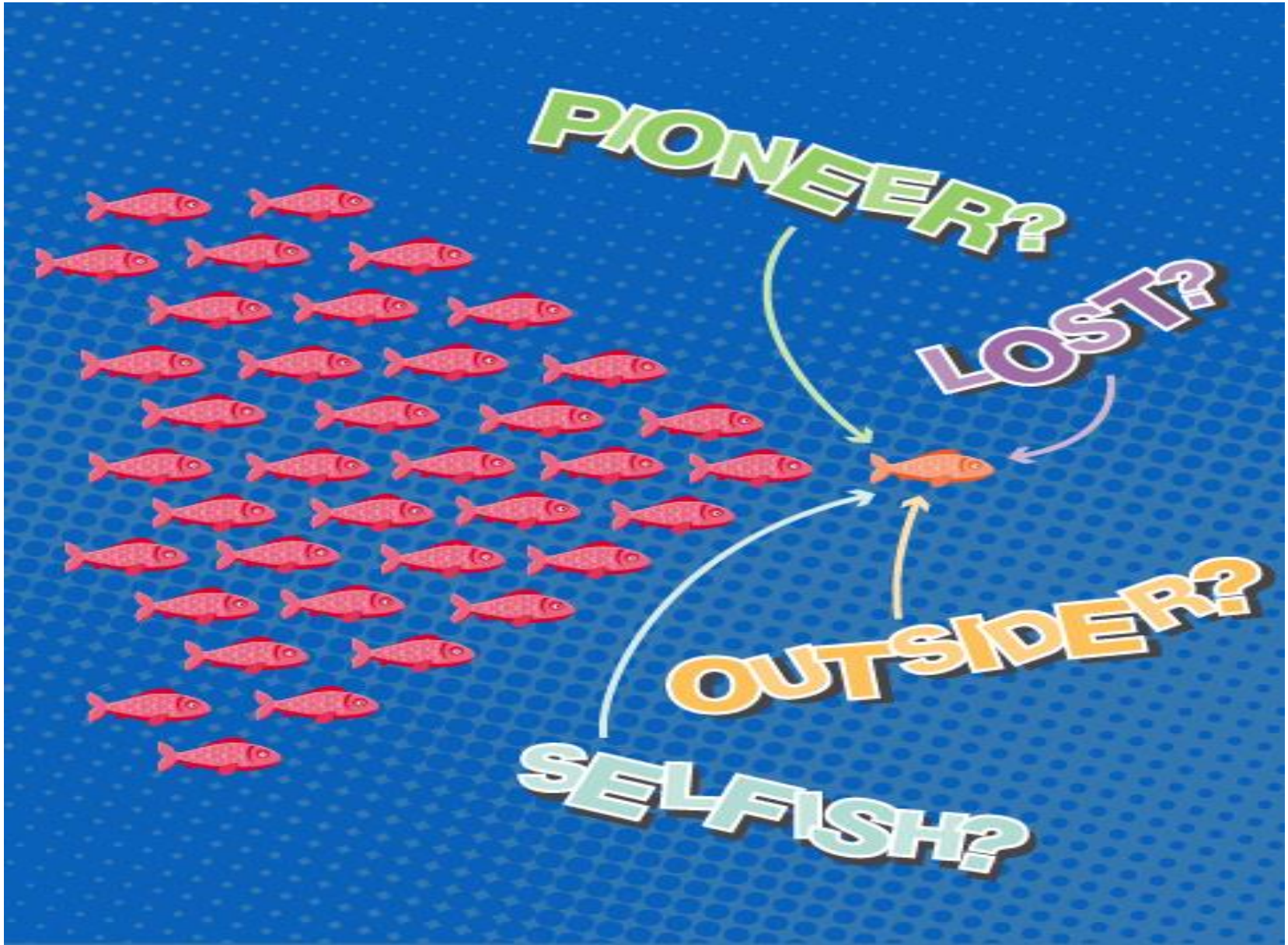
a. Complexity: The standard business culture advice. Complexity arises due to the diverse cultural make up of Malaysian culture and the fact that many Malaysians are very international both in their educational and business experiences, adopting more Western practices. There are some topics which appear to be very difficult to formerly tackle. The LGBT agenda and tolerance/celebration of it, while on a personal level appears unthreatening, in policy terms is out of consideration in the existing legal, social, moral and cultural context.

b. Lost in translation: Malaysians are in general admirably able to communicate in English and are familiar with most Western mores. They are also diplomatically sensitive and very forgiving of western mistakes in etiquette and protocol observance. In technical terms' vocabulary may be shared but meaning may vary.

Operational Factors 2.

c. Regulatory compliance: At first glance the Malaysian environment is highly regulated, both in social legal matters and university governance. However there may be ways in which the full regulation can be seen as advisory or examples of good practice without having the full force requiring compliance.

d. Leadership/followership protocols: As already mentioned Asians tend to respect a more hierarchical management system than many experience in the West. Top down instruction places great pressures on leaders to get it right and for followers to obey. In attempts to make lower levels of decision makers responsible, creative and self-managing, delegation has been attempted with varying success.



Operational Factors 3.

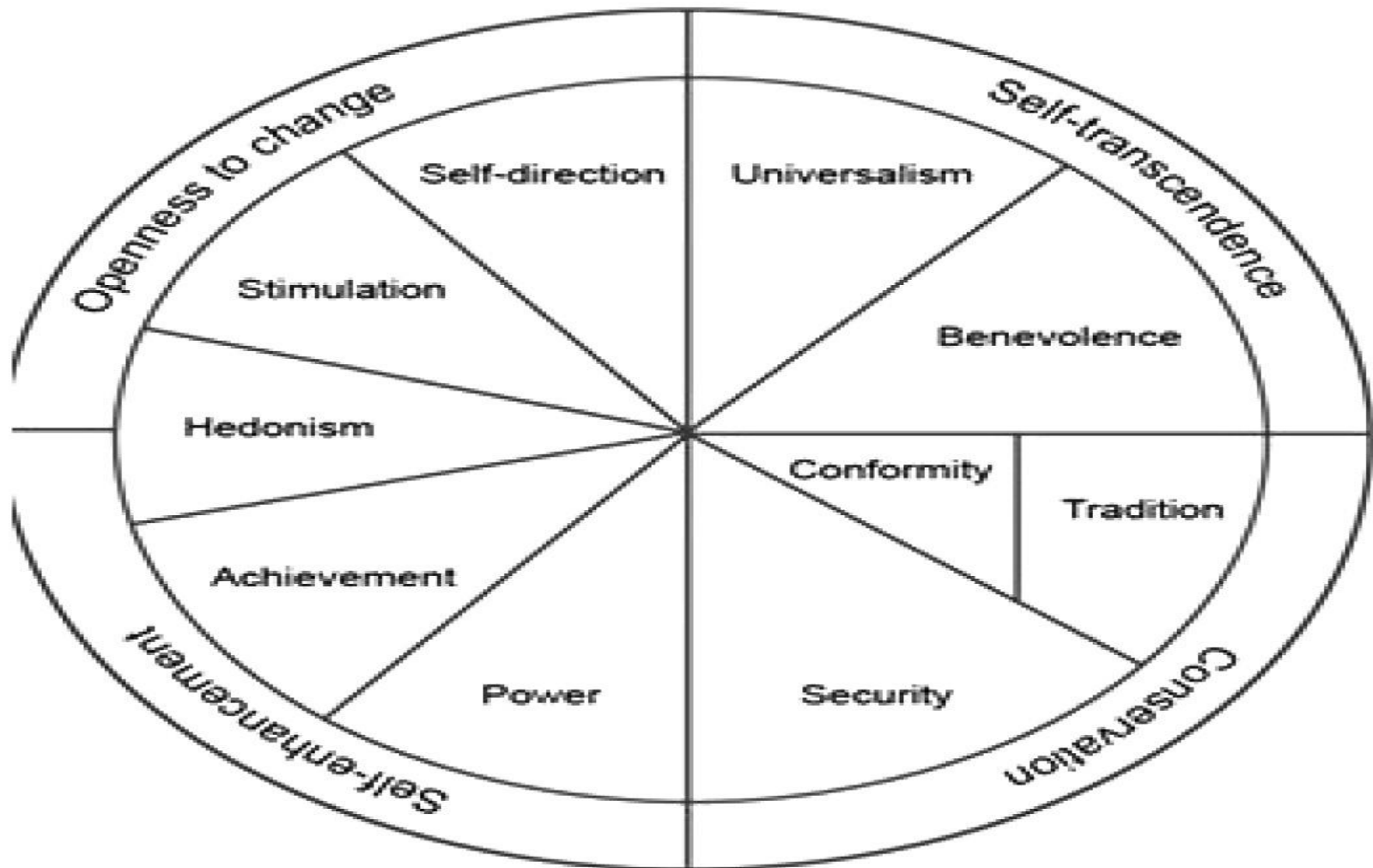
e. Communications environment: Sometimes advised by external mentors to “get angry”, the author has deliberately not shown such emotions, despite some frustrations. The act of angry communications would threaten the more High Power distance approach’ need for cohesive, communicable solutions to problems. It also risks the loss of face for criticized subordinates, similar to Chinese applications of Mianzi (Griffiths, 2016),

Operational Factors 4.

f. The “Half-done job”: This is perhaps a phenomena of not being clear about requirements or recognition of many Malaysian’s commitment to SOPs, job descriptions and work place job demarcation. This situation will be familiar to UK industrial relations students of the 1970s and the continuing “jobs worthy” attitude of some service providers in large anonymous bureaucracies.

g. Student aspirations and expectations: Malaysian students are uniformly delightful to teach. They display a thirst for education and a love of learning. We need to juggle Gen-X systems and provider expectations with Gen-Y demands (indeed to plan for Gen-Z, Millennials). See Ismail et al (2016)

Schwartz's core dimensions and specific cultural values. *Schwartz (2012, p. 9)*



Cross cultural misunderstanding

Building on the Hofstede model (2000) of High–Power distance and recognizing that his findings are thought often to be too simplistic, Milliman et al (2002) developed a model to break the misunderstanding downward cycle and avoid cross cultural conflict.

Staff attitude survey, Jan 2017, 1

Positive attitudes and a mix of Gen-X, Gen-Y attitudes.

Views on leadership

“IUMW needs to communicate its vision and how we can all contribute to achieving it”. “...educate the whole person”. “We must be clear but also transparent, to establish trust”. “We must be professional”. “..Create a happy environment”. “High standards of conduct and good learning environment”.

“Top management needs to communicate better, we are often informed by gossip”. “..need better work-life balance”. “...balanced work load...”. “...need to use email and plan, rather than demand instant responses by direct instruction or telephone call”.

Staff attitude survey, Jan 2017, 2

Views on Personal contribution

“To hit targets”. “To follow the instructions of my superiors”. “To carry out my work function”.

“My job specification restricts the full contribution I feel I can make”. A deferential comment was “Our bosses know better than us”.

“Give us a vision”. “Expand our horizon!”.

Therefore evidence of old and new in both student and staff attitudes.

Table 2. Milliman et al. (2002, p. 36)

Impact of Culture on Performance Feedback

The Characteristic of Performance Feedback Influenced

United States

Malaysia

Individualistic

Collectivistic

Level of Achievement

- Provide direct feedback to improve individual performance and self-identity

- Feedback should consider the individual's role in his/her group
- Feedback should consider group harmony and relationships

Low Power Distance

High Power Distance

Feedback Approach

- Provide opportunity for individuals to participate in the performance evaluation
- Encourage subordinate self-evaluation

- Focus mainly on top-down communication and control
- Avoid perceptions of managerial weakness by encouraging too much participation

Master of Nature

Subjugated to Nature

Performance Accountability

- Hold subordinates accountable for their own performance
- Encourage the belief that the individual is empowered and can increase his/her own performance through greater effort

- Consider external work factors as a source of individual work performance
- Find consensus on areas where the individual was in control of his/her performance

Low Cultural Context

High Cultural Context

Communication Style

- Communication should be direct and explicit
- Follow-up verbal feedback with written summary of evaluation

- Consider the surrounding context of the feedback.
- Avoid loud non-verbal gestures. Pay close attention to the body language of the individual.
- Be indirect in conveying feedback ("read between the lines").

The Future?

- The future for the author is to make changes to communications and work demands.
- This will mean emphasizing positive achievements before discussing and seeking team advice on the tough challenges facing us all.
- The author must resolve to be realistic about the quality of change that can be achieved in a short space of time, and the need to give encouragement at all times.
- Acceptance of poor performance remains unacceptable, but team members need to be given guidance on how to raise their work levels and how to benchmark against external standards.

A wonderful mix of enthusiastic students





IUMW
Men and
Women's
rugby
teams



Good colleagues and lots of fun



Thank you

Full paper available with full bibliography.

Steve Griffiths

VP

IUMW

