URL: https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/centralized-versus-distributed-teams

Jocelyn Goldfein, director of engineering at Facebook, responds to an audience question on why her company chooses to centralize its engineering teams in just a few locations, with the majority of the workforce being located in Silicon Valley. Goldfein explains the reasons for this approach, including the idea that "software development is a team sport" that requires working closely in collaborative teams.

Transcript

What's Facebook's - the question is what's Facebook's approach to regional development centers, we are very Silicon Valley centric especially in contrast to other companies.. This is true.. We have only three other engineering offices outside of the Bay area.. One in Seattle, one in New York and one in London.. The New York and London ones are pretty new.. And we're looking to grow those - all four of those sites, but I would definitely say that we would rather have a few large sites than many small sites.. It is very clear to us that working across long distances, geographic distances is just hard because making software is fundamentally a team sport.. There is no software of significance ever that has been built by a single person acting alone.. Facebook itself, like Mark enlisted his roommates within a week, right? And so - and this is one of the areas in which college will kind of mislead you actually because you're taking a lot of these yes classes, where it's actually cheating to get help from somebody else and then in real life what we expect you to do is get help from other people.. And it's really hard to collaborate with someone who you can't look in the eye, to resolve a dispute or a - just a miscommunication..

And it is really, really hard to communicate with someone who is in a distant time zone from you where you're overlapping hours of awakeness are not that many.. So Seattle was our first remote office and we deliberately - it's the training wheels of remote offices, alright? It's like the exact same time zone and it's like a two hour flight, so you can get up there for a day trip if you have to and that's - our strategy is basically to go slow, to travel a lot between offices, to throw lots of money at all the parts you can throw money at, like having really good VC equipment that's readily available.. But we just want to see it be super successful first in the places we are at.. What we don't ever want to do is have an office in a region for the sake of saving money.. We will just never hire an engineer - like that just won't happen.. So, the regions, I mean, Seattle, New York and London are obviously not low cost locations.. We are there so we can bring more talent to the company.. But I think we are aware that like working in - at a distance from headquarters is hard and we need to do more to support the folks in those offices...