



Bridging the Culture Gap in Distributed Teams



Introduction

Today, businesses worldwide are warming up to the idea of working with global teams, using the **offshore development model** to cut costs, improve performance, and increase profits.

They're also leveraging global diversity and bringing together people from **different cultures and backgrounds**.

However, while globalisation helps organisations scale up their business, the cultural and societal differences can throw a major spanner in the works.

And that's why [bridging the culture gap](#) in distributed teams is crucial — a situation that can either make or break your offshore operations.



Addressing the challenge

Problems arise when CEOs, managers, and even bottom-rung colleagues **fail to understand or connect with new employees.**

It's easy to get off on the wrong foot or develop poor expectations. This kind of "culture gap" can take a brilliant hiring strategy such as **building a specialist offshore team** and make it calamitous.

A [[Global Culture Survey](#)] conducted in 2018 showed that **roughly 65% of leaders and employees** believed that their **company's organizational culture** is more important to them than any strategy or operating model.

Unfortunately, more than 80% also agreed they **weren't happy with their company culture.** This suggests that an unaddressed culture gap may be more common than we tend to think.





Bridging the cultural gap effectively

When working with distributed teams, there are a few simple steps that you can take towards bridging the culture gap. Some of them include:

1. Acknowledge and appreciate the cultural differences
2. Over-communicate until everyone is comfortable
3. Conduct alignment meetings to standardise everything





1. Acknowledge and appreciate the cultural differences

Cultural diversity manifests in different forms: **language, behavioural differences, and values.** And so, before you can bridge the culture gap, you need to learn what it's made of.

Get your new colleagues together on a video call to share their cultural background, expectations for their job, how they work – whatever seems important.

You might discuss topics like:

- **Approach to conflict of interest**
- **Personal conduct**
- **Approach to work and deadlines**
- **Long-term expectations**

While an elementary exercise, the candid conversation can help your local team understand its new, foreign colleagues – and vice versa.



2. Over-communicate until everyone is comfortable

Despite excellent communication tools, misunderstandings can be an issue when working with offshore teams.

Why?

Body language accounts for roughly 55% of all communication. This means that the tone of a text or an email's formality is left entirely open to misinterpretation.

What can you do?

- Be prepared to adapt your soft skills.
- Dedicate time and effort to communicating as clearly as possible.
- Refrain from being overly critical: even if it's frustrating, both sides should be candid without aggression.
- Consider checking in regularly to ensure everyone is on the same page.
- Establish a collaboration that is built on transparency and honesty.





3. Conduct alignment meetings to standardise everything

If you have **ten people with ten different ideas** on how something should be done, it's a recipe for disaster. Alignment meetings can go a long way in establishing **norms and rules throughout your organization.**

Standardise processes, document templates, task management systems, the structure and frequency of weekly meetings — **everything that can be, should be systematised.**

You can even offer training on understanding cross-cultural differences for your staff to bridge the culture gap. Again, go to your workforce for feedback. Some concepts may sound good in theory but fail to work in practice.

Thank you



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