

Presented by

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Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy** 

Institute of Sustainable Development and Architecture

Bond University

Australia

10 February, 2012

"Four things support the world: the learning of the wise, the justice of the great, the prayers of the good, and the valour of the brave".

Muhammad a.s.

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#### **Thesis Abstract**

In the last 30 years the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has welcomed many foreign companies into the Kingdom to conduct business. Many international companies realised that there was a huge potential for growth in the rich Middle Eastern market and major international companies, such as *Pepsi* and *Starbucks*, have established themselves in this market by setting up their regional headquarters in Dubai.

In addition to the potential for growth in this new expanding market, these international companies want their brand names to be recognised and affiliated with a positive image, in a market associated with growth, richness and affluence. However, what these companies do not realise is that if the expatriates they send to their overseas assignments are not appropriately trained and prepared, the expatriates are more likely to experience difficulties that can have a serious impact on their activities and lead to possible failure.

A major issue is that expatriates lacking appropriate cross-cultural training and preparation will not be able to adapt to a new country and working environment. In addition, this lack of acclimatisation to the new setting becomes not only detrimental to the individual, but also very costly to the company. In many cases, it can damage the company's reputation and can undermine the future of the company in the host country and, as a result of this; those companies could potentially lose hundreds of thousands of dollars. Another potential problem for expatriates are differences in interpersonal behaviour. Since there is a cultural difference between Australia (a Western society) and the UAE (a Middle Eastern society) it is very easy for misunderstandings to occur. Hence, it is easy for the behaviour of an expatriate to be unintentionally offensive. For instance, certain behaviours that are accepted in Australia, for example shaking hands when introduced to a person of the opposite gender, are unacceptable in the UAE. With the proper and up-to-date cross-cultural training, this is one of the many problems that could be avoided.

The literature review led the author to believe that there is a lack of cross-cultural training provided to Australian expatriates who are working or are about to commence work in the UAE. To investigate this, the author designed an online survey, which was distributed to human resources managers and project managers already working in the

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UAE. A survey of 100 Australian project managers based in the UAE was then undertaken to discover the dimensions of the cultural business environment for these employees and how and/or if those employees have been cross-culturally prepared for their overseas assignment.

Once the online survey was analysed, it indicated that there was a lack of cross-cultural training provided to those expatriates. To gain a better picture as to why this was the case and to find out what could be done to fix the problem, and therefore help expatriates and their companies, the survey was followed by six case studies of senior management in large companies involved in project management, construction and property in the UAE.

All six case studies are based on Australian companies that have spread internationally, including to the UAE. The reason for this was that this research focused on Australian project managers working and living in the UAE.

Once all the information from the case studies was collected and analysed, the case studies revealed that although the UAE has a large expatriate population, (80 per cent of the population of the UAE is expatriates); most expatriates live in segregated communities. The majority of expatriates tend to live and spend time with people with a similar language and culture. In addition, the case study results confirmed the survey: Australian expatriates were lacking cross-cultural training. Most did not receive any cross-cultural training and those that got some form of preparation claimed that it was not adequate. More importantly, the case studies enabled the author to make recommendations on what type of cross-cultural training should be offered, how it should be delivered and when it should be delivered to the expatriates for the best effect.

#### **Keywords:**

United Arab Emirates, Expatriates, Project managers, Training and Preparation

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**Declaration** 

I hereby declare that this thesis comprises my own original work and that the materials

in this thesis constitute work carried out by me unless otherwise stated.

Any materials used in this thesis that are not my own have been acknowledged in the

text.

The materials from this thesis have been published in refereed journals and conferences,

in some cases as they are with no changes made to the work.

Additionally, this thesis (in the condition as it is, with no changes made to it) has been

given to all the case study participants, who wished for a copy of it.

The thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, figures, references

and appendices.

This thesis complies with the stipulations set out for the degree of Doctorate of

Philosophy by Bond University.

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### **Acknowledgments**

It is my pleasure to thank those who made this thesis possible.

First of all, I would like to thank God for everything.

My parents, Hajra and Hazurlad, who have encouraged me to write this thesis, deserve a big "thank you" for their patience and support whilst I have spent hundreds of hours working on it.

I am especially gratefully to my little sister Emina, for taking the time to read my thesis and for taking care of Princess and Beauty (our dogs) when I was busy with my research. Kitty "thanks" also for making all those healthy and delicious lunches and dinners for me.

I am very grateful to my supervisors Dr. Jim Smith and Dr. George Earl for the care with which they reviewed my thesis and for conversations that clarified my thinking. I have learnt a great deal from both of them.

I am most indebted to my primary supervisor Jim Smith, who took the time to meet with me every week to discuss my progress and who provided me with encouragement, guidance and vital support. I could not have wished for a better supervisor.

Dr. Craig Langston has helped me edit my online survey and he always took the time to see me. "Thank you", I really appreciate all of Craig's advice and help.

A big thank you to Dr. Linda Too and Dr. Lynn Crawford for taking the time to read my thesis and for all the very useful feedback they provided.

I have put a bit of "heart and soul" into this research. Therefore, I hope that you will enjoy this work as well as find it immensely educational and useful.

Lastly, I offer my regards and blessings to all of my colleagues, friends and everyone who supported me during the completion of my thesis.

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#### **Publications**

The following papers have been published in refereed journals and conferences during the three years that the research was conducted.

#### **Refereed Journals**

- Cerimagic, S. (2010) "Islamic Business Law" Education Business and Society;
   Contemporary Middle Eastern Issue 3(1):40-47.
- Cerimagic, S. (2010) "Influence of Culture on Project Practices Insights from Australian Project Managers in UAE" Education Business and Society; Contemporary Middle Eastern Issue 3(4):277-288.
- Cerimagic, S. (2011) "Cross-cultural adaptivity and expatriate performance in the United Arab Emirates" Education Business and Society; Contemporary Middle Eastern Issue 4(4):303-312.
- Cerimagic, S. (2011) "Pre-departure and Post arrival cross-cultural Training for Australian project managers working in the UAE" Education Business and Society; Contemporary Middle Eastern Issue, under review.

#### **Refereed Conferences**

- Cerimagic, S. (2010) "Cross cultural project management characteristics between Australia and the United Arab Emirates", COBRA Conference, Doctoral Student Session, 2<sup>nd</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup> September 2010, Paris.
- Cerimagic, S. (2011) "Do Australian project managers working in the UAE need cross-cultural training?" AUBEA Conference, 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> April 2011, Bond University, Gold Coast Australia.
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- Cerimagic, S. and Smith, J. (2011) "Screening and Selecting Project Managers for the Middle East", COBRA Conference, 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> of September 2011, Manchester, UK.
- Cerimagic, S. and Smith, J. (2011) "Cross-cultural Training: The Importance of Investing in People", COBRA Conference, 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> of September 2011, Manchester, UK.

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