

Project Management and Grant Writing

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Lesson 7.

Managing International Projects

International projects have some special characteristics, which can modify the usual way of executing projects. In this case, a project manager needs different skills to be able to coordinate the planning and the implementation of the project. What are these **characteristics** exactly?

- **Physical distance** between the management, the team members and the stakeholders. Communication and management become much more difficult when the people involved in the project are located away from each other across country boundaries.
- **Time zone** is an often-overlooked aspect of international projects. Living different countries means different time zones in most cases. This makes difficult to follow the schedule and organize meetings.
- **Language differences** can be overcome if a default language has been accepted. Avoiding words that have unambiguous meaning and can confuse others is crucial.
- **Cultural differences** affect almost every aspect of the team. It not only includes religious holidays (which can affect the schedule e.g.) or eating habits, but communication customs and working habits as well. It highly affects how the team can work together and what is the project manager's role.¹

A good way to manage an international project efficiently is using the **distributed leadership model**, where leadership is distributed among a team of individuals with different skillsets and experiences but a goal to reach. To learn more about this model, please watch the following videos:

- Distributed leadership: a different way of thinking about landscape leadership
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdxiSfPWxY8>
- Professor Alma Harris, Distributed leadership
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=biPC_IJyiHo&t=1s

¹ Linh Tran. 4 Common Pitfalls of Managing International Projects and How to Avoid Them. 2017. URL: <https://www.inloox.com/company/blog/articles/4-common-pitfalls-of-managing-international-projects-and-how-to-avoid-them/>

Communication is very important in every project; however, it has greater priority in international projects. The aforementioned characteristics have a huge impact on the effectiveness of communication. The following practices can help to communicate effectively:

- *Get the balance of information right:* concentrate on the most important and relevant information only and be precise. Getting too much information is just as bad as getting none/too little. Balance the amount of the given information. Another aspect is the level of the communicated information. For example, sponsors and co-workers need a different level of details to know.
- *Who should be involved?:* You have to decide who needs to be involved in communication. Decide, what will you share and with whom. Always measure the risks of not sharing information with someone.
- *Have a feedback loop:* Please read the following article to see, what does it mean:
<https://www.business2community.com/strategy/how-to-harness-feedback-loops-in-your-projects-02180676>
- *Virtual or face-to-face communication?:* The physical distance between the people involved in the project can be bridged by communicating virtually. However, in some cases, virtual communication is not enough. For example, when important decisions have to be made, or a major conflict needs to be resolved, face-to-face communication is much better, and much more effective. You will learn useful tools for virtual communication on the next lesson. To understand the difference between face-to-face and virtual communication, please watch the following video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asHncB7zDDA>
- *Adapt your communication style:* Familiarize yourself with the communication styles and preferences of your team members. Decide that it's more efficient to use e-mails, or they prefer phone calls for instance. Another e.g. is: decide whether graphics or texts need to be more dominant when you are giving out information or explain something.
- *Be specific:* Communicate concrete dates and specify the tasks; be precise when you talk with others. Don't forget about language differences! Because of the usage of an accepted default language, misunderstandings can occur easily.

Here are a few more tips to make communication more effective in project management, please watch it:

- 7 Secrets for Effective Team Communication - Project Management Training
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3QOULEhypA>
- Challenging Communication Tips for Better Project Communication
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hvj3XmHsxE>

Planning and executing an international project is not so different from what we have talked about earlier. However, there are a few special dimensions, which is recommended to consider during these phases.

- *Visibility*. The project manager is always ‘visible’ during the project to make sure everything is going fine, and everything is in order. However, it is really challenging in the case of an international project, where you must work across different countries.
- *Scheduling*. Every task is attached to a deadline, however, don’t forget the issue of the time zones. Always be specific with the dates and think about this difference. Time zones also have a huge impact on meetings. You have to attend and organize online meetings mostly, but keep in mind, it's almost impossible to find a time that's going to suit everyone. Someone always must get up early or stay up late to be able to attend at the meeting in most cases. So be focused, when you hold a meeting in similar conditions like this one.
- *Using software/online tools* is inevitable in an international project. Always make sure, that you are using the right tools. Choose software, which is easy to install and use, efficient and work well. Make sure that your team will get the necessary IT support.

These are just a few basic examples of situations, which makes international management special and sometimes more difficult. Esen Akter Tekinel wrote a paper about the **challenges and opportunities of international development projects**, please read it.

- Tekinel, E. A. (2013). International development projects—challenges and opportunities. Paper presented at PMI® Global Congress 2013—EMEA, Istanbul, Turkey. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute. URL: <https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/international-development-projects-challenges-opportunities-5809>

Assignment

Practice Quiz

You can find the quiz here: <https://forms.gle/1C1WgaJnwpTu6vMP7>