

Management of Culture and Managing through Culture in the Indian Software Outsourcing Industry

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The rise of the software and information technology (IT) enabled services industry in India is emblematic of the latest phase in the development of global capitalism, in which services and 'knowledge' work are increasingly relocated from the post-industrial economies to low-cost locations in the developing world. The development of enclaves of high-tech offshore production and services (as well as low-end services such as call centres) in industrialising countries such as India raises new questions about globalisation, labour and cultural identity. First, the outsourcing of IT services across national borders, and the organisation of software development projects through multicultural, multi-sited 'virtual teams', have foregrounded the question of culture and cultural difference in the corporate workplace. Second, key sites of global capitalism such as Bangalore's IT industry have produced culturally marked categories of globalised technical workers who are linked into the global economy in novel, technology-mediated ways. The emergence of the figure of the Indian software engineer in the global cultural economy is the outcome of several processes, both discursive and practical. These include theories and techniques of 'cross-cultural' or 'global' management that have been developed to manage multinational workforces; the specific conditions and modes of organisation that govern outsourced offshore work,

such as the 'virtual team'; and the transnational work experiences of both Indian software engineers and their Western counterparts, which have produced standardised narratives about cultural difference that in turn structure interactions in the workplace and shape the subjectivities of workers.

This chapter draws on interviews and observations carried out in Bangalore and Europe to explore the discursive construction of the Indian software engineer as a new type of global technical worker and the deployment of this discourse as a mechanism of control over work and workers. The ethnographic material illustrates the ways in which global capital subjects Indian software engineers to an array of conflicting cultural discourses and techniques that invoke 'culture' to mould them into competent global professionals, while simultaneously marking them as different and invoking this difference as a strategy of control.¹ I also argue that such discursive strategies, although integral to the management of the contemporary global workplace and linked to structures of power, are never totalising, and that the very nature of the culturalist management ideology leaves scope for play, critique and resistance by its subjects—Indian software engineers.

Culture, Labour and Management in the Global Economy

With the advent of the post-industrial 'informational' economy (Castells 1996), processes of economic and cultural globalisation are becoming ever more interdependent. As capital seeks new sites of investment and new markets, it invokes, plays upon, appropriates, and transforms pre-existing cultural tropes and images, creating and recreating new forms of cultural difference and social identities. According to Ong, the emerging 'cultural logics' of globalisation involve the '... reciprocal construction of practice, gender, ethnicity, race, class, and nation in processes of capital accumulation' (1999: 5). This process is, of course, not new: the history of global capitalism is replete with examples of the appropriation and generation of ethnic, racial and gender identities in the creation of specific categories of workers, for instance the emergence of new feminised workforces in Southeast Asia and Latin America in the 1970s as a result of export-oriented industrialisation (Mills 2003; Ong 1991). In earlier periods as well, culturally marked labour forces were created to service the

plantations and mines of colonial economies, such as tribal 'coolies' in India (Ghosh 1999; Prakash 1990). Most of the recent literature on the segmentation of the labour force by gender, ethnicity and race is concerned with industrial workers in the 'global assembly line', such as women in the global garment factories of Mexico or Indonesia, while much less attention has been paid to the emergence and cultural marking of professional, technical and managerial global workers.² Yet the processes that create gendered, ethnicised and racial hierarchies within the global labour market are similar in both cases. Nurses from Kerala working in the US, transnational Chinese businessmen (Ong 1999), and Indian IT professionals are examples of professional, entrepreneurial, and technical groups that are culturally defined and slotted into specific niches in the global economy.

This is not to argue that the workforce is 'segmented' by capital in a straightforward or mechanical way. The deployment or creation of cultural identities in the service of capital is a dialectical process in which pre-existing cultural communities, gendered identities or racially marked groups are transformed into labour forces that perform particular roles in the production process, which in turn marks these social identities with the stamp of capital. For instance, the type of work that is performed or the working conditions have implications for the reconstitution or reinforcement of masculinities or femininities (Mills 2003). The intersections between capital and cultural identity become ever more complex as globalisation gathers pace and both 'cultures' and identities get increasingly commoditised, becoming the subject of capital itself (du Gay and Pryke 2002).

In the case of Indian software engineers, the threatening but also comical (as in the Dilbert comic strip) image of the Indian techie is stock-in-trade for anti-outsourcing ideologues. Such ethnicised images circulate within the global cultural economy and can be invoked by different actors for their own ends. For many Indians, the figure of the Indian techie represents the success of the IT industry, which has finally thrust India onto the world stage, and is cited as evidence of Indians' greater intelligence and skill in technology fields, while to some Americans it only represents cheap labour out to steal their jobs. Thus, there is a complex ideological dimension to the construction of new global workforces, which encompasses hegemonic discourses that emanate from politicians, corporates and the global media as well as contestations by the subjects of these discourses—or what Ong (1991) terms 'cultural struggles'—that

produce counter-narratives and alternative images. As Freeman observes, '... states, transnational corporations, and local groups of social and economic actors both challenge and support each other as they face new sets of circumstances and contexts for enacting power and identities' (2000: 30). In this section, two currents in contemporary management ideology that pervade the global corporate world and produce culturally segmented workforces, as well as new kinds of working subjects, are examined.

Global Management

While there are substantial bodies of literature in sociology and anthropology on globalisation and labour (e.g., Kelly 1983; Nash and Kelly 1983), cultural processes in the formation of new workforces under capitalism and cultural forms of resistance (Ong 1987), and on globalisation and identity formation in general (Appadurai 1997; Featherstone 1990; Friedman 1994), one facet of these processes that has been less well studied is the role of transnational management ideologies and practices. The increasing integration of the global economy through networks of production and services and the activities of transnational corporations has brought companies, workers, managers and customers located in different 'geographies' into close interaction. Those who work in globalised workplaces, whether they are employed in multinational enterprises in their own countries, travel to other sites for work or are engaged in 'virtual migration' (Aneesh 2006; Freeman 2000), are forced to grapple with questions of cultural difference. For multinational and internationally networked companies as well, globalisation has foregrounded the question of culture as they do business across borders and with people from various cultural backgrounds, attempt to create new markets for their products, or establish subsidiaries in offshore locations to take advantage of cheaper wage rates. For this reason, the management of cultural difference has become a key problem for international management theory, which has generated a distinct discourse and set of techniques for 'cross-cultural' or 'global' management. These theories and practices are a major source for the production of cultural difference in the corporate world and perhaps beyond it as well.

The bible of international cultural management is Geert Hofstede's *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values* (1980a), which engendered this new area of training and

practice and stimulated a large body of research based on his 'cultural values' framework (Kirkman et al. 2001).³ In this literature, national cultures are categorised according to various 'pattern variable' schemes that are based primarily on Parsonian modernisation theories as well as an older tradition of anthropology, such as the work of Ruth Benedict, on 'national cultures'. This analysis is then used to develop strategies for more effective intercultural communication and cooperation. Hofstede's original schema is based on four basic 'dimensions of culture': individualism–collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity–femininity.⁴ This framework has been widely used by Western multinational companies to achieve a 'fit' between the organisational culture (usually American or European) and the dominant cultural values of employees of subsidiaries located in other countries by highlighting and negotiating cultural differences (Kirkman et al. 2001: 13).

Software companies in India, both Indian and multinational, utilise these theories of cross-cultural management to develop training programmes and techniques to aid in the integration of their 'virtual teams'. Offshore software projects are usually carried out across national borders using sophisticated computer and telecommunications technologies. The problems in coordination that arise from the geographical dispersion of work are addressed in part through strategies aimed at promoting better cross-cultural communication and collaboration. But while these management strategies apparently embrace the idea of multiculturalism, they also valorise a singular model of 'global corporate culture' into which Indian software engineers are expected to fit.

'New Age' Management and the 'Entrepreneurial Employee'

With the increasing integration of the global economy, diverse management styles (American, German, Japanese) have tended to merge together into a single dominant model—an ideal type 'global' corporate culture that every company, worker and manager must work towards in order to compete in the global market. Most IT companies operating in India—both Indian and multinational—follow, or attempt to follow, this model. The 'new model' corporation—or what was referred to by an HR manager we interviewed as 'new age management'—was developed primarily in the US and embodies

American cultural values such as egalitarianism, teamwork and individual initiative. The preferred structure of the modern corporation has shifted from the earlier hierarchical, bureaucratic and centralised model with direct systems of control, towards more open, 'flat', flexible, networked organisational structures that are designed to 'empower' rather than regulate employees. By minimising hierarchy, bureaucracy, and formal procedures, the 'new workplace' is supposed to give more autonomy to workers and encourage individual initiative and creativity, thereby stimulating greater productivity as well as employee satisfaction (Gephart 2002).

The 'new workplace' is considered to be typical of the post-industrial 'information economy' and is exemplified by Silicon Valley's informal, individualistic work culture. In the rapidly changing software industry, maximum scope for autonomy and creativity is given to programmers in order to promote product innovation. The new model corporation thus produces and requires a new kind of individualised working subject, the 'entrepreneurial' worker (Beck 2000).⁵ Rather than being controlled and directed by the management, employees are managed primarily through indirect and subjective 'cultural' techniques (Kunda 1992). Self-management by workers is a defining feature of the new work systems, whose key words are 'autonomy', 'empowerment' and 'self-motivation'. Work is driven by the ethic of individualisation in which workers (especially professionals and technical labour) focus on completing individual deliverables and on doing high visibility work to achieve personal goals (Perlow 1997: 34, quoted in Gephart 2002: 335).

In addition, the culture and organisation of large corporations around the world is increasingly based on a hegemonic model of 'global best practices' that they must follow if they want to succeed in the global marketplace. Because Indian software companies position themselves as 'global', they also tend to follow these practices and to replicate the global corporate model described above. Thus, there are two rather contradictory cultural processes at work in the practice and ideology of global management—one that recognises, draws upon, generates, and validates cultural difference, and another that attempts to erase difference by imposing a single ideal of corporate and business practice.⁶

Ong suggests that to understand the multifarious effects of the expansion of global capitalism into developing countries such as India,

we must pay attention to the ‘... regulatory effects of particular cultural institutions, projects, regimes, and markets that shape people’s motivations, desires, and struggles and make them particular kinds of subjects in the world ...’ (1999: 5–6). Below, the management regime that operates within the Indian software outsourcing industry to produce a ‘particular kind of subject’—the global Indian IT professional—is explored. This regime invokes and utilises ideas about Indian culture and cultural difference in the management of Indian software workers, even as it attempts to mould them into competent, self-directed global professionals who are able to function effectively in the new corporate workplace. In particular, several sites for the discursive production of the ‘Indian techie’, and some of the ways in which cultural typing is employed in management ideology and practice, are examined.⁷

Enculturing the Global Software Professional

Most outsourced software projects are carried out by teams composed primarily of Indian software development engineers located in India (‘offshore’), who interface with customers, colleagues and managers located at the client site (‘onsite’) or one of their company’s other offices located in the US or Western Europe. This means that many software engineers employed by companies located in Bangalore, Hyderabad or Mumbai work as part of ‘virtual teams’ whose members are distributed in different locations. Outsourced service work has two dimensions—much of it is carried out ‘offshore’, with work being performed remotely (or ‘virtually’) through sophisticated information and communication technologies (Aneesh 2006), but it also requires physical mobility as Indian software engineers are sent to their client’s offices to work ‘onsite’ or to other locations of the parent company. Offshore and onsite work are both essential components of most outsourced IT projects, and the common element is that both kinds of work entail the close interaction of Indian IT professionals with their clients, colleagues and managers in other countries—both ‘virtually’ or remotely and face-to-face. The management of such multi-sited projects and multicultural virtual teams presents a specific set of issues to both client companies and Indian service providers—issues that are usually framed in terms of cultural difference and are sought to be resolved in part through the management of culture.

Effective communication across locations and among culturally diverse employees is increasingly regarded as key to the success of software outsourcing projects, as well as a major weakness of the Indian IT industry. At some point in their careers, most Indian software engineers must interact and collaborate with foreign customers or colleagues, either in person or remotely, through conference calls, emails and other electronic media. This interaction and communication is considered to be crucial to the management of software projects and constitutes a major site of slippage. Most managers interviewed said that they frequently receive complaints from customers and parent companies about the 'poor communication skills' of their engineers. The problem that they identify is not so much unfamiliarity with English as lack of the appropriate social skills and communication styles needed to interact effectively with foreign customers and colleagues. To address this problem, the Human Resource (HR) departments of most Indian software companies organise frequent 'soft skills' training programmes for engineers—especially communication and 'inter-cultural' skills. These programmes are aimed at moulding the personalities of software engineers and inculcating the behaviour patterns, social skills, and cultural styles that are required to interact with foreign (mainly Western) colleagues and clients, and which are deemed to be appropriate to the global workplace. Apart from communication skills (business communication, presentation skills, how to write emails and conduct conference calls, etc.) and 'cultural sensitivity' training, a range of soft skills training is offered by many companies, such as time management, team-building, and management or leadership skills, all of which feed (in various ways) into the production of the self-managed, individualised worker. This paper focuses primarily on cultural and communication skills programmes, and on how cultural difference is both erased and constructed through them.

In the early days of the software industry in India, cultural training programmes were often designed on an ad hoc basis by outsourcing companies or 'bodyshoppers'⁸ to acculturate engineers to the countries where they were sent for onsite jobs. They focused on imparting advice on social etiquette, table manners, local food habits, appropriate dress and so on. Gradually, cultural training became more organised and professionalised and a category of professional cross-cultural trainers emerged (across the world and not only in India) to cater to this demand. Today, most of the major Indian software companies as well as multinationals provide at least minimal training

in the culture (i.e., 'customs and manners') of the countries to which engineers are being sent, especially when they are going there for the first time. Trainers explain the niceties of social manners in the target country, such as what kind of suit to wear for what occasion or how to make small talk with the boss's wife, or they tell trainees not to waste time in the office in idle chat or to ask their co-workers personal questions. An employee of an MNC posted temporarily in Germany described his company's 'cultural sensitivity' training in this way:

These inter-cultural and etiquette training sessions are more for fresh recruits, like those who have recently graduated or never been abroad before, or with very little work experience. It's more for those technical guys, who have to meet and interact with whites for the first time. We even have personal grooming sessions and we tell them not to use hair oils but gels, use deos and don't put too much talcum powder, because it all shows and looks bad ... things like that. We tell them not to wear white socks ... guys shouldn't wear white socks for formal occasions, since it gives a sporty look. Here it's more like Mondays are for formals and Fridays are for casuals and on other days smart casuals ... Of course it's all unwritten and we don't really follow it. There's no one around telling us what to wear and what to do anyway!

Although this kind of coaching in etiquette continues, cultural training has now become more sophisticated and broader in scope, and trainers incorporate psychological and anthropological theories in order to explain cultural differences and to teach engineers how to change their behaviour. Such training is aimed not only at engineers going abroad but also at improving communication within multi-cultural virtual teams. In fact, cultural sensitivity and communication skills training are often combined in the same programme, because communication problems in multi-sited projects are usually attributed to the cultural gap between Indian software engineers and people at the client site or head office. As the manager in charge of soft skills training in an Indian software major said:

Four years ago, we got this feedback from the clients. They said our engineers have very good technical skills, but when sitting across a table, there is hardly anything to talk about. When we got this feedback, we realised that our techies do not understand

the clients' interest areas. There was a clear frequency mismatch. Hence we had to start cross-cultural sensitivity programmes.

Clients had reported that the techies who come for onsite projects do not socialise with their local colleagues, so the company wanted to mould its engineers into 'good business professionals' by teaching them about other cultures and inculcating them with social skills. The programme that was designed to address this problem includes modules on general communication skills, corporate etiquette (how to write emails and use the phone) and basic manners (don't stand too close to a lady in the elevator). Participants are acquainted with norms of behaviour in foreign countries, such as differences between American and Indian notions of sociability and distance. Appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in the corporate setting is also discussed, including repeated warnings about behaviour towards women that might be construed as sexual harassment.

'Cultural Sensitivity' Training

Having observed several 'cultural sensitivity' and inter-cultural communication programmes offered by software companies in Bangalore, we found that they all tend to draw on the standard cross-cultural management theories discussed above and to follow a similar pattern. While Hofstede-type theories of global cultural management are intended to promote better inter-cultural communication and collaboration, in Indian software companies this training appears to be oriented more to fit Indian techies into the dominant culture of the global workplace. To illustrate this, a communication skills programme that was offered by one of the top soft skills consultants in Bangalore for employees of the overseas software development centre of an American IT major is described in detail.⁹ This five-day workshop covered a range of topics; only a few of the salient points are discussed here.

The trainer, a young Irish woman,¹⁰ first explained to the participants the concept of culture, citing common definitions revolving around 'shared values', 'ways of behaving', and so on. She then asked participants to describe the features of different cultures (Indian, American, etc.) and to describe their own cultures. She used the variety of answers that were given to make the point that identity is context-dependent and flexible (whether I identify myself as Indian, Tamil, South Indian, Iyer, etc., depends on the context and to whom

I am speaking). She then gave the participants a small lecture on ethnocentrism, saying that cultures are 'neither good nor bad, just different'.¹¹ These preliminaries were apparently aimed at preparing the participants to relativise their own cultures and to accept certain aspects of Western or 'global corporate' culture.

Drawing on the standard typology of national cultures found in the cross-cultural management literature (based primarily on Hofstede's framework), the trainer outlined the differences between two of the 'mainstream cultures':

(1) Pluralistic—the 'WASP' cultures (Australian, Canadian, American), characterised by:

- individualism
- personal achievement
- orientation to career
- materialism
- change as progress
- lifestyle diversity

(2) Extended family cultures—(Latin American, African, Middle Eastern, Indian) characterised by:

- social structure built around the family
- importance of where you are from
- authoritarian power structure
- family as source of social identity
- business carried out within a network
- minimal social change
- sharp gender differences
- tradition-bound
- religious

She then argued that corporate cultures around the world are merging into a common 'global corporate culture' model and suggested that we need to accept this global culture because it is now the dominant one. This dominant global corporate culture is based on the 'pluralistic' or 'WASP' type, which contrasts with the 'extended family culture' of India—a juxtaposition that clearly reflects the hoary social science dichotomy between the traditional and the modern.

Having neatly catalogued the differences between Indian and global corporate culture, the trainer's next task was to convince her audience that they can adapt their behaviour and communication style to the culture of the global workplace without giving up their 'own culture'. She repeatedly drew a distinction between 'behavioural changes' and changes in 'core values', to drive home the point that you can change superficial behaviour patterns in order to fit into the global workplace without losing your own identity. She asked the participants to accept the notion that 'I can behave differently during my eight hours at work in order to help my career, without changing myself fundamentally'.

What are these behavioural changes that are required? At work, she said, you have to be assertive and direct, especially when interacting with the Americans in your team. To illustrate these differences in communication and behavioural style, she outlined two different personality types marked by distinctive behaviour patterns:

(1) 'Linear active':

- plans ahead methodically
- likes privacy
- punctual
- dominated by timetables
- sticks to plans
- completes action chains
- separates social and professional life

(2) 'Multi-active' type:

- inquisitive
- multi-tasking
- works any hours
- timetable unpredictable
- completes human transactions
- changes plans and juggles facts
- people oriented
- pulls strings
- interweaves the social and professional

According to the trainer, the first type is typical of behaviour in the corporate world and is linked to the 'WASP' or 'pluralistic' culture,

while the second is more typical of India. She then had the following discussion with the participants:

Trainer: If the corporate world expects and behaves in the linear active mode, while you belong to the multiactive type, then what needs to be done?

Participant: I need to change myself.

Trainer: Are you comfortable with that?

Participant: It will help me in my career.

But a woman participant argued with the trainer, saying that she could choose her own style of working (such as 'multiactive') and 'still produce results':

Participant: Why don't others adopt the multiactive style [i.e., why should we adopt their style]?

Trainer: We have to be realistic—who dominates in the corporate world? It's the US, and the American system is what has come to characterise the corporate world all over, so we have no choice but to follow that style.

This training programme was clearly aimed at getting Indian software engineers to understand American or global corporate culture so that they can behave appropriately in that context, but also to make the process non-threatening and acceptable by convincing them that adapting their behaviour to these cultures does not entail giving up their own 'culture' or values. As another cultural trainer argued, 'It's not about changing culture, it's not a one-way process. Instead of a tug-of-war, we are trying to create a third culture' (i.e., the culture of the global workplace). But note that this 'global culture' embodies modernist values and expects its employees to transform themselves into modern, individualised and self-directed subjects.

One effect of these cultural training programmes is that the world gets divided into distinct culturally-defined workforces and locales that must be integrated into a functioning network. Indians, Americans, Germans and other nationalities are catalogued according to a list of typical cultural and personality traits. Ironically, this process of cultural classification is critiqued by trainers when they give their lessons on the evils of ethnocentrism and ethnic prejudices. In one training session, for instance, the trainer pointed out that most people

have preconceived ideas, or stereotypes, about what others are like. He asked the participants to list the characteristics that they associate with American culture and Americans. Their list included:

- Easy-going
- Casual in dress
- Punctual
- Professional
- Orderly
- Organised
- Rich
- Specific/to the point
- Social
- Forthright
- Good communicators

He then asked them to list how they think Americans see them (Indians):

- Conservative/traditional
- Hard working
- 24/7
- IST ('Indian Standard Time', a joke about Indians always being late)
- Intelligent
- Bad communicators
- Family values
- Varied culture
- Poor
- Not forthright
- Hospitable

Not surprisingly, many of the characteristics the participants listed were the negative ones that are commonly attributed to Indian software engineers in the industry (poor communicators, no sense of time), but they also included other traits that are associated with the image of the Indian techie that circulates in the global economy—'sloggers' who are willing to work round the clock (this stereotype is discussed in the following section). The trainer used this exercise to argue that

it is important to 'break such stereotypes' if we want to create more 'cultural awareness' and better inter-cultural communication. Yet, the creation, reproduction, and deployment of stereotypes is precisely what much of this sort of training does, and the cultural images that were voiced by the participants were much the same as those that are retailed by trainers.

Thus, there are two processes happening simultaneously in these culture and communication programmes. On the one hand, cultural difference is validated and trainees are told that 'no culture is good or bad, cultures are just different', while on the other hand they are told that they must learn to adapt to the now-dominant 'global corporate culture' (which is based on the Anglo-Saxon 'pluralistic' culture) because, implicitly, their own culture is not suitable to that context.

Producing the 'Empowered' Worker

Another key area of soft skills training for software engineers is personality development and assertiveness training, using standard psychological theories such as Transactional Analysis (TA) and Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI™). These programmes have been introduced in response to feedback often given by customers to HR managers that Indian engineers are too passive and have a 'feudal' mindset. Frequent comments include: they 'always say yes' even when they cannot complete the work given; they require 'micro-management' and constantly want positive reinforcement from managers, and they do not 'take ownership' of their work. These programmes attempt to teach software engineers to be self-directed and to take independent decisions. Because one of the reasons for poor communication skills is supposed to be lack of assertiveness (which in turn is considered to be a cultural characteristic of Indian engineers), some soft skills training consultants include modules on assertiveness training in their communication skills workshops.

The demand for psychology-based training is linked to the fact that most software companies have adopted the 'new age' management style discussed above. Most of the CEOs and HR (Human Resource) managers that we interviewed, as well as many employees, described their companies as having more 'open' work cultures and 'flatter' and more flexible structures, compared to the rigid, authoritarian and hierarchical cultures of 'traditional' Indian companies (especially the once dominant public sector companies). Of course,

these statements reflect the official position and not necessarily the reality, but what is significant here is that Indian software companies have self-consciously adopted the contemporary international management ideology that stresses employee 'empowerment' and self-management. This explains why managers and foreign clients often complain that Indian engineers are too passive and subservient, needing continual direction and feedback, and why these companies attempt to mould their engineers into proactive and self-motivated workers. But in the context of the Indian software services industry, this demand appears to be more ideological than real, for while managers and customers voice their desire for autonomous and creative engineers, the industry's actual requirement is for a malleable, flexible and passive workforce. Moreover, although managers pay lip service to employee autonomy and empowerment, many companies in fact have imposed rigid top-down systems of organisational control that appear to contradict the dominant management ideology (Upadhyia and Vasavi 2006: Chap. 6).

The deployment of this battery of psychological, behavioural, and cultural theories and techniques in the contemporary workplace is discussed in detail in Sathaye's article (chapter 5 in this volume). Here, the connections between this kind of training and the production of a new kind of working subject in the context of the software outsourcing industry is highlighted. From a critical perspective, soft skills training can be understood as an organisational practice aimed at ideological control over the workforce; rather than empowering employees, it is associated with 'domination, disempowerment, and undemocratic practices' (Ogbor 2001). Corporate training programmes, especially of the 'soft skills' variety, require trainees to acknowledge a lack in themselves, which they are encouraged to remedy by transforming themselves into the management-approved personality type. Employees are expected to learn and display modes of behaviour and attitudes deemed appropriate to the corporate workplace, and assimilationist themes such as 'organisational fit' and 'team play' are highlighted. Through training in interpersonal and communication skills, self-appraisal systems, and so on, '... employees are provided with the skills that enable them to regulate themselves in the absence of managerial gaze—an "internalised panopticon" [Boje 1993], where employees turn the disciplinary gaze on themselves through the assimilation of cultural values and norms' (Ogbor 2001).¹² In particular, the new knowledge-intensive 'high tech' workplaces depend on

the deployment of diverse 'technologies of the self' as a means of domination (Deetz 1998). In the case of Indian software companies, employees are expected to adapt themselves to the culture of the global workplace by transforming their personalities and interactional styles. But this process is built upon the delineation and juxtaposition of objectified images of 'Indian' and 'Western/global' work culture.

This leads us to ask: What are the regulatory effects of the extensive cultural psychological training to which IT workers are subjected? Is there a more subtle logic operating behind the 'culturalisation' of management? Should cultural/psychological profiling be understood as a mechanism of control over labour or as a method through which particular kinds of worker-subjects are produced? To answer these questions, in the following section the narratives of software engineers and managers about cultural difference, and the role that this discourse of difference plays in the management of outsourced software projects and onsite engineers, are examined.

Controlling Labour through Culture

The construction of national-cultural differences through cross-cultural management theory and cultural training programmes is echoed in the narratives of Indian software engineers and their managers, both Indian and Western.¹³ For instance, cultural profiles similar to those imparted by cultural trainers are invoked by managers and clients of software companies to explain why Indian software engineers are not behaving or performing as expected. The discourse of culture emerges most sharply in 'onsite' situations, where Indian software engineers tend to explain and negotiate the conflicts and problems they experience in terms of cultural difference. This section explores the ways in which the discursive construction of cultural difference identified in the narratives of both Europeans and Indians involved in outsourced software projects operates as a regulatory practice in controlling transnational software labour, in the process producing culturally marked working subjects.

Discursive Constructions of Cultural Difference

On closer investigation, the often-repeated claim that Indian software engineers lack appropriate social and communication skills

points to a much wider discourse about cultural difference that structures relationships in the context of outsourced software projects. Interviews with Indian software engineers and managers in India and Europe revealed that typical notions about differences in work culture are retailed by both sides. The differences that are often cited include:¹⁴

- Indian work culture is hierarchical and feudal, as opposed to the more egalitarian culture in Europe. For instance, Indians tend to treat their managers with deference and find it difficult to say no to them, whereas European managers treat their subordinates as equals and employees are more assertive. As the Dutch owner of a small software company said: 'The Indians always said yes for everything, even if you asked them to do something impossible'.
- Europeans are good at organisation, planning, and time management, in contrast to the inefficiency of Indians. These traits are associated with the greater 'professionalism' of Westerners in general, and the longer working hours kept by Indian employees is often explained or justified by reference to their lack of 'professionalism' and poor organisation.
- Europeans value their leisure and private family time and maintain a good work-life balance; one consequence of this is that they strictly adhere to office hours, unlike Indian engineers.¹⁵

This discursive construction of Indian-European differences in work culture is central to the way in which both European and Indian managers handle outsourced projects and Indian software engineers. For instance, managers often invoke these cultural differences to account for differences in working habits and communication problems, and they develop management strategies to overcome what they define as 'inter-cultural' problems within their organisations. The major strategy employed is to induce behavioural changes in employees through the kind of soft skills and cultural sensitivity training programmes described above. For example, Andrea,¹⁶ the anthropologist who is in charge of 'Indo-German team integration' for a major German company, organises workshops such as 'Getting to Know Germany', inter-cultural training for Indian techies in Germany, as well as a cultural sensitisation programme for German engineers who

work with Indians.¹⁷ She enumerated the ‘intercultural difficulties’ faced by the company as:

- ‘power distance’ or hierarchical mindset of Indians;
- ‘task orientation’ of Germans versus ‘personal/relationship orientation’ of Indians; and
- implicit communication style of Indians versus explicit style of Germans.

According to Andrea, the objective of these training programmes is not to mould Indian engineers to suit the German work atmosphere but rather to ‘sensitise’ both Indian and German employees to cultural differences. However, she conceded that in practice more changes are expected from the Indians than from their German counterparts. For instance, Indians are perceived as needing constant supervision and guidance (‘micro-management’)—a characteristic that clashes with German work culture—and training interventions are designed to make Indian techies more ‘proactive’ and independent. She stated:

I think it is necessary for Indians to learn to work independently (without any hand-holding or constant supervision). But generally we want to sensitise both the parties. In terms of work style, more adjustment is expected from the Indian side. We are just facilitators. There are some standardised procedures that we help them to follow.

Although Western companies expect Indian engineers to be proactive and self-managing, there are certain aspects of ‘Indian work culture’ that are seen as positive and are consciously sought to be retained. One of these is Indians engineers’ alleged propensity for ‘slogging’.

The ‘Slogger’ and the ‘Time Slave’

A strategy that is now employed by Indian companies operating in Europe is to hire local people (in our study, German or Dutch) for ‘customer facing roles’.¹⁸ However, employing both Indians and Europeans in their European offices gives rise to a new set of problems, because it means having to negotiate between two different ‘work cultures’. As a solution, the (Indian) head of an Indian software major’s

office in Germany said that they retain a 'strong Indian component' in the work culture of their local operations because most of the engineers are Indian, but they also integrate a 'German component' into it because their people 'should know how to handle German clients well'. When asked to define the elements of Indian work culture that they are trying to retain, he answered, 'ability to deliver at any cost'. To the researcher's query whether this simply means working long hours, he agreed: 'Of course there are many ways to do it. But the bottom line is there is a strong motivation to deliver goods at any cost. There is more willingness to do it [among Indians].'

Similarly, many respondents attributed the long working hours that are typical of the Indian IT industry to 'Indian work culture' and/or to inefficiency and poor organisational skills. Indeed, time is one of the major issues about which many software engineers and managers spoke: their narratives highlight the lack of time to do the things they want to do, the need for better time management, the pressure on time created by project deadlines, and especially the long working hours put in by Indians compared to Europeans. In part this focus on time is because long working hours are in fact typical of the Indian software industry, and managing time is one of the major problems faced by most managers and software engineers.¹⁹ This pattern of overwork, referred to by one informant as 'time slavery', is justified by some managers in terms of the individual motivation and aspirations of employees, reflecting the individualised work ethic that is promoted by IT companies. This hinges on the self-motivation of 'entrepreneurial' employees who accept individual responsibility for completing work assigned, even if it means working very long hours.²⁰

The difference in working hours and management of time was a key theme in informants' narratives about Western and Indian work culture. When asked to talk about these differences, Indian software engineers most often mentioned working hours, and this difference was often explained or justified in terms of Indian inefficiency and poor time management, in contrast to the greater efficiency and productivity of Europeans. It was also linked to the greater value placed on 'work-life balance' by Europeans, in contrast to Indians who are said to be willing to work '24/7'. It is significant that the difference in working hours, like so much management-speak, is cloaked in the garb of 'Indian culture'.²¹ While many respondents complained about their extended working hours, for many it is a source of pride and a positive attribute of Indian work culture. A top manager of a

large services company commented that long hours are 'part of our [Indian] psyche'.

The cultural justification for long hours masks the fact that it is largely the organisation of outsourced projects, the status of the employees, and the work culture of the Indian IT industry itself that account for the difference in working hours, rather than some abstract difference in 'work culture'. Of course, cultures of work are constructed within particular social and economic contexts: just as labour struggles within the industrial system of Europe gave rise to fixed working hours and extensive labour regulation, the specifics of transnational service work in the global informational economy produce 'flexible' labour regimes and extended and 'flexible' working hours. As relatively new players in the global IT industry, Indian companies and software engineers are under pressure to prove their individual and collective capability by working harder than their competitors.²²

'Willingness to deliver at any cost' is a central element of the image of the Indian software worker that is circulating in the global economy. This produces resentment on the part of European and American co-workers who believe that it is the Indian techie's propensity to 'slog' for long hours at lower cost that poses the main threat to their jobs. This image is partially linked to anti-outsourcing rhetoric, but it should be noted that the Indian reputation for being 'sloggers' emerged before the backlash against outsourcing. It is also an image that enables and justifies the exploitation of onsite techies. Indian engineers working abroad are under pressure to work harder than locals in order to gain recognition. Remarks one engineer: 'We being Indians just have to work hard and can't take it easy or rest like the local people.'

The cultural marking of Indian techies as 'sloggers' may operate in practice as a justification for over-work. An engineer interviewed in the Netherlands said that he had left his previous company because they had expected him to learn new technical skills 'hands on', without any training. He remarked:

I was in a hotel in Germany for one month, and each night I would be up till 3.00 a.m. reading manuals and learning stuff. Of course I could manage it, but it was hell. These people [the management] think, 'Oh Indians are sloggers after all, so they can learn things at short notice or as they start working'. I got fed up with that sort of mentality and that's one of the reasons I left.

This remark points to another key component of the Indian software worker's global image—his/her 'flexibility', which includes the ability to work on various technologies and platforms and to learn and adapt quickly to new work environments. Indian software services companies train their people to be 'generic programmers' so that they are able to work on all kinds of projects, a strategy that reinforces the Indian techie's reputation in the global software labour market for versatility, adaptability, and hard work (Upadhyaya and Vasavi 2006: 47–48). Indeed, apart from lower cost, this is one of the main selling points of Indian services companies.

Ideology in Practice

Managers of multi-sited or outsourced projects tend to attribute most problems and conflicts that arise to cultural differences, a strategy that effectively deflects attention away from organisational issues, deeper structural conditions, or contestations over power that could account for these conflicts. The following comment by an Indian manager suggests that it is not so much a propensity for disorganisation and poor planning on the part of Indian engineers, as demands from management, that account for long working hours: 'In Germany, everything is about planning. If something comes up at the last minute, they come and request us and make it sound like a favour. But in India, they think we can be asked to do anything any time.'

Although the idea that Indian software engineers work longer and harder than Europeans because they are inefficient, badly organised, and careless by nature appears to have been internalised by many of them, their narratives also reveal that the pressure to work often comes from above—whether they are in India or onsite in Europe. The economic (rather than cultural) roots of the Indian habit of 'slogging' were pointed to by several critical informants, as in the following remark: 'Mostly those who work on support [systems maintenance] go abroad and slog. They have to work both on Indian and American standard times. This means they have to work any time and be prepared to show up any time. They are forced to work overtime.'

Similarly, the frequent characterisation of Indian workers as having a 'feudal' or 'hierarchical' mindset ignores the structural context in which they work. Most Indian techies are in the position of contractors who have to cater to the client's needs and demands, and so can hardly afford to 'argue with the boss' as European employees are wont to do.

Also, onsite engineers must negotiate between the demands of their Indian employers and those of the European customers. The following comment by a Dutch manager points to structural factors that may also explain the alleged 'hierarchical' mindset of Indian engineers. He said that the engineers who came to work in his company on contract were not given a choice of assignment by their company (an Indian software services major), and could not leave until the job was done:

Some adapted well, and others felt homesick throughout. But even those who were homesick and wanted to go back would stay on. They felt it was their duty to stay and do their work since their boss told them to. Basically the Indians do exactly what the boss says. Here we are spoiled—we can refuse work and argue with the boss. But the Indians are probably happy to have a job and so don't want to risk it.

In addition, the notion that Indian software engineers are not proactive and are too respectful of authority is linked to the 'process-driven' nature of management in large software companies. Andrea noted: 'It is much easier to introduce standardised procedures like CMM²³ among Indians because they find it easy to follow exactly what they are told. This tradition is not found in Germany.' This suggests that the same qualities that are derided by European and American managers (need for micro-management, willingness to 'follow directions') may be considered necessary and desirable for software engineers working in CMM Level 5 software services companies. What are labelled as Indian cultural characteristics, then, are largely produced by the nature of the work and the way in which software projects are organised.

More broadly, problems in managing outsourced projects or virtual teams may arise simply from the struggles over time, deadlines, and allotment of work that take place within any software development team.²⁴ A very similar situation has been described in the case of Irish programmers working in virtual teams for US clients (O Riain 2000), which suggests that there is nothing specifically 'Indian' about the cultural characteristics attributed to Indian engineers. As O Riain's study shows, there is a continual process of negotiation over these issues between engineers and managers, and among engineers

within a team. When the team is a virtual or multi-sited one and is managed by a 'remote' manager (who is physically separated from most of the team members), these problems are exacerbated because the engineers have more leeway to strategise about the amount and kind of work they accept. In this struggle, rather than confronting the manager directly they may use indirect tactics to buy time or to avoid certain tasks, such as repeatedly asking for instructions or not completing work unless reminded. What are labelled as 'communication problems' may in fact be subtle forms of resistance that are linked to the 'politics of time' that characterises the contemporary workplace (O Riain 2000: 178). In the context of the Indian outsourcing industry, such behaviours may be interpreted by managers as 'cultural' in origin and understood as Indian personality traits. In such situations, the posited cultural difference between the multinational parent company and its Indian software centre, or between the foreign client and the Indian service provider, provides an acceptable explanation for problems. Rather than exploring the structural realities of the organisation of work in software outsourcing projects, managers attempt to resolve these problems by inducing behavioural and attitudinal changes in their employees through soft skills training and other such strategies.

The following remark by Andrea reveals how this discourse works in practice: 'Germans notice that there is more hierarchy among Indians. Indians expect more guidance from their superiors. There is also a bit of power distance—sometimes Indians keep information to themselves.' It is significant that she illustrated the point about 'power distance' and hierarchy with a comment about 'keeping information to themselves'. This points not only to the structural relationship between Indians and Germans (which is less egalitarian than managers of that company claimed), but also to a subtle strategy of resistance by Indian engineers that may stand in for overt assertiveness— withholding information from managers or other engineers. From other interviews as well, it appears that refusing to part with crucial information, or parcelling out information only to certain people, is a common strategy employed by software engineers as well as managers in negotiating their positions within their organisations.²⁵ It is also a tactic that is increasingly resorted to by European engineers whose projects are being moved to India. For instance, in one company we were told that German engineers

dragged their feet on handing over key elements of a technology to the Indian engineers who had come to Germany on a 'transfer of technology' assignment. Thus, control over information and 'knowledge management' (itself an important management area in software companies) can be seen as key sites and strategies of struggle within software outsourcing projects, in which decisions to share or withhold knowledge are interpreted as stemming from Indian cultural traits.

The discussion in this section suggests that Indian software engineers are subjected to different and often contradictory demands and discourses: that they should be more 'dynamic' and proactive at work but still should be willing to follow directions and finish their work without reference to time; or that they should be more assertive and direct in their communication style but also compliant and service-oriented towards customers. The contradictions in these management discourses leave space for play, as software engineers may appropriate narratives of cultural difference in devising strategies to pursue their own ends.

Contradictions and Counter-narratives

As in any complex social process that is imbued with relations of power, questions about consent or resistance to the 'dominant ideology' (in this case, the management discourse about culture and cultural difference) must be foregrounded. While many of the software engineers we interviewed appear to have internalised the cultural stereotypes described above, several informants voiced subtle or overt counter-narratives that reject or critique the dominant discourse. In this section these alternative narratives and critical voices are highlighted in order to point to the complexities of the ideological operation of this discourse and to suggest that it, like any discourse, is not completely hegemonic.

Many of the Indian software engineers we interviewed were highly conscious of the cultural stereotypes about them that are held by their European colleagues, and have even internalised them. Some have attempted to overcome what they see as their own deficiencies by adapting to European work culture as well as to the larger society. These adjustments often take the form of personal emotional and behavioural restructuring, which most see as a positive step in their own personality development rather than a negative movement entailing

loss of identity or culture. For instance, many informants mentioned that they have become more 'professional', 'organised', and time conscious as a result of working in Europe. However, informants also criticised some aspects of Western work culture. For instance, not all ascribed a positive value to the European habit of working limited hours and going on long vacations, and several were shocked by the fact that people in Holland easily take leave even when there is a project deadline approaching, which is 'unheard of in India'.

In cultural training programmes too, trainees do not necessarily accept what they are taught. Indeed, many are very critical of soft skills training—they may find it irrelevant, a waste of time, or even offensive, and few engineers reported that they found such training useful or insightful. During one workshop we observed, several participants repeatedly argued with the trainer about her characterisation of the Indian culture: while she attempted to elicit certain responses from them (for instance, about the authority structure of the Indian family), participants repeatedly challenged her generalisations with counter-examples. These exchanges suggest that trainees are not passive recipients of this potted cultural knowledge or are being mindlessly moulded into global workers. Similarly, as noted above, not everyone buys into the 'cultural' explanation for differences in working habits. An informant said: 'They [Germans] also want to achieve, like Indians, but their working hours are limited by labour laws; if they are made to work longer the union will take it up. It's not just a cultural thing—law frames culture.'

Just as the discourse of culture is reworked to suit the context and is deployed in diverse ways by managements, software engineers too may turn the discourse to their own advantage and use it to engage in 'cultural struggle' in the workplace (Ong 1991). Ailon-Souday and Kunda argue in their study of a globalising high-tech corporation in Israel that national identity is not a fixed attribute but a '... symbolic resource that is actively mobilised by members for the social goals of resistance' (2003: 1074). As in the Indian software industry, '... within corporations undergoing globalisation, organisational and national identities are constituted through relations of mutual inclusion rather than mutual exclusion and ... undergo transformations in the process' (Ailon-Souday and Kunda 2003: 1092). As this chapter shows, far from erasing or submerging national/cultural identities—as some theorists of the network society have suggested (Castells 1996; Poster 2002)—globalised workplaces invoke and deploy these identities in multifarious ways, in

the process reinforcing and objectifying them. But the reification of culture also provides a weapon for workers in their struggle against managements or one another. The authors of the Israel study found that employees 'symbolically recruit' Israeli national identity in their struggle to maintain separateness from their American merger partners. Like Indian software engineers, Israeli workers were told in cross-cultural workshops that they should submerge their Israeli cultural identity during global interactions and act more 'American' to avoid misunderstandings (Ailon-Souday and Kunda 2003: 1083), but instead they employed an essentialist notion of national identity for their own ends (2003: 1089). Ailon-Souday and Kunda thus argue that Israeli national identity plays '... a central role as a widely utilised, flexible, and powerful symbolic resource that is used in the constitution of difference through subordination' (2003: 1084).

Similarly, Indian IT workers in their narratives sometimes invert the usual cultural hierarchy, for instance in coffee room talk in which they frequently refer to Western colleagues as 'dumb' ('stupid *goras*').²⁶ An Indian manager interviewed in Europe maintained that Europeans need to learn how to work with Indians, just as Indians are forced to learn how to work with Europeans:

I've tried to teach my team here [European employees] how they can better communicate with Indians—how to ask questions and get answers, how to understand the kind of answers that are given. These people with their white skin think they are on top of the world, but I have learnt to change their attitude. They scare Indians by asking, 'Can you finish on such and such a day?' The poor guy thinks it's rude to say no or just can't say no. Instead, I've taught them to ask open-ended questions like, when do you think you can finish this and this? Most importantly I've told them that if the Indians need more time, then just give them that time, don't try and force them to do something that's not possible. It's still very frustrating to deal with the mentality of these white people. Divide and rule is what they did years ago and they still practice it here! Earlier I would get bogged down by the whites, but now I have fairly good relations with them.

This narrative points to the complex negotiations of power that may take place in multicultural work teams, in which hegemonic

discourses (such as about India and the West) may be invoked as well as inverted and deployed by subordinates in hierarchical situations for their own subversive ends. Thus, while cultural training programmes and management discourses promote a highly essentialised notion of culture that feeds into the rigidification of national identities and their utilisation as a mechanism of control, such identities may also be used in workers' strategies of resistance.

The Cultural Logics of Software Outsourcing

This study of software outsourcing projects and Indian software engineers illustrates the multiple and complex ways in which the discourse of culture operates within the global economy. Just as cultural representations of 'Chineseness' in discourses about the triumph of 'Chinese capitalism' are part of the new 'cultural logics' of global capitalism (Ong 1999), the deployment of narratives of cultural difference in the Indian software industry is linked to new modes of control over mobile and virtual workforces. The remote management of software engineers from Europe or the US in the context of outsourced projects and virtual teams, and the integration of onsite Indian engineers into local workplaces, present a new set of 'inter-cultural' problems that are addressed in contradictory ways. On the one hand, Indian software engineers are expected to fit themselves socially and psychologically into the dominant global work culture, while on the other hand they are classified by multicultural management discourse as 'different' (and deficient) in specific ways. This cultural typing has both positive and negative aspects: they are considered to be passive and 'hierarchical', inefficient and disorganised, yet are hard workers ('sloggers') who are technically competent and good at following directions. They are said to lack the social skills and cultural disposition needed to function in the global workplace, so they are subjected to training programmes to outfit them with the skills needed to work effectively in multicultural teams, but they are enjoined to retain the 'positive' aspects of Indian culture such as working long hours and with great dedication in the service of customers.

As Ong (1999) has argued, cultural discourses often intersect with the new global economy in contradictory ways: Indian software engineers as a cultural-economic category have come to occupy a prominent

place in the social imaginary of global capitalism, exemplifying the new global technical labour force that is threatening to steal American (and European) jobs, but which also provides an important means of cost-cutting for corporations located in those countries. While they position themselves within the Indian middle class as upwardly mobile professionals, when they work abroad they are labelled as 'cheap Indians' or 'sloggers'. Recent attempts by the Indian software industry to sell itself on its quality, efficient cross-border organisation (the 'global delivery model') and customer orientation cannot easily erase the essential cultural features that have been assigned to Indian software workers and the Indian IT industry in general: low costs based on lower wages and long hours, combined with technical competence in low-end routine IT work.²⁷

On the surface, there appears to be a contradiction between the substantialised categories of cultural identity that are purveyed by global management theories and the increasing hegemony of a singular model of 'global corporate culture', based on an ideology of individualism and worker autonomy. That is, contemporary management theory celebrates cultural diversity through ideas such as the 'multicultural workplace' and cross-cultural management techniques even as it promotes the idea of a uniform global corporate culture as a way of handling the conflicts that appear to arise from diversity. This contradiction is only apparent, however, because global industries deploy 'culture' in multiple ways for diverse ends, producing conflicting meanings and effects. This raises the question, left mostly unexplored in this chapter, of how these myriad meanings and practices of 'culture' in the workplace inflect the subjectivities of IT workers.

Notes

1. This chapter is based on a sociological study of the Indian IT/ITES (information technology and IT-enabled services) workforce in India and abroad that was carried out by A.R. Vasavi and me along with a research team at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore. The research project was funded by the Indo-Dutch Programme on Alternatives in Development (IDPAD), The Netherlands and was carried out in collaboration with Peter van der Veer. Fieldwork for the study was conducted for 18 months, between January 2004 and June 2005, in Bangalore and in three European countries. Research methods included formal and informal interviews with a large number of software engineers, BPO employees, managers of IT and ITES companies, their family members, and with many others connected

with the industry, as well as observations of training programmes, company events, meetings, and formal and informal interactions at workplaces and elsewhere. For a comprehensive report on the study's findings, see Upadhyaya and Vasavi (2006), available on the NIAS website, www.iisc.ernet.in/nias. For comments and suggestions on the earlier draft, I thank A.R. Vasavi, Sonali Sathaye, Supriya Roy-Chowdhury, and the participants in the International Conference on 'New Global Workforces and Virtual Workplaces' at which this paper was first presented. I am especially grateful to Madhava Prasad for his insightful comments that made me substantially rethink the argument. I hope that I have neither appropriated his argument for my own ends nor misrepresented it.

2. Freeman (2000) is one of the very few ethnographic studies of workers in an off-shore 'high tech' (rather, informatics) service industry.
3. Other key texts of cross-cultural management are Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1993, 1997).
4. 'Individualism–collectivism' and 'power distance' are the variables most often used to differentiate Indian–Western cultural differences. Individualism is defined as '... a loosely knit social framework in which people are supposed to take care of themselves and their immediate families only', while collectivism '... is characterised by a tight social framework in which people ... expect their in-group to look after them, and in exchange for that they feel they owe absolute loyalty to it'. Power distance is defined as '... the extent to which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions and organisations is distributed unequally' (Hofstede 1980b: 45, quoted in Kirkman et al. 2001: 3).
5. On the 'new workplace' and the emergence of new forms of organisational control in the West, see for example Thompson and Warhurst (1998) and McKinlay and Starkey (1998). On the individualisation of work and employment relations in post-industrial US and Europe and their implications for workers, see Benner (2002), Carnoy (2000), and Beck (2000). The process of individualisation is linked to the flexibilisation of labour in the new economy; see Castells (1996) and Harvey (1989).
6. It should be stressed that the deployment of culture as a management strategy is not unique to the software outsourcing business. Rather, 'culture' in various forms has become central to management theory in general and to capitalism itself, over the last twenty years or so (du Gay and Pryke 2002; Ray and Sayer 1999; Vasavi 1996). For instance, most modern corporations consciously 'engineer' distinct 'corporate cultures', a strategy that is linked to the shift in the theory and practice of corporate management away from direct forms of control towards more flexible organisational structures coupled with indirect or 'normative' forms of control (Kunda 1992; Ezzy 2001). The Indian software industry (at least the large service companies and the multinationals operating in India) has self-consciously replicated these strategies, so that employees are expected to accept and conform to the company's culture and identify closely with the company itself. Although this is an important type of cultural management in the software industry, issues related to the production and inculcation of corporate cultures are not addressed in this article.
7. This article draws on interviews and observations in two types of software company in Bangalore—large Indian software services companies that get contracts with customers located abroad for various kinds of software services, and overseas software development centres (ODCs) of multinationals, which are usually wholly-owned subsidiaries of their parent companies. Both types of company are concerned

with the management of cultural difference, but the problems they face are somewhat different due to the nature of their work and the type of outsourcing. The discussion also draws on interviews with Indian and European software engineers and managers in Europe.

8. 'Bodyshopping' refers to the system of contract labour in which consultants hire software engineers in India and send them to client sites abroad. This system was common in the early days of the industry but declined with the rise of more organised labour contracting through the software services companies. For an account of bodyshopping, see Xiang (2002, 2007).
9. Examples of communication skills and cultural training are shown in the NIAS-IDPAD film 'Fun @ Sun: Making of a Global Workplace' (NIAS 2006).
10. One outcome of the demand for soft skills training by IT companies is a burgeoning ancillary industry of consultants who specialise in providing such training programmes for corporates, which outsource much of this work—although some companies have large in-house training departments. Significantly, several of the most successful soft skills training consultants in Bangalore are expatriates (Europeans or Americans). This field has also given an opportunity to a number of young Westerners to work in places like Bangalore for a year or two as providers of cultural knowledge about their own countries as well as (ironically) about India.
11. In another cultural training programme run by the same company, the trainer ran through the same set of lessons about culture and ethnocentrism, and went on to argue that cultural differences matter only when they affect business relationships and the way we work with others:

When you are confronted with a cultural difference, you need to ask yourself, 'What? So What? Now What?' What's the difference? Does it affect the way I build relationships? If not (like differences in food), it doesn't matter, it's just a difference. If yes, then I have to do something about it, maybe I need to adjust myself a bit.

12. Critical organisation theory draws primarily on the work of Foucault, pointing to the emergence of new forms of 'panoptical' disciplinary power in the modern corporation through the normalisation of certain practices, rules, and routines as well as normative systems of control. See, for example, McKinlay and Starkey (1998).
13. This section draws on an IDPAD Working Paper based on the European phase of the IDPAD research project (Upadhyia 2006).
14. Most of the narratives cited refer to Germany and the Netherlands, where we conducted fieldwork, although a similar discourse is found with regard to India and the West in general among software engineers in India.
15. Meijering and van Hoven (2003) found that the same differences were articulated by their informants in their study of Indian IT professionals in Germany.
16. A pseudonym.
17. The objective of this workshop is to make the German engineers aware of 'Indian work culture' and to induce them to change their working style, for instance by giving a more 'personal touch' to management.
18. The diversification of the workforce employed by Indian software companies is a recent development, as the large service providers have transformed themselves into transnational corporations with offices in many countries.

19. This is true of the global software industry in general. As O Riain (2000) notes, when projects are executed by geographically dispersed teams, the main instrument that is used to control the use of time is the project deadline, which governs the rhythm of the projects and creates up and down cycles of work pressure (see Shih 2004). But project deadlines also become the focus of struggles within teams and between developers and their managers, especially when engineers are pressured to complete additional work within the deadline. 'The politics of the contemporary workplace is increasingly the politics of time' (O Riain 2000: 178).
20. This is the case in the 'new economy' generally, in which speed to market is crucial, organisational success is contingent on working long hours, and workers view spending the largest part of their waking hours at the workplace as necessary for career success (Gephart 2002; Hayes 1989; Shih 2004). The issue of working hours in the IT industry, and their ideological justification, is discussed at greater length in Upadhyia (2006) and Upadhyia and Vasavi (2006).
21. It is striking that the same discourse was voiced by Israeli employees of a high-tech company to explain their much longer working hours compared to Americans—that Israelis are 'crazy when it comes to work' (Ailon-Souday and Kunda 2003: 1084).
22. This discussion points to a major disjuncture between the public image that software companies attempt to retail—the 'global' quality of their work and working conditions—and the fact that their competitiveness is still based primarily on the labour cost differential, which in turn is based not just on the difference in salaries but also on the long working hours put in by Indian engineers.
23. CMM refers to the international quality certification that has been achieved by many Indian software services companies (the highest level is CMM Level 5). In order to signal quality to potential international customers, the Indian industry has gone in heavily for such quality certifications. The main feature of CMM type models is that they are extremely 'process oriented': they prescribe rationalised and systematic processes for the organisation of workflows at every stage of the software cycle and for management practices, as well as systems of detailed monitoring, measuring, reporting and evaluation of work completed. Quality processes are supposed to reduce the incidence of errors in software ('bugs') that are caused by the individualistic nature of programming. Most programmers dislike having to follow 'process' because it removes the scope for creativity and innovation. The informant is referring to the frequently noted attribute of Indian software engineers—that they are 'good at following directions' (and less good at creative tasks).
24. The case studies of software outsourcing arrangements presented in Sahay et al. (2003) show that these issues are ubiquitous in cross-border collaborations of this kind.
25. Of course, this would be true in almost any organisation, but in the software industry control over knowledge is particularly crucial because the successful execution of projects depends on the free flow of information. As O Riain (2000: 185) points out, information flow is always problematic in multi-sited projects, and in such contexts there is greatest scope for using control over information as a weapon in workplace struggles (see Sewell 2005).
26. *Gora* is a somewhat derogatory term for whites.

27. While successful Indian Silicon Valley entrepreneurs have created an alternative image of the Indian 'techie', these wealthy NRIs (Non-Resident Indians) find a place primarily within Indian middle class and diasporic imaginations rather than in the global narratives of the new capitalism.

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