

COSIM 2007

“Lessons Learned from Wycliffe’s Journey into Cross-Cultural Partnerships”

The Hard Work of Authentic Partnership:

Still learning to transition

from a more member-focused to a more inclusive and partnership-focused ministry

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If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:1-4)

Introduction: Partnership as Authentic Community, Relationships, Participation

“You are too powerful to be good partners.” So said an Anglican Bishop in Tanzania during our Wycliffe conference in Africa in 1998. He is a partner and friend of the organization, and his comment on the conference floor was one of those unexpected learning moments for me, as Africa Area Director at the time, and also for many of my colleagues.

Over the 26 years I served in Africa, various African friends and colleagues taught me about community, relationships and authentic participation – at least to the extent I was able to see and hear. I know I learned imperfectly and selectively. So I have to keep on learning. There is more to learn than can be learned in a lifetime.

The three African church leaders referred in this introductory section, such as the Anglican Bishop mentioned above, are to this day all friends and partners of Wycliffe in the ministry of Bible translation. They are concerned as we are to see God’s word become accessible to all peoples of the earth through the translation of the Scriptures and engagement with those Scriptures through various media. However, the incidents reported in this introduction remind us that partnerships have to experience periodic times of “truth telling.” These times are usually uncomfortable but necessary. They clarify the current issues inherent in the process of working together. They usually come in the form of one or two sentences that cut to the core of an issue. In these cases they have to do with issues of power, relationships, and equity.

So how is it that we are “too powerful to be good partners”? The Bishop explained. Those of us from the West come with economic, educational and organizational strength that cannot be matched locally. There is no way local partners can be equal in those areas. He was not saying we could not be partners; just that it would take a lot of hard work for us to be good partners. Part of that hard work would be to recognize and fully appreciate the strengths that the non-Western partner brought to the partnership. As he noted, with

our strengths we could pursue almost anything we wanted without regard for others. But would such an attitude or unilateral action achieve what we really wanted to achieve? It was highly unlikely. Such attitudes and actions do not build capacity in the local church or community. They do not lead to sustainable programs. So partnership was going to take great effort on our part to make it succeed. Partnership was not usually going to come “naturally.” It would require great wisdom from God and an abundance of the fruit of the Spirit.

On another occasion it was reported to me that another African leader, this one in Nigeria, said to one of my staff: “You treat us like business partners rather than those who have a relationship.” Within our organization we had Western staff that were trying to do their job the best they knew how. For them the defining item of their relationship was the signed contract. The contract was necessary to maintain good faith with the donors in the USA. So my staff person was fulfilling his responsibility to our donors, but ignoring the relationship with our Nigerian partner. In contrast, for the Nigerian leader it was the personal relationship that had priority. When something was less than it should be in the partnership project, our staff person would naturally point to the contract to show it was not being fulfilled. But a contract does not define a relationship. Referring to the contract was especially harmful if our staff person had not taken the time to even ask the Nigerian leader about his family and his own wellbeing. The Nigerian leader in this way reminded us that, within the partnership, more basic than the project was our personal relationship with him.

In the Congo, a church President said, “We don’t feel like a partner in these projects since you control all the resources.” He was referring to the fact that when our staff left to return to their home country in Europe or North America for whatever reason, the church leadership was seldom informed in a timely matter. The leadership was certainly not included in the decision making process that led our staff to return to Europe or the USA. In addition, funds that were needed to sustain the project were no longer available when our staff left because our staff had raised the ministry funds and they were under their direct control. The Congolese leader was right. We communicated poorly with them. He and his church were not fully included in the decision making process. And he and his church had no shared control over the personnel or the funds in the project. They were not involved fully in the ongoing planning of the project or the decision-making and mid-course corrections. Partnership was more than Africans allowing Europeans or North Americans to fulfill their own agenda. It had to include shared control over the resources and inclusion in the regular decision making processes involved in the project. Otherwise, the project could feel like another experience in post-colonialism.

These three incidents gave some insights into some aspects of authentic community, relationships and participation. First, differences in power can lead to division if those with power keep it to themselves. However, if power can be shared and distributed it can build community. Each partner brings some strengths to the partnership, and each needs to share those strengths with the other. Second, when the goals and strategic plan of the partnership take precedence over the relationships between the partners, then we risk seeing the partnership project not achieve its intended impact. If partners are first loved

and appreciated, then the partners will be able to weather many difficult things together and the project has a greater chance of accomplishing its goals. Third, if one of the partners makes all the decisions and controls all the resources, then the other will not grow in decision-making and thus be able to provide some level of sustainability for the ongoing activities when the project is completed. The partner needs authentic participation through mutual oversight of the resources and shared decision-making in those matters that affected their lives. This prepares the partner to sustain at least some aspects of the project over the longer term when the other partner is no longer present.

The Legacy of Member-focused Systems

Like so many para-church agencies founded in the 20th century, Wycliffe Bible Translators consists of staff known as “members” who raise their own support and ministry costs from their church, family and friends. As with other agencies Wycliffe had its own vision and mission, and individuals joined under this corporate umbrella to pursue their own mission, usually aligned in some way with the corporate mission. In the case of Wycliffe it involved producing translations of the Bible in minority languages so all people could have access to meaningful Scriptures in their own language.

In order to empower the members, the corporate mission developed systems that were “member-focused”. These systems helped members to raise their needed resources, prepare for service in another country, and address various practical issues such as taxes, children’s education, medical insurance, and retirement. Similar member-focused systems were put in place in the countries where ministry was pursued. Whether in the USA or in countries of service, the goal was to empower the individual members. This member-focused model was powerful and produced significant results.

Still within this model partnership was not ignored. One thing that Cameroon Townsend exemplified for us was the importance of working together with others. In the days of Townsend the focus of partnering was with government ministries, universities and research institutions. This did not exclude others however, such as missions and churches. In fact, Townsend did not treat partnership as simply a strategic issue. Instead he modeled for us the attitude that those people who come into the orbit of our daily lives do not come into it by accident. God ordains their presence in our lives, and Townsend wanted to do well by those God brought into his life. So partnership was more than a strategy. It had theological and relational underpinnings, embedded in the sovereignty of God.

A Vision for this Generation Depends on Partnership

In 1999 we reviewed the progress that had been made to date in the ministry of Bible translation. We could see that when we counted the current activity of all the Bible translation organizations in the world more was being done to translate the Bible than at any time in history. However, there was no longer any growth or acceleration in the ministry overall. It had plateaued. If all the Bible translation organizations in the world continued to work as they had been through the 1990s, would not be able to see a

translation project started in every language that needed one until the year 2125 or later. That would be a wait of 125 to 150 years for some language communities. So at our International Convention involving representatives from about 40 nations we resolved to pursue what we call “Vision 2025.” In this resolution we embrace the vision that every language that still needs a translation project will have one in progress by 2025. This is in essence a prayer that God would reduce the waiting time by 100 years for language communities without even a portion of God’s Word. We estimated that there could be 3,000 languages, plus or minus 10%, that might need some form of translation project. We recognize it is only possible if God desires it – and we want His desire above all else. He has ample personnel and funds available in the worldwide church to accomplish it. We also recognize that we have to be available and ready to change in whatever ways He might have if we are to make our contribution to the Vision.

In adopting this vision, it was clear to us that all of the Bible translation organizations around the world could not accomplish this vision, let alone Wycliffe by itself. It would take new partners and new kinds of partnerships. We could no longer act like we and other missions had often acted in the past, pursuing our agency goals in relative isolation from other agencies. Fortunately the decade of the 1990s had seen increasing cooperation among mission agencies that had been unprecedented in the 20th century. But we needed to increase this cooperation. We needed to pay greater attention to other agencies and, more importantly, to our national and local partners in the countries and communities where we served. In fact, the only way that Vision 2025 would be accomplished would be if God raised up people from around the world from what was now a worldwide church. It could not be accomplished simply by personnel from Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and Japan alone. It had to become a global phenomenon. It also had to become a national and local phenomenon. And this would require new partnerships and new ways of thinking about ourselves. It could no longer be about our organizations, but about the vision and mission to see all people have access to a meaningful translation in their own language so they could hear God speak directly to their hearts.

One of those new ways of thinking and being would be to become increasingly partner-friendly. A set of themes was articulated for Vision 2025 and one of those themes was Partnership. The theme is stated in part as follows:

“Cooperative behavior with others will have to increase in depth and in scope. Such cooperation will vary in kind and in dynamics but should result in accomplishing more or something better than we could accomplish on our own. Such partnership will require significant investment in time and other resources as well as training. ... The challenge in partnering will be to maintain our strengths in research, literacy and Bible translation in appropriate ways. In all partnerships, we seek to honor God and model humility, mutual respect and equity.”

This was not the first time we recognized the need to engage with the growing church in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific Islands. In the 1970s and early 1980s, we engaged with national colleagues to establish national organizations in Nigeria, Ghana,

Cameroon, Kenya, Brazil, India, the Philippines and Papua New Guinea. Another group of such organizations were established in the 1990s. But we had little experience in how to successfully build a national organization or partner with such organizations. Many good things have come from these national organizations. Today each one is a Wycliffe Member Organization. However, we still have much to learn in how to serve them well within our family of organizations and help make them to become sustainable institutions for the future. They are definitely part of what God is doing in making the workforce for Bible translation and literacy among the minority language communities increasingly international.

However, there is more. Besides helping establish para-church institutions, we have increasingly sensed the need to build better and deeper partnerships with national and local churches and missions in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific Islands.

So partnership has been to some degree a part of who Wycliffe has been. Yet today we recognize that there has to be a greater emphasis on partnerships. The difference between today and the earlier years is that in the earlier years the primary focus was commonly on the members, and systems were built around them. Much of the partnership activity depended on the will of the individual members. Today we are increasingly acting institutionally to develop partnerships and a shared vision with those partners. And systems need to be developed to meet this shifting focus, systems that are partnership-focused. In addition, we are seeking to expand our notion of staff from being exclusively members to include employees and volunteers.

Expanding our notion of staff: from members to include volunteers and employees

The realization that the workforce for Bible translation needed to become more international in ways we had not seen in the past – in fact we currently have personnel from over 60 different nations involved as members – this realization raised all kinds of questions regarding who made up our “staff,” questions we are still seeking answers to and consensus on. Should not staff include employees as well as volunteers and not just “members”? It also raises issues of how staff from radically different economic levels around the world are to be funded. It raises the issues of children’s education. It raises issues of what languages should be used for training and what languages for internal business. It raises issues of how we can work as healthy multi-cultural teams, respecting each other in profoundly biblical ways as we work together for common goals among language communities and within nations. It also raises the issue of a shifting role for those from Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. They will increasingly, but not exclusively, serve in roles that facilitate projects led by people from within the language communities being served, or from within the nations where the languages communities are found.

This means we have to work more closely than ever before with local and national churches, national mission agencies, in addition to local communities in countries where we do Bible translation and language-based development. Increasingly it is clear that individuals acting on their own cannot adequately address these issues. They need to be

addressed in a more corporate way, and this often means partnership between corporate bodies or institutions. It means personnel and funds being managed in a more corporate way. In addition to expanding our notion of “staff” we have been working to shift from our strong staff-focused systems to systems that are more partnership-focused. This also has seemed to mean a shift from being less individual-focused to being more corporate-focused. However, being more corporate-focused related only to the means of achieving what we hoped to see accomplish. It did not mean that the ultimate purpose of our work was to promote our institution. In fact, it meant any focus on our institution would have to decrease and the focus on others and their institutions would have to increase.

Shifting from a staff-focused to a more partnership-focused family of organizations

These shifts are not easy in an organization with 6000 “members” and thousands of more volunteers and employees, including local project employees and volunteers, serving some 1,400 language communities in some 97 countries with projects that take 10 to 20 years to invest in and accomplish. Change in this context does not come by decree or simply changing structure. It has to become a long-term process involving all of us.

In 2000 we accepted that it would not be appropriate or helpful to attempt a radical shift from our staff-focused nature to become more partnership-focused. At the same time, an incremental shift would not be acceptable either. The way forward had to involve “foundation setting” processes that would move us increasingly toward a partnership orientation, to being partnership friendly. We needed to increasingly ask: “What are the ways to reduce any sense of competition and increase the actual experience of cooperation among international, national and local agencies, as well as among national and local churches? What are the ways for us to move more intentionally into a facilitation role rather than a performing role in our national and local partnerships?”

One exception to making a radical shift involved South America. Among some of our staff there was a strong push to set up Wycliffe offices in various countries of South America. However, for various reasons, we decided to put a moratorium on such a process. Instead we wanted to walk along with the churches of South America as they established their own indigenous missions. We would then partner with those indigenous missions. And if they wanted to send some of their personnel in the ministry of Bible translation and language-based development, we would find a way to make that happen without requiring their personnel to become members of Wycliffe. Seven years later we have no national level office in Latin America, but we have a multitude of partnerships.

Elsewhere in the world, we could increase the pace of Bible translation to achieve Vision 2025 only by increasing the capacity of our staff through greater partnerships and facilitating others to do an increasing part of what remains to be done. In most cases it meant partnering with national and local churches and missions to help them accomplish their own goals for translating the Bible. It also meant partnering with local educational bodies to promote multi-lingual education and adult community literacy. Such a shift meant that we would need to move from a strongly staff-focused ministry to an

increasingly partnership-focused one. Our systems that were staff-focused would need to undergo revisions to become increasingly partnership-friendly.

We knew that moving from staff-focused to partnership-focused ministry was not a dichotomy as much as it was two different locations along a continuum that ran between two poles, one pole being “fully staff-focused” and the other pole being “fully partnership-focused”. We needed to move closer to the partnership-focused pole than we were. This would be a journey.

In this journey, we needed to recognize that the staff-focused orientation had served us well over the 70 plus years of our work. It was part of our DNA. Much had been accomplished to date with this orientation. We needed to evaluate the staff-focused systems and determine what was beneficial and worth maintaining. But we also believed that there was a greater long-term impact to be achieved in the partnership-focused systems. And we knew that the partnership-focused ministry was the only way to move into the 21st century if we were to achieve Vision 2025 and see Scriptures have the impact they could have.

In attempting to make this transition, it was clear that it would take time. We needed patience, but we needed to begin immediately. The first need was to identify current partnerships and potential partnerships. We needed to evaluate the current partnerships to determine which ones needed strengthening, and which we needed to let go of. In the case of potential partnerships, we needed to prioritize them and begin with those that held the greatest promise.

We also recognized that partnership is multifaceted. As rich and diverse as life can be for the individual, so it can be for a partnership. It is very difficult to summarize all the dimensions, benefits, and costs of working in partnership. I believe that partnership is theologically grounded in the dynamics and intentions that God introduces in Creation (Genesis 1:26 ff, 3:8-9); it flows from the infinite and eternal Trinitarian community of God as Father, Son and Spirit; and it leads us to the rich metaphor of the body of Christ. In fact, when it comes to those who follow Jesus Christ, cooperative behavior in the kingdom of God is deeper than a business partnership. It is made alive by the communion of those who are the Body of Christ. We could also point to other theological and biblical basis. Ultimately, loving, cooperative behavior with others pleases God and reflects his character and intentions for life. Strategically, and because of the limitations of our finiteness, we do not and cannot partner with everybody. We have to identify those who can help provide context for Bible translation, those who can actually do translation or be trained to do so, and those who will benefit from those translations in the end. These are among the partnerships to be developed for Bible translation. And even as we identified these partnerships, we felt like we were just beginning to learn about serving in partnership with others, and we are definitely still learning.

Partnership facilitation and learning

As we began to pursue Vision 2025 in early 2000, the Executive Director decided to establish the role of Senior Advisor on Partnerships. We appointed a leader who had

extensive leadership experience in Asia and Eurasia. He served in this advisory role for a couple years. The role then became an initiative involving a larger team of people. We continue with someone in the leadership role for partnership, but the efforts of the past seven years have been significantly successful. Today the leadership takes as basic the need to partner in ways we did not partner in the past. The value of partnership is widely recognized among the leadership.

Early on, as we were developing a more explicit and intentional orientation to partnership through this leadership, we recognized that we would benefit from those who were more specialized and experienced in matters of partnership. InterDev was an organization with such experience. So we turned to InterDev to help us think through some of the issues we were facing. They helped us enormously to consider various issues around the topic of partnership. Rather than reinventing the wheel, we found that the material and training from InterDev was greatly helpful. Their principles provide an excellent starting point and summary for partnership. Today they are known as InterDev Partnership Associates and we would encourage those looking for help in facilitating partnerships to connect with them. In general, all partnerships benefit from having someone to facilitate it.

Some examples of the steps we took to increase our engagement with partners are the following. First, we began sensitizing our staff to the need for being partner-friendly and developing more strategic partnerships. Multiple communications in various media and forums were used. In addition, we provided seminars and training in various parts of the world to begin the discussions. Second, we encouraged the development of multi-lateral partnerships at the national level. This might involve a Forum of Bible Agencies. In other cases it might involve multiple church denominations coming together with the Bible agencies to strategize and plan. Third, we needed to provide training and on-the-job mentoring. We were praying for what we hoped would be a growing number of Asians, Africans and Latin Americans ready to work cross-culturally. This would include mother tongue speakers of the very languages needing translation. This involved a shift in location and language. The shift in location involved taking the training to where the people are – specifically, around the world. We now have some 25 locations where university level training is available in language work. Nearly all of these programs are in partnership with some partner educational institution. The shift in language meant not only including English as a medium of training, but also respecting other languages in the world used in higher education where many translation needs remained. This meant improving or modifying the training we had been giving at this level in German, French, Spanish and Portuguese over the years, as well as adding other languages to the mix, such as Mandarin, Indonesian, Korean and Russian. To implement these shifts in location and language has required us to partner with various institutions of higher education around the world. In all of this we are still in process and learning how to do better. Fourth, we needed to demonstrate to our partners our commitment to working with them by offering what we had to give such as consulting and training services in language and translation.

When thinking about the purpose of moving closer to a partnership-focus, many practical reasons can be given. However, ultimately our desire is to glorify God and make His glory known. At the level of human society, all of this is done with a view toward an contributing in some small measure to the ultimate “shalom” God intends for the minority language communities of the earth. This shalom would mean they would have

Scriptures that serve them well in all aspects of their lives, both before God and among their fellow humans. They would have a written form of their language along with educational material that would benefit their children's educational process and their adult's growth in literacy. The written form of their language would also hopefully secure a place in the communication and educational processes within their nation. They would also be able to use their language in various media (e.g. print, video, audio, electronic, etc.) and in various domains of life for the long-term. In addition, they would have research documents that would benefit the community in the form of such things as a dictionary and grammar of their language, and they would gain value from recognition and status as being part of their nation's cultural and linguistic heritage.

Has there been resistance to these changes? Of course: comments such as "We have never done it this way," "This is not the organization I joined," "What if they don't do it like we do it," "Can others really produce the quality needed," "Can others really be trained," and so on. The list of fears, questions, risks, and potential problems is significant in such cases. But the larger question remains: what is the risk, if we do not change, to the provision of God's word to all the peoples of the earth? That risk of not providing His word is of even greater potential cost than all of the others. In addition, many of our members were ready and waiting for such a shift. So there has been noticeable traction at various levels of the organization to pursue the shift from being member-oriented to being more partnership-oriented.

As we relate to our partners we want to do it in ways that are mutually beneficial. So our partnerships need to be strategic, mutually respectful, productive, and future oriented. To be 'strategic,' we are selective with whom we partner. We do not partner with everybody. We partner with others who share common interests, concerns and goals for the minority language communities.

To be mutually respectful, we need to enter into partnerships with healthy attitudes. We need to see each partnership as providing a greater context for learning, for our own transformation as well as that of the partner. This requires that we listen well to our partners and we interact with humility and respect. A healthy partnership will never leave us just as we were when we started. It will impact us and change us, in small and major ways.

To be productive our partnerships need to identify mutually shared goals and commit to accomplishing those goals through shared decision-making and with the resources each can bring to the process. Generally partnerships will allow each partner to accomplish more than they would have accomplished acting alone.

Finally our partnerships need to keep the future in mind. Ultimately those partners that will contribute most to the sustainability of programs and the use of materials in minority language communities are institutions at the local and national level. So our desire is to see capacity increased as much as possible in these institutions where necessary.

In all of this we seek to honor and glorify our Lord. With our Christian partners we would especially hope that our partnerships would demonstrate the unity of love that Jesus prayed for in John 17 and be a confirmation that we are indeed Jesus' disciples.

APPENDIX: Lessons learned so far – gleanings from around the world

Edited by Todd Poulter and John Watters

“Through the process of listening, respecting and honouring our partners, we discover hope for the future.”

John Oo

The following comments were collected in March, April and May 2007 from a number of people inside and outside the Wycliffe and SIL family of organizations, with the following prompt: *“One of the most important lessons I have learned about working together well in partnership with others is...*

If possible, please share a short story or example (one or two paragraphs) that illustrates this lesson or principle”

The following is a summary of the responses received, organized by similar themes. Italics reflect the original words of the respondent.

Friendship is at the core of a strong relationship:

Listen, Learn, Laugh ...Love

To me “partnership” really means “friendship” – the kind of relationship where you actually enjoy each other’s company.

Listen – Hear who the other person is, until you can “resonate” with them.

Learn – Ask their advice. Understand what their issues and concerns are: their agenda may not be the same as ours.

Laugh – Appreciate things together; grow together as people; get beyond formality.

Love – Doesn’t have to be “soft”. Does have to put the other one first. May cost us time as we put aside our pressing goals for a while.

Carry each other’s burdens – Visit those you are getting to know, whether in the church, the community or the government, when they are going through a personal or family tragedy.

Solidarity at such times builds friendships.

Have the other person’s welfare in mind, not just our work – give small gifts, send birthday cards or other appropriate greetings, provide simple items that may not be accessible to the other person such as newspapers or magazines.

Let others do things for us – Someone said, to make a friend you need to let them do you a favor!

Include others in the program of a seminar, meeting or conference – to give the welcome or devotional or talk on local culture. Inclusion demonstrates recognition and asking for their thoughts respects their knowledge and them as people.

Be open to others participating in projects that you would not expect – They can sometimes become strong advocates for the partnership and its goals.

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"Earn the right" through authentic relationship to articulate your responses to knotty challenges in a straightforward and sensitive manner. If that has not happened yet, you aren't on first base toward genuine mutual partnership. There is an ever so delicate balance between "dying to self" and taking courage in hand to express that the other person needs to do a little dying too!

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If I can build a good relationship, the working together becomes a natural part of that relationship. Partnerships tend to run "well oiled" and very smoothly when relations among the partnership catalysts and/or organizational influencers are good and warm.

Understanding how our Partners perceive Partnership:

Acts 2:41-46 is a model for developing partnership: teaching/studying the Word together, fellowshiping, sharing, eating together, and prayer. Both the task and relationship orientations have to be present in partnerships, so if each side listens to the other, the partnership will be well balanced. Understanding the other's expectations is a first step to dialoguing about how to work together.

- *Africans define partnership as a long-term relationship, extending even beyond one's death. Metaphors like 'marriage', and 'older brother-younger brother' are used to describe the relationship. The first order of business is 'courting', getting to know one another, assessing whether or not the relationship holds promise.*
- *Expatriates define partnership as a business contract for a specified time period – and the first order of business is writing up a memorandum of understanding.*

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Few from the West seem to understand partnership. But Africans, Asians, Latin Americans and Pacific Islanders have a stronger corporate sense of life. So in one case, while the Western missions were not too interested in partnering with us, one national "mission partnership has written us right into their master plan and they regularly include us in their planning sessions and conferences. They have even contributed their field team leader to go through the applied linguistic course so that she can help our faltering translation program." [Being inclusive is a core value for those with a corporate sense of life.]

We can sometimes experience one-sided conversations where we hoped to assess the possibility of partnership and the other person was only interested in their needs being met. "Humbling question: might we be doing the same thing with others?" [At the same time, are we ready to listen to what the other is saying and start meeting their most strongly felt needs first before moving to shared agenda?]

Personal, Organizational and Cultural Exegesis – Understanding and working well with Organizational and National Cultures (including understanding the mission, core values, and decision-making structures of partner organizations)

Years of work in building relationship and establishing foundations for partnership can be jeopardised in an instant by a clash of organisational cultures or national cultures. In other words, working well in partnership depends entirely on working well cross-culturally.

- *The current scenario with the detention of the British sailors [in Iran] could be instructive in the context of partnership between Iranians and Brits. As events unfold it would appear that the UK government might have made more progress by adopting a policy of saying very little in the public domain, while identifying and working through a suitable third party mediator. This approach would have saved face for Iran (as opposed to publicly contesting their version of events) which is a very important cultural value, and the dignified, discrete third party approach is by far the preferred means of conflict resolution within the culture.*

Cultural exegesis: we need to do research into our partner's contemporary culture, as well as understand our own culture. Processes and structures should be developed that are easily understood, implemented and that serve the partnership effectively.

From another respondent: *It is essential to do this investigation PRIOR to allowing expectations for partnership to be raised on an organizational level. And another one: Which means that we have to be much more circumspect about who we call "partners" and how we throw the concept around. Unfortunately it's kind of a fad now to call any semi-likeminded friend a "partner." This so muddies the water! We need to be working toward strategic and healthy partnerships, not just pretending we've got them and now will do something (What? – who knows!) with them. / It's okay to have a lot of friends, but when it comes to partnering, we should be wise in developing them. And another one: I would agree with what has already been said about understanding the partner's organizational structure. I found [a specific agency] very hard to work with until someone explained to me their structure – or rather the intentional lack of this.*

- *Not only do [our organizational] members not understand contemporary urban African culture, our African colleagues do not understand the culture of [our organization]. When [our staff] arrive in Africa, they receive several months of orientation. An [African] said that when he walked into [our] center, he didn't realize it was a different culture. Only through unhappy surprises did he realize he had walked into a different world. Our organization needs to explain itself, its structures, its finances, its culture, so that our partners can understand us. Africans would like an Orientation Course [to our organization] ...*

Often there are problems because core values differ...

- *[Our organization] makes field decisions at the local level and values community ownership (service to all), while [other organizations] make important field decisions at higher levels, often at the top level, sometimes ignoring the wishes of the local community. They run their organization like a business. An obvious problem is [when partnering organizations] make decisions at different levels, and so the key people are not interacting. One must understand these differences and learn to work around them if one is to partner effectively.*

Another: *One of the aspects of being a good partner is doing "organizational exegesis" of the organization with which one is partnering. It is important to approach organizational exegesis with a heart for the partner, not as a research endeavor.*

The findings of the organizational exegesis do not necessarily dictate that a specific proposal is not possible, but it can show the barriers to the acceptance of a proposal.

It is important to understand a partner before making proposals.

As we learn about our partners it is important to know their annual calendar and know when it is more appropriate to have a proposal processed by their leadership.

A corollary of this principle is that one does not expect a partner to do something that it does not usually do... We go into partnership looking for something specific that we want without asking if the partner actually does that.

Another: *The person who speaks English well is not necessarily the partner leader or representative you should be listening to. He or she may just be the interpreter.*

Listening and valuing each partner's contribution:

No contribution is insignificant. Everyone, regardless of their economic position, has something to offer. As we engage in collaborative processes, sometimes we may need to think more creatively, but we need to be looking for the "widow's mite" or "oil" that each participant brings to the venture.

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Listen well, respect and honour your partner and where possible champion the concerns or interests of the partner - so that they know that you are not just about yourself and one-sided agendas. Shooting for the "win-win" situation and earning a trusting relationship. And in the midst of all this, is not to rush it, but to allow time for things to develop and grow.

Speed:

*Go at the speed of your partners. And believe that God is in that speed. If they go slow, wait! If they go fast, do everything possible to keep up! Accept the speed as how God is working wherever possible, rather than as only the decisions of men. **Another respondent:** If you really want us to go with you, you have to slow down to enable us to keep up.*

Service not exclusive:

*Partnership and service are much more similar than I thought. In a partnership worth its name I learn to serve the partner, rather than just "pursuing common goals."
We must clearly communicate from the beginning that we have a core value of service*

Learning together by listening and sharing our lives together:

Have a learner's attitude, not preaching, but listening even as we share helpful ideas:

- We were hosting a small workshop in a closed country. Everyone worked in a small house. Two mother tongue translators from three languages participated. Five expats were involved in preparing and delivering the translation theory and examples, offering computer help and other technical advice. However, everyone sat around together day after day, eating and sharing together, and using the adult learning method of asking a lot of questions, rather than just presenting a lot of good ideas directly. The learning experience was fun and exciting for everyone. At the end, the mother tongue translators commented, "We learned from you, and you learned from us!" Was it time-consuming to work this way? Labor-intensive? Team-oriented? Yes, but it also changed the lives of everyone there for the purposes of the Kingdom.
That was only the first time I saw this phenomena at work. But since that experience, I have observed it over and over again. After similar training events our friends and co-laborers from other organizations and backgrounds repeatedly say, "We learned from you, and you learned from us!"*

Working together on small, measurable, definite tasks:

*We get to know our important partners best by working together on something definite, rather than just sitting together and talking about partnership. **Another respondent:** Partnership needs action to grow. Sitting and talking does not get very far. Do small actions together. Also get to know each other on a personal level.*

Don't come to the partnership with priority on a major agenda:

Get to know each other. Make a personal commitment to enjoy the partner's staff and even the style of its meetings!

Do things together, starting small. The best start is a one-time joint activity. Do not start something big based only on talking.

Work to understand the other organization, with the head and with the heart (godly love and empathy). If you are cynical or doubting about the partner, walk away or ask God to change your heart.

Open, vulnerable Communication:

The need for true partners to communicate openly and be vulnerable to each other:

- In the early stages of the development of a significant partnership it became apparent that there were some hidden agendas. We decided to 'expose ourselves' by communicating openly about our limitations, weaknesses and 'bottom lines'. This openness clearly impressed the other two partners and slowly they too opened up and agendas were revealed and responded to appropriately.*

Delegated Authority:

On the importance for those representing each of the partners in the partnership to have delegated authority to make decisions and commitments that will hold:

- *Attempts to form a very significant and much needed partnership to address vast needs were constantly running aground. The primary problem was that decisions agreed to by one of the partners were constantly being countermanded by the CEO and Board of that organisation. As a result of this two-steps-forward one-step-back process, the partnership was near to breakdown. A 'final' meeting was convened to attempt to salvage the situation. Happily the CEO concerned attended (unusually) and at the outset made a statement that henceforth his representative to the partnership was authorised to make commitments and that they would be honoured. That was a true turning point, the partnership ... continues ...more than a decade later.*

Mental Models:

The intersection of my mental model and partnership: If I believe that "partnershiping" is to be part of my mental model, then that belief guides / motivates / sometimes kicks-in-the-backside to do what needs to be done. I think this is part and parcel of the mental model that Townsend and many others had. It's not always easy, it's not always convenient, sometimes you might not even want to ... but like the parable of the importunate widow, or the man whose neighbor continued asking for bread in the middle of the night, we (later, if not sooner) do the right thing. Because it's the right thing to do, whether it serves us or not.

- *When I was turning my director responsibilities over to my successor [in a country in Africa], we made out a rather long list of Important People To See, to whom I could present the new director. One of those people was the recently-appointed head of [a] National Language Committee. (Though [we] had no projects in that language, yet we did have some interaction with them). This man wasn't even near the top of my list, and we could have easily skipped him. We made an appointment to see him.*

In the course of conversation, he warmly appreciated our visit. The quote that sticks out, as part of a longer discourse, "...we would have heard that you ... had left our country. But you came yourself to see us, to tell us, and to present your replacement. We appreciate your friendship."

The point here is that we showed respect to him, and that we valued him as a friend, because it was the right thing to do.

Partnership is a journey of transformation, building our character and changing us in the process *Partnership is as much about building my character as it is about accomplishing a task. God wants to transform us and our world. Therefore, it is crucial to keep monitoring what is happening in me and in others. If we are not growing and maturing in the process, then the purpose of partnership from God's perspective is minimized. Also, if we do not grow in the process, then we tend to treat the partnership process like an engineer, very mechanically. (from a partner).*