



Building Hyper-Productive Globally Distributed QA Teams

WHITEPAPER

The rise of the Internet, the creation of a global fiber-optic network, and the rapid development of long distance communication technologies has made it very easy for people all over the world to work together. With the various platforms to plug and play, collaborate and share knowledge, people are more connected than ever before. These new communication technologies give teams a great advantage by providing many options that didn't exist before, such as allowing employees to work from their homes locally or by working together in teams across the continents. However, even with the array of communication technologies available, there is still several key collaboration challenges that globally distributed software quality assurance team's must overcome.

As more and more companies turn to experienced testing companies to augment their testing, or create their own offshore presence, management is tasked with multiple challenges. The purpose of this whitepaper is to outline six key ingredients for overcoming the challenges of managing a globally distributed team: Geography, Culture, Communication, Leadership, Trust, and Objectives.

Table of contents:

- 3** Geography
- 4** Culture
- 5** Communication
- 6** Leadership
- 7** Trust
- 8** Objectives
- 9** Conclusion

Geography



Geography plays an important role in any outsourcing plan. Time difference is the primary concern and shouldn't be overlooked in favor of lower rates. Team cohesion is important for the success of any project and a time difference of ten hours can stress team leaders who need to maintain communication. Travel may also be a concern with distant teams. One successful technique for building strong relationships is to make onsite visits and meet all the members of the remote team. In many cultures, this gesture wins great trust and helps to establish a feeling of respect and inclusion. Obviously, the closer the vendor or team, the less expensive and easier travel is. Turnover is another important factor when considering where to locate a remote team as every vendor struggles with this. Be sure to ask what their turnover rate is and their strategies for mitigating employee loss. Also, research the region on your own. For example, some small countries have a high saturation of technology companies who compete with local offshore contractor vendors for qualified resources. They generally pay higher and offer more competitive benefits. It's common for a young engineer out of college to work for a contracting agency for a year or two and then move on to a larger, more secure company.

Consider the following when choosing your outsourcing provider:

- 1 What is the time difference? For example, North American teams may want to consider sourcing with Canada, Latin America, or South American. At most there is a maximum four hour time difference.
- 2 If there is a large time difference, have the outsourced team work the same business hours.
- 3 If 24 hour testing is the goal, choose an outsourced location which will provide the difference but pay attention to the hours of contact. Someone from the project team will need to be communication on a regular basis and 2:00 AM meetings don't always go over very well.
- 4 Consider the value of visiting the offshore team and plan accordingly when choosing the location for your vendor.
- 5 Through organization of test artifacts and assignment of work, geography becomes flattened. That is, with an appropriate system through which to manage, assign, verify, and track work, even time zones can become less relevant as the manager/leader can see what's going on all the time.
- 6 An effective test management system assists with resource turnover and adding new team members. By managing well written test cases, it is easier for new team members to test and learn the application.



How Zephyr can solve geographical challenges:

Zephyr's globally accessible Test Management platform allows real-time assignment of tasks to distributed team members, tracks various testing related tasks, in addition to automatically gathering and presenting quality and productivity metrics in powerful, easy-to-understand dashboards. The benefits are immediate; dramatic reduction in long conference calls, quality and productivity status updates, reduced administrative work as well as governance overhead.

Culture

Cultural differences are important to recognize and learn when building a successful team. For example, an American team working with an offshore presence in India will experience a different value system than if working with a team in Costa Rica, which is more westernized. Cultural differences vary from work ethic (workers in some cultures require more direction while others are self starters) to degrees of politeness and protocol during interaction. Time spent learning the culture of your remote team through interaction and meetings will build morale, team spirit, and earn greater respect and willingness to contribute from the remote team.

Regardless of culture, the vendor should provide the level of support required by the customer and it is the vendor's responsibility to manage this. However, this does not negate the fact that we tend to respond naturally from our cultural filters, regardless of process, protocol, or agreements. This is why it is important to maintain an open dialogue around expectations, manage and track communication, and assure objectives are clear.

- 1 Research the culture and learn about work habits, learning styles, leadership respect etc.
- 2 Have a leadership meeting with the outsourcing company to discuss known cultural differences.
- 3 Bring all team members together to discuss each other's cultures (especially helpful if working with teams from more than two countries).



How Zephyr can solve cultural challenges:

A robust test management system contributes to bridging cultural challenges by providing a foundation for clear and concise communication and accurate reporting of productivity metrics. By standardizing on a platform, best testing practices and project workflows can be implemented and enforced, reducing any confusion caused by cultural differences. Other benefits include time savings, reduced conflicts, and faster decision making.

Leadership

Global teams need strong, well defined leadership to succeed. Outsourced team members rely on the knowledge, instruction, and direction of their leader for their success. Depending on team structure, the leader could be a QA Team Lead, Sr.Test Engineer, Manager or other member of the project team. Regardless of team role, the leader of an outsourced team needs to be versed in at least basic leadership principles and be a strong communicator who understands the importance of relationship building.

Successful leadership is the core of a productive team. Measuring the effectiveness of the team and leadership can be challenging. Integrating a strong test management system which tracks, in real-time, the work of the team and reveals the organization of testing artifacts is a positive way to evaluate any team. Metrics such as the number of test cases written and executed measure a tester's productivity regardless of geographical location. Leads and managers can be evaluated by analyzing the structure of the testing approach within the tool as well as the testing results. Having a system that can report across a variety of metrics including test creation, execution, organization, and results provides senior level management a clear view into the daily and weekly activities of their test organization.

A strong leader:

- 1 Supports the team by clearing obstacles (political, technical, etc)
- 2 Maintains a positive attitude – leads by example
- 3 Communicates clearly
- 4 Gains a full understanding of requirements and assure they are being met by the team
- 5 Understands any cultural differences and assures the team is aware of them
- 6 Integrates a powerful test management system which allows transparent evaluation of quality performance, processes, and results



How Zephyr can solve leadership challenges:

Attitude and culture is a reflection of leadership. Building a transparent culture will help build leaders establish and maintain trust. Zephyr makes it easy to share meaningful data that allows teams to see critical paths and timelines. Leaders can manage and organize local and/or global test requirements repositories as well as manage all testing and project user resources, while enforcing best practices. The system allows leaders to support facts with data and analysis, increasing the faith the team will have in its leader and the direction in which they are building the department.

Trust

A certain element of trust is inherent on any team – it needs to be in order to form and be productive. However, trust cannot be assumed nor should it's effect on team morale and productivity be ignored. As trust builds, so to does team effectiveness and ultimately, project success. If trust disintegrates, morale is likely poor, and individuals may have the tendency to ignore team needs in favor of self preservation. Often, trust within a QA team may be high while trust between teams such as QA and Development may suffer. This is a vital relationship on any project and should be managed to avoid unnecessary competitive or combative behavior.

Mistrust within a team is often created through un-met expectations between team members and management. In a fast paced environment, communication may be unclear or non-existent and what a manager might have thought was going to be done might not have been on a tester's list to do. A robust test management system, when used correctly, alleviates this condition and many other possible mis-cues. When work assignments are clear and everyone is using a system that tracks test case entry, execution, etc., management knows exactly what is occurring at any given time in the test process. A test management system with strong reporting capabilities provides management with a view into the process so they can foresee any potential pitfalls. Also, when a manager can view team productivity at a glance, it gives them the ability for immediate, positive feedback to the team or individuals which in turn adds to the building of trust.

Trust takes time to form on any team. Here are a few suggestions to assist in the process:

- 1 Do not promise anything that can't be delivered. If a situation changes, be sure to communicate the change and reset the expectation.
- 2 Always follow through on everything that was promised. Trust begins with leading by example
- 3 Mitigate issues between teams as soon as they arise. If a developer doesn't trust a QA engineer because of a disagreement over a bug, have a quick discussion so both individuals can better understand the reasons behind their emotions. Help them re-set their expectations so trust doesn't become an issue.
- 4 Team building exercises and events bring people closer. With globally distributed teams, exercises where members share something about themselves can be helpful. One tactic is to always begin team meetings with everyone sharing something about themselves that no one else knows about.



How Zephyr can solve trust challenges:

Zephyr helps build trust amongst the team because the system holds all of the vital data in a single location, giving everyone access to key performance metrics. Anyone can see test cases created or executed, any defect filed, changed or closed, any resource added or removed, instantly as changes happen. As long as everyone uses the system, they can trust the data inside it. The application automatically calculates testing metrics and provides interactive reporting, allowing teams to make more informed decisions.

Objectives

As mentioned above, expectations play an important role for successful globally distributed teams and help build trust. An important aspect of clear expectations is having well defined objectives. Without them, the team has no marker – no common goal - against which to measure success or failure. With any project, there are always objectives, or scheduled tasks. For test teams, objectives may be project schedule related in regards to test executions and other testing activities or internal, such as challenging team members to write a certain number of test cases per day. Regardless, it is important for team leadership to set clear and understandable goals which have a defined outcome and end-date. Of equal importance is follow-through. Setting objectives which are then forgotten can set a negative precedent and impact morale and trust in unexpected ways. One way respect and trust is earned occurs when team members realize that leadership follows through.

A robust test management system can assist with testing related objectives. For example, a system which allows the scheduling, assignment, and reporting of test executions provides a good foundation for setting a test completion objective. The manager can follow through by viewing the testing report determining if it has completed or is perhaps delayed and in need of intervention.

Objectives need not be complex but they are an important aspect for managing remote teams:

- 1 Always be sure to set clear objectives and assure they are understood (see Communication above).
- 2 Providing clear objectives allows the individual or team the opportunity to meet the expectation and have success.
- 3 Use non-project objectives, such as professional growth, to build team morale.
- 4 Leadership must always follow-through with objectives.



How Zephyr can solve objective challenges:

Whether it is manual or automated testing, or somewhere in between, Zephyr increases team productivity through automation and reduced data entry. Zephyr reduces the amount of conference calls, prevents the constant flow of status reports, automates pass/fail test reporting, and reduces project kick off time by reusing tests, schedules, reports, and metrics. Testers can easily enter and execute test cases, while managers can quickly reassign senior quality engineers to create additional test cases, manage the testing effort, or test the more complex features of the application helping teams meet their objectives, on time.

Conclusion

Globally distributed QA teams can be challenging to manage. However, with a concerted effort from strong leadership they can be very successful. Choosing a team whose geography makes it easier for communication and work flow is an important first step. Understanding and working with the cultural differences, while often ignored, builds trust within the team and should never be overlooked. Communication is always at the core of any successful relationship and is even more important when team members are geographically separated. Building a strong communication methodology and staying with it will provide the team with a solid foundation for success. Without strong leadership, distributed teams can struggle with direction, trust, and morale. Active and present leadership which provides clearly communicated objectives and expectations are the catalyst for highly functional and trusting teams.

Finally, a robust test management system is necessary to provide team members and leaders a platform across which to collaborate, store test cases, schedule test executions, record results, and report across all functions of the QA process.

ZEPHYR IS ENTERPRISE-READY

- ✓ SaaS and On-Premise Deployments
- ✓ Security at multiple levels
- ✓ Different forms of Authentication
- ✓ Industrial strength Scalability
- ✓ Data Migration from legacy systems
- ✓ Multi-channel Support
- ✓ Regular maintenance and upgrades
- ✓ Documented APIs
- ✓ Flexible Licensing model
- ✓ DR-ready
- ✓ Professional Services and Training



About Zephyr

Zephyr is a leading provider of quality management solutions, powering intelligent DevTestOps for more than 11,000 global customers across 100 countries. Project teams and enterprises of all sizes use Zephyr's products to enable continuous testing throughout their entire software delivery pipeline to release higher quality software, faster. Zephyr is headquartered in San Jose, CA with offices in King of Prussia, PA, Europe and India. For more information, please visit www.getzephyr.com.



Contact Zephyr Today!

sales@getzephyr.com

www.getzephyr.com

+1-510-400-8656