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BUILDING INTERCULTURAL PARTNERSHIPS

Working with a Nepalese Partner

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

IN - COUNTRY ORIENTATION PROGRAM (ICOP)

KATHMANDU NEPAL

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

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Working with A Nepalese Partner

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CONTENTS

Foreword 4

A Word of Caution 5

First Encounter: A Scenario 5

Introduction 9

Who Should Read this Guide? 9

How the Guide is Organized 9

Cross-cultural Partnerships: a Theoretical Framework . . . 10

Four Stages of Partnership Development 10

Partnership conception 11

Partnership design 11

Partnership formation 11

Partnership management 11

Hofstede's Model 12

Individualism vs. Collectivism 12

Large vs. Small Power Distance 13

Masculinity vs. Femininity 13

Strong vs. Weak Uncertainty Avoidance 13

Working in Nepal: Comparing Canadian and Nepalese Cultural Values 14

Canadian and Nepalese Values 14

Cyclic vs. linear time 15

Priority to relationships vs. tasks 16

Personal vs. business life 17

Status and hierarchy 18

Working Effectively with Your Nepalese Partner 21

Overall Context 21

Public Sector Bureaucrats 21

Context 21

Structure 22

Perspective of your partner 23

Attitudes toward you 23

Suggested approach 24

Non-governmental Organization Professionals 24

Context 24

Structure 25

Perspective of your partner 26

Attitudes toward you 27

Suggested approach 27

Technical Professionals 28

Context 28

Structure 28

Perspective of your partner 28

Attitudes toward you 29

Suggested approach 29

Teachers and Academics 29

Context 29

Structure 30

Perspective of your partner 30

Attitudes toward you 30

Suggested approach 30

Conclusion 32

References 34

FOREWORD

Working with a Nepalese Partner is one in 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 aspects 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 Nepalese Partner is for Canadians who work with Nepalese in a business, official, or international development capacity. It offers practical advice on forming partnerships and alliances based on trust, understanding and effective communication.

The guide was written by Kumar Upadhyaya and Parimal Jha of the Human Resource Development Centre (HURDEC) in Kathmandu with assistance from Ivan G. Somlai. The work was directed by D. Bikram Ingwaba (Subba), Coordinator of CIDA's In-Country Orientation Program in Nepal. Stiles Associates Inc. of Ottawa edited the guide.

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 Nepal is rewarding.

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A Word of Caution

Some readers may feel uncomfortable with some aspects of the guide, such as the way we have portrayed the foreign advisor in the scenario below. The discomfort is normal and healthy, likely a sign that the reader has already begun to develop an awareness of sensitive situations within the new environment. Although our characterizations are typical of many, they are by no means universal. In recognizing the uniqueness of every individual and the dangers of generalizing, our examples are meant to be illustrative.

First Encounter: A Scenario ◆ ◆ ◆

(The scenario below was written by Ivan G. Somlai, a Canadian living in Nepal. The dialogue is written in a standard font, the thoughts in italics.)

Day 1

Foreign Advisor: *Well, I should give him a call to let him know I've arrived. Perhaps the meeting can be finished a few days early. If we move on it I could get a couple of days in Singapore. God knows I deserve a break after all this traveling.*
Hello. Is this JAG-DISH NEW-PANE?

Receptionist: *What pronunciation!* Where are you calling from, please?

Foreign Advisor: What do you mean? From my hotel, of course.

Receptionist: *What do you mean, what do you mean ... they all say that when I try to be polite.* What is your good name, please?

Foreign Advisor: They're all good, ha! ha! Tell him it's William Parker.

Receptionist: May I know what company you're with?

Foreign Advisor: Well, not the one I'd like to be with here in the hotel, ha! ha! Just a joke. I'm from Hurricane Hydro.

Receptionist: *How lewd. I wonder if innuendoes are acceptable in his own country, and if his wife knows.* Yes sir, just one moment.

Nepalese Counterpart: Good afternoon, Mr. Parker. This is Jagdish Neupane.

Foreign Advisor: Hi Jag Dish. Jee, you don't mind if I call you Jag, do you?

Nepalese Counterpart: Oh no, of course not. *The least he could do is try to pronounce my name correctly.*

Foreign Advisor: Listen, Jag, I thought if we could sit down this afternoon and have a quick go-over on that technical report, we could have it in the bag by the end of the week.

Nepalese Counterpart: *He's had a long trip, but like most of them he's "got to get down to business." I wish he'd cut out the jargon—I can only guess what he means.* Why don't you relax from the long flight, and come to see me first thing tomorrow morning, Mr. Parker?

Foreign Advisor: Well, all right, I'll be there about quarter to nine then.

Nepalese Counterpart: Can we make it 10:30? *He probably doesn't realize we open at 10:00 a.m. Even then horrendous traffic can delay the arrival of some of my subordinates. I would like all the staff here to receive him.*

Foreign Advisor: *How in the world do they get any work done? "First thing" in the morning is 10:30 a.m.? Half the day is already gone!* O.K. Jag, I'll be there at 10:30.

Nepalese Counterpart: All right, Mr. Parker. Good day.

DAY 2

(At the office)

Foreign Advisor: Hi, I'm Bill Parker. I have an appointment with Jag-Dish New...

Receptionist: Neupane. Yes, sir. Please sit down for a few minutes. *Yesterday "William," today "Bill" Parker; I must have misunderstood him.*

Foreign Advisor: *Hell, even a set time can't be kept!*

(15 minutes later)

Nepalese Counterpart: Please come in Mr. Parker. *He looks impatient, like most of them. Little does he know I've been seeing people at home since 5:30 a.m. and that his project is not our only one.*

Foreign Advisor: *Well, it's about time. Are they serious about this project or not?* So, finally, Jag, it's good to see ya!

Nepalese Counterpart: *Incredible informality! We've never met before, yet he addresses me as I address my son!* Yes, Mr. Parker, I'm so sorry for making you wait.

Foreign Advisor: *Sure you are.* Ah, no problem, don't worry. So how's everything? I understand the draft technical report is finished.

Nepalese Counterpart: *Isn't he interested in my family or telling me about his home? They're all so direct.* Yes, yes it just needs a few modifications.

Foreign Advisor: *Either it's ready or it's not. What's this crap about modifications?* You know this is now the second draft, and in order to stick to our agreed schedule we can't afford further delays.

Nepalese Counterpart: *Easy for him to say. English is his first (perhaps only)*

language, whereas for my staff and me, it is our second, third or fourth language. But he still expects us to work as fast as he can. I understand, and we certainly intend to finalize it as soon as possible. Once our Secretary agrees, I think it can go to the Planning Branch and then the Finance Ministry.

Foreign Advisor: *What the hell. First we make an agreement and then their side can't make a bloody decision 'till everyone's uncle has seen it!* Look, I realize that things take a bit longer here, but couldn't we grease a few palms, so to speak, to get this through. My company does have a legal agreement, and any deadlines not met mean a slice off our profits.

Nepalese Counterpart: *Here comes his patronizing again. He talks of legality, yet he is willing to pay bribes; does he have any principles? Also, power cuts reduce computer time to prepare documents. I have to kowtow to politicians' whims and divert staff time to nonessential pet projects. It's hard to motivate my staff to work hard when they receive such low salaries, over which I have no control. But he wouldn't understand.* Of course I understand. We're really pushing to shape this final draft into a mutually acceptable document. Can I offer you some tea or coffee?

Foreign Advisor: *Finally, a sound offer! But I need a cool one.* A Coke would be nice if you have one.

Nepalese Counterpart: Sure we'll get you one. *He wouldn't understand we don't have refrigeration like in his office; but to please him I'll send the peon out to buy one.*

(After refreshments and more conversation)

Nepalese Counterpart: So, let's continue tomorrow when my assistant will also be able to be with us.

Foreign Advisor: *It sure would be good to get this over and done with.*

INTRODUCTION

Who Should Read this Guide? ◆ ◆ ◆

This guide is meant primarily for Canadians who come to work in Nepal, particularly those who stay a year or more. Expatriates from other countries and Nepalese professionals who work with expatriates may also find it useful. While it is impossible to address every intercultural concern, the guide provides examples of key culture-specific differences and similarities in management practice between Canada and Nepal. We have emphasized the subtle cultural differences that are more difficult to detect.

How the Guide is Organized ◆ ◆ ◆

The guide begins with a description of the context, basic assumptions and a theoretical framework for intercultural understanding. It is followed by differences and similarities between the Canadian and Nepalese work environments and their implications. The last section deals with intercultural interaction in government, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and the private sector.

Reading the guide from beginning to end will give readers an overview of the Nepalese work environment. Those with limited time may wish to focus on the sector in which they will be working. We strongly recommend that everyone read the opening section because it provides a theoretical framework for interpreting the differences and similarities between cultures, and their management implications.

CROSS-CULTURAL PARTNERSHIPS: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Four Stages of Partnership Development ◆ ◆ ◆

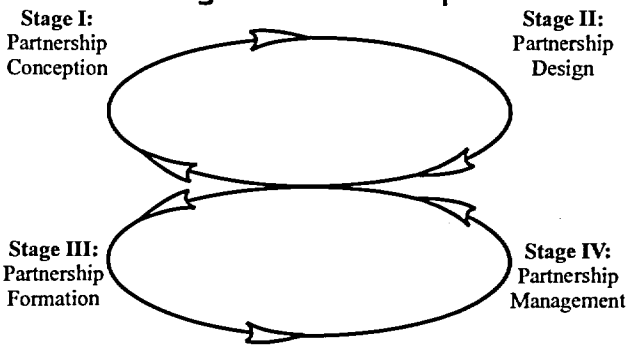
Researchers have concluded that many partnerships fall short of success:

- McKinsey and Company Inc. (1983) found that two-thirds of cross-cultural partnerships run into serious problems within two years, and only half succeed in the end;
- Dunning, Kogut and Blomström (1990) revealed that only 20% of international joint ventures survive more than six years;
- Harrigan (1985) found that both parties were satisfied in only 45% of cross-cultural relationships;
- Kealey (1990) found that only 20% of Canadian advisors overseas are highly effective, as measured by their ability to transfer skills and knowledge; and
- Philippe Lasserre (personal communication, July 1993) found that 65% of local partners thought large numbers of expatriates were a major source of difficulty in international partner relations.

Why do so many cross-cultural partnerships fail? Failures have been traced to such factors as inadequate preparation, insufficient ground work, superficial agreements and mis-matched operating principles. The framework below, which is based the stages in a project cycle, is a useful tool for conceptualizing partnerships. Things can go wrong at one or more stages.

Figure 1

Stages of Partnerships



Source: adapted by I. G. Somlai with assistance from Blitzer (personal communication, 1993)

Partnership conception

The partners should begin by answering such fundamental questions as:

- What advantages would be gained from the partnership?
- Would we have a better chance of attaining our goals independently?
- With whom should we collaborate? What are our options?
- How can we select the most suitable partner agency?

Partnership design

The project design can make or break the relationship. At this stage, you need to share expectations and concerns with your partners and highlight strengths. What resources can both sides bring to the relationship? What are the expected roles of expatriates and hosts? Will there be a transition or turnover stage? Could either side withdraw honourably? Are there any preconceived policies or rules?

Partnership formation

Once you and your partners design an acceptable project framework, it is time to discuss staffing. If new personnel are required, how will recruitment and selection take place? Are there any guidelines to be established before starting?

Partnership management

Most partnerships experience serious difficulties in the management or operative phase. The difficulties often result from problems at the previous stages and/or inadequate skills, knowledge and attitudes. Some questions that need answering at this stage are:

- Are the manager's beliefs, styles and practices appropriate?
- Are there deep-rooted value differences behind the contrasting management styles and practices?
- How are differences settled when they occur?

Most project problems can be traced to human factors, not technical deficiencies. By following a strategic process that addresses the human aspects of partnerships, projects have a good chance of succeeding. By human aspects, we mean the similarities and differences in the way the partners perceive and carry out their activities.

Transfer of skills, knowledge, and expertise to counterparts in the host country is the minimum condition for successful institutionalization and sustainable development. Researchers such as Somlai (1992) and Blitzer (personal communication, 1993) have noted that management and the

transfer of skills, knowledge, and expertise are culture-specific. Even among western countries there are remarkable differences in approaches to management.

Foreign partners need to understand and respect the salient features of the host country's culture, in particular those features that have a direct bearing on management effectiveness. Before turning to some of the relevant features of Nepalese culture, we will provide a theoretical perspective on cross-cultural relations.

Hofstede's Model ◆ ◆ ◆

Researchers have made progress in understanding the impact of culture on human behaviour. Geert Hofstede (1991), a Dutch cross-cultural specialist, defined culture as "the collective programming of the human mind which distinguishes people of one group from another" (p. 5). According to Hofstede, culture consists of the patterns of thinking that parents transfer to their children, teachers to their students, and friends to their friends. Following extensive research in about 50 countries, including Canada, Hofstede concluded that cultures vary along four dimensions, enabling researchers to compare one culture to another. The dimensions are:

- Individualism vs. Collectivism;
- Large vs. Small Power Distance;
- Masculinity vs. Femininity; and
- Strong vs. Weak Uncertainty Avoidance

Individualism vs. Collectivism

This dimension relates to the degree of interdependence a society maintains among individuals. In individualist societies, where people are expected to look after themselves and their immediate families, strong personal bonds are limited to a few close family members. In collectivist societies, people are integrated at birth into large, cohesive groups, including extended family groups, where they are protected in exchange for their unquestioned loyalty.

Cultural differences along this dimension have many important implications for managers, including differences in the way employees are motivated, in employees' perceptions of work and private life, in their expectations regarding employer-employee relations, in their priorities

between tasks and relationships, and in their acceptance of various performance appraisals and feedback mechanisms, and so on.

Large vs. Small Power Distance

This dimension is concerned with how a society handles inequity. Power Distance is the extent to which members of a society accept inequitable distribution of power in institutions and organizations. People in Large Power Distance societies accept the inequities of hierarchical order. People in Small Power Distance societies tend to demand justification for power inequalities.

Differences along this dimension have consequences for the way people build their institutions and organizations. It also has implications regarding styles of leadership, communication, settlement of grievances, career advancement and decision-making processes.

Masculinity vs. Femininity

This dimension is based on the society's distribution of social (not biological) roles between the sexes. Masculinity, in this context, means a preference for achievement, heroism, assertiveness, and material success; femininity refers to a preference for relationships, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life. Highly masculine societies strive for maximum social differentiation between the sexes. Men are given the more outgoing, assertive roles and women the caring, nurturing ones. In contrast, highly feminine societies strive for minimal social differentiation between the sexes. Women can assume assertive roles and men nurturing roles.

Differences along this dimension have implications for motivation, career advancement, quality of work life and communication.

Strong vs. Weak Uncertainty Avoidance

This dimension relates to the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. Strong Uncertainty Avoidance societies try to control the future by maintaining rigid codes of belief and behavior. These societies are intolerant of deviance. In contrast, Weak Uncertainty Avoidance societies take the future as it comes and are more tolerant of deviance, having as few rules as possible.

Differences along this dimension have implications for time management, planning, and personal conduct.

WORKING IN NEPAL: COMPARING CANADIAN AND NEPALESE CULTURAL VALUES

Canadian and Nepalese Values ◆ ◆ ◆

Why do nationalities differ in the way they do things? Canadians and Nepalese can trace their contrasting management styles to different historical experiences that have been reinforced over the years by the socio-economic systems of each country.

Although Nepal was not part of Hofstede's survey, Parimal Jha (1988) estimated scores for Nepalese society, using Hofstede's methodology. His findings were confirmed by Nepalese and Canadian expatriates (Jha 1993). The scores are as follows:

	Power Distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty
Nepalese	65-70	30-35	40-45	40-45
Canadian	39	80	52	48

The main differences are found in the Power Distance and Individualism dimensions. With its High Power Distance, Nepalese society is characterized by a relatively high dependence on socially accepted authority and institutional inequities. The opposite is true of most of Canadian society.

Nepalese society is characterized by a collective consciousness, while Canadians are largely individualistic. Nepalese place a high priority on family and social obligations and need affiliation, much more than most Canadians.

Looking at the differences along the four dimensions, we can see scope for miscommunication, misunderstandings and the frustration felt by Canadians who don't understand how things work in Nepal. The differences, as outlined below, are reflected in day-to-day management concerns:

- Cyclical vs. Linear Time;
- Priority to Relationships vs. Tasks;
- Personal vs. Business Life; and
- Status and Hierarchy.

Canadian and Nepalese differences associated with time relate to Hofstede's Uncertainty Avoidance; differences regarding tasks and relationships relate to his Masculinity-Femininity dimension; differences between business and personal life parallel differences along the Individualism-Collectivism continuum; and differences in status and hierarchy are connected to the Power Distance dimension.

We will now examine each issue in detail. Our examples are based on interviews with Canadians and their Nepalese counterparts. (We observed that Canadians in Nepal notice cultural differences more than their Nepalese counterparts, probably because one becomes more sensitive to the differences when one is working in an alien culture.)

Cyclic vs. linear time

You have a meeting with some Nepalese. As usual, you arrive on time, but find that the Nepalese are not very punctual. Once they arrive, they tend to take considerable time before they are ready to talk business. They seem to have several other informal, non-business issues to discuss. You wonder if these talks are an appetizer. No doubt, the chit-chat drives you crazy!

As the scenario suggests, Canadians are easily led to believe that their Nepalese counterparts care little for punctuality. What underlies this over-generalization? Nepal's low score on Hofstede's Uncertainty Avoidance and Individualism dimensions offers some clues.

Like most Asians, Nepalese perceive time as cyclical, unending, and relative. With a deep-rooted belief in fate and life after death, time for Nepalese is inexhaustible. Seasons change and days turn to nights and days again in perpetuity. Your Nepalese partners will be aware of time commitments, but may not give them as high a priority, among other pressing concerns, as you would. They are likely to be flexible about deadlines and will expect you to be the same. The slow, cyclical pace of life in Nepal is reinforced by low wages and a lack of social pressure to hurry. In contrast, westerners have a linear idea of time. For them, time lost is lost forever. Time is a categorical imperative. Time is money.

Don't be surprised if there is a 15-minute delay at the start of meetings with your Nepalese partners. It is expected. Once a meeting is underway, it is common to spend the first 15 minutes or more chatting about social matters. You can expect distractions during meetings, people constantly going in and out and telephones ringing. However, you may be surprised to learn that meetings tend to go on until the business at hand is done.

The Nepalese notion of time extends to planning. Planning is often a superficial formality, a ritual. Anticipation, an essential element of planning, is often missing. Nepalese tend to change plans at will and find it difficult to adhere to rigid work plans or highly structured procedures. Lack of planning often results in diffused responsibility, unclear accountability and vague job descriptions. One expatriate observed that some Nepalese have to do six jobs at once, resulting in all of them being done poorly.

How can Canadians cope with different concepts of time and approaches to planning? Canadian expatriates with long experience in Nepal give the following advice:

- Gently remind your counterpart about meeting times and deadlines;
- Don't schedule meetings or appointments back-to-back;
- Be flexible when scheduling meetings and tasks: expect between five and 15 minutes of small talk at the beginning of meetings unless your counterpart is western educated and/or has dealt often enough with westerners to know their habits (Somlai 1989); and
- Use planning as a tool, but with "flexible rigidity."

Priority to relationships vs. tasks

Nepalese value relationships more than tasks. Developing trust among the partners is more important to them than the partnership's contractual obligations. Harmonious, predictable friendships give Nepalese satisfaction at work where they tend to build lifetime relationships. They expect their employers to provide them with safe, cozy group environments in exchange for loyalty. Employers are expected to create a sense of belonging among employees.

Canadians, like many other westerners, tend to be highly task-oriented. They spend much less time than Nepalese in building relationships before getting down to business. Canadians tend to place their commitment to the job ahead of relationships. Some Canadians would consider the notion of relationship building fuzzy and extraneous. Canadians tend to be selective in building relationships; they have their own (subconscious, perhaps) rules regarding the number, frequency and intensity of their relationships. They are, for example, accustomed to short-term relationships at work since Canadians change jobs more frequently than Nepalese.

Many Nepalese share the perception that westerners live to work, whereas Nepalese work to live. Nepalese say that westerners seldom interact with their work colleagues after work hours and feel pressured if forced to participate beyond the conventional limits of their relationships at work. Nepalese think westerners who don't readily share their feelings are cold. Such cultural differences can undermine trust and adversely affect partnerships.

Westerners who fail to appreciate the collectivist nature of Nepalese society frequently accuse Nepalese employers of nepotism. Westerners fail to realize that Nepalese are obliged to be loyal to members of their extended family, caste or village group.

When considering individuals for promotion, Nepalese, unlike Canadians, give more weight to seniority than performance criteria. This practice can cause serious difficulties in Nepalese-Canadian partnerships.

Nepalese prefer compromise to confrontation. They dislike overt displays of anger and aggression. They detest being criticized in public and generally refrain from publicly criticizing others, owing to their fear of loosing face. They prefer indirect channels of communication, roundabout ways of raising sensitive issues, and, like people everywhere, they indulge in backbiting. It is more acceptable for managers to get feedback on performance on a one-on-one basis away from work than it is in front of colleagues in the workplace, especially if the colleagues are subordinates. Canadian managers must create an environment, preferably after regular work hours, where informal, frank discussion can take place. It's a good investment of their time.

Nepalese tend to be reticent, especially regarding information that may be used or perceived to be used against them. They will offer such information only after trust and confidence have been established over time. To establish trust and confidence with their Nepalese counterparts, Canadians need language skills, patience, caring, and a sincere desire to pass on their knowledge (Somlai 1989). They will learn that tolerance and understanding count more toward building trust than written or verbal commitments.

Nepalese tend to be less forthright than Canadians. They may express generalities at first and later introduce specifics. Because they value saving face, they are reluctant to admit that they don't understand something. Most Nepalese consider it improper to plead for one's own promotion or to praise oneself. They find it difficult to say *no* directly and use *please*, *thank you*, *sorry*, *excuse me* and other such expressions much less frequently than Canadians.

Personal vs. business life

Most Canadians make a clear distinction between personal and business matters, but Nepalese don't. For example, it is common for Nepalese to drop into the office to chat with staff about personal concerns. Similarly, it is common for Nepalese to settle personal affairs in the office, read newspapers at work, and so on. Your Nepalese counterparts will send your office staff out to pay their personal telephone bills during office hours. They will, however, work late into the night and on weekends to complete urgent assignments.

If you do something outside the office environment that your Nepalese counterparts disapprove of, it is likely to sour your relationship with them at work because Nepalese tend not to make clear distinctions between business and personal matters. There is another side of this issue. If you are critical of your counterparts in an official or business context, they are likely to take it personally.

Canadians tend to be more concerned with personal privacy than Nepalese. Nepalese are accustomed to asking personal questions. Nepalese borrow and lend things frequently without the same level of concern Canadians show toward private property.

Nepalese value leisure, considering it a reward for hard work. Money is a means to enjoy life, not an end in itself.

Nepalese give gifts to friends, guests and business partners, a practice that makes many foreigners uncomfortable, particularly when the gift is valuable. Nepalese frequently invite foreign guests home for refreshments or meals.

Some Canadian expatriates have observed that the Nepalese tend to disregard official rules and conventions when concerned with pressing personal or business matters. For example, it is quite common, and not considered disrespectful, for Nepalese to walk in and out of a formal meeting to attend to other business or personal matters (Somlai 1989).

Nepalese may expect personal favours that are beyond your authority or mandate. For example, your Nepalese counterpart may want you to influence his or her boss regarding a promotion.

Several cross-cultural workshops in Nepal have revealed that Nepalese feel threatened when donors insist on project monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. To the Nepalese, who are sensitive to scrutiny, elaborate

monitoring and evaluation mechanisms signal the donor's lack of trust and confidence in the relationship.

Jealousy among Nepalese often interferes with business life. What appears to be a professional opinion could be a reflection of some underlying jealousy or sense of injustice.

Nepalese are sensitive to criticism and ridicule and keenly aware of their country's political, economic and social problems. Somlai (1989) suggests that little if anything is gained by reminding them of these, or by agreeing with their self-criticism.

Status and hierarchy

Nepalese respect status and authority and value prestige and power to the extent that the predominant Nepalese management style is authoritarian, and the employer-employee relationship paternal. Often, the boss is more important than the job itself. Subordinates rarely argue with the boss because it may cause the boss to lose face. As a result, individual responsibility and accountability are often lacking in Nepalese organizations.

Canadian advisors say that decisions in Nepal are made at higher levels than necessary, with the result that ministers busy themselves with trivial matters. Delegation of authority is more the exception than the rule. Nepalese perceive delegation as giving up precious power. As a result, most decisions are made by the highest-ranking officials; meetings with mid-level managers are just a way of formalizing them. Decisions are sometimes changed by unknown people in the hierarchy. It is paramount that you learn to distinguish the figurative decision makers from the actual ones (Somlai 1989).

Nepalese look to the expatriate boss as a benevolent father-figure, who will guide them at every turn. Nepalese culture discourages personal initiative and risk taking.

Nepalese are indifferent to the shortcomings of bureaucracy, while the bureaucracy's slow decision-making process drives foreigners crazy. Some westemers find Nepalese incapable of handling more than one issue at a time.

Canadians and other foreign advisors give the following advice concerning status and hierarchy in Nepal:

- Don't give advice to your Nepalese counterparts without realizing that it is unlikely they will be able to implement any fundamental, lasting change. Listening and learning are generally more helpful than advising or reforming (Somlai 1989).

- Respect proper channels. Never bypass your counterparts or other concerned Nepalese officers, even if you know someone of higher rank who is in a better position to respond to your request.
- It is generally important to take the lead role in initiating such activities as report writing and letter drafting. Your counterpart may be too busy with other matters or lack writing skills.
- Check your counterpart's expectations of your role rather than determining your role by yourself. You can do this verbally and/or by observing your counterpart's attitude toward you when undertaking a project activity.
- When introducing a new measure, try to develop it in the course of a related discussion and get your counterpart to come up with the idea, rather than imposing yours. In this way you will protect your counterpart's status in the hierarchy.

WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH YOUR NEPALESE PARTNER

Overall Context ◆ ◆ ◆

Canadians are likely to form partnerships with Nepalese in government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academic institutions, most of which are located in Kathmandu Valley.

The public sector, which includes government and semi-government agencies, is by far the largest employer in the country. Permeating every sphere of Nepalese life, it has a marked impact on the country's social and economic development. It is common to find the government's bureaucratic way of working reflected in the NGO and private sectors. The relatively Large Power Distance in Nepalese society reinforces this phenomenon.

Nepalese are culturally diverse though they share certain cultural characteristics. They differ depending on their specific job context and their ethnic and caste background. Understanding the local context and cultural heritage of your Nepalese partners will help you understand their behaviour and attitudes.

Over the last few decades, the Nepalese have become more accepting of foreigner advisors.

Your Nepalese partners are likely to fall into one of the following categories: public sector bureaucrats, NGO professionals, technical professionals, and teachers and academics. We describe each category in the sections that follow.

Public Sector Bureaucrats ◆ ◆ ◆

Context

Government service is the first career choice of Nepalese, owing to its security, pension, gratuities, medical allowances, liberal leave policies, overseas training and education opportunities and, above all, the status, power and prestige that comes with many jobs in the public service. Although salaries are low, many public servants find ways of supplementing their incomes, especially those in positions of power.

NGO and private sector employment are becoming increasingly attractive to young Nepalese. Some NGOs and businesses offer more money, challenges, opportunities and better work environments than government.

In recent years, the government, under pressure from the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program and other donors, has attempted to restructure its bureaucracy and reduce its size. Over-staffing is, however, still commonplace.

Structure

The ministries and departments of the Government of Nepal are responsible for the administrative matters of government. A minister heads each ministry or department. Ministers are politicians, not career bureaucrats. Most senior bureaucrats—secretaries, joint- and under-secretaries, directors general, and so on—are political appointees. They are chosen more for their contacts and the degree to which the politicians trust them than for their professional skills and experience. (A typical Nepalese joke: Did you hear about the person with a Ph.D. in ***culture*** who was appointed as the Secretary to the Ministry of Agri***culture***?)

The next level of bureaucrats are the *subbas*, the clerks. Beware of them; they are the ones who are likely to direct you into a never ending bureaucratic maze. They will ask you to fill out endless forms and send you from one desk or office to another. Fortunately, as a foreigner, most of your contacts will be with more senior officials.

It is important to identify which department, section and individual can best assist you. It is advisable to get assistance from a local contact person in this regard, so as not to waste your time.

In the past, the ruling class controlled decision making; now the ruling politicians make most of the decisions of government, even decisions on minor details. You will find it easier to cope with the frustrations of dealing with government by accepting the fact that decision making is slow. You must learn to endure routine bureaucratic procedures at each step. Progress is torturously slow and must be monitored regularly. Unless you prod frequently, your file will get stuck up in the system. Here is where your Nepalese counterpart can assistance you.

Efficiency is hampered by archaic conditions in most government offices. Mid-level managers have no computers, fax machines and photocopiers, equipment Canadians take for granted. In some ministries, only the foreign consultants have computers.

Ministries compete fiercely for budgets and qualified personnel; cooperation and coordination among them are rare unless directed by top officials.

Job responsibilities and accountability are often vaguely defined. Job descriptions consist of little more than task lists. Program evaluations are non-existent. Frequent transfers of personnel make performance evaluations meaningless, despite the government's often-repeated commitment to use such managerial tools.

The situation is similar in semi-government organizations, such as public sector enterprises and so-called "autonomous" agencies. Management is characterized by political interference, lack of accountability and frequent transfers of senior personnel. However, the managers in public sector organizations appear to be open to new ideas, especially the young managers who have been educated abroad and who appreciate the need for managerial professionalism. However, like their counterparts in the government bureaucracy, their decision-making processes are long and slow.

Many public sector enterprises are a "one-person show" in which the chief executive has all the power and control. The chief executive must in addition cater to his/her political boss. Many employees of public sector enterprises perceive themselves as having less job security, status, power and prestige than their public service colleagues elsewhere.

Perspective of your partner

Generally, because the bureaucrats lack motivation and consider their work burdensome, they may be indifferent to your proposal. Working with foreigners is not, in itself, a great incentive. The bureaucrats will, however, be eager to help if they perceive the possibility of getting some fringe benefits.

They may find it difficult to comprehend what you want, so take whatever time is required to explain your purpose carefully. Politeness, patience and an occasional gesture of gratitude will help you and your project documentation move through the bureaucratic corridors.

Attitudes toward you

If public sector bureaucrats don't appear very helpful at first, it is because your project increases their workload. In addition, they face many constraints, such as a lack decision-making authority, which means that they must discuss even trivial matters with their superiors.

Be prepared for frequent work delays and late or postponed meetings. If your partners fail to show up at an appointed time, it is likely they have been summoned by their superiors, whom they cannot refuse.

Usually patience, politeness and a "thank you" help. An overtly aggressive posture on your part may complicate matters and cause your partners "to teach the foreigner a lesson." Despite many frustrations, you will receive much better treatment than a Nepalese person because you, as a foreigner, are special.

Suggested approach

It is always best to begin a project in Nepal with blanket approval from the highest authority. Then, break the project into smaller components for processing through the government system. Don't expect much tangible progress in your first few meetings with government officials. Instead, invest the time to build friendly relationships. Good personal relationships will give you access to information, contacts and linkages that may be particularly useful when attempting to understand or influence government decision making.

Have information about your project ready for the government authorities. Be prepared to answer their questions and adopt their suggestions, some of which may contrast with your plans.

Avoid conflict, confrontation and other situations that could cause your Nepalese partners to lose face. Since keeping face is an important cultural characteristic, your partners may be reluctant to disagree with you openly. They may show their disagreement by delaying implementation. If they do, review the situation and approach the concerned bureaucrats indirectly through a mediator.

Your Nepalese partners will respect you if you respect them. A condescending attitude toward them will make you unpopular. Remember that social status and hierarchical order are highly valued by Nepalese bureaucrats. You can accomplish your goals by blending patience and tact.

When dealing with all public sector officials, we recommend the "SIR" approach:

- See them. Meet them often, even if you perceive no immediate gains.
- Inform them. Keep them well informed of developments even if they don't ask for information.
- Respect them. Be respectful always. Remember that status and prestige are highly valued.

Non-governmental Organization Professionals ◆ ◆ ◆

Context

In the West, NGOs have altruistic objectives and provide not-for-profit services. In Nepal however, the NGO sector is not as clearly defined as it is the West. Nepalese NGOs include for-profit organizations, such as cooperatives, private limited companies and

private voluntary organizations, whose objectives are not entirely altruistic. Since most Canadian expatriates work with NGOs that are closer to the western definition, we will, unless otherwise indicated, mean not-for-profit, non-governmental organizations with altruistic objectives when we refer to NGOs throughout the rest of this guide.

Following the introduction of multi-party democracy and the beginning of decentralized, people-initiated development, the NGO sector experienced increased freedom from government control and unprecedented growth. Though small compared to Bangladesh, the sector in Nepal consists of more than 4,000 organizations. Previously, even registering an NGO was a big problem. Those that managed to get official registration were closely controlled by the Social Services National Coordination Council.

When the government allowed donor agencies to support NGOs directly, it became attractive for Nepalese to open new ones. Recent newspaper articles have suggested that the government should monitor NGOs more closely because some of them—family ventures without genuine development motives—have tapped substantial foreign funding. Some newspaper articles have highlighted discrepancies between the declared and real incomes of many well-known figures in the NGO sector. As a result, many educated Nepalese have an unfavourable opinion of the NGO sector.

Although the sector's reputation has suffered, the allegations of widespread profiteering have been largely unfounded. NGOs have been effective in creating awareness among the population, developing indigenous skills, providing income generation opportunities and creating social consciousness about basic needs for health, sanitation and education, for example.

Structure

To understand the structure of the NGO sector, it is useful to examine the four types of NGOs in Nepal: National Facilitating NGOs, National Implementing NGOs, District/Regional Facilitating/Implementing NGOs, and Grassroots NGOs.

National Facilitating NGOs, which are composed of international and national NGOs, facilitate NGO work at the district and grassroots levels by providing funding, training, technical assistance and institutional linkages.

National Implementing NGOs consist of international and national NGOs that are directly involved in implementing activities at the national,

district or grassroots levels, either through their own staff or the staff of other NGOs. Some also perform a facilitation role similar to those in the first category.

District/Regional Facilitating/Implementing NGOs carry out both functions, but restrict their geographical coverage. Some larger NGOs in this category cover five or more districts; the smaller ones operate in only one or two districts.

Grassroots NGOs are registered within a district and confine their activities to one ward or several Village Development Committees.

While all NGOs are supposed to report their annual programs and plans, sources of funding and achievements to the Social Welfare Council, many don't. All NGOs have boards of directors or executive committees that decide policy issues. The executive directors, many of whom are also members of the board, are responsible for day-to-day management. Many NGOs now hire skilled, professional managers to direct their activities.

With the growth and sophistication of the sector, NGOs have become an important player in the field of international development. Generally, NGO employees are respected, even though they have less power and prestige than their counterparts in government or the private sector. Increasingly, the Government of Nepal has invited NGO professionals to attend policy discussions, an indication of the sector's growing importance and legitimacy.

Perspective of your partner

Your Nepalese partner's perspective will vary, depending on the type of NGO where he or she works. The points mentioned below are valid for most district/regional and grassroots level organizations.

You will find your NGO partners far more positive than public sector bureaucrats. They will be eager and willing to learn from you, and may treat you with the respect they would accord a guru. Generally, they will appreciate your interventions and guidance.

Because of the difficult nature of their job and the hardships they must endure in remote areas, your NGO partners at the district and regional levels will appreciate encouragement, patience and sensitivity on your part, and an occasional pat on the back. They will expect you to assist them with proposal and report writing, areas in which they may be weak. As your NGO partners operating at the national level are more sophisticated, they may expect "expert" advice from you, such

as management input, policy guidance, and assistance in their relations with donors.

Attitudes toward you

Generally, your NGO partners will have a positive attitude toward you. You can enhance their appreciation and acceptance of you by making them feel that you are one of them. For example, you should accept their hospitality; eat *dal bhaat* (a typical Nepalese dish, generally eaten twice a day) with them; live the way they do in the field, and so on, especially if you are assigned to an NGO at the district or grassroots level.

They will be keen to learn from you, regard you as an expert, and give you the respect they would accord a person of high status in their society. Typical of a society that is more collectivist than individualist, they will expect that you become part of their family. (This expectation is valid for all types of NGOs.)

Suggested approach

Invest time in building relationships. Once the NGO professionals feel that they can trust you and that you are one of them, life will become easier for you. At the outset, clarify your role because they may have unrealistic expectations of you.

If you are planning on spending time in the field, ask your Nepalese partners about the do's and don'ts of behaviour in the field. As Nepal is a multi-ethnic, culturally heterogeneous society, what is acceptable in one area may be a *faux pas* in another. Learn the local language; without it you will be constantly frustrated.

Be patient with your Nepalese colleagues. Management professionalism is often lacking in NGOs. Senior staff often need management training and orientation.

If you are patient with your Nepalese colleagues, they will respect you. If they ask you personal questions or drop by unexpectedly, be tolerant and don't get angry. If their behaviour persists, explain politely that Canadians value privacy and ask that they not inconvenience you.

Don't criticize your Nepalese colleagues openly because it would cause them to lose face. If you must give critical feedback, do it on a one-to-one basis. Encourage workers to meet with you informally to talk about office or project politics. Although they may be hesitant to express their true opinions during working hours, they will be frank during informal meetings and casual discussions over a cup of coffee or a glass of beer.

Often, when volunteers or advisors from abroad are assigned to work with NGOs, they quickly assume the role of

the manager. In many instances, they restructure the organization and introduce new administrative procedures, which often fail or fail to be sustained once they depart. Sometimes expatriate volunteers and advisors with little management expertise are asked to manage projects or organizations. Such foreigners should seek professional guidance from local managers or management consultants.

Technical Professionals

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Context

Canadian advisors often work with Nepalese technical professionals such as doctors, engineers, environmentalists, demographers and so on. Technical professionals usually work for government or semi-government agencies such as the Institute of Medicine and Teaching Hospital, the National Planning Commission, the Water and Energy Commission Secretariat, and the Centre for Technical Education and Vocational Training. Much donor assistance over the past decade has focused on technical training in response to priorities set by the Nepalese government. As well, the government has encouraged many of the brightest students to opt for medical and engineering studies.

Many technical professionals are highly competent, some having received advanced training and education abroad. But some find themselves stuck in management positions where they have little expertise and limited opportunity to practice their technical skills. What they know about management, they have learned by trial and error on the job.

Structure

Technical professionals work within the structures of government, public sector organizations, private business and NGOs.

Perspective of your partner

The perspective of most technical professionals is similar to people working in government and the NGO sector. They tend to be proud of their technical education, with the result that some may feel they know it all. Nevertheless, technical professionals will respect you for your expertise and will seek new knowledge from you in order to update theirs. Some may want to know about the latest technologies, theories and practices without considering whether they are applicable to Nepal.

In some cases, your technical partners may want to use you as an ally, especially when their bosses have little technical expertise. You may encoun-

ter frustrated individuals who believe that the system will never change. This characteristic is especially prevalent among those who have been in the government or in semi-governmental organizations for 10 years or more.

Attitudes toward you

If you are working in areas that demand state-of-the-art technical expertise, such as hydro power, your colleagues will look up to you. They will treat you as a "guru" or teacher. They may, however, expect you to provide training abroad, salary increments and other incentives.

If your background is in management or the humanities, you will have to invest considerable time in gaining the confidence of technical professionals, because they tend to regard themselves as superior to people with non-technical backgrounds. They will be slow to admit that they may need to enhance their managerial and related "soft" skills. The technical professionals working in NGOs are more likely to be open-minded and willing to recognize their weaknesses compared to those working in the public sector.

Suggested approach

As with all Nepalese counterparts, you will be rewarded if you invest time and energy in building relationships with your partners. If you are polite and accessible, your partners are likely to be receptive to new ideas and changes.

You may find it difficult to strengthen the management of your partner's organization. It must be done gradually, one step at a time. Since changes in management styles require changes in attitudes, you must be patient.

Teachers and Academics ◆ ◆ ◆

Context

In the Nepalese context, the teacher is a guru and is accorded the same respect and prestige as one's parents. It is most unlikely that a Nepalese student would question or challenge a teacher, especially in rural areas where it is customary for community representatives to seek the teacher's input on most decisions concerning village life.

Most university professors you meet will be well educated, well read and well traveled. Many advise the government on policy matters. Some occupy important positions in the government, NGOs and local consulting firms.

Despite the high level of respect that comes with teaching, most teachers at the district and village levels choose

the profession only after they have unsuccessfully attempted to find work in government, NGOs or the private sector. The main reason for their dissatisfaction is low pay.

Most teachers and academics are politically active and more inclined to speak out on issues than government and private sector employees.

Structure

Although the University of Nepal is an autonomous institution, the Ministry of Education exercises indirect control by appointing its senior administrator, the Vice Chancellor. The Vice Chancellor is supported by the Registrar.

In 1994, the Vice Chancellor was responsible for 55 university campuses and 134 private campuses throughout Nepal, all of which were affiliated with the central university.

Political interference in promotions, foreign study tours, overseas training and deputations to lucrative positions is common.

Perspective of your partner

In some ways the perspective of your partner is similar to that of the technical professionals. For example, some teachers and professors feel superior because society holds them in such high esteem.

Attitudes toward you

Generally, your teaching and academic partners will be positive and respectful toward you if you are a subject matter specialist from whom they can learn. The older you are and the higher your professional status, the more they will respect you.

Although they may regard your suggestions for managerial change as interference and resist them, they are likely to soak up your academic advice, regarding it as the latest in the field.

Your academic partners will expect you to provide such fringe benefits as overseas training and education, study tours and short-term consulting and research assignments.

Suggested approach

You should respect your partner's age and status and vary your approach accordingly.

While teachers under 45 years of age are generally open to new ideas, you will have to invest time to establish a trusting relationship with them before introducing new ways of doing things. You should begin by clarifying your expectations of them, and theirs of you.

Many older teachers and academics will be skeptical of you and your

mandate, especially those who have been in the system for decades and who have seen their attempts to improve the environment fail because of political pressure, rivalries and other reasons. You are likely to have difficulty getting them on side.

Perhaps the best tactic is to build your relationship with them to the point where they are neutral and unlikely to oppose your actions. You will have to spend time with them to gain their trust. One possible strategy is to appeal to their areas of academic interest.

CONCLUSION

The importance of cross-cultural factors in building successful partnerships is a well-established fact. Management systems are largely culture-specific; what is effective in one cultural setting may not be in another. The generic management functions—planning, organizing, staffing, motivating, communicating, implementing and evaluating—are handled differently in different cultures. Successful managers have abandoned the myth that there are universally correct ways of managing; instead, they have adopted culture-specific techniques and systems.

After going through this guide, you will realize that many things are done differently in Nepal than in Canada. This realization may have caused you some initial discomfort. We believe this is not only a natural response, but also a healthy one. It indicates that you are coming to grips with the necessity of changing some aspects of your approach.

The following are key points to keep in mind when doing business in Nepal:

- Be patient and polite.
- Take time to develop a relationship of trust with your Nepalese partners.
- Provide positive reinforcement and support to your Nepalese partners in daily activities.
- Introduce new ideas and change gradually, one step at a time.
- Maintain informal, after-office-hour contacts in order to develop effective working relationships and keep informed on matters concerning the partnership.
- Listen to your partner's personal and work-related problems.
- Develop a tolerance for unexpected calls at home from Nepalese partners.
- Develop a tolerance for missed deadlines, missed appointments and general tardiness.
- Develop a tolerance for the tediously slow decision-making process, particularly in government bureaucracies.
- Adjust yourself to the indirect ways of giving and taking feedback, especially negative comments.
- Avoid criticizing Nepalese colleagues openly in front of others.
- Don't emphasize trying to change the Nepalese habit of attending to personal matters during office hours.
- Maintain neutrality regarding Nepalese politics.

We hope that our guide has been helpful, though we acknowledge that it is no substitute for learning from direct cross-cultural experience.

With this orientation, we hope, (we are rather sure) you will achieve things that might have first seemed impossible.

Good luck! Take care, and enjoy your stay in Nepal.

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