



1. **How do you address all the tools your company wants to use: Jira, Google Docs, Slack, email, Zoom, Hangout, and now Basecamp ... I think that's it. Basecamp check-ins has become laborious, and we get so many messages that it is time consuming to go through, especially when we are not tagged - even with alerts off.**

Answered 31:04

Mark: This is where the team should have a conversation on working agreements around the tools. Which do they prefer to use? What are primary communication channels? What would be secondary if the primary tools failed? How should team members respond to messages from certain tools so it doesn't become overwhelming?

2. **As a Scrum Master, how can we observe some impediments that are not visible via tools (chat, Jira, etc.), video conferences?**

Answered 33:08

Mark: You might want to conduct 1-1 meetings with team members or hold a lean coffee conversation. Get to know their interests and concerns. Building relationships with the team will help you see impediments before they become serious.

3. **If you can't choose tools and overlapping core hours how do you go about with scrum events covering multiple time zones?**

Answered 36:09

Mark: If you can't get many hours of overlap (6-8 hours), Scrum does not work well in my experience. You might want to consider kanban approaches. If you have less than 4 hours of overlap, you may not be able to use agile approaches, but there are alternatives that still allow you to build iteratively and incrementally. See our book, courses or my newsletter/blog at <https://www.markkilby.com>.

4. **Do you have any realistic approaches to working on a team that is globally distributed? e.g. 3 locations each 6 hours apart. Is this just a lost cause?**

Answered 37:57

Mark: "realistically", you may not be able to use a completely agile approach, but you may be able to use some alternative techniques combined with agile techniques. However, the most "realistic" approach is asking why do you need these particular people on the team? Can you reform teams or subteams or add people in some of the locations so they can have a full team. Also see my prior answer to "choosing tools and overlapping core hours."

5. **Do you know of any actual fun digital retrospective tools for distributed teams? It seems all of them just allude to the fun retro concepts and activities you could and would do together on whiteboards in a room, but all they offer is simply boring renaming of columns.**

Answered 39:39

Mark: In many cases, I've converted "fun retrospective" activities into some sort of online whiteboard. There are several tools available for that such as Google Docs, Miro, and Muro.

6. **Remote collaboration and experiments I've tried when teams have 0 hours that overlap during "normal biz hours" still cause a lot of challenges. Someone is tired, just woke up and doesn't feel comfortable going on video or team members feel they are never free of work, always on call. Babies cry in the background because folks are at home. Tips to incentivize people? I've tried alternating dates / times so no one is ever the one on the line in the middle of the night all the time but still without traction.**

Answered 41:13

Mark: Again, if you have 0 hours of overlap, there is no agile approach that will likely work. We find 4 hours a minimum. See some of my previous answers on hours of overlap for more.

7. **What is the optimal duration for one Retro / Sprint?**

Mark: If you have 6-8 hours of overlap, two weeks works just fine.

8. **How do you remove team impediments that are beyond your control and don't get managerial support?**
Mark: Highly recommend a retrospective using the Circles and Soup exercise (just search for “circles and soup” and the original article is from Futureworks consulting). Your team may have many things “in the soup” and this should prompt conversations on how do they want to react to those impediments? How can they make the impact of those impediments more visible to management?
9. **How do you build the trust to be open about improving the way of working and commit some personal comfort for the sake of team productivity?**
Mark: Find ways for the team to get to know each other. This can be bringing everyone together for 1-2 weeks to charter the team or running online exercises like the “Compass Activity” (see Resources at <https://www.markkilby.com>) or just incorporating the warm ups I mentioned in the webinar.
10. **What do you do for team building when distributed?**
Mark: See my answer previously on “how to improve trust.”
11. **Will you have a list of tools you have used/recommend? Then, I can give the team options.**
Mark: I have used many tools over the years and it all depends on what the team needs and what is provided by the organization. Context makes the difference. This is why I don't recommend specific tools as it may not fit your context.
12. **How do you coach teams on Retrospectives when the model doesn't include an "official" Scrum Master?**
Mark: I currently am coaching 10 teams. I do not have time to do retrospectives for them all. So I've asked people who might like to learn a little facilitation. We usually start with some simple retrospective formats and I dedicate extra time to these folks to help them build their skills.
13. **As my team has gotten bigger (it's too big right now - 14 ppl), there has been a mounting list of “Ways of Working” topic items. I want to address them but I also don't want to interrupt the team's productivity to schedule swarm sessions on this especially because we are all remote and it's tough to have productive conversations. How would you tackle this problem? I submitted a survey for the team members to rank their highest priority topics to work out. What else should I do?**
Mark: I typically recommend 4-6 on a remote team. You might consider splitting into smaller teams to manage the hours of overlap.
14. **In Retrospectives, how much should you focus on the micro (past sprint) vs macro (overall dev/product process) to identify ways to optimize? Should it just be about the last Sprint, or can/should you include more macro points?**
Mark: It depends what problems you are seeing. If the team is having problems completing sprints, that's a micro focus (using your terms). If they are having difficulty delivering on the longer term vision, then a macro focus may be needed and you might want to include your Product Owner in that retrospective.
15. **What would you do with teams distributed in different time zones and the gap between the retro and the planning? Retro last hour of friday would mean that part of the team has a gap waiting for the other part to be available first thing in the morning for the other part. Fit everything together on the same day? Sprint Review, Retro, Planning?**
Mark: I find it easier to end/begin sprints in the middle of a week. Less likely to run into holidays or the problem you describe.
16. **How do you stop people from speaking over each other without using the walkie-talkie phrase "over"?**
Mark: There are a number of ways. You could have them call on each other. You could use the text backchannel to have people queue up responses and go in the order of those responses. Or you could have the person speaking use the backchannel to choose the next response. You need multiple communication channels to collaborate and you typically have them between visual, audio and chat. So use Multiple Open Channels Always (MOCA).
17. **Wait! What is that magical background throne you sit on?**
Mark: That's the virtual background option in Zoom. My teams have a lot of fun picking backgrounds for themselves. Hint: What they pick as a background is another way for them to get to know each other. ;)