Managing Geographically Dispersed Software Teams

Many software development teams are physically spread out over the globe. As projects begin, the project management team may reside in one location while developers may reside in offices located around the country. Add outsourced teams from India, Russia and other parts of the world, and you have a very geographically dispersed team. Geographically dispersed teams present collaborative challenges which can be overcome with a combination of best practices and software.

1. **Set Project Management Guidelines** - Everyone on the team should understand how a project is to be run, what the major phases of the project are, and what deliverables are expected along the way. Once the project management guides are defined, they should be communicated to all team members as to ensure buy in from all stake holders. Here is a project management guidelines template to get you started:

   >> http://www.PragmaticSW.com/Pragmatic/Templates/ProjectMgtGuidelines.rtf

2. **Invest in a Project Management Portal** - To manage all phases of the software development lifecycle, invest in a web-based portal that allows all participants in the project to track all the deliverables, including customer requirements/functional specifications, project plans, detailed designs, and test cases/plans. It should also handle team collaborative needs, like issue/defect management, calendar management and should empower communication with discussion forums. By putting your project on-line, project managers can define the plan, clients can approve them, and team members can input their progress toward assigned tasks. There are a number of web-based products that can provide this level of project management and team collaboration. Here is how Software Planner accomplishes the various phases discussed:

   >> **Project Management**: http://www.PragmaticSW.com/GuidedTours/Default.asp?FileName=ProjectPlans
   >> **Requirements Management**:
       http://www.PragmaticSW.com/GuidedTours/Default.asp?FileName=FunctionalSpecifications
   >> **Test/QA Management:** http://www.PragmaticSW.com/GuidedTours/Default.asp?FileName=TestCases
   >> **Issue/Defect Management:** http://www.PragmaticSW.com/GuidedTours/Default.asp?FileName=Defects
   >> **Calendar Management:** http://www.PragmaticSW.com/GuidedTours/Default.asp?FileName=Calendar
   >> **Discussion Forums:** http://www.PragmaticSW.com/GuidedTours/Default.asp?FileName=DiscussionBoard
   >> **Microsoft Outlook® Synchronization:**
       http://www.PragmaticSW.com/GuidedTours/default.asp?FileName=psOutlooksyncdemo&width=790&height=545

3. **Be Proactive with Email Alerts** - Without rule-based email alerts, you are forced to physically log in and determine what is happening with projects. A better approach is to set up email rules, where you are automatically alerted via email as conditions arise. For example, if a project task is marked urgent, you may want to be notified.   If a task is completed early, you may want to be notified, so that follow-on work can begin earlier than expected.   As issues/defects are resolved, you can invoke the quality team to test the fix. These can all be accomplished via rule-based email alerts. Be sure that your project management portal has these capabilities.

4. **Bring Structure to Incoming Email Alerts** - After your email alerts are set, you may quickly become overwhelmed with the number of emails you receive. A great way to manage this is to use folders within your email system to automatically move emails with certain subject to folders. For example, you could have a folder in your email called "**Project Plan Updates**". Then anytime a email alert is sent to you regarding project plan updates, those can automatically put in a specific folder within your email system. That allows you to review them

at one time (end of the day, periodically during the day, etc).   Most email systems allow you to create folders/subfolders and create rules to automatically move the messages to specific folders based on who sent them, words in the subject of the email, etc. In Microsoft Outlook®, click **Tools / Rules and Alerts** to set this up.

Helpful Templates

Below are some helpful templates to aid you in developing software solutions on-time and on-budget:

- **Project Management Guidelines -** http://www.PragmaticSW.com/Pragmatic/Templates/ProjectMgtGuidelines.rtf
- **Functional Specifications -** http://www.PragmaticSW.com/Pragmatic/Templates/FunctionalSpec.rtf
- **Architectural Overview -** http://www.PragmaticSW.com/Pragmatic/Templates/ArchitectureOverview.rtf
- **Detailed Design** - http://www.PragmaticSW.com/Pragmatic/Templates/DetailedDesign.rtf
- **Strategic Planning Document** - http://www.PragmaticSW.com/Pragmatic/Templates/StrategicPlanning.rtf
- **Test Design** - http://www.PragmaticSW.com/Pragmatic/Templates/TestDesign.rtf
- **Risk Assessment** - http://www.PragmaticSW.com/Pragmatic/Templates/Risk%20Assessment.rtf
- **Weekly Status** - http://www.PragmaticSW.com/Pragmatic/Templates/WeeklyStatusRpt.rtf
- **User Acceptance Test Release Report** - http://www.PragmaticSW.com/Pragmatic/Templates/UATRelease.rtf
- **Post Mortem Report** - http://www.PragmaticSW.com/Pragmatic/Templates/PostMortem.rtf
- **All Templates** - http://www.PragmaticSW.com/Templates.htm
- **Prior Newsletters** - http://www.PragmaticSW.com/Newsletters.htm
- **Software Planner** - http://www.SoftwarePlanner.com/SoftwarePlannerPro.asp
- **Defect Tracker** - http://www.DefectTracker.com
- **Remoteus (Remote Desktop Sharing)** - http://www.PragmaticSW.com/Remoteus.asp

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