

Communication on global projects. A challenge?

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Program and project managers spend most of their time communicating. In traditional project teams, you usually recognise the project manager as the one moving from one meeting room to another, rushing to the team members's desks to obtain information on the project activities and building informal networks around the coffee machine or during lunch time.

Many project managers enjoy the contact with people and feel at ease performing these coordination activities. The communication flows naturally, the tasks get done and the projects are completed. When these project managers are assigned to global projects, everything changes. Low budgets restrain them from travelling to the project locations and suddenly they spend a large portion of their days with a headset, making telephone calls and organising audio conferences. A typical day finishes after hundreds of e-mail exchanges and with at least a handful of unread e-mails for the next morning.

The level of frustration increases when e-mail and voice mails are left unanswered and the tasks are not progressing as planned. The projects can be eventually completed, but are somewhat distant from the original cost, budget, quality and scope. Not to mention the customer satisfaction levels …

To avoid this situation, global project managers must know the communication channels between the stakeholders, define common rules and templates for communication over a distance and involve team members in defining a communication strategy. Different communication techniques may be deployed to increase the stakeholders's commitment level. Remote brainstorming techniques can gather ideas from team members across the globe, incorporating them into the project strategies and the product characteristics.

The modules in this section provide a starting point for reflections on these processes and methods that can reduce the frustration of global project managers, and increase the probability that their projects achieve the targets. Image © Anna Cieřlak | Dreamstime.com