

SUMMARY OF FUNCTIONS PERFORMED

Nearly all debate on the function of NGO joint consultative status conferences has centered on the depersonalized concerns of the organizations which do or might participate. This emphasis ignores a number of social factors which would be considered highly significant in a business management study of the operations of these conferences and of conferences in general, including NGO meetings. Ironically, these factors are mainly associated with human relations. These are briefly summarized below.

An obvious remark to make is that each NGO representative is concerned with three things :

- his organization
- himself as a representative of his organization
- himself as a private person (i.e., without his « hat » as a representative)

And in terms of each of these three perspectives, the representative participates in the conference and may act on the basis of any of them — whichever is « mis en cause ». In the case of each of them a number of areas of concern may be noted, any of which may or may not be evident in the case of a given representative at a given conference. The following points are given in no special order.

a) Furtherance of interests

The representative is concerned with furthering : (i) the interests of his organization (which may include inter-NGO coordination), (ii) his own as a representative of the organization, (with respect to other members of the organization), and (iii) his personal interests (which may, for example, be centered on the touristic possibilities of the area visited. N.B. This is even considered to be a problem in the case of government delegates to IGO conferences.)

b) Protection of interests, security

The representative is concerned to protect at all costs : (i) the interests of his organization, (ii) his own as a representative, as well as (iii) his personal interests, if they are threatened.

c) Status

It is the responsibility of the representative to maintain and improve (i) the status of his organization with respect to other organizations, (ii) his own status as a representative with res-

pect to others — as well as (iii) his own personal status.

d) Fulfillment

The representative is concerned not only to protect and further the interests of the organization but, in a special sense, also to insure that in doing so a more fulfilling environment for the operation of the organization is created. Similarly, as a representative, he is concerned that his actions should be fulfilling and should result in the creation of a more fulfilling environment for his representational responsibilities. And of course the private person is also concerned that any action should create more fulfilling conditions for himself.

e) Learning

Participation in a joint conference is not a one-way process in which the participants give only. There is also a process of learning : (i) learning which assists the organization to function more effectively, (ii) learning which leads the representative to function more effectively, and (iii) learning which is significant to the growth and orientation of the person. In each case, this learning may lead to a change of understanding of problems and priorities.

f) Identity

All action on the part of social entities modifies, but mainly reinforces, understanding of identities. Thus by participating in joint NGO conferences, the identity of an NGO as part of the NGO community is reinforced — for the NGO is given an opportunity to assert its identity. For the representative it is the same. His identity as a representative is reinforced, given relevance and legitimated, and of course the interaction of the person with others — as in all such situations — reinforces or modifies the individual's conception of his own identity.

g) Information exchange

Underlying all the above is the process of information exchange which is of concern (i) to the organization in assessing, planning, and improving its programmes, (ii) to the representative in assessing his own strategy, and (iii) to the person in assessing the relevance of his own actions.

This schema of functions performed by a joint NGO conference may be summarized as follows.

BY NGO CONFERENCES

	ORGANIZATION	REPRESENTATIVE	PERSON
depersonalized	interest furtherance interest protection information exchange	interest furtherance interest protection information exchange	interest furtherance interest protection information exchange
personalized	status fulfillment learning identity	status fulfillment learning identity	status fulfillment learning identity

Discussion of joint NGO conference usually concentrates on the three boxes of « depersonalized organization, » namely information exchange, furtherance of interests, and protection of interests. The other eighteen boxes are not discussed. Any changes proposed for the NSO conference system which are only made in terms of the depersonalized organization requirements are doomed to frustration. The existence of the other functions which govern the manner in which many aspects of the conferences are organized must be considered. In many cases, it is the real or perceived threat to the « hidden functions » that causes opposition to any change.