Third-World 'Sloggers' or Elite Global Professionals? Using Organizational Toolkits to Redefine Work Identity in IT Offshore-Outsourcing

Sharon Koppman
Organization and Management
The Paul Merage School of Business
University of California, Irvine, CA
skoppman@uci.edu

Elisa Mattarelli
Department of Engineering Sciences and Methods
University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Reggio Emilia, Italy
elisa.mattarelli@unimore.it

Amar Gupta
School of Engineering
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA
agupta@mit.edu

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Abstract

Organizations increasingly rely on teams that span national and organizational boundaries, yet team members in emerging countries and vendor firms are not treated as professional peers by their Western and client-based peers. To understand how they respond to this identity threat, we integrate two literatures that suggest two possible answers: an organizational response, based on the critical literature on top-down identity regulation, and an individual response, based on the positive literature on bottom-up identity construction. Drawing on in-depth interviews and archival data from three Indian IT offshore-outsourcing firms, we examine how organizational and individual identity processes work in tandem to address this threat. We find that firms do not resolve this threat by regulating employee identity directly as they claim but instead provide workers with an *organizational toolkit*—a set of organizationally-available cultural resources (e.g., frames and stories) and political resources (e.g., policies and procedures) that workers use selectively and strategically to construct positive identities. By bringing a toolkit perspective to identity processes, we contribute to theory and research on cross-level identity linkages, the strategic nature of identity processes, and the local context of global identity.

Keywords: identity regulation, identity construction, work identity, cultural toolkits, offshore-outsourcing, global work

The US client manager called up and said he wouldn't speak to anybody other than the Director. He said these [Indian offshore developers] are a bunch of guys who don't know what they are doing and they're screwing up every day, and so I am going to talk only to the Director.
(Indian offshore project manager)

Offshore, we feel that we've been made to do all the junk work.
(Indian offshore team leader)

The comments above highlight a central problem in global work collaborations: team members from emerging countries and vendor firms are not treated as professionals by their Western and client-based counterparts (Leonardi and Rodriguez-Lluesma 2013; Levina and Vaast 2008; Metiu 2006; Mirchandani 2012). Yet the growth of offshore outsourcing (McCarthy 2004) and transnational corporations (UNCTAD 2010) has led organizations to increasingly rely on teams that span national and organizational boundaries. To effectively manage these forms of organizing, we need to move beyond the Western perspective adopted by much of the management literature to examine how people and organizations from emerging countries and vendor firms respond to the unique challenges they face.

For offshore team members in emerging countries, we suspect these collaborations threaten the values, beliefs, and attributes they use to define themselves in the workplace—that is, their *work identity* (Ibarra 1999). To take Indian offshore engineering as an example, Indian engineers enter these arrangements with a view of themselves as high-status professionals (Zimmermann and Ravishankar 2011) but their sense of who they are at work is threatened by their experience working with Western colleagues and clients, who complain about their "poor communication skills," refer to them by derogatory nicknames like "cheap Indians" or "sloggers[1]," and assign them less interesting and complex work (Leonardi and Bailey 2008; Metiu 2006; Upadhya 2008; Upadhya and Vasavi 2006).

How do people and firms offshore in emerging countries respond to such threats? Two distinct identity literatures suggest two possible answers. Scholars in the positive identity tradition assert, in response to identity threat, people construct a positive sense of self in the workplace (Dutton et al. 2010; Rosso et al. 2010; Wrzesniewski 2003). Within this framework, we would expect individuals to respond

[1] An term used to describe Indians' willingness to work long hours and accept undesirable work tasks without complaining (Upadhya and Vasavi 2006).

through positive identity construction. Others contend that constructing a positive identity at work is a "narcissistic fantasy" (Schwartz 1992). Instead, worker identities are "regulated" by organizations in order to secure their compliance (Alvesson and Willmott 2002). Within this framework, we would expect organizations to respond through employee identity regulation.

In this article, we integrate these two literatures, seldom in dialogue, to build a multilevel model of how individuals and their organizations respond to work identity threats. While work identities are embedded in organizational arrangements and influenced by organizational-level processes, we know little about how identity processes work across levels of analysis because most studies of identity focus on only one level (Ashforth et al. 2011; Brown 2014; Chreim et al. 2007; Horton et al. 2014). Global workplaces—in particular, knowledge-intensive work collaborations between outsourcing firms located "offshore" in emerging countries and client firms in Western countries—are an ideal context for this study. In this context, the threat in question is extreme and both identity processes described above are likely operating: offshore-outsourcing organizations try to *regulate* employee identity through prescriptions and policies (Nadeem 2011), while knowledge workers typically have enough discretionary power to construct a positive identity at work (Grant and Parker 2009). Drawing on in-depth interviews and archival data from three large Indian offshore-outsourcing firms, we find that, contrary to the claims of top managers, offshore-outsourcing firms do not resolve this threat by regulating employee identities directly. Instead, they provide workers with a set of cultural resources (e.g., frames and stories) and political resources (e.g., policies and procedures) that workers use selectively and strategically to construct positive identities. Our analysis leads us to develop an emergent theory of how identity regulation and identity construction become linked through this set of resources, or *organizational toolkits*, which contributes to research on cross-level identity linkages, the strategic nature of identity processes, and the local context of global identity.

Identity Threats at Work

Experiences seen as a potentially harmful to the meaning, value or enactment of an identity, or *identity threats* (Petriglieri 2011, pg. 644), are experienced by workers across professions, industries, and

hierarchical levels. Such threats often arise from specific events or interactions that challenge workers' ability to affirm identity attributes, particularly those that convey status (e.g., I am a highly-performing employee) or distinctiveness (e.g., I am a technical whiz) (Brewer 1991; Elsbach 2003). For example, when a Silicon Valley tech company eliminated assigned office space, employees felt their identities were threatened because they lost their ability to affirm their distinctiveness through personal photos and their status through plaques (Elsbach 2003). Threat responses described in the literature range from the individual-level to the organizational-level. At the individual level, individuals either protect the threatened identity or *restructure* elements to protect it from harm, though restructuring is more common when the identity in question is newly acquired (Petriglieri 2011), as is the case for offshore developers. At the organizational level, managers regulate employee identities by motivating individuals to affirm organizationally-desirable elements (Alvesson and Willmott 2002).

A substantial literature in the positive scholarship perspective (Cameron et al. 2003) argues that individuals respond to identity threats by restructuring their identity around new positive meanings. In this perspective, people strive for a positive sense of self in the workplace and to imbue their identity with positive meanings (Dutton et al. 2010; Rosso et al. 2010; Wrzesniewski 2003). Work identities that are positive—that is, valuable, good or beneficial (Dutton et al. 2010)—promote favorable self-views, resilience, and transcendence (Kreiner and Sheep 2009; Roberts et al. 2009). Thus, when a work identity is threatened, this stigma is reframed into a self-serving and positive identity (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999). Male strippers, for example, positively restructure perceptions their work is "crude" and "cheap" by describing themselves as "entertainers" with a role in promoting women's rights (Dressel and Petersen 1982). Similarly, dog catchers respond to their negative image as "puppy killers" by restructuring the meanings associated with their job, describing it as "tough" and "dangerous" work that safeguards public health. In the case of offshore global work, offshore developers in India and Tunisia respond to identity threat by changing elements of their jobs to match their identities (Mattarelli and Tagliaventi 2015). How they restructure elements of their identities to match their jobs, however, remains unexplored.

This positive perspective has been criticized for neglecting the role of organizational control (Anteby 2008; Learmonth and Humphreys 2011). Guided by the assumption that workers' dignity is at odds with the organization's need for control, a more critical body of scholarship contends that organizations regulate workers' identities to achieve their own ends (Hodson 1996). From this perspective, organizations "usurp both freedom and rationality from the little individual men caught in them" (Mills 1956, p. xvii) and organizational efforts to "regulate" (Alvesson and Willmott 2002), "manufacture" (Burawoy 1979), and "engineer" (Kunda 1992) employees' identities imposes an ideological form of control more constraining than the hierarchy they replace (Barker 1993). Employee identity has been shown to be a "target and medium of management's regulatory efforts" (Alvesson and Willmott 2002, p. 623) for workers as diverse as management consultants (Kärreman and Alvesson 2004), paratroopers (Thornborrow and Brown 2009), and engineers (Kunda 1992). Similar patterns have also been observed in Indian offshoring. Managers at Indian call centers, for example, pressure employees to shed their Indian identity, encouraging them to eat American-style food, "neutralize" their accents, and take American names at work (Mirchandani 2012).

In this article, we integrate the research on positive identity with critical research on identity as control to build a better understanding of the links between individual and organizational responses to work identity threats. While we suspect positive identity construction and organizational identity regulation work in tandem, we know little about how these cross-level identity processes work because most studies of identity focus on one level of analysis, such as the individual or the firm (Ashforth et al. 2011; Brown 2014; Chreim et al. 2007; Horton et al. 2014). Bringing together these two perspectives rarely in dialogue, we build from the premise that work identities are neither wholly detrimental nor beneficial, but rather a tacit compromise negotiated through interactions between workers and management. What bears study, in our view, is the multilevel and interactive process by which this compromise is achieved.

Towards a Integrative Model of Identity Regulation and Positive Identity

To understand the links between individual and organizational responses to individual identity threats, we need a model that accounts for the multilevel and interactive nature of this process. Given that research on identity usually focuses on one level of analysis (Ashforth et al. 2011; Brown 2014; Chreim et al. 2007; Horton et al. 2014), the literature on cross-level identity dynamics is small and divided into two camps: bottom-up approaches mostly inspired by an interest in positive identity and top-down approaches mostly informed by an interest in identity regulation.

In line with the positive identity perspective, most research on cross-level identity dynamics examines the process from the bottom up: how lower-level identities (usually of individuals) combine to form higher-level identities (usually of organizations). Ashforth and colleagues (2011) theorize that individual cognition contributes to the emergence of shared cognition, which eventually becomes institutionalized reality. In other words, individual identities come together and construct a shared sense of "who we are," which, over time, becomes taken-for-granted (Ashforth et al. 2011). This bottom-up approach has informed a small number of studies that examine how higher-order identities emerge from the lower-order ones (e.g., Beck and Plowman 2013; Gioia et al. 2010). For example, Corley and Gioia (2004) show how individual leaders build a collective identity in the wake of a corporate spin-off.

Conversely, the literature on identity as a means of organizational control considers cross-level identity dynamics from the top-down, emphasizing how higher-level identities shape lower-level ones. Organizations, from this view, influence employees' sense of self through managerial discourse that employees come to accept as their own (Fleming and Spicer 2014). This top-down process, scholars contend, functions as a form of normative control by directing the feelings, thoughts and values that guide employees' action (Barker 1993; Kunda 1992). The relatively small literature on identity regulation (Alvesson and Willmott 2002) examines how managerial discourse and individual identity become linked. While this literature is theoretically multilevel, it is rarely so empirically: most studies focus on workers' experience of organizational control. For example, Thornborrow and Brown (2009) study paratroopers' accounts of how they came to identify with the British Parachute Regimen and Musson and Duberley (2007) analyze how supervisors in a manufacturing company make sense of managerial

discourse on "participation." In the small number of studies that interview organizational members from different hierarchical levels, these differences are not the main focus (e.g., Brown et al. 2010). One exception is Chreim and colleagues' (2007) study of how physicians reconstruct their professional selves by drawing on identity elements from their government and professional association. Their focus on such an elite profession, however, leaves open questions about workers with relatively less power—such as offshore developers—who must rely on different, more subtle strategies.

Integrating insights from the bottom-up interest in positive identity and the top-down interest in regulation, we analyze the distinct responses of individuals and their organizations to the very same identity threat. Our organizational toolkit model of identity regulation and construction, which emerged from this analysis, offers three main contributions to the literature. First, by bringing together the two small literatures on cross-level identity dynamics, we show how top-down and bottom-up identity processes work in tandem. Only by empirically studying how identities become linked across levels of analysis can we understand how identity construction and regulation really work (Alvesson and Willmott 2002; Ashforth et al. 2011). Second, by considering both positive and critical perspectives, we shed new light on the strategic elements of positive identities and how they can enable and constrain individual and collective goals. Finally, by bringing an interpretive lens to a literature characterized by a functionalist approach to culture (Ailon-Souday and Kunda 2003; Hinds et al. 2011), we show how local context shapes what it means to "be global."

Data and Methods

To examine these issues, we conducted a qualitative case study of three major Indian IT companies that adopted the "onsite-offshore model" (Vlaar et al. 2008) using two data sources: interviews and archival materials. The context of our study—Indian offshore-outsourcing firms—represents an extreme case of identity threat (Eisenhardt 1989), as the threat present in any client-vendor relationship is compounded by our interviewees' location in the emerging world. While Indian developers working offshore see themselves as members of an elite profession (Zimmermann and Ravishankar 2011), this identity is regularly threatened in daily interactions with Western colleagues and clients (Upadhya 2008). Extreme

cases such as ours are valuable for theory building because the object of study is more visible than it would be in other circumstances (Pratt et al. 2006). Multilevel issues are particularly salient in this context in which both identity regulation and positive identity construction are operating. In large multinational firms employing knowledge workers, organizations enact policies to elicit organizationally-desirable identities *and* workers have the autonomy to construct positive self-definitions.

Context and data collection

Our study focuses on three major Indian IT firms that adopted the onsite-offshore model. In this model, each client has a team that includes developers located "onsite" at the client site (e.g., the United States), "offshore" in India, and "nearshore" in countries near the client (e.g., Canada). We were granted access to these three firms through personal contacts of the third author and after an internal approval process. Table 1 details characteristics of each firm. All three used CMM (level 3 to 5) certification for software development and work protocols, templates, and collaborative technologies to formalize and document the process. New team members received a one-to-three-month induction training on technical aspects of particular projects and their client's industry, organization, and national culture. Indians working offshore completed periodic rotations onsite.

~ Insert Table 1 here ~

Interview and archival data were collected at all three companies. The second author conducted 37 in-depth semi-structured interviews in Bangalore and Chennai, India, between May and September 2007. All interviewees were told the project was about the organization of globally distributed work, the original focus of this project. They were asked about work tasks, interactions with team members, difficulties they encountered, how they collaborated at a distance, and their view of the distributed work process. Most of our interviewees (24) had worked both onsite and offshore. Given that, in the initial interviews, work identity emerged as a relevant concept, we added questions to capture the values, attributes, and preferences interviewees associated with their work lives. Each interview was audio recorded and lasted about one-and-a-half hours. Interviews were transcribed from audio files to Word documents by professional transcribers.

At the organizational level, we interviewed three Indian senior managers (one from each firm). We supplemented these interviews with archival sources, namely, all the white papers and marketing materials from each firm website that mentioned Indian outsourcing or offshoring from 2005-2013, a total of 21 documents and 196 pages. We consider top managers and the authors of these texts as speaking on behalf of their organization rather than expressing their individual opinions (see online appendix for detailed explanation). At the individual level, we interviewed 34 Indian offshore workers involved in eight long-term IT development and maintenance projects with US-based clients in retail, banking, and automotive industries. This included nine project managers, 12 team leaders, and 13 developers. We consider project managers and team leaders as expressing individual opinions rather than speaking on behalf of their organization because leadership titles have a different meaning in Indian outsourcing firms where mobility occurs very quickly, firms have more levels of management, and most of these managers supervise only a small number of colleagues (see online appendix for detailed explanation). The project managers and team leaders we interviewed had an average organizational tenure of just three-and-a-half years and total work experience of just six years.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using an iterative grounded theory coding process between the literature, data, and emergent grounded categories (Glaser and Strauss 1967). We began with a broad interest in how offshore workers in India collaborate with Westerners. We expected Indians would express resentment and feel they were being forced to adapt to Western practices, yet the coding process revealed our initial expectation was wrong. Rather than a process of (coercive) adaptation to Western practice, offshore workers described a process of redefining what it meant to be a professional in the global workplace.

Following Gioia et al. (2013), Figure 1 depicts the data structure that emerged from a three-stage coding process conducted by the first and second author. We began by generating first-order concepts through open-coding, a descriptive process that uses *in vivo* codes derived from respondents' terminology; for instance, we coded recurrent top managers' claims Indians were global employees with a superior ability to adapt to other cultures (see first column in Figure 1). Second, we looked for

relationships between first-order concepts. By grouping convergent categories at a higher level of abstraction, we identified theoretical categories or second-order themes (see the second column in Figure 1). For instance, we grouped the abovementioned first-order concepts ("Indians are adaptable global employees") into the second-order theme "organizational discourse." We held joint meetings to compare second-order themes and reconcile differences. Third, we looked for aggregate analytical dimensions and met weekly to discuss emergent dimensions and discrepancies, eventually constructing a shared interpretation. "Organizational discourse" for example, was grouped into the aggregate analytical dimension "identity regulation." Finally, we constructed a grounded model by identifying relationships between second-order themes and aggregate analytical dimensions (i.e., "substantive theory") and a more abstract general model (i.e., "formal theory") (Glaser and Strauss 1967). As described in the online appendix, we tested the construct validity of this coding scheme and used data triangulation to temper concerns our categories were an artifact of the particular firms studied.

~ Insert Figure 1 here ~

Findings

Our analysis of how Indian outsourcing firms and workers respond to identity threats revealed that organizations do not resolve threats by regulating their employees' identities directly; instead, they provide workers with "bits of culture" that function as a set of resources for individual identity construction. We use the term *organizational toolkits* to conceptualize this process. Organizational toolkits, as we define them, are an extension of *cultural toolkits*—that is, publically available symbolic resources (e.g., frames, stories, and justifications) that shape action, not by defining the ends or values people seek, but by defining the means or tools they have at their disposal (Swidler 1986). Organizational toolkits are symbolic resources that are available within an organization (Harrison and Corley 2011) and actively promoted by top managers (DiBenigno and Kellogg 2014). By bringing the toolkit perspective to identity regulation, we argue that identity regulation works, not by motivating employee behavior directly through organizationally-desirable identities, but by providing employees with a set of tools to strategically construct professional selves and navigate everyday work problems. In particular, we focus

on how workers strategically use organizationally-provided cultural tools, as well as *political tools* such as policies, procedures, and systems (Kellogg 2011), to respond to identity threats posed by global work arrangements.[2]

Our multilevel grounded model (Figure 2, Panel A) previews our findings. We find that relationships and work allocation in the global workplace threatened Indian offshore developers' identity as elite professionals. In response, organizations tried to regulate employee identity directly through discourse and policy. Workers used this discourse and policy selectively and strategically as a toolkit to construct positive identities and improve their work experience. The following sections present our findings, organized by aggregate analytical dimensions and second-order themes.

~ Insert Figure 2, Panel A here ~

Threats to Indian Offshore Developers' Professional Selves in the Global Workplace

The offshoring firms we studied were among the most desirable job placements for young Indian IT professionals; many graduated at the top of their class from prestigious engineering institutions. Although they entered global work arrangements with a view of themselves as highly-skilled professionals, this identity was threatened in their subsequent experiences working with Western counterparts. Below, we describe how relationships and work allocation in the global workplace threatened Indian offshore developers' view of themselves as professionals and, more specifically, their social status (Elsbach, 2003) as elite professionals.

Relationship threats

Indians are not treated as peers. The Indian offshore developers we interviewed worked as IT service providers for large client companies and relied on client interactions to identify the requirements for creating or updating information systems. As a result, they saw their relationships with clients as central to their definition as professionals. For example, a project manager defined herself as a professional through her ability to maintain a good relationship with her client: "I am an IT professional,

[2] We are not attempting to describe all of the organizational tools available in the three organizations under study, rather only those used to respond to identity threats posed by global work collaborations.

so I see myself with the professional characteristics of being able to talk to the client, being able to provide customer satisfaction, being to meet clients' expectations." Yet many of our informants described how these relationships left them feeling unprofessional. A project manager, for example, described his "relational problems" with American clients: "There were a lot of hot customer situations. The client manager called up and said he wouldn't speak to anybody other than the Director. He said these are a bunch of guys who don't know what they are doing and they're screwing up every day, and so I am going to talk only to the Director." This experience, he explained, was about professionalism: "That was a stage we passed through, but we learned how to be more professional." A team leader similarly lamented, "Sometimes Indians do not have very good communication skills and some clients, you make a small mistake and they will make a mountain out of a molehill kind of thing, will raise fingers at you, and point out small mistakes. They will blow it out of proportion." Senior managers similarly described how their employees were not always treated as partners: "Things have moved towards more partnership, where American companies and [Indian outsourcing company] are partnering. When it comes to partnering, Americans understanding our culture definitely helps the relationship. But there are lot of American companies that we work with that still don't care."

Work allocation threats

Indians are not treated as experts. According to Indian offshore developers, they were not treated as trained experts but rather "sloggers" assigned "junk work." Such treatment threatened their sense of self because complex and interesting work was central to their understanding of professionalism. "As a professional I don't just want to code code code," a developer said. "I like to do work that others can recognize as important, something I can be proud of with my parents, which speaks to my expertise." Yet many Indian offshore developers described how the work they received offshore threatened their view of themselves as professionals. "Offshore, we feel that we've been made to do all junk work," a team leader explained. "It's very, very boring." Work was considered "junk" not only because it was less intellectually stimulating but also because it was less emotionally satisfying. As a project manager explained, "At offshore, you never get to execute the projects. You just code and test and you deliver it to

onsite. Onsite, you actually see your code going into production live and it's a very good experience." In addition, Indians working offshore were expected to stay at work late (often past midnight) and come in on the weekend, while Western team members nearshore (i.e., in an organizational unit located near the client's country) were not. "Canadian developers' work is typically from eight to five. Unlike Indians, who are ready to take late-night calls, in Canada they generally resist all these activities," a project manager explained. As a result, a team leader explained, "We [Indians offshore] end up slogging, which I don't think is right. We'll push ourselves to the max and we'll work 24 hours a day and that doesn't help productivity—what that does is make the morale of the team go down." Senior managers similarly reported that their Indian employees were treated by Westerners, not as professionals, but as "low-cost labor." As one explained, "A lot of American companies treat us as pure-play offshore vendors and they would just give us a bit piece of work and, you know, expect us to do and give them back."

Identity Regulation: Discourse and Policy

Indian senior managers responded to these threats to their employees' view of themselves as professionals through identity regulation grounded in an idealized positive image of globalization. By asserting that threatened aspects of their employees' identities held a positive meaning in the global workplace (i.e., through organizational discourse) and by implementing training and rotation programs aligned with these positive meanings (i.e., through organizational policies), senior managers said they secured more client relationships and more work for their organizations. From a managerial perspective, employee identity regulation strategically benefitted the firm.

Identity regulation through organizational discourse

Using discourse to define the global employee

Through discourse on globalization as a positive force and path to equity with the West, senior managers framed their Indian employees as the ideal global workforce, assigning positive meanings to their threatened identities. Both interviews with senior managers and the marketing materials we analyzed portrayed globalization as a force for progress. "The global economy, it's not an economy basically restricted to US or Europe," a senior manager explained, "We talk about the global economy

and *how to flatten our world* in terms of leveraging the maximum benefit." Similarly, a white paper from Firm 1 asserted, "Significant changes driven by globalization, demographics, technology, and regulation are leveling the business playing field and *creating a Flat World*" (Firm 1). Globalization, in this view, had transformed the demands of the workplace, positioning India with its "rich pool of leading engineering talent," who could "integrate easily with client staff" (Firm 3), as "the most attractive sourcing destination" (Firm 1). "I don't know whether 'outsourcing' is the right word," a senior manager asserted. "It should be 'right-sourcing' because you're sourcing to the right place."

In this context, Indians were described as ideal global employees due to their "adaptability" to other cultures and "hungry" devotion to work. In their relationships with Westerners, adaptability was described, not as deference, but as a desirable trait Indians possessed. Likewise, Indians' acceptance of lower quality work and conditions was assigned the positive meaning of superior work devotion.

Indians are "adaptable" global employees. Corroborating past research (e.g., Mirchandani 2012; Nadeem 2011; Upadhya 2008; Upadhya and Vasavi 2006), senior managers described Indians as an ideal global workforce because of their adaptability. In this context, adaptability was defined as the ability to quickly internalize the communication styles, norms, and behaviors of another (typically Western) culture. Indian employees were better equipped to adapt to other national cultures, managers reasoned, because India was such a diverse country. As a senior manager explained,

> One thing good about India is that the culture, the food habits, the skin texture, the features, everything changes every 100 km in India - it is that diverse […] So, we are generally tuned towards *being sensitive* to fellow cultures. We are, from a mindset perspective, probably one of the most open-minded society when it comes to cultural adaptation. *We have a great advantage, because we have this natural inborn ability to adapt to cultures because of our own diversity.* You know, we have diversity of religion, we have diversity of language, we have diversity of basic social fabric, so that really helps us.

As illustrated by this comment, top managers claimed Indians' "natural inborn ability" to adapt to other cultures made them ideal global employees. Even though this assertion was based on debatable assumptions about Indians' open-mindedness, it reveals how adaptation was portrayed, not as a choice, but as an *ability* that gave Indian workers a great advantage in the global workplace.

By describing adaptation as a desirable Indian attribute, top management motivated Indian employees to address relationship challenges by acting like Westerners. Top managers told their Indian employees that cultural adaptation was the correct response to a positive encounter with another culture. "We say, if you like something from another culture, you adopt it," a senior manager explained. Indian employees were advised to deal with problems that arose in their relationships with Westerners by adapting to their culture: "Indian cultural style will be a longish email but Americans will send two lines. When the Indian sees that, if he is not aware of their style, the Indian feels like the American is not interested in him. But once you tell the Indian, just educate him, he is fine. We just tell Indians to fashion the email in the way Americans understand best." A second described a similar strategy: "Americans use slang, that's how they are. So my managers have to be continuously mentored and coached not to take it to heart. My managers are continuously being encouraged and motivated and monitored on these kinds of cultural sensitivities." Although top managers noted Western clients did not make similar efforts to adapt to Indian culture—e.g., "The need is from our side to adapt to their culture;" "There are lot of U.S. companies that we work with that don't really care too much about cultural sensitivity"—they consistently asserted adaptation was a desirable skill. In this way, they justified, at least to themselves, the one-sided nature of cultural adaptation.

Indians are "devoted" global employees. Top managers also defined Indians as desirable employees due to their strong internal commitment to prioritize their work over their personal lives, i.e., their work devotion (Blair-Loy 2009). Corroborating previous analyses of Indian outsourcing (Mirchandani 2012; Upadhya and Vasavi 2006), the marketing materials created for global clients portrayed Indians as an ideal workforce of "enthusiastic and highly motivated individuals" (Firm 3). This image was particularly salient when senior managers compared Indians to employees from other countries. At the time of the interviews, all three companies were transitioning from a predominantly Indian workforce to one that also employed Westerners, posing challenges for managers accustomed to "devoted" Indians. As a senior manager said,

> We strongly believe, at the top management level, that to become a global company we have to bring people from all nationalities and all geographies…But when we acquired Australia, a new company, we faced challenges, because our ways of working were different. In India there has been, at least last one or two decades, a hunger to perform. *You come in from a hunger,* a background, where you need to do that, whereas countries in the Western World have been satisfied, they have done well. There's a comfort level**,** so *you don't have to stretch* and that conflict comes in sometimes. In Australia at 5 one needs to go home. Whereas the Indian guy sitting over there *doesn't mind being there until 10* to finish his work. So these are the cultural conflicts we see. We don't pay overtime in India, it's a part of your job, the accountability, you can finish it earlier and go home or you sit more hours and do it, it's your problem. But in some countries you have to pay overtime.

As exemplified by this comment, upper-level management claimed Indians worked late and prioritized work over family because that was who they were. In their view, work devotion was a positive identity attribute that made Indians more desirable global employees than Westerners.

Senior managers motivated Indian offshore employees to accept lower work quality and conditions through work devotion. "The type of work a person would be doing in an offshore maintenance project is routine work so there needs to be a lot of motivating behind the scene to keep the momentum of the team running," a senior manager explained. "So we tell project managers to keep motivating the team by keeping them informed of how critical they are to the company and how important the work is to the customer." Motivational strategies grounded in devotion were considerably less effective, they found, when dealing with a non-Indian workforce. Managing employees from countries that lacked devotion, they lamented, meant lowering their work expectations. "In Uruguay or even in the U.S., people place much more importance on their private lives and they stick to their timings, so we cannot expect the same output from a Uruguayan associate as we expect of an Indian associate," a senior manager explained.

Identity regulation through organizational policies

Instituting policy to train Indians to be global employees

Organizations did not rely on words alone to address identity threats in global collaborations; managers also implemented policies designed to train Indians to be global employees. In all three firms under study, relationship threats were addressed by requiring all developers who had contact with nationals

from other countries to undergo mandatory training on "cultural sensitivities." Similarly, all three organizations implemented offshore-onsite rotations to address work allocation threats.

Cultural sensitivity training. To top managers, cultural sensitivity training addressed relationship threats by showing Indians how to be global employees. Offered through in-person sessions or e-learning materials, training on national differences was mandatory for Indian offshore developers whose daily work involved interacting with people in another country: "It is mandated that Indians who are working with other cultures go through trainings to understand the sensitivities of those cultures. You know, how to behave, general conversation etiquette, even eating habits and dressing. All those things are taught to Indians here," explained a senior manager. While such trainings were ostensibly "sensitizing" developers to specific Western countries, their content emphasized adaptation to cultural traits deemed "typical" of the target country (Upadhya 2008; Upadhya and Vasavi 2006). National culture, in this context, was reduced to fixed traits that supposedly categorize an entire country's behavioral patterns—behavioral patterns Indians were encouraged to adopt. As another senior manager said, "We train them. We have documents on how Americans behave." The third asserted, "After they attend entry-level cross-cultural sensitivity training, they are aware of all the various cultural significances of the target country." To top managers, this organizational policy aligned with the narrative of Indians as adaptable to motivate Indian employees to act like Westerners when interacting with clients.

Offshore-onsite rotations. Top managers used offshore-onsite rotations to address work allocation threats by motivating Indians to be global employees. During their employment, offshore employees would spend from a few months to a couple years working "onsite" at their clients' offices. Top managers considered these rotations a powerful motivator because the tasks completed onsite were more complex and interactive and thus more appropriate for a professional of their standing: "To keep their motivational level to an extent possible, we need to keep them on *as much dynamic work as possible*, so we have implemented these rotation policies. After a certain time, they can look for on-site opportunities, to provide them the benefit of facing the client," explained a senior manager. The other two concurred: "Regular rotation happens because being onsite is also one motivational element to keep

people in the job"; "Any person who completes one to two years, they *get a chance* to go abroad." This policy, combined with discourse on Indian devotion, was said to motivate Indians to accept lower quality work and conditions when working offshore.

Organizational goals of identity regulation

Top managers used discourse and policy strategically to address relationship and work allocation threats and gain organizational benefits. According to senior managers, employee identity regulation helped their organizations build new client relationships and gain more work from existing ones.

More relationships. Cultural adaptation and cultural training were considered central to reach new clients. For example, when one of the three companies we studied decided to enter the Japan market and increase the number of clients in that area, it invested in a cultural training program to help Indian employees adapt to Japanese habits, customs, and ways of doing business: "Our Chairman was very keen on building the Japan story, so we built a good Japanese team," a senior manager remarked. "We run a complete Japanese training program here and we take regular Indians and then train them in technical Japanese, and make them ready for the Japanese market." From this perspective, Indian adaptation was highly desirable, implemented through cultural training, and motivated by business interests. A second elaborated, "In any business, the success factor lies in getting an alignment towards cultural fit. If I'm culturally oriented, I can fit into your culture and understand your feelings and your thoughts, trust will slowly develop, the relationship slowly develops. It doesn't matter which part of the globe you've gone to." As he described, cultural adaptation allowed his organization to develop new client relationships.

More work. Senior managers also linked their "devoted workforce" offshore and onsite to attaining more work from clients. All three senior managers described how Indians' devotion—their "stretching," "accountability" and "commitment"—allowed their organizations to maintain relatively low labor costs, necessary for gaining more work and, conversely, how the "lifestyle" and "comfort" of Western employees raised costs. "The problem is we are a global company now and we are working out of Canada, and in Canada there are mostly Canadian people," a senior manager explained. "We cannot discriminate, like I want Indian, I don't want Canadian…But in Canada, because of their lifestyle, their

cultural background, they don't like night calls, weekends, those kinds of work. So that becomes tricky and challenging." A second concurred, describing how the "comfort" of Australian associates (i.e., their unwillingness to work late and on weekends) interfered with his ability "to leverage cost." As a result, rotation policies benefitted their firms because they brought "devoted" Indian employees onsite. "We have a global delivery model that is onsite-offshore, so we can transfer resources, people, anywhere to anywhere, without fail and *we are committed*," the third explained. "Each time we heard the same thing from our clients: Big Five firms keep squeezing you for money, but they don't deliver on time like we do." In their view, employee devotion and firm rotation policies allowed the company to gain more work.

Individual Identity Construction: Using Discourse and Policy as "Organizational Toolkits"

To management, organizational discourse and policy resolved relationship and work allocation threats to their Indian employees' professionalism that arose in the global workplace, allowing them to secure more relationships and more work. Their employees, however, said that organizational discourse and policy did not resolve the threats they faced. Instead, Indian offshore workers responded to these threats and organizational efforts to regulate their identity *critically*, by questioning values and rules imposed by management, and *positively*, by using bits of organizational discourse and policy as a set of resources, what we term *organizational toolkits*, to construct a new definition of professionalism in the global workplace. We use the metaphor of a toolkit, following Swidler (1986), to highlight the way employees used bits of discourse and policy *strategically* and *selectively* through individual identity construction, rather than passively accepting the values and rules imposed from above. Indian offshore developers used the positive frames, stories, and justifications, or *cultural tools* (Swidler 1986) provided by their organization to *restructure* their work identity around the ideal of a global professional who was culturally flexible rather than adaptable, forthright and visible rather than devoted. Similarly, the organizational policies introduced by top managers were used as *political tools* (Kellogg 2011) to become culturally flexible, forthright and visible. Taken together, Indian offshore developers' strategies explicitly sought to change their work experience by improving the quality of their relationships, working conditions, and the tasks assigned to the offshore team.

Strategic Use of Cultural Toolkits for Identity Construction

Resisting organizational discourse

Indian developers did not accept organizational efforts to regulate their identities whole cloth. Based on their personal experience with client relationships, work quality and working conditions, they responded critically to organizational discourse on Indian adaptability and devotion.

Questioning Indian adaptability. Indian developers questioned organizational assertions that adaptation was desirable. Many expressed dislike for norms, practices, and traditions in the Western countries, most often the United States. Reflecting on his experience working in the US, a team leader recalled: "It's a bit strange, when you first go to onsite and you find these people are being a little aloof…Our life in India we generally go out, talk to our neighbors, we know everybody in the apartments, but in the US, it's like we never knew who was living next to us. So it was very strange." Negative encounters with Western culture led him to doubt managements' claim that adaptation was the correct threat response. "You obviously need to learn from the West as well," he continued, "but if you adhere to the way they talk and the way they dress up and all that, I don't think that's the right way to do it." Being adaptable, in his opinion, was not "the right way" to collaborate with Westerners.

Questioning Indian devotion. Discourse crediting Indian devotion for lower work quality and conditions was not embraced by all interviewees. A project manager, for instance, described how his Indian team members reacted when their Canadians colleagues were given a different work schedule. Based on the advice of his senior manager, he had shifted the project schedule so Canadians only had to work during their daytime. This shift was met with resistance from his Indian team members: "They said 'Why is there discrimination? Why is he not in the late shift, why is he not getting late-night calls?'" Indeed, many interviewees questioned managements' assertion Indians "did not mind" working irregular hours and expressed displeasure with their work schedules. For example, one complained about his sensitivity to sunlight after working the night shift for six years, while another described frantically searching for last-minute child care when she had to stay at work overnight. As one team leader asserted, these conditions lowered morale and negatively affected productivity: "We work on weekends, we work

late night. People are slogging here, people don't have any personal lives here…They need a couple of days' holidays because they've been working, you know, 'like dogs' is an understatement."

Repurposing organizational discourse to define the global professional

In addition to their critical response to the Indian identity lauded by organizational discourse, Indian offshore developers strategically used the *cultural tools* provided by their organizations to construct a positive work identity around global professionalism. Although they described relationship and work allocation threats as stemming from the global context of their work, their identity construction was composed of "bits of culture" that reflected their organizations' positive framing of globalization as an inclusive and democratic force for progress. Other publically-available frames of globalization—for example, the neutral frame, in which globalization is seen as natural and inevitable, or the negative frame, in which globalization is seen as a source of inequality and exploitation (Fiss and Hirsch 2005)—were rarely observed in this context.[3]

Though they relied on the same positive frames, Indian offshore developers' identity construction was oriented towards professional identity and professional goals rather than their identity as Indian employees and organizational goals. In our context, workers defined global professionalism through three main attributes: cultural flexibility, forthrightness, and visibility.[4] Unlike organizational discourse, which used discourse on globalization to valorize *deferential* identity attributes attributed to being Indian, all three used discourse on globalization to valorize *proactive* identity attributes attributed to being a global professional.

Cultural flexibility. Unlike cultural adaptation—considered a deep change to a better alternative—employees addressed relationship challenges through a practice-based concept that required a more superficial shift and no assumptions about the relative value of a given culture, what we term

[3] The neutral frame was only mentioned by two informants and the negative frame was not mentioned by any.
[4] These attributes are not meant to encompass the entirety of interviewees' professional identities, only those mobilized in reaction to the threats posed by global work collaborations and their senior managers' threat responses.

cultural flexibility. People from different countries, offshore developers explained, had different cultural styles and practices; cultural flexibility was the ability to switch between them depending on the situation. "A customer in the UK prefers this style. In Japan they prefer this style. Or in US, this is the style. I work with different customers in Japan, Germany, UK, and US. Everyone has their own flavor," a team leader explained. "When you are interacting with Japanese customers you should adopt to their style. When you are interacting with US you should adopt their style." Relationships challenges, from this perspective, stemmed from the need to acquire information about these different cultural styles and practices:

> One of the difficulties we face, is if someone tells a joke, you need to understand that and you need to be able to join the crowd. To send emails, there will be some regional flavors in the email like, certain kind of sweet or a certain kind of item. These kind of things, we need to do groundwork to figure them out. If you are working for London, it will be good idea to know the famous places in London and the various things that interest Londoners. If I go to the US I need to talk about soccer or baseball, but I can talk about cricket to a London counterpart…We are always interested to know what they are about, what their interests are, because if you want to build up a good relationship, you always need to know them on a much more personal level.

Building a good relationship, this team leader suggested, came from learning about (i.e., "do groundwork") Western counterparts' cultural interests and practices.

Our interviewees described this capacity to fit in to *multiple* local cultures, rather than adapt to a dominant one, as a central component of global professionalism. Reflecting on her experience working with Western collaborators, a team leader described, "The one thing that I really admire [in a professional] is how they can work in any environment." Cultural flexibility was linked, in their minds, to what it meant to be "global." "I have been working in multiple companies, multiple locations, so I'm a global person," a project manager stated proudly. "I now have fluency communicating globally." This understanding was echoed by others: "We have global training, in the sense *wherever you're going* this will help you" (Developer); "We are global, we have people in New York, Tokyo and London and we interact with them on a daily basis" (Team Leader). Even though their relationships challenges stemmed from the globalized workplace, the "global" was framed in a distinctly positive light.

Forthrightness. By and large offshore workers did not describe their acceptance of low quality work and conditions as evidence of their work devotion, but rather as a source of frustration and exploitation to be overcome by being forthright and assertive—in short, "getting heard." Western clients, our interviewees reasoned, were not aware of the work conditions offshore. "I mean, US clients don't understand the fact that, you know, people are slogging here," a team leader explained. "We proposed to conduct regular meetings so that the client was aware of what was happening offshore but it never worked out." Poor working conditions, from this perspective, were attributed to offshore workers' lack of forthrightness. As he explained further, "Obviously we cannot stretch ourselves 24 hours a day to complete work. I believe that clients are very reasonable. *If you just talk to them* and tell them that you need more time to deliver quality work, I'm sure they'll understand." A project manager concurred: "The client is a club. You've got to manage them, manage their psyche, and make them listen."

Being forthright with Western clients and colleagues was thus considered a vital aspect of global professionalism. Offshore developers frequently described the professional benefits of "talking" and "saying no" in the global workplace. "Generally if you don't talk, people tend to take you for granted. I mean they think that you are not as knowledgeable as, you know, you should be," a team leader explained. Similarly, a project manager asserted: "Our clients, they very happily say no. If I say 'I need this' they say 'no.' It hurts if you take it personally, but *professionally*, it's point blank in the face but it doesn't matter. " As another project manager explained,

> When you have a global team, half of us here in India and half in the West, you've got to make Westerners listen, make them understand. My Indian team's motive has to be set at the very beginning, we can't keep beating around the bush or keep cribbing about it. We [the Indian and Western halves of the team] stand at different identities, but we learn from each other: they learn from us, we learn from them.

In his perspective, making oneself heard was a global skill ("When you have a global team…you've got to make Westerners listen") and globalization as a positive, equalizing force ("we learn from each other"). Although poor working conditions were seen as resulting from their global work arrangements, globalization was nonetheless framed as a positive force for equality and progress.

Visibility. Indian offshore developers described how they received "junk" work not because they were more devoted, but because their Western colleagues and clients were not aware of their expertise. Given that their Western collaborators had few occasions to directly observe their work, our interviewees reasoned, they underestimated the capability of offshore team members and thus gave them maintenance tasks like coding and testing. "We [offshore] are just given a piece of paper, these are the requirements and these are the impacted programs, you have to code and test," a team leader explained. "Then the credit all goes to onsite because the clients actually interact with them and the clients appreciate them, you know, face to face." Another team leader described the situation in similar terms. By her accounts, she had attained a high level of expertise: "I have completed so many trainings, I have attained a level of expertise." Despite this, as a member of the offshore team, she felt she had limited opportunity to demonstrate this expertise. "Our team offshore, all this time we have been in maintenance. I would like to move on to development, where we are given the liberty of coding in our own style."

As a consequence, offshore developers frequently mentioned increasing their visibility by "emerging" and "getting noticed" for their expertise when describing their professional selves. "People offshore long for recognition, to be visible," a project manager explained. This was particularly true in globally distributed teams, where visibility had to be actively pursued. As a team leader described:

> Typically the on-site regional manager knows what is happening in on-site because Indian developers sit very close to him, on the desk right there. What we are more interested in is how to improve the visibility of offshore to the clients. Sometimes the client will ask you, 'There are two people out there and you are saying there are no issues. Can you explain me what exactly these people do for, two people x 8 hours, so 16 hours a day?' So, there are lots of things people do in global teams that are not visible to the client. …If someone is not seeing you out there, you have to project it in some way. It is like improving your visibility and telling them 'This is what we are doing.'

As he explained, visibility had to be proactively sought ("you have to project it in some way") because of the absence of physical proximity in the global workplace. Descriptions of visibility often evoked the organizations' positive framing of globalization. A developer, for instance, described visibility or "global exposure" as a path to professional recognition and emotional satisfaction: "Here, you get a global exposure across all platforms, technologies, verticals, business processes, geographies, and there's even a

rotation process. You get good recognition for your work, so it's good…I had a very good global exposure from my project. I liked that exposure. It stimulates my interest." Even though the global workplace necessitated developers proactively seek visibility, globalization was nonetheless framed positively.

Strategic Use of Political Toolkits for Identity Construction

Resisting organizational policies

Organizational toolkits not only inform the symbolic resources workers use to construct identities, but also the structural resources they have at their disposal to construct identities. Indian developers' personal experience with relationship and work allocation threats led them to respond critically to organizational policies and strategically and selectively use policies in ways that differed from their intended purpose. Namely, they used cultural sensitivity trainings and offshore-onsite rotations mandated by management as political tools to become culturally flexible, forthright, and visible.

Questioning cultural sensitivity training. Indian developers questioned whether the organizational policy of mandatory cultural trainings aligned with global professionalism. Despite managements' sanguine portrayal of Indian national culture, Indian developers noticed the lesser role their customs played in client relationships. While Westerners would sometimes wear traditional Indian dress like Saris and Kurtas during visits offshore, many interviewees mentioned how cultural sensitivity trainings were not "global" in their implementation—they were *only* required for members of the outsourcing firm. The unidirectional nature of this requirement was seen as unfair. "It has to be a bidirectional thing," a developer asserted. "I don't like when I hear that the Indian company spends a lot of effort in understanding the Western ones and it's not the other way around. I mean it has to be a mutual thing, otherwise, I mean it's not going to work."

Questioning offshore-onsite rotations. Indian developers also questioned whether the offshore-onsite rotation policy was aligned with global professionalism. A team leader put it simply: "I don't want to go to onsite." Many described how the policy was not a "global" requirement among professional peers but was limited to Indians. For example, a project leader who left her one-year-old in India when

she went onsite described the surprise of her Western colleagues when they found out: "They asked me 'You left your husband and your kid and came here? What will your husband do now? Will he marry some other girl?'" Client visits offshore were described as occasional, brief, and primarily ceremonial. "They come here to visit us, spend a couple of hours, they generally leave at 5," a team leader explained. "I don't think clients will understand our way of life until they stay in India for at least a week." Others reported negative experiences onsite. As a team leader recalled, "There was this woman, I saw her my first day onsite and the next day when I went to the office, she wasn't around. So I said, 'Where is she?' and they [client's IT team] said, 'Thanks to you, she just lost her job, she got fired.' I felt really bad."

Repurposing policy to become a global professional

Below, we describe how Indian offshore developers repurposed their organization's political toolkits— namely, the cultural sensitivity courses and onsite rotations mandated by management—to become global professionals. Offshore developers used cultural sensitivity trainings to become culturally flexible and offshore-onsite rotations to become forthright and visible.

Cultural training to become culturally flexible. Indian offshore developers participated in cultural training beyond the minimum requirements to become cultural flexible. For example, a project manager described how he voluntarily underwent cultural trainings about countries in which he did not have clients or colleagues: "I have taken a culture session on France and Germany just because I was interested. I had nothing to do with France or Germany." Similarly, another project manager said he too had chosen to enroll in additional cultural trainings and that this was an opportunity for professional development: "Cultural training is available to anybody who is interested. I took a class on Spanish culture just to learn about it…There is a lot of scope for overall improvement here." In this way, offshore developers used organizational policy to become culturally flexible rather than adopt their clients' culture.

Offshore-onsite rotations to become forthright. Indian offshore developers used their offshore-onsite rotations to become forthright. For instance, when a project manager was confronted with an environment different from "friendly" and "welcoming" India, he took this experience as an education in professionalism: "I learned the way they execute things. Americans are very efficient. When it comes to

work, they are strictly very very professional…I learned to speak up like them." Although he felt isolated, he found learned to "speak up," a process he considered rewarding: "They listen to you, if you're a knowledgeable person, as in, if you can talk in meetings." In this way, offshore-onsite rotations, designed to achieve organizational goals, were used by offshore developers as a means to become forthright global professionals.

Offshore-onsite rotations to become visible. Indian offshore developers also used offshore-onsite rotations to make themselves more visible. Onsite, developers made themselves visible by seeking out client contact. "Developers onsite actually look for interaction with particularly the client managers," a team leader reported, "that visibility is the thing that people long for." Many also reported proactively sharing curriculum vitas with onsite coworkers. This behavior was so engrained that when we sat down to do our interviews, many shared their vitas with us. Sharing vitas onsite, they explained, earned respect because it made their expertise visible. "The [American] client treated me with utmost respect because when they saw my CV, it shows I worked in seven projects earlier," a developer explained. "He was saying, 'Man, I understand you, you come from seven different projects, you have executed different projects in different programs,' so I understand whatever you're saying might be right, let's think over it. *When I say an idea, they just don't throw it away.* They consider that idea, they speak about it." In these ways, offshore developers used onsite rotations to become visible.

Individual goals of identity construction

Indian offshore workers responded to threats to their identity as elite professionals by using cultural and political tools from their organizational toolkit to construct positive identities. Through these processes, professionals claimed they attained better relationships and better work allocation.

Better relationships. Offshore workers described how cultural flexibility, forthrightness, and visibility improved their relationships with Western counterparts. Switching between different cultural practices (i.e., cultural flexibility) was said to build better relationships. "If you talk to an auto client about automotive problems, you get there, but it's much better for the relationship, if say he is in Italy, to talk about a political problem," a project manager explained. "That makes a big difference." Another

agreed: "The challenge is to find a person who is willing to work out of any location and who fits in well with *all the cultures*…a typical production support person has to interact on a weekly basis with a client manager. They need to build confidence with each other, get to know each other, through this repeated interaction." Being forthright was also said to improve relationships. "Building the customer's confidence the offshore team could do the work was a challenge," a project manager explained. "With the amount of expertise I gained [onsite], when there is a business decision, I always *come forward and share my thoughts* on how best it can be done…and we have done well and created the confidence." Finally, visibility was said to improve client relationships. A project manager, for instance, described how his team had made their high-quality work visible by emailing clients a daily "scorecard" with their average response and resolution times. As a result, he explained, "We avoid situations where offshore is blamed when a call is not closed. Our work is completely transparent and visible to clients. Each and every one of us offshore and onsite knows where we are coming from and what we are talking about. It cannot be better than this." Taken together, offshore workers said that identity construction improved the quality of their client relationships.

Better work allocation. To offshore developers, being a global professional allowed them to gain better work quality and conditions. Cultural flexibility and the rapport built with clients was said to help developers attain more desirable work. As a project manager explained, "Over time, we built a rapport with the client and improved, not only how we worked, but also the tasks we receive from the US." Being forthright was also said to improve how work offshore was allocated by Western counterparts. For example, a team leader explained: "If you have people who can talk, anything is possible. I'm the offshore lead here, so the thing is I tend to fight a lot with onsite people, *I try to push back work*. Not many people onsite like me, because I tell them 'No, no this is not possible, this cannot be done by end of day today.' Everything is not end of day today task.'" Similarly, another project manager described how he used forthrightness to "buy time" for his offshore team: "If you're experienced, you have the guts to speak to the clients. Now I can go, you know, walk into my client manager's room and say, 'This is not possible.' I did it all the time when I was onsite…I do it to buy time for offshore, let them know this

[delay] is not offshore's mistake." Finally, offshore developers said being visible improved the quality of work allocated. A project manager, for instance, described how his teams' visibility had changed the type of work offshore was allocated. "When I entered into this relationship, clients would give us work, and would we take it and do it," he explained. "Now there is more ownership, I can truly say that some of the team members are recognized and accepted by the client as subject matter experts." Being culturally flexible, forthright and visible were said to improve work allocation.

Competing Organizational and Individual Strategic Goals

Indian managers and developers working offshore responded to threats in the global workplace through positive discourse on globalization but used this discourse to achieve different ends. Managers sought to increase the *quantity* of client relationships and work allocation through employee deference, while developers sought to improve their *quality* through proactive tactics. In particular, the difference between management's "devoted" Indian employees and developers' "forthright" and "visible" global professionals is a likely site of discord. Indeed, a recent study found that Indian developers' forthrightness is sometimes discouraged by Indian managers (Cramton and Hinds 2014). At the time of the interviews, however, this divergence did not appear to negatively affect manager-employee relations. Most of our lower-level informants, despite the identity threats they faced, heartily praised their organization: "The brand name is there [company name] and I'm happy that I joined" (Team Lead); "[Company] has kept me happy all this while so there is no reason for looking around" (Developer); "I have been working in [company] for nine years, and I'm sticking to the company. It's very employee friendly. You feel very good and proud to work for [company]" (Project Manager).

In the years since we conducted these interviews, however, all three firms have seen their already high attrition double to 20 percent a year. What's more, employees of all three firms have filed suits in U.S. Courts with complaints that appear aligned with the managerial preference for "devoted" Indians uncovered in this study: Indian employees working onsite in the U.S. have filed suit for unpaid overtime and Western employees have filed suit for employment discrimination. Whether Indian offshore

developers still use the same positive frames of globalization as their firms or instead draw on negative frames from Indian IT labor unions or the anti-globalization movement is an open question.

An organizational toolkit model of identity regulation and construction

Taken together, our analysis shows the offshore-outsourcing firms in our study did not resolve employee identity threats directly through regulation but rather provided workers with a set of resources, or *organizational toolkits*, for individual identity construction—the words, symbols and stories workers used to talk about themselves or *cultural tools*, and the actions they took to develop qualities aligned these descriptions or *political tools*. As depicted in our grounded model (Figure 2, Panel A), the organizations and individuals in our study were involved in concurrent processes of identity regulation and identity construction in response to threats posed by the global work environment. At the organizational level, offshore-outsourcing firms motivated employees to *accept* existing relationships and work allocation by using positive discourse on globalization to frame Indians as adaptable and devoted global employees and implementing policy to train Indians to be global employees through cultural training and offshore-onsite rotations. According to top managers, their identity regulation efforts allowed their firms to gain more clients and more work.[5] At the individual level, Indian offshore developers were critical of their organization's identity regulation efforts and wanted to *change* their relationships and work allocation. They strategically constructed their own work identity as global professionals, using their organizations' positive discourse on globalization as cultural tools to define their identity as culturally flexible (not adaptable), forthright and visible (not devoted). Cultural trainings and on-site rotations were similarly criticized and used as political tools to become global professionals. Offshore workers claimed that becoming a global professional improved the quality of their client relationships and work allocation.

Figure 2, Panel B synthesizes our model at a more abstract level of analysis, illustrating the basic processes we observed: identity threats trigger identity regulation (at the organizational level) and identity

[5] Our interest in the organizations' strategic goals is limited to top managers' stated goals of identity regulation. The companies we studied were pursuing other strategic goals at the time of the study but these were not represented in our grounded model because managers did not described them as goals of employee identity regulation.

construction (at the individual level), both oriented toward strategic goals. This model highlights how these two processes become linked through the use of identity regulation as an organizational toolkit for identity construction.

~ Insert Figure 2, Panel B here ~

Discussion

By integrating insights from the positive and critical perspectives on identity and accounting for top-down and bottom-up processes, our organizational toolkit approach contributes to research on cross-level identity dynamics, the strategic nature of identity, and the context of global identity. We conclude with a discussion of the study's limitations, future research directions, and practical implications.

Linking identities across levels

Our study extends theory on cross-level identity dynamics by conceptualizing the link between identity construction and identity regulation through organizational toolkits. Despite a vast literature on identity, very few scholars have examined the underlying cross-level processes (Anteby 2013; Ashforth et al. 2011; Ramarajan and Reid 2013). Identity research that spans levels of analysis tends to focus on *either* top-down processes (e.g., Thornborrow and Brown 2009) or bottom-up processes (e.g., Corley and Gioia 2004). In this article, we show how top-down and bottom-up processes work in tandem. In line with the top-down approach, the organizations in our study sought to define employee identity through discourse that aligned employees' sense of self with the goals of the organization. In line with the bottom-up approach, workers in our study sought to construct a positive identity that was personally beneficial. Had we not studied both processes in conjunction, we would have missed the real linkage between these seemingly disparate processes, as neither account tells the full story. Namely, the Indian outsourcing firms we studied did not directly regulate their employees' identities but rather provided them with organizational toolkits—that is, a set of cultural and political resources for individual identity construction.

By examining the accounts of employees and managers concurrently, we illustrate *how* organizational identity regulation actually shapes individual identity construction. Rather than motivating

workers through this idealized conception of Indian employees—an attempt to define the *ends* employees sought—what identity regulation actually did was provide workers with the *means* to construct their identity through organizational toolkits. Both employees and managers used a narrative of globalization as positive, equalizing force to describe the desirability of their identity, even though the ends these identities were oriented towards were not the same: organizations wanted their employees to *accept* existing relationships and work allocation, so that organizations can get more clients and more work, while employees' wanted to *change* the threat by building better relationships and attaining better work. While the identity regulation process described by top managers is consistent with traditional theories of how management instills organizationally-desirable values to guide employee behavior (e.g., Barker 1993; Kunda 1992), the actual process we observed is better aligned with toolkit theory (Swidler 1986, 2003): identity regulation provides employees with a set of tools to strategically construct professional selves and navigate their work lives. In our organizational toolkit model, organizationally-provided stories, frames and justifications are not motives for action; they are strategies for action.

Our organizational toolkit approach also helps to clarify *when* identities imposed by organizations can be personally fulfilling for workers. Contrary to prominent arguments that organizational efforts to regulate identities have deleterious effects on individuals (e.g., Hochschild [1983] 2003; Sennett 2011), we find that the process of responding to imposed identities can be, at least according to workers, psychologically and professionally beneficial. While research on identity regulation acknowledges that workers are more than passive receptacles for organizational influence and leaves open the possibility of individual agency, the empirical focus tends to be workers' experience of organizational control. Imposed identities that are simultaneously desired have been afforded relatively little scholarly attention (Anteby 2008, 2013). Our study suggests imposed identities can also be desired when identity regulation provides the *means* through which workers construct their identities (i.e., cultural and political tools) rather than the *ends* (i.e., specific values or beliefs). In our context, workers actively constructed positive identities to serve their professional goals, even though the cultural and political tools they used in this construction were imposed by their organizations.

Strategic goals of identity construction?

Organizational toolkits also offer an integrative framework to study the positive and critical dimensions of identity construction and examine their intersection. United by an interest in how people find meaning in their work, studies of work identity by sociologists, social psychologists, and scholars of organizational behavior have produced varied and contradictory findings (Brown 2014). Work identity has been described as highly structured (e.g., Alvesson and Willmott 2002) and highly agentic (e.g., Ibarra 1999), a quest for positive meaning (e.g., Dutton et al. 2010) and constrained by power differentials (e.g., Learmonth and Humphreys 2011). We suspect these differences are driven by researchers' different epistemological and ontological orientations, but "it seems perverse not to acknowledge the potentially complementary light they may cast on identity processes" (Brown 2014, pg. 34).

In our conception of organizational toolkits as a resource for identity construction, workers have agency to pursue, not only positive meaning, but also professional goals in the workplace. This conception differs from the traditional view that tends to portray positive identity construction as an unconscious process, in that the identity construction we observed was *strategic*—i.e., oriented towards specific long-term individual goals (improving client relationships and work allocation). While it is not surprising top managers' identity regulation was oriented toward organizational goals, it is surprising that developers' identity construction seemed to be a strategic and largely rational process. In the positive identity tradition, workers imbue their work with positive meanings by infusing it with general virtuous qualities (Dutton et al., 2011); the underlying assumption is that workers strive for some absolute positive ideal without conscious planning. In contrast, the offshore developers we interviewed used cultural and political tools actively promoted by their organizations *selectively* (i.e., they criticized some elements of discourse and policy and adopted others) and *strategically* (i.e., they used discourse and policy to solve their own relationship and work allocation problems).

This "strategic" perspective on positive identity, however, is limited when we consider the consequences of this process beyond the individual level. Our conception of organizational toolkits reflects our finding that managers and workers used the *same* cultural tools (i.e., the global as a positive,

democratizing force) to respond to threats in the global workplace. This is not to say that offshore developers did not draw on any tools from outside their organization, rather that *empirically* there was a tight coupling between the positive frames managers and workers used to respond to threats posed by the global work arrangements, even though other cultural tools were available in larger society. For example, an article in *The Hindu Business Line* (2005) described Indian Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) offices as "modern sweatshops," asserting that "work conditions in (Indian) BPOs are similar to 19th century prisons of Roman slave ships." Similarly, an article in *Rediff.com* (2003) described Indian IT professionals as "cyber coolies[6]" with "no rights and little security." Negative frames such as these are often evoked to respond to threats posed by globalization (Fiss and Hirsch 2005), yet they were not used by our interviewees. This has important implications for our understanding of the role of power in identity construction, typically neglected by that literature (Anteby 2008, 2013; Learmonth and Humphreys 2011). Less powerful organizational members can use cultural tools from *outside* the organization to *collectively* change practices that put them at a disadvantage (Kellogg 2011). The Indian offshore developers we studied, however, used cultural tools from *inside* the organization to *individually* improve their work experience. Thus, we suspect that, although their positive identities were strategically constructed, they have little influence beyond the individual level—they may even lower the chance of practice change because they encourage developers to feel good about a disadvantageous situation.

The local context of "being global"

Finally, organizational toolkits bring an alternative approach to a literature characterized by a functionalist view of culture. By conceptualizing culture as a means rather than an ends, a toolkit rather than set of values, we address criticisms of how management scholars study culture in the global workplace (Ailon-Souday and Kunda 2003; Cramton and Hinds 2014; Hinds et al. 2011; Kitayama 2002). Our approach specifically addresses criticisms of the extant literature's search for universal values that can be categorized along specific quantitative dimensions (e.g., Hofstede 1984). We focus on how people

[6] "Coolie" is a 19th century term used to describe a Chinese or Indian unskilled laborer hired by Europeans for subsistence wages.

within the same country use organizationally-available symbolic resources to navigate the challenges of global collaborations. Culture in this conceptualization is not a fixed set of values but rather a set of *contextually-dependent* stories, frames and justifications used to construct a positive image of what it means to be an Indian developer who works offshore.

As a result, our conceptualization of "being global" departs substantially from previous work (e.g., Erez et al. 2013; Shokef and Erez 2006). Erez and colleagues conceptualize global identity as a sense of belonging to a global culture, which they define as a fixed set of values—such as competitive performance orientation and openness to cultural diversity—shared by workers across the globe. In our study, Indian offshore developers' identity as global professionals emerged through their work experiences with Westerners and their organizational culture, which provided a toolkit of positive stories and frames about globalization for identity construction. As a result, "being global" had different meanings for different members of their organization. While some values proposed in previous work resonate with attributes of our interviewees' identities (e.g., openness to cultural diversity and cultural flexibility), the identity we observed was embedded in a particular work context and organizational role. In short, we found that the meaning of "being global" depends on the local context. Our developers' understanding of "being global" was quite different from that of Wall Street bankers, for example, who use "being global" to defend the elite status of financial products from New York (Ho 2009).

Limitations, future research directions, and practical implications

Our study has limitations that can guide future research. At that time our interviews took place (2007), the Indian economy had been rapidly growing for three decades. Thus, interviewees' positive framing of globalization may reflect this trend. Additionally, while we focus on relationships and work allocation, other identity threats can emerge in global collaborations (such as salary differences). As with any case study, there are limits to our grounded model's generalizability. While we expect our model applies to global work generally, our study represents an extreme case and the salience of these threats likely depends on a country's history and current stage of economic development. Beyond global work, we expect the more general process we observe (Figure 2 Panel B) to occur in other work arrangements that

threaten work identity such as temporary work. In other contexts, we suspect workers use other organizational tools to construct their identity, such as spatial toolkits (e.g. the physical space and location of the organization) or design toolkits (e.g., organizational structure and job design). Though research thus far has focused primarily on cultural toolkits, we hope future research will provide us with a wider classification of toolkits and a deeper understanding of their role in identity processes.

Our findings also have practical implications for global work collaborations. Organizations typically use top-down approaches to address the challenges of global work. This article proposes a different approach: build on the subjective understandings of workers themselves. Managers can create better links between employees' work identities and organizational goals if they integrate employees' subjective understandings. For example, in our study, employees were compensated for time spent at cultural trainings, even when they took courses on countries they did not work with directly. While not immediately beneficial to organizational output, this allowed workers to develop their cultural flexibility, which could help the organization achieve long-term goals such as reducing employee turnover.

We began this article with an empirical puzzle: Given that offshore workers in the emerging world are not treated as peers by their Western and client-based collaborators, how do they work together harmoniously? We found that while increasingly sophisticated technology has increased the occurrence of such collaborations, an age-old and fundamentally human process holds them together—the creation of meaning. Somewhat paradoxically, we found that the "global" nature of work informs some of the central challenges faced by Indian offshore developers and their resolution. In line with critical perspectives on globalization (e.g., Robinson 2004), global inequalities produced tension in global collaborations through Westerners' devaluation of collaborators in the emerging world. Yet at the same time, and in line with more positive perspectives on globalization (e.g., Friedman 2006), global aspirations held together the very same collaborations through the promise of opportunity and access. To effectively manage global work, there should be greater recognition of how culture serves as both a cause of tension and a strategy for its resolution. We hope our study inspires other scholars to explore the dual nature of the complex meaning-making processes that underlie organizing in the global workplace.

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Figure 1. Data Structure

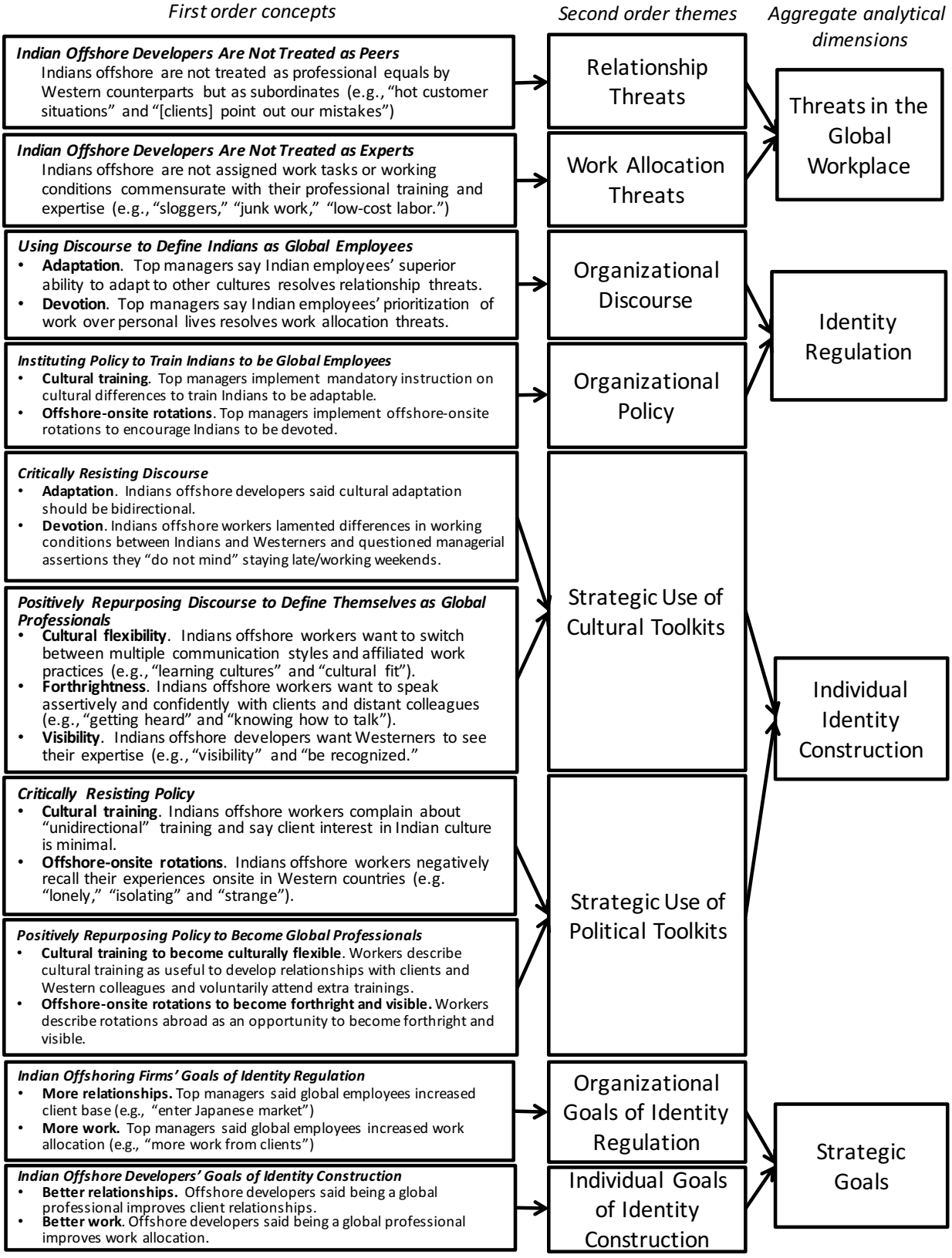
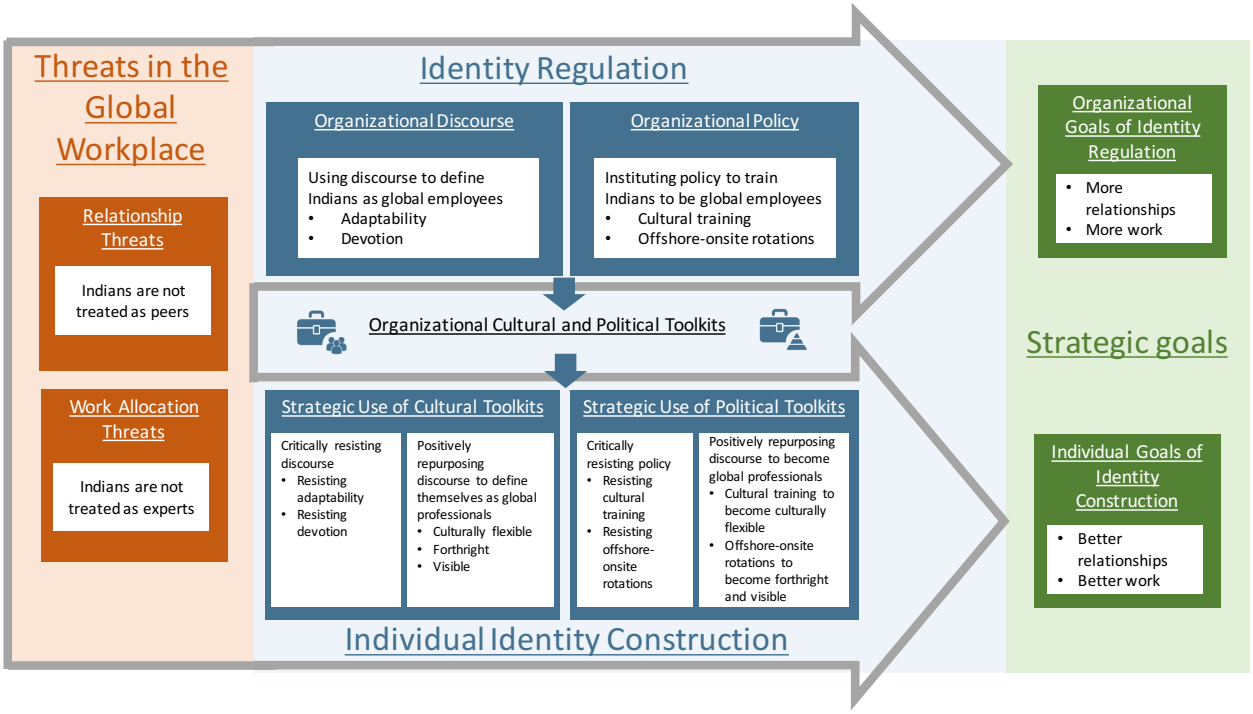


Figure 2. An Organizational Toolkit Model of Identity Regulation and Identity Construction
Note: Vertical arrows depict creation and use of toolkits; horizontal arrows depict organizational and individual identity processes

Panel A. Grounded Model (Substantive Theory)



Panel B. General Model (Formal Theory)

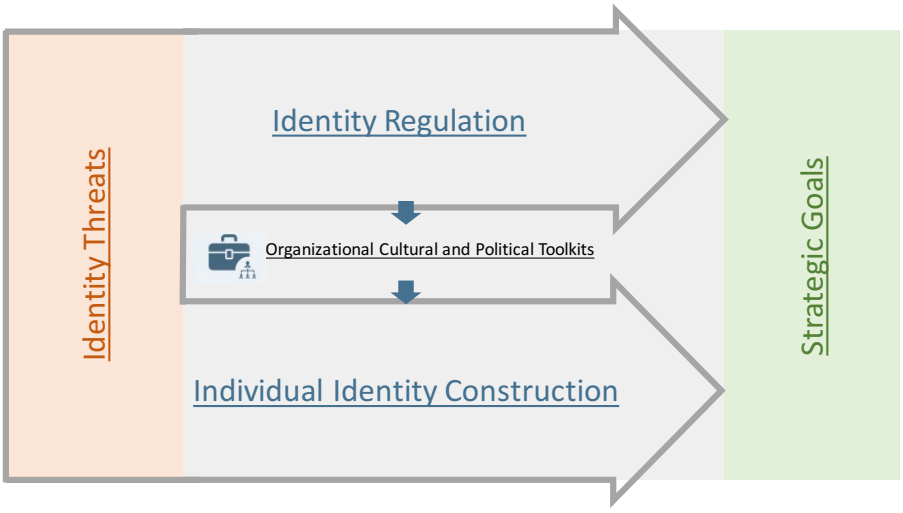


Table 1. Comparison of Research Sites and Data Collection

	Firm 1	Firm 2	Firm 3
Archival Documents	13	5	3
Archival Pages	121	41	34
No. of Interviewees	14	10	13
Client Domain of Interviewees	Banking	Retail	Banking, Auto
Clients (2013)	800	900	1000+
Clients (2007)	540	400	800+
Global Footprint (2007)	26 countries	35 countries	50 countries
Revenue (2013)	7.39 billion	7.95 billion	11.57 billion
Revenue (2007)	4.2 billion	4.9 billion	5.7 billion
Total Employees (2013)	157,263	145,000	276,196
Total Employees (2007)	91,187	61,179	100,000
Non-Indian Employees (2013)	11,247	15,950	21,282
Non-Indian Employees (2007)	2,735	1,835	9,600