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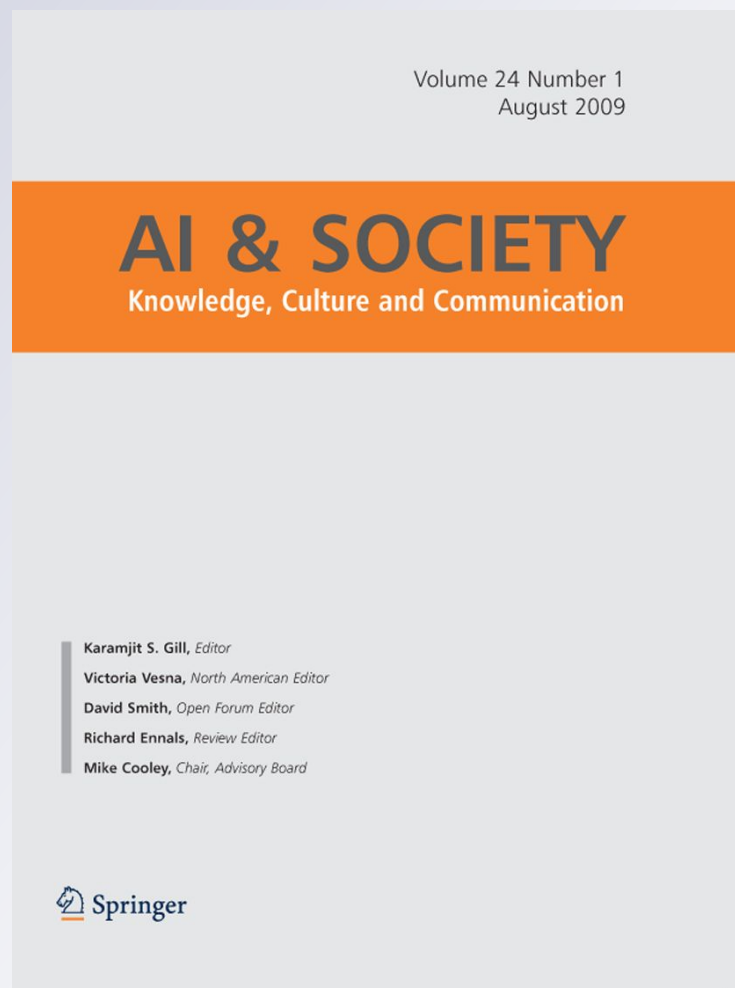
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# Collaboration and collaborative advantage: a case of SQC concept promotion in Nepal

Dinesh P. Chapagain

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**Abstract** The article explores the development of Students' Quality Circles (SQC) as a major contribution to education in Nepal. The principles of SQCs are introduced, together with a strategy for sustainable development of a national programme. The creation of collaborative advantage has wider educational and social implications.

**Keywords** Collaborative advantage · Nepal · Quest Nepal · Students' Quality Circles

## 1 Introduction

Nepal, a relatively small nation, is situated in central Asia as a bridge between two populous and growing economic giants: China to the north and India to the south. The country has vast bio-diversity, as well as diversity in terms of geo-physical terrain and cultural heritage. From the Great Himalayas with the highest mountain Everest (8,848 m), the Top of the World in the north, Nepal slopes down southward to reach the plain of low bush forest with the lowest land less than a hundred metres above sea level. Nepal is a nation where, from among a population of about thirty million, more than a hundred ethnic groups with different cultural heritage and languages have lived harmoniously for centuries. It has been a sovereign nation since its formation and is in the process of making a new federal democratic constitution, with a collaborative approach among twenty-five competitive political parties who have different competing ideologies, ranging from extreme conservative, socialism and leftist to radical

communism. They are represented in the constitutional assembly elected for this purpose.

### 1.1 Students' Quality Circles: historical perspective

Students' Quality Circles (SQC) have been adopted recently and represent one of the innovative and proven pedagogies to develop student personality, as well as to solve the problems of students and schools. In brief, SQC is defined as "a small team of like minded students who meet once a week at school to identify, analyse and solve their problems faced by them at school or home, applying Quality Circles tools and techniques for developing their pro-social personality."<sup>1</sup> Students at school voluntarily participate in this SQC process. The teacher just facilitates students with tools and techniques of Quality Circles in this process. SQC educational approach is an offspring of the Quality Control Circles (small group activities) of Total Quality Management as conceived by Dr. Edward Deming, Dr. Joseph Juran and Dr. Kaoru Ishikawa for empowering Japanese workers and solving the quality problems of Japanese industries way back in the 1960s. TQM has spread all over the world for sustainable business growth. Dr. Jagdish Gandhi borrowed this concept of Quality Control Circles and experimented in his famous school, City Montessori School, Lucknow, India, taking help from Dr. Vineeta Kamran, Principal CMS and Mr. Prakash C. Bihari, Quality engineer. This experiment was very successful for empowering students. The SQC approach has already been endorsed by veteran Quality professionals and educationists like Mr. Donald

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<sup>1</sup> The book "A Guide on Students' Quality Circle: An approach to prepare total quality people" (2006) written by Prof. Dinesh P. Chapagain, published by Network for Quality, Productivity and Competiveness, Nepal has given why, what and how of SQC in details.

Dewar, Dr. Syed Ali of USA, Mr. David Hutchins, Prof Richard Ennals of UK, Dr. Hayal Koksal of Turkey and many others from Mauritius, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The World Council has been formed at CMS India, who are promoting this innovative pedagogical approach throughout the world. The author was also one of the founder members and is promoting this concept in Nepal through an institution called QUEST-Nepal, devoted totally to promoting this SQC approach throughout the country.<sup>2</sup> QUEST-Nepal, “Quality Circles in Education for Students’ Personality Development, Nepal” was established in 2005 by prominent schools of Nepal. It has more than 200 member schools, working collaboratively to promote this concept.

## 1.2 School education system in Nepal

The first modern education system started in Nepal after the establishment of the first school named Durbar School at Kathmandu in 1892.<sup>3</sup> Recently, in the year 2009, the government of Nepal has begun to implement the School Sector Reform Programme (SSRP), which aims at restructuring school education into two types: Basic and Secondary education. Basic education has two parts: primary (consisting of grades 1–5, prescribed age 5–9 years) and lower secondary (consisting of grades 6–8, prescribed age 10–12 years). Secondary education also has two parts: secondary (consisting of grades 9–10, prescribed age 13–14 years) and higher secondary (consisting of grades 11–12, prescribed age 15–16 years).

Schools are broadly categorised into three types in the country: community schools, institutional schools and religious schools. The community schools are either (1) community-aided (schools, which are fully supported by the government for teachers’ salary and other expenses), or (2) community-managed (schools, which are fully supported by the government for teachers salary and other funds, but their management responsibility lies with the community), or (3) community-unaided (schools, which are either getting partial support or no support from the government). The institutional schools are supported by parents and trustees. In addition to these two broad categories, there are some schools running as religious schools such as Islam’s Madarasa, Budhist’s Gumba/Vihar and Hindu’s Ashram/Gurukul, who have received support from the government when they have been mainstreamed into the formal education system following the Education Act and Regulation.

<sup>2</sup> Website <http://www.questnepal.org.np> provides details about the institute and executive members and its activities.

<sup>3</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durbar\\_High\\_School](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durbar_High_School) contains other information available.

There are 40,424 schools in the country, where community schools are tuned to about 81% of total schools, and institutional schools mostly operated by private sectors are about 18%, and about 1% are religious schools.<sup>4</sup>

The performance measurement of institutional schools is good in terms of school board examination results. The private sectors have entered into the education business and have provided quality education for two decades. Their capability is increasing, and more and more entrepreneurs are entering into this business. However, they are facing problems of competition, and the competition has forced them to make their students smarter. Students are becoming increasingly smart and have started creating problems in society because they are forgetting moral values and ethics. They have become individualistic, rather than preferring to work in a team. They do not like to listen to others and always like to speak. In other words, the students are not good enough to meet the needs of society. The educationists are worried about this problem and are eagerly looking for an innovative approach to implant a Quality mindset into their students. The approach needs to develop smartness as well as goodness.

When the concept of SQC was introduced at the educationists’ forums in Nepal, they showed interest in experimenting with this innovative pedagogical approach to making a Total Quality Person, with a good and smart character. SQC as a co-curricular activity for students’ overall personality development is now accepted by prominent schools in Nepal. They agreed to collaborate for SQC promotion in their respective schools, as well as in other schools throughout the country. The SQC is promoted in Nepalese schools, adopting a collaborative approach. This article discusses how collaboration became possible, what lessons we can draw from this collaboration and see whether we can apply this in other parts of the world.

## 2 Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Co-operation, co-ordination and collaboration

Michael E. Porter’s “competitive advantage” has been a milestone for the study and development of better strategies in the competitive environment.<sup>5</sup> Nepalese schools are

<sup>4</sup> The Flash Report 2067 (2010–2011) published by Government of Nepal, Ministry of Education, Department of Education has produced these statistics. This report is available at [http://www.doe.gov.np/download/download\\_485099940.pdf](http://www.doe.gov.np/download/download_485099940.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Harvard Business Review published “How Competitive Forces Shape Strategy” by Professor, Michael E. Porter in 1979. More recently, health care, education and philanthropy. “Porter’s five forces” have shaped a generation of academic research and business practice.

also adopting the same methodology for growing their business. The cash surplus or profit earned by educational institutions, if stolen away for other business entities, may mean that the main social and development objective of the nation will not be met. In Nepal, educational institutions have been operating more like businesses for the last two decades.

Collaboration is a multi-dimensional and multi-level co-ordinated and co-operative relationship for development and growth. First, let us understand three terminologies: CO-OPERATION, CO-ORDINATION and COLLABORATION before developing the theoretical model for collaboration to get collaborative advantage. Co-operation among partners and co-ordination of all partners are the major factors for collaboration to create real collaborative advantage for all partners.<sup>6</sup>

Merriam Webster's dictionary defines *Co-operation* as "association of persons for common benefit" and *Co-ordination* as "a harmonious functioning of the parts for most effective results." *Collaboration* is defined as "co-operation with agencies, which are not immediately connected."

Co-operation provides value to members of a group who adhere to a linear, predetermined set that enable the individuals' input to be aggregated so as to get net benefits. We can observe co-operation between many agencies of the same status and nature. The example of two partners exchanging the baton in a relay race is an example of co-operation in winning the race. Co-ordination yields outcomes that are greater than the sum of its parts, by bringing together disparate, collectively produced elements into a common space. The example of dribbling and passing the football by players playing in various positions in a soccer game is a clear example of co-ordination. Collaboration captures and expands the development of many ideas from multiple contributors, in order to gain the synergistic benefits for each collaborator. The example of skydiving by hundreds of divers forming beautiful shining stars with different shapes, hanging without support in the open sky, is an example of collaboration, which would not have happened if all divers were not co-operating with each other, and co-ordinating nicely to form the expected beautiful design.

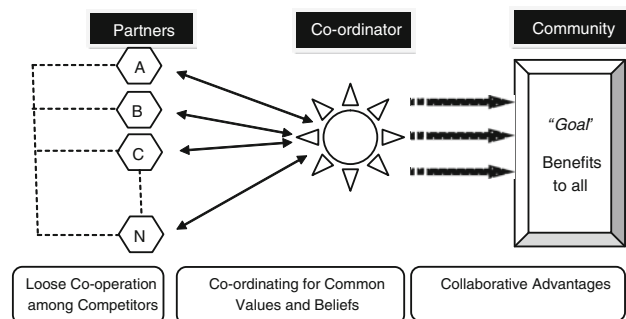
## 2.2 Collaboration model

If we look back in our history, many of us have cultivated strong competitive cultures that keep us from working

<sup>6</sup> A paper published in *Innovating*, vol. 7, Number 5 titled *Collaboration vs. C-Three (Co-operation, Co-ordination, and Communication)* by Leo Denise has defined the three terms and its relationship to develop the conceptual forum of Collaboration.

together towards common interests. Countries went to war to compete for more space and natural resources, business organisations tried to outdo each other to gain profits and market leadership, families and individuals fought with each other for wealth, status and ego. Eventually, resources are wasted on beating the competitors, while they could have been better used to improve the current states of our world. The same stories are still repeating even today and, in the near future, will be repeated again. Collaboration can address complex global issues, which otherwise will be really hard for individual organisations to cope with.

The Conceptual Framework of Collaboration with co-operation and co-ordination is given below.



In a community where competitive forces are struggling to achieve personal gains, if a leader wants to establish a common belief and values in a community, he or she needs to co-ordinate with the competing partners, creating the environment of loose co-operation among them, generating collaborative advantages that will help to achieve the goal as well as deriving benefits for all competitive and collaborative partners. Collaboration needs both co-operation



and co-ordination. This process may be called a *Collaborative Leadership* process.

Students' Quality Circles, or SQC in short, are popularly known among educationists who are trying to implement at schools to develop pro-social personality of students, and now represent a common belief and values among the eminent educationists of Nepal.

### 3 Case of collaboration and collaborative advantage

#### 3.1 13th international convention in Nepal, 2010

The concept of SQC was introduced in Nepal from 1999. First, it was explained to eminent leaders of prominent schools, and then seminars were conducted. Principals of these schools were sent to attend international conventions at India, Mauritius, USA and Bangladesh. This created an environment of understanding the values of SQC in developing the personality of their students. Common beliefs and values regarding the importance of SQC developed among the competing educational institutions joined together to agree to work for SQC promotion. National conventions on SQC started annually from 2005, and the 7th National convention in the series was organised collaboratively in the month of October 2011.<sup>7</sup> SQC has been institutionalised by creating a specialised non-governmental, not-for-profit organisation collaboratively linking competitive educational institutes of Nepal, with the sole objective of promoting SQC throughout the country. In numerical terms, there are now more than 200 schools who have already adopted SQC for their students, 64 master trainers are working to train SQC facilitators, more than two hundred SQC facilitators and more than 7,000 students have already been involved in SQC activities solving their problems.

QUEST-Nepal is working as co-ordinator to co-ordinate the competitive educational institutes whom we prefer to call collaborators for promotion of the SQC concept in the country. In addition to its own website (<http://www.questnepal.org.np>), it has published an internationally approved book titled "A Guide Book on SQC: an approach to prepare total quality person" (Chapagain 2006), and publishes e-communicé on monthly basis, conducts Master Trainers laboratory annually, SQC facilitators training periodically, SQC awareness programs occasionally and organise the most acclaimed event: conventions on SQC, annually.

QUEST-Nepal organised the 3 days 13th International Convention on SQC in 1st, 2nd and 3rd November 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Please refer to Conventions menu at <http://www.questnepal.org.np> for the convention outcome and resolution of 1st to 7th conventions on SQC conducted by QUEST-Nepal.

The theme of the convention was "*Thinking beyond Borders: Creating Global Values.*" Two hundred and two international professionals, principals and students from eight countries and four hundred eighty-seven national delegates participated in SQC case study presentations, paper presentations and other competitive and non-competitive events. The Convention was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of Nepal Mr. Madhav Prasad Nepal, amidst a great gathering of about twelve hundred senior government officials, educationists, media personnel and delegates. Dr. Jagdish Gandhi, pioneer of the SQC concept in academia, delivered the keynote address. Through an outstanding example of collaboration by various players, the outcome was beyond expectation. The feedback received from the delegates was wonderful.

#### 3.2 Application of collaboration model

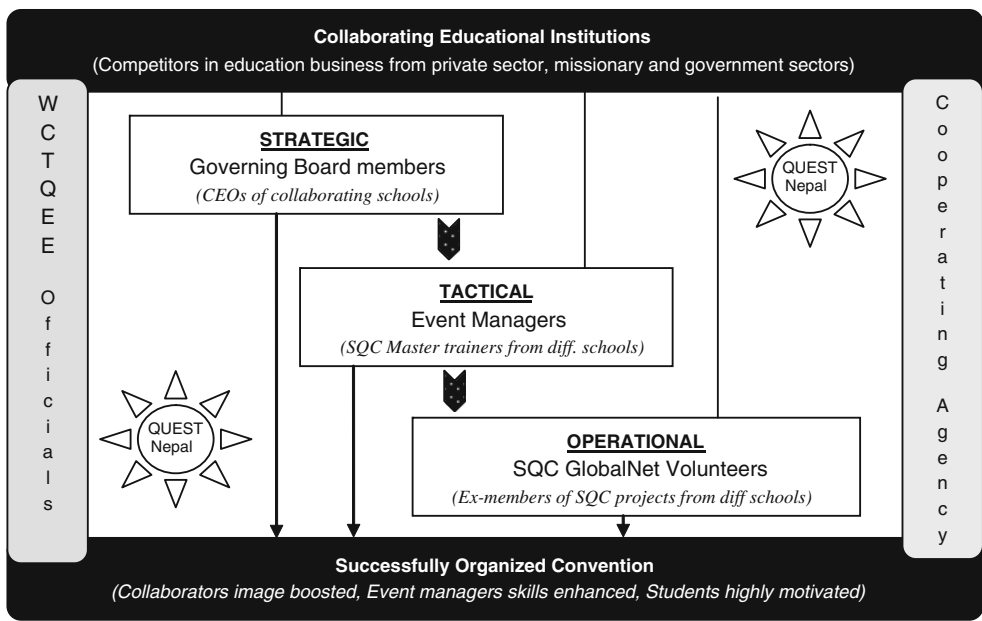
QUEST-Nepal adopted three levels of collaboration to organise the international convention. Competing educational institutions or schools came together to join hands for a common goal of students' personality development through SQC promotion and assisted through their finance and human resources. The collaborating partners were involved in strategic level, tactical level as well as operational level of the event management.

The collaboration model QUEST-Nepal adopted is shown below.

QUEST-Nepal had the responsibility for organising this mega convention in 2010. However, there were scarce financial and human resources. As a convener of the International convention, first of all it started searching the collaborating institutions among the premier educational institutes of the country.

Ten such institutions agreed to be collaborating partners. They were from different backgrounds missionary, private sectors and government sectors. They were operating in a competitive environment for business development. They, however, shared beliefs and values of SQC for students' personality development. They were—Kathmandu University High School, DAV SKVB School, Little Angels' School, St. Xavier's School, Galaxy Public school, Shubhatarra School, GEM School, LRI School, Brookfield Academy and VS Niketan School.

QUEST-Nepal asked WCTQEE Chairman, Executive directors, Advisors and Directors General for their support to participate in the Convention. Similarly, it asked national level agencies who are directly engaged in education and Quality works for their support to be co-operating agencies. This was needed to increase the visibility on SQC in the National environment. It succeeded in including nine such agencies as co-operating partners. They were: Ministry of Education of Government of Nepal,



PABSON, NPABSAN, HISSAN, NJS, NELTA, NQPCN, PQC/FNCCI.

The convention adopted three level of collaboration: Strategic, Tactical and Operational. Strategic level consists of a Governing Board members represented by CEOs of all ten collaborating schools. Tactical level consists of an Event management committee represented by thirty-two master trainers from different schools including collaborating schools. Operational level consists of SQC GlobalNet volunteers, who were former SQC project members from different schools including collaborating schools.

Very loose co-operation relationship among these collaborating schools exists. However, there was a strong belief in values, that is implementing SQC in schools for students' personality development. These values helped to develop collaboration among these schools. QUEST-Nepal co-ordinated all competing schools, with the help of loose co-operation, and strong beliefs on values. QUEST-Nepal conducted this experiment as collaborative leadership and was successful. During the process, it was very interesting to note that CEOs of different schools collaborated to give policy decisions with support of financial and human resources, as per their capacity. At the same time, teachers of different schools collaborated to plan and execute the events, and students of different schools collaborate as volunteers for the events, though they all have separate hierarchical relationships between CEO, teachers and students.

A successfully organised convention was the main outcome. The mission of QUEST-Nepal, to spread the importance of SQCs throughout the country, and promote implementation in educational institutions, was achieved. The image of all collaborating schools and their respective

chiefs were boosted. The skills of teachers or all master trainers on SQC promotion and event management were enhanced. The motivation level of students who volunteered through SQC GlobalNet was greatly increased. The collaboration process created, at all levels, a win-win situation together with the central goal.

#### 4 Conclusion

##### 4.1 Lesson learned from the collaborative leadership process

There are some areas of collaborative inertia that may hamper the collaboration process. The collaborative leader should understand these constraints and address them properly.

- Competitors who try to collaborate for one reason have differences in aims and goals of their respective organisations.
- Collaborators have difficulties in direct communication among themselves.
- Collaborators may have different cultures and procedures.
- The different nature and level of collaborating partners may reveal their power imbalance.
- There will be tensions between the autonomy and accountability of individual collaborating partners.
- There will be lack of authority structure in the collaborating partnership.
- The managing of the collaborating process demands enough time.

#### 4.2 Advantage flows from collaboration...

Something unusually creative is produced with collaboration. No single organisation could have produced the result on its own. Through collaboration, an organisation may be able to achieve its own objectives better than it could alone.

In some cases, it should also be possible to achieve some higher-level objectives for society as a whole, rather than just for the participating organisations. SQC in Nepal is just one example.