

Session Proposal for the AAG Annual Meeting, San Francisco, April 2007

**The Geography of Information-Technology Enabled Services:  
New Empirical and Theoretical Insights**

Organizers: Dr. Chris Benner and Chandrani Ohdedar, Penn State University.

Session sponsored by the Communication Geography Specialty Group (COMGEOG)

In the last decade, dramatic improvements in the capabilities of information and communication technologies have significantly increased the depth and complexity of remote interactive communication, resulting in new patterns of employment location and relocation around the globe. Daily media reports highlight significant relocation of work to India, where thousands of customer service representatives, software developers, and financial analysts now routinely handle daily work for U.S.-based corporations and customers. Other locations, such as Eastern Europe, South Africa, and portions of Central and South America, are also emerging as major growth centers for these information-technology enabled services (ITES). At the same time, however, many efforts to outsource or relocate work overseas have failed, as unexpected complications, rising costs, and lower quality have undermined the benefits sought by companies. Furthermore, international outsourcing of ITES is still dwarfed by the growth of this work in the United States. Today an estimated six million workers are employed in the U.S. in various types of remote telephone call centers, with over 10 million employed in ICT-related occupations increasingly being conducted in new, relocated sites around the country (Atkinson 2004; Datamonitor 2003; National Research Council 2001).

The factors shaping the location, quality and character of e-work activities are highly complex and poorly understood. Some factors, such as labor costs, infrastructure, tax and regulatory structure and so on, shape location and growth trajectories in ways quite similar to manufacturing industries. Yet the interactive element of the work, and its application to complex multi-site locations of corporate rationalization processes, brings in a wide range of cultural, linguistic, communicative and learning process factors that are not well understood. These factors all vary depending on the nature of the product or service involved, while with new products and services are being developed in the very process of relocation and out-sourcing. Developing robust theoretical constructs for analyzing these complex factors hinges on validating the importance of various factors in shaping the location, growth and characteristics of IT-Enabled Services in the U.S. and overseas.

The aim of this session is to explore these various factors shaping the location and dynamics of IT-Enabled services in different countries and explore the relations across space that help to make outsourcing and offshoring of services more geographically integrated. Some of the potential topics that may help to establish these relations are:

\* Factors that have evolved over time to promote the geographic spread of services

- \* Changing labor processes in the originating and destination countries as a result of offshored services
- \* Work restructuring in outsourced services
- \* The emergence of knowledge as a factor for competitive advantage
- \* Cultural issues and identity in offshore service workers
- \* Emotional stress and motivation of workers engaged in offshored work

We invite papers that address these topics and others that help to understand the on-going processes related to outsourced and offshored work. The abstracts for papers can be sent to Dr. Chris Benner at [cbenner@psu.edu](mailto:cbenner@psu.edu) or Chandrani Ohdedar at [chandrani@psu.edu](mailto:chandrani@psu.edu) by October 13, 2006.

Chris Benner, Assistant Professor  
Dept. of Geography  
Pennsylvania State University  
State College, PA 16803  
(814) 865-6693  
<http://www.geog.psu.edu/people/benner/>