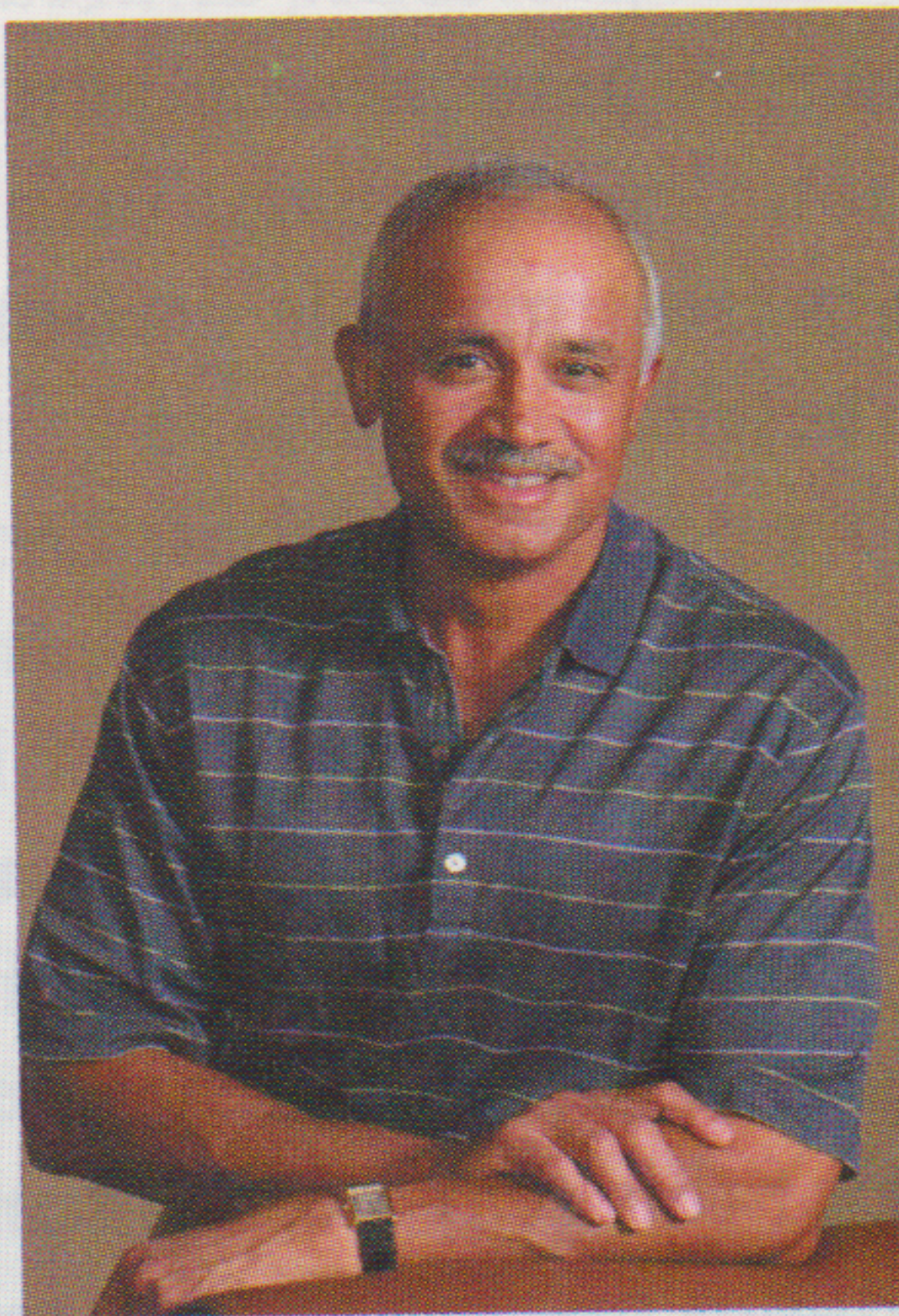


Integrating Distributed Work

This study examined various ways in which distributed work might be most effectively integrated through a study of business process offshoring. The international researchers were from the Indian School of Business and the London Business School. Together, they surveyed 126 Indian offshored processes, including IT, call centers, and back offices. The purpose was to understand the sources of difficulty in integrating distributed work and how organizations can overcome these difficulties. The researchers found that the interdependence between offshore and onshore processes contributes to lower offshored performance. This difficulty can be ameliorated by investing in coordination mechanisms. The study compared task design, communication, and tacit coordination as ameliorating mechanisms. The two commonly used coordination mechanisms are building communication channels or modularizing processes



Courtesy of Syntel Inc.

Prashant Ranade, President and CEO of Syntel, is a cross-cultural leader with technical knowledge and great emotional competence skills. NASDAQ-listed Syntel is an IT organization with U.S. headquarters and award-winning development centers in both the U.S. and India.

to minimize the need for communication. Even though these are positive ways to coordinate distributed work, together they do not completely overcome the difficulty posed by interdependence. Therefore, tacit coordination can be a complementary third mechanism. Tacit coordination occurs where one employee predicts the behavior of another and then adjusts responses accordingly. Onshore employees and offshore employees engaging in tacit coordination can complement the two more commonly used mechanisms and both sets of employees can leverage previously established common ground between them. The research advances both theory and practice in the important area of business process offshoring.

SOURCE: K. Srikanth and P. Puranam, "Integrating Distributed Work: Comparing Task Design, Communication, and Tacit Coordination Mechanisms," *Strategic Management Journal* 32 (2011): 849–875.

standardization

The degree to which work activities are accomplished in a routine fashion.

complexity

The degree to which many different types of activities occur in the organization.

hierarchy of authority

The degree of vertical differentiation across levels of management.

4. **Standardization.** The extent to which work activities are described and performed routinely in the same way. Highly standardized organizations have little variation in the defining of jobs.
5. **Complexity.** The number of activities within the organization and the amount of differentiation needed within the organization.
6. **Hierarchy of Authority.** The degree of vertical differentiation through reporting relationships and the span of control within the structure of the organization.

An organization that is high on formalization, centralization, specialization, standardization, and complexity and has a tall hierarchy of authority is said to be highly bureaucratic. Bureaucracies are not in themselves bad; however, they are often tainted by abuse and red tape. There are cases, however, where centralized structures can be beneficial. For example, one study found that a more centralized structure is effective for increased job satisfaction when perceptions of interactional and procedural justice are present.¹⁹

An organization that is on the opposite end of each of these continua is very flexible and loose. For example, Cisco System's new flexible structure increased its