



Cultural Compatibility Between Sri Lanka and Norway: Building Successful Business Partnerships



You might wonder how two countries as different as Norway and Sri Lanka manage to do business together so well. Despite being about 5,000 miles apart and having very different cultures, they've built a surprisingly strong business relationship. **In fact, around 350 Norwegian small and medium-sized businesses operate in Sri Lanka, and Norway's big national investment fund has put money into more than 20 Sri Lankan companies.**

Norway, part of the Scandinavian region, is known for its egalitarianism, low-context communication, and flexibility. On the other hand, Sri Lanka leans more towards hierarchy, high-context communication and structure. So, what's the secret to their success? It turns out that despite their surface differences, Norway and Sri Lanka share some important values that make them excellent business partners. This paper will explore those shared values and explain why they matter so much in business.

What Makes Cultures Different?

When we talk about cultural differences, we're usually talking about two main aspects:

Rooted in Societal Values

These are deep-rooted beliefs and norms that shape how people perceive the world and interact with others. They include concepts like the importance of community, the role of gender, and the value placed on consensus.

- Reaching Consensus
- Communal (Team) Responsibility
- Employee Voice
- Gender Role Differentiation
- Motivation to succeed
- Recognition of Efforts
- Conflict Resolution
- Emphasis on Qualifications
- Negotiation Style
- Work-Life Balance

Rooted in Behaviors

These are the visible ways people express their culture, like how they communicate, how they approach tasks, and how they manage their time.

- Communication Style
- Approach to Tasks
- Risk and Initiatives
- Emotional Expression



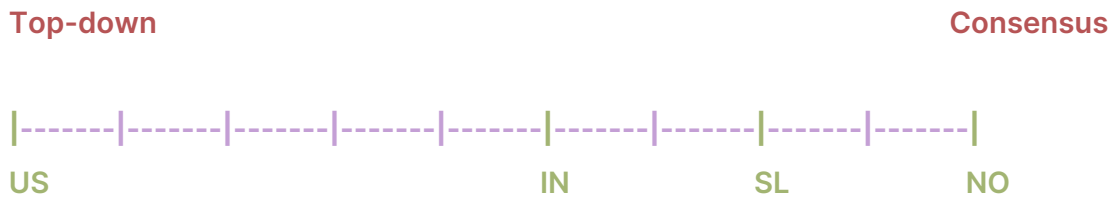
In this paper, we'll mainly look at those deep-rooted values that make Norway and Sri Lanka such great business partners. To give you a better idea, we've also included the US and India in our comparisons. This should help you see how these countries stack up against each other

Value 1: Reaching Consensus

The Two Ends of the Spectrum:

Top-down: Some cultures prioritize a top-down approach with quick decision-making, often favoring speed and efficiency over prolonged discussions.

Consensus-Oriented: Other cultures prioritize reaching consensus, ensuring that all voices are heard and that decisions reflect the collective input of the group.



Norway (NO): In Norway, decision-making is highly inclusive, with an emphasis on hearing everyone's voice before moving forward. This approach ensures that all team members are aligned and committed to the decision.

Sri Lanka (SL): Similarly, in Sri Lanka, consensus is crucial, though it is often achieved through more indirect means, such as one-on-one discussions to ensure comfort and agreement before a decision is finalized. While Norway strongly emphasizes egalitarian beliefs, Sri Lanka's decision-making could be influenced by the need to maintain group harmony.

United States (US)/India (IN): Both countries emphasize on quick decision-making. Decisions are often made by individuals or small groups of leaders, with a focus on speed, efficiency, and results.



Value 2: Communal (Team) Responsibility

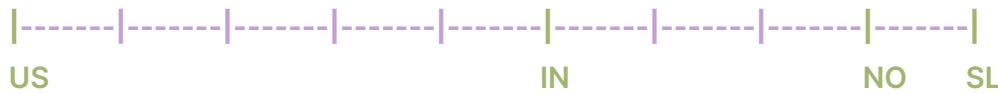
The Two Ends of the Spectrum:

Self-Reliance: At one end of the spectrum, some cultures emphasize self-reliance, where individuals are expected to take personal responsibility for their successes and failures and encouraged to prioritize their own goals over collective needs.

Community Orientation: At the other end, some cultures place a high value on collective well-being and teamwork. In these cultures, significant attention is given to community work, and success is seen as a shared endeavor.

Self-Reliance

Community Orientation



Norway: Despite its individualistic nature, Norway exemplifies high community orientation, with a strong focus on social welfare, community well-being, and collective interests. This mindset is akin to the "Law of Jante," which discourages standing out as better than others and instead promotes the idea that everyone is part of a larger whole.

Sri Lanka: Similarly, Sri Lanka's culture places great importance on community and collective efforts. This is evident in practices like 'Shramadana' (voluntary community work) and 'Dansal' (free food distribution during religious festivals), where individuals come together to contribute to the welfare of the broader community. However, Norway's social welfare system is well institutionalized, whereas Sri Lanka's community orientation might be more familial and informal.

United States/India: These culture places a strong emphasis on individualism, where personal achievements and goals are prioritized over collective interests. The focus is often on self-reliance and personal success.



Value 3: Employee Voice

The Two Ends of the Spectrum:

Suppressive Structures: In some cultures, hierarchical structures limit the expression of employee voice, with decisions often made by those in authority without much input from subordinates.

Empowering Structures: In other cultures, like Norway, employee voice is highly valued, with an emphasis on open feedback and participation in decision-making.

Suppression

Empowerment



Norway: In an egalitarian culture like Norway's, employee voice is typically heard in a more direct and open manner. The organizational structure is flat, with minimal hierarchy, allowing for more democratic decision-making. This approach fosters transparency, inclusivity, and a sense of ownership among employees.

Sri Lanka: In Sri Lanka, while respect for hierarchy is more pronounced, the strong labor protections ensure that employee rights are safeguarded, and their concerns are addressed. This approach emphasizes stability and protection, potentially leading to a more secure and stable work environment. The taboo against mass layoffs in Sri Lanka further highlights the importance placed on employee stability and well-being, aligning closely with Norwegian values.

United States: In highly competitive workplaces, employee voice may be more limited, with decisions being made primarily by those in authority. In India, traditional hierarchical structures are more prevalent, often limiting the expression of employee voice, particularly in more conservative or large organizations.



Value 4: Gender Role Differentiation

The Two Ends of the Spectrum:

Masculine Cultures: In some cultures, traditional gender roles are strongly defined, with clear distinctions between the roles of men and women in society and the workplace.

Feminine Cultures: In other cultures, gender roles are more fluid, with a strong emphasis on equality and inclusivity.



Norway: Norway is known for its low Masculinity culture with low gender role differentiation, strong gender equality and flexibility in roles. Both men and women are encouraged to participate equally in all aspects of society, including the workforce, education, and home responsibilities. Norwegian companies often have policies promoting equal parental leave, reflecting the cultural emphasis on gender equality.

Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka is said to have the highest score on Femininity in Asia. Society focuses more on the quality of life and equality than being in a competitive society, but this could lead to receiving adverse reactions if you stand out from the crowd. With the world's first female Prime Minister and a female President, Sri Lanka has a history of significant roles for women.

United States/India: High in Masculinity and exhibits strong gender role differentiation. Despite progress in gender equality, there are still noticeable differences in roles and expectations for men and women, particularly in certain industries and regions.



Value 5: Motivation to succeed

The Two Ends of the Spectrum:

Competitive Achievement: In some cultures, success is measured by competitive achievements, such as career advancement, financial gains, and outperforming others.

Quality of Life: In other cultures, success is more closely tied to quality of life, where work-life balance, personal well-being, and family time are prioritized.

Competitive Achievements

Quality of Life



Norway: Norway falls firmly on the "Quality of Life" end of the spectrum. In Norwegian culture, success is not just about climbing the corporate ladder or accumulating wealth. Instead, it is about creating a fulfilling life that includes ample time for family, leisure, and personal development.

Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka also leans toward the "Quality of Life" end of the spectrum, though it might not be as institutionalized as in Norway. Success in Sri Lankan culture is often seen in terms of social harmony, community well-being, and personal happiness. There is a strong emphasis on family ties, religious practices, and maintaining a balanced life, where work is important but not the sole focus of one's existence.

United States/India: Both the United States and India are positioned on the "Competitive Achievement" end of the spectrum. In these cultures, success is often defined by individual accomplishments, such as reaching the top of one's profession, earning a high income, or achieving recognition and status.



Value 6: Recognition of Efforts

The Two Ends of the Spectrum:

On Results: In some cultures, recognition is primarily based on the results achieved. Success is measured by tangible outcomes, and rewards are given to those who meet or exceed specific performance metrics.

Of Efforts: In other cultures, recognition is not solely based on the end results but also on the effort, dedication, and process involved in achieving those results.

On Results

On Efforts



Norway: In Norwegian culture, while achieving results is important, the effort put into achieving those results is also highly valued. This creates a supportive work environment where employees feel valued for their contributions, regardless of whether the outcome was a complete success. This encourages employees to learn through failures and not be afraid of judgement.

Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka places a very high value on the efforts and dedication individuals put into their work. Recognition is often based on the commitment and perseverance shown by employees, reflecting the culture's supportive and communal nature. Sri Lankan workplaces tend to emphasize the hard work that go into achieving goals, with a more explicit approach to recognition. This can include public acknowledgment, awards, or ceremonies that highlight the contributions of individuals and teams.

United States: The recognition is predominantly based on the results achieved. Performance metrics, outcomes, and the ability to meet or exceed targets are key determinants of recognition and career advancement. The focus is often on individual achievement, with rewards such as bonuses, promotions, and public recognition given to those who deliver the best results.



Value 7: Conflict Resolution

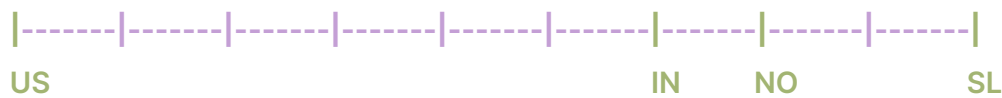
The Two Ends of the Spectrum:

Confrontational: In some cultures, conflicts are resolved through direct confrontation, where issues are addressed openly and head-on. This approach values transparency, efficiency, and clear resolution of disagreements.

Consensus/Mediation: In other cultures, conflict resolution is more indirect, emphasizing harmony, consensus, and mediation. The focus is on maintaining relationships and finding mutually agreeable solutions.

Confrontational

Consensus/Mediation



Norway: In Norwegian culture, conflict resolution tends to be indirect, with a strong emphasis on maintaining harmony and achieving consensus. Confrontations are generally avoided, and instead, issues are resolved through dialogue and mutual agreement. The focus is on understanding each other's perspectives and finding solutions that all parties can accept.

Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka also leans heavily towards indirect conflict resolution, valuing the maintenance of harmony and the avoidance of direct confrontation. Mediation by a neutral party, such as a senior leader or respected community member, is common, reflecting the cultural importance of maintaining social cohesion and respect.

United States: In contrast, these cultures favor direct conflict resolution. Here, conflicts are often addressed openly, with an emphasis on confronting issues head-on. This approach values transparency, efficiency, and the quick resolution of disagreements. While this can lead to faster outcomes, it may sometimes be perceived as aggressive or confrontational in cultures that prefer a more indirect approach. India presents a mixed approach to conflict resolution, where maintaining harmony and respect for hierarchy are paramount.



Value 8: Emphasis on Qualifications

The Two Ends of the Spectrum:

Low Emphasis on Qualifications: In some cultures, while formal education is valued, there is a greater emphasis on practical experience, entrepreneurial success, and on-the-job achievements. These cultures may prioritize skills and results over academic credentials.

High Emphasis on Qualifications: In other cultures, formal qualifications are highly valued, with significant importance placed on academic achievements and continuous education as key to professional and personal success.



Norway: Norway places a strong emphasis on formal qualifications. The educational system is highly regarded, and academic credentials are considered important for entering and advancing in professional careers. There is also a significant focus on continuous lifelong education, with a culture that supports ongoing learning and development.

Sri Lanka/India: In both countries, education is highly valued, and there is a strong cultural emphasis on academic achievement and formal qualifications. Families often invest heavily in the education of their children, viewing it as a critical pathway to personal and professional success. However, the focus tends to be more on academic qualifications rather than vocational or alternative education.

United States: While the United States values education, there is also a significant emphasis on practical experience and entrepreneurial success. In many cases, career advancement is driven by on-the-job success, networking, and personal initiative. Although formal qualifications like degrees from prestigious institutions are important, they are not the sole determinants of success. The U.S. culture often celebrates self-made entrepreneurs and professionals who have risen through ranks based on experience and achievements rather than formal education alone.



Value 9: Negotiation Style

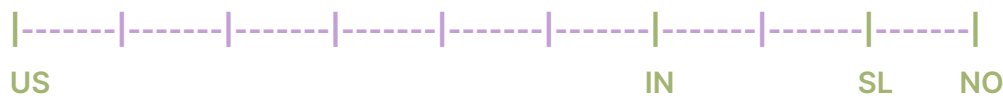
The Two Ends of the Spectrum:

Aggressive: In some cultures, negotiations are approached competitively, with a focus on winning the best possible deal for oneself. This style is often characterized by assertiveness, confrontation, and a zero-sum mentality, where one party's gain is seen as another's loss.

Cooperative: In other cultures, like Norway and Sri Lanka, negotiations are more collaborative, with an emphasis on mutual benefit, transparency, and finding solutions that work for all parties involved. This approach values long-term relationships over short-term gains.

Aggressive

Cooperative



Norway: Norway exemplifies a highly cooperative negotiation style. The focus is on achieving mutual benefits, with an emphasis on transparency, fairness, and maintaining positive, long-term relationships. Norwegian negotiators tend to approach discussions with a collaborative mindset, seeking solutions that satisfy all parties involved. This cooperative style is rooted in Norway's cultural values of equality, consensus, and trust.

Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka also favors a cooperative negotiation style. Reflecting the collectivistic nature of the culture, Sri Lankan negotiators prioritize building and sustaining long-term relationships. The goal is to find win-win solutions that ensure all parties benefit, rather than simply maximizing individual gains. This approach aligns well with the broader cultural emphasis on harmony, respect, and mutual understanding.

United States: In contrast, the U.S. negotiation style tends to be more competitive and aggressive. There is a strong focus on achieving the best possible deal for oneself, often with an emphasis on assertiveness and a willingness to push hard for favorable terms. This competitive approach is driven by a cultural emphasis on individual success, self-reliance, and achieving measurable outcomes. While effective in some contexts, this style can sometimes lead to strained relationships if not managed carefully.

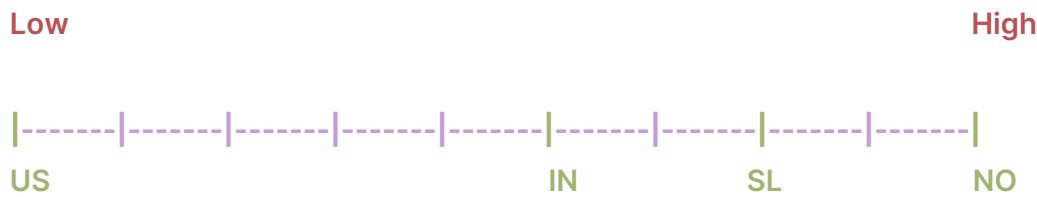


Value 10: Work-Life Balance

The Two Ends of the Spectrum:

Low Work-Life Balance: In some cultures, work demands are high, and professional commitments often take precedence over personal life. Long working hours, limited vacation time, and a focus on career advancement can lead to an imbalanced work-life integration.

High Work-Life Balance: In other cultures, like Norway, there is a strong emphasis on ensuring that work does not overshadow personal well-being, family life, and leisure time. These cultures support flexible work arrangements, ample vacation time, and policies that promote a healthy balance between work and personal life.



Norway: Norway is renowned for its strong commitment to work-life balance. The Norwegian culture values ensuring that professional commitments do not overshadow personal well-being and family life. This balance is supported by flexible work arrangements, generous vacation time, and robust parental leave policies. In Norway, it is common for employees to work standard hours with little expectation of overtime, allowing them to spend quality time with their families and pursue personal interests. The societal norm places well-being at the forefront, creating a work environment that prioritizes balance and health.

Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka also places a high value on family and community life, with cultural emphasis on personal well-being and maintaining strong social relationships. While work-life balance is important, the reality can vary depending on the sector and the demands of specific jobs. In more traditional sectors, there may be a greater emphasis on extended working hours, but generally, Sri Lankan culture supports the idea of balancing work with family responsibilities and community involvement. Social gatherings, religious practices, and family events are integral parts of life, reflecting the cultural importance of a balanced lifestyle.



United States/India: Work-life balance tends to be lower on the spectrum, with high work demands and long working hours often taking precedence over personal life. The culture of "hustle" and the pursuit of career advancement can lead to a work environment where work frequently overshadows personal well-being. While there are movements towards improving work-life balance, particularly in more progressive companies, the overall culture still heavily emphasizes professional success, sometimes at the cost of personal time.

Differences Rooted in Behaviour

Even though Norway and Sri Lanka share many cultural values, there are some behavioral differences that can lead to misunderstandings and friction in professional settings. Here are a few key differences:

Behavior 1: Communication Style

Norway: Norwegian professionals typically prefer direct and explicit communication. They value transparency and clarity in conversations, often getting straight to the point in discussions, whether they are formal or informal.

Sri Lanka: In contrast, Sri Lankans often use a more indirect communication style. They may rely on context, non-verbal cues, and subtler forms of expression to convey messages. This approach helps to maintain harmony and avoid potential conflict, but it can sometimes lead to misunderstandings if not recognized by more direct communicators.

For successful collaboration, Norwegian teams working with Sri Lankan counterparts should be mindful of the subtleties in communication and avoid interpreting indirectness as a lack of clarity or commitment. Sri Lankan teams, on the other hand, might need to adopt more explicit communication when dealing with Norwegian partners to avoid any potential confusion.



Behavior 2: Approach to Tasks

Norway: Norwegian professionals are known for their flexible work practices. They value autonomy in how tasks are approached and completed, often encouraging creative solutions and independent problem-solving.

Sri Lanka: Sri Lankan professionals tend to prefer a more structured approach to task management. There is a greater emphasis on following established procedures, which provides a sense of security and predictability in the workplace.

In joint projects, Norwegian teams should respect the Sri Lankan preference for structure and consider providing clear guidelines and timelines. Conversely, Sri Lankan teams might benefit from embracing some level of flexibility, which can lead to innovation and more efficient problem-solving.

Behavior 3: Risk and Initiatives

Norway: Norwegian culture has a high tolerance for taking risks and initiatives. Innovation is encouraged, and employees are often empowered to take calculated risks in the pursuit of new ideas or improvements.

Sri Lanka: Sri Lankan professionals are generally more risk averse. Decisions are often made after careful consideration, with a preference for avoiding actions that could lead to uncertainty or failure.

Business Implication: Norwegian teams should recognize the Sri Lankan preference for cautious decision-making and ensure that any proposed risks are well-justified and backed by thorough analysis. Sri Lankan teams might consider adopting a more proactive approach to initiatives, especially in environments that reward innovation and risk-taking.

Bridging Behavioral Gaps

Companies that work across these cultural boundaries, like 99x, are actively addressing these behavioral differences through training and cultural awareness programs. By educating employees on how to navigate these differences—such as helping Sri Lankan engineers understand Norwegian communication styles or teaching Norwegian managers about Sri Lankan approaches to hierarchy—companies can foster smoother and more effective collaborations.



Behavior 4: Emotional Expression

Norway: In Norwegian business culture, emotional expression is usually kept to a minimum, especially in professional contexts. There is a strong focus on maintaining a calm and composed demeanor, even in challenging situations.

Sri Lanka: Emotional expression is more accepted and common in Sri Lankan workplaces. Showing emotions, whether positive or negative, is seen as a natural part of communication and can be an important way to build relationships.

Business Implication: Norwegian professionals should be aware that Sri Lankan colleagues may express emotions more openly and should not interpret this as unprofessional. On the other hand, Sri Lankan teams may need to adjust to the more reserved and composed style of their Norwegian counterparts, particularly in formal settings.

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Summary & Conclusion

		Norway	Sri Lanka	US	India
01	Reaching Consensus	Highly consensus-oriented, inclusive	Consensus through indirect methods	Quick decision-making, top-down	Quick decision-making, top-down
02	Communal (Team) Responsibility	Strong community orientation	Strong community focus, familial	Individualism, self-reliance	Individualism, self-reliance
03	Employee Voice	Empowering structures, flat hierarchy	Hierarchical but with strong labor protections	Hierarchical, limited employee input	Hierarchical, limited employee input
04	Gender Role Differentiation	Low, strong gender equality	Low, some traditional roles but moving towards equality	High, traditional gender roles	High, traditional gender roles
05	Motivation to Succeed	Quality of life, work-life balance	Quality of life, social harmony	Competitive achievements, career-focused	Competitive achievements, career-focused
06	Recognition of Efforts	Values effort as well as results	High value on effort and dedication	Results-oriented, performance metrics	Results-oriented, performance metrics
07	Conflict Resolution	Consensus and mediation, indirect	Consensus and mediation, indirect	Direct confrontation	Mixed, hierarchical respect
08	Emphasis on Qualifications	High, formal education valued	High, formal education highly valued	Balanced, practical experience valued	High, formal education highly valued
09	Negotiation Style	Cooperative, mutual benefit	Cooperative, long-term relationships	Aggressive, competitive	Aggressive, competitive
10	Work-Life Balance	High, personal well-being prioritized	High, varies by sector	Low, work often overshadows personal life	Low, work often overshadows personal life
11	Communication Style	Direct, explicit	Indirect, context-driven	Direct, explicit	Mixed, context-driven
12	Approach to Tasks	Flexible, autonomous	Structured, procedural	Flexible, results-driven	Structured, procedural
13	Risk and Initiatives	High, encourages innovation	Risk-averse, cautious	High, innovation-driven	Risk-averse, cautious
14	Emotional Expression	Low, reserved	Higher, more openly expressed	Low to moderate, context-dependent	Moderate to high, more openly expressed



The cultural compatibility between Norway and Sri Lanka creates a great opportunity for business partnerships. Both countries value getting everyone to agree, thinking about the whole community, planning for the long-term, and respecting expertise. This shared foundation, along with efforts to bridge any remaining cultural gaps, sets the stage for successful collaborations. Many Norwegian businesses have already found success partnering with Sri Lanka, using these cultural similarities to grow, innovate, and succeed together.

Disclaimer: *The base data for this analysis is derived from 99x's extensive experience working with different cultures over the past 20 years. Additionally, we have utilized various online sources to supplement our insights.*

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