How to Overcome the Top 5 Challenges of Managing Projects with Dispersed Teams

# Table of Contents

smartsheet

Introduction

Today, across industries of all types and sizes, it is clear that remote work of some form — whether hybrid or fully remote — is here to stay. For most, this is good news — employees overwhelmingly prefer remote or hybrid work environments due to the increased flexibility, autonomy, and overall work-life balance.

That said, the global shift toward geographically distributed work does pose new, unique challenges to successful project management. From increased at-home distractions to new communication norms to decreased team accountability, it can be more difficult than ever to execute projects on time, under budget, and up to quality standards.

In this e-book, we'll walk you through the five most common challenges of hybrid remote project management:

- **Decreased motivation**

- **Working across multiple time zones**

- **Ineffective communication**

- **Lack of visibility into work being done**

- **Poor team accountability**

Plus, we share concrete solutions to overcome these challenges to help you set yourself up for success going forward.
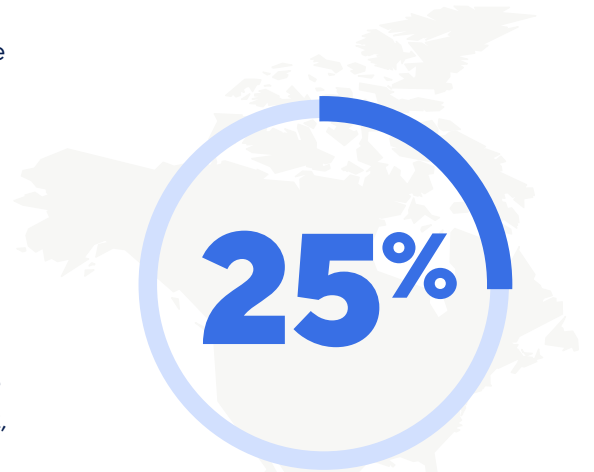
25%

of all professional jobs in North America will be remote by the end of 2022.

Source: Ladders

smartsheet

Decreased motivation

With the decrease in in-person connections and the rise in at-home distractions, remote team members may be less productive. On the flipside, many struggle to maintain clear boundaries between work and personal life, and this "always on" mentality can cause burnout. Both cases can result in decreased morale and motivation, which ultimately hurts the team's ability to deliver high-quality projects on time.

THE SOLUTION

As a leader, you are largely responsible for keeping your team motivated at work. By creating an environment of positive recognition and productive collaboration, you can help foster a constructive work environment.

To raise morale and stimulate productivity, remember to do the following:

Share the big picture: Look for ways to connect each individual's work to the greater project — as well as to the larger strategic goals of the department or organization. When people understand how their work fits in with other initiatives and benefits the company as a whole, they are more likely to see the value in — and execute on — their own contributions.

Establish measurable goals: At the start of every project, set performance goals for each team member. Doing so will help motivate team members to do well, since they have concrete metrics to hit.

Recognize good work: One of the simplest and best ways to boost team morale is to acknowledge a job well done. Positive reinforcement shows team members that you care, and connects them to the human element of work, which is often lost in a distributed team setting.

Employees are

2.8x

more likely to remain engaged when goals and accountabilities are clear.

Source: Quantum Workplace

Working across multiple time zones

Remote work increases companies' abilities to attract and retain top talent, since location is no longer a limiting factor in hiring. That said, geographically disparate teams often have a harder time building team cohesiveness and engaging in regular, meaningful team collaboration. This challenge is in part due to time zone differences and the scheduling difficulties that come with them.

THE SOLUTION

When working with team members in different time zones, find ways to remain connected and aligned — without burdening people with an expectation of all-hours availability.

Here are some practical measures you can take to ease the stress of managing team members in multiple time zones:

Set core working and meeting hours: Establish regular working hours for all team members, regardless of time zone, so that the team can separate work from personal time. Aim to only hold critical meetings during this time frame to ensure the right people are present in the right discussions.

Record meetings: Even with set meeting hours, there may be instances when some team members cannot attend. In this case, record the meeting and send it out to all relevant stakeholders.

Re-evaluate the need for every meeting: Take this as an opportunity to decide which meetings actually need to be face-to-face. Many questions can be answered in a simple email — or, better yet, with a quick status update in the project plan, which should be the one, real-time source of truth that the team can access anytime, anywhere.

smartsheet

Ineffective communication

Even in traditional, in-person project management, communication is hard to get right. Things become even more challenging in a hybrid remote setting, when you have to juggle the many real-time communication and collaboration tools on the market, from video conferencing to chat to virtual whiteboards.

Oftentimes, team leaders overcompensate for the lack of in-person connection by overloading people with meetings and various communication tools. And, keeping up with all these channels can turn into a job in and of itself. These tactics negatively affect project management efforts because they don't leave enough time to actually focus on the work that needs to be done.

THE SOLUTION

The key to successful hybrid communication is being intentional about when, where, and how often to keep in contact. Get clear on what you want to get out of team communication, and identify the best channels to help you accomplish these goals.

To overcome the common pitfalls of remote communication, do the following:

Set a standard communication cadence: Schedule regular meetings and check-in dates that only involve the necessary team members. You could also consider creating a no-meeting day to give the team regular, dedicated focus time.

Invest in the right collaboration tools: First, identify your needs. Outside of the normal video and chat apps, many communication challenges can be solved with simple project management tools. Look for solutions that offer automatic status notifications, support file sharing, and update in real time. Using the right tools can increase project visibility and help keep communication flowing — without adding a bunch of unnecessary meetings.

Establish norms around each communication channel: Think about which tools are the most useful for different types of communication (for example, when a status update might be more appropriate than a video meeting). Create guidelines for when to use what, and stick to them.

Lack of visibility into work being done

In the transition to remote work, many teams became disconnected not only from each other, but also from the processes that make project management run smoothly. Without a clear view into the work your team is doing, you might end up duplicating efforts, sorting through version control issues, and missing status updates — all of which waste time, cause frustration, and contribute to project delays.

THE SOLUTION

The easiest way to gain visibility into your projects is to invest in a project management tool that provides a single, common source of truth for all project information.

**Look for a tool that allows you to do the following:**

Store all project details in a central location: This ensures that all team members are working from the same, up-to-date documents and have insight into task and project status.

Invest in a cloud-based solution: Cloud-based project management tools allow you to store and access information from anywhere in real time. This greatly cuts down on time spent communicating via email or in meetings — plus, many tools offer automated notifications to make these updates even easier.

Create dashboards to surface key information: Dashboards, which highlight critical metrics in a visually appealing way, are a great tool to stay on top of your projects, identify risks or blockers, and make better informed decisions. Look for a project management tool that allows you to roll up metrics into a real-time dashboard, so you and your stakeholders can remain in the loop.
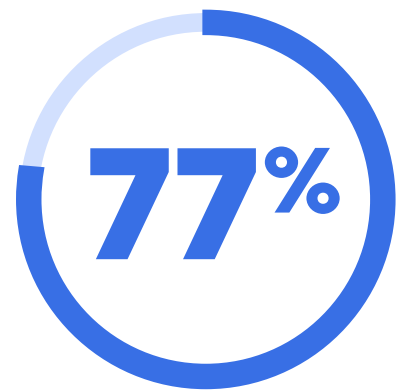
77%

of all high performing projects utilize project management software.

Source: GoRemotely

Poor team accountability

One of the most universally understood difficulties in remote project management is a general lack of accountability among team members. This isn't to say that your team members are necessarily underperforming, but that lack of accountability often stems from the failure to set expectations at the outset.

This lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities can lead to redundant efforts, schedule delays, and frustration among team members. Additionally, it can result in a flurry of unnecessary or inefficient activity — think: Too many cooks in the kitchen. Especially in a remote or distributed team environment, this can stifle the team's ability to work together and build trust over the long term.

THE SOLUTION

You can build team accountability by setting clear expectations at the project outset. When people understand their responsibilities upfront, things are much more likely to progress smoothly and on time.

The following tips will help you assign and communicate responsibilities to your team, to ensure that everyone is on the same page:

Understand your team member's strengths and bandwidth: Many accountability problems begin with a lack of understanding about team members' strengths and goals. Start by understanding what people want to do, what they are good at, and their bandwidth, before assigning responsibilities. You can also use your project plan to keep track of these details over the course of the project, to make sure everyone feels good about their workload.

Communicate expectations, but remain flexible: One of the greatest benefits of remote work is the autonomy it affords employees. Be sure to clearly communicate expectations early on. Then, trust that your employees will work their way, so long as they deliver.

Set aside time to review priorities in team meetings: In many fast-paced companies, new projects are added to the queue frequently, and priorities change by the week, if not by the day. Review these changes regularly with all team members, so everyone knows when to switch gears.

smartsheet

Conclusion

There's no doubt about it — maintaining strong project management practices in today's new hybrid remote environment can be challenging.

While technology makes it easier than ever to stay connected, teams still struggle to streamline processes, communicate efficiently, build trust and accountability, and stay on top of project status.

Creating effective remote or hybrid teams requires having the right tools and processes in place. With the right project management solution, you'll boost collaboration, automate repetitive tasks, and get real-time visibility into project, task, and team member status — all of which will help you be more successful in the long run.

See how Smartsheet can help you better manage projects, today.

Watch the demo

smartsheet

About Smartsheet

Smartsheet (NYSE: SMAR) is a leading collaborative work management (CWM) platform that empowers distributed organizations to plan, capture, manage, automate, and report on work at scale, enabling them to move faster, drive innovation, and achieve more. An extensible platform backed by enterprise-grade security, Smartsheet is used by more than 75% of the companies in the Fortune 500 to implement, manage, and automate processes across a broad array of use cases.

sales@smartsheet.com

(844) 324-2360

smartsheet.com

/smartsheet

/company/smartsheet-com

@smartsheetplatform

/@smartsheet

/smartsheet

/smartsheet