



## Working across time zones



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# Introduction

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In global teams, working across time zones introduces an additional barrier to communication and cooperation, one more source of complexity and potential confusion and delay.

One thing we can be sure about in working across time zones is that they are not going to disappear. So we need to organize the way we work to take account of this.

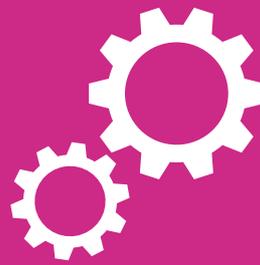




# The Tool

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Principles	Where can we apply this in our work?
1. Be aware	
2. Avoid where you can	
3. It is always local time if you do things locally – decentralize	
4. Take all the time in the world – turn them into a benefit	
5. Be a relay race not a rowing team	
6. Be clear on your accessibility	
7. Share the pain	



# The Process

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## Here are our top practical tips for managing time zones

### 1. Be aware

It is unforgivable in a global team not to be aware of the local time zones of the people you are working with, it shows a fundamental lack of respect for their time and personal lives.

A good way of making time zones visible is to have a world clock on your computer or wall so people don't lose sight of this reality.

This awareness and visibility helps prevent misunderstanding, if someone does not respond quickly to your emails and calls it may be that they are asleep rather than uncooperative.

Agree boundaries up front e.g. when is it OK to call someone late at night?

Be aware of 'informal holidays' e.g. Thanksgiving is officially only two days holiday but people quite often either take additional days or mentally exit outside that.

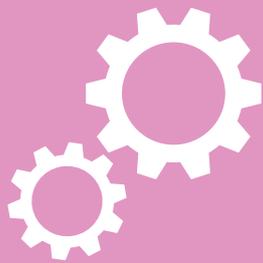
### 2. Avoid them where you can

To minimize the impact of time zones on your team, organize wherever possible at a local or regional level where time zones can be eliminated or minimized.

You can also eliminate time zones through shift working, though this typically puts all of the inconvenience on one party.

Working across time zones can force a team into a greater use of 'asynchronous' communication, which is leaving emails and messages rather than having an interactive discussion. The separation in time and the limited availability of discussion means that there is relatively little opportunity for a 'team' separated by large differences in time zones to really work as a team.

Take the opportunity to concentrate on star group working. Focus your team time on the handover periods and on the sub-teams in the different locations. Where possible make the sub-teams up from members in the same region or in time zones where there is at least some overlap.



## The Process *continued*

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### 3. It's always local time here

The more you can delegate locally, the less you experience time zones.

If there is a critical capability missing in one of your regions you may consider adding resources to make it available – if it is critical, it cannot depend on you always being awake and available.

If you do it locally, the people there are always in the correct time zone.

If it is an emergency that only you have the skills or authority to solve, then you may be stuck with being accessible. On the other hand, this may be a sign that you have not trained your people and are too much of a control freak to delegate responsibility!

### 4. Take all the time in the world

The biggest opportunity for speeding up delivery through time zones is the possibility of continuous 24 hour working. In a global team, you literally have 'all the time in the world'.

If we organize ourselves, we can take advantage of time zones to deliver faster, at lower cost (using lower cost labour sometimes or at least avoiding overtime payments). We can also provide a 24 hour service to customers and colleagues.



## The Process *continued*

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### 5. It's a relay race not a rowing team

It may be more useful to think of 'teams' that operate across major differences in time zones as a relay race rather than a team sport like rowing where everyone is tightly interdependent at all times. There are periods of independence within the region and periods of greater interdependence and possible cooperation in the handover or overlap periods.

This focus on consistent process and communication in handover is critical to teams that work across time zones.

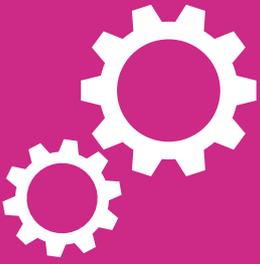
If you must organize worldwide then consider 'sunrise' teams where the work follows the sun and work is handed from one region to another rather than requiring all time zones to communicate at the same time.

The challenge of asynchronous communication is that it can cause delay, if you send an email and get a response you may need to request more information or clarification. If you do this across time zones your second email may need another 24 hours before you get a response. It is better to use telephone or some immediate text tool like instant messenger for handover discussions.

### 6. Win back your home and holiday time

Discuss and agree in your team what norms you expect on accessibility out of normal hours. Try to avoid the temptation to be macho; nobody really likes to be called at home and during holidays – even if it has become accepted.

Some technologies allow you to signal availability – for example Instant Messenger or Skype enable you to show whether you are online and available. These can be useful for teams working across time zones to signal who is available when.



# The Process *continued*

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## 7. Share the pain

Whilst handover across time zones from A to B from B to C and then from C to A again can be arranged without much out-of-hours inconvenience, there is no good time for an audio conference for a global team – someone always suffers.

Many companies take the decision to schedule these conference calls at the time that is convenient to most people, some choose times that are most convenient for the senior people. Some individuals never even consider other time zones and schedule the calls for a time that only suits them.

If you really cannot avoid these calls:

- > Be aware you are doing it and apologise – the worst thing is if you impose on people's free time without even being aware of it.
- > Keep them short.
- > Share the pain – it may be most practical to schedule the calls for the convenience of the many but if occasionally you take a turn rotating the call so it is more convenient for others, they will appreciate it a lot and you will learn how it feels to participate in the middle of the night. It is common for people to challenge the need for such inconvenient meetings once they have felt the pain themselves.

If it is not worth interrupting your evening or weekend you can be sure your colleagues feel the same way.

