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Book Review

Nassimbeni and Sartor, Sourcing in India (2008)

“If the Indian Elephant is slower than the Chinese Dragon, many observers consider its path more solid and sustainable. Indian democracy imposes a gradual development as it comes from the electoral will of the population, and so should cause less social tensions” (Nassimbeni and Sartor, 2008, p.81).

The Foreword for this book, written by an Italian Ministry for International Commerce and European Policies official, suggests that this book “aims at providing some useful guidelines to the companies which want to face challenges of globalization and which judge the Indian context as a priority nation for future investments” (p. xiv). While it is perfectly understandable that the Italian official’s wish is to enhance the economic relations between Italy and India, the authors Guido Nassimbeni and Marco Sartor – both academic research scholars in Italy – have done such a phenomenal job in providing an overarching analysis of sourcing in India that it is able to satisfy fully readers from all nations, even those who are not academic scholars, including practitioners and policymakers. The book reviewed here is *Sourcing in India: Strategies and Experiences in the Land of Service Offshoring* (2008), by Guido Nassimbeni and Marco Sartor, published by Palgrave Macmillan. The book covers its topic area in both great detail as well as with valuable theoretical considerations, and effectively intertwines the two by prescribing possible paths for decision makers with assistance from multiple case studies within the services sourcing context.

Organizations are always looking for solutions that enhance supply chain success and these authors outline the objectives that address the quest for success from the services perspective. In section four of the book “Planning and Starting an Offshore Project in India”, they deal with the following objectives: “(i) to analyze the literature focused on service offshoring, so as to develop a synthesis of determinants, risks, advantages and criticalities linked to that; (ii) to examine the main aspects linked to a sourcing activity in India: peculiarities in purchase orders (terms of payment, time frames, solutions for the industrial property protection, etc.), logistic variables (transport methods, delivery times, obstacles, costs, solution for the flow coordination, etc.) and cultural factors which play a role in these processes; (iii) to identify organizational and managerial solutions adoptable for developing services in India” (p.106).

The authors also attempt to “determine a classification of the entry modes in India and the path leading to an effective offshoring choice” as well as further to investigate aspects of “information sources, organizational responsibilities, control and monitoring tools” (p.106).

In their analysis, the three-step model from Monczka et al. (2005) is employed where the company initially goes through (1) the strategic analysis and planning stage, then (2) supplier selection, and finalizes with (3) relationship control. The application of the model into the Indian context provides engaging insights that can be taught in business schools. Offshore insourcing and offshore outsourcing are further explicated. Solutions such as wholly owned subsidiary (WOS), joint venture (JV), build-operate-transfer (BOT) are suitable for offshore insourcing. Offshore outsourcing is also discussed under the categories of pure offshore outsourcing, dedicated offshore center, and ‘third party transparent’ ways of sourcing of services. Providing a comprehensive business map, the sections on Indian modes and legislative structure and on transport/communication infrastructures in India complement the outsourcing analysis. While the entry-mode section elaborates on specific entry modes, corporate typologies, procedures for foreign direct investments (FDIs) approval, facilitated zones and governmental incentives, special economic zones (SEZs), and intellectual property protection (patents, trademarks, copyrights), the transport-communication goes into discussions about the air, sea, road, and railway transportation modes and also the communication infrastructures related to the internet and telephones, including mobile phones. Essentially, the book offers practical and theoretical information about India by creating new knowledge for executives as well as scholars. All the relevant aspects of service offshoring to India are fully covered in an exhaustive manner in the book.

The first three sections of the book present, clarify, enhance, and reinforce knowledge about India and also consolidate the knowledge about service sourcing, knowledge that many already possess but in a fragmented fashion. Through providing rational arguments backed with plenty of data, the book also has the power to convince those who are still on the fence about India’s business potential and capabilities. The rise of information technology (IT) services and IT enabled services, along with unique traits of the Indian society, are continuously woven in the discussions about justifications for information technology outsourcing (ITO) and business process outsourcing (BPO). Based on all these points, this book emerges as a major guide on sourcing in India, and serves as an

easy-to-read in-depth primer for those employees and executives who feel the need to become familiar with India and its business environment.

While the only weakness that I see in the book is the lack of recent data, especially after 2008, the way the data is presented allows readers to seek the relevant new data, update their knowledge, and fill the knowledge gaps on their own. Also, considering the core conceptual value provided by the book, added data would only strengthen the arguments already made by the authors. The book has many strengths including, but not necessarily limited to, the following: in-depth data regarding India's demographics, cultural values, civilization, democracy, industrial geography and their relevance to business practices; evolution of the India market and business practices; and comparisons with China and with global perspectives across many aspects such as demographics, heritage, business potential, and political relations.

Ultimately, this work is valuable and inspiring because it reveals and builds on India's differentiating property of conducting business humanely through considerations such as sustainability, diversity, and democracy. Naturally, the authors are highlighting the challenges that are posed with each of these considerations, should a company decide to pursue the service offshoring journey to India. After reading the book, I was left with the impression that India seems to present an ambidextrous (Birkinshaw and Gupta 2013) solution that address the constantly evolving business needs with humility and agility at the same time. The book feels as if it serves as one big case study about India, the country, as an offshoring destination, with multiple company case studies contained within the big study. While it may be perceived like a small step toward gaining knowledge about India – just like the Indian fable about seven blind men and an elephant – the authors manage to explore multiple facets of the service outsourcing elephant and create a credible knowledge map of this domain. Therefore, although I thought I knew much about service industry in India before I read the book, I realize that I now know a lot more about this topic and – more importantly – now have a good idea about what else needs to be studied and explored. That is exactly what a scholar, executive, or a policymaker needs in order to continue to improve and to innovate. Sourcing in India seems to strike the right balance and positions itself on the cutting edge through rigorous scholarly work, insightful analysis and appealing synthesis.

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