



Gender-based differences in culture in the Indian IT workplace



Amy B. Woszczyński*, Pamila Dembla, Humayun Zafar

Kennesaw State University, Michael J. Coles College of Business, Department of Information Systems, Kennesaw, GA 30144, United States

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ABSTRACT

Global outsourcing increases the complexity of managing IT projects. Gender adds another level of difficulty when managing IT projects. Understanding country and gender-level differences may improve chances for success. This paper provides opportunities to better understand underlying country and gender differences of Indian IT workers. We used Hofstede's value surveys module to analyze gender differences and cultural preferences of 107 Indian IT workers. After correcting for problems with outliers, none of the mean differences between men and women were significant at the 95% level; at the 90% level, we found differences in uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation only. Our results suggest that women and men working in the IT industry may have more similarities in terms of national culture than differences by gender. To overcome possible differences in uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation, IT outsourcers to India should ensure adequate professional development opportunities, mentoring programs, and clearly explained career path opportunities. Further, a focus on policies and management strategies that capitalize on the national culture of India, including group work to take advantage of collectivist tendencies, and clearly defined hierarchical systems to take advantage of masculine orientation and high power distances, may allow foreign companies to attract and retain men and women, where in many cases, national culture trumps gender differences. Future research should collect more data from women and investigate the effect of regional differences on cultural perceptions.

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1. Introduction

In spite of the unstable global outlook, the Indian IT outsourcing industry, which includes Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) and IT services, grew from 1.2% of national GDP in 1998 to 7.5% in 2012; for the IT services industry, India increased its world market share from 51% in 2009 to 58% in 2011 (NASSCOM, 2013). IT outsourcers recognize India's continued competitiveness and the effectiveness of India-based teams. In addition, the 12 h time gap between India and most of the western countries has enabled the Indian software and services industry to create a global 24/7 service delivery model while developing relationships and working with 75% of the Fortune 500 companies (Natarajan, 2013). With Indian software companies comprising over 70% of the top Capability Maturity Model Level 5 organizations (Ganguly, 2007), quality is evident, supporting IT outsourcing investment and increasing employment opportunities in the field for Indian workers.

With the growth of global IT outsourcing projects, India has begun to develop a thriving and information-driven middle class.

As a result of their access to information from around the world, this new middle class has been exposed to a global culture (Adhikari, 2013). Women, who have encountered limited employment opportunities in the past, now see the possibility of a career in the IT industry. These opportunities have allowed Indian women to become socially mobile and in charge of making their own decisions at work and at home, thus improving their bargaining power in the household (Kelkar & Nathan, 2002). In spite of these positive recent changes, women continue to struggle with societal expectations that require them to take primary responsibility for the home and child rearing, continuing to make it difficult for Indian women to meaningfully participate in the IT field (Patel & Parmentier, 2005). Although the IT field presents opportunities for Indian women, previous research has indicated that Indian women must work harder to prove themselves, deal with men who do not respect women bosses, and find a way to be included in informal networks (Kroeker, 2011).

In 2013, the Global Gender Gap ranked India 101 out of 136 countries, with sub-rankings of 124 for economic participation and opportunity, 120 for educational attainment, and 135 for health and survival (World Economic Forum, 2013). Only 5% of senior-level employees in India are women, and women earn 62% of the wages of men (Inderfurth & Khambadda, 2012). Further, India is ranked the fourth most dangerous country for women, behind countries such as Afghanistan and Congo (Udas, 2013). Clearly, India has

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: awoszczy@kennesaw.edu, awoszczy@gmail.com (A.B. Woszczyński), pdembla@kennesaw.edu (P. Dembla), hazafar@kennesaw.edu (H. Zafar).

some work to do to level the playing field for women in general and especially for women who choose to pursue careers. Managers outsourcing projects in India must be able to understand and overcome these challenges in order to recruit and retain a diverse and talented workforce.

The increased opportunities for women in the IT field in India have enormous effects on the labor pool of the country. Suddenly, this new generation of Indian women has become an important source of skilled labor for IT outsourcing. However, because of their recent entry into the workforce, outsourcing are often unaware of how differences between Indian men and women may affect the success of globally diverse IT teams, or if indeed, Indian men and women have different cultural perspectives. Indian women IT workers, in particular, have been under-studied in the literature, particularly using a cultural comparison tool. By understanding the motivations of Indian men and women in IT and their viewpoints and ability to work in diverse teams, we provide recommendations which help shape the development of appropriate management strategies for global IT outsourcing companies. Rather than rely on anecdotal evidence, like much of the previous research that studied Indian women in IT, we rely on hard, empirical data to draw interpretations and make recommendations.

In addition to understanding individual-level perceptions by gender, IT outsourcing also benefit by understanding the Indian culture at the country-level, a view advocated by Rao (2004). Indians in general possess qualities associated with a collectivist country, including deference to authority, clearly defined expectations of the traditional roles of men and women, and a focus on the family unit. While studies have evaluated overall average scores for culture in India, few studies have divided workers into groups by gender, although Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov, and Vinken (2008b) notes that using culture studies to analyze differences between men and women may be appropriate. In effect, men and women live in vastly different worlds, especially in India, and their cultural perceptions may vary. Indian IT workers, in particular, have been understudied, and thus, managers must rely on anecdotal reports or case studies to develop strategies to improve chances of success. By understanding the differing views of Indian men and women IT workers at the individual level, and at the country level, through an examination of cultural views, Western managers may improve chances of successfully managing IT outsourcing projects in India.

Recent studies have noted the need for more studies on culture's influence on globally distributed, culturally diverse development teams (Leidner & Kayworth, 2006). Culture often exerts a delicate, yet dominant influence on people, and organizations and technology are very closely intertwined. National culture has been shown to be an important influence on leadership and decision-making in global systems development projects (Heales, Cockcroft, & Radulescu, 2004). Moreover, culture theory has often been used to explain behaviors and outcomes in global projects. At the national level, researchers have previously studied western cultures and compared them to non-western cultures (Leidner & Kayworth, 2006). Others authors, such as Gurung and Prater (2006) note the importance of understanding culture at the national, organizational, and individual levels, introducing a construct which they refer to as psychic distance. Further, developed and developing countries differ in infrastructure access and availability, and companies should not assume that similar policies in developing countries will achieve desired results when implementing technology initiatives (Chen, Chen, Huang, & Ching, 2006). However, while previous studies completed country-level comparison studies (e.g., US vs. India), often using case study or anecdotal reports, we present an in-depth analysis of Indian women and men in IT, which should allow managers to overcome challenges when trying to recruit and retain Indian IT workers.

While some view India as a homogeneous country, the country is rich with diverse religions, hundreds of languages, traditional caste systems, and large differences in economic wealth (Sahoo, 2006; Saran, Guo, & Kulviwat, 2007). Due to the diversity of culture, initiatives that work in one part of the country may not work in other parts (Saran et al., 2007). It is clear that outsourcing projects to India presents challenges for IT outsourcing. Managers who understand and respond to cultural and gender differences in India may increase the chances of success. This research project seeks to explore culture at the country level, and by gender, in an effort to better understand the Indian IT worker, and improve the chances of successful implementation of global IT outsourcing projects. Our study is the first to use culture to empirically analyze differences between men and women working in IT in India. We begin with a literature review and then develop predictions based on cultural underpinnings and the traditional role of Indian women in the workforce, based largely on previous reports using anecdotal evidence. We move to data collection and analysis, and conclude with an analysis of the results and implications and conclusions.

2. Literature review

2.1. Culture

Over the years, many researchers have attempted to define culture. Sachman (1992) defines culture as a coherent set of beliefs and ideologies, along with a shared set of core values and collective will. Others suggest that culture includes more explicit, observable artefacts such as norms and practices (Hofstede, 1998), symbols (Burchell, Club, Hopwood, Hughes, & Nahapiet, 1980), and language, ideology, rituals and ceremony (Pettigrew, 1990). Many studies use Hofstede's survey to analyze cultural perceptions. At the core level, Hofstede defines culture as "collective programming of the mind" (Hofstede, 1993, p. 89) that distinguishes not only societies (nations), but also organizations, industries, and professions (Martisons, Davison, & Martisons, 2009). Cross-cultural studies, including those using Hofstede's instrument, have been criticized for not providing clear guidelines (Hofstede, 1998). However, Hofstede's research on culture and the resulting survey, have had a major impact on academics and practitioners alike. These studies have been used to explain national cultures in many organizations around the world (Martisons et al. 2009), and have helped to predict global IT product adoption (Bagchi, Hart, & Peterson 2004). In our study, we use an adaptation of Hofstede's culture, the Value Surveys Module (Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov, & Vinken, 2008a), as described in the next section.

2.2. Hofstede's value surveys module (VSM)

One way to measure national cultural beliefs is Hofstede et al.'s (2008a) Values Survey Module (VSM), a research tool which has been used – through several iterations – for more than 30 years. VSM's five constructs include Power Distance (PDI), Individualism (IDV), Masculinity (MAS), Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), and Long-term Orientation (LTO) (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Recently, Indulgence was added as a sixth construct (Hofstede et al., 2010), although minimal data has been collected to date on this construct. Hofstede's VSM measures national culture perceptions at the country-level.

2.3. Power distance (PDI)

Countries with high PDI scores follow orders without question and defer to authority (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Hofstede et al., 2010). Indian culture places a high value on order, following rules within a team, and respect. High scores are further influenced by

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