

BUILDING A TEAM

When a decision has been made to seek out a Mexican partner, the company will need to assemble a team to implement this strategy. The immediate goal is to find a suitable partner and negotiate an agreement. The team should be drawn from a variety of areas and management levels, so it will understand all the issues that might affect the partnership.

The team must be familiar with the company's situation. It will have to prepare draft agreements as well as negotiate positions and assess the qualifications of prospective partners. Team members must also have the sensitivity and confidence to be able to bridge cultural gaps. In cross-cultural communication, nuances, the misinterpretation of body language and even humour can quickly become major obstacles.

Every team needs a leader. The firm should appoint at least one person with enough clout to ensure things happen. The leader becomes the key catalyst for and promoter of the partnership within the firm. He or she is the driving force, taking responsibility for its creation and often serving as the chief negotiator.

FINDING THE RIGHT PARTNER

Many Mexican firms are open to partnering. Mexican companies see joint ventures and other forms of partnering as a good way to acquire state-of-the-art technology, design expertise and managerial know-how. They also perceive partnerships as a way to access foreign markets. It is essential, however, for the Canadian company to learn to quickly distinguish between genuine potential and mere enthusiasm.

The right partner is one that complements the Canadian company's capabilities so that the venture has a complete set of the skills and resources. In addition, the organizations must be able to work together harmoniously and effectively.

A critical issue is how much cooperation will actually be required. The amount of collaboration tends to increase with the uncertainty and complexity of a venture. Similarly, levels of interaction increase with the number of projects involved and the number of other objectives of the partnership. Close cooperation will also be required if the partners are characterized by any striking dissimilarities.

For example, special partnering arrangements may be required to compensate for substantial differences in company size. The smaller partner may prefer to enter into a joint venture that has considerable autonomy. Cultural differences will also have to be overcome. There are always differences in operating philosophy, attitudes, practices, and structures that make each company unique. These must be accommodated in any partnering arrangement.