

Cultural Issues in TNE

Jai's story

Jai has been working in a transnational program of an Australian university for the past one year in an offshore location. His role is mainly administrative and he has to oversee three department heads in business programs. Apart from managing the registration of students and orientation programs, an important role played by Jai is to solve student problems and offer counseling to students who are underperforming and the parents of the students who are underperforming. Last week Jai had been contacted by a parent of one of the students who was underperforming. The parent had wanted to know how his son was performing currently. When Jai contacted his Australian counterpart David, he was told that under Australian Privacy Law, only students can access their results. Jai tried to explain to his Australian counterpart that in Jai's culture, parents take a keen interest in their children's education, but he was told it was the law. When Jai told the parent that Australian Privacy Law meant only the student can access his grade, the parent got angry and said he did not understand this as he was paying his son's fees.

The exam results for the management course arrived and the head of department contacted Jai as he was anticipating a number of students would be upset with the result. The head of department felt that the exam was a case study set on an Australian company and the offshore students were at a disadvantage. The economic standards and terminology in Australia was very different. Jai contacted David via email and got no response for two days. He decided to call David but only got his voicemail. As each day passed, Jai had to handle more upset students and felt increasingly under pressure.

David's story

David prided himself on being a well organised program co-ordinator managing a number of offshore programs. Two weeks before the teaching period, David provided his teaching team in offshore locations a package. The package contained information on the course including a study guide, readings, lecture slides, lecture notes and lesson plans. David felt that to ensure quality standards offshore, a standardised approach was the way to go. He set the exams and provided them on the day to his offshore counterparts.

Managing multiple offshore programs meant David found it difficult to respond to Jai's emails in less than a week. Over time, David felt that Jai failed to appreciate the Australian university's operating environment. The request for parents to have access to student marks was an example of Jai's lack of understanding of the need for privacy under Australian law. The latest issue of exam content was just another area where Jai's request to alter the exam would lead to quality concerns and undermine the Australian standard.

Q: What are some of the cultural issues in this case?

Q: If you were Jai, what would you do?

Q: If you were David, what would you do?

Q: What can be done to improve the situation?