

Women in the Spotlight

GET Visibility

Proudly Made in Africa

by Mariana Bogdanova

A guest lecture and research seminar took place here at QMS in April 2016 under the leadership of the Proudly Made in Africa (PMIA) Fellowship at UCD. The session was a diversity management lecture, part of the Postgraduate module *Human Resource Management and Work in the Global Context*. It was delivered by the current PMIA Fellow Dr Penelope Muzanenhamo in consultation with Dr Heike Schroder (QMS). The aim of the lecture was to “challenge students to think outside the box by developing solutions to real business challenges faced by expats and business actors across Africa” (Dr Muzanenhamo).

“I am happy that Penelope agreed to work with me in teaching my students about human resource management in Africa. Her contribution and the subsequent animated discussion provided my students with a unique perspective and insights into management and diversity issues as well as approaches in Africa, a perspective often omitted in Management schools.” Dr Heike Schroder, QMS

The PMIA insights are mostly provided by individuals who have lived in and experienced the African business environment as businesses practitioners. Penelope draws on her own research interest in discussing how we perceive a “new” business context, where her focus was looking at the contribution of Brand Africa to Sustainable Development from a diaspora perspective.



Penelope, PMIA Fellow

The diversity management lecture demonstrated a context-specific teaching approach.

“Role-play was key to sensitising the students to the common challenges faced by HRM managers in managing the richly diverse personnel within corporations in Africa. Masters students were challenged to see themselves as HR Managers tasked with hiring for several departments. They had to first choose a specific African ethnic group to which they wanted to belong, prior to selecting candidates from a pool of ‘equally’ qualified but ethnically diverse contenders. This allowed students to put to test their knowledge and experience against what goes on in many African contexts. The role-play revealed the students’ capacity to apply acquired knowledge and make decisions, but also their experience, biases, and creativity.” Dr Muzanenhamo

The follow-up seminar with faculty was an opportunity to share insights on what it's like to teach about Africa at Business Schools in Ireland and the UK. The teaching approach raises questions about what we teach when it comes to under-explored spaces and contexts, as we stand in front of today's globally-minded business students. Why should we strive to explore and understand non-mainstream spaces as academics and educators? Where do we start and how far do we go in framing practice in underexplored contexts? What does understanding look like when the students' objective is mastering management skills? And to what extent are we exploring contexts rather than preparing to exploit them, once we absorb sufficient information and they become familiar enough?

Questions on assumptions, awareness, and contextualisation should be put forth to business management students at all levels, as well as beyond the Africa context. Business practice in China, India, and the Middle East for example receive little attention in our standard textbooks, despite growing involvement in trade missions to countries in those parts of the world.

Penelope's approach emphasises that it is important we are aware of our own biases and assumptions when approaching the unfamiliar and dynamic organisational contexts inherent in emerging and developing economies. Clearly there is a need for self-reflection as both lecturers and students transpose familiar management and business practice to unfamiliar places. Our assumptions in this process need unpicking and one way of doing that is by engaging in intercultural dialogue. Lecturers could benefit from entering into conversation with practitioners with first-hand culturally-specific knowledge, both in front of their students and off screen.



The changing African consumer, PMIA source

Teaching from a "native perspective" is an innovative approach in higher education and could take on a broader design. A module on global business could be planned as a series on 'cultural conversations from the source', led by experts from the field talking about how business really takes place beyond the language barrier clichés, and in conversation with lecturers.

A popular management principle derived from the practice of Japanese giant Toyota urges us to "go and see", or *genchi genbutsu*. On the future of her teaching and research approach, Penelope echoes this view:

"Experience-based teaching will be strongly supported by research and case studies will remain indispensable to teaching. The application of Eurocentric theories



to African environments will be interrogated, but not discarded. Lecturers benefit more from exposure to both African *and* European environments and therefore it might be helpful for business scholars engaging with the subject of Africa to spend some time at African schools.” Dr Penelope Muzanenhamo, UCD

To truly understand a place and its business practice we as academics should travel and host others who travel too. Global perspectives need global emersion.