

Culture and ethnocentric staffing in Indian MNCs in the IT Service Sector in the UK

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Abstract

This paper examines the tendency of emerging market MNCs to resort to ethnocentric staffing policy when operating in advanced economy. It looks at Indian IT sector companies operating in the UK. This paper argues that culture is a critical factor which prevents Indian IT MNCs from hiring local employees in their UK subsidiaries. This article divides culture into three broad types of national culture, organisational culture and the IT culture. A major part of the latter half of this paper delves deeper into the concept of 'IT culture' and its role in international staffing of Indian IT sector MNCs in the UK. This article provides examples of Indian IT culture that make Indian IT sector MNCs unique.

Keywords

Culture; IT Culture; organisational work practices; ethnocentrism; India; MNC

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Introduction

Emerging market MNCs (EM-MNCs) have been studied for the past two decades (Das, 2007; Hofstede, 2007; Bianchi, 2014). However, our understanding of their international operations is limited. EM-MNCs are often tagged as preferring ethnocentric staffing policies. Yet, the reasons for the ethnocentric predisposition of EM-MNCs are under researched. The conventional understanding of ethnocentric staffing suggests that EM-MNCs use parent country nationals in their foreign subsidiaries because they are cheaper than to hire locally (Rui, Zhang and Shipman, 2017; Zheng and Smith, 2019). This paper develops on the earlier research on EM-MNCs by looking at Indian MNCs operating in the UK. This paper argues that Indian MNCs prefer ethnocentric staffing in their subsidiaries in the UK not only because of cost factors but also due to cultural factors. Further, this paper bifurcates culture into national, organisational and information technology (IT) culture. This paper uses a case study methodology along with semi-structured interviews as tool for data collection. It looks at the Indian IT MNCs operating in the UK to identify how cultural factors may impact their access to the local labour market. And why Indian IT MNCs may prefer sending parent country expatriates to UK subsidiaries than hiring locally.

Thus, this paper asks the following research questions: (1) Why are Indian MNCs in the IT sector dependent on ethnocentric staffing policy when filling their UK subsidiaries? (2) How does culture impact the choice of staffing policies of Indian IT MNCs in the UK? And (3) In what ways does the IT culture promote ethnocentric staffing policy in top Indian MNCs' UK subsidiaries?

National Culture, Organisational Culture, and the IT Culture

The definition of culture is just as dynamic as the field itself (Schein and Schein, 2016). The definition has evolved over the years and so have its components. Culture can be expressed through rituals, songs, metaphors, humour, jargon, and stories (Trice and Beyer, 1995). As these components evolve so does the associated culture. Until now the concept of culture has been thoroughly studies from two varied but mutually inclusive perspectives, namely the national culture (Hofstede, 1980, 2007; McSweeney, 2002) and the organisational culture (Owens and Steinhoff, 1989; Yanow, 1995; Baral and Bhargava, 2011; Schein and Schein, 2016; Tripathi and Kumar, 2020).

On one hand, the national culture lens looks at the impact of culture at a macro level (national level), while the organisational culture suggests cultural differences at an organisational level (micro). The national culture has famously been studied as a continuum of collectivistic and individualistic cultures (Hofstede, 1980). This 'mental programming' of humans can be classified into three broad categories: individualistic, collectivistic, and universal. The universal level is shared by all mankind, for instance, emotions of laughing, weeping etc. The collectivistic is shared by people belonging to one group. This group can be as small as a couple and as huge as a nationality. The individual level is unique to every human being (Hofstede, 1980).

However, in this paper I would like to introduce a third kind of culture which is ubiquitous irrespective of the organisational or national level. I call it the 'IT Culture'. IT culture can be defined as the cumulation of institutional and societal factors that encourage a culture of promoting the dependence of IT status and knowledge in attaining high value IT skills. This

article looks for the evidence of an IT culture within the Indian IT companies operating in the UK. Then, it will move on to discuss the impact of the IT culture on the staffing policies of Indian IT companies in the UK. For instance, it is normal for Indian IT companies to expect their employees to hone their technical skills (by learning new software or computer languages) in their personal time to supplement the employees on job performance. The IT culture can be considered as a cultural aspect transcending the organisational and the national boundaries. For instance, the IT culture can be seen in IT service companies within the IT sector companies irrespective of their country of origin.

International Staffing Policies

When operating outside the national boundaries of the parent country, an MNC can choose between host country nationals (locals), parent country national expatriates (PCNs) or third country nationals. HCNs are employees working in an international subsidiary of the organisation who have the same nationality as the country in which the organisation is based. For instance, a British employee working in a British subsidiary of an Indian MNCs will be an HCN. PCNs are international assignees who have the same nationality as the organisation's parent country. For instance, an Indian employee working in a British subsidiary of an Indian MNCs will be a PCN expatriate. Finally, third country nationals (TCNs) are employees working in an international subsidiary of the organisation who do not share their nationality with the country where the subsidiary is located or the parent country of the organisation. For instance, a German national working in the British subsidiary of an Indian MNCs will be a TCN expatriate.

International staffing policies of MNCs are generally categorised into three different international orientations. These include, ethnocentric, polycentric and geocentric (Perlmutter and Heenan, 1974). MNCs that follow ethnocentric staffing policies will prefer hiring PCN expatriates while filling positions in the foreign subsidiaries. Whereas, hiring HCNs will be a part of the polycentric staffing. However, hiring the best candidate irrespective of their nationality is called the geocentric staffing. An organisation's propensity to hire PCNs in senior management positions is dependent on four broad factors. These include: - 'parent country/company'; 'industry'; 'host country'; and 'subsidiary characteristics' (Reiche and Harzing, 2019).

Emerging Market MNCs

The development of theories from EM-MNCs' perspective has been gradual, with early research unable to explain foreign direct investment (FDI) to and from EM-MNCs (Gaur, Kumar and Sarathy, 2011). Unlike the developed market MNCs, emerging market MNCs entering international markets expand their home country's competitive advantage rather than exploiting local resources (Gugler, 2017). This dependence on their parent company resources and advantages makes EM-MNCs unique.

When competing in developed markets, EM-MNCs face double hurdles in terms of liability of country-of-origin (COO) and the liability of foreignness (LoF) (Harzing and Sorge, 2003; Khan et al., 2019). MNCs are widely impacted by these hurdles especially EM-MNCs due to their higher need for global integration and local adaptation of human resource management (HRM) policies (Chang, Melani and Wilkinson, 2009).

Liability of COO means that MNCs are unable to operate to their full potential due to the home country of the parent organisation. Due to some misconceptions regarding the COO of the MNC, they find it difficult to hire local talent in the foreign subsidiaries of the organisation. For instance, Indian and Chinese MNCs are known for their cheap production methods and their preference for quantity over quality. However, not all companies come under this umbrella of cheap companies. Such a mentality for another country can hurt the growth of a business in a foreign market.

On the contrary, a liability of emergingness (LoE) may arise for MNCs from developing markets due to their less advanced technological infrastructure in their home country. LoE may also occur due to the limited experience of operating in the area (business/geographical area). Thus, EM-MNCs cannot reap the benefits of their technological advancements in the host country of the subsidiary like the developed market MNCs (Madhok and Keyhani, 2012). These EM-MNCs must learn about their roles as social actors, coordinate new roles of employees, and deal with mutual socialisation problems with the participants (Singh, Tucker and House, 1986). Hence, new firms are always at a disadvantage compared to the local MNCs.

LoF is the highest at the time of entry in the new market and it keeps on reducing over time as other competitors exit the market (Zaheer, 1995). Liability of LoF is a universal problem for MNCs but when it is combined with information problems, misguided regulations, and an inefficient judicial system (factors commonly found in emerging markets) makes the issues even more acute in EM-MNCs (Khanna and Palepu, 2000; Yaprak and Karademir, 2010). Furthermore, Barnard (2010) argues that even when EM-MNCs have the resources with which they can compete with their developed market competitors, their capabilities may not be appropriate or useful in highly developed markets (Barnard, 2010).

EM-MNCs may also face a liability of newness. This liability of newness may arise from MNCs from developing countries with less technological infrastructure in their home country to reap their benefits in the host country of the subsidiary. All the new MNCs must learn about their roles as social actors, coordinate new roles of employees, and deal with mutual socialisation problems with the participants (Singh, Tucker and House, 1986). Due to all these issues new firms are always at a disadvantage compared to the local MNCs. This kind of disadvantage is termed as the Liability of newness.

EM-MNCs use firm specific assets (arising from different factors of production like land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship) to overcome the LoF (Pradhan, 2004). These MNCs use different factors of production to get an edge over the competition in the foreign market. However, liabilities such as the LoE and the LoF tend to get resolved overtime. As MNCs mature, they learn to adapt to their local surroundings and with this comes local embeddedness. Since most EM-MNCs face liability of newness alongside LoF and LoE there is still a long way to go before they can overcome all these liabilities.

However, one of the strategies that Indian IT MNCs use is of 'Body Shopping' (Aneesh, 2006). He defines it as, a mechanism by which system analysts and programmers from India come to the USA on H-1B visa. Software companies shop for 'skilled bodies' in India and then send them for short assignments in the USA and thus entering the country's job market.

Methodology

Qualitative Research

This research uses Qualitative Research methodology to carry out the data collection. Many authors have argued that qualitative research methodology can potentially provide a rich and detailed insight into the field while providing a contextual explanation of various challenges faced in modern management research (Symon, Cassell and Dickson, 2000; Flick, Kardoff and Steinke, 2004; Cassell and Symon, 2008; Bryman and Bell, 2011). This research used case study approach along with semi-structured interviews to discuss culture induced staffing challenges faced by the top Indian IT Service companies like TCS, Wipro, Infosys and HCL when operating in the UK. Qualitative research seeks to understand the social realities and draw attention to processes, meaning patterns and structural features (Flick, Kardoff and Steinke, 2004). Hence the relevance in this research.

Case Study

This research used case study methodology to support the data collected with interviews. The case study approach is widely used for theory building when and where the existing knowledge is limited with an unusual, covert or illicit focus of the study (Eisenhardt, 1989). A research question can be divided into five broad types, which include, who, what, where, how and why. Since this research asks the why question, that is, why do Indian MNCs prefer ethnocentric staffing policies in their British subsidiaries, the most applicable method for research includes experiments, history analysis and case study analysis (Yin, 1993). Despite the over-generalisation and lack of replicability of one-off case studies and extreme polarisation of double case studies, this methodology can be used by generalising the theory with one case and then applying it with all other cases. For the same reason, this research used the whole Tata Group of companies as a source of data collection with more focus on TCS. This research also collected data from current/ex-TCS employees who have had experience working with other Indian IT service companies in the UK to give a more holistic view.

Data Collection Process

The primary data collection process was divided into three broad stages. The first stage was the 'pre-interview', the second stage was the 'Interview' and the third and final stage was the 'post-interview'. During the pre-interview the respondents were debriefed about the research project and all their questions were answered regarding the research process. The interviews lasted over 1 hour on average with extra time given to debriefing the research prior to the interview and participants' questions regarding the research. The interview questions were divided into seven broad categories, including, 'personal background'; 'current position and work roles'; 'current assignments'; 'current subsidiary'; 'staff composition'; 'knowledge transfer and training'; and 'work relations'. These interviews were conducted over Microsoft Teams and was included 12 broad questions which were asked from all the respondents. However, depending on the answers received from these questions, further in-depth questions were asked. After the conclusion of each interview, the respective respondent was asked to share further prospective candidates who may be willing to participate in the research. Due to the personal nature of the interview process and long pre interview discussions, most of the respondents shared a few contacts with one sharing as many as nine contacts, however not all of them were associated with Indian MNCs in the UK. Hence, the final respondents were selected only if they met the requirement for the research. The dataset, described in Table 1,

was drawn from three rounds of semi-structured interviews, published reports, newspaper articles and the official website of TCS.

Table 1: Data Description

Data Source	Description	Use in analysis
Semi-Structured interviews	First round (April-June 2022, 13 informants): HR head, subsidiary head, Managing Director, Quality Assurance Head, Business Development manager, Associate Vice President, Principal consultant, Program manager, Design engineer, and Design analyst. Second Round (September 2022): solution architects, technology advisors, business analyst, project managers, and business development director. Third round (January-March 2023) business consultants, subsidiary directors, program managers, portfolio managers, Quality Assurance Head, and HR head.	To look at the overarching strategies used by Indian MNCs when staffing their foreign subsidiaries in the UK. To identify different kinds of jobs that Indian MNCs need parent country national employees to fill in subsidiaries in the UK. To understand what separates the employees from Indian origin compared to locally available workforce when it comes to the IT sector in the UK. To present and discuss preliminary findings, validate data, eliminate biases and obtain additional feedback.
Published reports	India meets Britain tracker was analysed on a regular basis. The reports between 2020 and 2024 were analysed to identify market share of Indian businesses in the UK. Confederation of Indian Industries Report, 2020	To identify the current operations of Indian MNCs in the UK at a macro level. According to a 2020 report by the Confederation of Indian Industries, Indian MNCs hired 111,000 employees in the UK despite being ethnocentric
Data Source	Description	Use in analysis

Newspaper articles	Many newspaper articles were also referred as a part of this research. Be it the Cornell University article on Tata Innovation Centres from 2020 or the capital market article from 2022, which shared that TCS became #1 company in Europe in terms of customer satisfaction.	This article was used to elaborate how the Tata Group of companies have worked with universities worldwide to encourage innovation and discuss how different leaders of the Tata group have helped the group evolve over the years.
TCS official website	TCS official website (www.tcs.com) was used to identify the preferred form of recruitment and selection by the organisation for its subsidiaries all around the world.	The website was used to identify the reliance on Code Vita, a computer coding competition conducted by TCS on a global scale. Code Vita is one-of-a-kind competition which became a part of Guinness Book of World Records in 2022.

Table 2 Profile of interviewees

Respondent ID	Organisation	Job Title	Country of Origin	Experience in the UK (in years)
AM01	Am Sphere	Quality Assurance Head	India	30
WTW01	Willis Towers Watson (formally TCS)	Quality Assurance Lead	India	18
BS01	BirlaSoft	HR Head	India (American citizen for 32 years)	30
BS02	BirlaSoft (formally HCL)	Business Leader	India	23
CZ02	Cognizant	Program and Portfolio Manager	India	16
CZ01	Cognizant (formally TCS)	Program and Portfolio Manager	India	15
ESSAR01	Essar Oil UK Limited	Director Public Affairs	England	20

Respondent ID	Organisation	Job Title	Country of Origin	Experience in the UK (in years)
ESSAR02	Essar Oil UK Limited	Finance Head Europe Office	India	13
GC01	Green Combustion	Managing Director	England	10
HCL01	HCL	Manager	India	24
HCL02	HCL	Analyst	India (monthly short-term visits to London)	20
IS01	Infosys	Associate Vice President	India	28
LT01	Larsen & Tubro	Principal Design Engineer	India	7
LSE01	London Stock Exchange (formally TCS)	Analyst	India	26
NI01	NIT	Program Manager and consultant	India	20
SAP01	Publicis Sapient	Subsidiary Director	India	14
TL01	Tata Limited	Executive Manager	India (British citizen for 10 years)	20
TCS01	TCS	Director Business Development	India	27
TCS02	TCS	Program Manager	India	13
TCS03	TCS	Analyst	India	26
TCS04	TCS	Project Manager	India	15
TCS05	TCS	Senior Business Analyst	Indian (British citizen for 4 years)	25
TCS06	TCS	Solution Architect	India	13
TCS07	TCS	Consultant	India	21
TCS08	TCS	Client Relations	India	25

Respondent ID	Organisation	Job Title	Country of Origin	Experience in the UK (in years)
VE01	VE3 (UK consulting- IT service company)	Director	India	20
WI01	Wipro	Principal Consultant	India (British citizen for 15 years)	24
WI02	Wipro	Data Analyst	India	2

Secondary Data

The data was collected between April and June 2022 and then in September 2022 and ended with a third and final round between January to March 2023. However, due to the limited access to in-person interviews there was not enough primary data to support the arguments. To overcome this information deficit many company reports of Tata Group and specifically TCS were referred. This use of secondary data is common with case studies (Yin, 2014). Having access to secondary data helped contextualise the primary data collected as a part of this research. Not only did it support the data collected through interviews but also it helped fill in the gaps left out during the process of primary data collection. Other sources of secondary data were also used, like, official websites of TCS, Department of International Trade of the UK government and the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI).

Data Analysis Method

A thematic analysis of data may be applied irrespective of the kind of research being carried out (deductive, inductive or abductive approach to the research) (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Since, a thematic analysis is generally used to identify the themes and patterns occurring across a data set (including but not limited to a series of interviews, observations, documents, dairies or websites to be analysed), it is an ideal method for analysing qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2004).

A thematic analysis may be used for six broad processes while analysing the data. These include: (1) comprehending large and disparate qualitative data; (2) integrating data drawn from different transcripts and notes; (3) identifying key themes and patterns from the data set to help further exploration; (4) producing a thematic description of the data; (5) developing and testing explanations and theories based on thematic patterns; and (6) to draw and verify conclusions from the data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). However, thematic analysis may also be seen as the second stage of a five-stage qualitative data analysis framework (Ritchie and Spencer, 2002).

In this research, the data analysis process included going through each of the interview transcripts, which were coded and analysed. After conducting and analysing 28 semi-structured interviews, no new themes seemed to emerge and thus the interviews were halted. Due to the limited number of interviews manual coding was preferred rather than using software like

NVivo14. An inductive data analysis process was used. The research interviews were conducted in three stages. In the first stage, people working for Indian MNCs were interviewed to understand their experiences of working in the UK. The respondents for this stage were accessed through personal and family contacts. But to overcome the availability bias the respondents were requested for further contacts. The second set of interviewees were connections of the initial set of respondents. These interviewees had no personal contacts with the researcher and belonged to a wider background (i.e. they belonged to different states of India, while the initial respondents were mainly from Delhi NCR region of India and some of them were British nationals both with and without Indian ancestry). The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were then added to NVivo 14. On there, the data was marked and added to various nodes. These nodes were then combined into overarching codes. These codes were grouped into themes (Table 3).

Table 3 Identification of Themes and Codes

<i>Data</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Theme</i>
It's really important that companies are trusted no matter who the company is. Because that's what gets you your freedom to operate the fact that your stakeholders trust you and will leave you alone to get on with it. So trust gives you freedom to operate so that's really important to every company. What might be different about an Indian company is that you have to perhaps put lots more work in in into building awareness. The company's heritage the company's brand the company's credibility because that won't already be known to stakeholders in the UK.	ESSAR01	Lack of trust between Indian MNCs and the locals	Culture
In Kolkata there is no such time limit because you know when there is some	TCS06	Organisational culture at the subsidiary	

<i>Data</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Theme</i>
time difference 4.5 and 5.5 hours. So, we must start at the morning 10 or 10:30AM But when the business ends nearly 5PM here which is nearly 10:30 PM in India. So, we must serve nearly 12 hours and also if we need to attend a meeting at 4 o'clock BST so I must be there from 4 to 5PM so India time is 10-30PM.			
Sometimes what I've seen is that in India your work culture is you get the work done is important whether you your eight hours or 10 hours are over or not you know irrespective of how good the work environment is, sometimes people don't understand some cultural references or if somebody gives you an example of something which is from the U K. And a lot of times people get blank right what is even talking about So if you don't understand anything just ask what does it mean for People sometimes hesitate and they don't ask. So it's always better to ask if you don't understand anything and people are quite friendly and they would explain it to	CZ01		

<i>Data</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Theme</i>
you. And of course the interaction with the customer is quite important as well. Best experience that you get is working directly with the customer And only you will understand the product that you're working on understand why you're doing what you're doing.			
But you would say that I start my day at like 7:00 AM in the morning and it goes up to 11:00 PM. Really, so roughly about 16 hours of work and that goes from Monday to Saturday full on like this. 7:00 to 11:00 Sunday. It's kind of gets torn down Sunday.	VE01	Information technology culture	
If you look at the normal working hours. In geography, we do not adapt or typical working out. We have to do a nine to five job. And somewhere I think it is not a good thing also, but I think that is what we have adapt from the beginning. Doesn't matter if it is an important let's do it out of time at any point of day, let's do that. Visa versa, the priority is what I have seen outside India, especially in Europe and Eukary region. They take care of lot	SAP01		

<i>Data</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Theme</i>
of time on their parcel time for them it is important. It's not that it is not important for our Indian multinational			
The chief executive is Indian and half of the executive leadership team are Indian. Maybe two thirds are Indian so there's a really significant presence of Indian people in the leadership of the business. My interactions with the teams in India can be very transactional. We have a competency centre in India and one of my graphic designer works in India. Also, in the communications there's a big Indian team too. So we work together to ensure that all our messages are co ordinated and aligned and that we're supporting one another. And then the strategic direction comes from a leadership team that actually spends time in Mumbai in India and also in London. So, that strategic direction comes from a mix of our kind of strategic leadership team and then obviously the big boss in Mumbai.	ESSAR01		
What I meant was like you know in the Indian culture if we	TCS01	Impact of National Culture on	Organisation work practices

<i>Data</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Theme</i>
are saying that for instance if we take time as a very general example If we say a meeting is starting at 2 p.m. Most of the people might come by 2-15 that is a granted thing.		Organisational Work Practices	
So, I experienced this when I had my first assignment, and my team was in India and since they knew that I am Indian project manager their expectation it was quite weird actually I think it's a cultural shock for me. Maybe since I am of Indian origin there was a Christmas party and then they were expecting me to send them money for the for the Christmas treat. They expect me to send a part of my salary to you If you expect a treat then you should go to your manager like your project manager who will have the money to sponsor that to give you a treat You can't expect me because since I'm sitting in the UK does not mean that I am obliged to do that... But it was a shock to me that why they're expecting me but that's how maybe in system in India works.	WI01	Organisational culture at the subsidiary	
The refinery I work for was previously owned by Shell, well if you're	ESSAR01	Brand identity	Strategic consideration

<i>Data</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Theme</i>
in the UK that's a well established brand. That's a brand that you recognise, that's something you'll be very familiar with. Whereas Essar is not a brand you're familiar with and the owners are not business people that you're familiar with. So you have to invest energy to ensure that you're kind of building that awareness so that then the company can be trusted. It's not more important that you're trusted if you're a foreign investor but you might have to work harder to build the relationship to underpin the trust just because the other companies are just more familiar and more established within this marketplace.			
Like see, we are hiring (in the UK). Plus we have many kind of social events as well where we go to schools and motivate them regarding the technology. I'm part of that activities as well. So sometime we go then tell them (students) regarding the meta, then AIML and all, they have a lot of questions regarding that. But I have seen people don't like if	TCS05	Cost of hiring locally	

<i>Data</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Theme</i>
you see maths and algorithms they run away. But if you go with it, it uses like 10 minutes. Some people will say OK, let's understand. What is this? So you should not tell everything in advance. Better keep a secret and go ahead with the users. OK. You want to do this then? You have to learn this. Like more practicality aspect, like rather than saying that this coding like no, this is like mathematical. And they're more practical than coding with this coding. Like OK, I'll have to learn new language, which nobody likes.			
I have worked with many people here. Initially they (the organisation) hired very experienced very intelligent people at that time but they all left in 2-3 years of time. I always wonder why people could not retain those people because something the organisation was not providing them enough. They were very talented people I tell you like I looked them as my guru. I would say if I need any help I always go back to them, that I'm stuck here, how should I deal with this problem? So they	WI01	Talent development	

<i>Data</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Theme</i>
were so knowledgeable but (the organisation) could not retain them. They all are frustrated that the organisation does not care for their employees or maybe they don't know how to retain the valuable resources. This is my only complaint with the organisation at the moment. And as I mentioned that I want to do something I'm not counting enough support. So maybe I maybe the next one too.			
They (Headquarters) allow us full control. We have excellent relationships with everyone within the business, the management and the owners and because of the transparency anything needs their input they they will be made aware of in the management team here so that allows them the freedom to exposed to reassurance that they do not need to be Everybody bear with their information or decisions	GC01	Control and decision making	
So they're more India centric organisation of course is we have a critical mass there because our management comes roots are from there now we are a global company with global	HCL01	Large supply of skilled labour	International staffing

<i>Data</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Theme</i>
work force , global operation and global clients. It doesn't matter if it is Indian management. If you take IBM's Accenture as an example, they have the second largest work force based out of India. And maybe in five years time frame, Indian employees head count number will outnumber their USA. So would we say that IBM or Accenture is an Indian IT company? We all are now global.			
It's easier for anybody to find another right technical skills. People in India it's still I think Even today it's slightly a bit of a challenge to find somebody with technical skills communication style leadership style	AM01		
If we go back and we create the company again, it's really important that companies are trusted no matter what the company is, because that's what gets you freedom to operate. The fact that your stakeholders trust you and will leave you alone to get on with it. So trust gives you freedom to operate so that's really important to every company. What might be different about an Indian company is that	ESSAR01	Shift to geocentric staffing through spreading awareness	

<i>Data</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Theme</i>
you have to perhaps put lots more work in in into building awareness of the company, the company's heritage, the company's brand, the company's credibility because that won't already be known to stakeholders in the UK. So if you think that the refinery I work for was previously owned by Shell well if you're in the UK that's a well established brand, that's a brand that you recognise that's something you'll be very familiar with whereas ESSAR is not a brand you're familiar with and the owners are not business people that you're familiar with. So, you have to invest energy to ensure that you're kind of building that awareness so that then the company can be trusted but it's always it's always important. It's not more important that you're trusted if you're a foreign investor but you might have to work harder to build the relationship to underpin the trust just because the other companies are just more familiar and more established			

<i>Data</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Theme</i>
within this marketplace.			
Well, difference we see, but not from an IT perspective but from a business knowledge perspective. And that's where difference you see that. That's why we need to hire people who have understand of the local market. We can't hire people from India and they would not have business knowledge we've seen over the time. With the stuff that we have hired in India not been developed, the business sort of knowledge business sort of skills, they have been predominantly on technology side and that's one of the thing that we see lacking. In India, offices or staff in India and that's why you know it goes back to my point. We need to hire people, local people, literally.	VE01	Willingness to shift to geocentric staffing	
The person locals have some expertise on some levels in some technologies but when you have the different technologies or different things, so they have to learn it and they have to explore on those technology. So, it is very tough to modify rules to the new areas but for Indian	TCS06	parent country nationals' eagerness to learn	

<i>Data</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Theme</i>
people they learn something and doing something over there But for the local people they are on the peripherals. They're not very much keen to extend their knowledge or expand their areas so they are very much happy in their comfort zone.			

Findings

The subsidiaries of TCS in the UK were dominated by parent country national employees sent on short term assignments, which were independent projects with local businesses. This research identified multiple cultural factors which led to ethnocentric staffing practices in Indian IT sector MNCs in the UK. While national and organisational cultures have been extensively explored in existing literature (Hofstede, 1980; Owens and Steinhoff, 1989; McSweeney, 2002; Schein and Schein, 2016; Creanza, Kolodny and Feldman, 2017), this study highlights *IT culture* as a novel factor contributing to ethnocentric staffing patterns within the UK subsidiaries of Indian MNCs.

This concept of the IT culture is based on the broader concept of the engineering culture used in previous research (Hacker, 1981; Sharp, Robinson and Woodman, 2000; Patel and Bhanugopan, 2017); however, it is defined more narrowly than its predecessor. Unlike an Engineering Culture, the IT culture is based on the systematic relationship between the IT companies in India and the Engineering institutes, especially the top Indian Institutes of Technologies (IITs). In India, many local businesses revolve around this IT culture. There are hundreds of coaching institutes which help students crack the Joint Entrance Examination, which is required to enter any engineering college in India. The IITs have an acceptance rate of less than 2% as compared to 3.2% acceptance rate of Harvard University. Due to this, an IT culture has been created across India, especially in tier one and tier two cities. It is common practice among aspirants to invest an additional year in preparation to secure admission to top-tier institutions. This is of importance because even though a gap year in education, is frowned upon in Indian society, it is acceptable when it comes to IT just because of their value within the Indian society. Furthermore, a recent study on IT graduates from various information technologies across India identified the importance of working abroad for these IT graduates (Choudhury, Ganguli and Gaulé, 2023). Thus, the Indian IT culture is not just limited to the geographical boundaries of India but working abroad is a big part of this IT culture.

Unlike the Indian IT culture as described above, the UK has its own unique IT culture. The UK's IT culture involves learning about the broad areas of IT with coding being one of them. This diversity helps these UK graduates to operate in a much more complex and adaptive work environment. Since Indian IT service companies are more focused on one part of the IT sector,

they demand their employees to have certain skills like basic knowledge of the IT language with little to no need to advance their skill set to other languages. For instance, if an employee with TCS is working on-site for the client, they need to understand the IT language used just for that organisation's information systems. This is true for not only setting up new software but also for the upkeep of those systems.

This kind of culture is acceptable for many individuals working in the IT sector in India as it resonates with the "ideal" government sector jobs in India. On one hand, these jobs are not that challenging, on the other hand, there is a sense of job security in these sectors. This may discourage people to develop their skills to advance in their jobs. Thus, such jobs are not in tune with the mindset of the prospective employees working in the UK. Also, since Indian MNCs don't find many local employees, it is much easier for them to hire Indian expatriates to work in the UK subsidiaries as there is no such issue as the language barriers. Thus, promoting ethnocentric staffing in the UK based subsidiaries.

A 2007 study on IT culture identified an overarching culture transcending the national and organisational cultures on a global scale (Guzman et al., 2007). The beliefs and patterns of these IT workers are known to transcend the organisational and even the national boundaries as per some studies (Duliba and Baroudi, 1991; Guzman et al., 2007). Thus, it is possible to find the Indian IT culture in the Indian IT companies in the UK. These include factors like low value for labour, preference of newer graduates over experienced workers, intrusion of privacy (by expecting the employees to respond to official calls and e-mails at odd hours in the night and on weekends) to name a few. These characteristics are somewhat omnipresent in the different subsidiaries of Indian MNCs in India. However, when these Indian MNCs implement similar policies (which promote such work culture) in the UK, it may be seen as intrusive to local employees, who are accustomed to 9 to 5 jobs on a 5-day work week. One of the respondents shared, being forced to work from 9 to 5 despite finishing the goals early felt intrusive (Respondent #WTW01). She further added, working with a UK-based IT company (Willis Tower Watson) 9 to 5 work hours felt very unproductive given their job (also in the IT sector) is assignment-based rather than time-based manual work shift. This is a key part of the UK's IT culture or more generally the work culture of the UK.

Surveillance in Indian IT MNCs

Until now this paper has looked at the practices followed by Indian MNCs favour PCNs, however, now it is time to look at the factors discouraging local British employees from working in Indian IT MNCs. One such reason is surveillance in the workplace. Surveillance in the workplace is not a new concept. For MNCs to learn from the local market, less bureaucratic and formal controls from the headquarters are necessary to ensure compliance with local goals and strategy (Harvey, Speier and Novicevic, 1999). This importance of privacy at work in developed market MNCs even in the 1990s shows the importance of independent working in the developed markets. On the contrary, Indian MNCs are known for their lack of trust in their employees, as can be seen from their dependence on surveillance. For instance, one of the respondents shared, "...we were constantly required to keep our webcam on while working from home during the lockdown...". While this kind of requirement from the organization to monitor the employees may be acceptable for Indian employees, due to factors like high power distance between the supervisors and the subordinates, this is considered a violation of privacy in many developed countries. These policies transcend all companies and industries as they are a part of all Indian employees and are not considered intrusive. These HR policies resemble the formal direct control, often seen as the "Bear" (formal direct control) function (Harzing, 2001b) in the literature. These kinds of policies are generally not acceptable in Western cultures

(Hofstede, 1980). Developed market MNCs prefer a more informal communication (Spider) or even better socialization (bumblebee) approach to subsidiary management (Harzing, 2001b).

EM-MNCs are unable to have direct control over the processes in the local subsidiaries while EM-MNCs are interested in exercising more control over the local subsidiaries to overcome their dual liabilities of emergingness and newness. This control can help EM-MNCs to operate successfully in the international market; however, it directly contributes to the increase in the surveillance in the foreign subsidiaries. Thus, by design only employees who are willing to work in the UK subsidiaries of Indian IT MNCs are people from developing countries. With India being the largest emerging market with skilled IT graduates, it is logical for Indian MNCs to resort to ethnocentric staffing policies when operating in the UK.

The Indian IT culture as an antecedent to ethnocentric staffing in international subsidiaries of Indian MNCs

The general work culture in Indian organisations involves the employees working in office if the superior/manager is working in their chamber. It is considered rude and often frowned upon when an employee leaves early (before the superior) for any reason. On the contrary, in the UK, many MNCs encourage their employees to value their personal life alongside their work life, thus maintaining a work-life balance (Chandra, 2012). One of the respondents shared an experience working with a UK based IT company. He said that *one of his colleagues has a regular schedule of leaving the work in middle of the day to pick up her son from school and come back to the office after a long break, if the work is being done the organisation has no issues with how the employees distribute their time. He then went on to compare his experience working with Wipro in India, where he worked about over a year. This kind of freedom is unfathomable by most people working in the Indian IT sector* (Respondent #WI02).

These differences between the organisation culture between India and the UK help us understand the difficulties associated with local British workers to adjust to the idiosyncrasies of Indian MNCs in general and especially in the IT sector. These may include the expectations of overtime, lower wages compared to the market rate, and expectations to be online on weekends or at the wee hours of the night, to name a few. This further suggests a lack of commitment and trust on the part of Indian MNCs. As the data for this research was collected during the pandemic, many respondents noted that their superiors demanded that they keep their webcam ON when working during the office hours, so the organisation can always monitor the employees. However, respondents with experience working in non-Indian/British IT companies had no such issues with their supervisors (or the organisation).

These special expectations of Indian MNCs are responsible for making them less lucrative to local employees. For instance, when choosing a job employees prefer organisations which match with their own perception of the work culture. This is called the cultural fit. However, as it can be seen from instances presented in this paper, one can say that the Indian MNCs are more rigid in their understanding of the cultural fit. And due to this, Indian MNCs end up hiring Indian parent country national expatriates rather than local employees to fill in the roles in their UK subsidiaries. This is further facilitated by the IT Culture, since the employees of Indian origin are more likely to learn new technologies by practicing rather than being dependent on their existing knowledge. As one of the respondents explained, *“The problem is the locals have some levels of expertise in some technologies but when you have the different technologies or different things they must learn it and explore those technology. So, it is very tough to modify rules to the new areas. But for Indian people they learn something by doing something*

repeatedly. But for locals do not take many pains. They're not very much keen to extend their knowledge in new areas so they are very much happy in their comfort zone..." (Respondent TCS06).

Furthermore, digital labour cultures (Qiu, 2019) can be used to critique how both physical and immaterial labour are extracted within digital economies through the means of global supply chains, platform capitalism and techno authoritarianism. When applying this perspective to Indian MNCs in the UK, one may reproduce transnational hierarchies by embedding offshore labour into platform-driven operations, where control is exercised via code, connectivity, and metrics rather than physical mobility or direct oversight. Integrating this lens also opens space for a critique of hybrid organizational cultures, combining technocratic rationalism with postcolonial labour regimes, thereby reshaping how we understand professionalism and power in global IT operations.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to the evolutionary theory of MNCs, as the MNCs mature they become more geocentric (Perlmutter and Heenan, 1974). However, since EM-MNCs establish their existence based on their parent country's competitive advantages, they tend to use PCNs to retain the said competitive advantage. Hence the evolutionary theory of MNCs should not be considered as linear. Furthermore, the organisational culture of many EM-MNCs can be seen as a subset of the overarching parent country's national culture, as in the case with Indian IT sector MNCs in the UK. Due to this, the organisation culture itself can alienate the local staff. For instance, factors like lack of work life balance, high power distance between the superior and subordinates, high surveillance can be seen as intrusive from the perspective of local employees in the UK, but it is a status quo for working in any Indian MNC in the IT sector. The IT culture can be considered as a major factor contributing to ethnocentric staffing within the UK subsidiaries of Indian IT sector MNCs. For instance, top Indian IT companies like TCS, Infosys and Wipro are known for working with crème de crème of engineering institutes in India which help them innovate in the field and hence the latest technology is available for the students to learn at those institutes.

These special expectations of Indian MNCs are responsible for making them less lucrative to local employees. For instance, when choosing a job employees prefer organisations which match with their own perception of the work culture. This is called the cultural fit. However, as it can be seen from instances presented here, Indian MNCs are more rigid in their understanding of the cultural fit. And due to this, Indian MNCs end up hiring Indian PCNs rather than local employees to fill in the roles in their UK subsidiaries. Secondly, not only does the choice of international assignees is affected by the national culture and the organisational culture as previously known, but the IT culture is also a factor when considering MNCs in the IT sector, especially from Indian origin. And since these cultural factors are unique to the IT sector and are present beyond one organisation but aren't widespread across the nation, it is important to examine through the perspective of the IT culture. Finally, as seen in this paper, the IT culture has its flaws and one such flaw is the way it can alienate the local workforce who are not acquainted with the Indian culture (be it national, organisational or IT culture) and thus promoting ethnocentric staffing policies in the UK subsidiaries of Indian MNC.

Impact of 'Cultural Rigidity' on Work Practices

Culture is often considered rigid (Schein and Schein, 2016). The culture of an organisation can easily live longer than the people who created the said culture and be a part of the organisation even after the implementers have left the organisation (Schein and Schein, 2016). The same can be said for the IT culture or technology in general. If the technology is too quick to develop and gets implemented without sufficient debates or discussions, it is likely to do more harm than good (Sørensen, 2004).

As previously discussed, the IT culture surrounding IT in India have help developed the Indian IT industry and has brought it to the forefront of the Indian economy. However, there is a darker side to this 'IT culture'. Some of the respondents shared their reasons to follow IT careers, and most of them were not out of passion or love for the field. One said, "...people go for IT engineering because they don't want to go for hard core engineering streams like civil engineering..."; another said "...there is an unusual hype around the IT sector, because graduates want office jobs rather than working under the sun all day..."

With the nature of culture in general and the IT culture specifically, it is easy to fathom how the IT culture from Indian headquarters and subsidiaries have travelled to the UK subsidiaries of these IT companies. Due to the heavy reliance on the PCNs, there is a high likelihood of the PCNs to follow the same practices that they have followed in the local subsidiaries in India. With the large proportion of subsidiary employees being Indian expatriates on short term assignment, there is a regular reinforcement of the same principles with every new international assignee joining the office for their assignment.

Every new expatriate is likely to bring with them a new set of knowledge, which was accumulated based on the personal experiences of that PCNs. This knowledge is socially embedded in the employees who have worked in the parent company. However, for the parent company to transfer control of the subsidiary to the local employees, it is important for these PCN expatriates to share this knowledge with the locals. However, due to the different degree of tacitness of knowledge between the parent firm and the local subsidiary, there is an asymmetry in the knowledge between the two (Lam, 1997). This simply means that the PCNs has more hands-on experience within the field, and it is difficult for the said PCN to share the experience with a local employee. Furthermore, this expertise is more of a shared experience which is not owned by just one specific individual; therefore, it is difficult for one individual to share this knowledge.

This issue is present in all kinds of firms; however, it is more dominant in the service sector firms. Since the knowledge is not only shared between the different employees in the organisation but it is also shared with a group of individuals in the customer organisation. If an IT service MNC hires a local employee in the UK, they will have to learn not only the organisational culture but also how the other employees operate at the customers' sites. Since the knowledge and the expertise required to perform the job are not owned by any specific individual in the organisation, it will be difficult for the employees performing the jobs to train the recruit (Lam, 1997). Since most of the IT skills are somewhat intuitive for the expatriates (due to growing up surrounded by a predominant IT culture), likely, the issue of knowledge transfer (or skill transfer in this case) is even more severe This not only adds to the complexity of the job but also adds to the cost factor. As explained by one of the respondents, "we are doing local hiring as well but it's not always very cheap to hire here as well One other thing is that okay you don't have that many skill available here" (Respondent #IS01). If an Indian MNCs want to hire local employees, they will have to not only bear a higher recruitment cost but also pay extra salary (since most Indian expatriates operate with their base Indian salary

plus perks) and then carry out knowledge sharing programs to share the skills of the PNCs to the local employees to bring them up to the same efficiency levels of the PCNs. Thus, adding to the cost of running the foreign subsidiary. Thus, a MNCs has several options from which they can choose depending on the work practices of the subsidiary.

Advances and Contribution

IT Culture

The IT culture can be defined as the cumulation of institutional and societal factors that encourage a culture of promoting the dependence of IT status and knowledge in attaining high value IT skills.. In other words, the IT culture is a cumulation of unique experiences faced by individuals while being a part of the overarching IT sector which differentiates the people working in the IT sector from everyone else. This research not only introduced the concept of IT culture but also compared the same between India and the UK. In that comparison, it was identified that this culture is much more ingrained within the Indian national culture. Hence, it could be seen as a prerequisite for employees to be accustomed to this system and thus discouraging local employees to work in Indian IT sector MNCs in the UK.

Limitations of Research

Most of the interview respondents approached for this research were through my personal and family connections. Despite hundreds of emails and regular phone calls I could not reach people working in the UK subsidiaries of Indian MNCs. Thus, I had to depend on these connections to begin with the study. Due to this, most of the people whom I interviewed were software engineers working with Indian MNCs on the client side, thus making it difficult to identify their relations with the organisation itself (that is, with their subordinates, with superiors, or with other staff working in the subsidiary). Therefore, this makes it challenging to identify the exact demographic of the employees in the subsidiary. Furthermore, most of these respondents work on the client side with IT engineers from other Indian IT MNCs. For instance, TCS employees working for Lloyds Bank in London work along with employees from Wipro and Infosys within the Lloyds office premises. Even though it gave a wholistic perspective to the Indian IT MNCs in the UK, the lack of data from locals could have skewed the data. However, in the later stages some locals were also interviewed to get a better perspective.

Personal reflection and reliability

Now that I have discussed how my research evolved over the years and all the challenges I faced along the way, hence, at this stage a reflective analysis on the research process and the reliability of the data collected seems appropriate. After all, as previously mentioned, reliability is a key aspect of any research.

Advantages and disadvantages associated being an Indian researcher

The ease of accessibility with respect to the basic information regarding Indian MNCs was undeniable, given my Indian background. However, the data collection process was not without its challenges. On one hand, it was easy to identify Indian MNCs which were operating in the UK. Many Indian MNCs like TCS, HCL and Infosys have a presence in the UK. While on the other hand, it was difficult gaining access. I had to resort to many family contacts to get access for the initial set of interviews. But this time being an Indian researcher, I was able to get help from my parents who connected me with not only their colleagues who were now working with Indian MNCs in the UK or had worked in the past. However, one of my early respondents #AM01, who can be considered as a friend of friend, not only participated in the interview but he also helped me access ten more people for my research, out of whom, eight people successfully completed the interviews and I have documented their insights here.

On the contrary, being an Indian researcher had certain limitations as well. For instance, a couple of my respondents felt that I may create a startup based on it and end up giving them competition in the future. Another respondent was so scared that I would share the interview recording (or transcript) with her supervisor that she stopped answering the questions, in the middle of the interview. It took me a couple of minutes to assure her that I was a legitimate student at a University of London college pursuing my PhD and not someone hired by her organisation to access information for later use.

Unexpected findings

According to the literature on international staffing policies of MNCs (Perlmutter and Heenan, 1974; Scullion, 1994; Harzing, 2001c), ethnocentric staffing policy is often considered inferior to other staffing policies especially the ideal geocentric staffing policy. However, in this research I found that, in practice, MNCs may prefer ethnocentric staffing policy if it gives them a competitive advantage against their competitors in the foreign country. Indian MNCs in the IT sector are still resorting to ethnocentric staffing due to this competitive advantage despite being at a later stage of the MNCs' evolution, whereby they must opt for geocentric staffing policy (Perlmutter and Heenan, 1974). This suggest that not all MNCs can be expected to operate in accordance with the norms set by developed market MNCs especially considering EM-MNCs. However, I must confess that our understanding about EM-MNCs is still comparatively new, and it is still evolving as we speak. Thus, there is a need for further investigation in this regard.

Further research

This research is one of the first to look at the impact of IT culture as a factor leading to ethnocentric staffing in EM-MNCs. However, this research is limited to the IT sector and by the level of data collected. It is recommended that future studies look at the model presented in this research by overcoming the problems mentioned previously.

Human resource policies of Indian MNCs outside the IT service sector of the UK

This work opens fertile ground for future research. Comparative studies could examine Indian MNCs in other sectors—like hospitality, finance, and manufacturing—to assess whether ethnocentrism is sector-specific or culturally embedded. A closer exploration of regional patterns within Europe could also shed light on whether local contexts modulate staffing philosophies. Finally, longitudinal studies might capture how EM-MNCs evolve their staffing logic as their global integration matures.

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Declaration of interest statement

☒ The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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