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**“AM I STILL ONE OF THEM?”: BICULTURAL IMMIGRANT MANAGERS
NAVIGATING SOCIAL IDENTITY THREATS
WHEN SPANNING GLOBAL BOUNDARIES**

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ABSTRACT

We examine the practice of nominating bicultural immigrants to manage knowledge-intensive projects sourced from their host to their home countries. We focus on their actions vis-à-vis global collaborators and unpack psychological processes involved. Managers in these positions have to navigate the workplace social identity threat that arises from being associated with the home country group – a lower status group in this context. How they navigate this threat shapes the way they use their bicultural competencies and authority as managers. When they embrace their home country identity, immigrant managers tend to enable knowledge-based boundary spanning through actions empowering home country collaborators, such as teaching missing competencies, connecting to important stakeholders, and soliciting input. Instead, when distancing from their home country identity, they tend to hinder collaborators by micromanaging, narrowing communication channels, and suppressing input. We develop theoretical implications for the study of global boundary spanning, bicultural managers, and workplace social identity.

Keywords: global boundary spanning, biculturals, social identity, cross-cultural collaboration, offshoring, qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

Enabled by advances in information and communication technologies and fueled by an increasingly global economy, collaboration across national boundaries is increasingly prevalent and important (Hinds et al., 2011). The effective functioning of multinational corporations (MNCs), for example, involves complex initiatives undertaken jointly by headquarters and subsidiary units located around the globe, such as the introduction of new systems, products, and services (Schotter et al., Special Issue). It is also common for organizations to offshore information technology (IT), engineering, consulting, scientific research, and other knowledge-intensive projects to professionals in countries such as India, Russia, and China (Jensen and Pedersen, 2010; Di Gregorio et al., 2009; Kenney et al., 2009; Lewin et al., 2009; Mudambi and Venzin, 2010; Mudambi et al., 2014). These initiatives and projects require knowledge sharing as well as the joint development and refinement of novel ideas between parties located in different countries; in other words, they require global boundary spanning (Mudambi, 2011; Schotter and Beamish, 2011).

Collaborative boundary spanning involves activities, such as productive conflict resolution, that can result in a synergistic combination of the diverse expertise and interests of parties separated by institutional and cultural boundaries (Hardy, et al., 2005; Levina and Vaast, 2013; Schotter and Beamish, 2011; Tippmann et al., Special Issue). Such collaborative boundary spanning, however, is quite difficult to achieve in global contexts because the parties involved, e.g., headquarters and subsidiaries or onshore clients and offshore providers, tend to differ significantly in terms of status and power as well as culture and language (Cramton and Hinds, 2014; Hinds et al., 2014; Hong, 2010; Levina and Vaast 2008; Schotter and Beamish, 2011). The nascent literature in this area provides some guidance to redress these issues, suggesting that organizations nominate powerful agents, e.g. expatriates (Reiche et al., 2009), onshore clients (Levina and Vaast, 2008), or subsidiary managers (Schotter and Beamish, 2011), to boundary spanning roles or that organizations employ bicultural individuals with competencies in the

cultures to be spanned (Brannen and Thomas, 2010; Hong and Doz, 2013). Without closer theoretical scrutiny and empirical attention, however, it is not clear whether the status conferred by nomination and the competencies associated with biculturalism are indeed sufficient for collaborative boundary spanning in global settings.

To further push our understanding of boundary spanning empirically and theoretically, we examine global boundary spanning where the structural condition of being nominated to a boundary spanning role and the individual condition of biculturalism have already been met. In particular, we focus on the rather common occurrence of an organization nominating a bicultural individual to manage a knowledge-intensive project sourced to his or her country of origin (Carmel and Tjia, 2005; Krishna et al., 2004; Johri, 2008; Rai et al., 2009). For example, a bank headquartered in the United States that offshores a software development project to a group of professionals in Ukraine may appoint one of its IT professionals who years ago emigrated from Ukraine (i.e., immigrant's home country) to manage the project remotely from the US (i.e., immigrant's host country). Indeed, the idea behind nominating an immigrant as an onshore manager on projects sourced to his or her country of origin is that, as a bicultural in a powerful structural position, he or she is likely to have the necessary resources for spanning across the groups involved. Although intuitively appealing, it remains unclear empirically how bicultural managers draw on these resources when positioned for global boundary spanning. Examining such managers also presents an attractive research opportunity as it allows us to theoretically unpack the psychological processes and resulting actions of boundary spanners who are endowed with requisite resources to fulfill their roles, but may or may not do so in practice.

We take a practice-theoretical perspective, which underscores that boundary spanning activities are both situated in institutional settings characterized by multiple, conflicting, and asymmetrical power and status relations as well as emerge from micro-level interactions of agents (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Accordingly, we set out to understand the situated, emergent nature of collaborative

boundary spanning as it unfolds in settings that require globally distributed parties to collaborate to refine and create ideas, innovations, and other forms of work-place knowledge. Because issues pertaining to knowledge and collaboration are deeply embedded in practice (Orlikowski, 2002) and because our aim was to develop an empirically grounded interpretive understanding of this phenomenon, we undertook an inductive qualitative study (Charmaz, 2006; Doz, 2011). Of the various legitimate ways of writing up qualitative research (Pratt, 2008), we chose to first present relevant background literature to situate our inductive theory building. We then present our methods and findings, followed by our empirically grounded theoretical framework. We conclude with contributions, future research directions, and limitations.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

How Individuals Enable Boundary Spanning-in-Practice

Boundary spanning involves combining the expertise and interests of collaborators separated by social boundaries (Carlile, 2002; Cramton and Hinds, 2014; Hardy et al., 2005; Levina and Vaast, 2005; Mudambi and Swift, 2009; Schotter and Beamish, 2011). Collaborators situated in social contexts (or fields of practice) separated by such boundaries have differential access to terminology, tools, perspectives, and other work-relevant knowledge that arise from the habituated actions of the agents in each setting (Levina and Vaast, 2005, 2008, 2013). The practices of technical professionals, for example, can be readily differentiated from those of graphic designers, and the concomitant inter-organizational boundary between such practices delimits diverse expertise and interests (Levina and Vaast, 2005). Collaborative boundary spanning that enables a synergistic combination of diverse expertise may result in novel solutions to long-standing problems and innovative products and services (Levina and Vaast, 2005). It is no small order, however, to combine such diverse practices. It is challenging for individuals from diverse groups to be willing and able to understand one another (Cronin and Weingart, 2007), especially

when their interests do not fully align under a common goal (Kane et al., 2005; Kane, 2010) and their knowledge is tacit and embedded in practice (Carlile, 2002; Cramton and Hinds, 2014).

Although no one individual can overcome these challenges alone, the process often does rely on specific individuals, termed “boundary spanners-in-practice,” whose actions help diverse parties relate their different interests and practices and negotiate a common way of working (Levina and Vaast, 2005). As shown in Table 1, three conditions need to be met for individuals to become boundary spanners-in-practice (Levina and Vaast, 2005, pp. 353-354). First, individuals need to become *legitimate peripheral participants* in the practices of both groups (Lave and Wegner, 1991). Such participation enables individuals to develop an understanding of each group’s practices, which is critical, albeit not sufficient, for negotiating relations among those practices. Second, individuals must be *recognized as negotiators* for the group. Earning this recognition may arise from, among other sources, occupying a privileged position (e.g., manager), being nominated by other powerful agents, or due to their recognized professional reputation. Boundary spanners-in-practice do not arise solely as a function their resources or their nomination (Levina and Vaast, 2005, 2008; Wiesenfeld and Hewlin, 2003). Having the capability to span boundaries is not sufficient because boundary spanning requires practical actions. This leads to the third condition, namely that individuals must be *inclined* to engage in boundary spanning. Such an inclination involves both a willingness to meet and sustain the former two conditions (i.e., understanding each group’s practices and earning recognition as a representative) as well as a willingness to engage in the actions required to balance diverse interests.

INSERT TABLE I ABOUT HERE

Although there are significant career rewards associated with fulfilling boundary-spanning roles (Cross and Parker, 2004; Hong, 2010; Roberts and Beamish, Special Issue), actually fulfilling the requirements associated with each of the three criteria can be a very challenging task. Representing the multiple, sometimes contradictory, interests of diverse groups can be stressful (Dubinsky et al., 1992;

Singh et al., 1996). When tensions arise, representing the interests of one group may, for example, undermine an individual's status and even membership in the other group (Levina and Vaast, 2005; Nicholson and Sahay, 2004). This could be psychologically depleting for those individuals who had derived positive social identity -- a group-based sense of self -- from membership in that group (Ellemers, 2012; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Furthermore, in cases when an individual is marginalized by one of the groups due to an affiliation with the other group, he or she may be denied access to the practices of that group, which would undermine his or her ability to be effective.

Challenges for Global Boundary Spanners-in-Practice

The challenges associated with achieving boundary spanning-in-practice are intensified in global contexts because practices that need to be spanned are situated in different institutional fields associated with two or more nation states (Schotter et al., Special Issue). Whereas boundary spanning in the context of one national society involves a few groups, such as clients and consultants or diverse organizational units (Levina and Vaast, 2005), boundary spanning in global contexts involves multiple professional and organizational groups that are instantiated separately in each society associated with a particular nation (Cramton and Hinds, 2014; Levina and Vaast, 2008; Mudambi, 2011; Schotter and Beamish, 2011). For example, as shown in Figure 1, knowledge-intensive offshore projects, which we examine in this paper, occur at the nexus of multiple institutional contexts (or fields of practice), such as those specific to an onshore client firm (e.g., an American Financial Services Company), and an offshore provider firm (e.g., an Ukrainian IT Consultancy), as well as onshore industry professionals (e.g., American IT professionals, American financial service professionals), and offshore industry professionals (e.g., Ukrainian IT professionals) in addition to the usual boundaries among professional groups within an organization that are often examined by organization boundary spanning scholars (e.g., Carlile, 2002; Mudambi and Swift, 2009).

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

When the societies in which groups that need to work together differ in terms of key valuable resources, this impacts the relative status associated with each group. In the context of offshoring, for example, onshore groups tend to control the majority of the economic and intellectual resources resulting in perceptions of higher status for members of these groups (Jain et al., 2011; Hinds et al., 2014; Levina and Vaast, 2008; Mattarelli and Gupta, 2009; Metiu, 2006). Along related lines, in the MNC context, groups associated with headquarters tend to hold a privileged position compared to groups associated with subsidiary units due to resource dependencies (Schotter and Beamish, 2011). Such asymmetries in status and power make it hard for collaborators with smaller resource endowments to influence outcomes and represent an additional impediment to global boundary spanning (Hinds et al., 2014; Levina and Vaast, 2008; Schotter and Beamish, 2011).

Becoming a boundary spanner-in-practice is particularly challenging in such complex institutional contexts. It can take decades of international assignment rotations for a manager tasked with boundary spanning to gain the requisite understanding of the varied cultural and professional practices, especially given that such practices themselves are evolving over time (Schotter and Beamish, 2011). The common approaches to solving this problem through expatriation and repatriation (Harzing et al., 2016; Reiche et al., 2009), however, are both costly and time-consuming, and qualified managers may be reluctant to move abroad (Collins et al., 2007; Harvey et al., 2011; Doz and Wilson, 2012). Second, even if the requisite understanding of multiple groups is gained, a global boundary spanner-in-practice needs to be recognized as a negotiator on behalf of a complex constellation of groups. Legitimately representing the interests of such groups requires a vast endowment of personal resources or, more commonly, a structural position that would help mitigate status issues and empower collaborators from the disadvantaged group (Levina and Vaast, 2008). Third, a global boundary spanner-in-practice needs to be willing to be associated with and speak for the interests of multiple groups. This can be particularly challenging when groups have vastly different relative status making association with the lower status group particularly

unattractive. Indeed, Schotter and Beamish (2011) proposed that the motivation of certain managers to span global boundaries arises from a combination of personality, career histories, and organizational characteristics. This suggests more broadly that individuals positioned for global boundary spanning may be more or less inclined to become boundary spanners-in-practice based both on individual factors as well as on features of the work context.

The Promise of Biculturals as Global Boundary Spanners-in-Practice

The international management literature increasingly recognizes that some serious challenges involved in global work may be addressed by strategically deploying bicultural or multicultural employees (Doz, 2016). Notwithstanding some debate over the defining features of such employees, the literature converges in characterizing them as individuals who have spent enough time immersed in more than one culture to have access to multiple cultural schemas (Brannen and Thomas, 2010; Fitzsimmons, 2013; Hong, 2010; Hong and Doz, 2013; Lücke et al., 2014). The value of these employees arises not only from their understanding of the cultural practice of more than one society, but also from what is involved in integrating and applying these diverse schemas across cultural contexts. Brannen and Thomas (2010), for example, note that the process of adapting to multiple cultures confers on bicultural employees metacognitive abilities that enhance creativity and adaptability. Hong (2010) advances a theory of multicultural team effectiveness in which bicultural competence, arising from cultural metacognition, behavioral adaptability, and cultural general skills, enables bicultural team members to acquire external knowledge and help overcome internal boundaries separating members from disparate cultures through increased understanding and emotional relating. Hong and Doz (2013) further develop the value of multicultural individuals as team members, describing how they can help multinational corporations achieve global integration and local adaptation.

Biculturals employees are not merely a theoretical construct. The migration of well-educated workers has resulted in biculturals participating in the professional workforce of many developed

economies (Brannen and Doz, 2010; Hong and Doz, 2013). For example, numerous immigrants from countries such as India, Eastern Europe, and China are part of the information technology (IT) and engineering workforce in the United States (Saxenian, 1994; Wadhwa et al., 2007). In fact, Indian immigrants to the United States pioneered the practice of offshoring to India (Bardhan and Kroll, 2006; Zaheer et al., 2009).

It is therefore not surprising that organizations have been advised to nominate individuals with backgrounds in relevant cultures, such as immigrants from one of the countries involved, to fulfill boundary-spanning roles (Di Marco et al., 2011; Doz and Wilson, 2012; Hong and Doz, 2013). Their bicultural backgrounds provide the requisite understanding of the cultural practice of both societies, which helps to satisfy the first condition for achieving boundary spanning-in-practice. Their nomination, which affords them the resources to redress issues of asymmetric status, makes them legitimate representatives of the onshore group, while their shared cultural background can help them become legitimate representatives of the offshore group as well. Accordingly, bicultural individuals nominated to span boundaries involving their cultures are at a significant advantage in meeting the first two conditions of becoming a boundary spanner-in-practice compared to those lacking the relevant cultural background. Meeting the third condition, however, may present some challenges. It is unlikely that biculturals will universally have the inclination to span the boundaries they are in position to span. Psychological research indicates that bicultural individuals vary in how they respond to cultural cues, with, for example, better cultural frame switching and more synergistic combinations of elements of both cultures observed among those who view their cultures as integrated and compatible within themselves (high BII) as opposed to those who perceive them as oppositional and difficult to integrate (low BII) (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002; Benet-Martínez and Haritatos, 2005; Cheng et al., 2008). Decades of research in the social identity tradition further highlight that the extent to which people attach themselves to actual social groups and act on their behalf depends on features of the social context, e.g., salience, prestige, or group values, as well

as the degree of fit between these features and characteristics of the individual (Ashmore et al., 2004; Leach et al. 2008; Roccas et al., 2008; Haslam and Ellemers, 2011). Accordingly, some bicultural employees may be more willing than others to engage in global boundary spanning.

The potentially diverse attitudes of bicultural individuals towards spanning boundaries they are in position to span merits closer empirical scrutiny. Moreover, it is unclear how bicultural individuals who are more or less inclined to span boundaries go about enacting boundary spanning roles in practice. The bicultural literature with the exception of Hong and Doz (2013) has attended little to the actual work practices of bicultural individuals, focusing instead on how they psychologically make sense of their own cultural diversity within the self and its effects on cognitive abilities. By contrast, the practice theoretical literature on boundary spanning has focused on how the complexities of the social context and ensuing power and status relations influence work practices, but has largely ignored the psychology of individual boundary spanners. This empirical study aims to further our understanding of the role of bicultural individuals as managers tasked with enabling global boundary spanning in knowledge work by focusing both on their actions and on the relationship between these actions and how bicultural individuals navigate their own cultural diversity in the workplace.

METHODS

In order to understand how bicultural individuals with backgrounds in relevant cultures, such as immigrants from one of the countries involved, go about enacting global boundary spanning roles *in situ*, it was important to study this phenomenon in its context (Doz, 2011). Thus, we conducted a series of open-ended interviews that involved participants' views (Spradley, 1979) from both offshore and onshore locations. Our method followed principles of Constructivist Grounded Theory development, which acknowledges the importance of researchers' background, prior theory, and academic audiences as well as of the inductive accounts of the phenomenon in grounded theorizing (Charmaz, 2006). Consistent with grounded theory development guidelines, we viewed extant 'literature as another source of data to be

integrated into the constant comparative analysis process' (Birks et al., 2013; Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser and Holton 2007, p. 58). Accordingly, the method involved intertwining data collection and analysis and strategically selecting interviewees to confirm or disconfirm emergent themes and relationships until we reached the point of theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

INSERT TABLE II ABOUT HERE

Table II summarizes the set of 41 interviews conducted and references respondent codes we use in the paper.ⁱ Most interviews were conducted face-to-face with only four interviews conducted on the phone. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Russian-speaking participants were interviewed in Russian, except when they preferred to speak English. *Offshore* (Ukraine, Armenia, Russia, and India) interviews involved senior managers, project managers, and entrepreneurs who had experience working with immigrant managersⁱⁱ. The background details of onshore immigrant managers we interviewed are summarized in Table III. All interviewees had lived in the US for at least five years and were proficient in their home and host countries' languages, suggesting they had internalized two cultural schemas, i.e., onshore and offshore (for a similar bicultural sampling methodology, see Benet-Martínez and Haritos, 2005). We did not design the study to match offshore and onshore interviews because such study design could have triggered confidentiality concerns. In a matched sample design, offshore professionals may have feared that negative reports, even in aggregate form, that were conveyed to 'clients' could undermine their business relationships. This fear would have compromised honest reporting.

INSERT TABLE III ABOUT HERE

Data collection proceeded in three phases as outlined in Figure 2. Following a practice-theoretical notion that salient boundaries emerge in practice (Carlile, 2004; Levina and Vaast, 2005; Orlikowski, 2002), in the data collected in the first two phases, we asked offshore professionals about challenges they faced

collaborating with onshore clients and to give examples of projects in which these challenges exhibited themselves as well as examples of projects where such issues were overcome. After such discussions, participants were asked what role immigrant managers played, if any, in collaborating on such projects. In the third phase of data collection, we focused directly on the question of inclination of bicultural individuals to span boundaries and impact that had on their actions. Thus, our interviews focused primarily on onshore immigrant managers. We solicited information about their personal backgrounds and histories of immigration, as well as a series of questions pertaining to their home and host country's identities in their private and professional lives. We also asked how they felt about offshoring knowledge-intensive work, specific collaboration challenges they faced, means they used to address these challenges, and their perception of offshore professionals. Finally, we asked for their views on the possible advantages they had as immigrants when managing these projects. These questions allowed us to theorize how bicultural individuals psychologically navigated the situation where their bicultural backgrounds became directly relevant to their work roles, and how their attitudes towards their cultural roots shaped their actions on the project. Appendix A provides sample interview guides for both offshore and onshore respondents (note that interview guides evolved over time in accordance with the principles of grounded theory building).

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

We analyzed the data to develop an answer to the question of how immigrant managers engage in boundary spanning between their home and host countries. Emergent themes arose across the phases as shown in Figure 1. The initial coding focused on *offshore participants' key concern* (Glaser, 1978), which we identified as being empowered to contribute their independent judgment and professional expertise to the project. *Immigrant manager's key concern* was professional expertise of offshore contributors, its impact on project outcomes, especially quality, and how it reflected on them in the onshore (US) organization. Systematic comparisons across each interview were made in deriving a grounded theory through memos

and coding tables (Glaser, 1978). This allowed us to challenge our emergent categories (see Figure 2 for a list of emergent themes). For example, if an immigrant manager scolded offshore participants for their lack of technical skills arguing that it was impossible to collaborate with them, their sentiments were compared to other immigrant managers working with the same or similar offshore groups.

Through the iterative process of data collection, analysis, and literature review, we identified the following four emergent identity-related categories (1) using inclusive (exclusive) pronouns (e.g., we, my versus they, them) in reference to home country professionals, (2) (not) investing in keeping home country knowledge up-to-date (3) taking pride in (denigrating) offshore professionals, and (4) inflating (deflating) offshore productivity in relation to onshore productivity. We then related these data-driven categories to the conceptualizations of social identity and its dimensions, components, and modes. Specifically, the literature points out that deriving social identity from a group involves a number of potential things including, among others, using pronouns reflective of that attachment (Ashmore et al., 2004, pp. 91-92; Roccas et al., 2008, p. 283-284), investing in acquiring group-relevant knowledge (Ashmore et al., 2004, pp. 92-93), taking pride in the group (Ashmore et al., 2004, pp. 86-87; Leach, et al., 2008, p 146-147), and evaluating the group as superior to other groups along certain dimensions (Ashmore et al., 2004, pp. 86-87; Roccas et al., 2008, p. 284). Accordingly, the four emergent categories together represent a core category, which is *how immigrant managers navigated their home country identity in the workplace*. We then recoded our data focusing not on individual immigrant managers, but rather on the core category and how it related to core concerns we identified earlier.

FINDINGS

In this section, we present our inductive findings, focusing briefly on cultural field boundaries and then in more depth on actions that eased collaboration across knowledge-based field boundaries. We then follow with our findings pertaining to the actions that inhibited spanning of the knowledge-based boundaries. Finally, we describe how immigrant managers navigated their home country identity entering

their workplace and how unpacking this process helped us distinguish between actions that empowered or inhibited collaborators.

Spanning Cultural Boundaries

Adjusting to the home country culture, language, and traditions. As shown in Figure 3, respondents from India and Eastern Europe alike commented on how immigrant managers drew on their knowledge of their home country culture to ease spanning of the culture boundary.

INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

In the Indian offshoring context, English is a natural common language for conducting business. Nonetheless, respondents noted the usefulness of switching between English and Hindi for building interpersonal ties. Almost all immigrants mentioned the emphasis they put on adjusting work schedules to accommodate cultural events like Diwali and Holi as well as long-lasting wedding festivities. Immigrant managers' understanding and willingness to make accommodations was appreciated by their offshore counterparts (e.g., Figure 3, Indian Offshore #5).

In the Eastern European context, immigrant managers' home country language skills were particularly useful. At the time of data collection, the English-language skills of Eastern European line-level technical professionals were rather weak (Bardhan and Kroll, 2006). Accordingly, immigrant managers' ability to speak Russian – an official language of the former Soviet Union – was reported as a big advantage by many offshore professionals. In addition, offshore respondents valued immigrant managers' familiarity with Russian norms and traditions. As one Eastern European manager summarized, 'people who came from here know our mentality' (Ukrainian Offshore #7). Some of the most widely quoted examples of the cultural understanding pertained again to adjusting to home country holidays. For example, one respondent called attention to the first two weeks of January, which is full of celebratory parties in former Soviet block countries, as culturally significant to Russian workers (Figure 3, Immigrant

#6). These reports show how immigrant managers' served, in the words of one respondent, as 'membranes' of cultural knowledge.

Spanning Knowledge-Based Boundaries

In the early stages of data collection, which primarily involved offshore respondents, it became clear that nominating immigrant managers to address collaboration challenges did not always lead to intended outcomes. Recall that in this setting, offshore collaborators are associated with lower status than onshore (Levina and Vaast, 2008). Only in some cases did managers engage in boundary spanning-in-practice across knowledge-based boundaries taking actions that empowered, rather than hindered the low status collaborators (see Figure 4). In the words of one offshore professional: 'The distribution of good collaborators among immigrant managers is very polarized: They are either very good or they are unpleasant. It is never neutral' (Russian Offshore #23). This observation was well supported by data from collaborators located in both India and Eastern Europe and did not depend on variations in immigrants' work backgrounds and personal histories.

INSERT FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

Actions Empowering Collaborators from the Low Status (Home Country) Group. Offshore respondents in India and Eastern Europe reported that immigrant managers who facilitated collaboration across knowledge-based boundaries simultaneously engaged in three interrelated activities.

Connecting collaborators from the low status group to important stakeholders. Similar to other studies of offshoring (Mattarelli and Gupta, 2009, Mattarelli and Tagliaventi, 2015), offshore professionals consistently highlighted that having direct access to onshore business users was a big opportunity for them. Due to travel cost constraints, much of this access was orchestrated through electronic means, allowing for immediate feedback on questions and ideas. For many respondents, such access meant that they could learn what issues the 'end customer' cared about and better position their work to address these issues, building reputations, getting new interesting projects, and progressing in

their careers. Many offshore technical professionals mentioned that they derived professional satisfaction from seeing the organizational consequences of their labor (e.g., a software application used in practice). For more senior business-focused offshore professionals, “client” relationship development was mentioned as a key ingredient for project success (Figure 4, Offshore Indian #6).

Teaching missing competencies to collaborators from the low status group. Another way immigrant managers enabled effective boundary spanning was by teaching offshore professionals business knowledge missing due to knowledge-based boundaries associated with industry, onshore organization, and American professional practices. This was true both in India and Eastern Europe, but was a bigger problem for Eastern European professionals who had less experience in providing services in a global context. This lack of business knowledge often discredited technical suggestions coming from offshore professionals and impeded further collaboration.

In order to help offshore professionals build their credibility, as well as make their professional input more business relevant, many immigrant managers who worked towards enabling collaborative boundary spanning traveled to their home countries in the early stages of the projects to teach missing competencies. This practice was highly valued offshore. In one of our offshore site visits, Russian professionals glorified ‘their’ immigrant manager, who spent over a year setting up training sessions. Like other senior managers effective at spanning knowledge-based boundaries, he also supported short-term onshore visits for offshore professionals. His view was that although one or two individuals could learn by osmosis, larger groups needed concrete instruction in order to learn the specifics of the onshore business context (Figure 4, Immigrant #6).

Other frequent examples of teaching related to helping offshore professionals communicate in ways consistent with American business norms. For example, one immigrant manager recalled a situation in which an onshore client flew a Russian technical professional to the United States for a face-to-face meeting. Upon witnessing a strong difference of opinion between the two parties, the immigrant manager

suggested the Russian professional refrain from using Russian words such as ‘idiot’ in front of the client, which had the same sound and meaning in both languages (Immigrant #15). In the Indian context, immigrant managers focused on getting junior Indian professionals to ask direct questions in meetings with clients even if a more senior Indian person was in the room — an uncommon practice in Indian professional culture at the time.

Soliciting the ideas and dissenting opinions of collaborators from the low status group. One of the key actions that differentiated effective boundary spanning in this context was that immigrant managers actively solicited professional input from offshore on key issues pertaining to a project such as product functionality, system architecture, engineering solution ideas, and product development processes. For example, an Indian offshore professional we interviewed highlighted that effective immigrant managers not only asked for offshore input on technical solutions, but also encouraged offshore professionals to voice dissenting opinions even about business requirements. To facilitate this egalitarian exchange of ideas, the use of a wikis to document product requirements was introduced with both offshore and onshore participants authorized to influence product requirements. A Russian offshore professional also highlighted that his professional effectiveness rested on receiving open-ended requirements from onshore managers so that he could use his creative freedom and potentially develop more innovative software (Figure 4, Russian Offshore #11).

An Indian immigrant manager noted that effective collaboration *only* occurred when offshore professionals went beyond taking orders and instead questioned why certain decisions were made (Figure 4, Indian Offshore #5). In response to a question about whether offshore professionals ever offered any novel ideas, a Ukrainian immigrant manager stated that it happens, “All the time!” (Figure 4, Immigrant #10). In his view, open communication and respect were essential to advancing collaboration.

Actions Hindering Collaborators from the Low Status (Home Country) Group. Analysis of data from offshore respondents indicated that ineffective spanning of knowledge-based boundaries occurred when immigrant managers engaged in three activities that reinforced status differences.

Narrowing communication channels for collaborators from the low status group. In both India and Eastern Europe, offshore professionals noted that immigrant managers exacerbated collaboration challenges when they acted as bottlenecks, limiting access to relevant stakeholders onshore. Several Russian immigrant managers justified such action by saying that offshore developers did not have sufficient business knowledge and language skills to engage directly with users. For example, one highlighted that prototyping -- an effective product development technique -- can no longer be used now that the work is being offshored. When asked why offshore developers could not create user-facing prototypes, a technique used by another interviewee in the same organization working with the same Russian team, his answer was: 'They just cannot do it' (Immigrant #7).

An offshore professional elaborated on how immigrant managers' narrowing of the communication channels inhibited his team's ability to contribute. According to him, the problem was both a question of territory and convenience for managers. He also felt that managers viewed direct communication between business users and offshore professionals as a threat to the managers' power and position (Figure 4, Russian Offshore #12). In further probing these reports in interviews with immigrant managers themselves, we learned that in many cases their non-immigrant onshore colleagues directed all their communication with offshore professionals through the immigrant manager, thereby reinforcing the narrowness of the channel. This was especially the case in the Eastern European context where language barriers were still significant. Along similar lines, offshore professionals from Eastern Europe argued that wide communication channels was a key reason they preferred Western European clients over American clients. The geographic proximity to Western Europe allowed for more travel visits to client sites, during

which they could establish relationships and ultimately widen communication channels beyond those controlled by immigrant managers.

Micromanaging collaborators from the low status group. Offshore professionals reported that some immigrants managers employed a ‘do as you are told’ approach to managing their projects and often over-specified what had to be done. Comments like the following from an R&D manager from Russia were common in our data:

They think they are *a priori* right and don’t even have to explain why. I asked about some numbers that were given to me, and I asked about where these numbers came from, and how they were calculated, and most often people who were not from the Soviet Union would try to explain why. The immigrant says: ‘This is so’ and ‘Believe me.’ (Russian Offshore #22).

According to some respondents, micromanagement was particularly pronounced among immigrant managers holding junior positions (Figure 4, Indian Offshore #5). Our visits to offshore sites indicated that offshore professional organizations had office cultures and norms similar to those in the United States. Yet immigrant managers often made assumptions to the contrary. Some of them worried about the offshore work ethic, making remarks such as, ‘When you visit them in Moscow, tell me what time they actually get to work and leave when I am not there and watching’ (Immigrant #9). Others corroborated the views that offshore professionals had a poor work ethic and highlighted the need to micromanage them by ‘checking all the time’ so that offshore professionals would ‘stay on the ball’ and not ‘slack off on deadlines.’

More prominently, in both Indian and Eastern European cases, immigrant managers tended to justify micromanagement not on concerns about poor work ethic, but rather on concerns about offshore professionals’ lack of relevant business or technical knowledge. Some immigrant managers argued that they had attempted offshoring more open-ended tasks at first, but that this resulted in a lack of progress on projects because offshore professionals lacked the business or technical competence. Hence, they switched to micromanaging.

Suppressing the input of collaborators from the low status group. One of the key problems related to micromanagement and narrow communication channels was that the creative input from offshore professionals often ended up being dismissed by these same immigrant managers. At FinanceCo, we were able to interview an immigrant manager and a non-immigrant manager working with the same team of Russian professionals. The non-immigrant manager praised numerous ideas that were ultimately implemented from the offshore professionals. In sharp contrast, the Russian immigrant manager, working with the same professionals, laughed at our questions about offshore functional innovations, arguing that Russian developers were unable to provide any suggestions due to their lack of basic knowledge of finance. ‘They don’t know what a stock is,’ he explained sardonically (Immigrant Manager #7). Yet, as argued by a Ukrainian professional who was on a receiving end of such attitudes, the dismissal of input on the basis of the lack of business knowledge in the early days of collaboration discouraged further voicing of dissenting opinions even when such opinions were based on relevant competencies. ‘Often, though, we just “salute them” and do it,’ he argued (Figure 4, Ukrainian Offshore #9).

How Immigrant Managers’ Navigate Their Home Country Identity in the Workplace

Unpacking whether immigrant managers engaged in enabling versus hindering boundary-spanning actions consistently pointed us towards the need for further understanding how immigrant managers responded to their cultural group of origin becoming salient in their workplace. Our initial interviews with offshore professionals highlighted that the immigrant managers who engaged in *connecting* to important stakeholders, *teaching* missing offshore competencies, and *soliciting* offshore ideas and dissenting opinions held offshore professionals in high esteem. Respondents from India, Russia, and Armenia all echoed sentiments similar to the following:

[Effective Russian immigrants] valued what we have to offer from Russia and understood the Russian advantage [which is having] smart people who knew how to solve difficult problems. (Immigrant #23)

As we started probing immigrant managers about their home country identity and their host country identity, both of which were salient in the workplace, immigrant managers provided nuanced responses. One, for example, indicated, ‘I am probably a bastard of both, son of neither’ (Immigrant #16), before delving further into his thoughts and feelings on the issue. It is noteworthy that all immigrant managers in our sample indicated a sense of positive identity arising from their host country (e.g., the United States) where they had lived and worked for many years. What varied were the ways immigrant managers navigated their home country identity entering their workplace. Those who expressed ambivalence about their social identities in relation to their countries of origin often expressed it somewhat tentatively: ‘At the beginning I was for sure Belarusian, but now I am no longer sure’ (Immigrant #16). By contrast, immigrants who expressed a strong sense of social identity arising from their home country expressed it directly and, at times, quite eloquently. One Russian-speaking immigrant manager from Ukraine (Immigrant #11), for example, went so far as to share a poem he had written in the past entitled ‘Polygamous Patriot’,ⁱⁱⁱ (translated):

In faraway exotic land I walk,
And suddenly I hear Russian talk --
The sound so soft to me and dear
As when a kitten feels the milk is near.

I am a patriot!
I love my country so,
But as a husband loves his wife,
Not child – mother though.

I love Broadway, Kreshatik, and Arbat,^{iv}
I love the Beatles and my Russian bards,
And please forgive me for my strange emotions,
But no country has my full devotions.

For many, emigration means divorce,
For me, polygamy presents a better course.

For Russia, for Ukraine, for US --
My poor soul has aches day and night.
Three motherlands I have like three wives.

They call on me and know I am theirs.

Don't tell me, please, 'Oh, you – cosmopolite!'
For Cosmos does not call on me at night.

The poem, especially the last stanza, conveys sentiments echoed by other immigrant managers. They saw themselves not as belonging to a supra-national entity (e.g., cosmopolitans), but rather as belonging to specific groups (e.g., Americans, Indians, Ukrainians, Russians) that might call on them depending on the situation.

Before being involved with offshore projects, it was in the context of their private lives when immigrant managers typically enacted their home country identities. Indeed, when we asked immigrant managers about the role of their home cultures in their private lives, they universally confirmed that they tried to maintain their home cultures in their family lives (e.g., celebrating holidays, maintaining familial ties, and observing other cultural traditions). Yet when immigrants were asked to play a boundary-spanning role, this assignment not only put them in charge of managing people in their home countries, but also, importantly, it raised the question of how they would socially define themselves – as at one with the home country professionals or not.

Immigrant managers are not necessarily eager to heed this call. For example, in one extreme case, an immigrant manager we interviewed had perfect command of Russian, but chose to speak English with offshore professionals (Immigrant #9). When probed about this, she explained that she was concerned about becoming 'too familiar' and being taken advantage of when negotiating project resources due to home country professionals' lack of professional ethics. From immigrant managers who themselves may be considered as part of home country professional group, such evaluations convey volumes about how immigrants navigate their home country social identity in the workplace.

INSERT FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE

Using inclusive versus exclusive pronouns. One indicator of how immigrant managers navigate their home country identity comes from pronoun use when referring to collaborators. Our analysis of immigrant managers' interview responses indicated that managers who reported engaging in empowering actions intermittently used inclusive language such as 'our Belarusian youth' in referring to offshore professionals in general and language such as 'my guys in St. Petersburg' when referring to specific offshore professionals. In one interview, the Ukrainian immigrant manager's prepositional slips from 'them' to 'us' confused the interview process, causing the interviewer to ask for clarification (Figure 5, Immigrant #10).

The intermittent inclusive language described above is in sharp contrast to the language used by immigrant managers who negatively evaluated home country professionals and themselves reported that they engaged in micromanaging and narrowing of communication channels. These immigrant managers consistently used differentiating language ('us vs. them') when referring to onshore colleagues compared to offshore professionals. Recall example of the immigrant manager (Immigrant #7) who justified the decision to avoid prototyping while working with offshore professionals by explaining: '*They* just cannot do it'.

Investing in updating versus erroneously assuming home country knowledge is up-to-date. In all cases immigrant managers had superior knowledge of the offshore culture and language than non-immigrant managers. At the same time, in many cases, immigrant managers left India and Eastern Europe decades ago when their home countries were significantly less developed economically. As a result, their knowledge of their home country's current culture and professional language was outdated. We found some palpable difference in the extent to which immigrant managers were willing to update this knowledge. Managers who reported engaging in enabling actions also invested in keeping cultural knowledge of their home country up-to-date, visiting their home countries, and following the economic and business news.

From the offshore professionals, we heard the sentiment that immigrant managers who engaged in hindering actions tended to hold erroneous assumptions that their home country professional knowledge was sufficient. A Russian offshore professional elaborated that often an immigrant manager ‘thinks he should understand everything, but he understands half and often incorrectly’ (Figure 5, Russian Offshore #19). Accounts from Russian and Ukrainian immigrant managers, who reported engaging in actions hindering collaborators, such as suppressing offshore input, corroborate this observation. Several explained that they were reluctant to travel back to where they ‘had been before’ and had nothing to learn, and were fearful of encountering lawlessness.

Taking pride in versus denigrating home country professionals. Immigrant managers who reported engaging in enabling actions embraced their affiliation with home country professionals and took pride in their accomplishments. They repeatedly praised the technical talent and productivity of offshore professionals (Figure 5, Immigrant #10). Eastern European immigrants took pride in offshore counterparts for attributes including technical talent, breadth of education, learning abilities, and sheer intellectual prowess. They often used words such as ‘star’ and ‘erudite’ to refer to offshore professionals. Some even claimed that on their projects ‘all ideas came from Russia’ (Immigrant #15). Indian immigrant managers who engaged in enabling actions tended to acknowledge that the cadres in India were professionally junior to most people onshore; however, they praised the hard work and dedication of their teams, pointing out that they could be called upon any hour of the night and would work around the clock not to let the project down. An Indian immigrant manager (#3) elaborated that a key to his success was recognizing that offshore contributors were not merely ‘programmers working for pennies on small insignificant tasks’ but instead competent, independent professionals.

Far from all immigrant managers, however, shared these sentiments. The immigrants, who made cases for micromanagement, channel narrowing, and idea suppression, psychologically distanced themselves from home country collaborators. They expressed disdain for offshoring, arguing that the

caliber of offshore professionals was subpar along one or more dimension. Some of these immigrants did acknowledge certain positive attributes of the professionals in their home country, but indicated that these were overshadowed by deficiencies. For example, such Russian-speaking immigrants sometimes recognized the technical prowess of Russian contributors, but at the same time highlighted that Russians lacked professional ethics (e.g., honesty, responsibility, respect for deadlines) and business acumen. Similarly, an Indian immigrant manager lamented that ‘Indian people never ask questions. ... US people are more honest and upfront. Indian people do not have confidence and tend to hide behind a cover’ (Immigrant #4).

Critiques of offshore professionals were often coupled with an excessive focus on cost savings and a view of offshore professionals as ‘cheap laborers’. A senior-level offshore professional from Russia pointed out that some immigrant managers communicated a complete disregard for offshore professionals by using dehumanizing language (Figure 5, Russian Offshore #23). The immigrant managers who believed offshore professionals were incapable of generating innovative ideas or dealing with open-ended tasks also blamed offshore professionals for faux pas, errors, and slow progress of work. Another immigrant manager (#11) went as far as to say that all Russian developers were cheats when it came to delivering on promises. In those cases where we were able to interview multiple managers working with the same offshore group, it was clear that other onshore managers working with these groups took personal responsibility for slow progress or faux pas, arguing that they probably did not teach offshore professionals enough to be able to progress on the task.

Inflating or deflating home country professional productivity. Immigrant managers who intermittently used inclusive pronouns, travelled frequently to update their cultural knowledge, and discussed the need for teaching and listening to input also tended to emphasize that the productivity of offshore and onshore professionals was quite comparable. In response to our query about how many onshore people would be needed to replace offshore people if the project were sourced back onshore,

these immigrant managers estimated that one onshore person was roughly equivalent to one, or in some cases one and a half, offshore professionals due to additional coordination costs involved in distributed work. In several cases Eastern European immigrant managers even indicated that offshore professionals could outperform the same number of onshore people. One of these immigrant managers maintained that technical specialists in Russia were so well trained in sciences and engineering that they were not replaceable by Americans at all, even by those graduating from elite engineering schools. A Belarusian immigrant manager further elaborated on the superiority of ‘our’ offshore professionals:

Among people in my office, everybody is completely delighted [with Belarusians]. They are in complete awe. Indeed, they [Belarusians] are stars! What we have are real stars. A few boys and girls came to visit here. There is a generally negative attitude to girls in IT, but what we got [from Belarus] was above average, so much above average that everybody was in complete awe, complete awe. (Immigrant #14)

This was also the case with Ukrainian teams, which were praised for their intellectual abilities and responsiveness (Figure 5, Immigrant #10).

At the same time, immigrant managers who used only exclusive pronouns, denigrated offshore professionals, and emphasized the need for control typically agreed that the work done by offshore people could be done better by far fewer onshore professionals. One such Russian immigrant manager indicated that the work of 23 offshore people in Russia could be done more effectively with five good developers in the US due to better business and language skills. We also interviewed two of his colleagues, a Russian and an American manager who were working with the same team of Russian professionals. In sharp contrast to this immigrant manager, they maintained that Russian programmers could hardly be outperformed by the same number of American professionals. Similarly, in the context of Indian projects, an Indian immigrant manager who denigrated his offshore colleagues and emphasized the need for control over tasks indicated that 10 offshore programmers could not competently perform a task easily performed by one onshore professional, such as himself. This same manager went on to elaborate

how migration flows had, in his opinion, contributed to low offshore quality proclaiming that, “Anybody who was any good has come here [United States] long ago” (Immigrant #4).

DISCUSSION

Our findings suggest a model of global boundary spanning that is not only situated in complex institutional settings characterized by asymmetric power and status relations, but also importantly emerges from the micro-level actions of individual boundary spanners endowed with the requisite resources to fulfill the roles. In what follows, we present our empirically grounded theoretical model of boundary spanning by bicultural immigrant managers and elaborate on how boundary spanning-in-practice occurs in global workplace settings where status difference between collaborators are palpable.

Theoretical Framing

Examining global boundary spanning by immigrants nominated to manage knowledge-intensive projects sourced to their home countries enables us to examine what individuals endowed with the resources required for boundary spanning actually do in practice. As previously elaborated, firms have been advised to strategically staff immigrants and other biculturals (Carmel and Tia, 2005; Doz, 2016; Hong and Doz, 2013; Hong, 2010) based on the belief that these individuals will be effective in spanning relevant cultural and knowledge-based boundaries by virtue of having lived in the countries involved in the collaboration. Our study opens this assumption up to inquiry and reveals that it is not categorically accurate. Having lived for a significant period of time in each country involved in the collaboration and even having acquired the relevant cultural schema is not sufficient for effectively enabling global boundary spanning. Our findings demonstrate that immigrant managers nominated to boundary spanning roles generally drew on their bicultural competence and enabled spanning of the cultural boundary involved; yet, this was not sufficient for enabling collaboration across critical knowledge-based boundaries. In practice, their nomination could turn extremely beneficial or seriously problematic for collaborative spanning of knowledge-based boundaries. Our analysis suggests that this bifurcation was

directly related to how immigrant managers navigated their home (offshore) country identity entering their workplace. Next we theoretically elaborate on this relationship.

INSERT FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE

How Immigrant Managers Navigate their Home Country Identity in Relation to Knowledge-Based Boundaries. As shown in Figure 6, our model elaborates *how* immigrant managers nominated to manage knowledge-intensive work sourced to their home country differentially handle their role as a global boundary spanners and how their psychological processes engender different actions they take in spanning knowledge-based boundaries. Before going further into the discussion of particular actions, it is critical to recall that these projects are characterized by significant status differences that need to be renegotiated in order to achieve the synergistic combination of diverse expertise that characterizes effective boundary spanning-in-practice (Levina and Vaast, 2005, 2008).

In the offshoring context, the immigrant managers' actions that hinder collaborators, i.e., *narrowing offshore-onshore communication channels*, *micromanaging offshore professionals*, and *suppressing offshore input*, can be seen as status reinforcing in that they do nothing to alter offshore professionals' low status position. Furthermore, they represent a failure to negotiate on behalf of, and represent the interests of, the offshore professional group, thus undermining boundary spanning-in-practice. By contrast, the actions that empower collaborators, i.e., *connecting to important stakeholders*, *teaching competencies missing offshore*, and *soliciting offshore ideas and dissenting opinions*, are facilitators of social change. Ultimately, these empowering actions are ways that managers share resources with and actively enhance the status of offshore professionals, which enables boundary spanning-in-practice. These actions refute the notion that offshore professionals are nothing more than "cheap" labor and provide offshore professionals the opportunity to work on challenging assignment that could lead to professional

growth. Recent work by Mattarelli and her colleagues (Mattarelli and Gupta, 2009; Mattarelli and Tagliaventi, 2015) documents how satisfying such actions are for offshore professionals.

It is striking that immigrant managers used their home country cultural knowledge and language competencies in two very different ways. For those managers working towards elevating offshore professionals' status, their bicultural competencies were used not only to span cultural boundaries, but also to teach offshore professionals missing competencies. These findings echo the way international management theorists have described the facilitating role of bicultural employees in global collaborations (e.g., Doz, 2016; Hong, 2010; Hong and Doz, 2013). However, for those managers who do not act on behalf of and represent the interests of the low status group, their effectiveness at spanning cultural boundaries was used to narrow the offshore-onshore communication channels. Such managers held on tightly to the intermediary position that was conferred on them by their unique cross-cultural competencies. They acted as bottlenecks, whereby offshore professionals needed to go through them to communicate with onshore collaborators and vice versa. This highlights a potential "dark" side of assigning biculturals to boundary spanning roles.

The psychology underlying why immigrant managers engage in actions that enable or hinder spanning of the knowledge-based boundaries. From the bicultural literature, the background characteristics of immigrant managers would seem to be a reasonable place to begin this inquiry. Indeed, high BII individuals who exhibit better switching between and bridging of cultural schemas, tend to be more established in their host country, speaking the language proficiently (Cheng et al., 2014; Fitzsimmons, 2013). Yet, our inductive analysis did not reveal any systematic variation between immigrant manager's backgrounds (e.g., years in host country, level of education, type of work, organizational role, home country; see Table III) and their tendency to engage in hindering or empowering managerial actions. This may be because bicultural individuals in managerial roles are by definition established in the host country, which is a primary correlate of BII (Cheng et al., 2014). It is,

therefore, quite likely that the immigrant managers in our sample are high BII, subjectively perceiving their cultures as integrated within themselves.

We found, instead, that the tendency to engage in the empowering or hindering actions related to how immigrant managers' navigated their *home country identity* when such identities became salient in the workplace. Since the home country professionals could often be perceived as a low status group in the context of offshoring and because people derive self-esteem from belonging to prestigious groups, being associated with low status groups threaten one's sense of positive social identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Haslam and Ellemers, 2005, 2011). Accordingly, immigrant managers experienced a workplace social identity threat when they were nominated to manage projects sourced to their home countries, as this role visibly associated them with their home country professionals. From the seminal work of Tajfel and Turner (1979) to contemporary reviews (Ellemers, 2012), social identity theory delineates two basic ways that individuals may deal with such threats: either people try to escape from a low status group through individual mobility, i.e., leave, or they stand up for the group through social change.

There was a bifurcation among the immigrant managers in our data regarding how they navigated this particular identity threat. As shown in the middle of Figure 6, we propose the concepts of *embracing* or *distancing* from their home country (low status) identity to describe the bifurcation we observed in the data (see, Figure 5). The distancing process can be seen as reflecting the immigrant's decision years ago to leave his or her home country. In much the same way, Tajfel and Turner (1979) describe mobility in terms of passing from one group to another. However, the distancing that immigrant managers engage in during these boundary spanning assignments is more nuanced. On the one hand, these immigrant managers assert their home country affiliation as their bicultural competencies in these context can enhance their business and create career advancement opportunities (Hong, 2010). Moreover, immigrants' home country affiliation and concomitant competencies are a source of power as evidenced by those who used language skills to narrow the communication channels. On the other hand, by using exclusive

language, immigrant managers differentiate themselves from home country professionals (Kane and Rink, 2015, 2016). Their denigrating words and deflating evaluations of offshore professionals are reminiscent not only of classic cases of outgroup derogation (e.g., Blake and Mouton, 1961), but also of contemporary professional settings in which individuals may devalue characteristics of a group they were born into, e.g., gender (e.g., Derks et al., 2011). In sum, the way a bicultural immigrant manager distances from his or her home country identity involves a combination of affiliation as well as disaffiliation.

In sharp contrast to the aforementioned are the ways immigrant managers embrace their home country identity. Embracing could be seen as a way of reconnecting to the home countries that immigrants left years ago. Indeed, investing in up-to-date home country cultural knowledge involves making trips as well as keeping up with the home country news and cultural developments. When immigrant managers embrace their home country identity, they signal this affiliation through the use of inclusive language in reference to offshore professionals. They take pride in offshore professionals, lauding their accomplishments, and they evaluate them to be on par if not superior to the onshore professionals in terms of individual productivity. These identity displays serve to reinforce and maintain a positive sense of the immigrant manager's social identity in the workplace (Ashmore et al., 2004). In sum, embracing involves only affiliation.

We propose, more generally, that embracing the home country (low status) identity is associated with managerial actions that empower home country professionals and elevates their status, which, in turn, makes the identity derived from the home country more positive. This suggests a virtuous relationship among positive identity and empowering actions, whereby one begets the other. By contrast, distancing from the home country identity is associated with hindering managerial actions that further disempower home country professionals, and reinforces their low status, which, in turn, does little to elevate the home country as a potential source of positive social identity.

Although the majority of our data supports the notion that home country (offshore) professional groups occupy a low-status position, we note interesting developments over time. Global sourcing strategies have changed towards offshoring higher end work, increasing the value of cross-cultural competence and the ability to develop innovative solutions through offshored relationships (Haakonsson, 2013). Not only have home country business and technical knowledge become increasingly more valuable in such work (Lewin et al., 2009), but also immigrants increasingly see new career opportunities associated with their home country identities and bicultural competence (Hong, 2010). At the same time, the competence of home country professionals has been improving with experience and, in part, due to empowering actions of certain global boundary spanners. Both of these factors added positive value to the association with home country professional groups, positively impacting an individual manager's inclination to engage in global boundary spanning.

Theoretical Implications and Contributions

Contributions to and implications for global boundary spanning theory. By restricting our examination to individuals well positioned to fulfill global boundary spanning roles (e.g., bicultural immigrant managers nominated to manage projects sourced to their home country), our work advances understanding of what is involved in becoming a global boundary spanner. Whereas prior theory on boundary spanners-in-practice unpacked the nature of boundaries and boundary spanning actions (Levina and Vaast, 2005), we take into account the complexities of global boundary spanning context and their impact on an individual manager's inclination to fulfill his or her roles in practice. As shown in Table IV, becoming a global boundary spanners-in-practice involves having the (1) understanding, (2) resources, and (3) inclination to combine the diverse practices and varied interests of a complex configuration of groups.

INSERT TABLE IV ABOUT HERE

First, individuals need to become *legitimate peripheral participants* in the practices of each group separated by multiple cultural and knowledge-based boundaries because such participation enables individuals to develop an (at least peripheral) understanding of diverse practices. Being ‘born’ bicultural, immigration, expatriation, or other involvement in the cultural practices of the national societies involved confers or affords an understanding of the diverse cultural practices. Training and experience working in professional groups, e.g., scientists, managers, (Mudambi and Swift, 2009) and organizational groups, e.g., headquarters, subsidiary (Schotter and Beamish, 2011) affords understanding of knowledge-based practices. Second, individuals need to be *empowered as a negotiator* to enact on behalf of and represent the interests of the multiple groups. The legitimacy needed to represent these diverse interests arises from individuals’ status within each group, which could be obtained through role nomination, organizational position, or professional reputation, among others. Third, individuals who satisfy the first two criteria still need to be *inclined to enact their roles in practice*. Global boundary spanning is situated in a complex web of power and status relations where one group will be associated with a lower status than another group along at least one, if not many, dimensions of social distinctions. Thus, advocating on behalf of the low status group can threaten individual’s workplace identity. Our analysis proposes that *the inclination to enable collaborative boundary spanning arises on the basis of how individuals in positions to span boundaries navigate their workplace social identity threat associated with representing the interests of the low status group*.

Our work also contributes by highlighting the importance of mapping out relevant boundaries and considering practices that are involved in spanning each boundary involved. The act of assigning a bicultural to a boundary-spanning role assumes that spanning of cultural boundaries would also be helpful in spanning knowledge-based boundaries. It is not surprising that senior leaders tend to assign people able to span cultural boundaries because such boundaries are particularly visible in global contexts. Yet, in knowledge-intensive international projects, it is the knowledge-based boundaries that tend to pose the

biggest collaboration challenges (Levina and Vaast, 2008). Our work suggests more broadly that individuals who, through their backgrounds, are well positioned to span one boundary may, in fact, act in ways that inhibit collaboration across other boundaries. In doing so, we respond to Minbaeva's (2016) call for more nuanced, contextualization of individuals in international management research.

Our work joins the emergent, albeit sparse, literature that unpacks status dynamics in global business contexts. Prior work has focused on the role of language, whether naturally shared or institutionally imposed, and on the role of offshore site visits in reinforcing or transforming status hierarchies (Brannen, 2004; Neeley et al., 2012; Neeley, 2013; Hinds et al., 2014). Our work provides a more nuanced interpretation of both of these practices. Assigning a bicultural, for example, who can speak the language spoken at a subsidiary location can be seen as empowering; however, our analysis indicates that this is only the case when the boundary spanner uses his/her language skills to engage in managerial actions that enable spanning of knowledge-based boundaries and elevate lower-status collaborators. Otherwise, the boundary spanners use of a common language as well as offshore site visits may end up serving as walls isolating subsidiary collaborators from important stakeholders located at headquarters.

Contributions to and implications for bicultural theory. Our model contributes to the theory around how bicultural employees integrate their cultural identities and associated schemas to be effective in various international management contexts (Brannen and Thomas, 2010; Fitzsimmons, 2013; Hong, 2010; Hong and Doz, 2013; Lücke et al., 2014). Building on socio-cognitive research (Cheng et al., 2014), bicultural employees with integrated and compatible view of their cultures within themselves (high BII) have been identified as potentially effective global boundary spanners (e.g., Brannen and Thomas, 2010; Hong, 2010). Our work does not refute this recommendation. Instead, our inductive process model highlights that although BII may be necessary for spanning the cultural boundary, it is not sufficient for motivating the bicultural employee to engage in actions that enable spanning of knowledge-based

boundaries. Instead, our work suggests that *embracing* the specific cultural identities involved in the collaboration is critical at least in the situations when biculturals are being called on to empower members of the specific identity groups.

Our work further extends this literature by highlighting the context specific nature of cultural identity (Schwartz et al., 2014). The immigrant managers in our study, including those who distanced from their home country identity in the workplace, still reported that they derived social identity from their home country in their personal lives. In other settings, such as, for example, Russian immigrants attending a symphony performance, a home country identity will be a positively distinct rather than threatened. This calls into question approaches that aim to measure global cultural (dis)identification assuming it is a stable individual characteristic (e.g., Zou et al., 2008). Our work also questions the use of ‘cosmopolitan’ in relation to managers with diverse cultural experiences as specific cultural identities became more or less salient in the context in which they were asked to play boundary-spanning roles (Doz and Wilson, 2012). Whereas we examined identity threats arising from the home country identities becoming salient, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of not only dual but also triple and sometimes quadruple identity (Schotter and Abdelzaher, 2013; Schotter and Bontis, 2009). It would be profitable for future research to examine such situations paying special attention to the relative status of multiple cultural groups in the specific context of work.

Our work further contributes to the international management literature on biculturals by elaborating specific practices that are useful in enabling (versus hindering) collaboration across cultural and knowledge-based boundaries. Finally, our empirical accounts of how immigrant managers used their cultural competencies to narrow communication channels and disempower collaborators highlights a dark side of bicultural competence, adding a more nuanced view to the theoretical framework advanced by Hong (2010). Our findings suggest a need for further empirical examination of the role of bicultural individuals in multicultural team effectiveness. Moreover, future research may investigate how

backgrounds of bicultural individuals shape their willingness to facilitate multicultural team effectiveness. Even though our data does not reveal a relationship between biculturals' backgrounds and managerial attitudes and actions, a broader data set may reveal some interesting relationships as suggested by Fitzsimmons (2013).

Contributions to and implications for social identity theory. Our model of boundary spanning by bicultural managers enriches social identity theory. It responds to calls that scholars examine “the way in which organizational changes (at both global and local levels) affect people’s identities” (Haslam and Ellemers, 2005, p. 95). Being nominated to a global boundary spanning position represents one such change that may bring a manager’s cultural identities into the workplace and, in turn, create a social identity threat. With respect to embracing a threatened identity, our findings imply that raising the competencies and status of the low-status group members is indeed viable approach for standing up for one’s group. One implication is that such an approach might be included along with the extant strategies (i.e., social creativity and social competition). With respect to distancing from a threatened identity, research has by and large focused on the individual level consequences, e.g., psychological strain and missed opportunities to connect to similar others (Ellemers, 2012). Our work contributes by explicating how psychological distancing and the disempowering actions that derive from it undermine the learning and performance of members of the group being distanced from. In doing so, we respond to calls by Ellemers (2012) and Branscombe et al. (1999) to recognize that disavowed groups are also likely to suffer from individuals enacting mobility strategies.

Implications for governing MNCs. Our work offers implications to questions of MNC governance associated with collaboration across boundaries that arise from differences in practices of headquarters and subsidiary units. At a fundamental level, our analysis suggests the need for reflection about the kinds of boundaries that emerge in such collaborations beyond cultural boundaries. A focus on knowledge-based boundaries may point to new criteria for staffing employees to boundary spanning roles.

For example, listening skills, the ability to teach missing business or professional competencies, and tolerance for mistakes may be more important than employees' cultural backgrounds (see also, Roberts and Beamish, Special Issue). It is challenging to anticipate key boundaries *a priori*, and new boundaries may emerge as knowledge is created and enacted in practice (Orlikowski 2002, Levina and Vaast 2005, 2008). Therefore, MNCs would be advised to institute feedback mechanisms, such as the regular and systematic collection of information about the nature and quality of collaboration from subsidiaries and headquarters. Doing so is likely to not only help uncover boundaries impeding collaboration but also provide insights into ways for overcoming them.

As MNCs focus on building global boundary spanning capabilities they should also consider investments in structural mechanisms focused on fostering creativity and innovation (Tippmann et al., Special Issue). For example, assigning multiple individuals to span boundaries between headquarters and the same subsidiary may be helpful to avoid overreliance on individual boundary spanners (Zhao and Anand, 2013). Indeed research on the boundary spanning activities of headquarter executives found that such executives engage in brokering new relationships and generating broader visibility (Birkinshaw et al., Special Issue). Having broader relationships would prevent the narrowing of communication channels and create generative opportunities for global boundary spanning.

Our work also has some implications for unpacking the relationship between MNC's centricity profile (an enacted attitude towards foreign cultures) and global boundary spanning. As Caloff and Beamish (1994) illustrate, many MNCs strive to achieve a geocentric (world-oriented) profile by hiring employees with multicultural experiences. Such individuals are assumed to be geocentrically oriented, and thus unlikely to hold ethnocentric attitudes biased towards the MNC's headquarter country's practices or polycentric attitudes biased towards subsidiary country's practices. Our work adds a nuance to this literature by highlighting that achieving collaboration across knowledge-based boundaries may require that employees embrace identity-relevant cultures as well. So, while geocentric attitudes may be helpful

by providing an overarching, superordinate identity (Argote and Kane, 2009, Dokko et al., 2014; Richter et al., 2006), our findings suggest that bicultural employees holding ethnocentric attitudes (for example, those favoring a subsidiary unit) can also play a productive role, especially if they are focused on empowering collaborators from low status groups.

Limitations

This paper represents a first step in exploring a complex phenomenon. Clearly a key limitation of our research design is that, in most cases, we could not, without compromising honest reporting, obtain matched responses. It would be important for future studies to obtain data that corroborates immigrant manager's actions and attitudes with the offshore contributors' perceptions, or even better observational accounts of relationships and their evolution over time.

Our data set is also limited to only two regions and may have idiosyncrasies associated with these regions. For example, both regions are believed to have high power distance according to Hofstede's measures (Hofstede, 1980). Some of the actions we have observed may be associated with higher power distance in India and Eastern Europe than in the US. A high power distance society has been associated with authoritarian leadership styles that impede collaboration (Dickson et al., 2003). While we do not believe that high power distance explains what we have seen in this study as clearly offshore professionals did not appreciate authoritarian leaders who micromanaged and limited their control and contributions, further studies in these area are necessary.

Conclusion

It is often assumed that assigning bicultural immigrants to boundary spanning roles managing knowledge-intensive projects sourced to their country of origin will ease collaboration challenges. In this paper, we open up this assumption to empirical investigation and find it to be inaccurate. We find that such assignments can help in spanning cultural boundaries, but may have problematic implications for spanning knowledge-based boundaries. Being asked to manage offshore professionals makes immigrants'

home country identity salient in their workplace, which in this workplace context, highlights immigrants' affiliation with a low status group. Thus, while such assignments can potentially enhance immigrants' professional opportunities, they can also threaten immigrants' positive sense of identity. We unpack how immigrants navigate the workplace social identity threat by either distancing from or by embracing their home country identity and the managerial actions that ensue. Practically, our study suggests that organizations should be reflective in making such assignments, considering the relative status of the groups involved and the psychology of the individuals assigned to span them.

NOTES

ⁱ We excluded offshore workers on temporary onshore assignments, known as ‘bridgeheads’ (Krishna et al., 2004), because these individuals are not considered immigrants, rarely have spent sufficient time in the onshore country to internalize the host country’s culture, and are expected to return to their country of origin in the near term.

ⁱⁱ We are not including detailed information about backgrounds of offshore respondents due to space limitations and because our analysis did not reveal that variations in their backgrounds influenced their perception of immigrant managers in a systematic way. All 23 offshore respondents were in management positions in offshore organizations ranging from unit managers all the way to company co-presidents.

ⁱⁱⁱ This interview took place before the Russian-Ukrainian conflict of 2014.

^{iv} These refer to three prominent streets in New York, Moscow, and Kiev respectively.

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Table I. Becoming a Boundary Spanner-in-Practice

Requirements	Why each matters
1. Legitimate peripheral participant in each group separated by a boundary	1. Participation in group yields an understanding of their diverse, work-relevant practices
2. Empowered as a negotiator to act on behalf of and represent the interests of both groups	2. Confers legitimacy needed to represent and balance group's interests
3. Inclined to fulfill the role	3. Mobilizes individuals to engage the actions needed to relate diverse practices and balance groups' interests in a specific work context

Table II. Interview Data Analyzed

Setting	Offshore professionals	Onshore immigrant managers
India	6 participants (Offshore #1-6)	5 immigrant managers (Immigrant #1-5)
Eastern Europe (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia)	17 participants (Offshore #7-23)	13 immigrant managers (Immigrant #6-18)
Total	23 interviews	18 interviews

Table III: Immigrant Manager's Background

Code	Role, Organization	Project Type	Gender	Level of Education	Years in Host Country (US)	Age Range	Home Country
1	Project Manager, Marketing Consulting	IT consulting	Female	Graduate	10	25-34	India
2	Project Manager, IT Consulting	IT consulting	Female	Graduate	10	25-34	India
3	Project Manager, FinanceCo	Internal IT Application Development	Male	Undergraduate	10	25-34	India
4	Project Manager, FinanceCo	Internal IT Application Development	Male	Graduate	10	45-54	India
5	VP Engineering, Technology Company	Tech Product Development	Male	Graduate	15	35-44	India
6	Managing Director, FinanceCo	Internal IT Application Development	Male	Graduate	30	35-44	Russia
7	Project Manager, FinanceCo	Internal IT Application Development	Male	Graduate	15	25-34	Russia
8	Project Manager, FinanceCo	Internal IT Application Development	Male	Undergraduate	20	25-34	Ukraine
9	Vendor Manager, FinanceCo	Internal IT Application Development	Female	Graduate	20	35-44	Russia
10	VP Research, Pharma R&D	Pharma R&D	Male	Post-Graduate	20	35-44	Ukraine
11	CTO, Tech Start-up	Tech Product Development	Male	Graduate	20	45-54	Ukraine
12	Project Manager, R&D Consulting	Engineering R&D Consulting	Male	Post-Graduate	5	25-34	Russia
13	Project Manager, R&D Consulting	Engineering R&D Consulting	Female	Post-Graduate	20	35-44	Belorussia
14	Project Manager	Internal IT Application Development	Female	Post-Graduate	10	45-54	Belorussia
15	President, R&D Consulting	Engineering R&D Consulting	Male	Post-Graduate	30	45-54	Russia
16	Client Manager, IT Consulting	IT consulting	Male	Graduate	10	25-34	Belorussia
17	CTO, Gaming Start-up	Tech Product Development	Male	Post-Graduate	20	35-44	Russia
18	President, Gaming Start-up	Tech Product Development	Female	Post-Graduate	20	35-44	Russia

Table IV. Becoming a Global Boundary Spanner-in-Practice

Requirements	Satisfying the Requirements
1. Legitimate peripheral participant in each group separated by multiple boundaries	<p>Individuals' (at least peripheral) participation in the national societies involved (e.g., bicultural backgrounds, expatriation experience) affords an understanding of diverse cultural practices</p> <p>Individuals' (at least peripheral) participation (e.g., training, work experience) in the industries, professional groups, and organizational unit involved affords an understanding of their diverse professional and organizational practices</p>
2. Empowered as a negotiator to enact on behalf of and represent the interests of multiple groups	Individuals' control over resources (e.g., through role nomination, organizational position, or professional reputation) confers the legitimacy needed to represent the groups' interests
3. Inclination to relate the diverse practices and negotiate varied interests of groups with asymmetric status	Individuals' inclination arises from how they navigate the social identity threat of being associated with and representing the interests of lower status groups in a given workplace context.

Figure 1: Global Fields and Boundaries in Knowledge-Intensive Offshoring

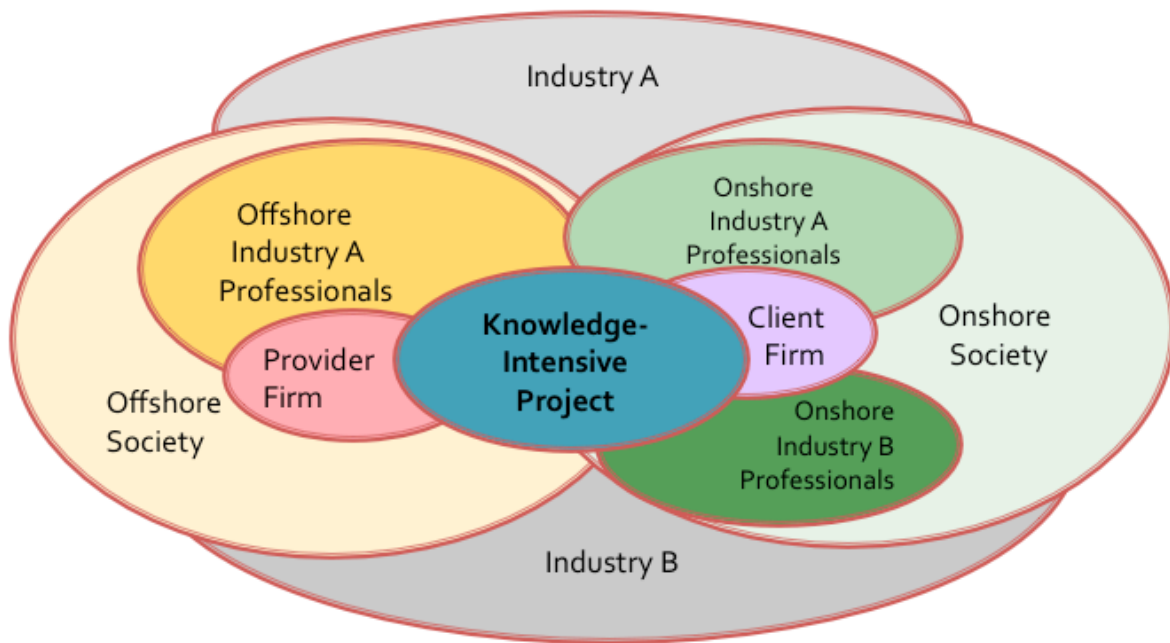


Figure 2: Data Collection Timeline

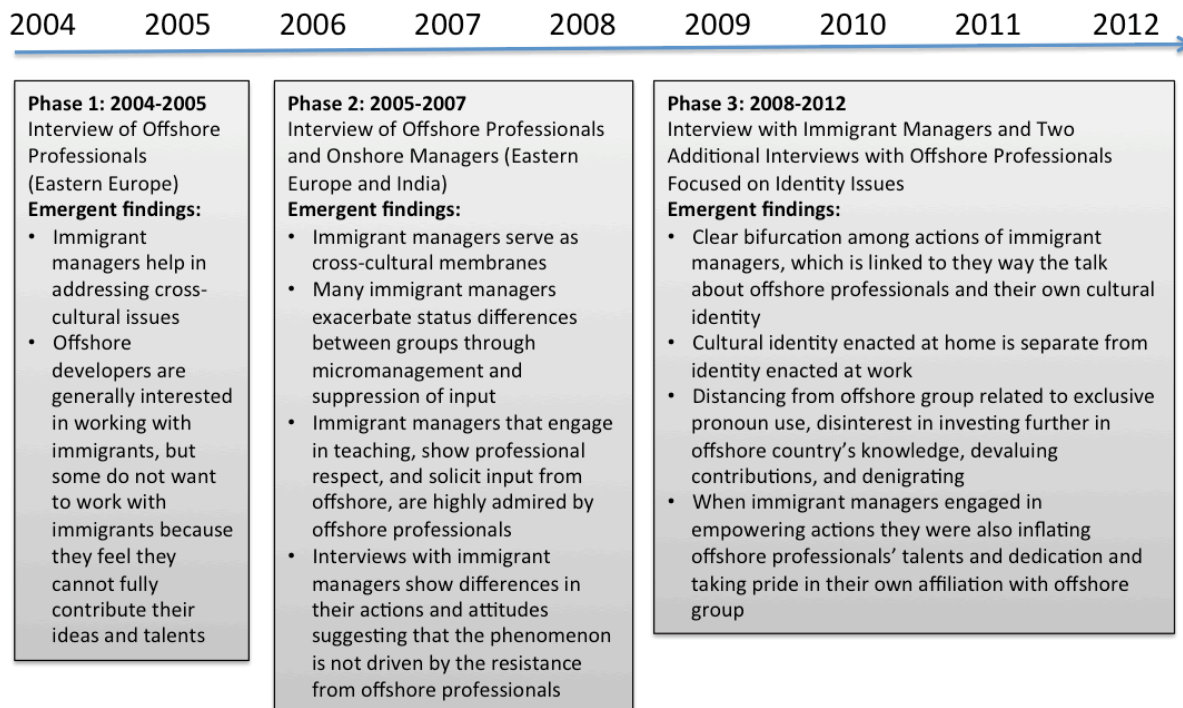


Figure 3. Spanning Cultural Boundaries

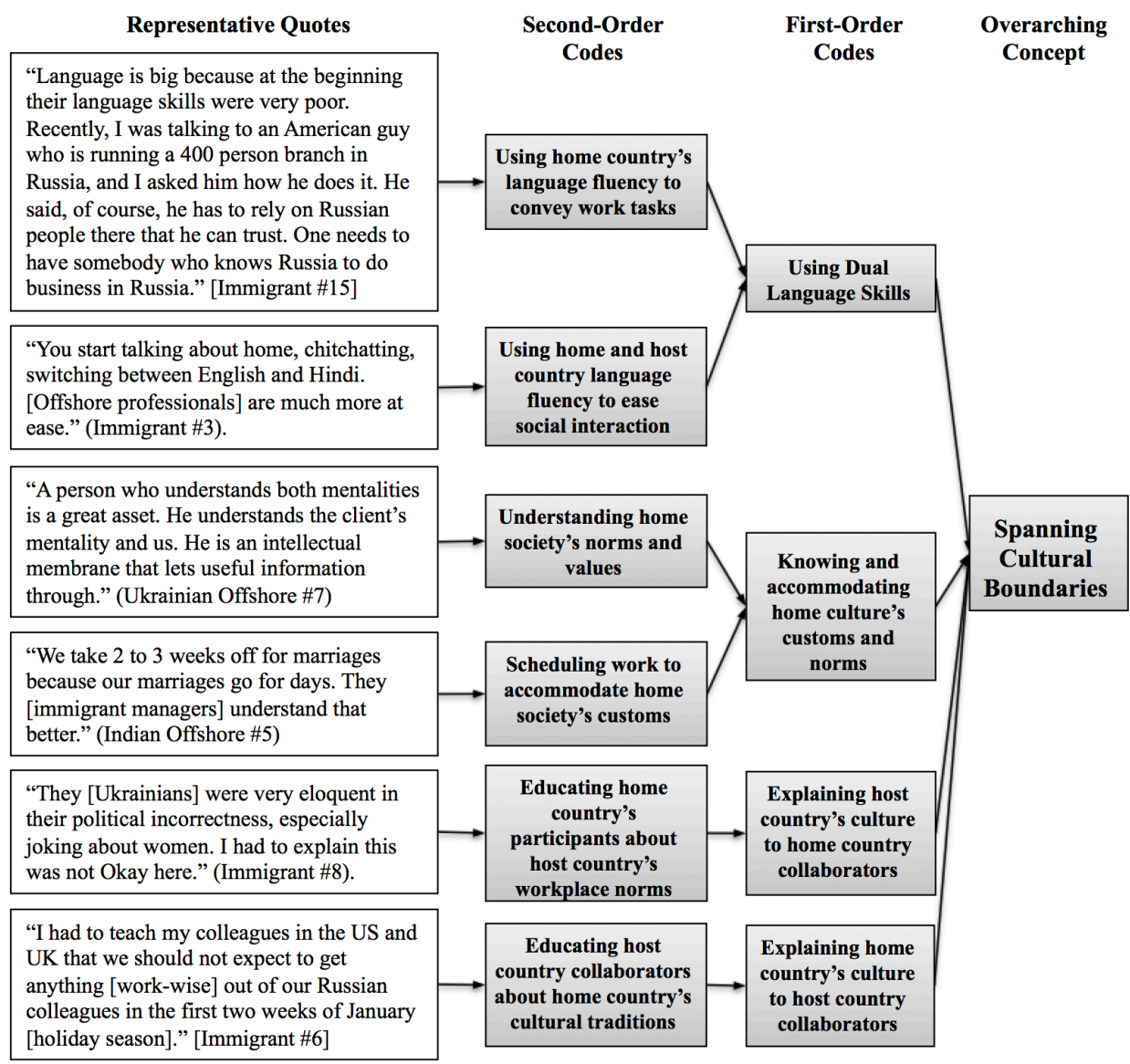


Figure 4. Spanning Knowledge-Based Boundaries

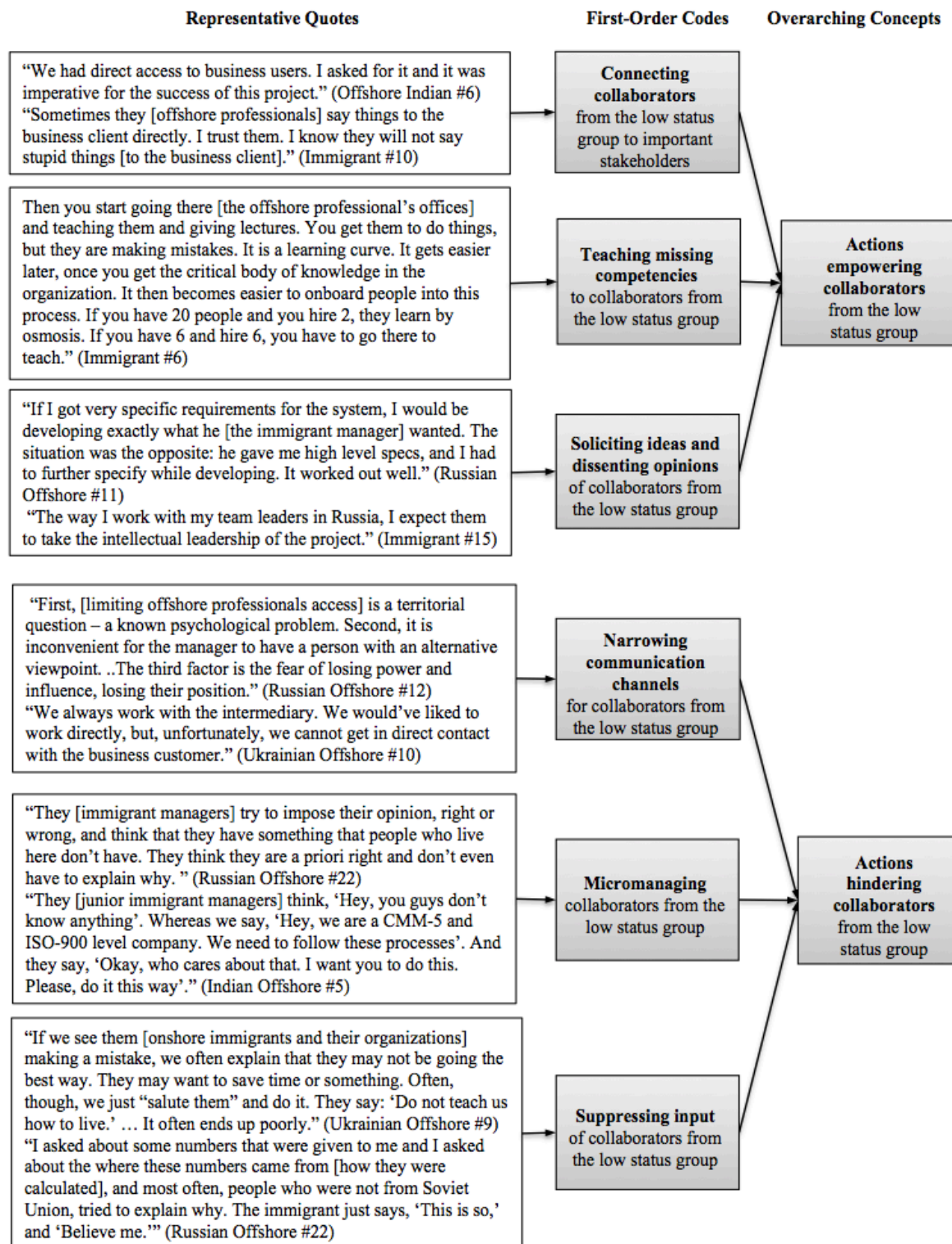


Figure 5. Navigating their Home Country Identity in the Workplace

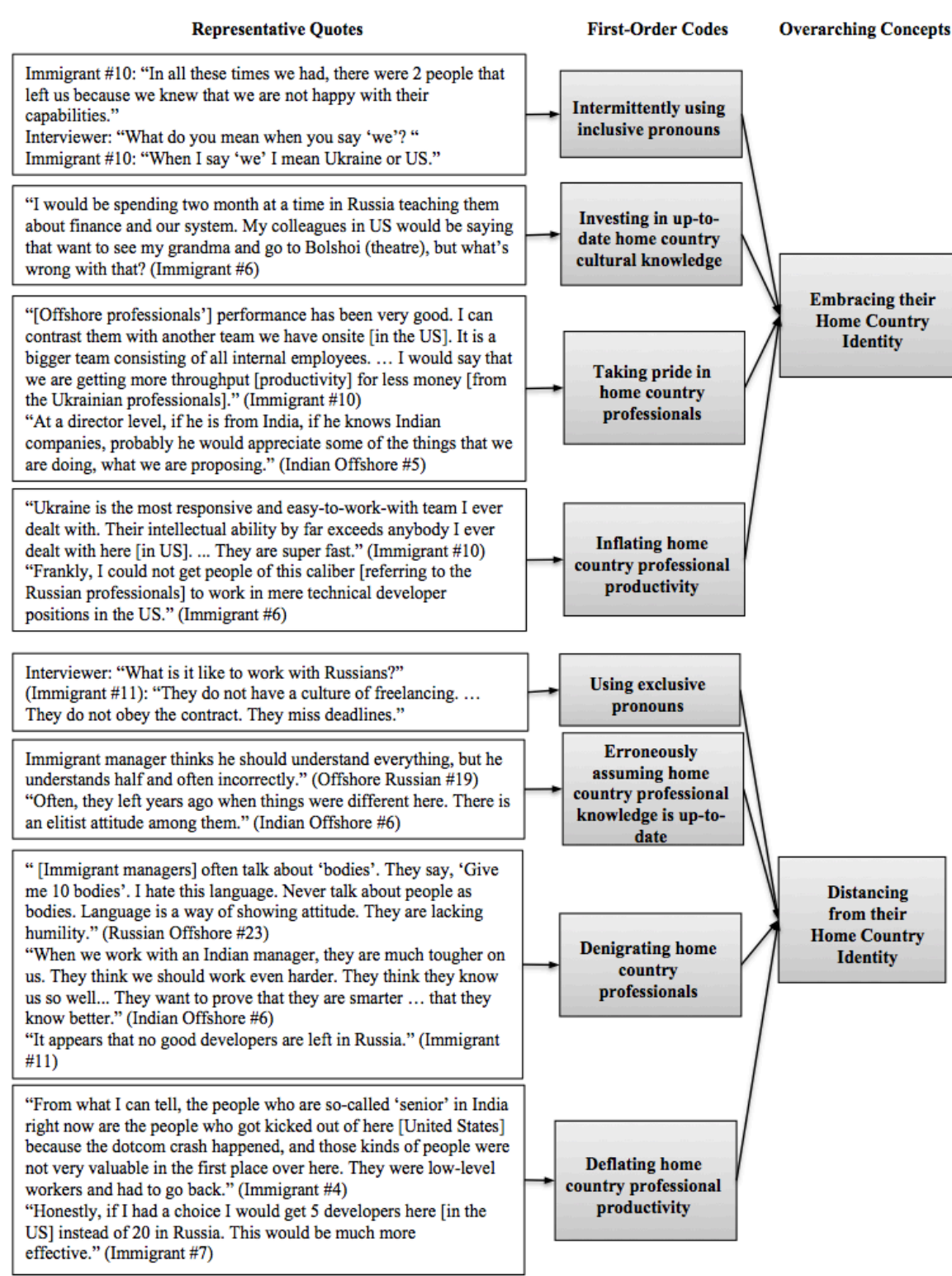
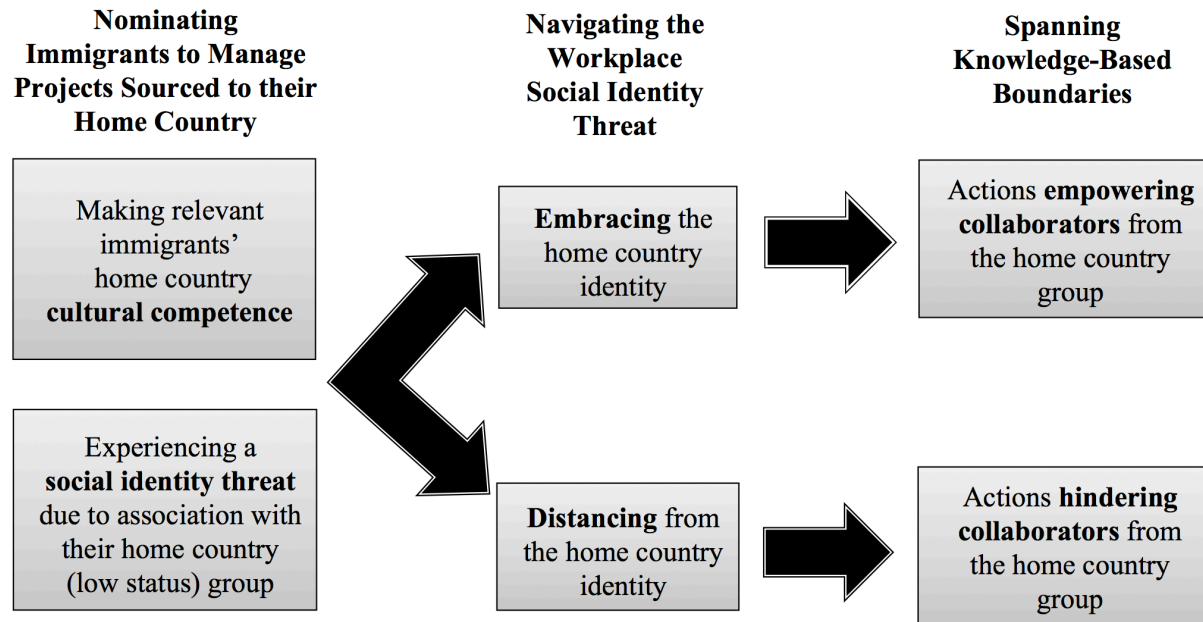


Figure 6. How Immigrant Managers Navigate their Home Country Identity in Relation to Knowledge-Based Boundaries



Appendix A: Sample Interview Guides

Sample Interview Guide for Offshore Professionals

The following questions came after respondent background questions.

1. Please think of some specific, recently completed projects with foreign clients. Can you briefly state the nature of these projects?
2. What country did the client come from?
3. What was the specific goal behind the projects?
4. Why do you think client organizations decided to obtain services from your company (and your country, in general)?
5. How large (contract size measured by spending, people) were the projects?
6. Were these fixed price or times-and-materials–based contracts?
7. What was the time frame?
8. How did these projects go?
 - Was the client happy with the outcomes?
 - Was the work delivered on time?
 - How would you assess the quality of the outcome?
 - Would the client use your services again? If not, why not?
 - Would you like to work with this client again? If not, why not?
9. Who (which person or persons) on the client side was in charge of and managing the project? Please describe each person's background:
 - Cultural background (e.g., were they American, European, or Asian?)
 - Professional background (e.g., did they have technical skills/education?)

- Functional area (e.g., was this person part of the user [business client] organization [e.g., accounting] or the IT group?)
 - Gender: was this a man or a woman?
10. (If respondent mentions an immigrant manager) What do you think about working with a manager from your own country? Does it make a difference?
 11. Do you think the client's managers were effective in managing and coordinating work on the project? If so, why so? If not, why not?
 12. Who (which person or persons) within your company was in charge of managing the project?
 13. Do you think people within your firm/group were effective in managing and coordinating work on the project? If so, why? If not, why not?
 14. During different phases of the project, how often did you interact with clients (e.g., daily, weekly, bi-weekly)?
 15. What medium of communication did you typically use to interact with clients (e.g., email, telephone, password-protected website for document sharing; video/tele-conferencing)?
 16. Did you have access to the business users of the IT application during the project, either through the client-side project manager or otherwise? If you did, please describe when and how you communicated with them.
 17. Were you satisfied with the amount of interaction you had with business users and other relevant stakeholders?
 18. Are there any cultural differences that you feel play a role in the project? Please describe. How do you address them? Examples?
 19. Anything else you want to add for me to better understand how your projects are managed and coordinated? Perhaps you can share examples of other projects.
 20. How do these project experiences compare to working with domestic clients?

Additional questions that emerged from data analysis, focusing on collaboration practices mentioned by early respondents. Questions highlighted in italics were specifically targeted at assessing collaboration effectiveness.

1. *How does the process of requirements gathering take place?*
2. *What happens if you and the client do not agree about the functionality of the system? How often does this happen? Do you try to convince the client of your decision? How? If not, why not?*
3. *What happens if you and the client do not agree about the development process? How often does this happen? Do you try to convince the client of your decision? How? If not, why not?*
4. *What happens when you disagree about the time it will take to complete the project? In cases of missed deadlines, what were the reasons?*
5. *Would you consider the situation in which your team can follow the client's direction perfectly an ideal one?*

Sample Interview Guide for Onshore Immigrant Managers

This interview guide was developed in 2008-2012 for the final round of data collection, when initial data analysis indicated that issues of social identity were important in understanding the phenomenon. The questions evolved from interview to interview. Many additional clarifying, probing, and summarizing questions were asked along the way, especially around social identity. The guide below pertains to Russian immigrants. It was modified when interviewing immigrants from other countries.

1. Please tell me about your professional background (education and prior positions).
 - a. When did you get involved in offshoring of professional services?
2. When did you come to the US? How old were you then?

3. Do you go back to visit Russia? Do you still have close relatives there? Do you follow the news? Do you speak Russian at home?
4. What is your overall feeling about offshoring to Russia (cost, quality, timeliness)?
 - a. Has your attitude to offshoring changed since you have been involved in offshoring? If so, how?
5. Do you think this a long-term trend or a short-lived phenomenon?
6. Do you feel that your job security is threatened by offshoring?
7. Think about the last 3-5 deliverables on your project (or your projects).
 - Did the offshore team deliver on time? If not, why not?
 - How would you judge the quality of the deliverable? If it was subpar, why?
 - Can you give me examples of some problems that occurred on these projects? Why did they occur?
 - Are there any examples of when Russian developers contributed novel ideas to the project? If so, what kind of ideas? Did people onshore listen to these ideas?
 - Do offshore participants have access to business users?
 - How many people onshore would it take to do the work of your team offshore?
8. Do you recommend working with Russians to your friends or coworkers?
9. Do you think you understand the business practices and challenges of doing business within Russia?
10. What role does your Russian background play in working with these offshore teams?
11. What does being American mean to you?
12. Do you feel proud to be American?
13. What does being Russian mean to you?
14. Do you feel proud to be of Russian origin?
15. To what extent do you think your US (clients, co-workers) see you as Russian?
16. To what extent do you think people offshore see you as Russian?

17. How do you feel when somebody praises/criticizes Russian technical professionals?
18. Did this attitude change over the course of your career? If so, how?
19. Do you have other comments that would help us understand the role of immigrants in managing offshore projects?