

Outsourcing:
Common Mistakes and
Simple Solutions

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Overview

- My experiences with international cultures and outsourcing
- A Brief History of Outsourcing
- Everyday Indian work life
- Common Mistakes
- What Works
- More Information: Books / Movies

Cultural Experiences

- Touched the real Berlin Wall in Germany
- Sat front row at Wimbledon
- Drank wine in Paris
- Swam in the Rhine River in Germany (in January)
- Scalped tickets for India vs. England cricket match in Bangalore, India
- Attended the Pope's mass in Rome at St. Peter's Basilica
- Enjoyed a hamburger in Hamburg, Germany
- Experienced the Taj Mahal in person
- Attended sister's traditional wedding in Mexican village
- Ate a Belgian Waffle in Belgium

International Professional Experience

- Lived and worked for a summer at engineering firm in Cologne, Germany
- Since 2007, worked with Indian software offshore verification team
- Lived and worked with software firm in a neighborhood in Bangalore and Chennai, India

A Brief History of Outsourcing

- Cost of labor
- Roughly 5 year investment to regain costs
- H1B-Visas
- ABCs of air travel: Airbus, Boeing, COMAC

Everyday Work in India

- Work day hours: Indians come into work at 10 or 11 am, lunch at 2 pm, work until 8pm-3am (if needed)
- Hierarchy, respect for authority
- Small, close desks
- Power outages, network connectivity and speed issues
- Email etiquette: The color red in email text has a meaning of urgency or importance in the US, but not so in India
- British English: Terms and pronunciation
- Date format: US: MM/DD/YY; World: DD/MM/YY

Common Mistakes

- Asking the question "Do you understand?"
- Requesting an estimated completion date (ECD) - then being surprised when the work is not done fully
- Making vague requests via email
- Improper use of technical solutions
- Signing an hourly support contract

What Works - "Do you understand?"

- Speak slowly, do not use contractions, slang, or cliches
- Have the assignee repeat the task to you in their own words
- Hesitation at responding probably means misunderstanding
- Tilting head left to right means listening, NOT comprehension

What Works - Requesting ECDs

- Be Flexible: Arrive at work 7-7:30 am
- Prod, poke, pull. Ask for date, then add a week.
- Initially you will be given a best case scenario, which will be difficult to achieve.
- Itemize every expectation, ask about worst case scenario, since it is far more accurate.

What Works - Email Etiquette

Improve your task delegation skills:

- When delegating, use bulleted lists, as opposed to paragraphs or run-on sentences.
- Create clear alternate actions if expected issues arise.
- Assign small tasks at first, check progress, then continue, to avoid wasting large amounts of effort for a small misunderstanding.
- Hold daily status meetings
- Create clear ACTION ITEMS with name of assignee, expected due dates, and follow up.

What Works - Technical Solutions

- Use CVS with smart merging capabilities
- Use a quick automated test suite which runs whenever a check-in occurs
- Test driven development with early / often reviews of tests
- Design compartmentalized architecture and isolate

What Works - Contracts

- Firm-fixed price instead of Hourly
- Identify clear user stories / requirements before test, design and coding begin

References

Movies:

- Outsourced, 2008.

Books:

- The World Is Flat by Friedman
- The 4-Hour Work Week by Ferriss
- Culture Shock India by Kolanad

Articles:

- "Facial expressions 'not global' " by Judith Burns
- <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/8199951.stm>