

Operation 24/7: Effective Project Management in Different Timezones¹

Steven Haywood

Every project manager's goal is to streamline the workflow as efficiently as possible. There are, of course, dozens of tried and tested strategies to refer to. However, in practice, projects cannot always be managed based on the theory of these trusted methods. When a company expands or outsources work, the most challenging responsibilities fall into the hands of the project manager. With diverse teams located in different time zones, there are factors such as cultural and time differences that have to be taken into account. For the project manager, the risks may only magnify. Still, companies don't seem to stop employing diverse teams as it leads to acquiring new talents and cutting off the costs.

However, if you ask any project manager working with global teams, they will say that the pros do not always outshine the complication. My experience associated with running global teams is along the same lines as well. Regardless of my opinion, business trends prove that global projects are here to stay. What is left to do for project managers is to find ways to tackle the issues, and make the global projects work in favor of you as well as your employees.

The Issue - Constraints of Time Zones

Imagine the case when your side of the organization is facing an emergency, and you need someone to solve it right away. But the team that attends to a certain department has already packed up for the day.

The Solution

Addressing the time zone issue starts even before your collaboration does. The first step is to ensure that both teams have an overlap in the working day, even if it is only for one hour per day. However, it might not necessarily offer a solution to an emergency

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described. There will inevitably be delays that occur in these cases. The upside is that with another team working during your off-hours, the problems could be fixed overnight. In effect, you will get an uninterrupted workflow as teams are essentially working in shifts throughout the day, although this might not work positively to manage team building or motivation aspects.

The Issue - Communication Barriers

Depending on your outsourcing team, you might be working with people whose mother tongue is not English. In some cases, the team members might still be fluent in the language, which diminishes the issue.

The Solution

Even without language barriers, a global workforce needs to have an effective communication system in place. Using simple language is the most vital step to facilitate communication with non-native speakers. Using business jargon and technology might make it easier. But you want to first establish common reporting strategies for all the teams. Collaboration tools might also be productive in order to exchange reports. Define expectations, the formats, and the frequency of communication right from the start. This would help to develop a standardized communication strategy. You can also assign someone who has the right language and interpersonal skills to be in charge of the correspondence.

The Issue - Cultural Differences

The chances are that if the team is located in different time zones, they will have the varying cultural trait. For me, this was the most challenging part of the job. You might not think that this will have a significant role in collaboration. However, it might affect factors such as holiday patterns and the overall attitude to work. For instance, they might not be appreciative or welcoming of overtime or working during the weekend - at all.

The Solution

The issue with cultural differences is that you cannot always fully comprehend them. As project managers, you can take specific training to be sensitive to these differences. You

are particularly hoping to build trust to adapt your management strategy. It will help you anticipate problems and respond appropriately.

The Issue - Building Team Spirit

In any project that consists of more than one team, there has to be a proper spirit for the success of all. This is of even more crucial importance when there are differences in language and culture. Consequently, it is more challenging to develop a cohesive team relationship.

The Solution

You can start understanding the reasons for any differences by recognizing the power balance. If there is a substantial imbalance in power and responsibilities, it will only strengthen any discrepancies. As project managers, you can only normalize the power balance to some extent. Diverse management teams can help with reflecting the cultural disparities. You can encourage unstructured conversation, which will contribute tremendously to reducing the social distance. Today, with all the technologies, social media, and the Internet, opportunities for personal interactions are plenty. Using personal correspondence could also foster empathy by effectively building relationships between teams.

The Issue - Lack of Action Plans

It is not uncommon for managers not to share your company's long term goals with remote teams if a particular team is working on a short-term goal. The same applies for a reverse situation as well.

The Solution

Unless you acknowledge the remote team as an extension of your company, you will always be communicating with an invisible barrier. Of course, this would depend on the type of outsourcing and the type of task you are hiring them for. Nevertheless, it is imperative to have coherent plans of action that details both long-term and short-term goals. While small and digestible tasks focus on the team, long-term goals can contribute to team building.

The Issue - Feeling Unappreciated

If you, as a project manager, do not consider outsourced teams as a part of your own, you might not be tempted to celebrate their successes as well.

The Solution

I cannot stress enough how important it is to share results and celebrate achievements with all teams. A lack of this could often result in inconsistency and specialists feeling unappreciated. Project managers also have to make it a point to send feedback, including individual work assessment. It can include positive remarks from clients as well, which will help to strengthen your relationship with the remote teams.

The Key Takeaways

In my experience, making time to attend to concerns and tasks personally will go a long way in collaborations. This will build mutual respect and allow team members to understand each other better. It makes you look and interact with them as individuals rather than just another team working for you in some part of the world.

The points I covered above touch on all the significant general issues one may face. There might always be other challenges pertaining to your organization. In effect, these solutions will help you increase efficiency, receive clear communication status, manage time, and foster better work relationships.

About the Author



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Steven Haywood is a Project Manager at [Essay Pro](https://www.essaypro.com), a leading academic writing service. His experience in the industry has exposed him to working with diverse teams in different parts of the world. Over the years, Steven has developed project plans and strategies that have helped him coordinate successfully with multiple remote teams. His career ladder began as a trainee in a marketing firm, where he learned the ins and outs of marketing, outreach, and project management. He specializes in carrying out all aspects of project management, from conception to execution and feedback. Today, Steven Haywood is the head of a project management team with individuals working from several remote locations.