

Coping with College Administration:  
A Case Study of Contrasting Campuses, Countries and Cultures

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Senior leadership in higher education is challenging under the best of circumstances. It is more so during crises and when the institution lacks sufficient infrastructure to resolve uncertainties. The author has experienced both circumstances, on campuses separated by geography, language, cultural heritage, tradition, and mindset. This paper examines the differences and their implications.

Although born and raised in Finland, the author has spent the past several years in senior leadership positions at universities in the United States and in Japan. Ironically, her unique campus community in Japan is culturally and linguistically more diverse than her highly homogenous U.S. institution. She served as elected president of the faculty assembly when a financial crisis precipitated the resignation of the president at one campus. She served as appointed director of multiple academic programs at the other as faculty unrest and turnover threatens institutional progress and reputation. What are the differences in management styles in these two very different settings, and what roles do culture, tradition, and language play in the approaches senior management takes to addressing such issues?

This paper addresses these matters, and considers instructive lessons that leaders in each setting might draw from the other.