Distributed Scrum: Why some teams make it work well and others don't.

February 18, 2012
Chihuahua, Mexico
Eiffel Tower, Paris
Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco
Taj Mahal
Shenzhen, China
Terracotta Warriors, Xi’an, China
Gasworks Park, Seattle
Travel
India is the 15th country I’ve visited!

Experience
After consulting engineering I founded an Agile firm. Now I work for SolutionsIQ.

Agile
For almost as long as it’s been called “Agile”, I’ve done XP and then Scrum, to which I’ve added Lean approaches.

Interests
How can a team have synergy and performance?
Learning Objectives

Attendees will be able to:

• Complete an initial web of potential solutions for issues surrounding distributed teams.
• Apply appropriate solutions to ensure team communication is effective across geographical boundaries.
• Apply appropriate solutions to mitigate cultural and language barriers.
• Relate new problems (not covered in the workshop) to existing solutions developed in the workshop.
Face to Face Before Working Remotely

Context
Market or personnel conditions sometimes require that a project be geographically distributed.

Problem
The pull of local organizations is so strong that it can overwhelm common architecture, market, and social aspects of a project.

Solution
Begin a distributed project with a face-to-face meeting for everyone. This meeting should establish project unity, as well as give people a chance to get to know those they work with.

Known Uses
Boeing, 777
ALLDATA Projects: S3000 project, Business Systems, ACME (2 cultures, 2 primary languages)

Every Second Meeting on Your Turf

**Context**
“Time Zone Blues”: Team is distributed across highly separated time zones with no natural overlap of work schedules (my day is your night).

**Problem**
How do we assure a high degree of communication and collaboration—a sense of team and “equality” (sharing any accommodations)?

**Solution**
Rotate meeting times with other locations to share the team’s pain at “uncomfortable” hours, instead of one part always making a concession. Even have every second meeting at a time that suits one of the time zones best.

**Known Uses**
- Bank –DK-India
- GE Energy
- Dell
- SolutionsIQ

*Source: Attendees, “Distributed Scrum: Why some teams make it work well and others don’t”, Agile 2011.*
Time Share

**Context**
“Time Zone Blues”: Team is distributed across highly separated time zones with no natural overlap of work schedules (my day is your night).

**Problem**
How do we assure a high degree of communication and collaboration—a sense of team and “equality” (sharing any accommodations)?

**Solution**
One team starts late and ends late. The other team comes a bit earlier. For example, the team in India can start late to avoid traffic; the US team can start early.

**Known Uses**
GE Energy
Dell
SolutionsIQ

*Source: Attendees, “Distributed Scrum: Why some teams make it work well and others don’t”, Agile 2011.*
Context
A team is geographically separated across multiple locations.

Problem
How do we distribute key roles, such as Product Owner, Scrum Master, Architect, and Technical Leads?

Solution
- Product Owner, Scrum Master, and Architect are co-located.
- Technical leads were placed in each location that had developers.

Known Uses
ALLDATA Projects: S3000, Business Systems, ACME (3 locations)
Exercise 1: Problems

Duration
10 minutes

Group Size

Identify your distributed teams' biggest question.

Acceptance Criteria:
Biggest question is on a sticky note on the central flip chart.
Problems

Did you consider these?:

- Lack of business context for the work that goes to offshore
- Improper Team structure
- Lack of understanding and support for accommodating cultural differences
- No unified/common understanding of process
- Lack of visibility/understanding of overall big picture on business deliverables
Before Working Remotely

Trust

Face to Face
Rotating Guru
Ambassador

Working Remotely
Every Second Meeting Your Turf

Time Zones

Time Share

Yin and Yang
Language & Culture

- Melting Pot
- Lingua Franca
Melting Pot

Context
A team represents different cultures, and has different primary languages.

Problem
How do we break language and cultural barriers?

Solution
Practice important customs team-wide to build relationships:

- Greetings
- Holidays
- How people get heard
- Meeting wrap-ups
- Life events

Known Uses
ALLDATA Projects: S3000 project, Business Systems, ACME (2 cultures, 2 primary languages)
Lingua Franca

Context
A team represents different cultures, and has different primary languages.

Problem
How do we break language and cultural barriers?

Solution
- Compensate for varying levels of ability in the chosen project language
- Have a primary spokesperson with advanced language skills on team with English as a second language
- Ensure there was consistent coaching and training in Agile methodology across teams and locations

Known Uses
ALLDATA: S3000 project, Business Systems (2 cultures, 2 primary languages)
Context
A team is geographically located in different countries, different cities and different time zones.

Problem
How do we ensure a high degree of communication and collaboration?

Solution
Use the following tools and techniques to enable teams to see and hear each other clearly on a regular basis:

• Video conferencing
• Web cams
• Lots of photos
• High quality speaker phones
• Skype
High Communication Modes (cont.)

Known Uses

ALLDATA: S3000 project, Business Systems
(2 countries, 3 cities, 3 time zones)

Gray Hill Solutions, Advanced Traffic Management System
(4 countries, 4 cities, 4 time zones)

Context
A team is geographically located in different countries, different cities and different time zones.

Problem
How do we ensure a high degree of communication and collaboration?

Solution
Meet face-to-face whenever possible (e.g., major milestones).

Known Uses
ALLDATA: S3000 project, Business Systems, ACME (2 countries, 3 cities, 3 time zones)

Shared Community

Context
A team is geographically located in different countries, different cities and different time zones.

Problem
How do we ensure a high degree of communication and collaboration?

Solution
Ease sharing of information:

- Wiki
- Online, centralized backlog management and sprint tracking

Known Uses
ALLDATA: S3000 project, Business Systems, ACME (2 countries, 3 cities, 3 time zones)

Gray Hill Solutions, Advanced Traffic Management System (4 countries, 4 cities, 4 time zones)

Transporter Room

**Context**
A team is geographically located in different countries, different cities and different time zones.

**Problem**
How do we ensure a high degree of communication and collaboration?

**Solution**
Provide dedicated rooms and equipment so team is able to meet on an ad-hoc basis.

**Known Uses**
ALLDATA: S3000 project, Business Systems (2 countries, 3 cities, 3 time zones)

SolutionsIQ, Enterprise Agile Adoption service definition (1 country, 2 cities, 1 time zone)
Exercise 2: Solutions

**Duration**
20 minutes

**Group Size**

![Group Size](image)

Document a pattern.

**Acceptance Criteria:**
Flip chart contains context, problem, solution, and known uses.
Exercise 3: Relationships

Identify uses and relate patterns spatially.

Acceptance Criteria:
• Wall contains pattern arrangement.
• Known uses are on each pattern.
Appendix
Rotating Guru

**Context**
Teams working in distributed locations, often across time zones, countries and cultures.

**Problem**
Even when all team members begin the project together, the understanding and context will diminish over time, which diminishes the level of trust.

**Solution**
Regular visits to each location by a ‘rotating guru’ facilitates collaboration by infusing each distributed team with the context from his home team, while simultaneously gaining context from each location — this creates across-pollinating effect, fosters communication and understanding, and also creates personal trust between the guru and the local team.

**Known Uses**
Major Asian telecommunication equipment provider, cloud computing project (2 cities, 2 countries, 2 time zones)

Ambassador

Context
Teams working in distributed locations, often across time zones, countries and cultures.

Problem
Even when all team members begin the project together, the understanding and context will diminish over time, which diminishes the level of trust.

Solution
An ambassador is a local champion for remote team members, and as such always maintains a trusted relationship with them.

Known Uses
Major Asian telecommunication equipment provider, cloud computing project (2 cities, 2 countries, 2 time zones)

Use With
This complements the Rotating Guru pattern—upon return the rotating guru becomes the ambassador, naturally continuing the trust relationship. Without Rotating Guru, find other methods to bring the local champion close to the remote team members. To help the ambassador’s rapport with remote team members, always use with High Communication Modes and the Remote Pairing patterns.

Context
Teams working in distributed locations, often across time zones, countries and cultures.

Problem
Teams working in a distributed fashion are not able to create the same productivity of a collocated team, produce lower quality work and have reduced morale. Even a team that starts off well will see degradation over time.

Solution
Establish social, cultural and technical connections between the locations of the team at the time the team is formed. There is a three step process – initialize (establish a bond), inspect (monitor for continued unity), and adapt (refresh the bond)

Known Uses

Context
A product must be developed in several different hallways, on different floors of a building, in different buildings or at different locations.

Problem
People avoid communicating with people who work in other buildings, other towns, or overseas.

Solution
The architectural partitioning should reflect the geographic partitioning, and vice versa. Architectural responsibilities should be assigned so decisions can be made (geographically) locally.

Known Uses
Automotive Marketing Company, Lead Manager project

Standards Linking Locations

**Context**
A product must be developed in several different hallways, on different floors of a building, in different buildings or at different locations.

**Problem**
People avoid communicating with people who work in other buildings, other towns, or overseas.

**Solution**
Use standards to express architectural concerns that cross geographic boundaries. The technique may extend to organizational boundaries, which can be as severe as distant geographic location.

**Known Uses**
ALLDATA Projects: S3000 project, ACME (3 cities, 2 countries)

*Source: James Coplien and Neil Harrison, Organizational Patterns of Agile Software Development, 2005.*
Yin and Yang

Context
“Time Zone Blues”: Team is distributed across highly separated time zones with no natural overlap of work schedules (my day is your night).

Problem
How do we assure a high degree of communication and collaboration?

Solution
• Try to pair of group members by function and shift their schedules
• Take advantage of a member’s preferred flex schedule
• Take-home conferencing tools to allow for “off hours” collaboration

Known Uses

Source: Attendees, “Distributed Scrum: Why some teams make it work well and others don’t”, Agile 2011.