Distributed Agile in the Enterprise and Virtual Spaces

Melinda Stelzer and Bill Opsal
Examples of Team Distribution
Enhancing collaboration in distributed teams
Partial collocation and its pitfalls
Pushing team performance a step beyond
The biggest pain point for distributed teams
Who’s working with virtual teams

Employees of companies with more than 5k employees

Martins, Gilson and Maynard, 2004
Collaboration in distributed teams
Collaboration in distributed teams

Allen Curve

Frequency of Communication vs Distance of Separation

(MIT Press, 1977)

Thomas J Allen, Managing the Flow of Technology
Exercise (part 1)

- Stand up
- Find someone in the room you have never met
- Walk over to that person (do not speak)
- Introduce yourselves to each other and converse for 2 minutes
Exercise (part 2)

- Guess what...
- Find someone else in the room you have never met
- Walk over to that person (do not speak)
- Put on a blindfold
- Introduce yourselves to each other and converse for 2 minutes
What did you notice?
Rapport

“A close and harmonious relationship in which the people or groups concerned understand each other's feelings or ideas and communicate well.”

*Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English*
The 5 Dysfunctions of a Team

- Absence of Trust
- Fear of Conflict
- Lack of Commitment
- Avoidance of Accountability
- Inattention to results

Patrick Lencioni, The Five Dysfunctions of a Team
“When trust goes up, speed goes up and cost goes down”

– Stephen M. R. Covey, Author of The Speed of Trust
Action item -
Everyone check with your team to see if 11:30 build is ok
Paul to check on Demo feasibility
Pitfalls of partial collocation
Participatory Culture

1. Relatively low barriers for engagement
2. Strong support for sharing creations with others
3. Informal mentorship
4. Members believe their contributions matter
5. Care about others’ opinions of self & work

“Not every member must contribute, but all must believe they are free to contribute when ready and that what they contribute will be appropriately valued.”

Henry Jenkins
Level the playing field
ACTION ITEMS
An app for effective meetings.

Keep meetings relevant and focused
Vote on your agenda as a team, then discuss the important stuff first. Track your pace as you go.

Promote action and accountability
Assign action items, then review them at the next meeting.

Keep everything in one place
Access comments from past meetings. Use labels to keep things organized.
Technology Stewardship for Distributed Teams, John David Smith
Distributed Team Collaboration in Organizations: Emerging Tools and Practices, Chapter 10

Photo by Chirstopher Augapfel
Going a step beyond
Beyond the basics
Geography games
Geography games in virtual environments
Geography game in virtual room
More possibilities

- Tribes
- Constellations
- Continuum
- Fish bowl
- Six thinking hats
The biggest pain point for distributed teams
“The goal in structuring teams should be to minimize pain according to levels of distribution.”

Woodward, Surdek and Ganis, A Practical Guide to Distributed Scrum
Best approach: Eliminate or minimize large time zone differences
Collaboration is harder with virtual teams
- Without face to face contact, rapport is harder to establish and maintain
- Use Video

Participation gets stifled by unequal access
- Level the playing field
- Be considerate to remote team members

Team building can be done remotely through shared virtual spaces
- Get creative!

Large timezone differences are painful!
- There is no silver bullet
- Look for ways to collocate as much as possible
Jeff Sutherland and Xebia achieved hyper productivity with distributed teams

- XP
- Half in Utrecht, half in Gurgaon, India
  - time difference: 3.5 hours
- Fully collocated initially (5 sprints)
- Video meetings (Skype)
  - Daily stand-up (15 min)
  - Scrum of Scrums
  - Sprint planning (4 hours)
  - Retrospectives (2 hours)
- Regular travel
- Digital burn-down
- Always-open Skype connection
- Wiki
- Computerized whiteboard (Smart board)
- Shared code repository and build system
- Project newsletter each sprint
