A framework for managing successful distributed collaborative teams

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Experiences from ecosciences and digital humanities
Benefits

- Access to a larger more diverse talent pool
- Skills sharing
- Decreased staffing costs
- Improved productivity
- Better employee satisfaction
Rationale - when you might need a distributed team

- Nationally significant/operated project
- International project or project partners
- Project partners distributed
- Lack of availability of specialised skills
Developing successful teams - principles

Respect - individual skills

Autonomy

Shared Ownership

Individual Accountability/ Competitiveness

Culture - Problem solving/ problems can be raised in a constructive environment

Remove bureaucracy
Challenges

Teams are often multidisciplinary and have specialised skill sets (such as marketing, development and change management). Furthermore, these teams may not reside under a traditional single line management structure or within the same institution.
Developing successful teams - setting up

- The ability to utilise distributed teams has become easier due to modern technologies that enable and equip these teams

- Meetings
  - Initial face-to-face kick off
  - High frequency virtual meetings
  - Face to face as frequently as possible (opportunities include workshops, conferences, stakeholder engagement)

- Communications
What can go wrong?

Not always line manager

Good communication/ forums

- With line manager

- Recognition of institutional contribution in published material

Changes need to go through line manager - team members are not ‘your staff’

Ensure performance is shared and visible amongst all project partners/ supervisors

Governance - helpful to have a regular meeting with supervisors etc.
Governance/ issues - Costs

Higher costs? Maybe but necessary

- Higher PM/ Communications costs
Developing successful teams - toolkit

Travel budget

Videoconference software (i.e Zoom, GoToMeeting etc)

Shared documentation hub (i.e Google docs, SharePoint)

Ability to delegate and foster shared ownership

  Team members responsible for reporting own milestones/deliverables

Deliberately foster culture you want

  Clearly set expectations
How to be a great team member in a distributed team

Be respectful: Acknowledge diverse skill set/personalities

- Good opportunity to learn new skills/discover new working methods

Have good lines of communication with the Project Manager

- Understand the overall aims/goals of the project
- How does your work package align with the overall goals
- What dependencies are on you
- How can others in the project help and vice versa

Attend weekly meetings

- Clearly communicate your progress