When present meets past: Onshore immigrants managing offshored software development and engineering projects*

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ABSTRACT

The sourcing of projects from high-cost (onshore) to lower-cost (offshore) countries requires overcoming challenges broadly classified as coordination issues and status differences. Increasingly, onshore firms are turning to immigrants from offshore destinations, assuming they will enable effective collaboration by leveraging their bicultural backgrounds. We investigate the role of onshore immigrants in addressing collaboration challenges on such projects. Using data from interviews with onshore and offshore IT professionals, we illustrate that the practice of assigning onshore immigrant managers to boundary spanning roles can be either beneficial or seriously problematic. While, by and large, immigrant managers are able to address coordination challenges by translating across cultures, some of them significantly exacerbate status differences often already present on offshore projects. These immigrants no longer identify with the offshore group, sometimes even refusing to speak their mother tongue.

Keywords: boundary spanning, biculturals, social identity theory, offshoring, immigrants, immigrant managers, software development, cross-cultural collaboration, qualitative research
INTRODUCTION

There is a growing trend in the developed countries to offshore increasingly complex parts of the software development and innovation processes to low cost locations such as India, China, and Russia (Kenney, Massini, & Murtha, 2009, Lewin, Massini, & Peeters, 2009). In addition to the labor cost arbitrage associated with offshoring high-end activities, firms are also enjoying the strategic benefits of having access to talent around the globe (ibid). Not only technology firms like Google, IBM, and Cisco, but also myriad enterprises across a variety of industries are striving to execute projects that tap into offshore professionals’ expertise (Di Gregorio, Musteen, & Thomas, 2009). As firms move high-end, knowledge work offshore, they begin to realize that success requires learning how to collaborate effectively across cultural and national boundaries.

Collaboration effectiveness has been defined as a process of achieving a synergistic combination of diverse expertise, while balancing each party’s interests (Hardy, Lawrence, & Grant, 2005). Ideally it is a cooperative practice that focuses on mutual respect, reciprocity, and free exchange of points of view in an effort to produce novelty (Psaltis, 2007). The ideal, however, is very hard to achieve when significant social and physical boundaries are present as in the case of offshoring. Challenges associated with collaboration effectiveness have hampered firms’ abilities to take advantage of the “follow-the-sun” development model (Carmel & Agarwal, 2002), to tap into innovation potential of offshore talent (Levina & Vaast, 2008), and even to realize cost savings generally associated with labor arbitrage (Dibbern, Winkler, & Heinzl, 2008, Rai, Maruping, & Venkatesh, 2009). These challenges can be broadly categorized into two sets: coordination challenges and status differences.

Numerous coordination challenges undermine the sharing of expertise on offshored software development projects. Because offshoring relies on work distributed across time and space, it requires significant coordination in order to compensate for time zone differences, limited communication channels, a lack of common ground, and the inability to observe each other’s work practices (Cramton, 2001, Cramton & Hinds, 2007, Kumar, van Fenema, & von Glinow, 2009). Additional coordination issues arise because of differences in language, experiences, and practices of those socialized into different cultural, social,
political, and economic systems (Cramton & Hinds, 2007, Krishna, Sahay, & Walsham, 2004, Levina & Vaast, 2008). For example, business practices such as giving and receiving feedback vary widely across cultures (Morrison, Chen, & Salgado, 2004). Sharing expertise may also be difficult as the same information may be interpreted differently in different contexts (Krauss & Fussel, 1991), artifacts may hold different meanings in different cultures (Leonardi & Bailey, 2008), or people may be unwilling to listen to somebody from a different group (Kane, in press, Kane, Argote, & Levine, 2005).

While coordination issues were noted first, subsequent literature suggests that issues pertaining to status differences between onshore and offshore participants are as crucial in enabling participants to achieve the synergistic integration of expertise needed to produce innovative outcomes (Levina & Vaast, 2008). Perhaps unlike some other international collaboration efforts, in case of “offshoring” control over key economic and intellectual resources typically lies with onshore participants because the logic behind offshoring is to tap into a cheap labor pool in order to produce goods and service for onshore consumption. Not only economically, but even intellectually, onshore participants tend to dominate such projects due to their superior business, marketing, and, at times, technical know-how. Status differences exhibit themselves when privileged onshore participants are unwilling to share such resources, impeding offshore professionals’ ability to contribute their full potential to projects (Metiu, 2006). Research finds that mitigating status differences on offshore projects may set the stage for effective collaboration despite time and space dispersion, language issues, and knowledge asymmetries (Levina & Vaast, 2008).

Establishing effective collaboration is a difficult process in any work environment, especially one that involves multiple groups, cultures, and perspectives. Structural mechanisms such as appropriate contractual terms and task design are key elements in easing coordination and aligning incentives (Kumar, van Fenema, & von Glinow, 2009). At the same time, it is often the social dynamics on projects that determines the extent to which the parties overcome their specific collaboration challenges and take advantage of synergies (Carlile, 2001, Hardy, Lawrence, & Grant, 2005, Levina & Vaast, 2005). While no one individual can accomplish this alone, the process often relies on specific individuals who take on a role of boundary spanner and help negotiate and sustain a synergistic relationship across groups. In international settings, this
role is often assigned to an expatriate manager, who travels abroad on a temporary assignment in order to facilitate knowledge sharing (e.g., Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985, Tung, 1998). In other situations, repatriates go back to their country of origin to bring the knowledge of foreign lands back home (Filatotchev, Liu, Buck, & Wright, 2009, Furuya, Stevens, Bird, Oddou, & Mendenhall, 2009, Oddou, Osland, & Blakeney, 2009). Another practice for addressing differences in international projects, especially in the context of offshoring professional services, has been the designation of onshore immigrants to serve as managers and cross-cultural liaisons (Carmel & Tjia, 2005, Krishna, Sahay, & Walsham, 2004).

_Onshore immigrant managers_ are those employees of onshore companies (e.g., Google) who are assigned to manage work sourced back to their country of origin (e.g., Russia/Eastern Europe) without relocation (i.e., staying in the onshore country such as USA). Because of the significant migration of well-educated workers from developing to developed countries, a number of such workers have become entrepreneurs and managers in the high-tech industry (Saxenian, 1994, Wadhwa, Saxenian, Rissing, & Gereffi, 2007). Drawing on of their social ties back home, onshore immigrants often pioneered the practice of offshoring to their home countries, especially in the early days (Bardhan & Kroll, 2006, Zaheer, Lamin, & Subramani, 2009). Some number of them have temporarily relocated or even fully returned back to the country of origin (Filatotchev, Liu, Buck, & Wright, 2009), but others stayed in US. As of 2009, according to our interviews with senior managers, about 50% of projects sourced to Russia/Eastern Europe were managed by a Russian immigrant working for a Western firm in the US. The number of such managers is also high among Indian- and Chinese-Americans who belong to one of the largest immigrant groups in the United States and are heavily represented in professional IT and engineering workforce, often holding managerial roles (Wadhwa, Saxenian, Rissing, & Gereffi, 2007).

Although the effectiveness of expatriates and their cultural assimilation have been studied extensively, there has been little research on the role of onshore immigrant managers in enabling collaboration on projects sourced to their country of origin. The practice is generally assumed to be effective among practitioners (Carmel & Tjia, 2005). In this paper, we undertake a qualitative field study exploring the role of onshore immigrant managers in enabling effective collaboration on projects offshored to their country of
origin. We first review the literatures on boundary spanning and bicultural individuals. We then present our methods and inductive findings from the field. We focus the discussion on the identification of bicultural individuals with their country of origin as our inductive theorizing suggests that this concept provides important insights into the phenomenon. We conclude with how our research contributes to the literature on international management, bicultural individuals, and boundary spanning.

**BACKGROUND THEORY**

**Onshore Managers as Boundary Spanners on Offshored Projects**

Collaboration and knowledge management literatures emphasize the importance of individuals who perform boundary spanners roles - linking and sharing resources across diverse groups (e.g., Allen, 1971, Hargadon & Sutton, 1997, Levina & Vaast, 2005, Tushman, 1977). A boundary spanner is understood to be a vital individual who facilitates the sharing of expertise by linking two or more groups of people separated by location, hierarchy, or function (Cross & Parker, 2004). Research on collaboration on offshored software development projects highlights the crucial role of boundary spanners, particularly onshore managers, as these individuals may be able to alleviate both coordination issues and status differences (Johri, 2008, Levina & Vaast, 2008). Supportive of this proposition, extensive research on globally distributed teams indicates that leaders can mitigate challenges associated with global work (Weisband, 2007), for example, by frequently communicating with and on behalf of team members (Cummings, 2007) and by using a constructive interaction style (Balthazard, Waldman, & Atwater, 2007).

Boundary spanning literature, however, has acknowledged that there is a considerable difference between nominating somebody to perform a boundary-spanning role and actually performing this role by becoming a boundary spanner-in-practice (Levina & Vaast, 2005, Wiesenfeld & Hewlin, 2003). Boundary spanners-in-practice must actually engage in boundary spanning, that is, start relating practices of one group of people to practices of another group and negotiate the meaning and terms of the relationship (Levina & Vaast, 2005). Levina and Vaast (2005) argue that becoming a boundary spanner-in-practice requires belonging, at least peripherally, to each group involved in collaboration, which is intricately tied to an individual’s engagement in group’s practices and identification with the groups. Related research on
knowledge transfer suggests that social identification with a common group is critical when individuals are engaged in sharing expertise across groups (Kane, Argote, & Levine, 2005, Kane, in press #2221). This works builds upon hundreds of studies documenting ingroup favoritism biases--people from my group are worthy of more respect, trust, and opportunities than people from other groups (Dasgupta, 2004). In the context of sharing knowledge about production routines, it was found that study participants who strongly identified with a common group considered each other’s practices thoroughly enough to uncover the productive ones and adopted superior practices, even in cases when the merits of a particular practice were hidden (Kane, in press). This was not the case with participants who did not identify with a common group (ibid). In other words, people’s psychological sense of belonging (or not) to a group can enhance (or inhibit) collaboration depending on whether group boundaries encompass or separate the collaborators. Moreover, when significant boundaries are involved, it is hard to find individuals both willing and able to live in between two worlds, often not fully belonging to either (Dubinsky, Michaels, Kotabe, Lim, & Moon, 1992).

In the context of offshoring, onshore managers are particularly well positioned to play boundary-spanning roles and, in turn, facilitate effective multi-party collaboration (Johri, 2008, Levina & Vaast, 2008). Onshore managers are likely to have the ability to build shared practices and negotiate interests because of their relevant business, technical, and design knowledge (ibid). On one hand, they have sufficient expertise in relevant tasks to enable knowledge sharing and help structure coordination processes. On the other hand, they are also empowered to share valuable onshore resources (e.g., authorize travel, provide access to business users, create technological infrastructure, provide business training for technical professionals offshore) (Levina & Vaast, 2008). Moreover, their nomination to manage offshore teams gives them symbolic legitimacy to influence how team members perceive each other and, hence, an opportunity to renegotiate status differences in productive ways (ibid). For example, a manager could point out that some of the offshore members’ characteristics (e.g., technical judgment untainted by the history of less than optimal decisions made’ in client organizations) are not only highly relevant, but also valuable for important team tasks (e.g., an innovative way of solving a business problem).
Although onshore managers appear well positioned to span the many boundaries arising from offshoring, research indicates that in practice some fail to fulfill the expectation of their role (Levina & Vaast, 2008, Nicholson & Sahay, 2004). While some onshore managers are willing and able to share resources and renegotiate status differences, others may be lacking expertise or legitimacy in one or both groups (e.g., they may be new to the onshore firms) (Nicholson & Sahay, 2004). Some may choose to reinforce rather than renegotiate established status hierarchies and start blaming offshore participants for their lack of competence and initiative (Levina & Vaast, 2008).

The idea behind nominating an immigrant as an onshore manager on projects sourced to his or her country of origin is that he or she is more likely to have the skill and motivation necessary to address coordination challenges. Despite the increased use of this practice the question remains open, however, whether onshore immigrant managers indeed help enable collaboration on projects sourced back to their country of origin. To better understand the role and motivation of these managers, we now turn to the literature on immigrants and biculturals.

**Immigrants as Bicultural Liaisons**

Immigrants have the potential to make significant contributions to international business by creating linkages between their country of origin and country of residence. Immigrants to the United States, for example, have been credited with increasing bilateral trade flows to their home countries (Gould, 1994), developing business relationships with their home countries (Saxenian, 1994, Wadhwa, Saxenian, Rissing, & Gereffi, 2007), and creating cross-national intellectual capital evidenced by joint patents in the US (Kerr, 2008). Immigrants also have played a crucial role in internationalization strategies of MNCs – termed the “immigrant effect” and referring to immigrants’ influence on firms’ entry modes and international marketing strategy design and execution (Chung, 2008, Chung, 2002). In addition to having an impact on their new country, immigrants also shape industries in their old countries. Recent studies find that immigrants’ and returnees’ (those immigrants who came back to their country of origin) social ties have a strong impact on industry clustering in Indian software industry (Zaheer, Lamin, & Subramani, 2009), the development of Russian IT services industry (Bardhan & Kroll, 2006), and on export orientation and
performance of Chinese high-tech SMEs (Filatotchev, Liu, Buck, & Wright, 2009). However, studies on the immigrant effect have so far not been able to establish a significant relationship between the involvement of immigrants in MNC’s strategy and firm performance, even when controlling for firm-level variables (Chung, 2004). A study of individuals who have spent a considerable time abroad before returning to their home country – termed ex-host country nationals (EHCNs) – suggests that acculturation processes may be a crucial factor in shaping immigrants’ ability to apply knowledge gained in one culture to work situations in another culture. (Tung & Lazarova, 2006) Thus, it is important to understand this process if we want to further unpack the role of immigrants in international management.

Understanding the acculturation of immigrants is has been a lively topic in anthropology, sociology, and psychology. Research in these areas indicates that the immigration process is diverse and multifaceted. Initial model of acculturation (e.g., Gordon, 1964 , Park, 1928) proposed a unidimensional model in which individuals had to give up their old identity in order to acquire a new one (e.g., you were either American or Chinese). Later psychological work (Berry, 1990) has departed from this view in distinguishing between four possible acculturation modes: integration (identification with both cultures, assimilation (identification with the host culture), separation (identification with culture of origin), and marginalization (identification with neither culture). The preponderance of evidence from acculturation studies supports a bidimensional model that maintains that immigrants may identify with both old and new cultures, one of these cultures, or neither culture depending on the extent that the immigrant retains involvement with a culture of origin and participates in a host culture (see Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007 for a review).

The growing body of psychological research on biculturals--individuals exposed extensively to two cultures -- such as immigrants, builds on this bidimensional model of acculturation to explore whether, how, and with what effect these individuals internalize two culture. Recently, Brannen, Garcia, and Thomas, (2009) suggested that the role of biculturals in the workplace would be shaped by the nature of their identification with each culture. The question of how biculturals negotiate their identities becomes important in understanding their psychology and behavior. Do biculturals draw appropriately on their diverse backgrounds based on the context? The initial answer to this question from sociocognitive experiments with
immigrants appeared to be in the affirmative (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000). For example, a Chinese-American when primed with a Chinese dragon would make collective attributions consistent with Chinese cultural schemas, whereas another Chinese-American when primed with the American flag would make individualistic attributions consistent with American cultural schemas (ibid). In other words, biculturals have internalized more than one culture and have access to multiple cultural schemas or ways of understanding enabling them to switch their perspective in response to cultural cues.

Not all biculturals, however, access their cultural knowledge appropriately, despite having internalized two cultures. Later experiments found that those biculturals who perceive their cultural identities as compatible tend to draw on cultural schemas appropriate to contextual cues as described in Hong’s experiment; however, those biculturals who perceive their identities as being oppositional tend to have a harder time switching to the situationally appropriate cultural behavior when cued to do so (Benet-Martinez & Hariatos, 2005, Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002). Some of these biculturals not only fail to evoke the appropriate schema cued with a cultural symbol (e.g., fewer collective attributions after seeing a Chinese dragon), but rather evoke “contrastive” behaviors consistent with their other culture (e.g., more individual attributions – an American response – after seeing a Chinese dragon). Recent experimental work by Zou, Morris, and Benet-Martinez (2008) finds that such contrastive behaviors arise from disidentification or a desire to not be identified with a cultural group, whereas appropriate behaviors arise from identification with a cultural group. Taken together this research suggests that deriving a positive sense of identity from a culture improves a biculturals’ ability to effectively operate in that culture.

This claim is supported by international business research on various mobile members of the global workforce, such as expatriates, EHCNs, and repatriates. For example, an extensive study of hundreds of expatriate managers from the US working on assignments in over fifty countries around the world reveals that the majority found integration to be the most functional acculturation mode for enabling interaction with host country nationals (Tung, 1998). EHCN research also suggests that acculturation impacts how people experience the process of returning to their country of origin after having spent a
noticeable period of time abroad. For example, 90% of Eastern Europeans who returned home to work after completing foreign study supported by a prestigious scholarship reported that being effective in their work required them to integrate elements of home and abroad (Tung & Lazarova, 2006). Repatriate literature has begun to consider how identity processes might impact the transfer of knowledge from repatriates to their domestic work unit and has posited that knowledge transfer will be more likely when repatriates are seen as ingroup rather than outgroup members (Oddou, Osland, & Blakeney, 2009). A conceptual examination of identity in the multinational context highlights not only the potential benefits of deriving a sense of identity from domestic and host country entities, but also the complexity of achieving dual identification (Vora & Kostova, 2007). Scholars have also proposed that depending on the type of identification that biculturals have with relevant cultural groups they are likely to bring different skills to bear to international management (Brannen, Garcia, & Thomas, 2009).

Offshoring creates unique situations where bicultural individuals can profitability draw on their cultural competencies, but potentially in diverse ways. In what follows, we investigate how one such group of biculturals—onshore immigrant managers—draws on their backgrounds when they need to deal with both their old and their new culture in the same work setting. Psychological literature on biculturals sheds little light on this situation because in this situation biculturals are asked to deal with both cultures at the same time; whereas, most experiments on biculturals tend to prime research subject with one cultural cue or the other but not both. At the same time, the literature on expatriates, repatriates, and EHCN does not deal with situations where biculturals who have not considered using their “old country” backgrounds in the workplace suddenly are put in a situation where, without going back to their countries of origin, their old country identity becomes salient in the workplace.

METHODS

The purpose of this research was to explore the practice of assigning immigrants to manage offshore projects—a phenomenon that is poorly understood and for which little prior theory exists. In order to understand how collaboration challenges exhibit themselves and what attitudes different participants had, it was important to study this phenomenon in its context. Thus, we conducted a series of open-ended
interviews that involved participants’ views (Spradley, 1979) from both offshore and onshore locations. We focused specifically on the consequences of assigning an offshore immigrant (e.g., an Indian-American) to play the role of an onshore manager on the client side (e.g., working for a client organization in US) in a software development and engineering design project sourced to the immigrant’s country of origin (e.g., India). Our study design excluded expatriate assignments to offshore countries and offshore workers on temporary onshore assignments, known as “bridgeheads” (Krishna, Sahay, & Walsham, 2004). We believe that behaviors and attitudes of these two groups of people are likely to differ significantly from those of onshore immigrant managers. In case of immigrant expatriates who chose to return to their original countries (also referred to as ex-host country nationals in the literature) we would expect that that the manager had to integrate actively with the “old culture” (Tung & Lazarova, 2006), and, in case of bridgeheads onshore, they are typically not immigrants but are rather on temporary (even if long-term) assignments for their MNCs. Our preliminary interviews with some representatives of each of these groups (four interviews) confirmed our suspicions that they are quite different from onshore immigrants that are the focus of our study. In what follows, we will refer to the client-side onshore immigrant managers as “immigrant managers.”

Our method followed principles of the grounded theory development, intertwining data collection and analysis and strategically selecting interviewees to confirm or disconfirm emergent themes and relationships (Eisenhardt, 1989, Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data collection proceeded in stages. In 2004, as part of a larger study of collaboration practices in offshored software development and engineering projects sourced to Eastern Europe (Ukraine and Armenia), we discovered in interviews with offshore professionals that these projects often involved onshore immigrant managers speaking Russian to offshore developers (a common language in the former Soviet Union). We also heard clearly that these managers eased some collaboration challenges but not others. Between 2005-2007 we collected additional data from offshore professionals working for a variety of firms in three key destinations for offshoring software development and engineering work -- India, Russia, and Eastern Europe (China was just starting to gain momentum in offshoring professional services at that time and was not part of the study). We also got access to a large Western
company that was sourcing its high-end projects to each of these locations and had involved a number of immigrants in onshore management roles. At the end of 2007, we had 21 interviews with offshore IT professionals who had experiences in dealing with immigrant managers (from diverse organizations) and six interviews with immigrant managers (all from the large Western company).

Upon analyzing these data, we had uncovered important themes around status and the cultural identification of immigrant managers that needed to be explored further. We thus reviewed extent literature on social identity and status and have developed additional interview questions. Subsequently, in 2008-2009 we conducted interviews with nine additional immigrant managers from diverse client organizations and two offshore Russian IT professionals who had experience with immigrant managers. Table 1 summarizes the set of 38 interviews we have conducted.

--- Insert Table 1 about here ---

*Offshore* (Ukraine, Armenia, Russia, and India) interviews involved delivery managers, project managers, and entrepreneurs who had experience working with immigrant managers. *Onshore* (US) interviews involved client-side onshore managers (in project management, program\(^1\) management, Vice President, and President positions) working with offshore providers. Most of 38 interviews were conducted by us face-to-face with four interviews conducted on the phone and two conducted by a research assistant. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Russian-speaking participants were interviewed in Russian, except when they preferred to speak English. We did not try to match interviews onshore with interviews offshore. If that were to happen, participants would need to reveal the identity of their onshore manager or offshore provider. We feared that the loss of anonymity of the people being judged would bias responses. Finally, it came out in early interviews that the Jewish background of onshore immigrant managers from Russia and Eastern Europe could have played a role in their identification processes. Indeed, all but two of the ten Russian and Eastern European immigrants were Jewish (a minority group). To explore if anti-Semitism played a role in how onshore immigrant managers were perceived by their offshore teams, our offshore respondents were chosen so as to include Jewish and non-Jewish respondents.

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\(^1\) Program managers are mid-level managers overseeing several projects; project managers report to them.
Reflecting the principles of grounded theory, our interview questions tended to evolve during the course of our research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In the data collected in 2004-2005 (the first two stages), offshore interviewees were asked to discuss the challenges they faced in achieving effective collaboration with onshore clients, provide examples of projects in which these challenges exhibited themselves as well as give examples of projects on which both organizations were able to address collaboration challenges effectively. After such discussions, participants were asked what role immigrant managers played, if any, in collaborating on such projects. In the third stage of data collection (2008-2009), we started interviews with an open-ended question that asked offshore participants to share their feelings about collaborating with immigrant managers (Spradley, 1979). We then probed further for additional clarification and examples. When interviewing immigrant managers, we solicited information about their personal backgrounds, and histories of immigration as well as the extent to which they identified with each of their dual cultures and their ability to advance in their host society. We also asked how they felt about offshoring as a trend and whether they felt their job was threatened by offshoring, the specific collaboration challenges they faced, the means they used to address these challenges, and their perception of offshore providers’ effectiveness. Finally, we asked for their views on the possible advantages they had as immigrants when managing these projects.

We followed the guidelines of grounded theory to inductively develop an answer to the question of what role immigrant managers played in facilitating collaboration on projects sourced to their country of origin (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Table 2 illustrates how the method was used. There are multiple valid ways of using the grounded theory method with respect to how much extant theory is used in the development of new theory (Locke, 2001). In early stages of data collection and analysis, we were not heavily influenced by extant theories. However, as issues pertaining to status and identification emerged prominently during our inductive data analysis, we focused more on theories of status, identification, and immigration because we felt they provided useful lenses for analyzing our data. There are various legitimate ways of writing up qualitative research (Pratt, 2008), including our model of drawing on extant literature in developing our arguments, even though many of the ideas we put up-front have been developed inductively.
FINDINGS

In the early stages of data collection, it became clear that the practice of nominating immigrant managers to address collaboration challenges did not always lead to intended outcomes. While some managers facilitated collaboration effectiveness, others did so partially and, on occasion, actually impeded it. In the words of one offshore professional: “The distribution of good collaborators among immigrant managers is very polarized: They are either very good or they are unpleasant. It is never neutral.”

Assembling a Skilled Team

Onshore immigrants in senior management positions took an active role in shaping their offshore teams. They drew on their knowledge of the educational system in their country of origin to pick those offshore professionals with especially relevant training. They often found talent by tapping into their social network ties such as childhood friends or family connections to link to professional networks in their country. Often these managers had significant personal influence if people they knew well were involved in offshore company’s ownership. They used these connections to influence job assignments, compensation, and training of people on their teams:

“One of my friends was the Chief Operating Officer of a tier two/ tier one company in India... That started off the relationship. We met at a couple of events and I started talking with them and as a result of that they were willing to do things that were really outside of the box.” [Indian Onshore Manager]

Consistent with findings from the economics literature on immigrants, having local knowledge and strong social networks offshore helped in picking high quality professionals to work on projects (Saxenian, 1994). This, in turn, helped in addressing coordination and collaboration issues that arise in global work (Cramton & Hinds, 2007).

Addressing Coordination Issues

Many comments about the role of immigrant managers in enabling collaboration centered on the usefulness of language and cultural competence these managers had in the relevant offshore culture; however, some comments also highlighted that immigrants sometimes did not have or refused to use these bicultural competencies.
Language competence. It was clear that in those instances where offshoring involved countries belonging to the Former Soviet Union (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Armenia), an immigrant manager’s ability to speak Russian – an official common language of the Former Soviet Union – was a big advantage. The English language skills of software development professionals in Eastern Europe are still rather weak; however, project managers usually have a good command of the language (Bardhan & Kroll, 2006). In our data, all but one of the immigrant managers spoke Russian to offshore teams. Offshore professionals and immigrant managers pointed to the common language as a key advantage in managing offshore projects. Although language was less of an issue for Indians, speaking Hindi was useful for building interpersonal ties: “You start talking about home, chitchatting, switching between English and Hindi. They [offshore people] are much more at ease.” Another Indian immigrant manager noted “when I speak to an Indian my accent changes instantaneously … It becomes an Indian accent [in English].”

Although language competence generally enabled immigrant managers to translate across cultures, there were a few exceptions. One offshore interviewee pointed out that several onshore immigrants he worked with came to the US so many years ago that their command of the Russian language was not sufficient, especially when it came to the language surrounding technology and business. He pointed out:

Psychologically it [collaboration quality] is better with the person who does not speak Russian. He does not think he knows Russian. He [the Russian speaker] think he should understand everything, but he understands a half and often incorrectly.

Another Russian interviewee noted that many immigrants inserted English words into their speech and sometimes “you could see that they were translating from English in their heads.” While most Russian-speaking immigrants spoke Russian with offshore developers, one manager we interviewed had perfect command of Russian, but chose to speak English with the offshore participants due to concerns about becoming “too familiar.”

Cultural competence. During the early stages of data collection (specifically, 2004 in Ukraine and Armenia) it came as a surprise to us that participants offshore said they experienced hardly any cross-cultural communication issues when working with US companies. In trying to further understand these reports, we learned that in 2004 approximately 80% of the business for these firms was conducted through
immigrant managers who had knowledge of local customs and norms: “People who came from here know our mentality.” Some of the most widely quoted examples of such cultural knowledge included knowing the holidays and traditions. “I had to teach my colleagues in US and UK that we should not expect to get anything [work-wise] out of our Russian colleagues in the first two weeks of January [holiday season].”

Indian immigrants also felt they could better understand the moods of their Indian colleagues around holidays and, thus, built bonds by acknowledging their cultural practices. They mentioned working around world-cup cricket schedules and holidays: “On occasions like Diwali, Holi [Indian Festivals], they don’t have days off but I manage so that they are more committed afterwards.” Offshore counterparts echoed these sentiments: “We take 2 to 3 weeks off for marriages because our marriages go for days. They [immigrants] understand that better.”

Some immigrant managers also served as mediators of cultural business norms or, what one respondent referred to as, “membranes” of cultural knowledge. For example, an immigrant manager from Ukraine pointed out that he often had to stop his offshore counterparts from making politically incorrect remarks about women that would be unacceptable in US business culture but acceptable in countries of the Former Soviet Union: “They [offshore people] were very eloquent in their political incorrectness.” In another case, a technical specialist from offshore was flown in for a client meeting. He did not understand the value of business arguments made by clients and kept remarking on their stupidity in Russian. The immigrant manager involved asked him to refrain from using such Russian words as “idiot,” which have the same meaning in English and, in general, softened his Russian colleague’s remarks when translating.

As in the case of language competence, immigrant managers’ cultural competence was often outdated, especially with respect to business culture. Many immigrant managers, especially those from the Former Soviet Union, left decades ago at a time when their home country was still under a communist regime. Cultural norms at the time encouraged a poor work ethic as people did not feel their compensation or advancement depended on effort. However, much has changed since these countries became capitalist, especially in the context of IT outsourcing and offshoring. Our visits to these firms indicated that these organizations had office atmospheres similar to those in the West. They offered good pay and career
prospects that attracted young professionals, many of whom lived most of their lives in a capitalist post-soviet era. Yet, Russian-speaking immigrant managers often made assumptions to the contrary. Some of them worried about the offshore work ethic even on projects where they believed the quality and productivity of offshore work was exceptionally good making remarks such as, “When you visit them in Moscow, tell me what time they actually get to work and leave when I am not there and watching.” A senior Russian offshore professional with considerable experience working with Russian immigrants commented:

> Cultural differences between Russian people and Russian immigrants are huge. They are people from different worlds. I know lots of people [immigrants]. When we talk about professional jobs, I see how they formulate problems and solve them and it is different from us.

Several Russia and Eastern European immigrants demonstrated reluctance to invest in updating their cultural knowledge. They often postponed or refused to take trips to the old country unless they wanted to visit close relatives. They explained their reluctance by arguing that they had been there before and were fearful of high crime and lawlessness.

In the case of India, Indian immigrants often misjudged the level of business knowledge that their offshore counterparts had. They erroneously assumed that offshore professionals knew more about Western culture and business practices than they actually did. At the same time, given that many of them left before the rise of IT offshoring industry in India, they often assumed less maturity in software development processes that Indian firms were actually able to offer.

By and large, however, the language and cultural competence of immigrant managers helped in easing coordination challenges by translating across diverse cultures.

**Dealing with Status Differences**

Comments from offshore participants regarding the role of onshore immigrant managers in enabling collaboration on projects centered on their attitudes toward offshore collaborators, which were mixed, and their behaviors, which ranged from exercising excessive control over offshore collaborators and disregarding ideas to encouraging initiative and fostering productive debates.

*Attitudes toward offshore collaborators.* Our interviews clearly pointed to the importance of onshore immigrant manager’s attitudes toward offshore collaborators in promoting or reducing status differences.
Whereas some managers took pride in offshore collaborators and their capabilities, others disrespected the offshore collaborators and their skills, pointing out that American professionals were better than offshore professionals in some significant ways.

Offshore participants indicated that immigrant managers who helped overcome status differences and enable collaboration were those managers who took pride in their offshore collaborators and their skills. One of them said that good collaborators among Russian immigrants were those who “valued what we have to offer from Russia and understand the Russian advantage [which is having] smart people who know how to solve difficult problems.” Similarly, Indian offshore participants noted that senior level Indian managers were typically good collaborators because they understood the Indian advantage: “At a director level, if he is from India, if he knows Indian companies, probably he would appreciate some of the things that we are doing, what we are proposing.” Many offshore participants referred to good collaborators as exhibiting “professionalism” in their relationships with offshore teams and in treating them as professionals.

In our data set of onshore immigrant interviewees, about half of the managers, who were evenly distributed across geographies, held favorable attitudes towards offshoring to their country of origin. They repeatedly praised the technical talent and productivity of their offshore teams:

Their performance has been very good. I can contrast them with another team we have onsite [in the US]. It is a bigger team consisting of all internal employees. … I would say that we are getting more throughput [productivity] for less money [from the Ukrainian provider].

Russian and Eastern European immigrants who had favorable attitudes to their offshore counterparts consistently praised their technical talent, breadth of education, learning abilities, and sheer intellectual prowess. They repeatedly used words such as “star,” “erudite,” and “a bright head” to refer to their people offshore. We asked a Belorussian immigrant manager how she felt when somebody criticized Belarusian developers she replied:

Among people in my office everybody is completely delighted [with Belarusians]. They are in complete awe. Indeed, they [Belarusians] are stars! What we have are real stars. A few boys and girls came to visit here. There is a generally negative attitude to girls in IT, but what we got [from Belarusians] was above average, so much above average that everybody was in complete awe, complete awe.
Indian immigrant managers acknowledged that their cadre in India were technically junior to most people onshore; however, they praised hard work and dedication of their teams, pointing out that they could be called upon any hour of the night and would work around the clock not to let the project down. Some immigrant managers commented that the key to their success in offshoring was treating offshore developers and engineers as “adult” professionals rather than “programmers working for pennies on small insignificant tasks.” In discussing problems with delivery by offshore teams, these managers hardly found any problems. If after some probing by us they finally recalled a problem, they would typically blame themselves or other onshore managers for a poor work design decision or lack of proper explanations.

Far from all immigrant managers, however, shared these sentiments. Many immigrants we interviewed distanced themselves from offshore collaborators, especially initially, and generally expressed disdain for offshoring, arguing that the caliber of offshore people was subpar along one or more dimension. This attitude was often coupled with an excessive focus on cost savings and a view of offshore people as “cheap laborers” -- a sentient clearly heard by offshore respondents. An offshore participant from Russia pointed out that immigrant manager’s negative attitudes at times were expressed with language signaling a complete disregard for offshore collaborators.

They often talk about “bodies.” They say, “Give me 10 bodies.” I hate this language. Never talk about people as bodies. Language is a way of showing attitude. They are lacking humility. Those people who have humility are ready to work with us, to collaborate instead of being overbearing bosses.

According to study participants from India, a negative attitude was more pronounced among immigrant managers holding junior project manager positions:

They [junior immigrant managers] think, “Hey, you guys don’t know anything.” Whereas, we say, “Hey, we are CMM-5 and ISO-900 level company. We need to follow these processes.” And they say, “Okay who cares about that. I want you to do this. Please, do it this way.” …We have not faced any such problems on [the senior level].

Onshore immigrant managers often revealed their attitudes toward offshore collaborators when responding to our query about how many onshore people would be needed to replace current offshore people if the project were sourced back onshore. Many managers who exhibited a favorable disposition to working with their former countrymen and women estimated that one onshore person was equivalent to one
and one half offshore persons due to additional coordination costs involved in distributed work. Moreover, one Russian immigrant maintained that his people in Russia were so well-trained in sciences and engineering that unless an American had that kind of education (meaning a Russian immigrant living in US) people in Russia were not replaceable even by a top engineering graduate from an elite school like Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

At the same time, negatively disposed immigrant managers from Russia or India felt otherwise: they felt that the work done by their teams offshore could be done onshore with far fewer people. On one project employing 17 people in India, an Indian immigrant manager complained that nothing was delivered in the past year due to the incompetence of the offshore staff. Most of his staff in India had between three and four years of experience, yet this Indian manager felt even experienced developers were not good enough:

We have senior people with 8-10 years of experience on the project. From what I can tell, the people who are so-called “senior” in India right now are the people who got kicked out of here [United States] because the dotcom crash happened, and those kinds of people were not very valuable in the first place over here. They were low-level worker and had to go back. So, the senior people are of very low quality and there are only junior people coming out of the school who are showing promise, but otherwise there is nothing really left in India. Because all these senior people went abroad over the years, and there is nobody who is really good left. Anybody who was any good has come here long ago.

This manager felt that even if the offshore developers were brought onshore to alleviate the distance problems, the performance would not improve as Indian offshore professionals were simply incapable of delivering. This manager provided an example in which a team of 10 people in India failed to deliver a piece of software after three weeks of work; the software was eventually programmed by one onshore developer (himself) in a single afternoon. When asked to describe cultural differences between India and the US, this Indian immigrant manager replied, “Indian people never ask questions. … US people are more honest and upfront. Indian people do not have confidence and tend to hide behind a cover.” He admitted that he was never optimistic about offshoring when it required extensive collaboration.

A Russian immigrant manager did not fault the technical expertise of Russian developers, but was quick to assign blame for the lack of effective collaboration on their inadequate language skills, industry knowledge, and corporate software development practices. He was strongly opposed to offshoring his
project, suggesting that the work of 23 offshore people in Russia could be done more effectively with five
good developers in the US. Another immigrant manager working with a Russian development team located
in the same office in Russia was also interviewed. He felt the developers working for them in Russia were
very professional and could hardly be outperformed by the same number of people onshore.

There was certainly a big difference in attitudes among immigrant managers, and it was observed
across geographies. The positive attitudes were clearly appreciated by offshore people who often gave
example of “visionary immigrants” who cared about them and helped them grow. At the same time,
offshore participants’ most common answer to the question of how helpful immigrants were in enabling
 collaboration was that they really helped in translating across cultures, but were often difficult to deal with.
It should be noted that managers’ attitudes in some cases changed over time: at least three Russian-speaking
immigrants evolved from distancing to developing pride in their offshore teams over the course of several
year of joint work.

Behaviors toward offshore collaborators. The offshore participants working with immigrants
from their own country consistently expressed concern that onshore immigrants took a “do as you are told”
approach to managing their projects. These controlling behaviors limited the contribution of offshore talent,
exasperated status differences, and impeded collaborations. Comments like the following from an offshore
respondents from Russia were common in our data:

They try to impose their opinion, right or wrong, and think that they have something that people
who live here don’t have. They think they are a priori right and don’t even have to explain why. I
asked about some numbers that were given to me and I asked about where these numbers came
from and how they were calculated, and most often people who were not from Soviet Union,
would try to explain why. The immigrant says: “This is so” and “Believe me.”

This R&D engineering manager went on to explain that a more helpful way of collaborating was when a
Western manager (immigrant or not) taught Russian engineers what he/she knew about the problem and the
business context rather than tried to tell them what ought to be done and how to do it.

Our early interviews conducted in Eastern Europe revealed a reluctance to work on US projects as
compared to cases when clients were from Western Europe or even domestic. Back in 2004, the majority of
US projects sourced to these countries were managed by onshore immigrant managers. In contrast, Western
European and domestic projects were often obtained through direct marketing channels and involved a larger group of client’s managers in the relationship. Even though cross-cultural issues were not as pronounced on US projects managed by immigrants as they were in Western European projects, and the finances were certainly more attractive on US projects, several leaders of Eastern European firms said that they preferred not to work with the States. While explaining this preference, offshore participants stated it was easier to develop and establish their expertise on domestic and Western European projects where their opinions mattered and where they had more independence. One of the Armenian managers said:

In a domestic context, things are different. We can tell the client that we would take another week and make a better design and the client would tend to agree. They trust our technical judgment.

A co-founder and CTO of a Ukrainian firm lamented:

The Americans want to fully control the project. He [the immigrant manager] assigns tasks. He checks the progress. We would have preferred for us to control these tasks, schedules, and performance.

As result this company gave up on the idea of effective collaboration involving dialogue, opting instead to follow offshore manager’s direction:

If we see them [clients] making mistakes, we often explain that this is not the best thing for them, but we do understand that it is not our role to teach the client how to live. So, often, we just salute and do what they tell us to do.

In the Indian context, we also heard that immigrant managers tended to behave in ways that reinforced the unproductive status differences. An offshore respondent commented: “They know how hard we work, and they want to extract even more work from us.” Onshore Indian immigrants corroborated this view highlighting the need to micromanage their offshore counterparts by “checking all the time” so that offshore developers would “stay on the ball” and not “slack-off on deadlines.”

Russian, Ukrainian, and Armenian offshore professionals reported that in many situations onshore immigrant managers became communication bottlenecks and did not trust offshore participants to approach other valuable stakeholders in the client organization. Several Russian immigrant managers justified such behavior by saying that offshore developers did not have sufficient business knowledge and language skills to engage directly with users. For example, one highlighted that prototyping, an effective development
technique, can no longer be used now that the work is being offshored. When asked why offshore developers could not create prototypes to be shown to users (a technique used by another interviewee in the same department and practiced by a number of Russian vendors), his answer was: “They just cannot do it.”

This example illustrates that micromanagement among immigrant managers was often associated with the notion that left to their own devices offshore professionals would not be able to contribute to projects. In reply to the question of whether any new technical or functionality ideas were contributed by offshore developers, one Russian immigrant manager laughed at the question explaining that with the profound lack of business knowledge even after several months of working on the project, he did not expect any novel ideas from Russians. Indian immigrant managers often had a similar reaction arguing that their staff offshore was simply too junior. These remarks are in sharp contrast with the statement by other Russian immigrant managers who maintained that for his firm “all ideas came from Russia!”

To summarize, some onshore immigrant managers helped elevate status differences, associated with the concentration of financial, physical, intellectual, and social resources onshore, by teaching their offshore partners about the business situation and then allowing them to work out ideas and solutions on their own. Others, however, tended to exacerbate status differences by excessively controlling as many decisions as they could from a distance and by not encouraging or ignoring ideas coming from offshore.

**DISCUSSION**

The data clearly indicates that onshore immigrant managers were generally helpful in easing the coordination challenges associated with offshoring. They typically drew on their offshore background to engage in translation across language and cultural contexts. However, some managers did not retain the up-to-date language and cultural competencies necessary for this translation and even refused to use competencies that they had. At the same time, there was a clear bifurcation in immigrant managers’ behaviors and attitudes toward offshore teammates. Some immigrant managers treated offshore teammates as incompetent and/or unprofessional people worthy of neither trust nor respect. In contrast, other immigrant managers used their position of authority to facilitate collaboration by respecting and treating offshore teammates as skilled professionals, which, in turn, helped offshore participants contribute.
This type of bifurcation in attitudes and behaviors toward offshore professionals has also been observed in a study by Levina and Vaast (2008), who did not differentiate among cultural backgrounds of onshore managers. What is special about immigrant managers, however, is that as biculturals they come to offshoring projects with cultural heritage, which they can treat as an advantage or as a baggage. As research on biculturals demonstrates, their background cannot be simply ignored – it shapes their judgments and actions when they are exposed to cultural cues from their old and new cultures. Similar to the findings on EHCNs who returned to their countries of origin after a prolonged stay abroad, our data analysis also indicates that the way in which immigrant managers integrate their diverse cultural identities heavily shaped their approach to collaboration (Tung & Lazarova, 2006).

**Onshore Immigrant Managers Identification with Offshore Collaborators**

The practice of assigning onshore immigrants to boundary spanning roles assumes these managers will maintain their offshore identity and will draw on it to address collaboration challenges. This is not, however, what we observed in the data as some immigrants clearly distanced themselves from offshore groups, others clearly took pride in their offshore groups, and yet others seemed to take pride in some aspects of their association with offshore professional group but not others. Table 3 illustrates how fifteen immigrant managers we have interviewed fell along this spectrum. Drawing on social identity literature, we know that taking pride in one’s group is an important part of social identification; whereas, distancing from the group represents a clear lack of such identification (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004).

--- Insert Table 3 around here ---

To verify this idea in our data we coded for how onshore immigrants referred to their offshore counterparts and their views of their social identification that were discussed explicitly in later interviews (2008/2009). The analysis indicated that those managers who took pride in their offshore groups also tended to use inclusive language such as “my guys in St. Petersburg” or “our Belarusian youth” in referring to offshore collaborators. They tended to emphasize that offshore professionals were in some significant ways better than US professionals. A quote from a Ukrainian immigrant manager is particularly
telling given his flattering references to Ukrainian potential and his prepositional slips from “them” to “us” which confused the interview process enough to cause the interviewer to ask for clarification:

Respondent: First, Ukraine is the most responsive and easy to work team I ever dealt with. Their intellectual ability by far exceeds anybody I ever dealt with ... They are super fast. ... In all these times we had, there were 2 people that left us because we knew that we are not happy with their capabilities.

Interviewer: What do you mean when you say “we”

Respondent: When I say “we” I mean Ukraine or US.

Carmel and Eisenberg (2006) document commonly held cultural narratives about the strengths of software development among developers living in various geographic regions including Russia, India, and the US. They note, for example, that Russian developers pride themselves on supreme mathematical and scientific skills, Indian developers pride themselves on their hard work and vast human resources, and US developers take pride in being the global beacon of the software industry (Carmel & Eisenerg, 2006). Immigrant managers who took pride in their offshore counterparts often subscribed to and promoted these very beliefs. Consistent with social identity theory, their identification with the offshore professional group translated into favorable treatment of their offshore partners, according them respect (Dasgupta, 2004) and attention (Kane, in press). The Ukrainian manager who mixed up “we” and “they” gave the following response to the question of what happens in cases when he disagrees with ideas from offshore teammates:

I just say to my team; “Guys I don’t think this is going to work,” and I give my reasons. I have to give my reasons. If I don’t explain, I do not respect them. I respect them. I want to be treated with respect. Sometimes they say things to the business client directly. I trust them. I know they will not say stupid things.

These remarks are in sharp contrast with those immigrant managers who distanced themselves from offshore developers and engineers. These managers expressed their psychological separation using “us vs. them” language when referring to offshore collaborators. As seen in Table 3, immigrant managers who distanced themselves from their offshore past tended to also hold unfavorable attitudes toward offshore collaborators. These immigrant managers implicitly highlighted the superiority of American professionals over offshore professionals by emphasizing what offshore professionals were lacking (e.g., honesty, business knowledge, respect for deadlines). When a Russian immigrant manager refused to speak Russian to offshore collaborators, she explained that she did so to create a barrier between them. Such behavior is
consistent with the findings of sociocognitive experiments on biculturals showing a connection between disidentification and the use of inappropriate cultural schemas when cued with “the old” culture context (Zou, Morris, & Benet-Martínez, 2008).

Interesting cases are those immigrants who seemed to take pride in some aspects of their offshore professional group but not others. Most Russian-speaking immigrants in that category were proud of the technical prowess and creativity of programmers from the former Soviet Union, but not in their lack of professional ethics or business acumen. They tended to distance themselves from offshore Russians. In some cases they started with positive disposition towards offshoring to Russia (e.g., Russian entrepreneurs who initiated the offshoring practice); however, as they learned that offshore Russians were lacking some skills that were valuable in US business, they quickly distanced themselves and exhibited both unfavorable attitudes and disrespectful behaviors. In the words of bicultural research (Benet-Martínez & Hariatos, 2005) these immigrants had trouble integrating their two identities because they perceived their two identities to be in conflict in the workplace. Unlike those onshore immigrants who fully identified with offshore groups and decided that what offshore collaborators were lacking was teachable and less important than what they had to offer, these “conflicted” immigrants chose to maintain their higher status American professional identity over the lower status offshore identity. Not only the structural set up of offshoring (heavily privileging the onshore group), but also the decision to immigrate (leave the old culture and join the new one) likely shaped their inclination to distance from the offshore group. However, we found that for a number of immigrants their attitudes and behaviors on projects evolved over time uncovering important dynamics of this phenomenon.

Dynamically Negotiating Conflicting Cultural Identities

Qualitative interviews allowed us to observe that for a number of immigrants the process of sorting out their identities evolved over time and was shaped not only by internal psychological factors, but also by the encounters with offshore team members, the attitudes of other onshore workers, and the changes in socio-economic context. For example, many Indian immigrants started their involvement in offshore efforts with favorable dispositions. However, when they encountered weak technical skills, the lack of business
knowledge, and covering up of problems by Indian developers on their offshore teams, they started distancing themselves from their Indian developers though not necessarily from the Indian culture in general. As they distanced themselves, they started treating Indian developers as second-class citizens who needed to be micromanaged rather than empowered. Indian developers in turn stopped showing initiative or trying to learn to work independently as they were “expecting to be spoon-fed specifications.” This behavior further disappointed immigrants managers encouraging them to distance further from the offshore collaborators professionals from their country of origin.

Other personal histories of immigrants, however, exhibited a virtuous rather than vicious cycle. For example, a Ukrainian immigrant manager left Ukraine as a teenager remembering a country full of Anti-Semitism, anger, and lawlessness. When he was asked to manage a offshore project, he was skeptical, even though his own career benefited from a strong math and science education that he had received in the Soviet Union. As he encountered developers from Ukraine on his projects, he was impressed by their friendly demeanor, technical talent, and professional ethics. Even though offshore business knowledge was insufficient, often impeding delivery and slowing down progress of work, he taught his offshore collaborators, taking time to explain requirements. As they acquired more business knowledge, offshore developers started contributing valuable technical ideas further impressing their onshore manager. This immigrant was reluctant to travel to Ukraine to meet his team; however, several years after the project started he finally took his first trip to Ukraine in 20 years. He was positively impressed by the changes in the Ukrainian society and business practices (the trip took place after the interview, but the manager felt so strongly about the change that he sent us an email sharing his positive experiences).

We identified a number of factors that played a role in shaping the initial identification of immigrant managers, such as their status in offshore country before immigration (e.g., whether they were a persecuted minority group), their status in onshore country (e.g., a more secure status held by senior managers allowed immigrants to feel comfortable going back to their roots without sacrificing their well-established American identities), or the attitudes of their American co-workers to offshore professionals (e.g., one does not want to be seen “playing favorites” with a low status group). These factors, however, were hardly predictive of
how managers ended up feeling and behaving and their eventual integration of dual identities. Indeed, if anything, the process of identity integration was complex and ever changing, often failing to reach a stable state for many people. Most immigrant managers hesitated in answering our social identification questions typically qualifying their answer about identification with, “I am probably a bastard of both, son of neither” or “At the beginning I was for sure Belarusian, but now I am no longer sure.” Most immigrants, however, denied adopting a cosmopolitan identity (Haas, 2005). One Russian-speaking immigrant manager from Ukraine even shared a poem he has written in Russian on his complex identification that he called “Polygamous Patriot” (which we translate here):

In faraway exotic land I walk,
And suddenly I hear Russian talk --
The sound so soft to me and dear
As when a kitten feels the milk is near.

I am a patriot!
I love my country so,
But as a husband loves his wife,
Not child – mother though.

I Broadway love, Kreshatik, and Arbar²,
I Beatles love and I love Russian bards,
And please forgive me for my strange emotions
But no country has my full devotions.

For many, emigration means divorce,
Polygamy is my chosen recourse.

For Russia, for Ukraine, for US --
My poor soul has aches day and night.
Three motherlands I have like three wives.
They call on me and know I am theirs.

Don’t tell me “You are a cosmopolite!”
For Cosmos does not call on me at night.

The process of identification was also shaped by the changes in ever-evolving national cultures (Tung, 2008). For example, the growth of offshoring strategies has changed the nature of doing business in the West increasing the value of cross-cultural competence and the ability to develop innovative solutions

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² These refer to three prominent streets in New York, Moscow, and Kiev respectively.
through offshored relationships. The competence of offshore professionals in various aspects of Western business has also improved. This added additional dynamic aspects to the identity integration process faced by immigrant managers, whose careers can benefit increasingly more from an integrated identity.

Finally, we also observed a dynamic in the interplay between immigrants’ thoughts and actions. Those immigrants who were distancing themselves from offshore professionals were not interested in maintaining their cultural competence and practices (e.g., language skills). It is well-known in literature (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that engaging in practices of a particular group strengthens identification with that group and vice versa. Thus, as immigrant managers stopped using the language, following the news, watching movies, etc. they also distanced themselves further from their old cultures. These, in turn, made harder for their offshore partners to accept them as one of “their own” and created further distance reinforcing initial attitudes.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS
This is a first step in exploring a complex phenomenon that presents a number of limitations and many directions for future research. For one, we have not addressed the issue of power distance within onshore and offshore countries. For example, some of the behaviors we have observed may be associated with higher power distance in India and Eastern Europe than in the US. A high power distance society has been associated with authoritarian leadership styles that impede collaboration (Dickson, Den Hartog, & Mitchelson, 2003). We do not believe that high power distance associated with Eastern countries explains what we have seen in this study as clearly offshore developers did not appreciate authoritarian leaders who micromanaged and limited their control and contributions. Moreover, if one assumes leadership style is part of the offshore cultural schema and applies the findings from sociocognitive experiments on biculturals, immigrant managers with stronger offshore identification should have been those displaying more micromanagement, which is the opposite of what we find. Still more work needs to be done in diverse cultures to understand the interplay between cultural characteristics of specific culture and behaviors and attitudes of bicultural managers.
Another important research direction to consider is what contributes to an immigrant’s identification with offshore collaborators. Characteristics, such as time spent onshore, the onshore country’s language skills, strength of professional identity, and various societal characteristics (e.g., social mobility) may be important antecedents. Similarly, relative status of each country involve in collaboration is likely to play a role (e.g. in US-UK collaboration we are less likely to observe the same dynamics). However, each person’s enduring sense of social identity results from their own unique journey that unfolds over years, across myriad social and professional interactions, and in the case of immigrant, across multiple cultures.

Also, it would be useful to better understand what role offshore participants’ willingness to accept an onshore immigrant as one of their own plays in the collaboration process. The literature on boundary spanning points out that boundary spanning is not an individual action but rather a community-based system of practices and relations (Levina & Vaast, 2005). Similarly, some social identity theorists have argued that identity granting by the group members may be important to an individuals’ self identification (Bartel & Dutton, 2001). As one of the first works on the topic of onshore immigrant managers, this paper opens up possibilities for many research directions both empirically and theoretically.

IMPLICATIONS

This paper makes a significant contribution to the international management literature and studies of offshoring. To the best of our knowledge, the practice of assigning onshore immigrant managers to manage offshore projects sourced to their country of origin (without relocation) has not been researched systematically despite several claims to its effectiveness (Carmel & Tjia, 2005). We illustrate with ample examples that such practice is generally useful for addressing coordination challenges and translating across cultural contexts; however, the effectiveness of the practice in terms of enhancing collaboration depends on managers’ individual inclinations to ease or exacerbate status differences. International management literature has recently started looking at issues of how expatriates, repatriates, and ENCNs facilitate knowledge sharing across cultures; however, it has not yet attempted to distinguishing different aspects of knowledge sharing – those that pertain primarily to translation of knowledge across cultures from those pertaining to synergistic integration of expertise through collaboration. Qualitative studies like ours help fill
the gap in the literature by exploring the aspects of these phenomenon that are deeply embedded in organizational practices. Thus, we found that identity integration of bicultural managers is particularly relevant to the quality of collaboration and somewhat less relevant to the quality of translation across cultures. At the same time, future research should test our emergent theory in relation to other types of bicultural managers such as expatriates, repatriates, and EHCNs, whose personal backgrounds, motivations, and social positions are significantly different from those of onshore immigrant managers.

Another major contribution of our research is to the literature on biculturals and social identification. This work contributes to psychological research on biculturals that thus far has only looked how identity impacts judgments in situations in which one culture is cued (Benet-Martinez & Hariatos, 2005) by examining how managers respond to a workplace assignment that simultaneously cues both their past and present cultural identities. In doing so, we join a small set of organizational scholars who have begun to recognize the role of social identification in unlocking the organizational value of workers with bicultural backgrounds (Brannen, Garcia, & Thomas, 2009, Furuya, Stevens, Bird, Oddou, & Mendenhall, 2009, Tung & Lazarova, 2006). We also clearly observe that identity integration processes are ever evolving and unstable, suggesting that cross-sectional studies of biculturals may miss important dynamics in this phenomenon. Even in an experimental study, it may be useful to cue subjects with more or less socially desirable cultural cues representing each culture (e.g., a Great Wall of China vs. Protesters at Tiananmen Square) and observe the change in identification and culturally appropriate responses.

The study also makes a theoretical contribution to social identity theory and inter-group relations by further advancing our understanding of identification in context. Drawing on previously separate literatures on boundary spanning and social identity, our study suggests that identification with personally-relevant groups at the same level of inclusiveness-- that is for groups that are directly comparable with one another as in two countries, professions, or organizations (Dovidio, Gaertner, Hodson, Rick, Johnson, & Houlette, 2006)-- is not only possible, but could impact intergroup relations. Research to date has revealed that groups at the same level of inclusiveness tend to have tense intergroup relations unless they adopt a common goal
or find ways to play complementary roles (ibid). We find that immigrants tended to change the role of each group in the relationship potentially changing the nature of the relationship between groups.

Last but not least, this paper contributes in several ways to the literature on boundary spanning and collaboration effectiveness. The issues pertaining to biculturals and social identity have not been explored in this literature. While it is widely acknowledged that boundary spanning involves the renegotiation of status differences as knowing is embedded in practices (Carlile, 2004, Levina & Vaast, 2005), the role of individuals’ identities and attitudes in this process is poorly understood. This is perhaps because most of the literature comes from a practice theory perspective (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), which tends to focus on social processes as opposed to individual characteristics and outcomes. This work largely ignores the international management and social psychological literatures. In this paper, we bridge this gap by highlighting that in the context of offshoring, nominated boundary spanners with biculturals backgrounds fulfilled their role only by identifying with both groups whose boundaries they were spanning. While they had the legitimacy of their managerial positions and even the ability to engage in boundary spanning with offshore developers (Levina & Vaast, 2005), those who enabled effective collaboration tended to take pride in, and help develop, offshore competencies. We also contribute to the work on boundary spanners by highlighting that their identification processes are dynamic and ever changing.

**Conclusion**

Onshore immigrant managers may be seen as an easy solution to collaboration challenges on offshore projects. In this paper we take the position that collaboration effectiveness on offshored projects depends not only on participants’ abilities to address coordination challenges by engaging in cross-cultural translation, but also on their ability to renegotiate status differences inhibiting offshore participants’ ability to contribute their expertise and ideas. Client-side onshore managers have both structural resources and symbolic authority that can be marshaled to help reshape unproductive status beliefs. It is often expected that assigning immigrants to onshore management positions on projects sourced to their country of origin will automatically result in their having the motivation and understanding to engage in such renegotiation. What we found, however, was that while immigrant managers were, by and large, able translators across cultural
contexts, they mitigated unproductive status differences more often when they identified with offshore collaborators. These managers took pride in offshore people, often highlighting their technical prowess or hard work and dedication. To practitioners, our study suggests that they question the assumption that immigrant managers will solve inter-cultural collaboration challenges, which seems to be more myth than truth, and instead aim to assign to the role those immigrants who are willing and able to engage their bicultural backgrounds without adopting high-brow imperialistic attitudes towards their former compatriots.
REFERENCES


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Table 1. Interview Data Used for Current Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Offshore IT professionals</th>
<th>Onshore IT Professionals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>India</strong></td>
<td>6 respondents (4 firms)</td>
<td>5 immigrant managers (4 firms)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Russia</strong></td>
<td>9 respondents (5 firms)</td>
<td>7 immigrant managers (2 firms)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia</strong></td>
<td>8 respondents (6 firms)</td>
<td>3 immigrant managers (3 firms)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Table 2. Grounded Theory Method Application

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grounded Theory Method Procedures</th>
<th>Implementation in the Interview Study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Sampling: Intertwining Data Collection &amp; Analysis (Glaser &amp; Strauss, 1967, pp. 45-60)</td>
<td>Informants are picked opportunistically to help develop theory. After each interview, the field researcher made analytical notes based on the answers to questions. Conceptual themes and propositions emerged from these notes. The notes were also used to pick additional respondents and formulate new interview questions in order to ascertain whether additional data could confirm, further explain, or deny emergent propositions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaching Theoretical Saturation (Glaser &amp; Strauss, 1967, pp. 61-76)</td>
<td>Data collection on a particular issue stopped only when it reached a state of theoretical saturation. For example, when several interviewees in different positions and in diverse settings consistently reported similar sentiments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Theory using Constant Comparative Method (Glaser &amp; Strauss, 1967, pp. 101-115)</td>
<td>Systematic comparisons across each interview were made in deriving a grounded theory (tables were created to code data across interviews). For example, if an immigrant manager scolded offshore participants for their lack of technical skills arguing that it was impossible to collaborate with them, their sentiments were compared to other immigrant managers working with the same or similar offshore groups. As new concepts emerged from the data (e.g., status of an immigrant in the offshore society), data was compared across this dimension. Extant theory was used as “an additional data source” to challenge emergent themes and as a source of new themes (e.g., bicultural literature was used to suggest that bidimensional identification may play a role in immigrant attitudes and behaviors).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Formal Theory from Substantive Theory (Glaser &amp; Strauss, 1967, 1967, pp. 79-99)</td>
<td>Both authors compared emergent conclusions with existing literature on biculturals, social identity, boundary spanning, and status. Results of the analysis were presented to key informants and academic colleagues in order to gain feedback and improve theorizing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3: Overview of Findings from Interviews with Onshore Immigrant Managers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent’s Ethnicity and Title</th>
<th>Years Onshore (US)</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Onshore Identification</th>
<th>Identification with Offshore Collaborators</th>
<th>Offshore Language</th>
<th>Cultural Knowledge</th>
<th>Attitude Toward Offshore Collaborators</th>
<th>Perception of Offshore Idea Contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indian Project Manager</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>IT consulting</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Takes Pride</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
<td>Outdated</td>
<td>Positive, but only on costs</td>
<td>Some technical ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Project Manager</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Financial Consulting</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Takes Pride</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
<td>Outdated</td>
<td>Positive, but only on costs</td>
<td>Some technical ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Project Manager</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>FinanceCo</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
<td>Up to date</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Some technical ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Vice President</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>IT R&amp;D</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
<td>Up to date</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Some technical ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Director</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>FinanceCo</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
<td>Up to date</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Many great technical and design ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Project Manager</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>FinanceCo</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
<td>Up to date</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian Project Manager</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>FinanceCo</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Changed from distancing to taking pride</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>Outdated at first, but then updated</td>
<td>Changed from negative to positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Operations Manager</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>FinanceCo</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Distances from professional ethics</td>
<td>Fluent, but did not use</td>
<td>Outdated</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian Vice President</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Pharma R&amp;D</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
<td>Up to date</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian-Ukrainian Entrepreneur</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
<td>Up to date</td>
<td>Changed from positive to negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Project Manager</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Eng R&amp;D</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
<td>Up to date</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian-Belorussian Project Manager</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Eng R&amp;D</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
<td>Outdated</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belorussian Project Manager</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
<td>Up to date</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Boss</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Eng R&amp;D</td>
<td>Takes pride</td>
<td>Takes Pride in Technical Skills, Distances from Professional Ethics</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>Outdated at first, but then updated</td>
<td>Changed from negative to positive</td>
<td>Many great technical and design ideas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A: Sample Interview Guide for Onshore Immigrant Managers

This version of the interview guide was developed in 2008/2009 for the final round of data collection, when initial data analysis indicated that issues of social identification were important in understanding the phenomenon. The questions evolved from interview to interview. Many additional clarifying, probing, and summarizing questions were asked along the way, especially around social identification.

**Background**

1. Please tell me about your professional background (education and prior positions).
   a. When did you get involved in offshoring of professional services?
2. When did you come to US? How old were you then?
3. Do you go back to visit Russia? Do you still have close relatives there?

**General Questions on Offshoring**

4. What is your overall feeling about offshoring to Russia (cost, quality, timeliness)?
   a. Has your attitude to offshoring changed since you have been involved in offshoring? If so, how?
5. Do you think this a long-term trend or a short-lived phenomenon?
6. Do you feel that your job security is threatened by offshoring?
7. Think about the last 3-5 deliverables on your project (or your projects)
   - Did the offshore team deliver on time? If not, why not?
   - How would you judge the quality of the deliverable? If it was sub-par, why?
   - Can you give me examples of some problems that occurred on these projects? Why did they occur?
   - Are there any examples of when Russian developers contributed novel ideas to the project? If so, what kind of ideas? Did the client/user listen to these ideas?
   - Do offshore participants have access to business users?
   - How many people onshore would it take to do the work of your team offshore?
8. Do you recommend working with Russians to your friends or coworkers?
9. What role does your Russian background play in working with these offshore teams?

**Social Identification Questions**

10. Do you feel that being Russian is an important part of who you are today and in what ways?
11. Do you feel like being American is an important part of who you are today and in what ways?
12. Did these change since you got involved in offshoring and how?

*Do you have other comments that would help us understand the role of immigrants in managing offshore projects?*