



## BUSINESS

### The glue in global dealings

Project managers make sure all is right between U.S. clients and employees half a world away

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By KATHERINE YUNG / The Dallas Morning News

When Shishir Madhugiri arrives at his Dallas office in the mornings, most of his colleagues are already finishing up a long day's work.

That's because they're halfway around the world in Noida, India.

Mr. Madhugiri, a project manager at Dallas-based Cyber Group Inc., has a job most people never dreamed of a decade ago.

He's the link between Cyber Group's U.S. customers and the company's 25 software engineers and developers in India, making sure that new software programs turn out the way they're supposed to.

Middlemen are expected to become more common as more companies outsource U.S. jobs to lower-cost workers overseas.

Project managers such as Mr. Madhugiri are also called global supply coordinators, technical ambassadors or offshore coordinators. No one knows how many there are.

But these jobs are extremely important for companies that need to communicate with workers in far-apart time zones and hemispheres.

"It's a critical job in the sense that the project in many ways rests on their shoulders," said Erran Carmel, who has written and taught about offshoring as chairman of the information technology department at American University's Kogod School of Business.

"They are a bridge between cultures," he added. "Any kind of complex work still requires the human glue to put it together."

Mr. Madhugiri is one of three U.S. project managers at Cyber Group, which designs software for industrial automation equipment and information technology services. He started there as a software developer in 1999 after earning a master's degree in computer science from the University of Texas at Arlington.

John Pillow, Cyber Group's vice president of software engineering services, says companies usually run into problems if they hand everything over to India without anyone overseeing the work from the U.S.

He compares Mr. Madhugiri to a quarterback: "He has to call the play. He has to understand the play."

## Close contact, far away

This kind of work isn't limited to the tech industry. Atlas Legal Research in Dallas employs a U.S. quality assurance attorney who oversees assignments handled by the firm's 30 lawyers in Bangalore, India.

These coordinators are "crucial for almost all offshore functions," said Abhay Dhir, Atlas' president.

But since India is nearly 12 hours ahead of Dallas, getting work done abroad that meets the demands of U.S. customers requires a unique balancing act.

One recent morning, Mr. Madhugiri began his day by sorting through a flood of e-mails from his Indian team. Then he arranged a conference call with a customer in Minneapolis and hurried to a phone call with a manager in India who was up late at night.

Before leaving the office, he had to e-mail questions, customer requests and other matters to his overseas colleagues so he could get their responses by the next morning.

Often, his workday seems to have no end. Because of the time difference, Mr. Madhugiri frequently leaves the office, goes home and calls his team in northern India during the evening. He also heads to the office many Sunday nights, when his team is starting its Monday morning.

"Somehow, the work gets done even though the team is so far away," said the 31-year-old immigrant from Bangalore.

## Disturbed sleep

Even with e-mail, Mr. Madhugiri usually speaks to Cyber Group's managers and software engineers in India three or four times a day, mostly to discuss problems or clarify questions.

In cases where software bugs must be fixed immediately, the firm's Indian employees get very little sleep.

They sometimes join in conference calls or e-mail exchanges with Cyber Group's customers. And several times a year, some of them travel to Dallas to meet with clients and undergo training.

The visits don't lessen customers' reliance on Mr. Madhugiri.

"He really plays a critical role in the front-end work of a new project," said Tamim Shipchandler, Cyber Group's senior vice president and chief operating officer.

Talented project managers such as Mr. Madhugiri usually command salaries ranging from \$70,000 to \$85,000 in Dallas, he added.

"These are good jobs for people who want to segue into management," said Ravi Aron, an assistant professor of information and operations management at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business.

For Mr. Madhugiri, three years of almost daily interaction with his Indian team has taught him what it takes to succeed. "You need written and detailed requirements" for the software developers, he said. "This is very necessary when they are 10,000 miles away."

## Tapping technology

Technology, however, is what makes Mr. Madhugiri's job – and offshoring in general – possible. Cyber Group's

software developers post their work on a company Web site that Mr. Madhugiri, the firm's customers and others can access easily.

"As long as you maintain the [quality] standards, it should not matter where the work is done," said Mr. Madhugiri, whose desk faces a whiteboard filled with computer jargon. "At the end, the product is the same."

In the future, as Cyber Group grows, Mr. Madhugiri wants to become a project leader overseeing several project managers.

But on this day, he was scrambling to handle a more pressing concern: The Hindu festival Diwali, which means "row of lights," was coming up, and he needed to make sure the company would have enough workers on hand.

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