6 TIPS FOR WORKING WITH A REMOTE TEAM
A Guide to Outsourced, Offshore Software Development in an Agile Distributed Team Environment
If you’re in charge of software development for your company, you know that carrying out software development with distributed teams is a reality today. A distributed team might be in the form of your employees permanently working and living in different locations; employees traveling on occasion (e.g., working from hotels, at client or vendor sites, etc.); or your company outsourcing projects to third-party vendors (like Integrant) whose team members might be located in your same city, overseas, or some combination of the two.

**STRATEGIES TO WORK WITH A DISTRIBUTED TEAM**

*It can be challenging to operate with teams in different locations, but practical and empowering solutions (for you and your vendor) do exist. The focus? Culture/communication and technology.*

*The vendor is just part of the equation. Certainly, there are characteristics you need to expect and require, but you also have a strong impact on the outcome of using distributed teams.*

**Culture/Communication: Encourage a “One Team Culture” and Expect the Best**

You want to avoid the type of environment where you hear things like this: “It was the other (client/vendor) team that did it,” or “I expect you (vendor) to exactly follow what I tell you to do.”

If you’re working with a vendor that is a true partner, you’ll have a team on your end and a team at the vendor’s end—but the lines and boundaries between them should be very, very blurry. It works against your goals to establish a two-team culture.

Encourage all team members to communicate often, even to the point of pair programming across client/vendor teams. It might sound like too much of an investment, but your returns will be exponential.

Expect your vendor team to be just as good as your own team. Don’t protect your vendor from tough standards and tough feedback, and likewise, don’t expect performance from the vendor team that you wouldn’t expect from your own software developers. We’re all human—we respond to support, challenge, respect, and guidance.
Culture/Communication: Share Business Knowledge and Strategic Decisions

You may balk at the idea of investing too much time and energy into a “third party,” but if you’ve got a strong vendor on hand, your investment will pay off remarkably. Your input regarding business strategy, style, and objectives will allow a strong vendor team to “own” outcomes in the same way your internal team does. Assume that if you share your vision, mission, and goals, a strong vendor team will support them.

Case in Point: Because the Integrant team felt part of the client team, knowing that the product needed to launch on a certain date to secure additional funds for it was a strong motivator. The result was an authentic level of understanding and engagement, including embracing extra work and a stressful schedule.

Culture/Communication: Facilitate Face-to-Face Contact

Arrange for your vendor team to come onsite for a few weeks, or a day, or...just get the teams together. The effect of having your team physically meet with your vendor’s team is priceless. The increase in understanding, support, and teamwork is well worth any associated investment, and a good vendor will cover the cost or include it in its basic fees.

Culture/Communication: Invest in a Walk on the Other Side

The reality is that most outsourcing involves offshoring and most offshoring involves at least some kind of cultural difference. Take this as a positive. If you pretend like there are no differences, you are wasting a lot of energy avoiding the elephant in the room.

- Assume you have a highly focused, committed, collaborative team, and expect that acknowledging any cultural differences will only enhance those characteristics. For example, in some cultures it’s less accepted to say, “I don’t understand.” Encourage your vendor team to ask questions by saying something like, “Would you like me to re-phrase that for clarity?”
- A good vendor will accommodate your schedule, including your workweek, but that shouldn’t mean you disregard theirs. Be mindful of that when arranging large team meetings or deployments.
Technology: Use Video/Voice Conferencing

Google Hangout and Skype are two simple examples of free tools. Other tools are available, such as MS Lync. You don’t need to use these tools only for official/formal meetings. Make it a habit for any kind of communication between client and vendor teams so everyone feels they’re together on the same floor.

Our key team members, such as Technical Project Lead, Dev Lead, and Support, have these communication tools on their mobile devices, and they have their overseas cell numbers linked to their Skype accounts. At least one Integrant team member is on call 24/7. This way, if there is a need to talk to a team member urgently or to send them a message, clients can easily do so.

Technology: Include Personal Photos on All Emails, Texts and Voice Conferencing

Introvert or extrovert, please make sure your employees and your vendor’s employees have their photo attached to any communication tools. Seeing your offshore team member (especially smiling!) will strengthen the unity and personal aspects of the teams.

The Path to Success

Having a strong communication approach and supporting tools is key for successful Agile implementation within a distributed team environment. You can’t change the reality of virtual teams, but you can make that reality a positive, motivating aspect of your business.

Some of our clients used to consider offshoring a high-risk endeavor. After working with us to outsource according to the guidelines outlined here, these same clients agree that outsourcing is not really high risk if you have the right approach and tools.

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WHY INTEGRANT

In a perfect world, Agile software development teams work side-by-side, but in the real world this is not always possible. Outsourcing is one way to quickly add new technical talent, but quality is often an issue. With Integrant, you no longer have to compromise on quality when you extend your team—because our focus is on providing quality service and a quality experience that leads to quality software.

We’ve created a proven model that facilitates our ability to build, extend, and manage global, distributed, and remote teams. Our Tech2Tech connection supports true collaboration among developers and testers within remote teams that’s unprecedented in the outsourcing world.

Contact us to learn more about how we can extend the capabilities of your internal development team.

LET’S TALK CO-DEVELOPMENT

We’d love to hear about your custom software needs and how we can partner. Contact us today.