

BY ROBIN ROBINSON



# Effective Global Teams **ARE ALIGNED NOT BUILT**

Trust, understanding, common goals and perceptions, speaking the same language — literally and figuratively — all sound like the ingredients for a successful marriage. The same factors that are inherent in any successful relationship must be present among the members of global cross-functional teams, or the results are just as disastrous: missed deadlines, delayed drugs to market, and rising costs. Issues can arise from every angle: geographical, cultural, and most obvious, language barriers that include differences in meaning, tone, and delivery.

factor in employee performance for organizations, but it sure is now. Team building today is so much more than going on a retreat and rappelling down a cliff. The global environment adds more complexity. In addition to traditional issues, there is a whole other set of global issues that pertain to different nationalities, cultures, and understanding of what it takes to be a team leader or a team player in a global context, as well as the issues generated by distance and virtual teaming.



*"It's virtually impossible to exploit the economies of scale and scope of the transfer of knowledge without investing in global team effectiveness."*

**SHIDEH SEDGH BINA**  
Insigniam Performance

PharmaVOICE asked industry thought leaders to discuss the importance of team building and how having a process in place can equip cross-functional teams with the tools they need to keep projects and goals moving forward.

The following are their pertinent responses culled from our interviews.

### Team Alignment is Critical

*There was a time not so long ago when working virtually or with others that were located across the world was unheard of. But, today that situation is commonplace for even small companies.*

*According to a Best Practices benchmarking field study and report, Best Practices in Building Global Capacity for Corporate Teams, more than one-third of employees surveyed at 56 companies work on a global team, and at 25% of those companies, 60% to 100% of employees*

*work on global teams.*

*Along with the benefits of the talents and skills provided by the diverse members of virtual teams come just as many challenges. In terms of creating effective cross-functional global teams, team rapport building is out — team performance alignment is in.*

**BINA.** INSIGNIAM PERFORMANCE. Twenty years ago globalization was not a

### Coaching is Imperative

*Companies that do not invest in coaching global teams will lose creatively, financially, and competitively. While experts and surveys report that global teams need to have guidance to function efficiently, not all companies are on board with providing all of the necessary tools that will help global teams work effectively. In today's competitive landscape, this is a dangerous practice that can lead to many losses across the board.*

**BINA.** INSIGNIAM PERFORMANCE. These days the emphasis isn't on team building; rather it's about enhancing team performance or team effectiveness. Large, complex organizations are grappling with how to deliver higher levels of performance from individuals, teams, and even the entire enterprise. This is unprecedented in terms of historical trends

### THOUGHT LEADER

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In the global nature of today's business environment, team alignment is critical to success.

and expectations. This need for a higher breakthrough level of performance is critical in new drug development these days, and teams are not going to get to those higher levels by just doing more of the same thing. It requires a whole new mindset and approach to aligning team members.

### Process and Human Nature

According to Best Practices, agreeing on team operating principles and holding regular team improvement and operating reviews are successful global team operating mechanisms for working with other cultures. Cultural awareness training and short-term cross-cultural assignments

also aid global team members working with different cultures. Our experts say human nature cannot be ignored as a huge factor in the effective functioning of a team. If individuals are given the opportunity to learn about the different influences of culture and language, form relationships with each other, and are given a framework to work within, global teams can flourish at a performance level never before experienced.

**BINA.** INSIGNIAM PERFORMANCE. Team success boils down to three fundamental areas: cross-cultural fluency, a very strong and comprehensive face-to-face team launch, and continual touchpoints. Team members cannot be effective in a global environment unless they have a

deep understanding that national differences result in perceiving the world differently. In other words, two people can assess the same situation in two entirely different ways. The team launch should take two to three days, always be done face to face, and the agenda should include hammering out and getting alignment on the project plan, as well as creating a unique team culture that borrows from the best of all of the different cultures in the room. Key pieces of superior performance are perception and intellectual effort, in other words how the team members think. The third important ingredient to success is building in continual touchpoints along the course of the project for the team. ♦

# Improving Team PERFORMANCE

PharmaVOICE asked our thought leaders to describe a situation they have observed or experienced that greatly benefited from global team alignment coaching. These are their stories.



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For more information, visit [insigniam.com](http://insigniam.com).

There was one occasion in which the development of a drug was off schedule and the company was going to miss Wall Street's expectations. With some coaching and alignment, that team not only caught up, but it gained 44 days. The product was being developed multinationally, and there were definite and real cultural issues and misunderstandings. Those misunderstandings were leading

to an "us against them" scenario, and this attitude created a work slow down. We pulled the team together for a three-day, face-to-face meeting, during which we worked on cultural fluency and goal alignment. If you ask me, the cost and time invested in three days to improving performance and facilitating a product delivery worth hundreds of millions of dollars becomes loose change. ♦

### Three key goals to improve global team performance

Team success can be boiled down to three fundamental areas: cross-cultural fluency, a very strong and comprehensive team launch that is done face-to-face, and continual follow up touch points.

#### Cross Cultural Fluency

If one is working in a company that is owned outside of the United States, minimally an employee has to have fluency in the way the world is perceived from those cultural perspectives. This issue of cross-cultural fluency is probably the least tended to — companies send employees for language training, but not necessarily cultural fluency. For example, in Spanish and Japanese, the phraseology of blame is conjugated in a way that cause and effect does not exist. In those languages, if a vase gets broken, the literal

translation is that the vase broke itself. So if something happens within the team, the relationship to blame is very different and serious misunderstandings can arise.

#### Face-to-face Team Launch

The second piece that is extremely important is to have a strong comprehensive face-to-face team launch. The launch should take two to three days, always be done face to face, and the agenda should include not only hammering out and getting alignment on the project plan but creating a unique team culture that borrows from the best of all the different cultures in the room. A key piece of superior performance is accountability and intellectual effort — how the team members think. Cross-cultural fluency becomes a matter of one's ability to be agile in thinking and behavior, for example, finding

common ground on how to communicate and agree on what is accountable behaviors and how trust is earned.

#### Touchpoints

The third important ingredient to success is building in continual touchpoints along the course of the project. These days it is too difficult for people to travel all the time for meetings, so using videoconferencing and a new technology called telepresence allows everyone to be at a virtual table and look each other in the eye. Technology has not completely caught up with the need to work globally, but when it does it will make a huge difference in the effective functioning of a global team.

Source: Shideh Sedgh Bina, Co-founder, Insigniam Performance. For more information, visit [insigniam.com](http://insigniam.com).