Chapter XIII
Understanding Global Information Technology and Outsourcing Dynamics:
A Multi-Lens Model

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides information technology (IT) project leaders, call center management, research-ers, and educators with an analytical tool to examine current concerns and anticipate future trends related to globalization and information technology. The authors propose to use a multi-lens analysis as a framework for evaluating outsourcing opportunities. This approach offers a valuable and effective full-circle methodology for assessing technological, political, organizational, economic, legal, educa-tional, and cultural considerations that encourage a fuller understanding of the issues, problems, and opportunities that globalization and technological innovation creates. An understanding of these factors related to outsourcing and other technical collaborative projects can avoid costly miscalculations, reduce misunderstandings, and promote mutually beneficial results. Outsourcing is part of a larger socio-po-litical and cultural process, and extends beyond the narrow parameters of economic and technological considerations. The discussion of the various lenses is supported by relevant material from case studies and qualitative interview data collected by the authors in Germany and India from IT experts, call center managers, and call center agents.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the authors propose the multi-lens model as an analytical tool offering a systematic view of the forces and trends that influence outsourcing decisions. This tool provides a framework that encourages a multi-pronged assessment of the outsourcing phenomenon. Recognizing that the rapid development and diffusion of information and communications technologies is a major driver of globalization, the authors present a group of factors that we believe impact the outsourcing process. It is simplistic to look at outsourcing as purely an economic or technical decision–it is important to recognize that outsourcing contains social, legal, and political aspects as well, and to understand their interrelationships.

This model is presented in the context of outsourcing and offshoring—pertinent and pervasive issues that many organizations confront in order to continue their success in today's global, interdependent business environment. The authors believe that a broad understanding of globalization and its effects upon knowledge-based professions will benefit call center supervisors, their team leaders, and information and communication technology (ICT) managers by encouraging them to innovate

and adapt continually to new opportunities created by globalization. Thus, companies will need to train and deploy their staff in new ways to maintain flexibility and competitiveness. This includes effective use of technology for supporting the collaboration of work processes and increasing cultural awareness to enhance team building across geographic and organizational boundaries.

Using lenses is not a new idea. Andersen and Dawes (1991) presented four lenses, or perspectives, to explore the political, organizational, economic, and technological aspects of information management. Here the authors have enlarged the scope of these perspectives and added additional legal, cultural, and educational lenses (Figure 1) to reflect categories immanent in recent globalization literature, such as The Lexus and the Olive Tree (Friedman, 1999), In Defense of Globalization (Bhagwati, 2004) and Globalization and Its Discontents (Stiglitz, 2003). Globalization is a force that significantly influences all lenses of the model. Note that there is flexibility in which lenses to use for a specific situation, and the relative importance of each lens will vary. Our goal is not to present a detailed discussion of every possible lens, but to show that understanding globalization issues is naturally multidisciplinary. As Manfred Steger

Figure 1. Multi-lens model
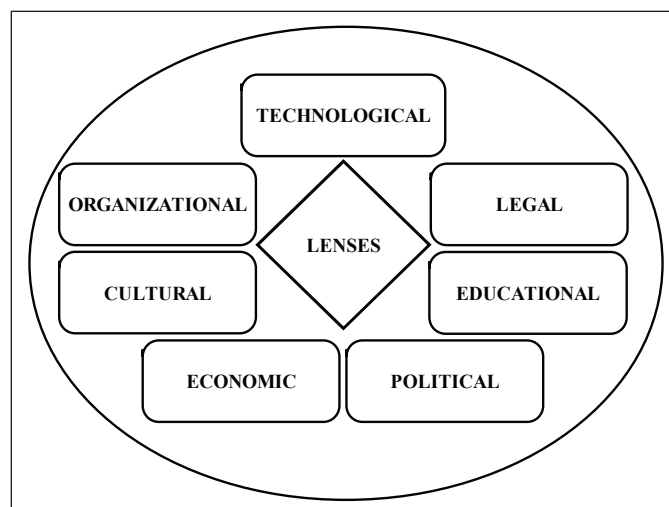
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