4 Tips for Managing Communication Among Remote, Multilingual Teams



There are many challenges to maintaining a successful telecommuting workforce, including language and culture.

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Remote teams aren’t going anywhere. A study by IWG reveals that half of employees work from outside the office for half of the week. Also, a FlexJobs annual survey shows that workers across all generations want more flexible jobs. Consequently, teams now come in all shapes and sizes. They can be entirely remote, or a few employees may work in one location while all other team members work remotely across numerous countries.

One thing is sure: The workforce is evolving, and companies must embrace remote employees to stay competitive. However, they must also must consider crucial and challenging factors such as varying digital tools and language and culture differences. Here are four communication tips for managing a distributed, multilingual team.

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1. Create a digital framework.

Having the right digital infrastructure to support a remote or distributed team is vital. However, the same tools or management methods for in-office groups may not translate to the remote space. Therefore, companies should think remote first to ensure digital tools are suitable for both work environments.

Remote teams will only be as successful as the tools available to them. Companies should invest in collaboration tools, such as Slack, Google Docs, Trello and Zoom, to create a robust framework of technology for virtual employees and ensure that in-office teams work seamlessly with their remote counterparts. By arming virtual teams with the right technologies, companies will see results in terms of responsive communication, increased productivity and better team building, regardless of their location.

2. Adopt a common language.

A report from New American Economy found that there is a steadily increasing demand for workers who speak more than one language. Remote, multilingual teams are common and provide a significant advantage since they allow companies to communicate with a larger percentage of the marketplace. However, speaking in more than one language can cause

communication issues. Therefore, companies should choose a primary language. For instance, most international businesses primarily speak English. Communicating in one language prevents miscommunication and avoids creating a non-inclusive environment. It’s best practice to choose the language that everyone can understand and feel comfortable communicating. However, companies should also be sensitive to team members who may not be fluent in the primary language.

Companies should acknowledge any employees having difficulties and ask for their input on how they can help, perhaps by translating company materials for employees or offering optional language courses. Regardless of the language the company chooses to use primarily, everyone on the team must understand each other.

3. Use consistent communication channels.

When part of the team is in the office and others are working remotely, there must be consistent communication. Otherwise, important decisions and discussions may occur without input from the entire team, resulting in confusion and feelings of inequality among remote employees. Companies should make sure that everyone is kept in the loop, receives the same information and participates in decisions related to the project at hand.

It’s a great idea to use communication channels that digitally document discussions so that all team members can access information on their own time and location. Slack and Twist are excellent solutions, since team members have access to a digital paper trail for project updates or expectations.

It’s best to over-communicate rather than under-communicate to ensure the team is running smoothly. Companies may consider holding daily or weekly meetings to resolve any issues so that

the distributed team feels confident using the designated communication channels.

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4. Develop a community and company culture.

Without a workplace water cooler to gather around, remote team members may feel left out at times. But there are numerous ways companies can create a sense of community among employees and reinforce their culture, such as using a video-conferencing tool like Zoom when hosting team meetings so that everyone can see each other and feel more connected. Additionally, a team-messaging platform like Slack is crucial because it allows teammates to show their personality and helps strengthen workplace relationships. When possible, scheduling in-person meetings or retreats once or twice a year can be an excellent way to cement a company's culture.

Managing a distributed, multilingual team that spans multiple countries comes with its own unique set of challenges. However, companies can create a work environment that is just as productive, if not more, than a traditional, in-office team. Furthermore, embracing a remote team of talented employees from different geographies gives today's businesses a competitive edge.

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