



UsabilityNJ Monthly Meeting 11 January 2006

Present in the meeting: 19 current members of UsabilityNJ.

Panel discussion on 'International Collaboration for software development and usability work' – panelist Dr. Allen Milewski (department of software engineering, Monmouth University) and Mr. Arvind Ramakrishnan (manager of usability engineering group, Pershing).

Format: Each speaker had 60 minutes to present followed by discussions and question/answer session.

- The first speaker Arvind Ramakrishnan shared his experiences on setting up an 'offshore' usability engineering group in Chennai, India. He also shared a brief history of his company's development center in Chennai, India.
- Arvind introduced the 2 models that his company employs for working on software development projects – team extension model and project outsourcing model. In the team extension model, each team (for a product or series of projects) is setup in both locations (US and India). A project can be worked on in either location. In the project outsourcing model, the entire project is done in the 'off-shore' location with one or two people doing the coordination and other activities (with the business) here in the US.
- Of the various usability services/activities that Arvind's group does, low-level UI design, high-fidelity prototypes, authoring the UI specifications, and development support activities are primarily done in the off-shore location. User visits, usability tests, and conceptual designs are primarily done in the on-shore location.
- Participants were interested in understanding the greatest challenge with working on international teams. According to Arvind one of primary challenge was to have effective communication between the team members. As long as requirements, designs, issues, and concerns were communicated well, a project could run smoothly.
- Participants were interested in understanding the skill set that are available for potential usability candidates in India. According to Arvind, there are few world-class universities producing designers (industrial and visual communication designers). Candidates with this background are extremely proficient in prototyping tools and have a good background in usability. This background along with on-job training helped produce knowledgeable usability professionals over a period of time. Not having direct access to actual product end-users does pose a problem.
- The next speaker Dr. Allen Milewski, gave a presentation based on his extensive literature search. His presentation centered around overall trends in global software

development, current research literature on this topic, and suggestions on how to make it work based on the research finding.

- According to Allen, the research seems to indicate that there are 2 primary models for off-shore software development, similar to the practice that Arvind had indicated. And it is envisioned that there will be a significant growth in off-shore software development in the future.
- Allen indicated that the top 28 reasons why firms choose to do off-shore software development are related to cost savings. Meeting participants observed that cost savings may be mitigated in future as the cost of living in these off-shore locations becomes similar to the US.
- Participants also observed that issues and concerns associated with off-shore software development might be very similar to the issues and concerns that are faced when software development is outsourced to any local consulting firm. This might be especially true in the modern work place of telecommuting and virtual teams.
- Based on his research, Allen came up with the following points to make international collaboration in software development work better: reduce intensive collaboration (by creating structured tasks and object oriented teams), reduce temporal distance (to minimize time differences), and reduce cultural distance (by having good liaisons).

Both presentations were recorded and are available to download as MP3 files from the UsabilityNJ website.

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