

INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE KAOSPILOTS: FLYING THROUGH CULTURAL DIVERSITY

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The KaosPilots have a mission: to be the “best school for the world”. To achieve that, we would need to be more aware of what the world needs.

Currently, it seems that the KaosPilots are still somewhat stuck in its Scandinavian shell. Some students have commented on the lack of student diversity - all the students come from Western Europe (predominantly Scandinavia) and the Americas, and within them there is very little cultural diversity. Publications such as Ode and the RSA Journal have also asked whether the KaosPilots are too Euro-centric.

The KaosPilots have a great opportunity to extend its reach internationally, and there have been some strong strides in that area - forming a very international Board of Directors, organizing Outposts and World Internships, opening international KaosPilots schools, and so on. More work is always possible, though, and here are some concrete ideas on how to make the KaosPilots truly international.

About me: I come from a Bangladeshi family and was born and brought up in Malaysia. I currently study in Brisbane, Australia and I travel very often. I have always been in multicultural environments and am passionate and sensitive about cultural diversity. I describe myself as a “citizen of the world”, a true cosmopolite. My perspective will be somewhat skewed to Asian cultures, but I will try to take into account other under-represented cultures as well. I tend to look at any situation and think “how can this be more culturally diverse?” - it's a hobby of mine :)

About this report: This report is based mainly on my experience as a TestPilot with Team 1 Stockholm and my visit to the KP Aarhus school. It is also based on research from the different KP websites, the Kaospilot A-Z 2 book, and conversations with various KP staff and board members. It's meant to be encouraging rather than critical, but will also be quite honest and open. It's more conversational than academic. I apologize in advance if I offend anyone with my observations - none of them are meant to be personal. Take them as some useful ideas :)

LANGUAGE

- Please make the information about the language of operation clearer and more consistent. I was surprised when I learnt (through Facebook) that the working language of KP Stockholm is Swedish, as the application and website were in English and there was no other indication! Make everything the same language and make a note of the language requirements.
- Sometimes nuances of the language get lost in translation. What may be meant to be friendly and casual may come off as aloof - for instance, “of course you're coming to visit us!” was, I'm sure, meant to be welcoming, but came off as an order instead. This is also true of people contacting the KaosPilots - as KP becomes more international, all sorts of people will be in touch, and everyone's language level is different. Take careful note of any communication to make sure what you want to

say is clear, but also be considerate of other people's language abilities. People are generally kind and mean well (or at least it's better to assume that way, haha).

- If something is going to be presented in a different language, please provide translations - both live and printed. Please don't rely on the other students to fill in (particularly during presentations). It does come off as rude (the translating student can't pay full attention), and often important information gets lost in translation.
 - I understand that the Aarhus school offers English lessons, which is great. Do offer some Danish (or other native language) lessons too for the foreign students. It would be a great help not just with the KP education but with life in a foreign city in general. It doesn't have to be formal - casual fun lessons work really well. It would be great to incorporate the Danish students in this to create a sense of community and friendship.
 - Proofreading services (for written reports) would be great - maybe allow an enterprising student to hire out their services in return for free tuition ;)
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ADMISSIONS WORKSHOPS

- Notify international TestPilots at least **ONE MONTH** before an admissions workshop and **THREE MONTHS** before the actual program of their acceptance - that's how long it takes to process visas. I was lucky to get mine processed in two days, but that required getting EVERYTHING (tickets, accommodation, etc) sorted in literally a day. Others may not be so lucky. It's bolded because it's EXTREMELY important.
- Some elements of the Admissions Workshop can be rather intimidating, and may feel like hazing/bullying - for example, the last-minute task of making our own dinner after a long tiring day. Some of us did wonder if we were being initiated into a cult! Do take that into consideration when planning workshop tasks.
- Schedules and location information will be extremely helpful to those coming out-of-state. I understand that the Admission Workshop contents are meant to be secret, but some info on the start and end times are handy and are especially important for safety and planning. Maps and information on public transport are IMPORTANT - local systems may not be intuitive for everyone.
- Along those lines - please help organize transport, pick-ups, and accommodation for out-of-state TestPilots. This doesn't have to be complex - maybe allowing a participant to stay over at a staff member's house, or making sure that they get a ride back to their accommodation after the workshop. Again, this is important for safety reasons.
- Pre-Workshop suggestion: allow the TestPilots to get in touch with each other, e.g. YahooGroups or Ning. I've gone on a few programs and workshops that had this function and it REALLY helped with creating strong bonds and with logistical information. That way we all get to know each other, the local folk can help out the out-of-state folk, and there isn't too much awkwardness to go through when the workshops start. This is also great for individual teams before they begin Year 1.

- The Blue Arrow/Red Arrow activity (where participants are asked to draw arrows to certain people and provide praise or criticism openly) is a little culturally insensitive. In Asian cultures, “saving face” is a BIG thing - praise and criticism are NEVER done openly, only in private and only with those one is very close to. There is some value to the activity, but please understand that some people may find it challenging and humiliating. It can also be quite awkward for those that receive more of one arrow than the other, or those that don't receive any arrows (perceived as invisible). The other activity of people pairing up and discussing praise & criticism works quite well for this. Please take this into consideration when organizing a workshop with international TestPilots.
 - Being observed, while understandable, can be rather unnerving. More unnerving is the stoic quietness when participants try to converse with the observers. The unnerving-ness is possibly part of the point of observing, but do take into consideration that people act quite differently when observed, even when you say “be yourself”.
 - Splitting the workshop into the English Group and the Non-English group was a little unfair - it didn't allow for much diversity and mixing, and it put the English group at a bit of a disadvantage as most of the Scandinavian members had to deal with a second language. (I do admire my group greatly for coping with the language difficulties VERY well.) In the interest of fairness, have everyone in the workshop operate with the same language all the time.
 - Acceptances and rejections should be personalized - how do we learn if we don't know what to learn from? Getting a “Dear TestPilot” email without any opportunity to ask why is a little disheartening and impersonal. We should be able to get feedback after the workshop too.
 - Ask for dietary requirements ahead of time, not just on the day - helps a lot with planning :) Also please mark out the ingredients of all meals (even if it's just Beef/Pork/Fish). Helps a LOT.
 - Do allow provisions for religious requirements, for instance a Muslim prayer space. This would largely depend on the composition of TestPilots, so it is important to ask for their special needs. (This would also be important for those with illnesses/disabilities.)
 - Try to arrange to partially/fully fund travel costs for TestPilots coming internationally. It is a big expense for a short trip, and any help is appreciated!
 - Consider placing international/out-of-state TestPilots in host families, even if it's the apartment of a staff member. Not only does this cut down on costs, it is also safer for the TestPilot (as someone is there to take care of them) and helps the TestPilot learn more about the local culture. Host families are awesome!
 - Prepare a city info pack with resources on accommodation, public transport, things to do, key phrases, important phone numbers, etc (this is also good for incoming KaosPilots). Really really handy.
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LIFE AS A KAOSPILOT

- Host family living works really great here too, at least for the first year while everyone tries to find their footing.
 - Provide resources and counselling for those experiencing culture shock (which is likely everyone). Adjusting to a new culture is difficult and often leads to depression and anxiety, which can severely affect their KaosPilots performance. At least be understanding of those that are finding it hard to cope with a completely different cultural setting.
 - Give international KaosPilots 1 or 2 weeks of orientation before the program starts to learn about the city, get everyone settled, deal with paperwork (health insurance, resident number, ID cards, etc), find available resources (shops, doctors, etc) and so on. That way international KaosPilots do not need to stress about getting themselves settled and coping with school at the same time.
 - Keep in touch regularly with accepted KaosPilots before the program to make sure they're doing well, if they need help with visas/settling in, etc. It doesn't have to be "babying", but support is always helpful especially when you're making a big move.
 - Provide some resources for living in the city - where to shop, where the doctors are, who's got a good deal, what to do if you're bored, how to get a job, etc. Really good resource, and can even be made as a KaosPilot team project!
 - I noticed in the KaosPilot A - Z book that there is a yearly tradition of a cocktail party, where everyone is expected to bring a bottle of liquor. I don't know how indicative that is of drinking culture in Europe, but do consider that not everyone drinks, and some people have a stronger aversion to drinking than others. It can be quite alienating for these folks if social activities tend to revolve around alcohol (or dancing, which seems to be the other popular option). Allow for other social activities that do not involve alcohol, and don't compel people to drink if they don't want to.
 - Is it possible for the KaosPilots to talk to Denmark Immigration or the Foreign Affairs Ministry to help with visa concerns? That would be a BIG help.
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FUNDING

- Please, please, **PLEASE** provide scholarships for international KaosPilots! It's really difficult to find funding (particularly in countries where the KaosPilots are unheard of). Money is one of the main barriers of programs like these - the people that would benefit the most and add the most to the program don't get a chance to participate because they can't afford it. Imagine the value of having a community leader from Romania or Bangladesh be a KaosPilot and share their wisdom - only to not get the opportunity because they can't afford it. What a shame!
- The KaosPilots organization has some tight partnerships with various organizations and companies. Generate some funding partnerships - for instance, Apple can provide

free laptops, Fast Company can sponsor books and magazines, Netto can give groceries for a year, Scandinavian Air can provide flights, etc. This can help the KaosPilots and those companies in the long run too through exposure and word-of-mouth.

- Provide a breakdown of costs - not just tuition, but also living and travel. It helps a lot with planning.
- Provide assistance with fundraising, such as official letters, introductions to companies, and so on. A big barrier with fundraising efforts is that many folks would go “KaosPilots who?” and ask for proof of legitimacy. Having some proof of legitimacy and importance is very helpful.
- The admissions fee is quite a big chunk of change and can be quite challenging to pay off. Consider providing a payment plan for this - perhaps monthly, together with the Year 1 fees.

RECRUITMENT

- The websites could be a lot clearer - they're a little non-intuitive at the moment. The KaosPilots NL website is an excellent model; the only problem is that it's not often updated. Make it easy to find information - perhaps a “Being a KaosPilot in 2 Minutes” page like the Netherlands program has.
- Send out materials about the KaosPilots to embassies, study fairs, universities, and so on. Adds immensely to the legitimacy, and also makes for a great publicity tool! Also send people out to universities and study fairs - it's great to have someone to talk to to ask about the program.
- Partner up with different universities and coordinate credit-sharing programs - I.e. Students can gain university credit for being a KaosPilot. Accreditation is a BIG thing for many (Asian in particular) students and (unfortunately) having “KaosPilots” on your resume doesn't quite have the same weight as “University of So and So”. The Malmo model is a good start.
- The Board of Directors is oddly more diverse than any KaosPilot team in history. Everyone in the Board should get all out in recruiting students from their home countries and cultures to be KaosPilots, and to spread the word about the KaosPilots in their home regions. Otherwise why have an International Board?
- Advertise in various local and international media. An article in the Business or Education section goes a long way.

THE ACTUAL SCHOOL BUILDING

- I understand that the Aarhus library was recently burnt down and so now is lacking in material. This is a great opportunity to stock international books, magazines, and newspapers, as well as subscriptions to international material. Also have some

material in foreign languages. Students can make recommendations and donations for the library too, particularly international students as they would have knowledge of resources from their own country and culture.

- Get speakers from the non-Western world (or even smaller enclaves of the Western world like the Caribbean or Eastern Europe) to talk about business culture from their perspective.
- Hold classes on cultural differences in project management and business (team vs. individual, direct vs. indirect, etc). Some sort of real-life working experience with this would be valuable too (not just the Outposts) - particularly projects that involve interaction with different cultures.
- Before the Outposts, hold thorough training of the host country's culture, etiquette, sociology, geography, history, etc. Make sure that the teams understand the place they're going to and its unique perspective. Cultural sensitivity goes a long way!
- Organize regular community/volunteering activities so that the KaosPilots are aware of social issues (poverty, health, etc) and get closer to their community. They can run a soup kitchen, organize a fundraiser, talk to sick children in hospital...the possibilities are endless.
- Allow students to organize their own classes on whatever they know, be it Yoga or Crochet or Cooking or whatever their passion is. The KaosPilots get to learn something different and it's really empowering for the "teacher" to lead their own class.
- Provide a Creative Space with materials such as art supplies, crafts, sewing machines and kits, musical instruments, and so on. Let students go wild. Set up a gallery of artwork, a concert, a zine library. It's a good way to destress and get ideas for other projects.
- Some KaosPilots, when asked about their experiences, tend to sound brainwashed. Never a bad word, always "it's great! It's amazing! It's awesome". That sounds rather creepy and insincere. It's good to be sincere, even if you're saying something negative. It makes the KaosPilots more real and believable. People appreciate honesty.
- Please keep appointments and promises! I was promised an interview with major Swedish media for the workshop but that didn't happen because the organizers never got back in touch with the paper. That was rather disheartening. If you promise something, live up to it.
- Don't expect the students to do EVERYTHING. Independence is extremely important, yes, but sometimes we all need some help - especially when we're dealing with a hundred differences in culture. Everyone needs to work together to help each other out.

I hope the ideas above have been helpful. If you have any comments, please contact me at tiara.shafiq@gmail.com . Thanks and have a great day! :)

