

BT adapts to a new phase of globalisation

Collaborative solutions from SMART playing pivotal role



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Bola Oshisanwo, Director, Agile Development Centre

Globalisation has redefined the modern economy; it offers growth and opportunity but also demands a new way of working. As a company that serves customers in more than 170 countries, BT recognises that it must improve business agility to generate efficiencies and improve operational and environmental performance. To achieve this,

BT Innovate & Design (BTID) has embarked on a Global Development Centre (GDC) Programme that embeds collaborative solutions from SMART Technologies.

Central to BT’s growth ambitions is BTID - responsible for building all the systems and networks used by BT. These systems are built by end to end project teams that have adopted the agile development methodology. Collectively these teams are responsible for development that enables BT to drive towards its strategic goal of being Number One for Customer Service.

The adoption of agile development practices requires a new type of environment, especially as the teams are geographically dispersed across the UK, India, China, USA and Central Europe. BTID realised that it needed a new environment where both layout and technology supports agile delivery.

“The idea was influenced by information from Google, Gartner Group and Microsoft as well as research into understanding how people actually collaborate. We also researched interactive environments that are conducive to dynamic and positive decision-making. We knew some form of telepresence was required and evaluated a range of technologies and software, all of which supported some of our vision,” says Bola Oshisanwo, Director, Agile Development Centre. “Our developers tend to work in groups around a white board and research revealed that they want to interact with and see what their colleagues are writing on the boards, and not their faces. At

that point we knew our solution must support this way of working whilst connecting teams that are spread across multiple locations.”

BT’s research culminated in the complete redesign of the agile development teams’ working environment and included the adoption of SMART Technologies’ collaborative solution. It started with a proof of concept at Adastral Park, BT’s centre for development in Ipswich. The initial pilot project was conceived and implemented within five months, involving two hundred people and seventeen SMART Board™ interactive whiteboards at Adastral Park, one whiteboard each in Belfast and Glasgow and two whiteboards in India. End to end development teams were selected to occupy the new space. Desks are arranged so that people on chairs can easily slide between them, monitors sit on swivel arms and each team of twelve people has its own SMART Board, a circular meeting table, IP video and audio conferencing capabilities.

“People were wowed by the SMART Boards initially but quickly snapped back into old habits,” says Bola. “It became clear that this was because they didn’t understand the capability of the technology, so we designed a training package which was delivered to a critical mass of people over a short period of time. The training was based on observing what people did day to day. The training focused on helping them to incorporate the SMART Boards and collaborative working into their day to day work.”

The proof of concept subsequently proved so successful that BTID



has set up the GDC Programme to manage the deployment of the solution to five Agile Development Centres worldwide. The next stage of the project has deployed the solution to Dallas, Adastral Park, BTID's headquarters in London and to Pune in India, enabling a further 700 people to work effectively.

Bola comments: "The successful delivery of a customer solution relies upon the effective collaboration between people across BT. Our new SMART collaboration capability enables people to meet, irrespective of where they are in the world and interact as if they were in the same room. This has had a massive impact on travel costs and reduced our carbon footprint significantly. Last week I trained 34 people in India from Adastral Park and yesterday

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In another instance, by using the new SMART collaboration tools, a group of five developers were able to resolve a problem within two days rather than travel to India for five days. This has clear implications for people satisfaction, staff retention and work life balance, as well as reducing travel costs and carbon footprint.

"Ultimately we're using this technology to change and transform the culture of the company," explains Alan Bateman the Director for Next Generation Engineering "What started as a project at Adastral Park has led to plans for a network of five global development centres

worldwide, all adopting the same blueprint and specifically designed to accelerate and improve the quality of our development." He concludes: "BT is dedicated to helping customers thrive in a changing world. We understand the power of technology to achieve this and believe SMART has a pivotal role to play."

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