CAMPUS Research Group

The Psychology of Place Attachment: AUC Faculty’s Adjustment to the New Cairo Campus

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Introduction

Moving from one place to another can be a stressful experience. Place attachment can be very strong and cause people to feel some grief when leaving a loved place. A move from AUC’s old campus in Tahrir to a new campus in New Cairo was announced to take place in the Fall of 2008. Even though there was some excitement, based on reports (e.g., in the student Caravan newspaper) on the surface it seemed that people were upset about the move. Our research team wanted to examine the issue to learn about the AUC faculty member’s attitudes about the move before and after it took place.

Research Questions

1. Was there a difference between AUC faculty’s feelings of sadness about the move before it happened and after it actually took place?
2. How well did AUC faculty adjust to the move from the old campus in Tahrir to the new campus in New Cairo?
3. How did feelings of grief and sadness about the move after it took place relate to faculty member’s adjustment to the move?
4. How did demographic factors like sex and nationality relate to improved or decreased feelings of sadness and positive adjustment to the move?
5. How did some faculty characteristics, like the department that the faculty member works in, relate to improved or decreased feelings of sadness and positive adjustment to the move?
6. How did feelings of sense of community relate to the faculty’s feelings of sadness about the move and their adjustment to it?
Procedures for Collecting Data

We posted an online survey before the move to the New Cairo campus. The survey asked the AUC community about its attitudes towards the move from the Tahrir campus to the New Cairo campus. The survey was reposted online one year after the move to the new campus. That survey aimed to examine how the AUC community felt about the move after it had actually happened. We will focus here on AUC faculty and how they responded.

Participant Characteristics

For the pre-move survey, 90 members from the AUC faculty responded, 57 of whom were females, and 33 of whom were males. A total of 61 from the 90 that responded, or about 68% of our participants, planned to teach in the new campus during the fall 2008 semester. The majority of the faculty that responded to the survey was either Egyptian (42%) or American (34%). For their highest academic degree attained, 53 faculty members had a Doctorate degree, and 36 had a Masters degree. The sample came from various departments with the largest numbers coming from the English Language Institute (n=13), the Arabic Language Institute (n=11), and the SAPE, GWS, and FRMS departments (n=11). The rest were distributed fairly equally among the sciences and other departments like Journalism and Mass Communication, Performing and Visual Arts, Management, and Economics with 3 or 4 faculty members in each.

A fewer number of people (n=51) responded in the follow-up survey compared to those who took the survey before the move. The sample of 51 that responded to the post-move survey had 25 females and 26 males. A total of 32 of respondents taught during the fall 2008 semester in the new campus, and 12 did not. The distribution across the nationalities was quite different from the pre-move survey sample. In our sample, 29 participants were American, 9 were Egyptian, and the remaining 13 came from a range of other countries. The majority of the sample came from the SAPE, GWS, and FRMS departments (n=9), the English Language Institute (n=8), and Performing and Visual Arts (n=6). Only two faculty members came from the science departments like Biology, Chemistry, and Physics. For their highest academic degree attained, 34 participants had a Doctorate degree, 14 had a Masters degree, and one faculty member had a Bachelors degree.
Measures

Before we move on to discussing our results, let us first explain how we measured the constructs that we wanted to examine. We had one scale that measured feelings of sadness about the move to the new campus and another scale that measured positive adjustment to the move. Our report will aim to examine three main groups of factors and how they relate to decreased or improved feelings of sadness and positive adjustment. Our three groups of factors were demographic factors, faculty characteristics, and sense of community. We now move on to explain in more detail how we measured each of these constructs.

Grief

Both surveys, the one posted before the move and the one posted after the move had a series of questions that asked the AUC faculty about their feelings about the old campus, the move, and how they were dealing with it. The original questionnaire was made to capture feelings of anticipatory grief experienced by relatives of patients diagnosed with dementia (Theut, Jordon, Ross, & Deutsch, 1991). Thus the questions reflected feelings of sadness, grieving, and difficulty adjusting to news of potentially losing a loved relationship. In our study the news of the diagnosis of dementia was replaced in the questionnaire with the news of the move to the new campus. It had statements like “I feel close to the old campus” and “I have felt it was unfair that we moved” that the faculty would rate their agreement with on a scale from 1= “Strongly disagree” to 5= “Strongly agree”. The pre-move survey included all 24 items that were in the original questionnaire. The post-move survey only included 15 of the most relevant of those items. We compared between the total score that the faculty had on the 15 items that were shared in both the pre-move questionnaire and the post-move questionnaire. The Cronbach’s alpha for the pre-move anticipatory grief scale was 0.81. The Cronbach’s alpha for the post-move grief scale was 0.87.

Each participant had a total score on the 15 items ranging from the least possible score of a 15 meaning the lowest “grief” or sadness to the highest possible score of a 75 meaning very high levels of sadness about the move. As reported below, we were able to compare between levels of this construct before and after the move using a t-test. (A t-test is a statistical tool that compares whether the average score between two groups of people differ significantly).
Adjustment

The survey that was posted after the move had a series of questions that measured positive adjustment to the move to the new campus. This measure was created by our research team. It had statements like “I have become used to the commute to the New Cairo campus” and “I feel much happier about the New Cairo campus now that I have settled in” and the faculty would rate their agreement, on a scale from 1= “Strongly disagree” to 5= “Strongly agree”, to these statements. There were 15 statements giving each faculty member a lowest possible score of 15 indicating the least adjustment and a highest possible score of 75 indicating high adjustment to the move. The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.95.

Demographic Factors

In looking at demographic factors, our research team decided to look at sex and nationality. We felt it would be interesting to examine whether there was a difference between men and women for example and whether the faculty’s nationality related to their attitudes about the move.

Faculty Characteristics

Our research team also decided to look at some characteristics of AUC faculty. We looked at 2 faculty characteristics to see if they are associated with better or worse adjustment, and with more or less sadness about the move. First, we looked at whether the participant was a local hire or a foreign hire. Second, we looked at the number of years for which they had worked/ studied at AUC.

Sense of Community

To explore at this theme, we examined 4 main factors that we thought might have a relationship with how sad the faculty felt about the move and how well they adjusted to it afterwards. The first factor was a question that asked the AUC faculty how much they collaborated on projects with faculty from other universities in Egypt. The faculty would rate their collaboration rate on a scale from 1= “Never” to 5= “Always”. The thought was that maybe because the Tahrir campus was at the center of the city, the participants that collaborated more
with other faculty in Egypt would be more upset about the move than those that collaborated less, and they would have adjusted worse.

The second factor was a question that asked the AUC faculty how many hours a month they engaged in community service activities such as donating clothes or volunteering at an orphanage or NGO.

The third question asked the faculty how many times a month they attend lectures and events at AUC. Would the people that were more engaged with AUC as an institution be more upset or less upset about the move to New Cairo? Would they adjust better or worse?

The fourth factor was a series of 12 questions that asked the AUC faculty about their feelings of pride of and connection and attachment to AUC. This was a modified and shortened version of the Organizational Identification Questionnaire (Miller, Allen, Casey, & Johnson, 2000). It had statements like “I have warm feelings about AUC” and “I am proud to be an employee of AUC” that the faculty would rate their agreement on a scale from 1= “Strongly disagree” to 5= “Strongly agree”. We obtained a total score for each faculty member so that each participant could get a lowest possible score of 12, indicating low feelings of pride and connection, and a highest possible score of 60, indicating high feelings of pride of and connection to AUC as an institution. The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.96.

Results

Grief

There was no significant difference between levels of grief about the old campus before and after the move to the new campus. This means that the AUC faculty’s scores on the grief scale before the move were about the same as after the move.

Adjustment

Adjustment to the move from Tahrir to New Cairo was measured after the move. The AUC faculty was dispersed almost like a bell curve in terms of adjustment (see Figure 1).
Grief and Adjustment

There was a significant relationship between the levels of sadness that faculty members felt about the move and how well they adjusted to it. The more upset a participant was about the move to the new campus after it took place and the more the participant missed it, the less that participant reported adjustment to the move ($r = - .791$) $p < .001$.

We now move on to the results of our three themes and how they relate to the grief the AUC faculty felt about the move and their adjustment to it.

Demographic Factors

There was no difference between the sexes on the pre-move anticipatory grief scale. So before the move, both sexes felt more or less the same level of sadness towards leaving the Tahrir campus. There was also no difference between the sexes on the post-move grief scale.
Positive adjustment was also not impacted by the sex of the participant. Men and women had similar scores on our adjustment scale.

Both our pre-move sample and our post-move sample were mainly composed of two nationalities, Egyptian and American. There was no significant difference between the levels of anticipatory grief that Egyptian faculty felt prior to the move compared to how the American faculty felt. There was also no difference between their feelings of grief about the move after it took place. Both Egyptian and American faculty had similar levels of feelings of sadness. Egyptian and American faculty also had similar levels of positive adjustment to the move from the old campus in Tahrir to the new campus in New Cairo.

Faculty Characteristics

Both local and foreign hires reported similar levels of anticipatory grief about the move before it happened. They also had similar levels of feelings of sadness about the move after it took place. The faculty that was hired locally also adjusted about the same as relocated faculty.

The number of years for which the faculty had worked or studied at AUC had no relationship with the anticipatory grief that they felt prior to the move. There was also no relationship between the number of years they had worked and the feelings of grief they felt after the move or how well they adjusted.

Sense of Community

AUC faculty members’ degree of collaboration with other universities in Egypt had no relationship with their pre-move anticipatory grief, the grief they felt about the move after it took place, or their adjustment to it afterwards.

The number of hours that the faculty members spent engaging in community service had no relationship with their levels of grief before or after the move. However, it did affect their adjustment. The more time a participant spent engaging in community service activities, the worse they adjusted ($r = -.370, p=.014$).

The amount of time a participant spent voluntarily attending events and lectures at AUC had a significant relationship with the participant’s pre-move anticipatory grief. The more
engaged the participant was in events at AUC, the more sadness that participant felt about the move \((r = .441, p = .009)\). However, there was no relationship between this construct of engagement in the social life at AUC and the levels of grief participants felt after the move or how well they adjusted.

There was a significant relationship between feelings of pride of and connection to AUC and the levels of anticipatory grief that the AUC faculty had about the move. The more proud of and connected to AUC a faculty member was, the less upset he/she was about the move when it was announced \((r = -.346, p = .002)\). The more proud and connected to AUC a faculty member was, the less upset they were about the move after it took place as well \((r = -.497, p < .002)\). In line with the previous results, the faculty members that felt the most proud of and connected to AUC also adjusted the best \((r = .519, p < .001)\).

**Discussion**

Even though one would think that the AUC faculty’s feelings of sadness about the move would be reduced after it took place since some time would have passed, this was not the case as we’ve seen. The AUC faculty were just as upset as they were about the move to the new campus when it was announced. Maybe the AUC faculty still felt just as close to the old campus as when they were teaching at it. Or it could be that it had only been a short period of time since the move and feelings of sadness about it were still strong and still need time to fade out.

It was interesting to see how diverse the AUC faculty respondents were in terms of adjustment to the move from the Tahrir campus to the New Cairo campus (see Figure 1). Most people adjusted at an average rate with fewer and fewer people reporting at both extremes of perfect and problematic adjustment.

The more upset an AUC faculty member was about the move after it took place, the worse he/she adjusted to it. It makes sense that the faculty members that felt more close and connected to the old campus and sadder about the move found it more difficult to adjust to it.

What’s interesting to look at is how several different characteristics of the faculty members did not seem to affect their levels of grief and adjustment. For example, sex, nationality, whether the faculty member was a local hire or a foreign hire, the number of years
for which the faculty member had worked at AUC, and how much the faculty member collaborated with faculty from other universities in Egypt all did not significantly relate to their pre-move anticipatory grief, their post-move grief, or their adjustment to the move. It seems that the move from the Tahrir campus to the New Cairo campus impacted all of AUC strongly and almost equally; differences in the characteristics of the faculty apparently made no difference in terms of the effect of the move on the faculty itself.

Three of our four constructs that were under the theme “sense of community” did have significant relationships with our two scales for grief and adjustment. The more time a participant spent engaging in community service activities, the worse they adjusted. Maybe this is due to the fact that the old campus in Tahrir was in the center of Cairo, where it was probably easier to engage in community service activities. The new campus is situated in New Cairo, a lot further from the heart of Egypt where orphanages, NGO’s, informal settlements, and places that you would generally engage in community service activities are. It is possible that this was the reason that these faculty members found it harder to adjust.

The more engaged the participant was in events at AUC, the more sadness that participant felt about the move. Maybe it’s these faculty members were more involved in life outside of the classroom at the Tahrir campus so they felt more attached to the place. It is natural that a professor that attended more lectures, events, concerts, etc. at the old campus would be more upset about moving to a new campus than a professor that was less involved in AUC’s university life at Tahrir.

The more proud of and connected to AUC a faculty member was, the less upset they were about the move when it was announced. The more proud and connected to AUC a faculty member was, the less upset they were about the move after it took place as well. It is possible that they were so connected to AUC as an institution regardless that they were able to have a positive outlook at the move to the new campus and be more optimistic about it that those who were less attached to the spirit of AUC. Naturally, those faculty members that felt the most proud of and connected to AUC also adjusted the best after the move.
Conclusion

It seems that faculty demographic and job characteristics did not really have an effect on their grieving and adjustment towards the move from the Tahrir to New Cairo campuses. What did have an effect though was the faculty member’s sense of community. Levels of feelings of sadness about the move before and after it took place and positive adjustment to the move were impacted by some characteristics that related to the faculty’s engagement in their community both at AUC as an institution and in Egypt.

It would be quite interesting to see how AUC faculty’s attitudes about the move will be in a few years from now and follow up with it. Will feelings of sadness still remain just as high as they were when the move was announced and two years after it took place? Or will these feelings slowly fade away? Will the faculty adjust even better in a few years? Would they have reached a certain level of adjustment and stay at it? Or would these feelings of positivity about the New Campus decrease with time? Only research will tell.