

TRANSITIONING TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE

The Requirement

The Carphone Warehouse has always employed a strong project management ethos across its software and systems development, resulting in the consistent delivery of high quality solutions. However, the company were interested in implementing a Rapid Development Methodology in this area to increase speed to market on their work without compromising quality or control over resources. Having considered a number of options they elected to implement an Agile process and selected IndigoBlue to support its development and introduction.

IndigoBlue Approach

“IndigoBlue were the only providers who offered to take a coaching and mentoring role to help us realise our objectives,” explains James Barker, systems analyst manager at the Carphone Warehouse. “The other vendors we considered were more focused on putting in their own people and following a set process.”

This difference in approach is integral to the success of Carphone Warehouse in improving its approach to projects. While ‘parachuting’ in experts may have a positive effect, it can be short term and dependent on those consultants deploying their particular skills. With IndigoBlue, the emphasis has always been on Carphone Warehouse discovering the right processes for its own purposes. In this way everyone involved in a project – the business and systems analysts, systems architects and programmers – have been able to develop the required skills and work together in a framework that can deliver success in the future, long after IndigoBlue’s involvement.

To support this work, IndigoBlue introduced their own Agile framework ADAPT to Carphone Warehouse in June 2006 through a number of workshops. The consultants then remained on hand overseeing the first

four week pilot project. During this time IndigoBlue’s role was to educate, guide and inform the project teams as they worked together. The project’s objective was to introduce a more effective linkage between manufacturers and store franchises for refund and returns purposes. But while this outcome was important, the project also had another objective: to introduce the use of Agile: “The first project was intended to help define our processes,” says James Barker, “IndigoBlue gave us an overview through their workshops and they then led us through the initial steps.”

IndigoBlue’s guidance was not aimed at introducing a single inflexible methodology, indeed, ADAPT works as a framework for projects rather than a definitive way of doing things. As the pilot project progressed, the consultants could highlight diverse techniques involved in ADAPT that were relevant to the task in hand. “They weren’t preaching any single method,” notes Barker, “They simply brought the best bits from the ADAPT framework that worked in our particular context.”

With the first pilot successfully completed, a second, more ambitious pilot was instigated to test the new approach in the context of a larger project with a bigger team. With that step accomplished, the company are now looking at implementing the approach across Carphone Warehouse’s technology driven projects and the Information Systems department. “There is still some work to be done over defining roles and responsibilities,” says James Barker, “But we hope to be using ADAPT methods a lot more in the future.”

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CARPHONE WAREHOUSE



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Benefits Realised

Integral to the success of the approach has been the shortening of space between a project's requirements and the outcomes delivered. Quality Assurance has been involved in the project from the beginning, enabling objectives to be clearly identified and problems to be raised and solved far sooner than in the conventional development cycle.

Using ADAPT, the project team can move from solution requirements to development rapidly, even starting to deliver the most important business functionality of a system without having to wait for the entire set of requirements to be analysed in detail. This way of working has required a change in mindset among analysts and programmers at Carphone Warehouse, and while proving a challenge the bringing together of previously diverse stakeholders in a project has delivered clear benefits for the company. "There's now a very clear understanding of business objectives across the whole team," says James Barker, "We have increased co-ownership of projects and the approach is very good for gaining customer involvement."

With the first major projects using ADAPT already underway, IndigoBlue's unique approach to introducing an Agile methodology has enabled the Carphone Warehouse to gain from the techniques while learning how it should be implemented. The workshop and on-going support - delivered through regular 'stand-up' briefings over the course of the project - has meant those involved at Carphone Warehouse have only ever experienced ADAPT as a practical tool rather than a theory which must be understood before it can deliver value.

As definitions for roles and responsibilities under ADAPT are made more concrete by James Barker and his colleagues, IndigoBlue's work is set to deliver further returns for the organisation through increased efficiencies and a continuing emphasis on delivering high quality solutions to the company, its partners, clients and customers.

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