



# 5 Tips for Managing a Global Team

*It's a physical and mental test to manage teams of people operating in different locations. **Criticaleye** spoke to a number of experienced executives to gain their tips on how to keep global teams focused and motivated*

Managing a globally dispersed team is a tricky proposition. First and foremost, you have to ensure people are collaborating, sharing knowledge and working together in order to achieve clearly defined objectives. To do this, you will need to be sensitive to other cultures, have a system which accounts for working across different time zones, and be relentless in how you communicate in order to avoid misunderstandings.

It presents a personal challenge because as a global leader you have to deal with

complex operational issues and maintain your energy and enthusiasm despite the long, unsociable hours and endless travelling. *Criticaleye* spoke to a range of executives to get their views on how to overcome these hurdles and successfully lead a team that is spread around the world.

## 1 SET CLEAR TARGETS

The team has to understand what they're aiming for and how they're supposed to get there. **Anne Stevens**, Vice President

for People and Organisation at mining company Rio Tinto Copper, says that "the most important thing is achieving alignment within the team and with the business".

Specific goals need to be set out at the individual level and for the team, with clear roles and accountabilities. **Erica Smart**, Chief Developments Manager at multinational oil and gas company BG Brazil, comments: "Elements of our organisational structure are changing and we're having to ensure everyone ►

understands their new reporting relationships, responsibilities and accountabilities... and how they're contributing to the greater part of the business."

**Ian McCubbin**, SVP for North America, Japan & Global Pharma Supply at GlaxoSmithKline, comments: "We use quite a rigorous personal development and objectives planning process... and share that openly with the team. We try and get people to work together making one of the objectives a joint one, for example with somebody in Japan and somebody in North America, because we want to encourage collaboration."

## 2 BE FLEXIBLE WITH TIME

A common mistake is to operate in such a way that virtual meetings and calls are scheduled to suit 'HQ time', which often results in employees from other offices having to work an unfair number of unsociable hours.

**Anne** says: "I'm not sure if you can ever make it completely fair in a truly global environment because it is virtually impossible to meet everybody's needs, but it is critical that everybody is flexible and adaptable. We alternate calls on a regular basis from southern hemisphere to northern hemisphere so that people do an early or a late stretch on a rotational basis."

According to **Els Vandecandelaere**, Vice President of HR at pharmaceutical company Janssen, if organised in the right way the differences in working hours can be used positively. "Sometimes working in global teams is seen as a hurdle. However I've been in teams where they take advantage of the different time zones, whereby the person on the West

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Coast [of America] would work and then, at the end of their day, pass over to the Asian team, almost like the project follows the sun," she says. "There's a lot of mileage you can get from that."

**Tracy Faulkner**, Vice President of Global Communications for Downstream at Shell, says: "To fairly manage the disruption caused by different time zones, I hold meetings at times that accommodate all, including multiple meetings on the same day when necessary..."

"In addition I have a senior leadership team with responsibility for managing clusters of countries and an extended leadership team in which individuals are responsible for key countries and business units. This structure enables all to contribute and grow, thereby promoting stronger collaboration, delivery and performance."

## 3 UTILISE TECHNOLOGY

Staying in touch with employees is getting easier as technology and connectivity keeps improving.

"We've been experimenting with FaceTime," says **Ian McCubbin**. "I can FaceTime my guy in Japan who can be walking around his factory and he can show me stuff while we're talking."

**Ian Mills**, Group Vice President of the Worldwide Technical Expertise Platform at global service solutions business Sodexo, uses a specialist content management system to share knowledge across the team. "We form groups on a particular subject and then use our collaborative tools which will send out updates if someone has been active. That works pretty well," he says.

It's fundamental to utilise the various channels and applications now available.

**Gary Kildare**, Chief HR Officer at IBM Europe, says: "Communication is tough when your team is spread around the world and in different time zones. One of the practical leadership skills needed today is the ability to communicate successfully whether it's in person, through email, via web or TV link, by phone or conference call."

## 4 BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER

While technology undoubtedly has a significant part to play in facilitating interactions, meeting in person strengthens communication within the team. **Tom McCabe**, Global Leader for HR Performance Improvement at EY, says: "It's important to have face-to-face meetings at the start... then over time you can do more virtually, by phone or even email. There's a huge difference to people that you have met in the flesh compared to those you have only met virtually."

Once these relationships are built you still need to be visiting your team in ►

their various locations in person on a rolling basis. “Face-to-face contact with colleagues operating overseas is a critical element for successful business transformation,” says **Bryan Marcus**, Former Regional Head for Latin America at Volkswagen Financial Services. “Cultural nuances and body language can be missed on video links, and being in the country will provide deeper insights into the local political, economic and business climate.”

It’s important to bring the whole team together too, even if it’s only once or twice a year. “Those sessions are partly for business but they’re more about relationship building and then, once you have that relationship to set the common direction,” says **Ian McCubbin**.

**Bill Payne**, Vice President for Customer and Industry Practice at Concentrix, says having frequent contact across the organisation is paramount: “The issue you’ve got, with an organisation of tens of thousands, is you can’t possibly have regular face-to-face time with every employee. You have to cascade communication over and over again, regularly, with updates, right through the chain. Not forgetting that it is a two-way mechanism and capturing employee feedback is critical.”

## 5 BE CULTURALLY AWARE

Time needs to be taken in order to understand other cultures. **Ian Mills** says: “Never forget the cultural side of how to manage teams, because if you’ve got that wrong, it doesn’t matter what you do with communication... A lot of it comes down to experience. My advice to anyone managing a global team is to do some cultural awareness training.”

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**Anne** says: “It’s around people being open to seeing things from a different perspective. That means recognising and being sensitive to other cultures and the fact that something that might work in Mongolia, for example, may not work in North America.”

According to **Els**, the best approach to developing relationships is by focusing on individuals. She explains: “I always start with the person. While I believe it is important to know the basic dos and don’ts, I don’t over-think the culture too much. I believe there’s much more variability in individual behaviours than there is in national culture, which is an average of everyone in that country.”

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Ultimately, good leadership will always get the best out of a global team. It requires, on a personal level, maintaining your focus no matter how complex working schedules get, engaging employees, establishing a strong sense of purpose and keeping motivation levels high to ensure the right business outcomes are delivered. ■

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## Featuring Commentary From:



**Tracy Faulkner**  
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