Agile Byte: Case Study No.1

Sourcing the right IT for FCO's overseas crisis management

The requirement

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office required a new solution for co-ordinating its response to overseas crises. For any crisis situation, FCO needed to capture up to date information about affected British Nationals quickly and efficiently through a number of channels.

The main challenges were:

1. **Critical lead times**. The solution needed to be in place within 5 months of project start up to meet Ministerial commitments around introduction of the new approach.
2. **New Government IT policy**. A procurement and sourcing strategy based on Cabinet Office directives, digital-by-default and working closely with Government Digital Services (GDS); these meant looking at alternatives to FCO's incumbent suppliers.
3. **Avoiding supplier lock in.** FCO needed to retain control over the ownership (including **Intellectual Property Rights**) and future development of the business critical new solution. Overseas crises require a flexible response which must be matched in any supporting system.

The solution

Working closely with FCO business stakeholders, Agile Byte staff developed a set of high-level requirements and a defined **minimum viable product** for the solution. **A supplier event** was held to get an IT market sector view on how best to proceed. The feedback concluded FCO should build their own specific solution following an Agile delivery approach, procuring such services through the G Cloud Framework.

Agile Byte staff then worked closely with Cabinet Office, FCO business and procurement professionals to identify likely candidates from available **G Cloud offerings** to provide on-site agile development services. We developed catalogue search criteria based on agile development service capabilities which enabled a **long list** of potential suppliers to be quickly down selected to a **short list** of five. A further **supplier event** ensured that FCO's evaluation approach and requirements, including retention of **Intellectual Property Rights,** were clearly

conveyed. After submission of proposals, the **final evaluation** process culminated in prospective suppliers presenting to FCO.

On-boarding of the successful agile development services supplier then followed, again facilitated by Agile Byte. We needed to ensure that the momentum of the procurement was not lost during development start-up activities and that the new supplier team were quickly inducted and ready to work co-located with FCO's business team.

In parallel, Agile Byte Staff set about the procurement of an IaaS Cloud service and SMS gateway service to support the system being developed and deployed. The goal was to have these services procured, integrated and ready for go live. Procuring a cloud based hosting platform was another 'first' for an FCO system.

Agile Byte staff were then tasked with managing and assuring the integrated Crisis Hub Service from scratch with the new agile development supplier using the set of high-level requirements and minimum viable product (MVP).

The results

The fully accredited Crisis Hub solution went live on 18th July 2013 - around **four months** after the agile supplier was on-boarded. **The solution was used successfully in a crisis almost immediately**. Agile Byte have managed and assured the subsequent development of the system to realise the full potential of the system. This has included new functional capabilities in the areas of automatic prioritisation and alerting, mapping and reporting - all in real-time.

Eighteen months in and with the G Cloud Framework restricting the length of a service contract to a maximum of 2 years, Agile Byte were tasked by FCO to re-procure the agile development team. This was made possible by FCO retention of IPR and provided an opportunity to see if the market place had a better, more cost effective supplier. It did, and Agile Byte concluded another successful procurement by off boarding the old supplier and on boarding a new one within a 3 month window. Agile Byte also recommended the IaaS Cloud provider was re-procured in order to improve release and deployment efficiencies and to maximise cost benefits through a utility-based cost model. Transition to this service has now successfully completed and is already delivering real cost savings.

With well **over twenty real overseas crises having been supported by the Crisis Hub Service during the past 18 months** the FCO have really embraced the G Cloud approach and agile delivery process. But one thing the FCO and Agile Byte have learnt is there is not a single 'right' approach Agile within a government environment. The key is the need to leverage the flexibility of the method to deliver the intended benefits – **quick quality delivery**.

Other areas of HMG are now starting to look at how they can follow a similar approach or re-use the functional capabilities FCO already have in place. **For further information**

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