



Managing Offshore Projects - How Do You Align Goals and Values?

Let's look at a scenario I have observed many times. You have been just promoted to the position of project manager of a very important product development effort. You are given a tight deadline and a tight budget. Your senior VP of engineering, who is 3 levels above you in the organization personally met with you and informed you that the company needs to make this deliverable happen within the time frame allotted if not sooner. Otherwise marketing has said to him "competition will eat our lunch!" If that is not bad enough, a significant portion of the next quarter's revenue depends on successful launch of this product. Because of the tight budget, more than half of your team is offshore. How do you make sure that you will meet your goals?

If you had all your team at your location, one of the first things you do is to gather each and everyone on your team, get them to understand what you have just learnt and how important it is to meet the deadline; also of course shipping the product with zero defects is part of your company's value system. You do not need to spell it out. Everyone on your team understands it.

But, you have less than half the team at your location; the bigger part is in Bangalore, Beijing, Belarus or Shanghai. Without getting them fully on board, you have no hope of delivering the product on time. How do you make sure that this happens?

In high-context cultures like India and China, value systems are different and feed back mechanisms are different. Some of the contextual information that you take for granted may be news to some of your team members offshore who may not have had the opportunity to experience how business is conducted in the western world.

As the offshoring industry matures many companies understand the importance of deadlines and western value systems; but it is not universal. Also, recognize that most companies are experiencing high growth rates. Consequence - you cannot be sure that your particular offshore team will be fully on board with your priorities, goals and values.

What can you do? You need to spend time with your team in person. Take time to build relationship with the team. Have them understand project goals, your value systems and what is expected of them. You may also consider bringing some key individuals to the US for a short time so that they can share their experiences with their colleagues once they return.