



## White Paper 2018-12

### How to Handle Large Complex Projects That Involve Multiple Offices Globally

*Large Complex Projects involve a global contracting strategy. Many of those projects also involve multiple project management and engineering offices that can sometimes be geographically very distant. Specific challenges arise in this configuration that need to be anticipated to allow for project success. In this White Paper we share some of the best practices we have identified for those multiple-office projects.*

#### Typical multiple office setups

In this White Paper we do not count as a project office the local representation of the project consisting of a limited number of individual project engineering and/or Quality Control personnel such as on a supplier or fabrication site.

Project offices are substantial offices consisting of a subset of the project team, leveraging on a locally established organisation, and generally headed by a direct report to the Project Director or overall Project Manager.

Typical multiple project office setups will result from the following:

- Project office quite distant from the construction site,
- Local content requirements imposing need for local team with support from other corporate offices,

For Owners,

- Multiple key contractors, each in turn possibly leveraging several office locations.

For Contractors,

- Multiple offices due to capacity or specialisation reasons,
- Key subcontractor that requires localisation of a subset of the project team.

The dynamics of the multiple office setup will evolve during project progress, typically with the site office taking an increasing importance as engineering and procurement tapers off in other offices.

#### Remote teams must be setup close to key contractor teams

One simple solution that is sometimes contemplated is to plan for a single project office and suppose that contractors will travel as required.

This is not a recommended solution. It is far more effective to have a sub-team close to the key contractor's engineering and procurement teams. The objective being to be available when required for discussions and decisions and generally implement an effective surveillance program. We consider that not creating these sub-teams in key contractor locations is a major delivery risk factor for the project and is a red flag when evaluating the chances of success of the project.

#### Complexity minimizing practices

While developing the contracting strategy and reviewing the proposals from key contractors, it is useful to plan for as few remote sub-teams as possible so as to minimise complexity, which stems from the need of coordinating a large number of contributors.

#### Closely analyse the internal organisation of key contractors to understand where sub-teams may be needed

The plan for location of offices must consider the need

to have several locations for a single contractor depending on its internal organisation and its location of key execution teams. One should not take for granted that the contractor's own local representation is sufficient. The

importance of the scope and interfaces with other work may require dedicated sub-teams at various contractor offices. This must be analysed carefully.

#### Remember that project success in a Complex Project lies in an effective team

As we have repeatedly stressed in our approach to Large Complex Projects, addressing complexity successfully requires a well-functioning, integrated project team. Therefore, the challenge of a multiple office setup is to maintain an effective team throughout project execution. It is even more the case if it involves distant locations and substantial time differences.

#### Invest in initial team formation activities

Team formation is an essential and critical moment at the start of the project. Specific focus and investment must be devoted to this process in the case of multiple-office projects. Team formation activities will typically include:

- Physical co-location of the team during the start-up process. This may involve several weeks of co-location,
- Organisation of relevant workshops to discuss and define as a group the execution strategies and setup principles of the project as well as an internal communication plan,
- Development of personal bonds between key personnel.

**On Large Complex projects, remote offices involving project sub-teams are inevitable. This situation requires planning and investment.**

### ***Invest in communication and collaboration tools***

The topic of appropriate communication and collaboration tools seems self-evident, and many such tools are now available for a limited cost. However, our experience shows that certain issues may require particular attention in project environments:

- Remote access to the ERP and all other systems where approvals are performed in particular when the remote office is not within the corporate internal network,
- Quality of communications with remote sites (nothing is worse than a line that cuts repeatedly and is generally of poor quality); this includes the investment in efficient equipment and tools to ensure proper voice and image recording and transmission,
- Setup of a single repository of project documentation, and a proper document control system that is easily accessible by all project team members (and not only document control specialists),
- Availability of a powerful collaboration tool including:
  - sharing of project and team news on a project intranet,
  - sharing, assigning and notifying actions, and
  - sharing relevant dashboards (virtual Oobeya style),
- Downloading performance for large documents that need to be reviewed or used from a central document repository (on sites with low connectivity, this issue may require the implementation of a local replication solution).

### ***Do not underestimate the power of regular physical presence***

In spite of powerful modern technology, nothing replaces physical presence to get the feel of an office, of the effective operation of a team, and to discuss personal

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issues. Therefore, a comprehensive and voluntary travel program must be setup and budgeted for Project Management Team members. Ideally frequency of visits

in each office are defined and a calendar is setup to make sure that representative of the Project Management Team remains visible to all team members with sufficient frequency. In that respect it is useful to rotate the representatives that visit a particular office so as to offer

multiple sensitivities and viewpoints and avoid the possibility of having a blind spot in a specific office.

### ***Celebrate achievements as widely as possible and make sure people meet each other***

Celebrations of success must occur throughout the entire project team, including all remote sub-teams. It is important to use these opportunities to reinforce the team spirit.

To complement management visits it is also important to make sure that key contributors in disciplines do know each other at least at the lead level, as they will necessarily have to work together on some aspects of the project. Celebrations are good occasions to organise get-together.

### **Conclusion**

On Large Complex projects, remote offices involving project sub-teams are inevitable. In those conditions developing and maintaining an effective project team, condition for project success, is a challenge. Specific efforts must be devoted to team formation and continuous internal communication. This may require some investment in travel, tools and time, and needs to be taken into account when planning for the project.

### **Reference**

White Paper [2013-01 'A Manifesto. Projects are First of All a Human Adventure: Why You Can't Manufacture Projects on a Standardized Assembly Line'](#)



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