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BUILDING INTERCULTURAL PARTNERSHIPS

Working with a Pakistani Partner

A Guide to Establish Effective
Cross-Cultural Communication and
Working Relationships in Pakistan

IN - COUNTRY
ORIENTATION
PROGRAM
(ICOP)

ISLAMABAD,
PAKISTAN

CENTRE FOR INTERCULTURAL TRAINING (CIT)
CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (CIDA)

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Working with a Pakistani Partner

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FOREWORD

Working with a Pakistani Partner is one of a series of guides designed to help Canadians and Asians work together effectively. The idea for the series came from years of experience preparing Canadian technical advisors for work in developing nations and their foreign counterparts for missions to Canada as part of Canada's international development assistance programs. Although many guides were available to help them prepare for culture shock and learn the practicalities of living overseas, there were few good resources to assist them in developing effective working relationships, one of the most challenging and critically important aspect of their overseas experience.

The guide is modeled after *Thais Do Business the Thai Way*, which was produced by the SVITA Foundation of Bangkok for CIDA.

Working with a Pakistani Partner is for Canadians who work with Pakistanis in a business, official, or development capacity. It offers

practical advice on forming partnerships and alliances based on trust, understanding, and effective communication.

An original draft was prepared by Rukhsana Rashid and Debbie Nikolai of the In-Country Orientation Program (ICOP) in Islamabad. It was revised and edited by Stiles Associates Inc. of Ottawa.

We welcome your comments, suggestions and insights for subsequent editions. Please write to us or send us a facsimile message. We hope your stay in Pakistan is rewarding.

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INTRODUCTION

The increasingly global nature of our economy requires people to live abroad or travel internationally for work in the public, private and non-governmental sectors. Whether stationed in a foreign country for a few days or a few years, success depends on your willingness to adapt to, and learn about, different cultures. Culture shock, language differences, family adjustment, pressure to show results quickly, and other stressful aspects of overseas work can make your stay an onerous experience. Once adapted, however, it can be one of the most rewarding experiences of a lifetime.

This guide is intended to increase your effectiveness in the Pakistani work environment by sensitizing you to many of the cultural differences you will encounter, and by giving you practical tips on how to deal with them.

Inshallah, God willing, in the chapters that follow, we will:

- ◆ describe differences between Pakistani and Canadian work-related behaviour;
- ◆ increase your understanding of Pakistani behavioural patterns by explaining the values which underpin them; and
- ◆ help you communicate more effectively in a Pakistani work environment by explaining how to recognize the factors which affect communication, highlighting specific differences in communication styles and suggesting helpful modifications to your way of communicating.

The Pakistani content of this guide has come from Pakistanis who have worked with North Americans in the business world and in government.

Most Pakistanis we consulted are urban professionals, educated abroad, fluent in English, and female. Although not representative of the Pakistani population as a whole, they reflect the views of Pakistanis with whom you are likely to be associated.

A word of caution.

The danger inherent in a guide of this kind is to run the risk of stereotyping. Readers should bear in mind that

customs and behaviours differ in urban and rural Pakistan, between and within provinces, and from one ethnic group to another. The differences are determined by a variety of factors such as tribal and ethnic backgrounds,

levels of education, and socio-economic status. For every guideline we present, there is a myriad of exceptions. Much of what you will learn will come from your personal experience and careful observation.

CULTURAL PRECONCEPTIONS

It is important to consider the perceptions Pakistanis and foreigners have of each other and the historical factors which underlie them in order to

appreciate some of the challenges involved in developing effective partnerships.

***The Colonial Legacy* ♦ ♦ ♦**

Prior to Independence in 1947, Pakistan was ruled by Britain. Pakistan's public institutions and system of government are part of Britain's colonial legacy. The British imposed their Victorian class structure on top of the existing Indian caste system and produced an immensely complex social hierarchy, the psychological remnants of which can be seen

today. Under British rule, all power and decision-making was in the hands of expatriate leaders; even the most inconsequential decisions were made by the governor or manager at the top. This hierarchical structure continues in the Government of Pakistan today. The only difference is that the Pakistani elite has replaced the British decision-makers.

***How Pakistanis and Foreigners Perceive Each Other* ♦ ♦ ♦**

Westerners arriving in Pakistan may find a wide range of reactions awaiting them, from a warm welcome to resentment. Although it is useful to understand these reactions in an historical and cultural context, one must remember that your relationships with Pakistanis may belie the generalizations made here.

global politics and the emergence of the United States as a superpower, the term for white foreigners became *Amreecan*. Owing to what some would describe as the love-hate relationship between Pakistan and the United States over the last several decades, many Pakistanis have mixed feelings toward foreigners. Many still associate them with British colonial rule.

Pakistanis' perceptions of foreigners are rooted in their recent colonial past. In the 1950s and 1960s all white men and women were referred to as *Angraze*, English. With the shift in

Foreigners symbolize the West's cultural and political dominance in the international arena, and cause antagonism, resentment, and the perception that westerners exploit Pakistan for

their own vested interests, much as the British did in earlier times. Most Pakistanis are, however, remarkably tolerant and respectful of foreigners.

For many Pakistanis, foreign technical advisors and business people epitomize western affluence, a perception fostered by exposure to western media and the lifestyles of expatriates living in Pakistan. Many resent that foreigners earn far higher salaries than their Pakistani counterparts. If not acknowledged and dealt with, the resentment can strain partner relationships. Even if you do not consider yourself wealthy, your Pakistani colleagues will think you are. Often, Pakistanis are unaware of Canada's higher costs of living and the compensation required to attract qualified Canadians away from careers at home.

Pride in Pakistan co-exists with ambivalent feelings of inferiority and superiority. You will find a contradiction between those Pakistanis who want to be accepted by foreigners and those who shun them and most things western. (The contradictions can lead to interesting conversations if handled with tact.) Westerners may be surprised to discover that some Pakistani urban professionals think western culture is superior. Their feelings of inferiority are natural, given Pakistan's colonial past and the economic disparities between Pakistan and western nations today. On the other

hand, Pakistanis, regardless of their education and western appearance, are fiercely proud of their heritage. Even those who do not fast, say their prayers, or refrain from alcohol, and who may be openly critical of some aspects of Pakistani society, will leap to the defence of their country, religion and culture. Do not underestimate this sense of loyalty and patriotism, as it is likely to surface at the first hint of criticism from outsiders.

Many Pakistanis believe that westerners are more efficient and industrious than Pakistanis. This idea stems from experience with missionaries, social workers, educators, and the British bureaucracy and judiciary. Western technological advances have strengthened this belief. Many Pakistanis want to work for foreigners because they are straightforward, judge on merit, and more likely to offer higher salaries. Many believe foreigners run projects and businesses more efficiently. Most Pakistanis believe that foreigners are more impartial and more interested in hearing the truth about Pakistan than Pakistanis. This explains why they sometimes feel freer to discuss their culture, politics and social grievances with outsiders. They might be more hesitant to be openly critical among fellow Pakistanis for fear of offending them in a society where ideology militates against frank opinion.

Under British colonial rule, white skin was associated with power and female beauty. It is still considered a sign of high status to be light-skinned. Most Pakistanis will not be so blunt about this colour prejudice, but you will see subtle reminders of it everywhere, as in the television commercials for skin bleach creams and lavish praise for fair-skinned brides. People will laugh at you if you tell them you want to acquire a tan.

Some foreigners contribute to Pakistani feelings of inferiority by projecting a sense of superiority or optimism about the West. Regrettably, some westerners, Canadians among them, look down upon Pakistani society. Because Pakistani goods, customs, values and religious beliefs are alien, foreigners assume they are of less value than their own. Ironically, many Pakistani customs and values are similar to what Canadian customs and values were at the turn of the century. Many expatriates retreat into their own communities, isolating themselves and impeding relationships with Pakistani

acquaintances and work partners. Pakistanis perceive such behaviour as arrogant, and, like all peoples, they are very sensitive to any insinuation of foreign superiority.

Some Pakistanis think most westerners are morally decadent. They are aware that Christianity is no longer a dominant force in western societies. They cite extramarital sex and high rates of divorce, crime and alcoholism as examples of western decay.

Many Pakistani men assume that western women are promiscuous and open to advances. This stereotype results in unwelcome remarks and, on occasion, advances from Pakistani men. Foreign women should dress conservatively in public and maintain a degree of personal reserve when interacting with men. A few well-timed phrases in Urdu or English will help ward off advances. A woman who is accompanied by her children or husband is less likely to be harassed than is a woman on her own.

Toward Mutual Understanding and Respect ◆ ◆ ◆

Pakistani methods and systems have evolved over centuries in a collectivist, hierarchical society. Most western societies are pluralistic and individualistic. Canadians and Pakistanis must learn to understand and appreciate both sets of cultures and historical

backgrounds. They need to recognize that culture determines attitudes and values. The way we perceive ourselves, our social roles and obligations, and the way we go about our work are shaped by our experience. If we recognize this, we are less likely to

judge behaviour by one set of standards. We can then develop strategies that are sensitive to the cultural context.

As a Canadian business person or technical advisor, you are likely to be more successful if you adapt your methods and approaches to Pakistan's reality. Look at your work as a two-way exchange of skills, rather than a one-way transfer. That is what

partnerships are all about. As you begin to understand your partner's values and motivations, the adaptations will become clearer.

Your very presence as a Canadian expert, with a mandate to help Pakistanis, creates a superior-inferior relationship. It is, therefore, all the more important to be humble, friendly and courteous. Let tolerance and an open mind guide you.

PAKISTANI CULTURAL VALUES AND CHARACTERISTICS

A Culture in Transition ◆ ◆ ◆

Feudalism

As the twenty-first century approaches, Pakistani culture is very much in transition. Although the country is moving from an agrarian to an industrial-based society, it continues to operate in a feudal mode. Employers are perceived as feudal lords; their organizations are their territory, their employees their serfs. Most of today's urban professionals are only the first or second generation to live away from the rural areas and derive their income from something other than agriculture. Strong rural ties and frequent visits to their villages keep them in tune with Pakistan's predominantly feudal mentality.

Hierarchy

Class distinctions are very clear in Pakistan and give rise to a hierarchical society wherein one's status and position determine one's power and control. This is especially true in the

government. Power is centralized in the hands of a few in the public and private sectors. Family-controlled businesses dominate the private sector.

Patriarchy

Pakistan is a patriarchal society. As the family patriarch is held in high regard, so is the patriarch of a business or government ministry.

Status

In direct contrast to the understated way Canadians live and work, status and position are all-important in Pakistan. The higher the position or status, the more the power, respect and authority one commands. Appearance is intimately connected with status. (If you've got it, you flaunt it!) Job titles carry a lot of weight. Who and how many people you invite to your daughter's wedding is a measure of your status. The car you drive reflects your place in society.

Concepts of Time ◆ ◆ ◆

Although there are many exceptions, Pakistanis generally believe that anything not done today can wait until tomorrow. The reasons for this attitude are many. To begin with, the Urdu word for yesterday, *kull*, is the same

word for tomorrow. Although Pakistani society is fast becoming urbanized, its time structure remains rural. Whether the cattle are brought in from the fields at five or six o'clock in the evening is unimportant. If the plough-

ing is not finished today, there is always tomorrow. Work is determined by nature, not by the clock.

Punctuality

Given its rural, agrarian history, it is not surprising that being on time is much less important to Pakistanis than Canadians. People frequently turn up late for work and meetings, particularly in the public sector. Punctuality is, however, more highly valued in the private sector. Although it is the prerogative of Pakistanis, especially senior bureaucrats, to be late, foreigners should never be late, except for social engagements connected with work where it is polite to arrive 15-30 minutes past the appointed hour.

Since your Pakistani counterparts will be eager to make a good impression, they may adopt Canadian standards of time while you are there. You will need a lot of patience when conducting and attending meetings. Do not be shocked or angered if after waiting two hours, you are informed that your meeting is canceled or rescheduled for another time. The best advice is: stay cool.

A man's family obligations make it impractical to adhere to western work schedules. For example, with few exceptions, it is unacceptable for women to do things in public alone. Men must accompany their wives

when visiting the doctor and husbands or servants must do the shopping. It is common for a husband to shop for his family's clothing. These family obligations consume a good deal of time during the work day.

Logistical problems also cut into work time. When you see Pakistani buses, referred to locally as flying coaches, you will understand why most Pakistanis prefer to transport their children to and from school themselves. School buses are almost unheard of. With no western-style, one-stop supermarkets, shoppers must go to many small stores and vendors for food. Since government employees work a six-day week and almost everything is closed on their day off, workers have to do their banking and other personal business during the work week. Using work time for personal errands is not frowned on as it is in Canada. It is part of the system and must be accepted.

Fate

You will hear Pakistanis say *inshallah*, God willing, almost every time they refer to something in the future. When someone says, "See you tomorrow, *inshallah*," the implication is, "Who among us can be absolutely sure we'll see tomorrow?" Inherent in *inshallah* is the belief that fate influences outcomes more than humankind. If someone doing a job for you says, "It

will be completed the next day, *inshallah*,” save yourself from disappointment and accept that it will not. But do not be worried the first time you hear your flight attendant on Pakistan International Airlines announce, “*Inshallah*, we will be landing in Lahore shortly.”

Planning

Planning or preparing for something in the distant future is uncommon in Pakistan, the prevailing attitude being more in tune with “take it as it comes.” The lack of forward-thinking appears to be related to how much control Pakistanis think they have over what happens; the more control, the more attention to planning. The private sector tends to be more concerned with planning than the public sector. It is not unusual for someone in a high position, especially in a large bureaucracy, to decide to meet on short notice, even the same day. Those summoned must drop whatever they are doing and attend the meeting if the person calling it is of a higher status.

This happens frequently, making it difficult to plan far in advance.

Spontaneity

An analytical, methodical approach to work is a western characteristic. Pakistanis tend to react spontaneously, except in bureaucracies where there are strict procedures to follow. Rote learning is the norm in Pakistani schools. Graduates tend not to be as analytical as graduates of western schools.

Socializing at work

Socializing on the job is customary, even expected because Pakistanis consider social relations more important than task. For Pakistanis, there is little distinction between their personal and professional lives. It is perfectly acceptable to call someone at home at any time to discuss work. Similarly, it is standard practice to use work time to socialize. Foreigners sometimes fail to understand the extent to which good social relations determine professional success.

Individualism versus Collectivism ♦ ♦ ♦

Whereas individualism dominates western culture, collectivism is central to many Asian cultures, including Pakistan's. A collectivist culture is one in which people are organized in strong cohesive groups to which they offer loyalty in exchange for support

and protection (Hofstede, 1991). Pakistanis tend to speak as a group rather than as individuals. They always say, “We did this,” rather than “I did this,” in formal meetings and general conversation.

Family and tribal relationships

Pakistan's system of extended family has a direct bearing on decision-making and the division of responsibilities. Parents and elders make most decisions. They have unquestioned control over young family members. Every relative is considered a member of the family. Loyalties and obligations extend to each and every member. In the work environment, especially in the government, relatives from one *biradari*, clan, tribe or sub-ethnic group, often work together in the same office. There is a tremendous sense of loyalty among them. If you antagonize one, you antagonize all. In such circumstances it is best to keep frustration or anger to yourself.

Indebtedness

There is a well-established system of favours and reciprocal obligation in Pakistan. Pakistanis keep detailed mental accounts of indebtedness. They

must return favours as a way of settling past debts. They may, for example, hire a cousin in order to honour past favours or respect family ties. As a foreigner, you come to Pakistan without indebtedness. If someone does a favour for you, you owe that person one in return. Foreigners must, however, be completely transparent in their dealings. More than being fair, everything must appear to be fair. Do not be surprised if you are asked to help Pakistanis find jobs or obtain visas to enter Canada. Listen patiently and explain at some length that you are not in a position to get jobs or visas for people. Never make false promises, but if you can help by circulating a curriculum vitae, or bio-data as it is commonly referred to in Pakistan, your Pakistani colleagues will be grateful. You have done what you can to fulfill the obligation. You are not really helping, but you appear to be helping.

Islam ◆ ◆ ◆

Pakistan is an Islamic republic with many of its laws based on the Quran and the Sunnah. Islam is predominant. Christianity, the largest minority religion, is practised by about 3% of the population. Some customs that appear to have religious significance can often be traced back to social conventions. Religion is used to legitimize cultural practices such as *purdah*, the veiling of women, and the

actions of the powerful. It is best to avoid getting into controversial discussions about Islam unless you are knowledgeable about the subject or completely comfortable with the other person. Foreigners can seriously offend someone without ever knowing it when discussing religion. If it happens, the offended person is unlikely to tell you, but may forever hold a grudge against you. On the

other hand, Pakistanis love to explain their religion to outsiders and respond eagerly to questions. Never hesitate to ask questions about Islam, but always with great respect.

Religious practices

Pakistanis appreciate foreigners who respect the many rituals associated with Islam. Devout Muslims pray five times a day. Be aware of prayer times when scheduling training sessions or meetings so as not to have to interrupt them for prayers. The second prayer of the day, *Zuhr*, is during working hours. In summer it can be any time between 1:00 and 3:00 p.m. In the winter it is earlier. Employers provide a break for the *Zuhr* prayer. It is normal for individuals to leave in the middle of an event to pray.

Muslims fast from dawn to dusk during the month of *Ramazan* (which runs from about February 2 to March 4 in 1995, 10 days earlier each successive year). Productivity in the country falls sharply because people are usually tired after delaying dinner until after sunset and waking up to eat before dawn. Government and banking hours are reduced during *Ramazan*; government works from 8:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., banks from

8:00 a.m. to noon. It is strongly recommended that business people and short-term consultants avoid visiting Pakistan during *Ramazan*. Foreigners working in Pakistan during *Ramazan* should adjust their work schedules accordingly.

Muslims do not eat pork because it is forbidden in Islam. Pigs are considered dirty. Calling someone a pig is a supreme insult. Muslims eat with the right hand.

Pakistanis will assume you are Christian, if not by religion, then by culture. Most Muslims are tolerant of other religions, but frown on atheism.

Alcohol

Alcohol is forbidden in Pakistan and is unavailable in public places. However, some Pakistanis have alcohol in their homes and will offer it to you. Never ask for it; ask for a soft drink instead. Though common practice, it is illegal to serve alcohol to Pakistanis of Muslim faith, even in your own home. Never offer Pakistanis alcohol unless they are close friends and are known to drink. As a non-Muslim you can buy alcohol for your own consumption after obtaining a permit.

Privacy and Confidentiality ◆ ◆ ◆

According to many Canadian expatriates, confidentiality, as it is known in Canada, does not exist in Pakistan. Although this is not true necessarily, it is fair to say that Canadians value privacy more than Pakistanis. The extended family system in Pakistan does not lend itself to privacy or confidentiality.

Pakistanis are accustomed to asking questions that Canadians may be embarrassed to answer, such as, "How much money do you make?" or "What is your religion?" Expect that everyone on your staff will know how much

the other makes. Remember that walls have ears. Do not underestimate the ability of servants, even those with apparently poor English, to overhear something and pass it on.

Everything that is thrown out is recycled. It is not unheard of to find your discarded letters being used for wrapping paper at the local market. You should shred or burn personal and confidential paper. Any work document or correspondence of value to your office staff will be scavenged, duplicated, and traded for money or favours.

Customs and Traditions ◆ ◆ ◆

Respect for age and parental authority

In Pakistan, the older the person, the greater the respect he or she commands. When an older person walks through the door, it is customary to stand. Within the family, elders are held in high esteem and their wishes respected. Children respect their parents' decisions, even if they disagree. Parents arrange marriages, whether in a traditional or modern household. Even love marriages must be sanctioned by the parents. Many other decisions—whether or not to take a new job, accept a transfer, go abroad for training—require authorization from members of the extended family.

Formalities

Pakistani society is much more formal than Canadian society. There are formalities between men and women, juniors and seniors, children and teachers and most other members of society. How can Canadians learn these formalities? The key is to observe carefully at all times and ask what to do when in doubt. Your Pakistani colleagues and most foreigners who have lived in Pakistan for several years can give you good advice. Be patient; there is lots to learn.

You will be invited to attend many inaugurations, conferences and formal gatherings. In Canada, you would

decline many of these invitations, for lack of time. In Pakistan, your absence will be noted, so it is best to go whenever possible, no matter how tedious some functions may be.

Speeches are much more formal in Pakistan than in Canada. When making a speech or addressing a gathering, you must acknowledge everyone at the head table, formally welcome and thank the chief guest and other dignitaries, and thank the sponsors of the event. Make sure you include all the people who matter. Follow protocol at all times.

Dress code

Dress code varies a great deal. In urban areas young male Pakistanis wear western clothes, but in rural areas traditional clothes are the norm. In most situations you should dress formally. Men should wear a tie. When it is hot, men can wear short-sleeve shirts. Never wear shorts or jeans to work. If you wear a *shalwar kameez*, the traditional Pakistani loose baggy trousers and knee-length shirt, it is a gesture that will be highly appreciated. If you wear local clothes, however, make sure they are of high quality, spotless and ironed neatly. Western women are advised to wear a *shalwar kameez* or modest, loose-fitting, western garments that cover the legs and arms. Women should never appear in public in shorts, halter

tops, short skirts, bathing suits or other clothing that exposes their arms or legs. If you wear a *shalwar kameez*, wear the *dupatta*, a long, flowing scarf, too, since it is an essential part of the dress.

Addressing Pakistanis

Addressing Pakistanis can be confusing to an outsider. Although it varies depending on the person's position and age, it is safe to refer to men as Mr. or Sir, and women as Miss. Married women will correct you if you address them as Miss. The Canadian practice of calling people by their first name is uncommon in Pakistan, so avoid first names unless invited to use them.

When meeting with senior bureaucrats such as the Commissioner or the Home Secretary, it is customary to address them by their title. When corresponding with Pakistanis, there are conventions for addressing individuals that depend on the person's status and/or position. Check with your counterparts. Accept that you will be referred to as Mr., *sahib*, or Sir if you are a man and Ma'am, *memsahib*, if you are a woman. Sometimes women are addressed as Sir, too!

When you meet with a Pakistani business person or government bureaucrat for the first time, let the individual know who you are beforehand. Make a phone call prior to your

meeting and, if possible, go to the meeting with someone the individual knows. In other words, do not walk in cold.

Manners and courtesies

Pakistanis are renowned for their gracious manners. It is a characteristic of their culture to be deferential to superiors, elders, and guests. Pakistanis expect you to be courteous and well-mannered at all times, too, even when its 45 degrees Celsius!

Relationships

Relationships are more important than tasks. Tasks that require a person's assistance are not begun until the social niceties are completed. Getting right down to work is perceived as being rude because it indicates that you consider the task more important than the people involved.

Relations between the sexes

Canadian males must be very careful in dealing with women in Pakistan. Foreigners have great difficulty dealing with cultural differences in the relations between the sexes. Even in non-traditional marriages where a woman appears to be very western, her relationship with her husband and family may be traditional. She may maintain a distance or aloofness from her male colleagues and if this is extended to you, do not misunderstand.

Physical contact between men and women in public is taboo. However, it is quite common for couples of the same sex to hold hands, a practice not associated with homosexuality. As a general rule, males should never touch a woman no matter how friendly she might be. Foreign couples should refrain from embracing in public.

Shaking hands is a big issue. Canadian men should shake hands with men, but not with women unless the woman extends her hand first. For Canadian women, the reverse holds. Shake hands with all women, but wait for men to extend their hands before offering yours. This advice is based on much discussion and experience. It is embarrassing for everyone when a Canadian extends his/her hand and there is no response from the other side. It is a convention that takes time getting used to.

It is inappropriate to ask a man directly about his wife, unless you have met her previously. Do not ask, "How's your wife?" It is correct, even expected, to ask, "How's your family?"

Hospitality

Pakistanis will lavish their hospitality on you and treat you as an honoured guest. You should be hospitable, too. Always offer tea or a cold drink when

someone comes to your office or home. When going to a restaurant for a meal, Pakistanis will always want to treat a newcomer. It is important that you reciprocate at a later date. Never “go Dutch.”

Tea breaks

Drinking tea is an important aspect of building relationships. Some Canadians think interrupting work for tea and a chat with colleagues is an imposition or a waste of time. However, Pakistanis may feel offended if the foreigner does not take the time regularly for tea and chitchat. When Pakistanis come into your office or home, always offer them tea or a soft drink before beginning any discussions. Always ask about their health and their family’s health before starting any business talk. There are many rituals around tea, such as always pouring for your guests.

Weddings and funerals

You will likely be invited to weddings of the family members of your Pakistani work partners and domestic staff. You should oblige whenever you can. It is greatly appreciated. It is a good way to learn about Pakistani culture first-hand. If an immediate family member of someone you are working with dies, you should visit the family to offer your condolences. This,

too, is highly appreciated and goes a long way in building interpersonal relations.

Gifts

Cards should be sent at Eid (the Muslim holiday marking the end of Ramazan) much in the way that Canadians send Christmas cards at Christmas, except that it is more important in Pakistan than in Canada. People will notice, and take note of, whether or not you sent an Eid card.

For weddings, it is customary to give money or a gift, similar to what you would give in Canada. Pakistanis do not expect thank-you cards. You should give small gifts to your work colleagues and domestic staff at Eid. A salary bonus is common at Eid. It is customary to tip all hotel and restaurant staff, as in Canada. At the end of your assignment, it is at your discretion whether or not to tip a driver or a *peon*, the fellow who brings you tea and does your photocopying.

Negotiating

Negotiation skills are very important. It is possible to negotiate on almost everything in Pakistan, especially prices. Always remember that Pakistanis are superb negotiators, especially the shopkeepers.

COMMUNICATION

Good communication is the key to successful partnerships. Exchange of skills and transfer of technology depend on communication. Communicating effectively across cultures requires well-honed listening skills and an understanding of the host culture. The following information includes some guidelines to assist you in developing your communication skills in a Pakistani work environment.

Urdu

Urdu, Pakistan's national language, is spoken by the majority of the population. It is difficult to function well without a grounding in Urdu in many other parts of the country, especially in rural areas and small towns and cities. Most Canadians arriving in Islamabad, the capital, are not motivated to learn Urdu because they are surrounded by people who speak English. By the end of their assignments, however, most Canadians, even those posted to the capital, regret not having made greater effort to learn basic Urdu. Just a few key words and phrases go a long way towards building rapport with your partners and their staff. It is the effort that Pakistanis greatly appreciate. It is well worth your time and effort, if only to get exposure to the rudiments of the language.

English

Many educated Pakistanis have a good command of written and spoken English since all schools teach English. Standards are, however, generally lower than in Canada. Some Pakistanis, even those with graduate degrees, have great difficulty expressing themselves well in written English. Canadians find the Pakistani writing style flowery and their language-use stilted. When writing to prominent people, by Canadian standards, Pakistanis letters are long-winded and laced with too many superlatives. Canadian correspondence tends to be brief, concise and to-the-point, to the extent that some Pakistanis find it abrupt and jarring. You should strive for a balance between the two styles in your letters to Pakistani officials.

Some Pakistanis who do not speak English well can read and write reasonably well. This is because there is little emphasis on spoken English at school and few opportunities to practice speaking.

Many Canadian English words have a different meaning in Pakistan. It is best not to use too much slang. Pakistan's English is of the British variety, and so is the spelling.

Canadians speak quickly and have accents which Pakistanis do not always understand. The reverse is also true. Many Pakistani counterparts report that Canadians do not listen carefully and often cut Pakistanis off short. Listening is one of the most effective communication skills. Not only does it allow people to learn, but it also conveys a sense of interest in what others have to say.

To facilitate communication, it is helpful to speak slowly and paraphrase frequently. Where appropriate, repeat incoming messages in your own words and ask the person receiving your messages to do the same. Using this technique will help ensure that messages are interpreted correctly. Paraphrasing is better than asking, "Do you understand?" This question always elicits an affirmative response. Never assume that the other person has understood what you have said.

Read the Pakistani English newspapers. Pakistanis love to discuss politics. Keeping up with Pakistani news will give you some talking points and help you gain rapport with your Pakistani colleagues. Pakistanis will ask you about Canadian politics.

Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication is a complex subject of great importance when communicating across cultures. The best way to learn about non-verbal communication is by observing. For instance, you will soon notice that men and women rarely look each other in the eye when speaking. Subordinates and servant never look their bosses in the eye. Pakistanis rarely say "no" directly. Watch their body language; they can be telling you "no" while saying "yes."

As a general guideline for effective communication, listen, observe, and don't assume anything.

WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH YOUR PARTNERS

You and your partners will have to work hard to overcome preconceptions and stereotypes in developing your

relationship. We will now look at how to go about it.

Building Trust ◆ ◆ ◆

Right from the outset of your stay in Pakistan, it is important to build personal relationships with your partners. Get to know their interests, family backgrounds and education, work experience, what they do, and where they stand in the hierarchy. The key to success is to build trust.

Pakistanis often feel that foreigners do not trust them. This false impression is usually the result of poor communication. Here are some guidelines for building trust.

- ◆ Don't rely on your foreign value system to judge situations and make decisions. First get a grasp of the country, local value systems, customs and norms.
- ◆ Be fair; treat everyone you work with equally.
- ◆ Be transparent in all dealings.
- ◆ Don't say one thing and do another. Be consistent.
- ◆ Carefully explain your actions. Have them translated or use an interpreter to ensure that everyone understands.
- ◆ Be honest and keep your word. Make it clear that you will follow through.
- ◆ Be open, respectful, and patient. Ask the same of others.
- ◆ Recognize and accept your limitations and, wherever possible, share them with your counterpart.
- ◆ Don't be afraid to admit a mistake and laugh at yourself. Show humility.
- ◆ Reveal some personal information about yourself. Be authentic.
- ◆ Ask questions to better understand. Listen attentively.
- ◆ Show respect and appreciation. Praise, a pat on the back, or a *shabash*, "well done," go a long way in building your counterpart's confidence.
- ◆ Think of all the possible ramifications before you act. The circles within which you move are small; word of any unseemly conduct or remark will spread quickly.
- ◆ Discuss work problems with trusted colleagues.

- ◆ Join in social activities and outings with your Pakistani work colleagues.
- ◆ Don't expect to change the system. Keep a sense of perspective as to what is really important.
- ◆ Drink lots of tea.

Managing Pakistani Staff ◆ ◆ ◆

Pakistani staff always regard foreign managers or advisors as authority figures. How you use your authority depends on your personality. But do not be afraid to use it; it is expected. Don't let the formalities and courtesies of the workplace get in your way of achieving your objectives. Be polite but firm.

Hiring, firing and remuneration

As in most other cultures, almost everyone in Pakistan plays power games as they jostle for position in the hierarchy. Associating with or working for foreigners carries a lot of status. There may be hundreds of applicants each time you advertise a vacant position. Be careful when selecting and recruiting people. Make sure that merit and professionalism are paramount in your choices. You may not wish to delegate the recruitment of key staff to your Pakistani colleagues because a host of other considerations, including family or tribal obligations, may dominate their selection criteria. Sometimes it is, however, expedient to give in to pressure. Use your judgment and be flexible.

It is very unusual for people to be fired, except in the private sector. Even then, it may be difficult. A disgruntled employee can make life difficult for you and everyone else. Wherever possible, look for a win-win solution. Reassign ineffective staff or encourage them to leave on their own accord in such a way that they do not lose face. Seek the advice of trusted colleagues and other foreign managers before you act.

If you are responsible for determining the salaries, benefits, working hours, per diems, medical allowances, and terms of employment for Pakistani staff, proceed carefully and do your homework. Find out what other projects and organizations do. Get some outside advice. Remember that your Pakistani staff are likely to run circles around you in any negotiating session. You can be sure that nothing will remain confidential; everyone will find out what each receives. Be fair, but firm. You are fortunate if you have a good administrative officer to handle most personnel matters. Regardless, you will need to exert your authority from time to time.

Performance appraisals are not part of Pakistani management culture, especially in government. If you must evaluate subordinates, do it individually and in private so as not to erode their self-esteem.

Planning and scheduling

After working in Pakistan for a while, most Canadians realize that the schedule they have set out for themselves is unrealistic. You need time to build relationships, to listen and learn. If you rush, your frustrations will rise and you will have limited success.

When scheduling tasks, you need to compensate for delays owing to sickness, weddings, funerals, religious holidays, personal business, transport strikes, and other unforeseen events. If a staff member's relative or friend dies, it is imperative that he or she attend the funeral. No matter how important, you and your work will have to wait. People drop everything to pay their last respects. When planning your work, build in extra days to compensate for such inevitable events.

In spite of a more relaxed attitude towards time, deadlines can be an effective motivator. Since Pakistanis tend to leave many tasks until the last minute, artificial deadlines may help to ensure that the work gets done. Be

careful not to "cry wolf" too many times.

Delegating work

In Pakistan, an individual's responsibility is to the process, not the outcome, while the western approach is more result-oriented. This may be related to the importance accorded to fate and the general perception that most outcomes are beyond an individual's control. Pakistanis do what they can to ensure that their role in making something happen has been fulfilled, but what they regard as their responsibility does not extend very far. For example, once work is delegated, it is no longer the individual's responsibility.

When you assign work to your Pakistani staff, chances are they will assign all or part of it to junior staff and not follow up afterwards. Each person along the line abdicates responsibility, with the result that low-level staff are left with more work than they can handle. You will have to follow up on everything you assign, and train your staff to take responsibility if you want to be sure that the work gets done. When delegating, make sure your instructions are explicit. It is helpful to distribute a written record of all work assignments and schedules and ask for written progress reports.

Motivating staff

It is difficult for foreigners to understand what motivates Pakistanis. In Canada, employers raise their employees salaries and give them promotions or bonuses in reward for hard work and good performance. The attitude of workers is, perform well and we will be rewarded. Pakistani employees may not work hard or perform well at the outset if they feel they are underpaid. On the other hand, they are likely to work hard if they think they are getting sufficient pay. Their attitude is, reward us and we will perform.

In the government, promotions are based solely on length of service and seniority. There is no reward for performance and no incentive to do a good job. Once in a government job, it is almost impossible to be fired. Many government employees spend their entire career putting in time. They are motivated only at a personal level. They will do something for you because you are a friend, they owe you a favour, you have paid them extra, or, if you are lucky, because you are a foreign guest in their country. Some foreigners working in government

have successfully motivated others by their own infectious enthusiasm. Unfortunately, performance levels are rarely sustained once the foreigner leaves.

Maintaining harmony

Maintaining harmony in the workplace is all-important. Learn how the relationships operate in your place of work and do your best not to upset them if they are harmonious. Keep a close eye out for tensions and conflict among staff, especially animosities between genders and ethnic groups. Some interpersonal conflicts can get very messy, especially those which have a long history. The opposing individuals are likely to have formed allegiances throughout the organization. Try not to get involved; try not to take sides; and be careful whom you confide in. If, however, the conflict affects work, you may have to step in. Conflict resolution skills will help you a great deal. There is a strong need to save face in the Pakistani culture, so look for ways to settle disputes without either side losing face. If you lose your temper, it is you who has lost face.

***Dealing with Bureaucracy* ♦ ♦ ♦**

Dealing with bureaucracies in Pakistan is frustrating, and worthy of a book in itself. There is a lot of red tape, shuffling of paper, slow decision-making, and inaccessible senior

officials. It takes lots of time and patience to get anything accomplished. Be prepared for changes, abrupt cancellations, and people failing to turn up for appointments. Imagine the

worst and you will not be too disappointed.

Decision-making within bureaucracies is mostly autocratic and follows a rigid chain of command. The authority of senior bureaucrats is unquestioned. In many cases you will find it difficult to get a clear-cut decision. Often, only the person at the top has the authority to decide matters that would be the responsibility of mid-level or junior managers in Canada. The decision will not come until all the pros and cons have been considered. Low-level workers, such as servants, messenger boys, and drivers will not likely take the initiative to make decisions. Therefore your instructions to them must be comprehensive and explicit. Remember that subordinates never question or contradict their superiors at meetings. They are unlikely to make suggestions in the presence of their superiors.

Connections

Who you know is of paramount importance in helping you get things done. If you don't know the appropriate person, you must know someone who knows someone who can help. This makes it difficult for newcomers to get things done. But remember,

nothing is free. Every favour carries with it a reciprocal obligation. In the business world, a trustworthy local agent can save you a great deal of time and expense. On development projects, an experienced Pakistani administrative officer is essential.

Corruption

Corruption is widespread and an accepted part of Pakistani society. There are many reasons for corruption, not the least of which is that people must supplement their salaries to survive. It is common to pay staff extra to do work that is in their job descriptions. When required, do it discretely, using Pakistanis who understand the system to act on your behalf. Transactions for visas, licences, and similar requirements should be conducted by a Pakistani who has the appropriate contacts or who knows how much and how to pay.

That said, it is possible to carry on business in Pakistan without paying bribes, but you must accept that things will take longer without a little grease to smooth them along. It becomes even more important to develop a social network. Having friends in the right places is the most effective way of doing business.

CONCLUSION

Whether on a short- or long-term assignment in Pakistan, your personal enjoyment and professional success will depend on your attitude as much as your expertise. If you observe carefully, listen, learn and try to understand before acting, you are more likely to have an enriching experience and gain the trust of your Pakistani partners.

Understanding and respecting cultural differences are the keys to developing effective communication and strong work relationships across cultures. We hope that this guide has provided insights that will contribute to your understanding and appreciation of the Pakistani work environment.

May your stay in Pakistan be rewarding!

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