

Carmel, E. and Tjia, P. (2005) *Offshoring Information Technology: Sourcing and Outsourcing to a Global Workforce*, Cambridge University Press, May 2005. 306 pages, £35. Reviewed by Robert Davison.

The Information Technology Offshoring Phenomenon is growing at a tremendous pace. It is now increasingly seen as a business necessity, not an option, with increasing numbers of organisations, notably in Western Europe and North America, taking advantage of the availability of offshore resources that both cost less and are present in significant quantities. IT Offshoring may be disliked or feared, loved or worshipped, but it is inevitable and as such should be on the action list of managers, whether global or local, worldwide. This new book from Carmel and Tjia is essential reading for managers, IT practitioners, software development engineers, business, management and IT professors, as well as students in these disciplines.

It is quite remarkable for a book of this genre that it should be equally readable by and valuable for such a wide audience: the language is crisp and precise, without requiring much knowledge of the jargon of the software and IT industries. At the same time it is insightful, intellectually stimulating and comprehensive. It should, furthermore, be relevant to readers in both developed and developing nations, to providers of offshore services as well as users of these services.

The twelve chapters that comprise 'Offshoring Information Technology' cover both the fundamentals of the domain and more specialised topics such as legal issues, culture and national differences, marketing - from the provider perspective, virtual work, and political considerations associated with offshoring (both domestic and international). Practical aspects of offshoring are not neglected either, with chapters on how an offshore strategy can be developed and the management of the transition process that leads to successful offshoring. A focus on success is appropriate, for there are many examples of offshoring failures. Such examples, of successes and failures, are liberally distributed throughout the book, together with longer cases and shorter anecdotes. These sources of front-line stories greatly enhance the usefulness of the book, giving readers a much enhanced sense of what offshoring is all about, what are its risks, what can and does go wrong, and how these kinds of problems should be tackled. Many of the difficulties are associated with cultural differences. The authors generally take the position that cultural differences should be respected, not denied or ignored. Furthermore, it is pointed out that both individuals and organisations (at least the successful ones) are able to adapt themselves to most of these differences. The types of differences are many and varied, ranging from those associated with the profession of software development, through more general management, communication preferences, and on to behavioural differences that are more obvious, even if one does not understand the reasons for the behaviour. Thus the predilection of Dutch programmers to leave work at 5 pm sharp, and indeed of the Dutch in general to prefer nudity in saunas, is contrasted with work-related preferences in Hong Kong, China and the US, not to mention bath-house behaviour in Russia.

IT Offshoring is a global phenomenon, as the subtitle to the book suggests, and there are examples throughout the book from countries around the world. Country profiles are included from a handful of these, including the famous - India, Israel and Ireland, the recent high profile actors of China and Russia, as well as emerging offshoring destinations such as Latvia, Romania, Malta, Costa Rica, Vietnam and Bangladesh. It is with respect to country focus that I can detect the only weakness in this book: perhaps unsurprisingly, given that most firms that offshore their work are located in Western Europe and North America, the book also tends to be written from and for the perspective of countries in these regions. It is

noted, for instance, that Indian firms are now starting to offshore in turn - usually to still cheaper destinations such as Vietnam. This is likely to be an emerging trend that will become more prominent in the near future, with developing and emerging nations also engaged in the offshoring of their development work to even less developed nations that provide these kinds of services.

Overall, this is a highly valuable contribution to our knowledge about offshoring that I warmly recommend.