

How to Manage IT Projects with External Developers

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Quick answer

Managing IT projects with external developers works best when you treat team extension as a structured process built on clear communication, well-chosen collaboration tools, and intentional onboarding.

Whether you need to implement new features in your software, integrate your systems, or, for instance, create a new digital product for your brand, an extensive development team is an absolute must. Often companies have software engineers but lack specific competencies for a particular project. In other cases, it is simply insufficient to cover the demand, or they are too busy with other responsibilities to take up another task. In all these scenarios, development team extension is a perfect solution that quickly helps companies fill the competencies gap and cope with an extra volume of work. Or rather. It can be perfect if only you approach it in the right way. We have prepared a step-by-step guide that will help you ensure that the final effect will be as good as you expect. Structure your team extension plan with us and avoid the potential issues the hybrid teams often encounter.

Team extension - How does it work?

Often offered next to end-to-end development as one of the two cooperation models by the software houses, team extension allows you to add specialists to your team temporarily. For a while (often a long while), they become an integral part of your internal team, bringing in the essential competencies for a project. Suppose your company operates on its dedicated system where the customer data is stored and wants to replace the traditional database with a distributed ledger to improve safety and transparency. In this case, external blockchain developers could join your team, facilitating this migration to the blockchain. The cooperation could be ongoing if they also take care of its further maintenance, or your team could later take the steer.

How to make the team extension work?

Software team extension can be an astonishingly effective collaboration method if only you stick to a few simple rules. Here are the most essential ones based on our experience. Because they are that simple, companies often ignore them and later end up disappointed. Don't repeat their mistake!

Communicate

To successfully merge your team with the external one, you should, above all, ensure clear communication. A person should keep an eye on the team and always ensure everyone's on the same page regarding project objectives (in projects led in Scrum, that will usually be the Product Owner). The way you establish your communication habits matters, too. Will you expect the remote developers to be available in particular hours to discuss the project matters, or rather leave them full freedom to organize their time? Will you meet daily or instead choose rarer but longer meetings? Decide which variants are the most beneficial for your team and discuss them with external specialists.

Stay connected

The collaborative tools can significantly facilitate the work of such a hybrid team. However, you should ensure they do not add unnecessary complexity and that all the team members are familiar with them. Find the middle ground to make the transition smooth for both sides. Maybe you could skip this project management tool if the external specialists do not know it. Think about when they are joining you and whether it is worth sacrificing time to familiarize them with the new tools. Consider using innovative onboarding techniques - such as tutorials. An effective team onboarding and knowledge transfer system assures that each deployed hire follows the same path, meets the same standards, and becomes a valuable team player. Video tutorials can significantly assist in this situation, providing an easy-to-access medium for information transfer. They are efficient too - update a video once, then new staff can easily access it as part of their training. Don't forget to define the way you will cooperate. Your external developers can collaborate with you online. Still, in many cases, companies expect them to appear in their headquarters from time to time to do a quick catch-up or discuss some project details. Meeting personally can positively impact the dynamics of such a hybrid team and solve some underlying issues.

Start with a workshop

Even if the external developers are joining in for the ongoing project, it may be worth organizing a one or two-day workshop during which you will establish the common goals and examine the requirements. While it will benefit the external developers who can understand the project deeply instead of relying on a brief recap, your internal team should also gain from it. They earn a fresh perspective on the project, which could improve their future performance and contribute to its overall quality. So, it's a win-win! Often the software houses offer the service of organizing discovery workshops, so you could kick off with long-term collaboration on such a note, bringing the external developers and internal specialists together to brainstorm, discuss and discover things together.

References

1. inwedo.com - services / it-outsourcing-team-extension - <https://inwedo.com/services/it-outsourcing-team-extension/>