



# Comprehensive needs analysis for NGO staff

Hiromasa Tanaka  
*Meisei University*  
 Yoshifumi Fukada  
*Meisei University*

## Reference Data:

Tanaka, H., & Fukada, Y. (2007). Comprehensive needs analysis for NGO staff. In K. Bradford-Watts (Ed.), *JALT2006 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.

While the need for nourishing competent Japanese non-governmental organizations' (NGO) personnel who can work internationally has increased, information regarding the necessary abilities or skills to enter the NGO staff community is limited. Although some studies come up with their framework, none provide a thorough needs analysis grounded in on-site data with insider-perspectives. The authors collected detailed information in their ethnographic study about NGO staffers' requirements by conducting unstructured interviews with 69 NGO managerial/volunteer personnel and by observing NGO activities in Japan, East Asia, and Europe. This study clarified many different types of requirements for a NGO staffer, including the indispensability of English language skills and other related factors. These findings implied some English educational needs for prospective NGO staffers to contribute more competently to international cooperation.

国際的に活躍できる日本人NGOスタッフを育成していくことの必要性はますます高まっているものの、NGOコミュニティーで働くために求められる能力、技能に関する情報はまだ少ない。過去のいくつかの研究はその大まかな枠組みを示してはいるものの、現場の詳細データ、内部者の視点に基づく徹底したニーズ分析を行なった研究は依然としてない。この度のエスノグラフィック研究で著者たちは、日本、そして東南アジア、ヨーロッパの数カ国で、合計69人のNGOマネージャー／ボランティアスタッフに会話形式のロングインタビューを行い、また、いくつかのNGO活動を観察することによって、工作上、彼らに必要とされる要素に関して詳細な情報を収集した。結果的にこの研究は、世界の各地域で働く各職階のNGO職員に求められる様々な要素を明らかにすることができたと共に、インタビューを行なったほとんどのNGO職員にとって英語コミュニケーション能力、またいくつかの関連要素が必要不可欠であることを明確にした。これらの研究結果は、将来、NGO職員になることを目指している人々に対していくつかの英語教育ニーズを示唆するに至った。

The global economy, the progress of information technology, and the use of English as an international language has strengthened the connection between all countries. This has benefited many people, but has also generated serious global issues, which include economic disparity, political strife, and environmental destruction. As an economically powerful country, Japan must assume a major role in providing economic assistance and also in dispatching human resources to the areas suffering from these global problems. However, according to the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) (独立行政法人国際協力機構, 2002), few Japanese non-governmental organizations' (NGO) personnel can work internationally, and Japanese higher educational institutions need to develop educational/training programs that nurture competent human resources.

#### Past studies of needs analysis for NGO staff

To develop effective education/training programs, we must clarify the requisite abilities, skills, and knowledge of capable NGO staffers. Some studies have pursued this question. JICA (独立行政法人国際協力機構, 2002), for example, concluded that NGO personnel needed professional abilities in related fields, communicative competence, appropriate skills/selected knowledge, management abilities, knowledge related to the regions/communities they work in, and knowledge related to assistance.

Kuroda's needs analysis study for NGO workers (黒田, 2001) was relatively consistent with JICA's. As a part of his study, Kuroda administered a survey to 158 participants in JICA's projects in order to trace the problems these

participants faced in their involvement with international cooperation. This survey helped identify JICA participants' educational needs such as transferability of professional knowledge and experience, communicative competence, knowledge related to recipient countries educational system, and flexible adaptability.

Hiraga (平賀, 2003) conducted interviews with five nurses who participated in a JICA project, and discovered that the abilities/skills they needed for their specific activities were knowledge of nursing management, practical power of nursing management, information-collecting ability, problem analysis ability, negotiation skills, strategic technique, presentation ability, and communicative competence.

These three studies are the only needs analysis studies for NGO staff. They provide little detailed information about the requirements of NGO staff. NGO staff requirements should vary depending on their specialties, their working positions, and the country/area in which they work. In addition, NGO staffers' requirements will probably change constantly in response to socio-economic and political factors.

Information about their requirements is necessary to achieve Japan's educational goal of nurturing more competent human resources who actively contribute to international cooperation. Although Japanese higher educational institutions should take its major role, they cannot develop effective educational/training programs without knowing the specific abilities/skills needed by NGO staff.

## Methodology

To clarify NGO staffers' requirements, the authors conducted an ethnographic study by adopting the critical incident analysis approach. This approach was borrowed from Bee and Bee (2003) and Rosewell and Sredl (2000), who suggested that researchers clarify each type of requirement or educational need through the deep analysis of actual critical incidents and their possible causes at work sites. In their ethnographic study, the authors obtained most of the examples of critical incidents from interviews with NGO staff members. It would have been ideal if they could have observed and confirmed these incidents during their visits to NGOs. In order to enhance the validity of this study, the authors collected related data by using interviews and observations to triangulate data sources (Davis, 1995). The authors interviewed NGO staff to elicit as many critical incidents as possible from them. When it was allowed, they observed the staff's NGO activities to clarify the tasks/problems they encounter and the abilities, skills, and other requirements necessary for accomplishing/solving these tasks/problems taking account of the staff's positions, contexts/settings and countries/areas in which they work. Both interview and observation data were analyzed with the coding technique.

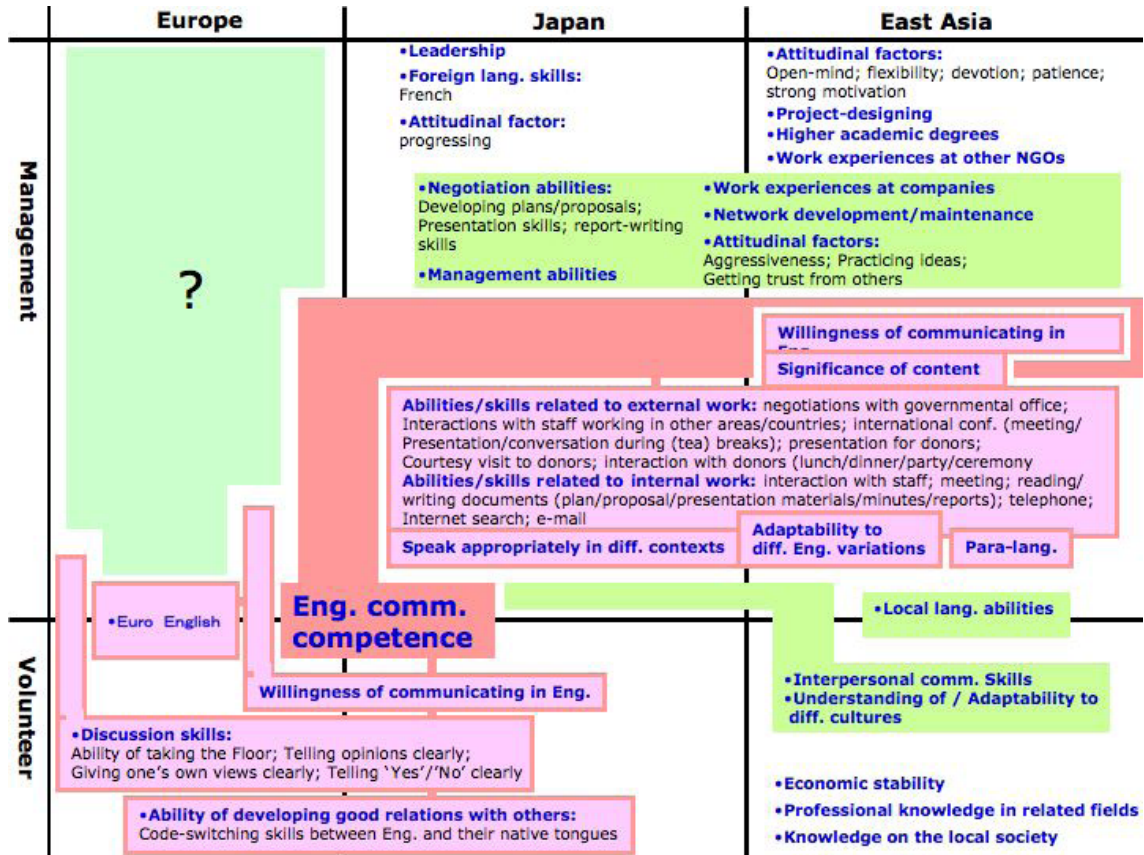
Their fieldwork was conducted in three different areas: Japan, Europe (Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, and Hungary), and South East Asia (Cambodia and Thailand) between July and September in 2005. First, the two authors interviewed five managerial staffers working at each NGO and conducted observations of 26 NGO volunteers in one NGO volunteer camp in Japan. After

collecting the data, each author visited Europe and East Asia, respectively. One author visited four NGO camps and six NGO-related organizations located in the five European countries, and then interviewed 27 NGO staff members (seven managers and 20 volunteers). He also observed NGO volunteer activities led by those interviewees. The other author interviewed eight managerial staffers and three volunteers at five NGOs located in the two East Asian countries, and he conducted brief observations at two NGOs.

## Findings

### *Many different types of requirements*

As the results of their fieldwork, the authors came up with many different types of requirements as shown in the following chart. Their requirements included abilities/skills and knowledge, along with some attitudinal factors, work experience, and academic degrees. Managers and volunteers in each area had different requirements, and some of them were recognized in more than one category. It should be noted that a requirement recognized in one category could appear in others since the chart was based only on the information elicited from their fieldwork.



\* A question mark is put in the category of NGO managers in Europe since interviews conducted with those staffers mainly elicited information about English communicative competence and other related abilities/skills rather than information about the other requirements.

Figure1. Elicited requirements for each level of NGO staffers in three different areas

*English needs*

As shown above, English communicative competence was one of the most significant requirements for most NGO staffers except those working in South East Asia. (The authors found in the interviews that NGO volunteers in the area used local languages in most of their communication with people in the communities and with other staffers.) The following interview comments from three NGO managers denotes that NGO managers take it for granted that most NGO staff have enough English competence to engage in NGO activities. “It’s a working language...we used to have French and English....But we use English only” (Managerial staff member in Belgium, 2005, September 10). “In our recruitment ad, we put the first class of *Eiken* as one of the requirements” (Managerial staff member in Japan, 2005, August 2). “If you have good English abilities, they will be your weapons. If you don’t, nobody wants to deal with you” (Managerial staff member in Cambodia, 2005, August 23). While the authors expected that a couple of languages including English would be used in NGO activities, they learned that English was actually the main language used in those activities.

*Complexity of English communicative competence*

The authors found that NGO staffers were required to use their English communicative competence in combination with many types of abilities, skills, knowledge, or attitude in different contexts/settings both inside and outside of their offices. For example, NGO managers in Japan and South East Asia used English in negotiations with government officials, interactions with staff working in different countries/areas,

presentations at conferences, presentations for donors, interaction with donors outside of their office. Likewise, they used English in meetings with other staff members, reading/writing documents including proposals, reports, and minutes, telephone calls, internet searches, and sending/receiving e-mails inside of their offices. These activities required strong willingness to communicate, adaptabilities to different English varieties, and knowledge about how to speak appropriately in each context and para-language (intonation, pitch, stress, speech, and rhythm of speech).

NGO managerial/volunteer staff in Europe and volunteers in Japan used English in discussions with other staff and reported a strong willingness to communicate with others. The authors recognized from volunteer staff in Europe and Japan the need for appropriate code-switching between English and the staffers’ native tongues to develop good relations with others. Furthermore, they recognized that managerial/volunteer staff in Europe needed to be familiar with “Euro-English,” a new English variety used in European countries in recent years. In this paper, the authors will present some findings about the indispensability of English communicative competence, focusing on some of related factors.

*Willingness to communicate in English with others*

The authors found that NGO staffers were required to speak English in their activities and to show a strong willingness to communicate with others. However, some NGO managers commented in their interviews that Japanese NGO volunteers in lower structure of their organizations hesitated to speak English.

I think one problem there was they (Japanese volunteers) were shy...because English was not as good as well...she (one Japanese volunteer) maybe very good but she was not speaking very much not to do many mistakes... she is also shy and afraid to make mistakes. (Volunteer leader in Germany, 2005, August 25)

This comment denotes that many Japanese volunteers are afraid of making grammatical mistakes in their use of English, which could be one reason why they tend to become taciturn in their English communication with others.

However, one Japanese NGO manager appointed in Thailand thought this kind of worry was unnecessary.

Nobody in this office expects you to speak perfect English. Even if you make mistakes speaking in English, it is not regarded as a decisive factor of a failure. ...the important thing is to tell what you think, telling your meaning. ...There will be no problem as long as you can transmit your meaning. (Managerial staff member in Thailand, 2005, August 18)

She implied that as long as the messages/comments themselves were meaningful and valuable, English grammatical mistakes would not be problematic. She also said that in the NGO environment non-native speakers' English was acceptable.

NGO staff thinks that they should not expect non-native staff to speak perfect English. The mindset is shared among top-managers. ... One manager from Ireland does not use more than 15 words in one

sentence. ... He never uses complex sentence forms like 'comma which' in his remarks. ...Japanese who received higher education unnecessarily try using such expressions. (Managerial staff member in Thailand, 2005, August 18)

### *Adaptability to different English varieties*

The authors found that NGO staff needed to be familiar with British/American English as well as other varieties of English spoken in different parts of the world. A Cambodian NGO manager commented that she had attended an international conference every year and had many opportunities to listen to presentations in English by Indians, Sri Lankans, and Ugandans. She commented that unless she was familiar with many different English varieties, it would be difficult for her to understand those presentations (Managerial staff member in Cambodia, 2005, August 23).

A Thai manager also stressed the significance of this adaptability. He mentioned that his Thai subordinates used to miscommunicate with their counterparts in Japan through the conversations via telephone or e-mail. He said the Thai staffers used to complain the Japanese staff's frequent use of the expression, "you should" when the Japanese staff gave advices to them. This expression is very direct, and it is not very polite to use the expression in such speech context. However, many Japanese people learn this expression at school as the only expression they can use for giving advices. The Japanese counterparts complained about the Thai staff's frequent use of the expression "wait a minute." The Thai staff used the expression but frequently made them wait for one or two hours. The Thai manager mentioned that

these miscommunications did not occur after he explained to his subordinates the different English speech styles of the two groups (Managerial staff member in Thailand, 2005, August 18). These problems introduced in the episode could be related to the issues of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and discrepant perception of time (mono-chronic vs. poly-chronic) between the two ethnic groups (Hall, 1983). However, there is not enough data to discuss either of these subjects in detail. As Long (2005) insists, each of these problems need to be analyzed/discussed based on more varieties of data collected through the triangulation of data sources and research methods.

The authors recognized in this study the existence of a new English variety called Euro English used in NGO activities in Europe. The following is a comment collected from a volunteer leader in Belgium.

I think the British who work with us adapt to the way of Euro... Euro English that we use. They are used to hear (sic.) kind of broken English that doesn't represent their value system. ... We have a lot of jokes, like ... when say "You are destroying English language." They are joking, but it's true. But I don't think that we are destroying English. That's another English. (NGO volunteer leader in Belgium, 2005, September 19)

The volunteer leader implied in this comment that native English speakers who work with European staffers must adapt to the new variety of English.

The interview data introduced in this and last sections signify the prevalence/acceptance of "World Englishes" (Kachru, 1988) or "Global English" (Graddol, 2006) in NGO

community. The data in the first section show that native English speakers who work on managerial level do not expect non-native staff to speak English in the same way as native English speakers, while the data reveal that different varieties of English classified into the categories of "outer circle" and "expanding circle" (Kachru, 1988) actually have been used in their work.

### *English discussion skills*

Third, this study clarified that NGO staff members had many occasions to discuss various serious topics in English including global issues, such as disparity of world economy and regulations/rules they should follow during their NGO activities (NGO volunteer leader in Germany, 2005, August 25). To perform well in English discussions, NGO staffers must know how to take the floor and to state their opinions/ideas clearly. Their performance is important for a high evaluation from other staff, including their superiors. Some European volunteer leaders pointed in their interviews that Japanese NGO volunteers tended to be passive/quiet in English discussions.

The (Japanese) volunteers, they don't express basically anything. For most of the Japanese, things are good...They don't speak out....How then can things improve? That's the main consequence of not speaking. (NGO volunteer staff member in Germany, 2005, August 25)

Japanese volunteers themselves seemed to be frustrated that they could not actively participate in English discussions. "They discussed, like a debate, on atomic bombard in

Nagasaki, but I could not say what I wanted to say” (Japanese volunteer staff member in Germany, 2005, August 25).

One volunteer leader also commented that many Japanese volunteers cannot express their preference (telling yes/no) clearly in English discussions.

Even if they don’t like, they agree. Agreeing all the time, of course, is not good because others say “yes” if a volunteer say “yes.” This creates a problem. If I ask Japanese to wash dishes four times a day, they will. If I ask “Are you happy?” they say “yes” (Volunteer leader in Germany, 2005, August 25) .

This NGO volunteer leader shared an episode in the interview. One day, his NGO volunteer camp members had a meeting to discuss who will take each chore in their camp, and some of the volunteers asked two Japanese volunteers to do the dishes four times a day. The Japanese volunteers felt this request was unreasonable, but could not say “No” clearly, and did the dishes four times a day without any complaints during the whole camping period. This episode implies that the ability to clearly express preferences/opinions in English is necessary for staffers to secure a comfortable working environment during their NGO activities.

### *Code-switching skill*

Finally, the authors found in this study that NGO staffers are required to have good code-switching skills between English and their native tongue. Some volunteer leaders insisted in their interviews that this skill was necessary to develop good relations with other staffers. For example, one volunteer

leader commented that he saw two French volunteers having frequent conversations in their native tongue even when there were many volunteers from other countries. He denoted in the following comment that this behavior would create a barrier between these French volunteers and the others.

The problem is because they (the French volunteers) speak the same language. So the contact is easier or can be because they don’t want to speak with others. (Volunteer leader in Germany, 2005, August 25)

However, another volunteer leader commented that she felt odd when she observed two Japanese volunteers with rudimentary English abilities trying to communicate in English even when no volunteers from other countries were nearby.

They never talked each other in Japanese. They always talked in English each other and it was... and I told them you don’t have to do it (speaking English). (Volunteer leader in Germany, 2005, August 25)

Both of these comments signify that NGO staffers are required to code-switch between English and their native tongues depending on their surrounding environment and interlocutors.

### **Educational implication**

The authors found that English communicative competence was indispensable for almost all NGO staffers, and that NGO staffers needed to use English in combination with other abilities, skills, knowledge, or attitude in different context



of their work. These results imply that teaching English holistically is significant to prospective NGO staffers. The authors suggest a need for improving prospective NGO staffers' English communicative competence consisted of grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence. They discovered various English-related factors that prospective NGO staffers should learn in their English classes. These English-related factors could be fit into the three sub-categories, which are communicative competence, while one of them; willingness of trying to communicate in English fits none.

Grammatical competence:

- Pronunciation of different English variations
  - NGO staffers need to be familiar with British/American English and also other English varieties used in Asia, Africa, Europe, and other parts of the world.
- Vocabulary/expressions/sentence forms used in specific contexts/situations for different purposes
  - NGO staffers need to be familiar with various types of English vocabulary/expressions/sentence forms used for negotiations, presentations, reading or writing proposals/reports/minutes, discussions, courtesy visits, telephone calls, e-mail, and other specific purposes.

Sociolinguistic competence:

- Phatic function of languages - Code-switching skill
  - NGO staffers need to recognize the significance of code-switching between English and their native

tongues depending on who they are talking to and who is around them in order to develop and maintain good relations with the other staffers.

- Recognition of the significance of performing well in discussions in NGO community
  - NGO staffers need to recognize the significance to contribute to various discussions in serving NGO activities, to be evaluated highly from the other staffers, and also to secure comfortable working environment during their NGO activity.

Strategic competence:

- Communication strategies to perform well in discussions
  - NGO staffers need to learn some communication strategies, including back-channeling, complimenting, hedging, and others, to take the floor and state their opinions/ideas/preferences clearly in discussions.

One attitudinal factor related to English communication

- Willingness to communicate in English
  - NGO staffers, even if they are non-native English speakers, need to communicate their messages positively in English conversations/discussions and not be afraid of making grammatical mistakes. A passive attitude is no virtue in English discussions /conversations.

The authors have some suggestions about how to teach these English related requirements to prospective NGO staffers. Teachers can;

1. Adopt a textbook which puts importance on the concept of “World Englishes” in their classes to increase awareness of different English varieties spoken/used in each part of the world.
2. Introduce English words/expressions/sentence forms used for specific purposes in different contexts/situations through task-based class activities such as “writing a proposal in English for an NGO activity” and “doing a presentation in English about the developed proposal”.
3. Use the episodes collected in this research for case studies to teach the significance of “performing well in discussions” and “code-switching their languages appropriately” in order to be evaluated highly and to work comfortably in NGO community.
4. Develop class activities to teach various communication strategies on meta-level as the means of performing well in discussions.
5. Offer many opportunities to use English both inside and outside the classroom to get confidence in communicating in English.

## Conclusion

The authors were able to clarify various types of abilities, skills, knowledge, attitude, and other factors necessary for working internationally in NGOs. In this paper, they mainly introduced English and some related factors, proposing some English educational needs. They believe that these results and implications would help Japanese higher educational institutions develop effective educational/training programs to nurture more competent NGO staffers in this society.

**Hiromasa (Hiro) Tanaka** is a professor at Meisei University, Tokyo. His research interests include English and intercultural communication curriculum development in business corporations. In his recent article, “Emerging English-speaking business discourse in Japan” (in *Asian business discourse(s) part II: Special issue of Journal of Asian Pacific Communication 16:1*), he took a critical discourse analysis approach to investigate business interaction in a Japanese subsidiary of an American multinational corporation.

**Yoshifumi Fukada** is an associate professor at Meisei University, Tokyo. He received his doctoral degree from University of San Francisco. His specialty is English pedagogy and sociolinguistics, and his current research interests include TL learning through social interactions outside of classrooms, early English education at home, and curriculum development for English education programs in Japan.

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