



Project Management Best Practices for Aligning Disparate Teams



Table of contents

Challenges of Working in Disparate Teams

Why Align Disparate Teams?

- How to Align Disparate Teams Using Project Management Tools
- The Importance of Project Management Tools

Tips from PMs for Managing Disparate Teams

Best Practices for Members of Disparate Teams

Conclusion



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Bicoastal. Cross department. Multilingual. Stress-inducing for both project managers and employees alike, these words actually fall under a term you might not be familiar with: disparate teams.

The continued transition from in-office to remote or hybrid work models has called employees to become more flexible and creative than ever, turning to platforms and new methodologies to smooth the process.

Challenges of Working in Disparate Teams

Disparate is just another way to say different, dispersed, or distinct. In the working world, this can present in different ways, whether it's remote or virtual teams, teams located in different regions and time zones, or even cross-functional teams within the same location.

It's easy to imagine the complexities a project manager can face in working with teams like these. In addition to their core management functions, challenges such as different currencies, cultural sensitivities, languages, and suchlike make it even more difficult to develop an aligned team.

Why Align Disparate Teams?

According to a [study](#) conducted by the Harvard Business Review, 95 percent of employees, on average, are unaware of or do not understand their company's strategy. Case in point, if marketing's goal is to run campaigns, sales wants to rake in leads, and the product is building a new feature, it can be easy for these teams to not be tuned into the north-star goal (or goals) of the company.

Aligning disparate teams prevents a disconnect between teams and company priorities. The effects of disconnected teams can reach far, whether it's a company's use of time and resources or even the company's culture.



If these teams drift, subcultures could develop that affect judgement in what priorities are deemed important. For example, the finance team could fail to see the need for a social impact program budget, if they are only focused on the conversions from digital marketing efforts in a particular project.

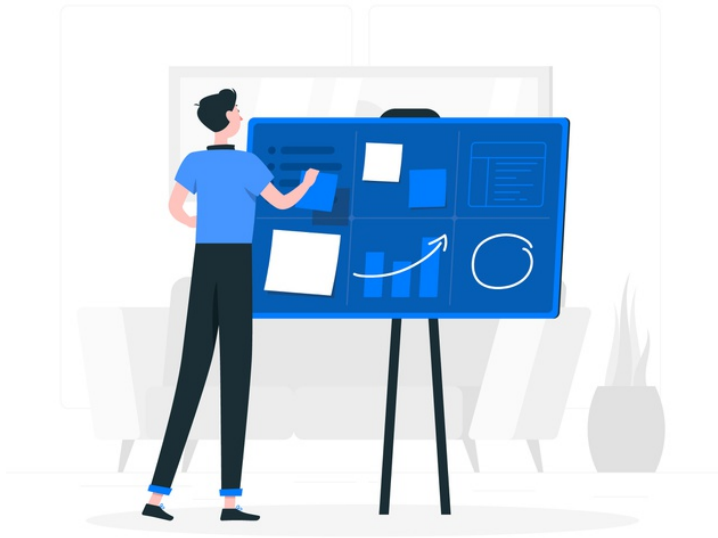
Enter the project manager, who can provide a broader context to unify teams while ensuring consistency across each and every objective and plan.

To learn more about aligning teams, you can have a look at this blueprint for [agile collaboration between teams](#).

How to Align Disparate Teams Using Project Management Tools

Let's start with the basics. In a nutshell, [project management](#) is one of the most important functions in business, as it aims to shape the trajectory of an organization, whether it's reducing expenses, maximizing efficiency or increasing revenue.

The [Project Management Institute \(PMI\)](#) is a well-respected authority in project management best practices and certification. They generally see project management in five steps. Here's a high-level overview.



1. **Initiating:** as with any good project, preparation is a must. This phase is all about determining project scope and creating a foundation. *Scope* describes the specific limits and boundaries for a project, that is what will get accomplished as a part of the project vs. what will *not*.

2. **Planning:** details, please! While they may change, it is crucial to set intentional and clear milestone dates and a final project completion date. It sets the team up for success, as they are all reaching for the same goal. It's also the time for a project manager to choose team members, outline deliverables, and estimate resources.
3. **Execution:** you guessed it, this phase is all about getting stuff done. The team's job here is to make sure the deliverables are realized.
4. **Monitoring/Controlling:** project managers keep an eye on progress and task completion so they can quickly identify when a project has derailed and get it back on track. Accurate tracking and consistent check-ins are crucial here, highlighting the real [need for project management tools](#).
5. **Closing:** this is the end of a given project, in which all activities are wrapped up and the final product is delivered, either internally or externally! It is also a best practice to do an audit or review of what went well, what didn't, and future improvements.

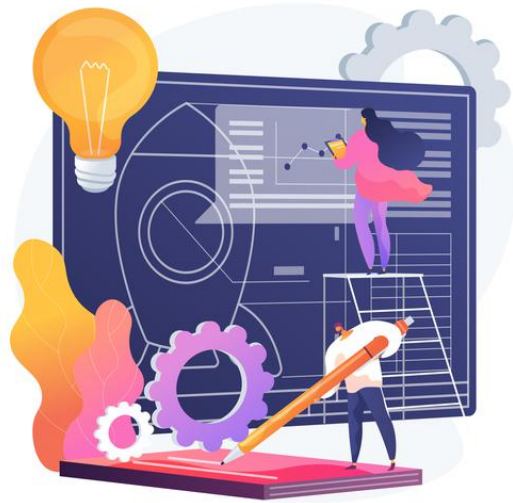
The Importance of Project Management Tools

Maybe you're a seasoned project manager, or maybe your responsibilities are quickly expanding with a growing company. Whatever the case, there is no question that any project manager seeking to realign dispersed teams needs to combine exceptional soft skills and trusted tools in their practice.

As a quick refresh, project managers, or PMs, are the champions who plan, organize and direct the completion of specific projects for an organization. They ensure these projects are on time, on budget, and within scope.

PMs must be flexible, able to include many different details at once (budgets, deadlines, points where teams are getting stuck, etc.) and know how to work with the people needed (team structure, personalities, schedules, and more) .

Naturally, it can be difficult to choose how many tools are needed, and what works best for the PM, and their diverse teams (can one workflow tool really work for an R&D team and a creative writing team?!).



Project management tools are an essential part of any organized and efficient PM’s arsenal: they give leaders quick visibility into everyday work and ensure alignment with standard procedures.

Tips from PMs for Managing Disparate Teams

1. Know your team members’ strengths and use them

Leadership is a fundamental part of being a PM. Effective project management also comes from bringing out the best performance from all project team members, depending on their skills.

By getting to know your team beyond their official job titles, you can tap into their strengths and weaknesses to ensure better time management, project completion, and general team harmony.

2. Pick the perfect project management tool

Every project manager has a unique flavor that they bring to their teams. In order to create or maintain this superpower, it is important to take advantage of the right tools to serve as a store-house for all critical project information.



Having an online and centralized place for your own work, [communicating and collaborating with colleagues](#) bridges many gaps that stifle productivity.

There are many project management tools out there that specialize in one specific aspect of project management, like Gantt charts, budgets, or file sharing. Take into consideration what the needs of the project are if it's something rather simple like one team's ticket management or something that needs more expansion, like a product feature release that spans different teams.

Note: Learn about [TeamWave](#), a project management software for small businesses

3. Meet your new best friend: the Work OS

As the number of disparate teams is on the rise, project management requires the flexibility and expanded capabilities of a Work OS.

A [Work OS](#) is an open platform that allows anyone to create the tools they need to run every aspect of their work. By combining building blocks, like Apps and integrations, teams can build or customize the solutions of their dreams.

Because a Work OS brings all workflows in one place, teams can communicate in real-time about projects within the context of the work, reducing the need for disruptive meetings or long email threads.

As an added bonus, the Work OS framework supports a strong culture of transparency and ownership, because it empowers every team member to manage their part in the process.

Best Practices for Members of Disparate Teams

Is anybody out there...out there...out there? Being a member of a disparate team member doesn't have to be a sentence for isolation and siloed work. Everyone has a hand in fostering a connected and efficient team. Here are a few best practices to help create an engaged and connected team.

1. Schedule check-ins with your manager

Short, routine check-ins with your manager can help you stay in the loop, and create a space to communicate openly and directly. Don't forget the importance of timely performance reviews as well!



2. Choose the right communication channel

Remember that there is a time and place for everything, including your virtual communication tools. Ask yourself what the most appropriate tools are for what you need- do you need a phone call or video meeting, or can you post it in your shared channel?

3. Commit to team systems

If you don't have the option for chatting across cubicles or a lot of face-to-face time with your team, it's paramount to stay aligned with your disparate teams process for submitting, updating, and providing feedback on tasks and deliverables! Keeping everything organized and consistent will reduce headaches- absolutely priceless in the age of excessive screen time- and keep the ball rolling.

Conclusion

Disparate teams on the surface appear to face more challenges than traditional, onsite teams. While their unique challenges should be acknowledged, the enduring truth is that there are several ways for team leaders and members to succeed through considerate project management, the use of flexible tools, and a commitment to culture.

As we covered in this blog post, project managers have a special part to play in aligning or maintaining alignment of disparate teams, but they are also only as successful as the team members who follow through with best work practices. Paired with a Work OS or the right project management platforms, PMs and team members can maintain alignment and get the best results for their disparate teams.