Resolving Conflict in the Middle East: A Case Study on MEET

21F.034 Final Presentation
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MEET: An Overview

• Three-year program for Palestinian and Israeli high school students
  – Summer program and yearly projects

• Innovative conflict resolution model
  – Uses computer science to create a common professional language between the students

• Curriculum focuses on Java programming, team management, leadership building, and entrepreneurship
Program Goals

• Provide students with quality computer programming and business skills
• Offer Israeli and Palestinian students an opportunity to work together in a professional setting
• Create a network of future leaders
• Break misconceptions between Palestinians and Israelis
Student selection

- Selected from Israeli and Palestinian high school students throughout Jerusalem
  - 14 – 15 years of age
- Two stage selection process
  - Written exam
  - Interview
- General qualifications
  - Proficiency in English
  - Highly motivated
  - Demonstrated leadership
  - No programming experience necessary
Instructors

• Roles and Responsibilities
  – Teaching, leadership, and management
  – Lectures, recitations and labs
  – Mentorship

• Compensation/Benefits
  – Airfare, Housing, Stipend, Food, Extracurricular activities every weekend

• Professionally and culturally diverse team

• Training
  – Conflict resolution workshops
  – Working in multicultural environments
  – Curriculum development and learning
Impact Overview

• Three main areas of impact
  – As an non-profit organization
    • Financial information
    • Outside Support
    • Target groups
  – As a conflict resolution model
  – As a student group
Limitations to Analysis

• Methods of gathering Data
  – Personal interviews with founders
  – Interviews of instructors
  – Internal reports and documents from MEET analysis

• Limitations
  – Short time period made a wider base of interviews more difficult
  – Difficult to obtain some internal documents
  – Could not create our own assessment forms due to short time period
MEET: The Organization

• Support
  – Strongly backed by the MIT community as well as government organizations and Middle Eastern corporations

• Financial Successes
  – Have built the program so that funding is acquired one year ahead of time
  – Although most funding is continued, a large portion of it was supplied by MIT and MEET must currently secure other sources
MEET: The Organization

• Target Groups
  – Intends to impact Israeli and Palestinian students
  – Due to funding issues, the program primarily admits students in Jerusalem
    • Last year, 5 students from Bethlehem attended the program

• Obstacles:
  • Program at Hebrew University
    – Creates a slightly biased atmosphere even though other students are not at the university
  • Palestinian students must pass through a check point everyday
MEET: A Conflict Resolution Model

• Primary goal: address Israeli/Palestinian conflict indirectly

• Other conflict resolutions models exist, but most directly address issues of conflict

• Most of these models take the students from the Middle East to discuss their topics in a neutral area
MEET: A Conflict Resolution Model

• Seeds of Peace is one of the foremost examples
  – Created in 1993
  – Brings 60 students from Middle East (Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Egypt)

• Appears to have some sort of long-term effect
  – 120 alumni returned this summer
  – Does not seem to be capable of the same type of changes as MEET due to program structure
MEET: A Student Group

• Although MEET has several officers outside of MIT, they function first as a student group

• As such they have access to a lot of MIT resources:
  – Students
  – Faculty
  – Institute funding

• Founder Yaron Binar was heavily involved in AITI at the conception of MEET and used several of its features to improve MEET
MEET: A Student Group

- AITI was founded in 1999 at the beginning of the Open Courseware movement

- Strives to educate African students about technology to help decrease the digital divide

- MIT-AITI functions solely as an ASA-recognized group on campus
  - Allows for the same access to resources as MEET
  - Places a heavier emphasis on MIT students to find resources for the program
Student Feedback

“I never thought I would befriend an Arab…and now it is completely different. I now understand we are both human beings.”

- Overall approval rating of 4.7/5.0
- Improve relations between Israeli and Palestinian students
  – Pursuit of common goals
- Positive impact on academic and professional lives
Instructor Feedback

• General feelings of accomplishments

• Tension between ends and means
  – Conflict resolution model primarily
  – “When I stand before the group and teach…I often have to remind myself that this [programming] is not the main goal…”
Future Plans

• Provide participants with continued opportunities
• Expand program to include cities from across Palestine and Israel
• Establish a MEET Center
• Build a strong and active MEET alumni base
MEET: A Case Study

Questions?