CULTURAL AWARENESS, SENSITIVITY AND COMPETENCE: BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR BUSINESS SUCCESS IN NEPAL AND SOUTH AFRICA

Daniel IACOB[1]
Virginia Mihaela DUMITRESCU[2]

Abstract

The present article looks at the importance of cultural awareness, sensitivity and competence when doing business abroad, in countries such as Nepal and South Africa, whose cultures may be very different from one's own. On the one hand, it offers a brief overview of the main cultural characteristics of the two countries, based on two major models of cultural analysis (Edward T. Hall's and Geert Hofstede's), as well as on one of the authors' (Daniel Iacob's) first-hand experience with the two cultures. On the other hand, it provides a few guidelines to Romanian business people who would be interested in conducting successful business activities in these still (to a certain extent) "unchartered territories".

Keywords: business success, cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, cultural competence

Introduction

An interesting perspective on the impact of globalization upon the global market is the one presented by Thomas L. Friedman, who claims that through the globalization process "the world has been flattened", and individuals from every corner of the world have been empowered by "making it possible for so many people to plug and play" (Friedman, 2005: 11). However, as Friedman notes, although it seems that the globalization process has brought us closer to the dream of a perfectly efficient, frictionless global market, the world is still far from being perfect, and still abounds in frictions: "Some sources of friction are worth protecting, even in the face of a global economy that threatens to flatten them" (Friedman, 2005: 237). One of the most important sources of friction in any human interaction (business interactions included) has always consisted in the cultural "walls" around individuals, groups of people and nations. Obviously, the globalization process is eroding these walls, and sharper challenges are

[1] Daniel Iacob, Ministry of National Defence, danieliacob@yahoo.com
[2] Virginia Mihaela Dumitrescu, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, mihaela.dumitrescu@rei.ase.ro

continuously posed to particular values, national identities and other bonds that have historically provided protection to individuals and communities. However, reality proves that "people still need agreed-upon ways of establishing authority and building communities, doing work, protecting copyrights, and determining whom to trust" (Friedman, 2005: 238). This means that even in today's rapidly changing global environment, people continue to value their cultural uniqueness and resist some of the challenges resulting from the aggressive and fast-moving process of globalization.

Business people, who must operate in this complex context, usually claim that their activity requires many qualities if it is to be done successfully. There are many remarkable books on the topic, and all readers interested or involved in this activity undoubtedly owe a major debt to different authors. Qualities like good leadership, initiative and capacity to make quick decisions are held in high esteem by many scholars and are consequently considered by most business people as being critical to the success of their activity. In addition to that, in recent years, business ethics has become one of the key ingredients for turning business activity into real and sustainable success. Nevertheless, despite the importance given by business people doing business globally to these generally acknowledged qualities, other basic factors such as cultural awareness, sensitivity and competence are sometimes overlooked.

Cultural awareness, sensitivity and competence

According to a definition given by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner in 1997, cultural awareness is being able to "understand the states of mind, your own and those of the people you meet" (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997: 196). Another definition of cultural awareness would be the ability to notice and recognize that people have different values, different behaviours and different approaches to life.[3] Succinctly, cultural awareness means recognizing that all people do not have the same cultural background. It signifies one's ability to stand back from oneself and become aware of both one's own culture and another's culture, i.e. cultural values, beliefs, perceptions.

Cultural sensitivity consists in understanding the needs and emotions specific to your own culture and other cultures while at the same time refraining from making value judgments (better/ worse, right/ wrong). It should be noted that there are several fundamental questions raised by cultural sensitivity; for instance, is it fair and adequate to treat everyone the same way? (The answer is: it could be, but only if the cultural values and norms of the people involved in an interaction were quite

---

[3] http://wiki.answers.com/Q/How_would_you_define_cultural_awareness#ixzz1xEoyTBNe.

similar). The bottom-line when speaking about cultural sensitivity is that this quality requires an accommodating attitude between members of different cultural groups and avoidance of comparisons and qualitative evaluations.

Unlike cultural sensitivity, cultural competence involves using one's cultural knowledge to adjust one's behaviour and attitude to the cultural environment or to the intercultural communication situation one is exposed to. According to Nostrand, Gundstrom and Singerman, cited by Thérèse Saint Paul, "cultural competence is a blend of linguistic ability, cultural knowledge and empathy towards the target culture. More precisely, […], cultural competence consists of a core of cognitive abilities, behavioral skills and the affective capacity for dealing with intercultural differences in a constructive spirit" (Saint Paul, 2000: 6).

The Nepalese culture and its influence on business

Nepal, a country located in Central Asia, has a unique mountain range, the Himalayas, lying on its territory, and is characterized by a very peculiar societal dimension. The fundamental characteristic of Nepal's ancient society was the existence of a social stratification system called "the caste system", i.e. a division into birth-ascribed, and hierarchically ordered groups (castes) belonging to different cultures. Despite the fact that this social system was formally abolished in 1963, remnants of it are still visible throughout Nepal even today. However, the Nepalese caste system differed from the one existing in India, Nepal's much bigger southern neighbor, which means that the ancient and historically stable Hindu caste code coming from India did not manage to penetrate and spread into Nepal in its pure form, but was modified to suit the local situation. Basically – hence Nepal's unique historical evolution, its ethnic and religious uniqueness.

Throughout history, religion has always played a central role in the Nepalese society, and has always meant duty, ethics, morality, rule, merit and pious acts. Hinduism and Buddhism are the two major religions, but apart from these there are many other rituals specific to various castes and ethnic groups that add variety to the spiritual life of the Nepalese, who are not in the least inclined towards fanaticism. Almost 30 festivals (most of them religious) are celebrated every year. Despite the fact that Hinduism is the dominant religion, the Nepalese are very proud that Buddhism originated in Nepal.[4]

Symbols play an important role in the Nepalese culture. Apart from the state symbols that are kept in high esteem in Nepal, people value their country's main natural symbol, the impressive Himalayan Mountain Range, which is present everywhere and, contrary to some appreciations that its value is mainly

---

[4] http://asianstudies.msu.edu/nepal/Nepal%20Study%20Guide/Understanding_Nepal_ development.pdf

commercial, has not lost its significance to the people living in the area. In the Hindu religion, the Himalaya Range has been personified as a god (Himavat)[5].

The Nepalese people's usual form of greeting is "Namaste", which is specific on the entire Indian subcontinent, and is mainly used when a younger family member meets older relatives. However, the greeting ritual varies depending on social status and prestige. The person having a lower status or prestige performs "Namaste" first to show respect for the interlocutor's higher status. The same greeting, often accompanied by a firm handshake, is also used by the Nepalese when they want to show their respect to foreigners.[6] Moreover, the Nepalese use a gesture that poses an interesting dilemma to many foreigners: they shake their heads when they approve or accept a situation. Most Europeans interpret this gesture as a negation, denial or rejection, which might lead to serious misunderstanding especially during business negotiations.

Nepal is a high context culture, judging by the criteria used by Edward T. Hall in classifying cultures according to their communication styles (Hall, 1976). People in Nepal communicate considering and observing several important rules. First, they tend to treat each other according to social status. This is understandable, because Nepal has experienced and inherited a very deeply ingrained caste culture. Actually, it was only in 1991 that, for the first time in the history of constitution making, "the constitution of 1991 acknowledged the fact that the caste discrimination was prevailing in Nepal and it should be made punishable by law."[7] It took, however, 15 years to have the lowest caste group in Nepal, the Dalits, involved in the constitution making process Even after promulgating the interim constitution in 2007, it was acknowledged that the caste-based problems of the Dalits continued to exist, and the general issue of untouchability was lingering throughout the Nepalese society.[8] (The word word "Dalit", coming from Sanskrit and meaning "ground", "suppressed", "crushed", or "broken to pieces", is a self-designation for a group of people traditionally regarded as of Untouchables and unsuitable for making personal relationships.)

Generally speaking, people who are older are shown more respect and treated more formally. This attitude can be justified by the fact that the Nepalese traditional family is the joint family. However, in the urban areas, slowly but steadily, the nuclear family has started replacing the joint family. As a result, cultural norms

---

[5] http://www.explorehimalaya.com/religion.php

[6] http://www.thefullwiki.org/Namaste

[7]   http://www.fesnepal.org/reports/2009/seminar_reports/papers/Dalits%20and%20Constitution%20Makig%20fo r%20FES.pdf, p. 3.

[8] Ibidem

have changed, and traditional family support systems for the elderly in Nepal have been placed under substantial strain.[9]

Surprisingly, these cultural characteristics have been formed in an ethnically diverse country, but the strong sense of tradition and history, corroborated with the effect of geographical factors (i.e. no access to the world's maritime and main terrestrial axes of communication), has contributed to the creation of this high context culture.

The Nepalese culture is also "polychronic", to use Hall's term (Hall, 1990): people tend to change plans easily and frequently, and are very much concerned with the relationship that exists between them and their families. Furthermore, their promptness in dealing with others depends on the relationship they have with the persons they interact with. However, some Nepalese are learning very fast to become monochronic people, as they deal more and more with representatives of Western culture.

We can also notice some interesting characteristics in terms of the role that space plays in the Nepalese culture. In Nepal, families have many members and live in small houses, which are usually overcrowded. Furthermore, especially in crowded urban settlements, the space between households is scarce and therefore there is an intimate interaction between different families. However, the Nepalese do not stand or sit too close when communicating with one another. Also, despite the rapid modernization of society, there is still a tendency to apply caste rules in communication, which means that people belonging to different castes keep more distance between fro one another as their relationship has a historically developed foundation.

Of course, some of the nonverbal signals conveyed by people from a superior caste (e.g. Brahmi) to lower caste people are not easily noticeable by a European. For instance, a low caste woman will not dare to talk to her higher caste employer about her family problems, even when those problems represent some sort of obstacle in performing her job effectively, and even though there may be some sort of communication between the two. Such cultural aspects may pass unnoticed by Europeans.

When analyzing the Nepali culture according to Geert Hofstede's model based on "dimensions" (Hofstede et al., 2012), Nepal clearly differs from Western cultures. This is obvious especially in the state's bureaucratic apparatus where, most often, power is concentrated in the hands of few people, and "common administrative norms include slow decision making processes, maintaining high levels of secrecy, ritualized work, and shifting responsibility to others"[10] .

---

[9] http://www.globalaging.org/elderrights/world/2007/being.htm
[10] http://www.ub.uib.no/elpub/2005/h/701002/Masteroppgave.pdf -

There is also great emphasis on process rather than results.[11] On the other hand, the income is distributed unevenly and although in today's Nepal protesting against governmental authorities is almost a custom, those employees that enjoy a certain individual stability and welfare are very reluctant, or even afraid, to express their disagreements with their autocratic superiors. All these traits are determined by the high power distance that exists between superiors and their subordinates, and the centralized and non-participatory decision making processes.

In terms of how people define themselves and their relationships with others, it can be said that Nepal has a collectivistic culture. People have a strong sense of belonging to their family, caste and ethnic group. Consequently, many of their decisions are made based on their group's interests. However, individualism is not absent from today's Nepal. Under the influence of Western cultural models to which many Nepalese have easy access, people have started to understand the role of individualism in a democratic society. However, individualism is unevenly distributed throughout society, being more manifest at the highest levels of society. People from lower strata still have that sense of inferiority and vulnerability, and therefore a strong desire for protection offered by the group or caste to which they belong, which gives them a strong motivation to maintain the collectivistic approach to life.

As for the distribution of gender roles, Nepal has a definitely masculine culture that evolves slowly towards a moderately masculine one. In spite of an almost 10-year presence of many UN organizations and other international agencies in Nepal, whose work has been dedicated to the reduction of gender gaps, Nepalese men's and women's roles within society are still clearly defined and distinct. Deeply ingrained cultural norms and practices continue to undermine gender equality as women are primarily viewed in their role as wives and mothers.[12] First-hand observations indicate that gender is often equated with activities for girls and women rather than activities that address the relations between men and women. It is true that very strong and clear signs of significant reduction in gender gaps have been noticed in primary education over the last 20 years or so..[13] However, in the remote and less developed areas, where caste relations are still influential, there are still clear signs of gender discrimination.

The Nepalese culture's tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity is average. On the one hand, people are quite comfortable with uncertainties and, generally speaking, they prefer and observe very few rules. Thus, in many parts of Nepal's society there is no clear understanding of the consequences that may result from an action

---

[11] http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/apcity/unpan035757.pdf
[12] http://reliefweb.int/node/393309
[13] http://reliefweb.int/node/393309

that does not comply with legal regulations. This may be partially due to the lack of strong and efficient authorities as Nepal has experienced a two decade-long period of political unrest. On the other hand, Nepal has a low uncertainty culture because people still have a great respect for religion and some of the rules imposed by it. Furthermore, due to western influences brought to Nepal (especially to Kathmandu) by foreign multinational companies and other international agencies, people working for these employers have the tendency to change their views on uncertainty. These so-called "westernized people" are inclined (or forced) to obey strict rules of conduct, as their superiors expect rules to be followed.

The coexistence of low uncertainty and high uncertainty behavior in one society demonstrates that the Nepalese society is changing at a very rapid pace. Less than 25 years ago, Nepal was quite an autocratic monarchy characterized by a low uncertainty culture, but over the last decade, many substantial changes have been made, which have made Nepal well-known for its rapid societal changes. For instance, Nepal is one of the few countries in Asia to abolish the death penalty and the first country in Asia to rule in favour of same-sex marriages.[14]

Nepal's orientation towards religion and respect for tradition stresses patience and perseverance. Also, from the feudal period to recent times, the caste system determined a strong sense of shame inside the lower castes. Such characteristics are specific to long-term orientated cultures. Nevertheless, the Nepalese culture also evinces some characteristics of short term orientation, as people are more and more inclined towards consumption due to the modernization process. Furthermore, Nepal's high unemployment rate, especially among the younger generation, creates conditions for people to become more oriented towards personal stability and protecting one's face. This is manifest not only in private activities but also within bureaucratic institutions where administrative decisions are influenced by political influence, bribery, personal connections, and the desire to maintain personal status.

When doing business for the first time in Nepal, a person coming from Europe will experience culture shock. In general, this shock will manifest itself through psychological symptoms, one of the most important being the feeling of frustration. The degree and length of culture shock will however vary according to individual values such as personality, ability to cope with novelty and other variables. But these symptoms can be kept under control as the Nepalese are friendly people and despite the fact that their language is not widely spoken, their ability to speak English makes communication easier.

On the other hand, the Nepalese people's reactions when receiving foreigners are not exaggerated and do not mirror exactly those of the foreigners. The Nepalese are very adaptable to foreigners' behaviour as they are accustomed to host foreigners from all over the world. Even in the remotest and less developed areas, people are

---

[14] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepal.

able to cope satisfactorily with foreigners. NGOs, funds, different companies and other international organizations are present throughout Nepal and are therefore part of normal everyday life. Furthermore, because tourism is the main source of national income in Nepal, almost the Nepalese are well aware of the benefits brought by the presence of foreigners in their country.

Negotiation is to be expected when doing business with the Nepalese people. If there is no real interest in certain products or services offered by the Nepalese it is not recommended to negotiate. Also, when a certain price has been agreed on by negotiators it is not adequate to continue negotiations for an even lower price.[15]

Top managers of Nepalese companies do not share offices in order to share information, many of the decisions, sometimes even the unimportant ones, being made by higher level supervisors or decision makers. Although personal relations and goodwill are particularly valued in Nepal, Nepalese business people do not prefer slow, ritualistic negotiations. Furthermore, the Nepalese are very efficient at negotiating. As with many other Asians, conversations with the Nepalese may have a few "dead" patches, as they do not feel uncomfortable with moments of silence.[16] Long pauses are therefore to be expected when talking or negotiating with the Nepalese, as they are pretty much the norm among the Nepalese.[17]

The South African culture and its influence on business

South Africa has been inhabited for more than 100,000 years. The region occupied by today's Republic of South Africa has experienced a unique evolution brought about by two main factors: immigration from Europe and the richness in mineral resources which has attracted significant other waves of immigrants. In the 20th century, the period of apartheid had a great influence on the country's evolution. According to van den Berghe, cited in Giddens, "three main levels of segregation in South African society could be distinguished in the period of apartheid: the segregation of public places (the so-called microsegregation), the segregation of Whites and non-Whites in terms of the neighborhoods in which they lived in urban areas (mezzosegregation) and the segregation of all people in distinct territories set up as native reserves (macrosegregation)" (Giddens, 1989: 258). It was in 1994, after its "first all-race elections"[18], that South Africa became a full democracy.

---

[15] http://www.hikenepal.com/nepal/culture-customs.php.

[16] http://www.hikenepal.com/nepal/culture-customs.php.

[17] http://www.exotic-nepal.com/customs_and_traditions_101.

[18]   http://www.communicaid.com/access/pdf/library/culture/doing-business   in/Doing%20 Business%20in%20 South%20Africa.pdf

Today, South Africa is one of the most multicultural countries in the world, as the population is made up of many different ethnic groups. About 79.5% of the South African population is of black African ancestry, divided among a variety of ethnic groups speaking different Bantu languages, nine of which have official status. South Africa also has the largest communities of European, Asian, and racially mixed ancestry in Africa. That is why it is difficult to try to generalize about the South African culture. The expression used today to describe this multicultural, diverse country is "The Rainbow Nation". Today South Africa is a progressive nation that looks forward and seeks unity, a country that should be praised for the way it has so far managed racial segregation.

Symbols are very important to South Africans, especially within the black majority. However, even white South Africans who are descendants of British and Dutch settlers are very much interested in the value of symbols. It is worth mentioning that white South Africans have been quite eager to embrace the new symbols (flag, anthem, etc.) inspired from African specificity, which have reflected a significant change in their lives and a reconciliation process that they have tried to be part of.

Because of a lack of ethnic homogeneity, South Africa has a complex culture. Like most westerners, white South Africans have a low context culture. Generally speaking, their communication style is explicit, straightforward, and relies mainly on verbal and written messages. The context of is less important in communicating the message. However, there are differences between white English-speaking South Africans, and white South Africans of Dutch origin, the Afrikaners. Because they are proud of their cultural heritage, English speakers are generally reserved when communicating, but also relaxed, elegant, and usually expressive in their speech. They generally try to avoid unnecessary conflicts. On the other hand, Afrikaners are quite different: blunt and often tactless, they have the tendency to "tell things like they are", they are bilingual and have a sense of urgency, which explains why their approach to communication is so direct. A visitor to South Africa cannot avoid being aware of the eager hospitality and thoughtful kindness of the white people living there" (Lewis, 2006: 216; 217). On the other hand, the black majority in South Africa has a high context culture. Although their communication style differs from that of other high context communication cultures from Latin America or the Middle East for instance, black South Africans are talkative; they convey messages both verbally and non-verbally. They have a strong group (tribal) identity, "meetings with them tend to be folksy and chatty and do not strictly adhere to agendas; also, meetings with them can be noisy but are not necessarily aggressive" (Lewis, 2006: 218). They love dancing and rhythm, and often use their body language to convey non-verbal messages. "They often sway in rhythm with their verbal utterances." (Lewis, 2006: 218).

South Africa can be compared with some western cultures (Canada or Germany) in terms of Geert Hofstede's "power distance". People, to a large extent, accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification. However, there are people, especially within the black community, who perceive hierarchy in an organization as a manifestation of inherited inequalities.[19] This may appear as a sort of inertial prejudice from the apartheid period and the associated inequalities. Anyway, there is significant and rapid change in terms of people's perception about power. Since they now have access to the highest political positions in the country, black South Africans are conscious that "they hold the key to the nation's future" (Lewis, 2006: 216) and thus they generally do not question leadership positions. Nevertheless, opposition to leadership, determined by social inequalities and probably some perceptions within the black communities that the distribution of power among them is not fair, still occurs from time to time.

South Africa can be considered an individualistic society with a high preference for a loosely-knit social framework in which individuals are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families only.[20] In the South African society, the employer-employee relationship is a contract based on mutual advantage; hiring and promotion decisions are generally based on merit and the management of individuals. However, within the black community of South Africans, "the tribe is everything. Without a tribal affiliation, the African is incomplete. This has little to do with the political nation–state boundaries drawn up in the 1880s by colonizing Europeans." (Lewis, 2006: 217). Therefore, black South Africans have a strong sense of belonging to their tribes, whose interest they protect. However, the democratization process, the well-developed education system and other changes associated with globalization are eroding the tribal bonds.

South Africa is a masculine society where people live to work, managers are expected to be decisive and assertive, the emphasis is on equity, competition and performance, and conflicts are resolved by fighting them out.[21] This value system is clearly formed in schools: South Africa has an efficient, European-style, educational philosophy. The masculinity dimension is then further cultivated in all organizations, despite the fact that women also play a major role in society. Most white women are involved in education and business activities. Especially in the Afrikaner families, there are many white women that maintain the custom of being housewives, taking care of children and doing housework.

---

[19] http://geert-hofstede.com/south-africa.html.
[20] http://geert-hofstede.com/south-africa.html.
[21] http://geert-hofstede.com/south-africa.html.

On the other hand, the black community is not so masculine. As a consequence of the patriarchal system that has endured until the end of apartheid, men play an important role within the black communities. However, women have their clear role and power, and are more and more involved in decision making and supporting their families.

South Africa shows a preference for avoiding uncertainty. It maintains rigid codes of belief and behaviour. South Africans are intolerant towards people whose behaviour and ideas are out of the ordinary or extravagant. They also have an emotional need for rules (even if the rules never seem to work), and for them time is money. Furthermore, people are hard workers and have an inner urge to stay busy. Precision and punctuality are the norm, innovation may be resisted, and security is an important element in individual motivation.[22]

The concept of time and the approach taken towards it differs in the white and black cultures of South Africa. Among the majority of white South Africans, time is viewed in a more formal manner. People are focused on quick results as they are normative. By contrast, black South Africans usually do things at a slower pace (Lewis, 2006: 218). They have a long-term orientation, and consider that truth depends on situation, context and time. However, they are very quick to adapt to changes, or adopt the short-term orientation style of white South Africans.

Regarding the indulgence vs. restraint dimension, white South Africans are clearly concerned with their basic natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun. This might be considered a result of the fact that in the past, during the apartheid period, white South Africans could indulge more easily in a more relaxed lifestyle. In fact, this is a paradox because the social norms at the time were very strong, but white South Africans did not consider that norms were designed mostly for them, but rather for black South Africans and others. However, as significant political and social changes have taken place in society, restraint is more manifest even among representatives of the old white community, who have started observing today's social norms. Definitely, as the struggle for getting jobs and providing a better life for their families has become more difficult for white people in a society where political life is dominated by black South Africans, such a change has become not only necessary but compulsory.

At the beginning of a business meeting, white South Africans generally appear as warm, friendly, affable communicators, but later on, warmth is tempered by tenacity in reaching the established goals. In the case of black South Africans they also defend their tribal interests. On the other hand, according to Richard Lewis, "meetings with black South Africans are folksy and chatty and do not strictly adhere to strict agendas. Points are discussed in order of importance and are not abandoned until some measure of mutual satisfaction has been achieved. Older

---

[22] http://geert-hofstede.com/south-africa.html.

men usually decide when this point has been reached (Lewis, 2006: 220). Although they are suspicious when dealing with white people as a result of historical memories, black South African establish quite quickly an atmosphere of trust between negotiating parties. Negotiators should not get impatient if black South Africans go over points that have already been discussed once, as this is a cultural characteristic.

Final remarks about the role of cultural awareness, sensitivity and competence in achieving business success in Nepal and South Africa

Culture influences business activities in important areas such as: problem solving; decision making; meeting management; team building; communication and negotiation styles. As these are the main activities conducted in any business endeavor it can be said that business people must learn how to tackle the complex environment created by the world's cultural diversity. Considering the peculiarities of Nepal and South Africa's cultures presented above, it is obvious why business people going to these two countries need to be culturally aware, sensitive and competent.

First, Nepal has a complex and very original culture. Much of the communication style in Nepal is determined by the relationship between castes, although today, due to the changes that have taken place over the last decade, modern ways of communicating are becoming more common. Apart from that, religion and other historically inherited values make this culture difficult to understand. In this context, when entering Nepal, it is necessary to have emotional competence, intercultural sensitivity and cultural intelligence. Emotional competence is needed as the Nepalese people are sensitive to persons that are able to express their feelings and interact with them easily on a personal basis. Cultural sensitivity is an asset that helps the foreigner in Nepal cope with needs and emotions specific to the Nepalese culture without making value judgments. Here it must be mentioned that Europeans tend to regard the Nepalese as Gypsies, which is a regrettable stereotype based on distortion, ignorance, and racism that does not reflect the reality and can create problems in human relationships. Nevertheless, Nepal, an unchartered territory for many business companies in the world, has a great demographic potential and can offer many business opportunities. At present, there are already many foreign companies from Europe, mainly from Germany, Switzerland and Scandinavian countries operating in Nepal.

On the other hand, South Africa has a multicultural society with many economic discrepancies among different social strata. Nevertheless, it is the most developed African country, with a great potential for international investors. Not surprisingly, both China and India look upon South Africa as one of the main gateways to the African market.

In conclusion, both Nepal and South Africa are very good examples of markets where business people can achieve success. For Romanian business people, they might be countries of choice for future investments and business development. However, one should be aware of the fact that, apart from business acumen, cultural awareness, sensitivity and competence are three major "must haves" for starting and conducting successful business activities with companies/ business people from these remote countries.

References and bibliography

Friedman, Thomas L. 2005. *The World is Flat. The Globalized World in the Twenty-First Century,* Penguin Books.

Giddens, A. 1989. Sociology, United Kingdom: Polity Press.

Hall, Edward T. 1990 (1959). *The Silent Language.* Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday.

Hall, Edward T. 1976. *Beyond Culture*, New York: Doubleday.

Hofstede, Geert, Gert Jan Hofstede, Michael Minkov, 2012. *Culturi si organizatii. Softul mental.* Transl. Mihaela Zografi. Bucuresti: Humanitas.

Lewis, Richard D. 2006. *When cultures collide: Leading across cultures*, Nicholas Brealey International.

Saint Paul, Thérèse. 2000. "Developing Cultural Awareness with International Business Students: A Look at Empathy Breakdown", in *Global Business Languages*, vol 5 (Internalization and the New Millenium), Art. 5.

Trompenaars, Fons, Hampden-Turner, Charles. 1997. *Riding the Waves of Culture, Understanding Cultural Diversity in Business*, Nicholas Brealey Publishing Limited.

http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/apcity/unpan035757.pdf, retrieved 14.05.2011

http://mibcom.ase.ro/index.php/ro/resurse/navigare.html

http://reliefweb.int/node/393309, retrieved 18.05.2011.

http://www.globalaging.org/elderrights/world/2007/being.htm; retrieved 17.05.2011.

http://www.fesnepal.org/reports/2009/seminar_reports/papers/Dalits%20and%20Constitution%20Makig%20for%20FES.pdf, retrieved 13.05.2011

http://wiki.answers.com/Q/How_would_you_define_cultural_awareness#ixzz1xEoyTBNe, retrieved 06.06.

http://www.thephoenixprinciple.com/quotes/2004/11/isaac_asimov_th.html, retrieved 04.06.2012.

http://countrystudies.us/nepal/; retrieved 08.05.2011.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Africa, retrieved 03.06.2012.

http://geert-hofstede.com/south-africa.html, retrieved 04.06.2012.

http://www.communicaid.com/access/pdf/library/culture/doing-business in/ Doing%20Business %20in%20 South%20Africa.pdf, retrieved 04.06.2012.

http://asianstudies.msu.edu/nepal/Nepal%20Study%20Guide/Understanding_Nepal
      _development.pdf retrieved 04.06.2012.
http://www.explorehimalaya.com/religion.php
http://www.ub.uib.no/elpub/2005/h/701002/Masteroppgave.pdf

The authors

Daniel Iacob is an officer in the Ministry of National Defence and a graduate of the Faculty of Geography/ University of Bucharest. He also holds a master's degree in Defence Studies from the Canadian Royal Military College, and a master's degree in Business Communication from the Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest. He has participated in various international military missions.

Dr. Virginia Mihaela Dumitrescu is a Lecturer in English for Business Communication with The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, a translator, co-author of textbooks, author of articles on education, intercultural business communication, literature, criticism, and translation theory. She holds a Ph.D. in Philology from Bucharest University.