



# ***A customer-friendly government organization: mission impossible?***

VDAB Customer eXperience Transformation  
by AE

## Do you remember the last time you came into contact with a government agency? How did it feel...?

**Public services generally have a bad reputation when it comes to customer experience.** Citizens are a 'customer' of public services whether they want to or not, so customer experience is not a top priority.

VDAB is one of the first Belgian public service providers to acknowledge this AND do something about it. By using an innovative approach and a clear governance, endorsed by upper management, it is transforming itself into a customer-centric organisation. There is still a lot of work to be done (and quite frankly, is a customer experience journey ever completed?), but the fact is they have made a first major step is something to be proud of.

**A true transformation of an entire organisation takes a long time to complete**, but we can already see the positive impact on the customer. One project focused on VDAB's training service: we saw a **10% increase in customer satisfaction** after the process redesign.

We not only focused on customer experience but also aimed to improve the **internal capability to deliver this experience**, now and in the future. We trained 60 VDAB employees, of which close to 80% of them rated the CX training 8/10 or higher. This is an important step to a broader customer experience mindset. The results are reflected in the positive feedback about the training.

The impact of these changes is reflected in these quotes from trainees:

"The training clarified why CX is needed and how it adds value to my own work in the organization."

"Focusing on the needs of the client can make discussions between business and IT much more efficient."

## Trust the process

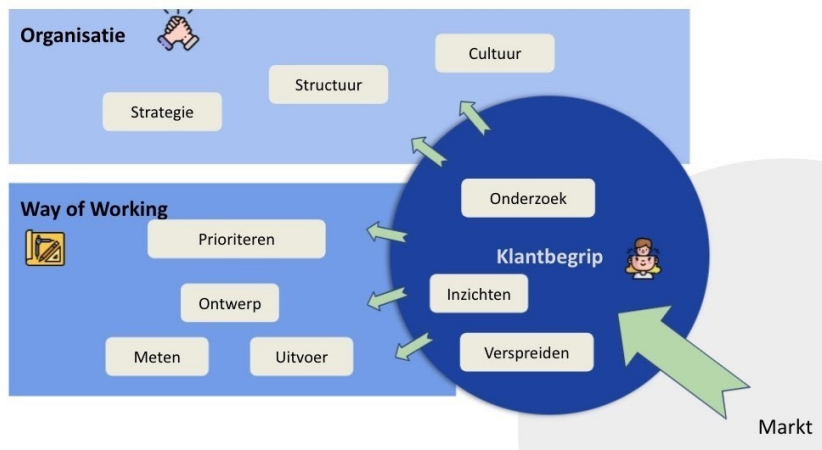
### How did AE's team tackle this challenge?

As a Flemish government agency, VDAB aims to help citizens create sustainable career paths by means of mediation and education, with a mission to create sustainable employment in Flanders. In 2019, the newly appointed CEO of VDAB, Wim Adriaens, decided to emphasize the need to further enhance the experiences that all VDAB customers and Flemish citizens encounter with the organisation.

VDAB believed it could achieve its goals faster by putting more focus on creating class-leading customer experiences. If employers and employees could find each other better through faster and smoother customer journeys, this would result in a more effective and accelerated process of job seekers becoming employees.

That's why we introduced a new set of values. "Klanten Voorop" ("Customers First") was the primary value. This was a clear 'why', but the organisation had difficulties finding out the 'how' and 'what' to this 'why'. VDAB already has teams that work towards gaining this customer data. However, those teams operate separately from each other. The challenge of defining and implementing the 'how' and the 'what' was taken on by a mixed project team consisting of VDAB staff members and AE consultants.

After an initial assessment phase, the project team concluded that an organisation-wide focus on the customer could only be achieved by a Customer eXperience Transformation of the organisation. This transformation took place in three domains:



Each of the domains was analyzed and a set of deliverables was created to ensure (a) a clear improvement in customer experience and (b) the internal capability to deliver this experience, now and in the future.

## In detail

### Field report from the CX trenches

The team first focused on the “Organisation” domain to create an environment and structure that was ready to implement the changes necessary for the transformation. Later on, the focus shifted towards the “Way of working” and “Customer understanding” domains.

#### An overview of the deliverables in each domain:

##### Organisation

- Define a vision & strategy for customer experience at VDAB
- Set up a CX cell: an internal network consisting of VDAB customer insights experts with the aim to support all new initiatives with customer impact
- Improve culture: CX coaching and training of the VDAB service design department and other key players

##### Way of working

- a. Defined a methodology and service design process to design, deliver and measure customer experiences in projects
- b. Set up a governance model, based on the Programme Management Office process, to ensure consistency in customer understanding in projects
- c. Play an advisory role to the organisation's Programme Management Office, to help prioritize projects with the customer in mind

##### Customer understanding

- d. Maintain a knowledge base with customer insights, to easily reuse past research in future projects
- e. Organize knowledge sharing sessions with customer insights, to inspire business
- f. Lead inspiring research initiatives

We believe that for a successful transformation, a thorough understanding of the context and showing value early are key. These beliefs guided the project team's approach to deliver the transformation.

Firstly, we made sure to master the reality of VDAB's way-of-working, on a strategic, tactical and operational level.

### **Mapping, envisioning and creating sustainable change**

We worked closely with VDAB stakeholders to map the AS IS-situation. Moreover, getting a feeling for the organization's customer culture was also important. We did this by investing time in interviews and observation. In this phase, we also assessed the VDAB's CX maturity.

Subsequently, we envisioned change. We defined a new approach together with internal stakeholders of all levels, based on observations, experience and stakeholders who were on board. Additionally, we conducted a pilot project to determine which service design methods, tools and techniques would be a great fit for VDAB.

Then, we scaled up to make sure that the transformation would be a sustainable one. We moved up the value chain from operational to strategic level and extrapolated change initiatives to the entire organization and its processes, in co-creation with internal stakeholders. We implemented those changes in the organization with a balanced approach of empathy and determination. Here, the project team took a pragmatic approach by moving forward step by step. This way, the changes in organizational structure and on the operational level were gradually implemented, which allowed the customer experience mindset in the organisation to expand.

### Innovative techniques

We employed innovative techniques during the transformation. Most notably, we created a **CX maturity model**, tailor-made for the VDAB organization, based on a compilation of different maturity models. Furthermore, we researched best practices of other government organizations with customer-centric culture, like UK Gov, the American government and Flemish government reports. However, we didn't limit ourselves to **industry best-practices** alone: we also were inspired by outside-in best practices from other industries.

Armed with the knowledge that a CX-centered mindset is quickly becoming a very valuable asset these days, we **upskilled employees** through CX-training and CX-coaching making them as self-sufficient as possible. We created **employee buy-in** to rethink the way-of-working of the CX-cell by working closely together. This involved having a clear vision while also leaving enough room for stakeholders to contribute during several workshops. We integrated the service design method and other CX-techniques as much as possible into the VDAB-methodologies.

### Ready to tackle your Service Design challenges?

**To know how we are measuring outcome and not only output of this project and discuss your CX needs: get in touch with us at [inspire@ae.be](mailto:inspire@ae.be).**