



Project
Management
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Digital Insights:

Successful Execution of Mega Project in Different Time Zones

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INTRODUCTION

Petrochemical projects have been successfully completed since the late 19th century. Ranging from the thousands to mega-billions, each one had its own uniqueness with both challenges and successful outcomes. Major companies today have streamlined work processes and the staff needed to complete both small and large projects. This paper points out the execution of a mega project using people from numerous different time zones. The intent is to provide both challenges and successful outcomes in order for the betterment of future similar projects.

BRIEF HISTORY

Once the project approved for investment and pass the gate alternative selection (GAS) gate, it was floated to the market for bidding to commence the conceptual design which include the Pre-FEED/ FEED development. The awarded bidder was Worley which has design offices all over the world. Nonetheless, the main project scope was divided to two main offices.

EXECUTION PLAN

Initially the project work was split between the 2 offices of IK (In-Kingdom) and OOK (Out-of-Kingdom). OOK was further split between Houston and Mumbai. Each office was chosen for its inhouse ability and expertise to complete the different scopes of work. OOK would also include a Saudi Aramco Project Management Team (SAPMT) who could be consulted with for direction and clarity as needed. Having resident experts in Houston also provided for a streamlined approval process and assistance in engaging Saudi Aramco management personnel.



CHALLENGES

HUGE TIME ZONE DIFFERENCE

This very difficult project started out with very difficult working hour differences. With the many entities involved including Saudi Arabia, Houston, London, Chicago, etc., project had to very quickly adapt to challenging circumstances when it came to planning meetings, resolving important issues, turnaround for draft report reviews to name a few.

An example of such difficulties includes meeting deadlines between offices. When Houston had a deadline to provide documents on a Friday, it actually completed this task on a Thursday. The receiving entity (In-Kingdom) working hours ended on Thursday and began on Sunday, where they uploaded the files for the contractor who then first saw the documents on Monday. So even though Houston delivered the documents ahead of schedule, the actual recording date showed them late by 4 days.

Planning everyday meetings also involved knowing the audience and being prepared ahead of time when setting meeting times. Setting an afternoon meeting in Saudi Arabia would mean Houston would have to come in before the office was even open. Other obvious issues include having to wait days in between emails going back and forth between offices as information and data gathering was being matured.



CULTURE INTERFACE

With the different cultures involved on the project there was a need to understand the many differences between them. Something as simple as not knowing how to properly address someone could offend and have negative impacts to the team. Meeting structure, communication platforms and meeting note production could also be impacted if you do not understand your client or counterparts. Some cultures have expectations of prompts meeting start times while others are more casual.

Also, it is important to understand how different cultures interact with themselves as well as other cultural entities. The “One Team” approach is a great attitude but can be diluted if you don’t understand the subtle differences in decision making, running meetings and reporting data. In some cultures, spirited dialogue and aggressive back and forth communications is accepted, whereas in others it may be a sign of disrespect.

PROJECT INTERFACE

This is one of the more challenging issues on mega projects, much less ones working in different time zones. Interfaces can be both physical and managerial. Not knowing them could cause delayed schedules and poor project quality. Working in different time zones only amplified the issues.

In the case of this megaproject, it was important to know the different chains of command and who best to interface with in order to ensure direction was provided to the right people. Not doing this leads to potential ambiguities and loss of communication lines. A specific example of this is when passing information back and forth between Houston and In-Kingdom offices and associated subcontractors. Not going through the right channels led to information being delayed causing schedule delays.



Identifying physical interfaces is also important. As this mega project was split between the different entities, not addressing interfaces leads to confusion and potential rework. A negative example included identified specification differences between ISBL and OSBL areas potentially leading to the project being built out of the required standards.

COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Not having the right communication tools can lead to numerous problems including lack of alignment, unresolved problems, rework and schedule changes. Each office used different communication methods and different ways to produce and check documents. An example of this is Houston using Teams and Bluebeam to conduct meetings and check documents, whereas IK would use Aconex check documents and Saudi Aramco using Zoom and Prima+ for their primary communication tools. Not agreeing on the tools at hand directly impacted meeting coordination and timely document production and checking.

It was also hard to document clear directives and be able to find them later on when important decisions had to be made. With the different resources in place, members from the different offices were forced to learn new methods when communicating back and forth with their counterparts. Not agreeing on the different checking programs also led to misalignment in final reports and quality issues from those reports.



SUCCESS FACTORS

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Establishing clear and consistent communication channels is paramount. Regular updates through a unified platform can mitigate misunderstandings and ensure all team members are aligned on project goals and timelines. Utilizing tools that accommodate all parties, such as shared document repositories and standardized communication protocols, helps maintain coherence.

CULTURAL AWARENESS AND SENSITIVITY

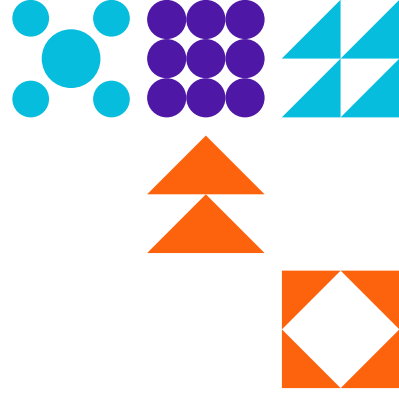
Understanding and respecting cultural differences fosters a collaborative environment. Training sessions on cultural competency can equip team members with the skills to navigate diverse workplace interactions, facilitating smoother communication and collaboration. This awareness enhances team cohesion and minimizes the risk of misinterpretation.

ROBUST PLANNING AND SCHEDULING

A well-defined execution plan that accounts for time zone differences is essential. Implementing a project management tool that allows for real-time updates and visibility into deadlines across different regions can help synchronize efforts. Regularly revisiting and adjusting timelines based on feedback from all offices ensures that the project remains on track.

DECENTRALIZED DECISION-MAKING

Empowering local teams to make decisions can streamline processes and reduce delays caused by time zone differences. Establishing clear guidelines for decision-making and ensuring that local teams have the necessary authority can enhance responsiveness to issues as they arise.

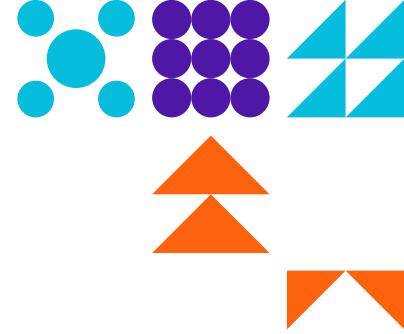


CONTINUOUS MONITORING AND ADAPTATION

Establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor project progress and team performance is crucial. Regular check-ins and assessments allow for early identification of potential issues, enabling the team to adapt strategies as necessary. This proactive approach minimizes disruptions and keeps the project aligned with its objectives.

INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGY

Leveraging technology for project management, communication, and documentation can significantly enhance efficiency. Tools that support collaboration across time zones, such as cloud-based platforms for document sharing and video conferencing, can bridge the gap between geographically dispersed teams.



BRIEF HISTORY

The successful execution of mega projects across different time zones presents unique challenges, but also offers significant opportunities for innovation and efficiency. By prioritizing effective communication, cultural sensitivity, robust planning, decentralized decision-making, continuous monitoring, and the integration of technology, project teams can navigate the complexities of time zone differences.

As demonstrated in this case study, the ability to adapt to varying working hours and cultural dynamics is critical for achieving project goals. Moving forward, organizations embarking on similar projects should consider these success factors as essential components of their execution strategy. Through careful planning and execution, teams can not only overcome the barriers posed by time zones but also harness the diverse perspectives and expertise of a global workforce to drive project success.

In conclusion, the lessons learned from this mega project can serve as a blueprint for future endeavors, paving the way for more efficient and successful project execution on a global scale.