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?