

A black banner for the PMPC 2018 conference. It features the PMI Bangalore India Chapter logo in the top left and a globe icon with "PMPC 2018" in the top right. The central image is a night photograph of the NIMHANS Convention Centre, a large, ornate building with a central dome and multiple wings, illuminated with warm lights. Below the image, the text "Project Management Practitioners' Conference 2018" is written in yellow and white. Underneath that, "ARCHITECTING PROJECT MANAGEMENT for Value Creation" is written in white. The dates "July 12th – 14th, 2018" and the location "NIMHANS CONVENTION CENTRE, BENGALURU" are also displayed in yellow and white.

Managing Global Projects for Organization Success

Global Reach

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ABSTRACT

This is the new era of Globalization and Diversity, what we now famously call the Global Diversity era. In an era where geographical boundaries have become redundant and global project management becoming the norm, and with advancements in technology making communication seamless, organizations are increasing scouting the world for project managers who are excellent in formulating Business strategies and can successfully deliver project outcomes interfacing with resources and tools across the spectrum.

Global teams typically function differently as compared to homogenous teams. On the flip side, there tends to be greater conflict and scope for escalation. This is where the role of Project Managers becomes crucial. Project Managers need to realize that the value of global teams lies in their capacity to tackle highly complex problems producing better results through a greater level of synergy. With the advent of technological advancements, virtual exchanges using advanced project management and communication tools are becoming the norm. In such a scenario, it is important to find innovative ways to manage global complex projects.

Through the course of this paper, we'll look at the various challenges faced in managing global teams, how it can be overcome and develop a global model to define project success by unifying Business Strategy, Technical Project Management and Leadership skills. By use of a case study, we'll also explore how a large diversified team managed by a Global Lead Project Manager handling complex projects in a leading MNC and facing several challenges ultimately won a Global Eminence award.

INTRODUCTION



Success or failure of (y)our organization is directly proportional to the success or failure of Global Teams managing Diverse Projects

Organizations are increasingly focusing on diverse work teams as key assets to achieve their strategic objectives. Diverse teams which are often virtual generally offer a greater level of synergy as compared to homogenous teams provided it is harnessed the right way. Diverse teams facilitates greater functional specialization, pooling and cross training. Project Managers should strive to maximize the potential of diverse teams for organization success.

Global Diverse teams do have the potential to outperform homogenous teams as they can draw on a greater pool of ideas and their breath of knowledge is higher. They have the capacity to see issues from different perspectives, which ideally leads to a sophisticated understanding of that problem and the development of high quality solutions. With the advent of technological advancements and the world becoming flatter, it is becoming quite common to see clients, architects, sponsors and project teams having representation across the globe.

As in any great organization, high performing teams are those that are able to consistently deliver superior performance over a period of time. Project success is typically determined by whether it met the client expectations and covered the requisite scope within budget and on schedule. In today's context, more often not, project teams are too complex to be managed by traditional project management techniques alone. In such a scenario, it is important to acquire new competencies and capabilities and learn to use large, diverse teams effectively for project success. We'll explore through the course of this paper how this can be achieved providing real world scenarios for achieving success in managing global programs.

MANAGING GLOBAL PROJECTS – KEY CHALLENGES

Before dwelling into what managing Global Projects entails, let us understand what we actually mean by Global Teams. In any organization, the Team is a basic unit of performance which is a conglomeration of the skills, experiences and insights of all the team members. Teams handling global projects are an entity in themselves and managing a diverse workforce can be a challenge for any organization. Global teams typically consist of team members from different backgrounds coming together in the workplace and while there is potential for great accomplishment, there is also scope for great conflict. Therefore, it becomes crucial to create an environment where people's differences in perspective can be valued and allowed to positively influence their experiences and contribute to the work of the organization. This requires good project management and team building skills.

What are the challenges typically encountered in managing diverse teams and projects? Few of them are listed below

A) CULTURAL DIVERSITY OF PROJECT TEAMS

When managing any diverse project, a key challenge project manager will face is the cultural diversity of team members not to mention key stakeholders working from different locations across the globe. Language and cultural barriers can create ambiguities and misunderstanding making things even more difficult

B) REMOTE PROJECT MANAGEMENT

In many global MNCs, remote project management is being embraced with full vigor without getting the requisite planning done. It is not uncommon for project managers to work from a location which is different from where the client is, and the project teams working from multiple locations spread across the globe. Unless a detailed analysis is done beforehand and processes well defined, more often than not, it can lead to troubled projects and unnecessary fire-fighting.

C) WEAK ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE ETHICS

When project leaders fail to define clear objectives and hold themselves equally (if not more) accountable for the success or failure of a project, such behavior permeates across the team and undermines the mutual trust and openness that is the hallmark of any high performing team. This becomes more glaring in the case of diverse teams where teams do not have regular contact with their project lead.

D) TRADITIONAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS

In the earlier times, project managers had the luxury of face-to-face meetings with the client and their team members. With the globalized dispersed teams, such interactions are limited and long distance interaction becomes a part of daily routine. If the methods of communication and sharing of information is not well defined and project managers employ random style of communication among stakeholders, the team can end up making critical decisions based on second hand information. This unstructured exchange of project information in turn can negatively impact timelines and project deliverables.

E) STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT

When the key stakeholders work in a different location from the rest of the team, perception could play an important role in deciding how successfully diverse projects can be delivered. Project managers find it difficult to convince the stakeholders that diverse teams are competent to handle critical projects.

F) INTEGRATION CHALLENGES

When there are disparate teams working from remote locations, probability of multiple independent solution components being generated will be high which could lead to a whole lot of integration issues. Procedures and tools used could be fundamentally different leading to low quality deliverables. Also in the case of remote teams, there is a possibility that they may not be aware of the exact business requirement which can lead to unstable results that the client had not envisioned.

Let us understand how these challenges can be converted into opportunities which will help us in achieving positive business outcomes.

GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR ORGANIZATION SUCCESS

There is no one stop shop for success – each organization is different and the strategy should be defined based on what the business needs of the organization are. However, it is a global reality that managing diverse teams is the need of the hour and the strategies mentioned below should help most of the organizations and project teams to manage their global workforce more effectively.

A) COMMITMENT SHOULD COME FROM THE TOP

No matter what type of organization it is, Functional, Projectized or Matrix, unless there is a firm understanding from the senior management and push for a diversified workforce with the advantages that go with it, it is difficult for diverse teams to succeed.

In IBM, for example, the commitment comes right from the top

“Today when I think about diversity, I actually think about the word ‘inclusion’. And I think, this is a time of great inclusion. It’s not men, it’s not women alone. Whether it’s geographic, it’s approach, it’s your style. It’s your way of learning, the way you want to contribute, it’s your age – it is really broad. You’ve got to keep reinventing”

- **Ginni Rometty, CEO, IBM**

“A globally integrated company... is an enterprise that shapes its strategy, management and operations in a truly global way. It locates operations and functions anywhere in the world based on the right cost, right skills, and the right business environment. And it integrates those operations horizontally and globally... You have to be willing to change, to re-invent yourself, to innovate.”

- **Sam Palmisano, Former CEO, IBM**

And this is reflected in the global strategy of IBM

“... This is the new era of diversity, the global era. To operate successfully, we must be especially mindful of how we respect and value differences among people in countries and region.

... We will continue to ingrain workforce inclusion into our operations. An inclusive workforce makes for a creative environment; IBM believes this – and will continue to promote global workforce diversity as its key differentiator among all others. “

- **Ron Glover, Global Workforce Diversity, IBM**

And this is being successfully implemented across all global business units in IBM.

B) SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

In the 21st century, Collaboration is more than just an approach, it is becoming a business imperative.

For any organization to succeed, project teams must learn to collaborate across

- Geographic borders
- Different cultures
- Social boundaries
- Time zones

And each team member in the organization should commit to

- Be innovative
- Nurture relationships across the spectrum
- Communicate effectively
- Be flexible

C) WISDOM AND POWER OF GLOBAL TEAMS

Global teams are just not about teamwork, empowerment, or participative management. To succeed in the global business environment, project managers must learn to leverage the power and wisdom of diverse teams. One must be appreciative of the fact that there will be quite a lot of differences of opinion in a diverse team as compared to a homogenous one. It is for the project manager to build an element of trust among all the team members for the projects to be successful over a period of time. Project managers handling complex projects with diverse teams must strive to understand the benefits of teams and learn how to optimize team performance by developing individual members, fostering team cohesiveness, and rewarding team results. Since teams are the primary building blocks for strong organizational performance, complex project managers cannot ignore the power and wisdom of diverse teams.

On a broader scale, it is important for the team members to accept accountability for team results, engage collaboratively with other teams, work within the project organization framework, and align project goals with team goals.

D) ADOPT AND BUILD A LEAN DELIVERY MODEL

While each organization is different, it is recommended to build a delivery framework using Lean concepts that enable consistent delivery excellence through standardization of processes and minimizing waste leading to improved efficiency. This is particularly applicable to global diverse teams. A project manager can identify areas of improvement; look at all the wastes that one encounters during delivery of projects and build levers around eliminating such waste. If needed, a focal point can be identified for each account and similar projects pooled accordingly. The consolidated efforts can be analyzed by a centralized team including delivery focals and standardized processes can be defined accordingly.

A standard methodology coupled with collaborative planning and decision making, with the right tools and techniques, goes a long way in improving communication within global teams and help achieve better results. It is also important to establish a formal communication strategy to minimize barriers in exchanging, sharing and interpreting information critical to a project's success. At the same time, it must be noted, that too much of standardization can also lead to a closed door approach and inefficiencies. It is important to strike the right balance.

IBM uses such delivery models across the board, and it has been a huge success in managing diverse global projects. While the processes and methodologies will be different from one organization to another, and within each Business Unit within an organization, there should be a constant endeavor to define a global operating system, a management framework and make it work across the organization.

E) QUICK WINS DURING THE INITIAL PHASE

Especially for global teams, it is important to focus on quick wins so that it creates a sense of bonding and ownership. An effective Project Manager should

- Select the team based on skills and skill potential and not personalities
- Share project charter and team objectives with all the team members. A simple enough step, but many a times, it is skipped in real world scenario due to various factors
- Encourage the team to undergo cross cultural training so that the team members are well versed in interacting with team members across the globe
- Set the ground rules on communication and behavior for the entire team which promotes focus, commitment and trust
- Set and seize upon a few immediate and important deliverables and establish a sense of urgency and direction. It is easy for dispersed teams to go off-track, so if they have a challenging assignment yet achievable, the team will be contributing to the success of the deliverable. This is the first step in making a high performing team and the appreciations that follows gives them a sense of ownership and rightly so.

F) POWER OF POSITIVE FEEDBACK

When a team member has come up with a new idea or is contributing well, nothing works better than a positive appreciation – when it is real. Teams, no matter how dispersed, will always be receptive to a Project Manager who uses the power of positive feedback, recognition and reward the right way.

G) CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

Global teams keep evolving and the management should always look for ways as to how the process can be improved upon. It is important to involve all core team members during the project planning process and seek feedback often to continually improve the performance of the team.

While there is no substitute for face-to-face working sessions during planning meetings, in remote project management, one should have regular checkpoint meetings with the concerned stakeholders and have periodic control-gate reviews. It is important to identify the gaps and keep updating the lessons learned manual so that it will be useful for other project managers as well.

Team members should be constantly encouraged to undertake certifications and training based on their skill and capability. Engaging the employees via 360 degree feedback, voice of the employee etc at regular intervals will create a sense of bonding with the team members and bring a sense of ownership and belonging.

A 30/60/90 day continual improvement plan can be set for large complex projects and needs to be periodically reviewed by an independent panel to see how effective the process improvements have been.

CASE STUDY

In this case study, we'll take up one of the high complex projects of a leading MNC which involves large virtual teams, remote project management, multiple vendors with disparate technologies and see how to harness the power of diverse teams for strategic advantage. While there is scope for improvement, I hope this is a step in the right direction for effective management of diverse teams and projects.

A) PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Storage Transformation Program is implementing a vendor based storage solution for the currently running Service Investment Programs and migrating existing applications to the new infrastructure. The scope includes the preparation and remediation of the existing environment, and documenting and testing migration methods in preparation for migrating applications currently residing on Storage A to Storage B SAN (Storage Area Network) infrastructure.

This was a complex project with a large budget and aggressive schedule. This involved migration activities of > 1000 TB and thousands of servers, with the storage architecture being different for each application bundle.

B) AS-IS-ASSESSMENT

Three months into the project, it was in Red. Despite being a high visibility project, there were several factors plaguing the success of the program. Some of them are listed below

- Multiple vendors and complex contractual agreements
- Unclear ownership on shared deliverables
- Skewed distribution and critical skill gap

- Low motivation level
- Lack of management focus
- Technical challenges – storage mapping is highly complex and different for each application

C) GAP ANALYSIS

Client satisfaction was at an all time low. He could not understand that despite having resources from leading market players with specialized knowledge in the particular domain, why the project was in the state it was. Client was losing patience and was expecting results – fast.

Though there were multiple issues due to which the project was in red, Root Cause Analysis showed that most of the issues were due to the poor management and utilization of Diverse Teams. While in theory the issue looks simple, the remediation efforts were far from simple - the project needed emergency surgery to bring it back on course.

D) SOLUTION IMPLEMENTATION

Senior management felt that Global Teams could be the reason for the mess and wanted to go back to the localized homogenous teams to salvage the situation and cut down the losses. After multiple discussions, it was decided to persist with the existing model but with major modifications starting with a change in Project Manager. Three months were given to the project team to bring the project back on track.

The new project manager realized that the project needed drastic course correction – some of the remediation steps undertaken are mentioned below.

- Go back to the basics – sit with the client and understand the customer's pain points. Get the client's perspective on why the project is in Red and get his valuable inputs
- Get the buy in from Senior Management on the efficacy of Diverse Teams – make them understand the benefits of Diverse teams and the that issue lies with the Management of Diverse Teams and not the Diverse Teams per se
- Share the Project Charter with the entire team
- One-to-one meeting with each team member and get to understand their concerns. Get their feedback on the project – good, bad and ugly
- Recommend each team member to undergo cross-cultural training and track them accordingly – see if there is a marked improvement in the interactions across dispersed teams
- Re-visit RACI matrix and fix ownership and accountability for each deliverable with all the vendors. Get the buy in from senior management and the client
- Utilize the skeletal structure of Global delivery framework and customize to suit the needs of the existing project – use standardized processes and value stream mapping wherever possible
- Form a core team with specialized skills and active participation from all geographies
- Address the critical skill gap, do a segmentation analysis – for each of the deliverable, analyze the complexity and perform a skill mapping for the resources in the team and assign deliverables accordingly. After the exercise, where there was still a skill gap, recruit additional SMEs

- Identify the potential for quick wins – deliverables which are of high priority for the client and which can be completed early with the right effort. Get the team to work on those deliverables with maximum urgency and focus.
- Celebrate the success of the quick win – no matter how small the deliverable is, get to share the appreciation of the client and recognize the entire team. It is important to move from a mood of pessimism to one of high optimism. This is a crucial step for project success
- Keep eyes and ears open for potential conflicts and have periodic checkpoint meetings – once the first hurdle is crossed, the rest becomes relatively easy to manage

E) CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

- Client Satisfaction – Given the state of the project initially and the contribution of the entire team in moving the high visibility project to Green despite the challenges faced, client was very happy with the project deliverables
- Project Cost under control – project costs were brought under control and within budget owing to the efforts of the diverse team and good onsite/offshore model
- Project Schedule – no overrun. Due to the aggressive schedule followed by the team and the various best practices followed, the project schedule was on target (except during the initial phase when the project was in Red and which was rectified later)
- High quality deliverables – owing to the diverse pool and varied capabilities and competencies of the project team, the deliverables were of high quality with minimal defect leakage

F) BUSINESS BENEFITS

The project moved to Green before the stipulated deadline and went on to meet and surpass client expectations

- This was a massive achievement via thousands of remediation and migration events, touching the client's most critical midrange applications and database environments, without a single **Severity 1** incident
- Client was happy with the successful handling of the project and the high quality deliverables produced. Over time, he became appreciative of the diverse team and its contribution to the success of the project - CSAT rating was high
- Project cost was under control and completed slightly ahead of schedule – this was largely due to the efforts of the virtual team (including remote project management).

Based on the complexity and criticality of the project and the success achieved, the entire team was rewarded with Eminence and Excellence Award for its excellent contribution (selected from a pool of more than hundred projects in the given quarter).

G) LESSONS LEARNED

- Quite often, due to aggressive timelines, we directly jump into the project and start working on the deliverables. It is recommended to take a step back and understand the requirements of the diverse team - this is as important as getting the client requirements right.

- It is not sufficient if the project manager is competent in handling project related issues alone. He needs to work on his people skills in addition to his project management skills especially when managing diverse teams and projects
- Any process improvement should be captured in a lessons learned manual and needs to be constantly reviewed.
- Project Manager should encourage shared leadership wherever possible - at the end of the day, a project manager is only as good as his team.
- Knowledge sharing sessions - given that diverse teams have a greater pool of ideas and multitude of skills, knowledge sharing sessions serves a dual purpose of greater information sharing as well as improving the bonding and trust quotient within the team

CONCLUSION

“Teams help ordinary people achieve extraordinary results.”

—W.H. Murray, Scottish Himalayan Expedition

Global Teams handling diverse projects do not become successful overnight – it requires a lot of time and effort on the part of management to build these diverse teams. But setting clear guidelines and objectives, encouraging and driving the team with challenging deliverables, celebrating the successes with the team and most important of all, building an element of openness and trust will go a long way in fostering the growth of diverse teams.

Organizations are taking into account increasing business and technological complexities and have started forging strategic alliances with like minded partners and sometimes even with competitors. To remain competitive in the market, organizations need to have a blend of virtual and physical models. This in turn will further fuel the growth of teams handling diverse projects. And the effective management of diverse teams will play a key role in determining the success and growth trajectory of an organization.

Successful teams are those that consistently deliver superior performance over a period of time. Effective management of teams handling diverse projects is as much an art as a science; it is as much people management as it is project management; we still have a long way to go in harnessing the full potential of diverse teams, but clearly it is a good beginning and bodes well for the future. And there will be more and more success stories to come with global teams managing diverse projects achieving extraordinary results.

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