

WORLDBEAT - Engineers in India look for recognition

By [John Ribeiro](#), IDG News Service, 04/03/07

At [Nagarro Inc.](#), a midsize outsourcer focused on product and application development, company President and CEO Vikas Sehgal thought there had to be a better way to synchronize Google Calendar and Microsoft Outlook calendar. Sehgal discussed his need with a lead developer at the company's services operation, which has about 300 staff, in Gurgaon near Delhi, and the two came up with a product called [SyncMyCal](#) in their spare time.

Since the formal product launch in January, there have been about 300 downloads daily of the software from the Web site [www.syncmycal.com](#) and on an average about 40 to 50 customers a day pay US\$25 to download a full version of the software, according to Sehgal. SyncMyCal is profitable and the developer is now working on new features, including a version that synchronizes Google Calendar with a Pocket PC phone.

Nagarro is one of a number of small and midsize outsourcers in India giving employees challenges and high-end work to keep them motivated and to attract experienced staff. "SyncMyCal is not a large business proposition for us, but one of many ways to provide challenging work to some of our experienced staff," Sehgal said.

In the early years of their careers, many engineers were attracted to large Indian outsourcing companies and the Indian operations of multinational services companies. After about six years of working at these companies, some of them are turning to small and medium-size companies for job fulfillment and recognition.

"We are getting requests from many middle-level managers that they would like jobs in smaller companies where they can get greater responsibility, quicker promotion and recognition," said Amitabh Das, CEO of Vati Consulting Pvt. Ltd., a recruitment firm in Bangalore. Retaining midlevel staff has emerged as a key challenge for large services companies, and that problem will stay, he added.

About 60 percent of project managers and other midlevel and senior staff at iGATE Global Solutions Ltd., a midsize outsourcer in Bangalore, have been recruited from Indian outsourcers and multinational companies, said Mohan Sekhar, a board member and chief delivery officer at the company. They are paid in the same range as what they would earn at larger companies, he added.

Unlike junior staff, midlevel employees with six years of experience are less attracted by the brand of the employer than by the content of the job, said Gautam Sinha, CEO of TVA Infotech Pvt. Ltd., a recruitment firm in Bangalore. Small and medium-size companies that offer good jobs can now hope to attract midlevel engineers and managers, he added.

Advanced project managers and business development leaders -- employees services companies can least afford to lose -- are at risk of leaving because they are past the initial thrill of shiny new campuses and working on global projects, said Dana Stiffler, a research director at AMR Research Inc. "They've been working dogs' hours for three to five years," Stiffler said. "If they don't see regular advancement opportunities, if they are not assigned to prestigious, diverse projects, they will leave."

Staff size at large services companies appears to have become a key handicap when it comes to retaining midlevel employees, according to Sekhar of iGATE. While employees at larger companies have inflexible, strictly defined roles, smaller companies are less hierarchical and can offer a lot more responsibility, he said. A project manager at iGATE, for example, manages the entire interaction with a customer.

Workers also feel more anonymous in large organizations, some of which have more than 50,000 employees. "It takes a lot to be noticed in my company, and a lot of the decisions and customer interactions are done by staff closer to the market in the U.S. or Europe," said an engineer at a multinational services operation who asked to not be named.

A manager handling a US\$10 million project in a larger company would be just one of many such managers, Das said. At a small and midsize company, such an employee would be key, with access to top management and a lot of recognition.

Working for midsize companies also means broader exposure to different technologies and roles in less time, according to Stiffler. Many employees find this more fulfilling and that they advance more rapidly, she said. Employees feel they personally have a bigger influence on the company's success, that they are not just a cog in the machine.

Multinationals and large Indian outsourcers are gearing up to counter the threat. "They are working on mechanisms to reward people out of turn, create role models, and offer fast-track promotions," Das said. If some of the multinational services companies were driving business in India from the U.S. and other locations, now they are passing on more of the responsibilities to Indian staff, he said.

Though there hasn't been an exodus of midlevel staff from large services companies in India, this may occur over time in the same way it happened in the traditional global consulting and IT services market during the past five to eight years, Stiffler said. In the U.S. and Europe, experienced professionals left large IT services companies to join midsize firms or to strike out on their own.