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## Global by Design: The Culture Playbook for Distributed Workforces

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Host: Dr. Shari Simpson, Thought Leader, Paylocity

Guest: Ingo Piroth, Chief Revenue Officer, Emapta

[00:00:00] **ANNOUNCER:** You're listening to The HR Mixtape, a podcast for leaders who wanna understand people, strengthen culture, and navigate change with clarity. Today's conversation starts now.

[00:00:16] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** Joining me today is Ingo Piroth, Chief Revenue Officer at Emapta. Ingo focuses on building strong global teams and making offshore talent work as a true extension of the organization. Ingo, thank you so much for jumping on the podcast with me today.

[00:00:36] **INGO PIROTH:** Thank you for having me, Shari. It's a pleasure to be here.

[00:00:39] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** So you have spent time in the global delivery environment for decades, and I'd love to get your perspective on culture really being a driving factor now in that space.

[00:00:54] **INGO PIROTH:** With about 30 years in this space, I've seen all the core elements of success in this area: the technology, the people, the labor rules, and everything else. But at the end of the day, connection, context, and commitment really drive performance. And when you think about what creates successful outsourcing projects, culture is now the key differentiator. The barriers of infrastructure, talent access, and costs have all largely been solved. So if you can get the cultural alignment done well, that's really the strategy for success.

[00:01:36] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** With the complexities that you see in these different environments, especially as I think about organizations that are just kind of dipping their toe into a more global mindset, what do you think are the best ways that you've truly seen integration approached? Because in my experience, it can go a whole bunch of different ways. You can try to absorb them, you can try to mirror the culture, there's a whole bunch of approaches. What have you seen as best practice in that space?

[00:02:05] **INGO PIROTH:** To me, this is at the heart of the issue. And if you can design cultural integration from scratch, that's really going to be what makes the model successful. Think about rituals, recognition, real-time communication. Those all build culture. Whether you're looking at best practices around shared rituals, things like standups, demos, leadership touchpoints, how do you create consistent communication channels that reinforce the why? Culture also means ownership and alignment to your core strategies, something that is often forgotten in the outsourcing world. And if you can celebrate both the global and local cultural moments to drive belonging, that's when culture becomes real. In the Philippines, Christmas starts in September, so embrace that. Teams decorate early, they run gift exchanges, it's a huge cultural moment, and if you don't embrace it, you're missing out. In Colombia, Semana Santa, the Easter week, is deeply meaningful and celebrated differently than it is in the United States. We've seen clients celebrate both a US Thanksgiving shout-out and a Filipino Christmas kickoff, and that really creates shared identity. That's what you're looking for.

[00:03:39] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** It's cool to be able to see those experiences inside your own organization and to share them in that unique way. It's an educational piece too for the rest of the org as they go through that. What are some of the mistakes that you've seen early on that leadership takes that might sabotage this integration and the cultural cohesion we're all hoping for?

[00:04:05] **INGO PIROTH:** One of the biggest mistakes we see people make is not taking a good look at what the blueprint for success looks like. We talked about culture and connectedness already, but if you think about how you structure an outsourced environment, you need agility, you need to standardize the SOPs, and you need to really look at how this team is going to get integrated into your company. We always say at Emapta, if it's done well, those people will walk around with your water bottle, your T-shirt on their back, and they'll show on LinkedIn that their identity is part of your organization. And if you don't set up an environment from the very beginning that incorporates this, you're going to run into trouble. We loosely call this workforce transformation. It's slightly different than outsourcing because what you're really doing is shifting the way you're managing labor and work across different geographies and different types



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of talent entities. If you don't do this deliberately and you're just looking at it as a cost-efficient way to get labor arbitrage benefits, you're going to run into trouble very quickly.

[00:05:23] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** How have you helped leaders understand how to set expectations across these groups? I'm fortunate to work on a team where we have teammates in India and in Canada, and I'm located in the US. Part of our expectation is to be very cognizant when we're scheduling meetings if we are requiring our India counterparts to participate. But beyond that, there are deadlines to follow, best practices for sure, and then there are things you just know don't work. How have you coached people to look at project management and expectation setting in this environment?

[00:06:02] **INGO PIROTH:** Before we get into the mechanics of follow-the-sun work, time zone overlap, and night differentials, I think from a leadership standpoint, the very first thing I'd recommend is treat offshore like it's your core business, not like it's offshore. Visibility, voice, and value really create those true teams. Inclusion is the ultimate performance lever. That means including your offshore teams in core meetings and decision-making, giving them a voice in shaping outcomes, and treating them as part of the organization, not an extension of it. If you take that philosophy to heart, then the mechanics of distributed agile workforce alignment, daily scrums, time zone overlaps, become more intuitive and easier to do. We often have a tendency to approach outsourcing as, well, if they're being paid the night differential, then surely they can make the 6:00 AM call. That is just a recipe for high attrition and employee dissatisfaction. Time zone overlap as opposed to time zone alignment is important. It all depends on function. If you're getting teams aligned on core application development, you only need two or three hours of overlap. It's different when you're talking about customer experience that needs to be on 24/7. If you've got people who are going to be unhappy, the cost of that is very high: high attrition, high turnover, employees who don't feel integrated.

[00:08:06] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** I love the idea of that overlap and the handoff of work. If you're working in a team and you've set clear expectations, you can do that time zone handoff, and the next person in the next time zone picks it up fresh at the beginning of their day. I love that cascade of work.

[00:08:26] **INGO PIROTH:** Time zones are a design challenge, not a barrier. You have to be cognizant of intentional overlap, become a professional at asynchronous communications, use the right tools, and protect personal time to sustain long-term performance. I'm constantly reminding my team in the Philippines not to be available at 2:00 AM just because I'm asking. The best global teams respect time as much as they respect talent, and if you have that philosophy in mind, you're going to have a successful team.

[00:09:08] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** What does recognition look like globally? The reason I ask is that even in any one organization, people want recognition vastly differently, and then you layer on the cultural variances. What have you seen as best practice in the recognition space?

[00:09:28] **INGO PIROTH:** There's both a guiding principle and culturally specific things you have to take into consideration. First, recognition has to feel personal, not procedural. What motivates people in one culture may embarrass people in another. In the Philippines, public recognition in team meetings often lands well. It builds pride in community. But in Latin cultures like Colombia or the Dominican Republic, recognition tied to team contribution and relationship carries more weight than formal awards. We've seen global employee-of-the-month programs fall really flat, but local team shout-outs work brilliantly. Consistency matters more than scale, so frequent, authentic recognition wins every day. And if you tie recognition to impact, not just effort, that should be a guiding principle anyway. At the end of the day, recognition works when it reflects how people want to be valued, not how leaders prefer to give praise.

[00:10:49] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** As I think about my HR counterparts listening to this, when you're going through an acquisition process into a different country you haven't been in before, how do you quickly ramp yourself up on the cultural norms you're going to need for that environment? We can all pick up a book, but are there tips and tricks for really digging into what those norms are?

[00:11:23] **INGO PIROTH:** The number one thing you need is a really good partner that understands the outsourced cultural nuances of the place that is your target area. There are many companies that do that, our own included. You can do as much research as you want, but if you don't really understand labor laws, the way talent is found, and the cultural components of an area, you're not going to figure that out with one or two visits in country.



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[00:12:07] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** Yeah.

[00:12:08] **INGO PIROTH:** That being said, we love hosting leaders to go check it out, to spend some time in market, to meet the people, go out to dinner, and really understand the types of environments you're looking at. Especially in the United States, we often have completely different perceptions of the countries we're outsourcing to, and then when we go, our minds are blown. The economy's different, the people are different, everything is so different, and you don't know until you go and see it. So number one, partner with someone who knows it, do all your research, and then you just have to put in some good old shoe leather and get into market to check it out.

[00:12:53] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** You mentioned building team cohesion early. As you think about that first 30 to 90 days, what does the leadership playbook look like in that first month to really build cohesion fast across teams?

[00:13:08] **INGO PIROTH:** Month one sets the tone for everything that follows. Speed of clarity determines speed of performance. You have to do some upfront work establishing clear roles, workflows, and communication norms immediately. Handing this off as just another project is not going to be successful. You need to ensure full system and information access from the start. Any delays kill momentum. If you hire people and they're sitting around waiting for access or with unresolved compliance issues, all of that needs to be handled from the very beginning. What I'd highly encourage is to come up with ways to create some early wins, because what you're really trying to do is build confidence and trust. These very talented people in other countries are also making a leap of faith working with you as their new de facto employer. Unless you build their confidence that they've made the right choice and celebrate some early wins, you lose that momentum. The first 30 days are not about perfection. They're about momentum and confidence.

[00:14:38] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** That makes a lot of sense. As you've worked with teams, what does succession look like across this global environment? You set the stage early in our conversation to say don't treat them as separate, treat them as one. With that as the background, how do we think about career trajectory and leadership opportunities with this global workforce?

[00:15:05] **INGO PIROTH:** This is where a misconception about outsourcing often comes in. Think about your own career here in the United States: everybody wants to know what's my career path, how am I going to get ahead? Exactly the same is true in any outsourced environment. Growth creates retention, not perks. Global talent wants careers, not just roles. Clear career pathways and role progressions are essential. Visibility into the rest of the organization increases engagement, and we often forget this about our counterparts in the outsourcing world. Creating leadership opportunities within the offshore team drives long-term stability. We've seen analysts in the Philippines grow into team leads managing global workflows within 12 to 18 months. I recently had a client ask me, "Do you think it's going to be weird if our American team reports to the lead of the outsourced organization in the Philippines?" I said, "No, that is an absolutely perfect model." You may have to deal with some salary discrepancy nuances, because you can't avoid that in a lower cost market. But that is an insightful way to look at career growth for offshore talent as a mechanism to both retain and attract the best talent.

[00:16:44] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** What an exciting opportunity for that person to be able to say, "Yeah, I manage teams in another country." How cool is that?

[00:16:51] **INGO PIROTH:** Absolutely. We currently have more than 12,000 global talent on staff, and about 20 of our customers are doing this. We're very active in encouraging people about how to do this right so you drive down costs, improve retention, and attract the best talent. This just fills me with joy.

[00:17:21] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** I love that. You mentioned cost, which gives me my next question around metrics. How do you know via metrics that your integration is going well?

[00:17:34] **INGO PIROTH:** Retention, results, and responsiveness really show you if you're successful. What gets measured gets managed. There are three key areas that signal your integration is working. First, retention and engagement scores. The very first question when you outsource is what is the attrition rate? If you're going to have high turnover, how do you create institutional knowledge and keep momentum going? We measure those obsessively. Second, productivity parity and quality consistency. When you outsource, you might expect to see a drop in quality. The opposite is true. The work ethic, the



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dedication, and the quality we're seeing from outsourced operations is exceptional, and measuring that signals the integration is working. Third, communication responsiveness and collaboration patterns. These are metrics that tell a consistent story across people, performance, and outcomes, without getting into the weeds about widgets and KPIs. In a call center, you'll measure SLAs around responsiveness and minutes on the call. That won't tell you whether the integration is working. What tells you is how the people are actually working together.

[00:19:37] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** Such good metrics to actually look at that you can evaluate for that integration. As we wrap up, what's one of the biggest myths that you hear in boardrooms about this type of work that you want our audience to know isn't reality?

[00:19:58] **INGO PIROTH:** The biggest myth about offshoring is that it equals lower value or quality. Nothing could be further from the truth. We've seen unbelievable quality coming out of outsourced teams. In terms of desire, work ethic, and pride of identity with your core brand, we're seeing some of the most dedicated employees in the offshoring world, because geography doesn't define capability. The offshore talent is usually equally or more capable across multiple domains, and the limitation is how the team is structured, not the talent itself. Companies that treat offshore as strategic outperform those that don't. Try it out. You'll be astonished at the quality of people you'll be working with.

[00:21:06] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** Geography doesn't define capability. That is a quote worth saving. Ingo, this was a great conversation. Thanks for taking a few minutes to chat with me on the podcast.

[00:21:19] **INGO PIROTH:** No problem at all, Shari. It's been a real pleasure. Thank you for having me.

[00:21:28] **ANNOUNCER:** Thanks for tuning in to The HR Mixtape. Like, share, review, and subscribe to support the show and help more people discover these conversations. Until next time, keep the conversation going.