

A Perfect Match. Situating and Gendering Work Ideals in Transnational IT Companies

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Introduction

A “good cultural match”, referring to compatible ways of working, cultural norms of social behaviour, attitudes towards authority and language, has been described as important in determining the success of outsourcing information technology (IT) production and services (Krishna et al. 2004; Lacity et al. 2009). Dealing with cross-cultural barriers between client and supplier is highly relevant for the Indian software industry, which is built on transnational customer-provider relationships and to a high degree conducted by multi-national companies with headquarters outside India. This chapter argues that some difficulties and “cultural clashes” between onsite and offshore in software development can be understood and at least partly explained by the diverging ideas about which qualities characterize ideal employees. Although highly relevant, gender has mostly been left unexplored in previous research on these cross-cultural issues in global IT offshoring. In this chapter we investigate global software outsourcing relationships from a gendered perspective using the theoretical framework about ‘gendered work ideals’ as developed by Joan Acker (1990; 1992; 2006; 2012). The chapter draws on the results from a project on offshoring of advanced IT services from Sweden to India. It reports on how managers, both in Sweden and in India, perceived the ideal software developer. Although the ideals coincided in several aspects, some divergences also existed between how the requirements were defined. These divergences contributed to creating cultural clashes.

The contribution is both of empirical and conceptual character. Using the concept ‘gendered work ideal’ adds a new dimension to how “cultural clashes” can be understood in collaborations in transnational business contexts. But using ‘gendered work ideals’ in the context of transnational companies also adds a new dimension to the theoretical concept, until now developed and applied in a purely “Western” company context. To make this conceptual contribution we elaborate on three designated themes from our empirical data. The first theme highlights how the transnational business context adds nuances to how the universal, abstract work ideal has been understood to exclude women. Our data shows that it is a simplification to assume that it excludes all women, “universally”, on the same grounds. The second theme focuses ‘situated gendered work ideals’ in the transnational business context. Previous research has demonstrated that situated work ideals, unlike the universal work ideals, actually can favour women and at the same time exclude men. Our results illustrate that it is a simplification to assume that ‘situated gendered work ideals’ exclude either women or men when rather they can produce multiple masculinities, privileging certain masculinities over others. Finally, our third theme demonstrates how the diverging work ideals – abstract as well as situated – create “cultural clashes” concerning policies used by Swedish and Indian managers to create a “perfect match” between employees and companies.

The chapter is structured as follows. The next section presents our theoretical framework and the concept 'work ideal', distinguishing the universal, abstract work ideal from the situated work ideal. Then some previous research is introduced, followed by the methodological considerations that guided the collection of empirical data in the project. Subsequently we present our results and the analysis of the three themes described above. The chapter ends with a concluding discussion section where we discuss the implications of diverging conceptions of the ideal software developer for collaboration in transnational IT companies as well as the more theoretical implications for the conceptual framework used.

Theoretical framework

The universal, abstract ideal worker

The analytical tools used in this chapter were inspired by the theoretical framework developed by Joan Acker (1990; 2012) to understand how gendered assumptions about women and men, femininity and masculinity, are embedded in organizations and reproduce inequalities. One of the concepts that Acker (2012) uses to refer to supposedly gender-neutral processes in the workplace is "work ideal". The idea of the universal and abstract ideal worker is institutionalized in organizational processes and manifested in managerial practices, such as recruitment, wage setting, promotion and dismissal of employees (Acker 2006). The ideal is part of the organizational logic that includes certain expectations on employees' behaviour concerning number of hours worked and a focus on work – based on the idea of a worker "who exists only for the work" (Acker 1990: 149). The ideal of a disembodied worker prescribes a devoted employee that gives priority to paid work, is mobile to travel if needed and works long hours (Acker 1992).

The requirements of the universal and abstract ideal worker are requirements that generally men are expected to live up to but not women (Acker 1992). Acker describes that the closest this universal and abstract ideal comes to a real worker is: "the male worker whose life centers on his full-time, life-long job, while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and his children" (Acker 1990: 149). Women workers on the other hand are: "assumed to have legitimate obligations other than those required by the job" (Acker 1990: 149). Women have been, and still are, seen as the primary care taker of children, and managers have considered them unable to fulfil the demands of the ideal worker as they are "less likely to follow the expected path of continuous, full-time employment" (Kelly et al. 2010: 283). The universal and abstract work ideal thus produces gender inequalities as it presumes a gender based division of labor and the separation between the public and the private sphere (Acker 2012). It is therefore related to what in the realities of life is known as the problem for workers to reach "work-life balance" (cf. Sallee 2012).

A study of a transnational business context can be expected to contribute to a development of the concept 'work ideal' from an intersectional perspective. As Acker notes, analyses of the reproduction of inequalities in work organizations are incomplete if they ignore racial and class processes that also produce inequalities (Acker 2006). She uses the concept 'inequality regimes' in order to integrate class and race in analyses of inequality in organizations. Acker describes class as intrinsic to employment and most organizations and also congruent with class processes in the wider society (2006). This is also how class is relevant in our study as the Indian workers in the companies we studied are presumed to belong to the middle-class or

upper middle-class in Indian society (cf. e.g. chapters by Radhakrishna and by Varma in this volume). Race and ethnicity, referring to historical domination and oppression is relevant to our study due to India's colonial past.

Notwithstanding the universal character of the abstract work ideal, the extent to which it excludes women supposedly fluctuates due to for example generous government-sponsored parental leave as in the Scandinavian countries or due to organizational policies and programs to provide work/life support (Sallee 2012). Kelly et al. (2010) show how workplace initiatives to decrease work-family conflict for employees can challenge the universal, abstract ideal worker norm that privileges paid work obligations over unpaid family care work. Using the theoretical framework of 'gendered work ideals' can also help explain why these kind of policies meet resistance from men as: "living up to the ideal worker norm is an important way to enact masculinity – and protect a privileged position – in white-collar workplaces and at home" (Kelly et al. 2010: 283).

Situated work ideals

In this article we make the distinction between the universal, abstract ideal worker and what we call situated work ideals. Although she is not using the same concept, this is also a distinction made by Acker. In her later writings she expounds: "The ideal, abstract worker is only part of what employers seek when they are hiring: employers, of course, have specific qualifications in mind, such as education, experience in particular fields, evidence of competence, etc" (Acker 2012: 218). In addition to the universal ideal of the unencumbered abstract worker, there are thus also locally constructed ideals, stipulating the more specific qualities required of the holder of a certain position or job (Kelly et al. 2010). We call these work ideals, 'situated work ideals' as they are based on "real life ideal workers" in certain cultural and social work contexts (Acker 2012: 218). Situated work ideals refer to the specific qualities, knowledge, skills, personal conduct and behaviour that characterize an ideal employee in a particular work organization (Tienari et al. 2002).

Although described in gender-neutral terms these situated work ideals are also often gendered (Benschop and Doorewaard 1998b). However, in contrast to the universal, abstract work ideal the situated work ideals could favour women by emphasizing skills and competence typically associated with femininity: "The ideal worker for many jobs is a woman, particularly a woman who, employers believe, is compliant, who will accept orders and low wages. This is often a woman of color; immigrant women are sometimes even more desirable" (Acker 2006: 450). Men are thus not the ideal workers for all jobs. How situated work ideals are gendered is an empirical question to be investigated in specific professions, sectors and companies. There are some previous studies that have used and developed Acker's theoretical framework to study situated gendered work ideals. These studies have demonstrated how different work ideals can develop in different work organizations depending on for example management ideologies and organizational structures.

Benschop and Doorewaard (1998a) analyse situated gendered work ideals in two different work contexts: Tayloristic organizations and team-based work. They conclude that, although different, ideals in both contexts are gendered as masculine. The Tayloristic work ideal is associated with authoritarianism, paternalism and careerism while the team based work ideal is characterized by careerism and entrepreneurialism (cf. Collinson and Hearn 1994). The team-based ideal worker, typical for many Western IT companies, is available full-time, enjoys autonomy in

fulfilling the job and displays an entrepreneurial attitude in thinking about improvements of the work. The Tayloristic ideal worker is also full-time available and career oriented but, in contrast to the team-based work ideal, he also displays an instrumental reasoning, accepts authorities, and: “concentrates obediently on performing specialized, small tasks without thinking” (Benschop and Doorewaard 1998a: 9). Another way to express this would be that there are variations in the situated work ideals but that the universal abstract ideal worker is constant and independent on the way work is organized.

Metcalfe and Linstead (2003) use a similar framework to analyse team work from a gendered perspective. They found that although feminine qualities were presented as desirable for team work and team development, women were still constituted as “*different*, the other, the lesser than” (Metcalfe and Linstead 2003: 114, emphasis in original). Tienari et al. (2002) argue that work ideals vary with organizational structure but also across societal contexts due to different gender orders. Their study illustrates how the notion of the ideal worker changes along with organizational reforms in the Finnish and German bank sector. Organizational changes can shift notions of qualifications for employees in different positions, from “‘male bodies’ to feminine imagery” (Tienari et al. 2002: 267). Brumley (2014) likewise shows how work ideals can be transformed and require a new kind of employee to fit an increasingly competitive market in a previously paternalistic work culture in a Mexican company.

Previous research

Gendered work ideals in IT companies

Previous research suggests that the work ideal in Swedish IT companies excludes women as they are not perceived to have the right technical skills or technical competence to the same degree as men (Peterson 2007). Moreover, the work ideal has been taken to discount women as it prescribes not only the right technical skills, but also a specific, dedicated and self-confident approach to technology (Peterson 2010). However, on the other hand, social and emotional competence has also been emphasized as of importance in European knowledge-intensive companies, implying that so called feminine skills become more valued (Kelan 2008). There are also claims that the Western IT industry is a good working environment for women, because of the high level of work flexibility, which can be used by IT professionals to balance work and family life (Perrons 2003). This might suggest that women are not necessarily excluded as ideal employees due to the long hours work culture in this industry (Roman and Peterson 2011).

While requirements for technical competence have been described as disqualifying women as ideal employees in the West, in India, women are not expected to be technically less competent than men (D’Mello 2006; Fuller and Narasimhan 2007; Poster 2013). Moreover, the new and emerging IT industry in India has been depicted as “de-gendered” and as providing Indian women with an opportunity to develop a “new identity” (Lau 2006). However, research also shows that the expected standards of femininity in the Indian context still entail that women display “submissiveness” and “docility” (Shanker 2008).

As we noted above, the extent to which women can fit the universal work ideal depends not only on norms and values within the companies but also on the societal

context. The Swedish welfare society is characterized by “women-friendly” dual-earner and dual-career policies that support less traditional gender roles and gender equal parenting (Korpi et al. 2013). This is a context drastically different from the Indian society, described as permeated by attitudes about women as the primary care taker (Arun et al. 2006; Gupta 2014). India is a country characterized by societal ideals of men as breadwinners and women as the heart of the family (Rajadhyaksha and Bhatnagar 2000). The long-standing societal norm of arranged marriages and regulating the relationships between sexes among young people can also be expected to influence the lack of fit between women and work ideals as they restrict women’s behaviour (Donner 2008; Fuller and Narasimhan 2007). These societal ideals are internalised by the employees, but also by the Indian management of companies, affecting their practices and policies (D’Mello 2006).

Traditional gender ideals have been a building stone in creating the Indian middle class (Fernandes, 2006; Donner, 2008; Vijayakumar, 2013). This implies that wives and mothers have the moral obligation to take care of the family, even if some of the practical work can be delegated to servants. In particular, Shanker (2008) elaborates on how the problems for women in combining work and family is, above all, a question of living up to social conventions. The conflict between the norms for the ideal Indian woman and the ideal worker are therefore expected to be different from those in the West. In order to be able to provide a multifaceted analysis of these conflicts we also need to take into account differences in the organizational structures and management ideologies between Sweden and India.

The transnational business context

The Indian working life is largely based on a male provider model, with an expectation that duties outside work will be taken care of by somebody else (Donner 2008). A male provider can work both long hours and late hours in the office (Fuller and Narasimhan 2007). Flexiwork and working from home is an exception in many companies, normally a privilege for people higher up in their careers (Sahay 2007). This kind of working hours are not possible for people who have caring obligations, and in India daily caring obligations fall on women, while men have the obligation for providing for their family, including their parents and siblings (Radhakrishnan 2009). Previous research illustrates how the approach to work-life balance issues differs between Indian and Western companies (Chandra 2012). While spatial and temporal flexibility is key in the Western approach, Indian companies focus on employee welfare (Chandra 2012).

Pellegrini et al. (2010) describe Indian management ideologies and organizational values as paternalistic. They explain how paternalistic managers: “take a personal interest in the workers’ off-the-job lives and attempt to promote workers’ personal welfare while offering career-related support. Paternalistic leaders combine benevolence with control of subordinates’ decision making” (Pellegrini et al. 2010: 392). According to Pellegrini et al. the paternalistic leadership ideology agrees with the collectivistic Indian culture. In the individualistic cultures of U.S. and Sweden the paternalistic leadership style would be perceived as violating the privacy of the employees.

Gertsen and Zølner (2012) refer to “nurturant leadership” as they describe Indian leadership values. According to them Indian leadership emphasizes clearly visible hierarchies and authoritarian management power but also a management involvement in the employees’ professional development as well as their personal

lives and their families. Gertsen and Zølner (2012) studied a company with Danish headquarters and a subsidiary in Bangalore and highlight how Western and Scandinavian corporate values are recontextualized in the Indian local organization and the paternalistic organizational culture. The Scandinavian corporate values stand in sharp contrast to the Indian values by emphasizing flat hierarchies, participative management, consensus orientation and individual decision making. The recontextualization entailed that the Danish corporate values about flexibility were transferred to an organizational context where employees were not used to taking responsibility for planning their work. Their use of flexibility thus jeopardized the completion of work tasks in time. The recontextualization was also problematic as the Indian employees were used to supervision and evaluation and associated it with positive values such as feedback and recognition. Without the supervision they felt frustrated, not empowered.

Poster (2008) identifies a similar process in her case study of a US high-tech transnational firm in India and how it implemented equality policies from the headquarters, but she terms it “filtering”. She found that the Indian male managers filtered corporate values in a similar way that the employees in Gersten and Zølner’s (2012) study recontextualized values. According to Poster the managers rarely accepted or adopted the corporate diversity programs of the U.S. company. Instead they ignored these policies or transformed them by integrating them with their own agendas. Poster (2009) interprets this as an illustration of resistance to the US hegemony of business masculinity.

We began this chapter by introducing the idea of “cultural clash” between Swedish (“Western”) and Indian organizational structures, values, social beliefs and norms. However, we do recognize the risk with reproducing simplistic constructions of “West” as “modern” and “East” as “traditional/patriarchal”, thus recognizing the work done by postcolonial and transnational feminist scholars. While the cultural differences are important to articulate we need to be careful so that these differences do not appear to be fixed or immutable, as they are linked to political economic and historical changes (Ganguly-Scrase 2003). While this chapter focuses on issues of flexibility and team work versus Tayloristic modes of operation, these issues need to be situated critically within the transformation from fordist to postfordist modes of production worldwide, including India (cf. e.g. Aneesh 2009; Radhakrishnan 2009).

Method and methodology

The case study companies

This chapter draws on interviews made in three IT firms all employing professional IT workers with a higher education background in Sweden and India. The interviews were made within the framework of the research project “Offswing” coordinated at Uppsala University in Sweden, focusing the so-called “soft” issues in advanced IT offshoring from Sweden to India. The interviews were conducted in the Bangalore, Chennai and Kochin offices of these companies. In the section below, we present the three organisations, under pseudonyms for reasons of anonymity.

Of the three organisations studied, two are start-ups and the third is a well-established large multi-national corporation. All have their headquarters outside India. All engage in developing software programs for Swedish clients and other European clients. The size of their clients vary. **Aspicom** is a small start-up with

headquarters in the Netherlands and development offices in Eastern Europe and in India. They have sales offices in Sweden and in two more European countries. They have around 30 employees at their Indian office. **Benicom** is a small start-up IT organization set up by Swedes in India. It comprises of less than 100 employees in India. In Sweden they only have marketing and management, conducted by Swedes, and the company mainly works with Swedish clients. Both Aspicom and Benicom are managed by Europeans –Aspicom by the European CEO from distance and during frequent visits, and Benicom by Swedes (two with a background in South East Asia) in India. One of the sales arguments of both companies is the presence of Swedish staff offshore, to ameliorate the collaboration and eliminate cultural clashes.

Cindicom is a multinational IT company with headquarters in the UK. They acquired a previously Swedish-owned company, and by this acquisition the Swedish employees became part of a global arena, with collaborators in different countries and an order to offshore some development work to the company's offices in India. The number of employees in the company's Indian offices is about 5000 and they serve clients in different European countries and the USA. They do program development, IT support and some business process work.

There were considerable differences between the companies. Cindicom, because of its size, had more structured policies and processes and the management in the Indian office was practically all Indian. The transnational collaboration in the teams that were studied was between team members and team managers in the Swedish and Indian offices of the company, and only rarely directly with the customers, who mostly communicated with the company's Swedish offices. Aspicom and Benicom were directly managed by Europeans and the developers communicated directly with customers. In the text, the expression "Swedish collaborators" consequently refers to customers in relation to Aspicom and Benicom, and to the Swedish part of the development teams in regard to Cindicom.

Data collection and analysis

Initially, senior management at Aspicom and Benicom were contacted for granting access. The suggested interview sample consisted of employees on different career levels, middle managers and HR people. At Aspicom and Benicom basically all female employees and a corresponding number of male employees in roughly the same positions were interviewed in India, as well as the Swedes engaged in these companies and Aspicom's Dutch founder. At Cindicom four developer teams were chosen by the company's Swedish offshoring coordinator and both Swedish and Indian members of these teams were interviewed, as well as leaders of some other teams and Indian HR personnel. HR personnel and team leaders in the different companies collaborated with the research team in identifying suitable interviewees.

Data was collected by face-to-face interviews between January and August 2012 in Sweden and India. The interviews in Sweden were conducted by two Swedish researchers, and the interviews in India by both the Indian/British researcher and one of the Swedish researchers. In all, 137 people were interviewed in all three organizations. As many of the managers were men, there was an overweight of men in the final sample, but 20 per cent of the interviewees were women. Most of the interviews were conducted in offices and meeting rooms at the companies. Each interview lasted between 20 minutes to an hour and half. Almost all the interviews were recorded. All the interviews in India were in English while the interviews conducted in Sweden were in Swedish. All interviews were transcribed in the

language in which they were recorded. The authors have translated the quotations from the Swedish interviews in this chapter.

The interviews were semi-structured and different interview guides were used for employees and for senior/HR managers. The interviews with the employees focused the employees' educational background, position, career aspirations, work tasks and working conditions, work-life balance, relationships with colleagues, managers and customers, differences in organizational cultures between Sweden and India and differences in working with different clients and customers other than Swedish and Indian. The interviews mainly focused on work issues, and the informants' family background, such as class and caste, or rural vs urban origins were not elaborated on. The employees' educational background was a diploma course, a bachelor, or a masters' degree, mostly, but not always, in disciplines related to information technology. The different levels of education indicate that their mainly middle class backgrounds also varied between lower and upper middle class.

The interviews with senior/HR managers focused on how the initial co-operation between Sweden and India started, how the managers recruited employees and put together a team to manage and deliver the projects, initial phases of the project and challenges in setting up communication routines. They were also asked to comment on the cultural differences that affected everyday work, failures and successes in communication and delivery, work-life balance, and differences in organizational cultures between Sweden and India.

The interviews were analysed by coding and categorising (Fereday and Muir Cochrane 2006), with and without the analysis program Atlas.ti. The analysis involved a combination of inductive and deductive techniques. An existing framework of previous research and theoretical concepts was used, but within this framework the primary objective was to understand, interpret and represent the subjective viewpoints of the interviewees in order to capture the qualitative richness of the data.

The method used to collect the data has some limitations. Since the interviews took place within the organization, it is possible that some interviewees were not able to freely express themselves, in particular because access was provided by managers. A number of the interviews were also conducted in a language which was not the native language of the interviewer, the interviewee, or both.

Results and analysis

Contextualizing and nuancing the universal work ideal

Women were a minority in all three companies in this study, both in Sweden and in India. The managers described that between 10-25 per cent of their employees in India were women and this was explained by the fact that only 10-20 per cent of the applicants for a positions as software developers were women. More men than women graduate from engineering and computer programs in India, even if the ratio of women is higher than in most Western countries (NASSCOM 2009).

When asked explicit questions about gender and gender (in)equality, most informants framed these as family related issues that concerned women in the Indian context. Female employees as a group were almost always seen as tied to their families which was considered problematic in relation to being a software developer. Referrals to actual female individuals also normally dealt with their family

constellations in one way or another. If women actually did continue working after marrying and becoming mothers, their obligations outside of work were expected to put restraints on their work. Although some wives and mothers continued to be employed, their care responsibilities made it difficult for them to work long and late hours and be flexible and mobile.

In addition to women's caring duties, the requirement on the ideal worker to work long and late hours had another gendered aspect in the Indian context, not previously observed in the writings about how the universal work ideal excludes women in the Western work context. This aspect concerned the perception that it is unsafe to be outside late at night and problematic for reasons of decency to work late hours with male colleagues (D'Mello 2006; Donner 2008). In general, both Indian managers and Indian colleagues asserted that women should not work at night:

3:30 is when we start shift in the afternoon and we ended 11:30 in the night and we don't put lady staff in this shift unless they're comfortable. Basically we don't do any bias, because we don't want the male staff to come and complain saying that what's the difference between male and female staff everyone is same. But to be honest, even Indian men have that feeling okay it's not safe for them to travel late nights even though there is a cab available and security available. For safety reasons we don't put them in the last shift and it's a company policy.
(Cindicom manager)

Consequently, when overtime was needed, sometimes male employees were asked in the first place. That women were not perceived as being as flexible and available as men could also be manifested in the salaries:

For the same qualification background job you get the same. But when the increments are given sometimes we may say that woman may get a little less. For example, the manager will say that I am giving 2% more to a man because he is available for me twenty-four-seven on the days but being a lady I can't disturb you after 7 o'clock, I can't disturb you before 9 o'clock, I can't disturb on a Saturday, Sunday. So this man has done, is available all through so I give him 1% more so that can happen, it can happen anywhere. (Cindicom manager, India)

Even if almost all female employees denied that there was a gender pay gap in their companies, some of them also explained that their own salaries might be lower because of this lack of availability.

Thus, the ideal femininity of being a wife and a mother clashed with the universal, abstract work ideal. However, as we will show below, our empirical data highlights a paradox when it comes to women's fit with the universal abstract work ideal in India.

Several of the informants, both Indian and Swedish managers, explained that the lack of technically competent women was a problem as women were considered as valuable employees due to their loyalty. One essential aspect of the universal, abstract ideal worker is the life-long commitment to the workplace and company (Acker 1990; Sallee 2012). Finding loyal employees was of great importance in Aspikom and Benikom, the smaller companies, as they were more vulnerable for

employee turnover, but this was also mentioned in Cindicom. In the Indian transnational business context, characterized by high attrition rates, employee commitment and loyalty was redefined and hardly expected to be life-long. It was also an aspect of the ideal worker that was clearly gendered, although not in the sense that it excluded women as generally suggested (Acker 2012). Instead, several of the managers expressed their will and desire to employ women for reasons related to commitment:

Highly educated girls exist, no doubt. And they are more loyal to the company too. If they feel that it's a good company with good values that gives them a good wage – then they stay. They don't have a great need to move between companies in order to increase their rewards as many guys do. (Benicom manager, Sweden)

This perception existed at all three companies. Previous research has also described women as more loyal to companies than men and less disposed to change work places in order to pursue a career (D'Mello 2006). While life outside work made it difficult or impossible for women to be ideal workers, the opposite was true for men. The obligation to be the provider puts a hard pressure on men to fulfill the requirements of working life, and succeed in the competitive environment (D'Mello and Sahay, 2007). Chandra (2012) describes how men's home environment both requires them to excel in their career and supports them in fulfilling their work role. And in India, changing workplaces is considered an important career strategy which the Swedish managers disapproved of as one of them explained: "We are not interested in people who are only focused on their paycheck but more those who have the genuine interest".

Recruiting a woman could thus be seen as a safe investment compared to recruiting a man. Women were therefore described as sought-after employees and difficult to recruit, which called for special recruitment strategies. The Swedish Benicom manager continued:

I don't think they come to us. Women are very popular. They are much, much more loyal than men. [...] They go to the large companies. It's really, really difficult to employ women software programmers. I even... I even discriminated. I gave the women in our company responsibility to recruit women. Because it would be nicer for the women if women were responsible. But it didn't work out. They go to larger companies.

Exhibiting the ideal characteristic of loyalty most often only lasted, and was expected to last, until the woman got married or became a mother. After that, the female employees were said to leave the company – either to follow their husbands to other locations, or to become full-time mothers. Thus, women could be constructed as both loyal and disloyal by Swedish and Indian managers.

As the analysis above demonstrates, certain Indian femininities were constructed in relation to some of the most essential aspects of the universal work ideal described by Acker (1990; 1992); the employees' loyalty to the company and their ability and desire to work long hours and be both temporally and spatially flexible

. In both aspects, women's role outside work was seen as constituting an obstacle for them in working life, and thus, in spite of women's loyalty, these aspects constructed men as more ideal employees. However, as will be outlined below, even a man who would be considered as an ideal employee in India, was not always seen as such in the eyes of the Swedish customers due to diverging situated work ideals.

Contextualizing and nuancing the situated work ideal

In the three case study companies, the Swedish perceptions of what constituted an ideal worker clashed with the Indian ones in several key aspects. Not surprisingly, technical competence was mentioned as the most basic aspect of the situated work ideal for software professionals in our interviews, both with Swedish and Indian managers. However, when it came to required behaviour of the ideal worker some divergences appeared.

One of the most frequently mentioned requirements for an ideal software professional in the Swedish interviews was being "independent", meaning taking responsibility and initiative and being "proactive". One of the Swedish Betacom managers described their company philosophy in a way that was characteristic for how the ideal worker was perceived by the Swedish managers: "Our company culture is based on that if I give you an assignment, then you'll do it and you let me know if you run into problems".

In the hierarchical Indian context the quality of being "independent" is obviously not so important (cf. Pellegrini et al. 2010). The traditional Indian ideal of the junior employees who execute their tasks to the satisfaction of their seniors and get frequently rated for their ability to do this, collided with the Swedish ideal where even junior staff are expected to take responsibility and ownership of their tasks:

It's a cultural issue. [...]I mean your team will tell me to do a certain thing. If I'm also a Swede, and once my manager tells me, because of my culture, I do it. But in India it's not so. In India you require a couple of reminders for follow-ups, So what happens is the Swede gets surprised when something does not get done. So my suggestion is, when something is told, immediately set up reviews also, you say that okay these things you're supposed to do, let's us take stroke after three days, seven days, 15 days. (Cindicom manager, India)

The emphasis on experience, autonomy and independence meant that the Swedes understood the Indian attrition rate as a major problem. The high attrition rate forced them to redefine the characteristic of an ideal worker as someone staying at the company at least during the lifetime of a project. Even in the Indian perspective, people staying were a more useful resource than those who would leave. However, the Indian managers had a higher tolerance for the high rate of turnover based on their understanding and acceptance of the Indian male worker as the breadwinner that constantly tries to improve his income and status by changing workplaces often.

On the other hand, the composition of the Swedish workforce with middle aged professionals was not seen as an ideal by Cindicom's Indian HR: "I know, I am conscious about it, that with age it is extremely difficult to pick up and be responsible to new ideas immediately". The perceptions of an ideal employee were thus

differently related to age in the two cultural contexts. The Swedes appreciated experience and thorough domain knowledge, but in India, even if age and experience were valued, youth was also seen as having many valuable qualities: young people were seen as career hungry, hardworking, flexible in terms of travelling and work hours, and eager to learn new things. An ideal worker in India would have a desire for constant improvement and would appreciate structured feedback to know which characteristics to improve.

The divergences between a work ideal, situated in a Swedish work tradition, that emphasizes employee initiative and independence and a work ideal, situated in the Indian work tradition, that requires an employee that takes orders and obeys, reflect different management ideologies and organizational structures. The Swedish managers understood the Indian hierarchical organizational structure as problematic because it prevented the employees from developing into self-sufficient and assertive employees. The two different situated work ideals expressed echo to a great deal the different masculinities identified by Benschop and Doorewaard (1998a) as characterizing Tayloristic work context and team based work respectively. While the Swedish work ideal reflects masculine constructions based mainly on an entrepreneurial attitude, the Indian work ideal is associated with authoritarianism and paternalism. While both work ideals to a certain extent exclude women as ideal workers they also create hierarchies between men and exclude certain enactments of masculinity.

The situated work ideal expressed by the Swedish managers was also closely related to expectations on employees' communicative skills. To be able to communicate within the team as well as with customers was as an essential part of the Swedish work ideal.

Because our coworkers need to communicate with
Sweden we need people that are a little more social and
have the talent for asking and listening at the same time.
(Benicom manager, Sweden)

The Swedish managers expressed frustration with the Indian software developers who were said to be too careful in expressing their doubts or problems in front of managers. This was another aspect of the ideal employee which was sometimes difficult for Indians to live up to, as they were used to an hierarchical organization where they were not expected to initiate communication with clients or managers. One of the Swedish Aspicom managers explained how he perceived the problem with Indian employees not fitting the situated work ideal: "They are a little more timid, careful and silent. They don't take the initiative to talk and when they talk, they express themselves with a very limited vocabulary".

A particular aspect of the ideal employee's communicative skills was related to the fact that the transnational counterpart was in a non-English speaking country. The Indian pronunciation of English varies depending on the speaker's geographical origin, class, caste and education. Some software companies conduct English language training for the benefit of those employees who had not been privileged with an English speaking educational background. Thus, English is pronounced in a variety of ways and some of the accents can be experienced as problematic even by native English speakers. For the Swedes it was crucial that the Indian employees spoke English in a way that they could understand. For some of the Swedish

managers a recruitment interview was therefore important in order to check that the accent of the candidate was understandable for a Swede. The language issue was often described as a one-way problem. While Swedes were complaining about the Indian English, the Indian employees did not express any dissatisfaction with the Swedes' knowledge of English. However, in Aspicom it was pronounced that it was the responsibility of the customer also to learn to understand Indian English.

– *Recruiting and retaining ideal workers for the perfect match*

The clashes between differently situated work ideals described above meant that the Indian managers as well as software developers met requirements and ideals that in some aspects were new to them. The Indian offices often strived to satisfy the needs of their Western clients, and coached their staff to correspond to the ideals. An Indian Aspicom team leader for example explained how he perceived it as important for the employees not only to have the technical skills but also to have the "right" attitude to fit into their "family", in order to protect organizational values and work atmosphere. However, some of the ideals seemed more difficult than others to be accepted and transferred from the Swedish organizational culture to the Indian work context.

Both Indian and Swedish managers expressed frustration over cultural clashes in their collaboration and some of these cultural clashes had differences in work ideals as their ultimate cause. Diverging situated work ideals affected what policies and practices the Swedish and Indian managers preferred and promoted in order to create a "perfect match" between employees and companies. The most prominent of these policies were related to recruiting and retaining ideal workers.

The first grid for a prospective employee was often to pass a technical test during the recruitment process, to demonstrate that they actually had the competence that was claimed in their educational qualifications. However, at the next stage in the recruitment process the diverging, situated perceptions of the qualities of the ideal workers clashed. At Cindicom the Swedish emphasis on the ideal worker being "independent" and "proactive" resulted in a cultural clash between Swedish and Indian managers. According to the Swedish team leaders, the Indian Cindicom HR offices did not consider this aspect enough in the recruitment process. It worked better when the recruitment was taken over by an Indian team leader with previous experience of the Swedish work ideals:

Right, the first thing was what I felt and then realized in Sweden, even if you don't know the technology much, what they really look out for is someone who can go and get things done. [...] So I was mainly looking for people who had the attitude to do things by themselves. And then the technology in terms of what we're supposed to do, and trust me when I say that I took people from different technical backgrounds by just looking at them and the way they're performing in Cindicom earlier in different projects. And I know they're performing very well in this project so technology is second to me than the person and the attitude.
(Cindicom team leader, India)

The Indian managers on the other hand were critical to the Swedes' requirement to take part in hiring people for their projects, to find those who had the right kind of attitude to their work according to the Swedish ideals and whose English was understandable for Swedes. The Indian HR perceived this as an intrusion from the Swedes. Some Cindicom managers in India perceived the Swedes as particularly

frustrated, compared to other customer countries, and told that the Swedes wanted to micro-manage the Indian work processes. Concretely this also concerned different incentives the Swedes wanted to use to retain employees who worked for them – for example with salary rises for men and flexible working conditions for women. According to the Indian Cindicom managers, giving extra incentives for people working towards Sweden would disrupt the local structure.

If the quality is suffering it is your right to demand quality and it is our duty to provide quality. But then, you can't say 'I own these resources so if he is going out and he is resigned from the company pay him extra'. But we can't do that because we have a certain set of people here, they have a certain salary band. You should leave the decision to the local management to handle it. (Cindicom manager, India)

This was also one of the cultural clashes mentioned by the Swedish Cindicom team leaders. They were concerned over the lack of flexibility at the Indian offices in handling individual employees' needs and especially attending to what was seen as women's specific needs. Cindicom had rules, regulations and policies for retaining women, including a target figure for the percentage of women in the workforce and meetings between the HR manager and women to discuss issues. A women's network had also recently been started. However, Cindicom was less flexible than the smaller companies in this study. When Swedish Cindicom team leaders wanted to find individual solutions for recruiting and retaining women, they met with problems with the Indian HR. A Swedish manager who was affected by Cindicom's policies expressed his dissatisfaction with the inflexibility of the Indian HR:

In some deliveries we have seen that we would very much like to keep a woman after she has had her child. And she wants to continue working and could work two or three days a week. But it has been turned down. Because they didn't allow distance work.

According to this manager the Indian HR prevented the development of a more flexible work organization that would support and retain mothers in the company.

The general equality policies were not always followed on the middle management level. For example, in spite of the career development programs officially being open for both women and men, some Cindicom managers were said to be more reluctant to recommend women to them, because of the perceived risk of them leaving the company.

The training program announcement offers everyone with skill to come. A man gets a preference, a woman doesn't get a preference. So, because the managers feel the woman, after training she may not come to work, she may resign and go, whereas a man, I think if he completes the training at least he will be useful for the organization.

Any mention of managers who would have made corresponding estimations of the risks of their male employees changing companies was not found in the interviews, in spite of the general impression of men being more prone to change jobs for career reasons.

The small companies in this study, Aspicom and Benicom, did not have comprehensive programs for support and promotion or for gender equality. Instead they focused on finding individual solutions. All three companies, had difficulties in

retaining married women with children, and often did not succeed. Cindicom had the advantage of having offices in several Indian cities, which meant that if the reason for attrition would be husband's location, the company could sometimes arrange a transfer for the woman to an office at that location.

All the three case study companies had official policies to keep to an eight hour work day and prided themselves of providing reasonable working hours, which were expected to be specially valued by women. Although the employees said that they occasionally worked overtime if there was a deadline to be met, they also appreciated the official policies of the companies. A Benicom manager explained: "We look at it from a gender equality perspective. We prefer an eight hour working day". The Swedish managers and colleagues of the Cindicom employees were concerned about the long working hours of their Indian colleagues. However, in all three companies there were also hero stories about people saving a project and satisfying a customer by working late or on weekends. In this case the Swedes benefited from the Indian ideal about long hours. When it comes to the long hours culture promoted by the Indian managers the differences between the work ideals created frustrations for the Indian managers, when Swedes were not available in the way the Indian managers needed and expected.

Swedish people are, what do you say [...], I mean they are a little bit late in replying their mails. Here we believe if you get some mail you should be prompt enough to reply. At least, if you do not have any information you will reply saying that we are working on this or I will get that information and then get back to you. But they keep quiet for maybe two days, maybe five days, maybe ten days and then after ten days then they say, 'Okay, I will discuss quickly [...] and get back to you.' So for that reason, I mean, that is, clarity is a little bit blurred.
(Cindicom team leader, India)

Another set of policies and practices used in the Indian context that caused frustration on behalf of the Swedish managers concerned the use of different evaluation and rewarding schemes. These were used by the Indian managers to openly express the expectations of the ideal worker. Frequent open assessments and ratings were important to decide both salary levels and different awards, which were used to motivate constant individual improvement. In the interviews with the Indian employees they were a recurrent topic and considered very important. Conversely, the Swedish managers and team members expressed frustration towards Indian employees' need of guidance and supervision. The importance of formal feedback in the Indian setting was not always understood by the Swedes, and some Indian employees felt that this disadvantaged them:

I get feedback from my line manager and from the teams in Sweden. I can get good feedback when I'm working with them and talking to them, but it's not enough. Cindicom needs proof, so it needs to be put on paper in official ratings.
(Cindicom employee, India)

Concluding discussion

Transnational work ideals

Our results show that the so called universal, abstract ideal worker that Acker (1990) described is a construction clearly shaped by the Western context it is situated in. The concept 'gendered work ideals' reflects the Western context in that it to a certain extent assumes that men's and women's roles in society are much more similar than they are in India. Acker for example does not relate the concept of an ideal worker to a situation where women's work roles are so tied to their private roles that all discussions of women's roles in the company are explicitly based on a conception of their private roles. In the Indian IT industry conditions outside the workplace play a role not apprehended by Acker, in particular for women.

Managers at all three companies pointed out that it is common in India that grandparents take care of their grandchildren. With the salaries from the IT sector it is also fully possible to employ household help. However, that does not relieve middle class mothers from the obligation of being responsible for the household and for children's upbringing and education. To be able to work, a woman with children thus has to have engaged and supporting parents or in-laws, that were not in need of care themselves, (Rajadhyaksha & Bhatnagar 2000), and even with the help of relatives, it is seldom possible for her to live up to the ideal norm of long and late hours.

The chapter has also illustrated that the concept 'gendered work ideal' can be used to highlight how multi-faceted transnational work ideals are and how cultural clashes can be explained with reference to conflicting situated work ideals. Work ideals are not always easily transferred and institutionalized from one work context to another. What is considered an ideal employee in an IT transnational organisation depends on where the company is located, culture of the country, size and age of the corporation (multinational or small start-up) and nature of the business and the clients of the company. Previously, the work ideal concept has been used to analyse the Western work context and to delineate the exclusion and subordination of women employees at work. In cross-cultural studies this concept can also be used in order to highlight the construction of different masculinities and hierarchies between men. Investigating transnational work ideals underlines how culture, ethnicity, language, age and class intersect with gender and create hierarchies not only between women and men but also between men. The results highlight how work ideals diverge according to organizational structures and management ideologies but also how they are linked to the very different national cultural dimensions of Sweden and India (cf. Bredillet et al. 2010). Even if software industries are much more Western than most of the workplaces in India, traditional values still influence the management ideologies that are used, which in our study is reflected in that the Indian work ideals more resemble the Tayloristic than the team-based ideal (Benschop and Dooreward 1998a).

When Swedish and Indian managers describe the ideal Indian software developer, both commonalities and differences appear. Aspects that we have discussed here are technical competence, loyalty to the company and the project, engagement manifested in willingness to work long hours and being independent, responsible and proactive. Both the commonalities and the differences have gendered aspects.

Technical competence is a characteristic which is valued by managers in both contexts. In India it is the baseline, it is what you get recruited for. For Swedes, it is extremely important that the Indians have a good technical competence because it

justifies their being in the project in the first place. However, in Sweden, compared to India, the focus is less on technical competence. This is because, firstly, in the local Swedish context there is no particular need to focus on technical competence: applicants normally have the necessary technical competence they claim to have according to their educational qualifications and so it needs less attention. And, secondly, as Swedish organizations are flat and the culture stresses teamwork, soft skills become more important relative to technical competence only.

The appreciation of the employees' technical competence can take on gendered forms. In the Indian context, technical competence is valued and gender neutral and women are perceived as technically competent and confident, and thus, could be ideal employees. A technically competent woman may enjoy high esteem for her skills in India, while she does not necessarily get that appreciation among the Swedes who do not expect her to be as technically competent as men and who put somewhat less weight in technical skills. However, technical competence does not make women ideal workers in the Indian IT sector, where long working hours and availability are even more important than in the West, and women are seen as not being able to comply to these, because of their obligations outside work. While the problems for women in the West for being ideal IT employees mainly can be referred to their work identity, it is the opposite for women in India.

Loyalty to the company is something that is also valued in both contexts, but to different degrees. The Swedish ideal worker stays at the company and grows into the company culture and acquires domain and client knowledge. In India, the attitude is more ambivalent. Being loyal to the company is an advantage, and companies and managers have incentives to keep their employees. At the same time, in particular young male employees (who are the absolute majority) are rather expected to change jobs in search for better income and better CVs, and a young male software developer who would be satisfied with staying at the same company or same team would be negatively regarded as lacking ambition. For women, the situation is different. The fact that women change jobs less often is recognised as advantageous for the company, but it also makes them into secondary employees who are not showing ambition and participating in the race. The expectation that they will leave the company for family reasons contributes to marginalising them.

Long and late hours culture is valued in the Indian setting, while the Swedish managers do not particularly applaud it – even if they do not complain when they reap its benefits. This is the main issue separating genders among the Indian software developers, and making it very difficult for women to be ideal software developers. The long work hour culture effectively divided men and women into two separate groups, one of which was far from the ideal. Both the late hours culture and the difficulties of women to stay late at the office were presented as something unquestionable, even in the three case study companies, all of which officially had an eight hour work day. Here, a prevalent Indian organizational culture and work ideal overrode the expectations of the Swedish customer. The Swedish managers and colleagues, who did not visit India for any longer periods, were only dimly aware of the long hours practices. Thus, the disadvantages caused by women's restrictions in regard to time and space were maintained, even when that might not have been necessary.

Employees who are independent and proactive, who take the full responsibility for their part of the work and who communicate about problems when they appear, is a strong Swedish ideal, which both men and women are expected to fulfil. In India, this is not an ideal when it comes to software developers, but rather for employees on managerial levels. The Swedish expectations that the Indian software developers would conform to this ideal effectively separated Swedish and Indian developers into two groups, of which the Indian one was far away from the Swedish ideal. As women were few in both settings, this divergence effectively pointed at two local masculine ideals and practices.

Ideals in the post-colonialist context

While the large Indian offices of Cindicom were practically all-Indian, employees at Aspicom and Benicom were working under direct European (Dutch and Swedish) leadership. This also means that the understandings of the ideal worker among the managers differed. With the different management structures of the companies our study gives certain insights in neo-colonialism and also its relation to gender equality policies. Even if Sweden and India do not have a common colonial past, the present day Western colonialist thinking regards it as a self-evident fact that the Indians should strive to be the ideal workers in the Swedish sense to keep the Swedish customers happy. An example of the power relationship was the often one-sided issue of language, where the Swedes who found it difficult to express themselves in English were met by patience and helpfulness, while some of the Indians actually tried to learn Swedish. Yet, language was described as a problem more often on the Swedish than on the Indian side.

Managers of Aspicom and Benicom, who were directly involved in the day-to-day management in the small startups, had developed their understanding of the ideal employee (as well as their perceptions of gender) in the European setting. The Swedish managers in Benicom had spent considerable time in India and two of them had a background in South Asia, even if they had grown up in Sweden. Thus they had an understanding of the Indian culture as well as an understanding of the needs and preferences of the Swedish clients and a will to comply to them. The mission of the founders was to export Swedish management and development models to India. Following the line of reasoning of Ravishankar et al. (2013), colonialism in this case was a reflection of a certain ideological discourse, of superiority and inferiority of cultures, regardless of the exact national background of the parties involved. During the years of the company's operation the managers had conceded to a hybrid model of managing, still asserting that the basic values were Swedish, but also having incorporated Indian management techniques. However, the communication of work ideals between the Swedish and Indian offices suffered from the fact that one of the important ways of doing this, written individual feedback of different kinds, was not used and understood by the Swedish clients. Ratings from the Swedish collaborators could have been a powerful medium to transmit ideas of the ideal employee.

The differences in perceptions of ideal workers caused problems in the collaboration between Swedish and Indian managers at Cindicom. At Cindicom, the Indian management, in particular those who had long time collaborations with Swedes, had created what Ravishankar et al. (2013) would call hybrid ideals. The Indian offices were managed by Indians, who wanted to promote ideal Indian employees' careers to foster a younger generation of Indians to take over. The management used both Western managerial techniques and a paternalistic Indian approach. The ideal

employees were expected to exhibit both entrepreneurial and complying characteristics. The Indian management processes were to a certain extent seen as a nuisance by the Swedish collaborators, while the Indian management thought it would be much easier if the Swedes would accept the Indian organizational practices to the same extent as earlier offshoring collaborators, for example in the UK and the USA had done. The Cindicom management did not hide that they did not fully share the Swedish ideals. This attitude was probably facilitated by Sweden's position in the global order, as a country with a lower position than USA and UK.

Gender equality policies, as they are formed in large multinational companies, in themselves can be seen as a part of the neo-colonialist discourse. They normally originate from headquarters or are modelled the same way as in the West, with more or less adaptation for the local context. Poster's (2008) reflections on how the headquarters of transnational companies try to impose their gender equality policies in different cultural contexts, and how these efforts are ignored or adapted, hold also in our study. The policies at Cindicom were a good example of this, where the Indian office of the international company tried to implement some gender equality measures following general Cindicom policies, being successful in some and less successful in others. At Benicom the Swedish background of the managers had not resulted in particular gender equality policies. At Aspicom the family metaphor was very strong, comprising both women and men. Thus, when coming into an Indian setting, the European managers left the European gender equality discourse (which in Sweden is very strong) behind as something European, but did not investigate those gender equality issues which could be relevant for their employees in the Indian setting.

Possibly, as indicated by both Cindicom and Benicom managers, the differences in work ideals are particularly large between India and Sweden, causing more problems than what is found in offshoring collaborations between other countries, making the "perfect match" difficult to achieve.

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