How to Overcome Challenges Working with a Remote Team

We address concerns about working with a remote team as a long-term partner that cares about your business goals, shares risks, and works with you as one team.

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How can I explain something to my co-workers if I don't even see them? Is it possible to address conflict situations via Skype? The fact that you've started reading this post could mean that these concerns about remote development have crossed your mind.

Here at HYS Enterprise, we're convinced that even if you can't shake hands with your teammates every day, you still can work as one team and be on the same page.

This post will allay your fears and concerns regarding working with HYS Enterprise as a nearshore long-term development partner. We're going to show how we set up our workflow to make remote collaboration comfortable for both parties.

Challenge #1: Remote developers can't understand your company culture and product vision

This problem does exist, but only for development companies working on one-time projects. When these companies start collaborating with a new client, they usually do their technical part of the work without understanding your business. That's because they're not part of your team. It's more like a contractor/client relationship.

The solution: shift from client to partner

HYS Enterprise is focused on long-term partnerships, which means that we're ready to become a part of your team. This, in turn, means that we're committed to your ideas, vision, and culture, and we take responsibility for your business goals and value stream.

We assign a dedicated team to each project, and this team not only solves the problem our partner came with but also maintains and develops the project as long as we remain partners. Each team is focused on one project, which is why developers understand the company they're working with and are involved, engaged, and proactive. This kind of partnership gives both parties a feeling of working together as one team, getting developers interested in the company's culture and focused on the company's business goals.

Challenge #2: Difficult to start and hard to be on the same page without meeting in person

Collaborating online is almost as easy as collaborating in person, but it's still not the same. When starting a partnership, you have to explain your whole business to a new partner, set realistic goals, establish workflows, assemble a team, and so on. All these business processes are complex and time-consuming, especially if you don't have an opportunity to conduct an in-person meeting.

The solution: nearshore development with an experienced partner

There are two things you should do when choosing a development company to overcome this challenge.

First of all, you should work with a nearshore company so you can set up all business processes and conduct a workshop in person. Second, you should choose an experienced company that knows your market and industry so they can offer a quick start to development without compromising quality.

HYS Enterprise has an office in Amsterdam so that you can handle all business issues right away with our Dutch-speaking management. Our development facilities are situated in Odessa, and it takes only six hours to get there from the Netherlands. So if you need to conduct a workshop in Odessa, you still can be home for dinner!

Our office in Amsterdam allows us to book a meeting with a new partner within two days, and our ten years of experience allow us to start development within two weeks.

Challenge #3: Remote teams give no commitments, and you can't know whom to trust

It's difficult to choose a remote development team, as you can't get acquainted in person, talk, and understand if a particular team would be great for you.

The only option you have is reading reviews and testimonials to find out what it's like to work with a team. The problem is there are so many paid reviews and fake awards on company websites that it's difficult to find a reliable partner.

The solution: ask for a reference!

We came up with an idea for how to handle this problem. We decided to suggest our potential partners ask our existing long-term partners for feedback. You can talk directly to C-level specialists in your industry and ask all the questions you need to make a final decision.

With so much fake information on the internet, networking is the only way to get to the truth.

Challenge #4: Coordinating your team across time zones

This problem is the most obvious: you just can't work with people from completely different time zones. If your team is going to sleep right when you're waking up, the collaboration will happen with a noticeable delay, and you won't be able to rely on your team members to be available whenever you need them.

The solution: find a team in a neighbouring time zone

The time difference between Ukraine and the Netherlands is only one hour, so there's no problem with scheduling.

Challenge #5: not sure if the team is really working

One of the biggest concerns about remote workers, whether developers or other specialists, is the impossibility of verifying if they're really working.

The solution: Agile methodology and collaboration tools

Working with Agile methodologies allows you to monitor your team's progress without having to micromanage. Here's what our development process looks like:

- We define the high-level scope and general goals of the project. This is the step where we do our best to understand the project vision and company culture.
- We hold a workshop to help us understand what exactly needs to be done, define weak points, and prepare accurate project estimates.
- We create a backlog, which defines the scope of the project in the form of a list of user stories to be developed.
- We use Scrum poker to make and discuss estimates.
- We break user stories into tasks.
- Every day, we hold a 15-minute stand-up meeting during which the development team and product owner discuss the progress.
- At the end of each sprint, we hold a demo to show the product owner what has been done during the sprint. Each sprint lasts two weeks.

With standups, you can always know what each developer has done yesterday and will be doing today. With sprints, you know the scope of work that will be done every two weeks. This way you can follow your project's progress without having to monitor every single step. Developers take a scope of work for the next two weeks and deliver on time no matter what.

Additionally, there are a lot of tools that help teams to follow Agile methodologies and monitor stories and tasks. Jira is a great example. Product owners always have access to Jira so they can see how the project is going.

Summing up

This is how we solve the most difficult remote development challenges at HYS Enterprise. Whether you choose to work with HYS Enterprise or some other company, be sure to:

- choose a long-term partner instead of a one-time company so that your developers will be involved and engaged;
- choose nearshore companies instead of offshore so that you can easily see your partners in person;
- always ask for references from real people and don't believe reviews and awards;
- find a team in a neighbouring time zone so you can collaborate without delay;
- use Agile methodology to monitor the progress of your team.

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