

Can you hear me now?

...Working with global, distributed, virtual teams



Jesse Fewell

Can You Hear Me Now

WORKING WITH GLOBAL,
DISTRIBUTED, VIRTUAL
TEAMS

Jesse Fewell

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Art ©2013 Pictogifo.com

Book Layout ©2013 BookDesignTemplates.com

Printed in the USA by www.Minibuk.com

Can You Hear Me Now/ Jesse Fewell. —1st printing.

ISBN 978-0-9910351-0-6

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Acknowledgements

It takes a village. Many thanks to Dana for introducing me to Hayley, who totally inspired me and put me in touch with David and Kathy, who simply made this book happen. Probir is the best collaborator. And Ajay, Shanti, Akash, and especially Seema, deserve huge credit for their support.

CHAPTER 1

Context

Most of what we call management consists of making it difficult for people to get their work done.

Peter Drucker

Mid-afternoon in Bangalore, the team is nicely caffeinated after tea break, and is convening for the daily stand-up meeting. A simple black phone sits on a table flush with the wall. As the team leader dials in our UK customer, the rest of us form a ring around the table, like a corporate religious gathering. Much too loudly the customer answers the

phone, “Hello! Is anyone there?”. After adjusting the volume a bit, the team leader announces that the meeting has started, and team-members begin offering their latest status to the group. After 10 minutes of friendly conversation, several head wobbles indicate the team is rather content with a productive briefing. The leader announces the meeting is ended, at which point the customer says “Um, this meeting doesn’t work for me. I couldn’t hear a thing any of you said.”

Sound familiar?

With the rise of the internet, emerging economies, and the trend of working from home, today’s professionals are dealing with a much different workplace than the world

has ever seen. Never before in the history of mankind have we been able to conduct so much work, so quickly, with so many people outside our own location.

Of course, it's not all rainbows and unicorns. We struggle with time zone issues, language barriers, limited visibility, poor infrastructure, and so on, and so on. Sometimes we chose remote teams intentionally for their benefits. But often this kind of organizational structure is handed to managers and team members without choice.

This book is about how to deal with all those issues and strengthen your teams.

Definition

To understand the dynamic better, it's helpful to use a definition:

A distributed team is any group of people working together, where at least one person is not working in direct physical proximity to everyone else in the group.

What's helpful about this definition is that it broadens the concept to include many scenarios: Offshoring, Working from home, Customer-Vendor, Open source, different buildings, or even different floors of the same building. It could be one person absent from a single home base. It could be several satellite locations working together. It could be a wholly virtual team that has never seen each other's anonymous faces, let alone met

in person. But even more interesting is the vagueness around “*direct physical proximity*”. What might that mean?

Information Technology guru Alistair Cockburn defined it even more aggressively as the “bus-length communication principle”. Namely, communication between people suffers radically as soon as their walking distance from each other exceeds the length of a school bus (Cockburn, 2006).

Interestingly, a pair of MIT researchers verified this observational assessment in what they called the “30 meter principle” (Allen & Henn, 2011). They found that the degree of communication within teams plummeted, once team members are seated 30 meters

apart, More to the point, once people are seated more than 30 meters apart, they might as well be seated 3000 miles apart.

So, if research shows that we don't perform as well when we don't sit together, then why do we do it?

Business Drivers

Many times the most important question we can ask ourselves, in any situation, is “why?” Understanding the context for a problem can help us sift through distraction and frustration to get to a solution, or simply reframe a negative into a positive.

There are several reasons why an organization chooses to work in a distributed environment. Here are the most common:

FINANCES: What started first as a western phenomenon of offshoring jobs to cut costs has become much more complicated. For example, in 2011 Volkswagen launched a new factory in the US, a practice called reverse-outsourcing. Also, the growth of western companies into emerging markets finds companies like Wal-Mart adding 100,000 jobs outside of its home country. Whether lowering costs or chasing sales, companies move into these situations for very real business reasons.

SKILLS: Many times, teams may not have the skills in house to do the work needed. A

mid-sized New York marketing house may not have engineers on staff, and thus it makes sense to hire a website vendor in San Francisco to work together for a brief time on a project.

Alternatively, a large accounting firm may need to add hundreds of new people quickly for a new long-term client, and a English-speaking, rapid-staffing provider in Cyberjaya, Malaysia looks like a great option.

Or perhaps a local startup in Silicon Valley is having a tough time recruiting talented engineers when Google and Facebook can pay them much more. Thus, the CEO logs onto a global tech community in LinkedIn and notices a very experienced Belgian is looking for work, and is ready to start right away.

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS: Sometimes, a mid-sized company will perform so well with the costs and skills they already have in-house, that a larger firm acquires them. Now, in order to meet our new obligations, we have to interact with the many other offices of the parent company.

TELECOMMUTING: In order to attract and retain their best people, companies will often advertise the option to work from home, as a means to improve work-life balance. Despite the controversy of Yahoo's 2013 ban on remote work, the United States government estimates as much as 1 out of 4 workers do at least some of their work from home. It has become a reasonably standard practice in today's work environment to say "I'm working

from home tomorrow, and I'll just dial into the meeting.”

DIVERSITY: Sometimes opposites attract. Working with an office across the world can give a business more coverage of global work hours; it's a technique called “follow the sun”. Also, more diverse workforce has a broader perspective on the problems we are trying to solve. Varying backgrounds and experiences inject more ideas and information into a conversation. “Team, we've hired our first German employee, located in Frankfurt, to help us understand the European market.” Diversity hires can lead to higher productivity and more innovative solutions, catalyzing companies to remain competitive in a global economy.

If you know WHY your project, program, or company is working in a distributed fashion in the first place, then you can know WHAT actions are or are not appropriate.

Here are some examples of how we make that connection between context and actions:

- IF we have a virtual company so that we can recruit the best and brightest, regardless of where they live, THEN we know that efficiency can be compromised to preserve our DNA.
- IF we are working with European partners in order to open up a new product market, THEN spending money on trav-

el might well be worth the strong revenue potential.

- IF we are using offshore labor to save costs, THEN we know our business case for procuring telecom equipment needs to speak to labor costs and productivity.

Having a sense of the context of your virtual team allows you to be more focused in coordinating the team.

That being said, every team runs into issues. Let's take a look at how to understand whether the hoped-for benefits are eluding us.

Warning Signs

In collocated teams, problems reveal themselves much more easily and quickly, largely because they're right in your face. Therefore, when working with virtual teams, leaders have to be much more attentive to signs that all is not well.

COMPLAINING: See if any of these sound familiar:

...“I'm so sick of having to dial in at night for the daily stand up meeting with California. Why can't they do the task once in a while?”

... “Those foreigners can't make up their minds, so I have to redo all my work.”

... “Come on. It’s a joke about Canadians; it can’t be that offensive.”

... “Akash is British? I just assumed that he’s Malaysian, because he lives in Kuala Lumpur.”

...”All of my work got done, so it must be their fault.”

In virtual teams, the lack of face time means that silos and misunderstandings are faster to form and harder to break. If your team members are complaining about each other, be concerned.

DISTRACTIONS: You're in a conference call, and ask into the phone "What do you think Bob?" After an awkwardly long pause you hear him say, "I'm sorry what was the question." That's a tell tale sign that Bob was not paying attention, but rather was multi-tasking on email or documents or anything other than the meeting at hand. Of course, this is common in collocated environments where people will be tapping away on their laptops during a meeting, in front of each other no less. However, in virtual environments, it's that much more tempting to do so, because the communication is often taking place at your desk, or even on the computer itself. If you find conference calls are slow, jerky, and ineffective, be concerned.

INCOMPATIBLE WORK: “We have only 2 days before the deadline, and your sans-serif typography completely clashes with the formal brand message we’re going for. What are we going to do?”

Today’s knowledge work is based on understanding and assumptions. The less understanding we have, the more we have to rely on assumptions, which leaves people to operate in completely different directions. If your distributed work is scheduled to get pulled together only at the last minute, be concerned.

MISUNDERSTOOD ASSIGNMENTS: It’s been 4 weeks since the last milestone meeting, and the New York office is excited to show off it’s latest output to an firm in Du-

bai. The reaction is less than ideal: “Yes, that’s technically what I asked for, but that’s not at all what I wanted.”

Virtual teams rely way too often on documentation to drive assignments, requirements, and specifications. If you see a program run primarily against compliance to a contract, be concerned.

If we see any of these symptoms occurring, we need to take action to steer the team back on track. The next chapter tells us how to get started.

CHAPTER 2

Collaboration

“Any fool can know. The point is to understand.”

- Albert Einstein

True teamwork only happens when we are intentional about creating the environment for real collaboration.

Several models for collaboration and high performing teams are available in the market, and almost all of them encourage starting off with good **chartering**. Then, we'll talk about the value of **travel** for distributed

teams. Finally, we examine several examples of **working agreements** that make virtual teams more effective.

Chartering

Good managers have known for a long time the value of chartering. An effective team kickoff can set everyone off on the right foot (if you're American) or the front foot (if you're English).

Some basic questions need to be clarified *before* a global team begins working together. Without these basic pieces of information, you can be assured of issues and problems:

Management science for the last several decades has emphasized the value of articulating the mission and vision of a business endeavor. Unfortunately, too many mission statements and vision statements are much too broad to give meaningful context. In a global context, it becomes even more critical to articulate specific outcomes and expectations:

- *Why* have we been chartered? Do we know our purpose and our goal?
- *What* does success look like when we're done? *What* are we going to do as our first step towards that success?
- *Who* is responsible for what? *To whom* do we escalate issues, or ask for answers?
- *How* will we interact with each other to be most effective?

These are the ingredients for a context that offers sufficient information for teams to be moving towards a collaborative dynamic. Indeed, this could be the agenda for your kickoff meeting.

Travel

If there is any way possible under the sun, have your team kickoff in-person. One expert after another tells us the best kickoff meetings are done in-person.

During the in-person kickoff, make an effort to have social events scheduled after-hours. There is a reason that restaurants have most of their seating for more than one person: eating is a fundamentally social activity.

Those who meet and eat together, get along well together.

These kinds of interactions build the relational foundation for real teamwork and collaboration. Also, getting away from the office can spur new ideas and impromptu work conversations can arise over dinner.

But what about the cost? Perhaps the bulk of the team is located in Budapest, with only 3 people located remotely. In this case, we only need to cover the travel costs for these three people:

Airfare	\$1000 USD x 3
5 nights hotel	\$500 USD x 3
5 days per diem & transport	\$500 USD x 3
In-Person Kickoff →	\$6000USD

That's it.

That is not a lot of money. Sometimes simply putting a number on the unquantified taboo of travel makes it more finite and manageable. In Chapter 4 we talk even more about how to justify the cost, relative to existing budgets.

The financial goal of virtual teams is to reduce travel costs to the lowest point where results are not compromised. Going to extremes, however, and removing travel com-

pletely, is certain to prevent a true collaborative dynamic.

Working Agreements

During our Chartering efforts, let's say we've covered the business goal, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the group. Now, we get to the next question of how we plan to work together.

Formalizing inter-personal expectations is critical in global teams. There are too many different perspectives on what is efficient and what is distracting. Having an open conversation about those things can result in

some concrete agreements that prevent frustration down the road.

Here are some examples of what might go into those agreements.

CULTURE EXCHANGE: In today's world, many collocated offices will boast a strong representation of international expatriates, allowing for both cultural learning and occasional misunderstanding. However, whenever your team of internationals is now distributed across virtual locations, those learning become harder, and those misunderstandings become easier.

The first step is to find provide your team some quality cross-cultural resources.

- **The Hofstede Dimensions** (Hofstede, 2010) are a fascinating tool, and give you a basic language for understanding cultural differences. For example, an Indian who knows that his country on average tolerate uncertainty more often than Brazilians, will be intentional about crafting a more detailed business plan than he would have done otherwise.
- *Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands* (Morrison & Conaway, 2006) is one of my favorite books for international business. In particular it warns readers that the United States is the most litigious society in the world, and lawyers are a much more common part of business than you might expect.

- *Global Business Leadership* (Wibbeke, 2008) focuses on the leadership skills needed to lead any team that goes across ethnic or country boundaries.

Once your teams have these resources in hand, have them talk through the observations during the kickoff meeting. Consider having a professional cross-cultural training or facilitator guide this part of meeting.

QUIET TIME: One of the more interesting trends for virtual teams is with hot Silicon Valley startups, multimillion-dollar ventures comprised of employees distributed around the world. In their popular eBook *Getting Real* (Fried, Hansson, & Linderman, 2009), 37signals founders believe strongly that virtual teams increase productivity. Time Zone

overlaps are reserved for meetings and discussions. All other time is left for individual, focused work. You can't disturb each other, because half of the group is asleep, and the other half is at home away from distracting co-workers.

This policy has been adapted to several larger offices, where even if you work in the same office, we choose to work as if we weren't. In this way we create more equality between those who work in the office and those who don't.

2 EMAILS LIMIT: One team issued a limit on the number of emails in a discussion thread. If after the second email, you still don't understand what is asked or said, you propose a video chat. The hard part was en-

forcing the rule. Some tried a system-rule that auto-copied every message to a dummy email account, where everyone could see how long a thread went. But, the real solution came when one person, who hated email more than most, would make mention in the daily conference call as to who sent too many emails.

ENGLISH-ONLY, OR NOT: One multinational financial services company I've worked with has an office in Shanghai featuring a rule where everyone must speak English-only. Their global headquarters was in New York, and to encourage unity and equality, everyone was expected to be in the habit of thinking and working in English. Alternatively, another gaming company in Beijing with several western expatriates has

much more dynamic approach. They recruited several local Chinese professionals with the promise of an English work environment, but all the senior expats spoke fluent Mandarin. Meanwhile, the more junior expats were expected to speak the international variant of English. In this way there was both the operational need for everyone to learn English, but there was also the support for less fluent team members to be productive as they grow into the behavior.

And while you're at it, speak international English. As an American working at an the Indian office of an English company in 2010, I never knew what flavor of English I needed to speak at a given moment; it showed me just how localized my business language was. You can do well by avoiding slang and en-

courage questions ("I'm sorry, I don't know what a sticky wicket is. Is that another phrase common to your culture?")

CHAPTER 3

Communication

The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.

George Bernard Shaw

Once a strong foundation is built for team collaboration, we need to get results. We do that by optimizing daily communication.

In this chapter, we'll explore two essential ingredients for effective virtual communica-

tion. First, we need a **Toolkit** with as many options as possible. Second, we need to **Match** them together the right way for the right context.

Building a Toolkit

Documents and Email are not enough for communication to happen. Ever.

Let's say we have an unhappy co-worker in the Washington DC office, "I'm so frustrated that the fulfillment team in Shanghai is telling me we don't have alignment on the product specs. I've sent them at least ten emails explaining them over and over."

“Have you called them?”

“No. I don’t speak Mandarin.”

“Actually, the team lead went to Oxford, so his English is pretty strong. Have you noticed he’s on Skype every morning?”

“Um...maybe. I think... But the first email has the marketing document with all the details. I’m a busy person; it’s all they need.”

No, it isn’t.

Collocated teams know this already. How often have you thought “This email thread is way too confusing; I’m calling a meeting after lunch.” We often get away with relying

on written text, because we can have casual hallway conversations, or simply book a conference room to hash it out. In global teams however, we don't have those organic communications systems.

The more complex and nuanced modern work becomes, the more documents can only record what has been effectively communicated through other means.

For robust remote communication, leaders need to have a toolkit full of options to use for a given situation. Here are some must-have tools to have at your disposal.

VIDEO CHAT is a must-have in today's workplace. If you don't have a solution in-

stalled, get one. Now. From Skype to Google Hangout to FaceTime, there is no shortage of tools to choose from. Also, the technology improves each year, making the experience better and better. Hardware is of course necessary for video chat to work. However, with minimal costs, we could easily buy a couple hundred webcams for each employee's computer without making a dent into a large program budget.

TELEPRESENCE is fast becoming cheap enough for everyone. "Human sized" video chat with curved screen and high-fidelity streams, creates the very real dynamic that you're face to face with counterparts on the other side of the screen. These high-end systems have traditionally been procured only for senior management to save on travel

costs. However, newer startups are offering entry-level products and hosted solutions, that are fast bringing prices down to where any global team can start considering pricing as part of a program budget.

A VIDEO WALL is a monitor/webcam combination unit mounted on a wall broadcasting the casual activities of your office, every hour of every work day. If someone has a question for a remote team member, she can just walk up to the monitor and say “Hans! I have a query.” This is especially effective if Hans was not on Instant Messaging earlier when the query first came to mind. It was only when she saw Hans on screen that she remembered she needed him, and was able to get his attention.

INSTANT MESSAGING (IM) is a feature built into several common tool sets. From Microsoft Linc to Skype to Google Chat to iMessage, it's everywhere. Know what your corporate environment provides, and if it's not sufficient, find out what free tools are allowed. Every team should have an agreed IM policy, with contact info in everyone's contact list.

SOCIAL MEDIA is inserting itself into the work place more and more. From Salesforce Chatter to Doximity to Yammer, there are very real efforts to leverage the modern worker's digital prowess in the workplace. The key difference between social media and traditional IM is the team-wide visibility of conversations and the archiving of those conversations for later reference.

TRANSLATION TOOLS are a must-have for any global team. One team I worked with had Google Translate windows shared between the Washington DC and Mexico City. As the Americans were speaking, they typed the key points into the English window, and the Spanish version instantly showed up. The Mexican counterparts did the same. In this way, there was a multi-lingual conversation happening, thereby improving mutual understanding.

PROJECT BOARDS are a tool practically guaranteed to be in place at any large company. Whether Microsoft Sharepoint, Wiki pages, or specialty project tools, every team

should have a central place to go to for the latest project files. If your IT department doesn't have one in place, there are several free solutions out there that integrate threaded discussions, FAQs, document repositories, and other features to archive your work.

SCREEN SHARING tools are also increasingly common, and many of which are free. Skype has screen sharing option, as do many virtual meeting and teleconference tools. Usually, there is an option to do a one-way broadcast as in a webinar or a more interactive transferring of control between participants.

HEADSETS are another winner in the cost-versus-value category. One telecom company

I worked for issues all its project managers wireless headsets for coordinating remote team conference calls. Several of them would get up from their desks and pace in the hallway, as if talking to a group of friends. They were noticeably more engaged in their conversations. Also, when headquarters wanted to broadcast a revenue update over webinar, they used microphone-enabled computer headphones to participate in the briefing without disturbing their colleagues.

TRAVEL is still needed occasionally, even after an in-person kickoff. Yes, you have to be strategic about when to use a travel budget, but you should not accept “No Travel” as a reasonable operational policy. As discussed in the previous chapter, you should have a

cost-benefit analysis that supports the travel budget you think you need. Also, be creative with the asset that it is. Consider rotating the travelers to increase implicit knowledge across the team, and also hosting whole-group meetings at key milestones.

“But we’re not allowed to use any internet tools like Google or Skype. What do I do?”

You ask. You present the business case.

What does IT offer as the official tool? What are other programs using? The larger the company, the more likely an approved solution is in place somewhere. If IM and/or video, are not permitted, translation solutions may exist. Request both a formal solution and a temporary waiver to use the free

stuff. Most management organizations understand that basic infrastructure is required to do work.

“But I’ve already asked, and they won’t give me anything or let me use anything.”

So ask again. And again. A little online research will give you the productivity statistics to make the business case for either an investment or a temporary policy waiver.

Virtual teams need a diverse toolkit to maximize communication.

Mix and Match

Let's say you've investigated these tools, found a few already in place, and requested for others. Now we have a to tackle the next question: Which ones do we use when?

Crafting a distributed communication strategy requires first understanding the underlying dimensions of the tools we're using: Directions and Channels.

DIRECTIONS: Too much of digital communication one-directional, whether email, documents, or even podcasts, streaming music, YouTube, and Hulu. The vast majority of what we call "multimedia" is really just a

bunch of people shouting at you. Stop and consider whether you see the same dynamic at work? Does your communication reveal a tendency to **monologue**, or you putting in the very real effort to create effective **dialog**?

CHANNELS: Communication consists of several pieces of information: body language, tone of voice, and the actual verbal content. Furthermore, since each kind of information is continuously conveyed from the sender to the receiver, then we can consider them to be active channels of data, broadcasting simultaneously.

Of course, much of that gets lost in a virtual environment. If we rely only on email or conference calls with team members who speak different dialects and languages, a lot

of information gets missed. Therefore, we want our virtual tools to leverage the human capacity to transmit and receive information on multiple channels.

When we plot our tools according to these two dimensions, we can use the chart below.

	Monologue	Dialogue
Multi-Channel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Video Recording	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Video Chat• Mix & Match
Single-Channel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Document• Email• Podcast	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conference Call• IM

Our desire is to use the tools in such a way that we get both a dialog and a multi-channel interaction.

Here are some examples:

USE AN EXTRA PROJECTOR: If your conference room has a projector hanging from the ceiling, this will likely be the primary tool for displaying a document or presentation the team needs to discuss. Then, to get the extra non-verbal information across, connect a second mobile projector to someone's laptop, to display a video chat window.

EVERYONE GETS A SCREEN: If your company issues laptops or tablets, then it could be very easy to have a projector display the video chat, what everyone accesses the presentation on their own screen. Of course, there is the very real temptation to tab over to email and “get productive” during the meeting. So, you'll need a strong facilitator to

call out people by name for feedback, suggestions, and questions. In these cases, you want to treat your personal screen as a virtual printout, and not a license to multi-task.

SWITCH MODES: Your team has an active video wall, and an analyst walks up to the wall to get Priti's attention. Priti walks up to the screen and says, "Sorry John, but the room is rather loud right now. Is it okay if I go to my desk where we can Skype with headphones?"

Later in the day, a conference call starts with a quick slide presentation. But with only one screen available, the moderator switches the view to the video chat mode, and says "Now that you know the story, what are your

thoughts”. They’ve switched from presentation to conversation.

R: Two remote colleagues on video chat disagree on the details of a human resources policy. One of them sees the human resources director is online in the Instant Messaging tool. He quickly texts her a quick question, “Do we really have to complete diversity training to qualify for travel? The latest policy document on the intranet says otherwise. See here...” Now, three different remote workers are viewing the project board in one screen, with a virtual conversation happening in another screen.

Our goal is to make it as easy as possible to initiate and maximize interaction.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

Human diversity makes tolerance more than a virtue; it makes it a requirement for survival.

- René Dubos

We've covered all the basic concepts. Now, it's time to pull it all together into a final strategy.

Making the Business Case

Knowing what's needed to make teams successful is a good start. But now we need to make turn our ideas into workplace reality.

To lobby management for proper investments, we need some information. Here are a few scenarios to help spur your thinking:

VIRTUAL TEAM KIT: To equip a small, purely virtual team of 10 people with the tools needed, we need:

VOIP Headset	\$50USD x 10
HD Webcam	\$100USD + 10
Google Hangout, Chat, Voice, Docs	Free

Joinme Screensharing	Free
Virtual Team Kit →	\$1500USD

In order to make case for expenditures, a team leader needs to know what costs are already on the table.

FOR A FIXED PROJECT BUDGET: For a \$1.5M USD project, our Virtual Team kit represents 00.1% of the overall project budget. That means to break even, the investment needs to changes of project success by only a fraction. In fact, if better communication reduces our delivery risk by only 5%, the Return on Investment will be on the order of 50 times the investment made.

FOR A KNOWN LABOR RATE: Perhaps we as a staffing provider charge \$US300 per

day, but we incur defects and rework orders that cost us an additional 5 days of unbilled labor per month. If this investment improves our quality by only 20%, and can invoice 1 additional day per month, then our payback period will be 5 months, after which we will only increase earnings.

FOR A GENERAL LABOR BUDGET: The in-person kickoff meeting from Chapter 2 costs us \$6,000 USD. Furthermore, let's commit to 1 in-person gathering each quarter, for key milestone reviews and planning. Our in-person meeting budget becomes \$24,000. Now, let's say our 10 person team incurs \$6Million USD per annum. That means our travel budget costs less than 0.5% of our total labor costs. In fact, I've known some teams to surrender whatever part of

their salary or bonus to cover those costs, because it makes their job that much easier.

These are just a couple ideas, to get you started. The key principle is to ask your leadership what financial metrics matter to them, and compare the infrastructure investment accordingly.

Consider Agile Methods

Establishing collaboration and communication policies is the most important start. But to increase control over remote work even further, there are some additional techniques that merit strong consideration.

Popularized by the technology industry, agile methods are a collection of modern management techniques intended to accelerate delivery, with higher quality output. They are enumerated at length in the website www.agilemanifesto.org, but for our context, there is one benefit in particular worth considering:

Agile methods minimize the risk created by your distributed team.

SHORTER DEADLINES: When working in virtual teams, pulling together everyone's output simply cannot wait until the end. Consider requiring teams to deliver true business-facing outputs every 1 to 4 weeks.

Going any longer than that runs a great risk that outputs won't be usable.

FREQUENT CHECKPOINTS: A common business tradition is to have a weekly status meeting. In distributed teams, weekly meetings can easily default into the primary means of interaction. Instead, consider a daily stand-up meeting, which lasts about 15 minutes. People don't necessarily have to stand-up in front of their monitors, but hosting a daily checkpoint forces more regular verbal interaction.

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL TEAMS: Also common in global teams is the creation of skill-based silos. We rely on documents and specification to communicate how all the work is to be performed and handed off to

the next group. Instead, consider building virtual cross-skilled teams, each having all the skill resources needed to build a single, complete unit of business-facing deliverables. In fact, a virtual cross-functional team is highly preferable to a co-located silo team.

	Silo-ed	Cross Functional
Co-located	Risky	Ideal
Virtual	Worst	Better



Much more is described at the Agile Manifesto, but these techniques are important to start with, as a means to reduce the risk your teams will not deliver high performance output.

Summary

Global teams bring many benefits. We can reduce costs while bringing diverse opinions into our work. We can increase office hour coverage, while also improving individual productivity. But to get these benefits, real intentional investment must be made. These tips give you everything you need to start moving in that direction.

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A leader in the advancement of management practices, he founded the PMI Agile Community of Practice, co-created the PMI-ACP® agile certification, and co-authored the Software Extension to the PMBOK Guide®. A graduate of Johns Hopkins University, he is the world's only certified Project Management Professional (PMP) to also hold the expert-level agile designations of Certified Scrum Trainer (CST), and Innovation Games® Qualified Instructor (IGQI).



Jesse Fewell is a writer, speaker, and coach in the world of management and innovation. From Minneapolis to Malaysia, he's helped startups and conglomerates alike catapult to better results:

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