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DISSOLVING THE DISTANCE:
A PLAYBOOK FOR DISTRIBUTED, GLOBAL TEAMS

A recent article in Forbes[1] states, "Globalization and technology are powerful forces shaping the job market in the U.S. and most other western economies." In fact, many companies have removed location as a critical prerequisite for hiring, in order to build optimum teams with the best talent. This has contributed to an increase in the number of remote workers and distributed-team environments.

Today, more than 60 percent of enterprise knowledge workers typically work from home at least once per week.[2] And many believe that number will continue to grow, as remote work has proven to be highly beneficial to employees and businesses alike.

1 Strutz. Martin, "Freelancers and Technology are Leading the Workforce Revolution," Forbes.com, November 10, 2016.

2 "Digital, Disparate, And Disengaged: Bridging The Gap Between In-Office And Remote Workers," a June 2016 commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Prysm.

THE TOP 5 BENEFITS OF REMOTE WORK

1. **Increased productivity**

   Free from distractions, over two-thirds of employers report increased productivity among their telecommuters.

2. **Improved retention of talent**

   Forty-six percent of organizations say that telework reduces attrition.

3. **Higher employee morale**

   With less time spent commuting, remote workers gain benefits, such as greater job satisfaction, eating more healthfully, exercising and spending more time with loved ones.

4. **Eco-Friendly**

   Every one-percent reduction in vehicles on the road yields a three-fold decrease in traffic congestion.

5. **Cost savings for both employees and businesses**

   - **Employees:** For half-time telework, employees can save an average of $2,000-$6,500 per year which offers a clear financial motive in working remotely. Employees save on expenses such as gas, clothes, food, parking and even day care.

   - **Business:** A typical business could save $11,000 per person per year with telecommuting programs. For example, such options allowed IBM to cut real-estate costs by $50 million.

Source: GlobalWorkplaceAnalytics.com[3]
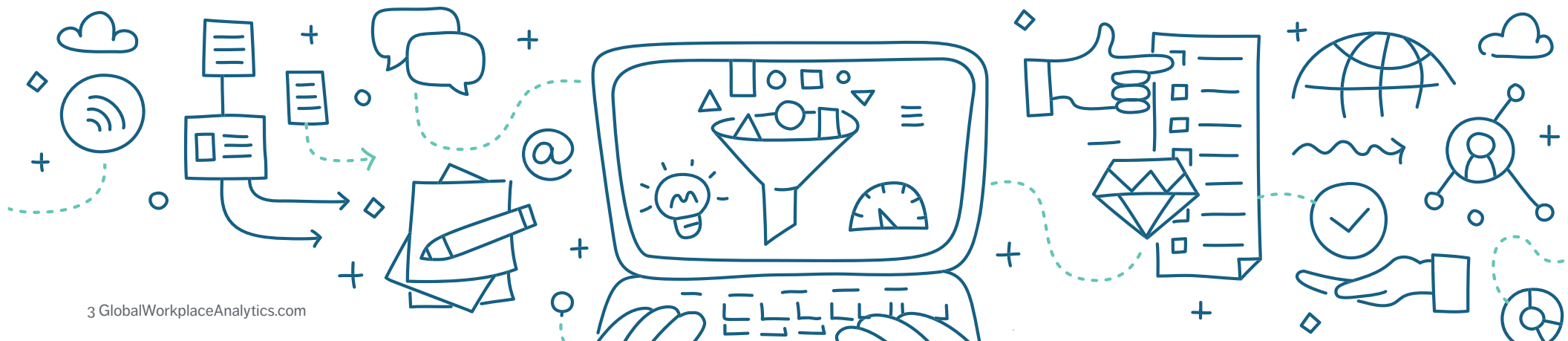
3 GlobalWorkplaceAnalytics.com

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# What remote workers say they need to get the job done

Remote workers say it's all about having the right technology. Data from a recent Forrester Consulting study shows 83 percent of information workers said they could be productive regardless of time or location if they had modern collaboration tools.[4] Companies and organizations that commit to remote work, supported by modern technologies, can expect happier employees and more efficient teams.

What your business can do to support your distributed workforce

There's no question that technology has helped remote employees increase productivity for their daily tasks. But there is still work to be done when it comes to facilitating group interactions. Now is a great time to examine the obstacles your remote workers face, so you can provide the tools they need to simplify communication and collaboration.

4 "Digital, Disparate, And Disengaged: Bridging The Gap Between In-Office And Remote Workers," a June 2016 commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Prysm.

5 Greenberg, Alan and Nilssen, Andrew, "The Last Digital Holdout: Using Technology to Unleash Creativity and Enable Nimble Group Processes," Wainhouse Research, October 18, 2016

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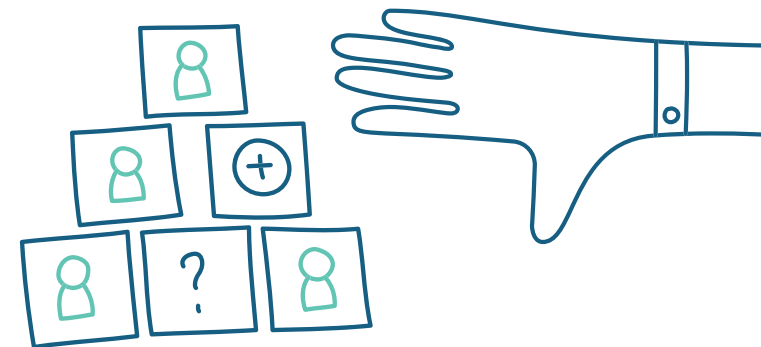
OBSTACLE #1:

Time-zone barrier.

Working with teams that cross several time zones can be challenging—especially when you need to deal with critical issues. Even routine activities, such as daily check-ins and working-group sessions, are challenging when team members are scattered across the globe.

> **"Believe it or not, this small thing—bringing the time of day into context and acting accordingly—can help a team member feel respected."**
>
> **Source: Harvard Business Review[6]**

Solutions

It's important to make sure everyone on your team feels their contributions are valued and important. For example, schedule your meetings on a rotating basis, so that the same person isn't always working at midnight. Other strategies to break down the time-zone barrier include:

- Schedule regular, consistent meetings with team members.
- Organize working hours so that each person overlaps a few hours with at least one other teammate.
- Use collaboration tools to share information, so project work can continue seamlessly.

6 Sobel-Lojeski, Karen, "The Subtle Ways Our Screens are Pushing us Apart," Harvard Business Review, April 8, 2015.

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OBSTACLE #2:

Lack of communication goals and proper tools.

One of the most common problems facing businesses with remote workers is that no one has a clear understanding of how often team members should communicate with remote workers—or how—for optimal collaboration. Should they meet face to face, via video or connect through email and online chat? Without clearly communicated expectations, these unstructured exchanges make it difficult to keep your team on the same page with progress, issues and process.

> "Simply ordering employees to start using a wiki or to start blogging without any clear work-related benefit—any answer to the 'what's in it for me' (WIIFM) question—is a recipe for failure."
>
> **–Tamara Erickson,**
> **"Adopting Transformative Technologies"**

Solutions

It's important for your organization to develop and communicate a formal strategy that minimizes the barriers in exchanging, sharing and interpreting both day-to-day and critical project information.

**For example, your business should:**

- Set standards for communication so in-office and remote employees all know what is expected and can adhere to an agreed-upon cadence.

- Offer a variety of easy-to-use tools that support mobility and offer face-to-face interaction options.[7]

- Centralize information so it's available to all team members and reduce unnecessary emails and logistical conversations.

- Encourage regular face-to-face interactions—both in person and real-time video conferencing—to promote camaraderie.

7 Zent, Monica, "5 Ways to Effectively Lead Remote Teams," Entrepreneur.com, August 20, 2015.

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OBSTACLE #3:

Isolation and social barriers.

Distributed teams don't have the everyday conversations that many in-office workers take for granted. Remote employees can go hours and even days without verbal contact—leading to feelings of isolation. Plus, remote employees don't have the opportunity to observe non-verbal cues that can be helpful when determining what your colleague is actually thinking. Considering that 93 percent of communication is non-verbal, remote employees are missing out on a critical piece of the puzzle. Significant effort must be made in order to improve the quality and frequency of communication, maximize engagement and minimize frustration.
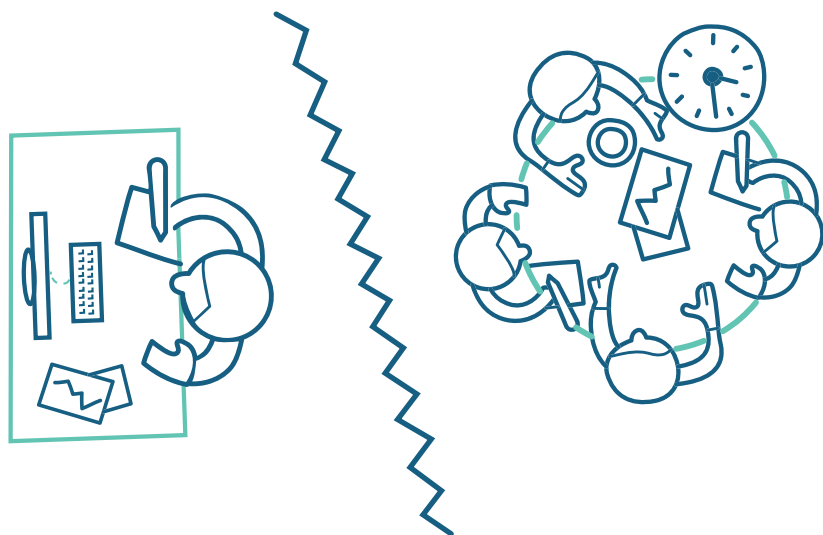
"A study at MIT found that 35% of the variation in a team's performance can be accounted for by the number of face-to-face interactions and that teams that speak mainly via telephone make poorer decisions overall. Teleworkers have been shown to exchange information less frequently than office-based employees, and tend to communicate primarily via email or phone, both of which could hinder performance. Additionally, there's evidence to suggest that telecommuting creates in-group/out of group biases that could socially frustrate teams."

Source: Cornell HR Review[8]

Solutions

It is critically important to create and maintain a fluid and cohesive group dynamic for your distributed teams. Regular face-to-face interactions are important to build trust and nurture connections. However, travel isn't always possible due to time and budget constraints. Traditional communication methods, such as phone and email, should be augmented with visual collaboration technology. Real-time videoconferencing can also help bridge that gap and offer valuable face time with remote co-workers.

8 Brumm, Francesca, "Telework is work: Navingating the new normal," Cornell HR Review, May 10, 2016.

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OBSTACLE #4:

Limited access to critical information and expertise.

All too often, remote workers don't have access to the right technology—or up-to-date information—needed to do their job. Since they can't walk over to a colleague's desk, these questions often hinder project progress, stymie creativity and even go unanswered. While file-sharing solutions, such as SharePoint, Box and Dropbox, can help, it requires rigorous discipline to ensure content is current and available.

27%

of remote workers say they have experienced a work-related problem because they weren't in the same place as their team.

Source: TINYpulse[9]

Solutions

To help support remote workers and distributed team members, create a formal strategy that outlines how to document project details and share information. Making sure information is always current and available is critical to ensuring that every project moves forward.

For example:

- Cloud-based digital workspaces offer a convenient repository to upload, review and annotate files and documents. With one integrated environment, it's easy to add and access content right from the application.

- Digital workspaces preserve your meeting materials, content, context, and action items so you can always pick up where you left off.

- Use cloud-based conferencing tools to make meetings more engaging. Integrate web sources, video, images and more for an immersive experience that brings people and information together.

9 "What Leaders Need to Know about Remote Workers," TINYpulse, 2016.

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OBSTACLE #5:

Employees not using collaborative technologies.

According to a recent study, business leaders may be overestimating the effectiveness of their current collaboration solutions. Despite investing in collaboration technologies, employees may not be using them with the frequency that IT and facilities workers believe. In fact in a recent study of 800 information workers, just 26% felt they had the tools to collaborate effectively. Fewer than half also reported that existing applications and services enabled real-time collaboration during meetings all or most of the time.[10]

Just **24%** of information workers believe their office is completely up to date and equipped with the latestand greatest technology and workspaces.
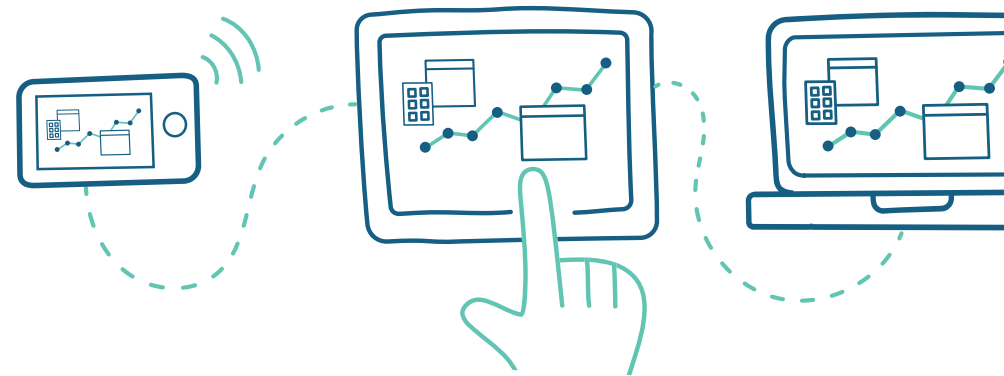
Source: Forrester Consulting[11]

Solutions

It's not enough to simply invest in collaborative technology. It's critical that your organization have a clear view of how employees are working and what they need in order to be successful. Your business must provide tools that are both easy to use and fit in with your employees' natural workflow.

Employees will get on board with solutions that are:
- Integrated with processes and workflow
- Reinforcing and promote "good" behaviors
- Addictive and encourage frequent use
- Secure[12]

10 "Digital, Disparate, And Disengaged: Bridging The Gap Between In-Office And Remote Workers," a June 2016 commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Prysm.

11 Ibid.

12 Erickson, Tamara and Bevins, Timothy, "Adopting Transformative Technologies Will Drive Collaboration in the Digital Workplace," Tammy Erickson Associates on behalf of Prysm, July 2016.

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HOW PRYSM CAN HELP YOU OVERCOME THE OBSTACLES:

1. **Demolish the time-zone barrier**
   Enhance global-team collaboration by kicking off a project in one part of the world and having a team in another time zone pick up exactly where the first one left off. With Prysm, you can exponentially increase productivity. See how.

2. **Establish and support communication goals with the right tools**
   Prysm lets you integrate existing communication tools and share all kinds of rich content, creating a more engaging experience for both in-office and remote participants.

3. **Nurture a healthy group and encourage regular communications**
   Minimize the risk of social isolation among group members. Offer multiple ways to communicate and make face-to-face interaction a priority, both in-person and through integrated video conferencing. See how Prysm delivers.

4. **Provide "always-on" access to expert information**
   Prysm's cloud-based workspaces are a convenient, persistent repository where meeting and project participants can upload, review and annotate files and documents. Plus, you can visualize and compare large datasets for more effective analysis with Prysm's touch-enabled displays.

5. **Give them collaborative technology they want to use**
   A collaboration solution should bring together your standard business tools, not force you to work outside of them. Prysm integrates Box, Microsoft Office 365 apps, Skype for Business and OneDrive, among others, for a seamless experience in a unified interface. It's also compatible with most leading VTC technologies.

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Discover how Prysm Visual Workplace
can solve your collaboration challenges.

Visit prysm.com/teamwork-transformed to watch an online demo.

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