# Case Study:  Building Effective Teams

BUSINESS INTELLECTS

# The Task

A real-time mobile OS company was growing in India and there were plans in place to make India as a R&D site with equal capability as their London office which was this UK based company's head-quarters. The decision was made to start a new group for a particular domain area and concentrate first on one of the three sub areas of the domain. This domain skill set was slightly difficult to get and the competition pays big for the same skills. The group was supposed to grow to 25 to 30 in 6-8 months, and certain competency areas were selected to be delivered out of India, mostly on the protocol and security side. The other groups that existed were extended teams of their UK R&D site, either doing support and maintenance work or involved together with development work – nothing in India was owned and executed and this was the first time such an opportunity has come by.

# The Path

The strategic plan and the operating plan were first developed, presented and approved by the necessary stakeholders with aggressive timelines. This included a proposal of ownership items from India and a detailed transition plan to achieve expertise in those areas. A proper recruitment plan was drawn and a full time and couple of contractual recruiters were tasked with finding the right profiles after a detailed description of the potential work to be done was documented. We had incentive plans for reaching recruitment targets and also finalized on a budget not to exceed – there were a few weekend hiring drives at various metros in India doing a talent drive to get the best resource available and some fresher recruitment drives in local and nearby colleges. Internally the team was seeded by three engineers with protocol knowledge of a different domain and who were with the company for quite some time. Senior level detailed technical interviews were arranged with the UK counterparts during the evenings, mostly through Skype and video conference. A Monthly operational review of status was presented and reviewed and corrections and feedback were incorporated on the plan – all the plans and presentations were posted on a centralized site for review anytime by anyone.

It was decided to recruit two good senior folks (10 + years) with both software coding and domain experience and to build the team around them and a certified project manager. We also had detailed travel plans for a few key individuals to the UK. Due to budget constraints, a pyramid structure of engineers were essential for long term sustenance and growth of the individuals, and short term assignments to the UK only were allowed (< 2- 3 weeks).

# *The Outcome*

The team of 29 people was formed in 9 months(a month + late), and slowly as the team expanded we started by working with UK counterparts on customer driven projects with an exit plan for them to allow India to own the same in 8 months' time. It was a difficult first year for everyone who had to extend their time and learning skills to achieve according to plans and the team celebrated each and every success story however small or big they were to boost their motivation and confidence. The architect and the senior lead were able to talk the same language as the customers and gained their confidence, and the project manager was able to track both the transition and operating plan, as well as the project execution plan together and be able to present the status on the weekly basis to the stakeholders. The freshers were excited because they knew they were doing high end work at the very start of their career and had the appetite to learn quickly. The senior manager was able to motivate the team with his high energy and

good coaching and mentoring skills and all other groups seem to look at this new group with envy but with pride. The senior leadership were very supportive, and since they were learning news domains, they also wanted to do it differently and piloted Agile and other methodologies in execution and had a centralized document and code storage area with secure check in and check out procedures, as this was critical due to the UK engineers also being part of the execution.

 After the success of the team, the senior leadership decided to transfer the other two sub domains over the next 9 months period and this had a lot of knowledge transition activities included that weighed in on the time of work for the engineers as they worked with Russia, Vancouver and London – since couple of these sites were slated to closed due to cost cutting decisions taken, the transition was not easy – the Indian team had to do a lot of work by themselves in acquiring the knowledge and be able to influence the customers as well at the same time. Eventually the team became 50 member strong with full ownership and delivery responsibility for that domain.  A good job, well done.

*Side note* – this company was acquired by a well-known mobile company and the only team that remained intact in that new organization was this team that was built and that was very productive.


# *Few Hiccups*

- It was not easy recruiting the talent at the price we wanted them and since the budget was fixed, we had to pay a little bit more for couple of senior folks and had to reduce some experience in others talents recruited later due to budget constraints – it was important that we made every effort to hire and retain the best talent and keep them for 3+ years as the whole team was built around 3-4 individuals.
- Knowledge transitions especially from the sites that were closing were not an easy one – they thought we are taking their jobs and there was no reason for them to make another site successful at their cost.  It looks a lot of convincing and good sponsorship from the senior management to get things ironed out.
- Since there was a customer release twice a year, it was critical that the team prioritized features needed and its development and also to interact with customers on a regular basis for any change management or integration issues, and  at the same time learning the domain that we were taking up. It was uphill a task but slowly learning from our mistakes we were able to showcase we can be independent, help accountable and can run the show ourselves.