# VDAB Customer eXperience Transformation by AE
# A customer-friendly government organization, impossible? The VDAB-case

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## Achievement summary
## What was delivered and what was the result?

As a Flemish government agency, VDAB is responsible for helping citizens create sustainable career paths by means of mediation and education, in order 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 knew that it could attain its goals better and faster if there would be more focus on delivering customers a better experience; 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 introduced a new set of values was introduced for the organisation; of which "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 that gaining 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 employees and external 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:

1. Organisation
2. Way of working
3. Customer understanding

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.

## Achievement details
## Please explain the details of the initiative and the approach that was taken.

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.

A short description of each of the deliverables can be found below:

### 1. Organisation

A. A vision/strategy for customer experience at VDAB
B. CX cell: a network consisting of experts in VDAB customer insights, created to support all new initiatives with customer impact
C. Culture improvement: CX coaching and training of the VDAB service design department and other key players

### 2. Way of working

A. A defined methodology and service design process to design, deliver and measure customer experiences in projects
B. A governance model, based on the Programme Management Office process, to ensure consistency in customer understanding in projects
C. An advisory role to the organisation's Programme Management Office, to help prioritize projects with the customer in mind

### 3. Customer understanding

A. Knowledge base with customer insights, to easily reuse past research in future projects
B. Knowledge sharing sessions with customer insights, to inspire business
C. Inspiring research initiatives

We believe that for a successful transformation, a thorough understanding of the context and showing value early on in the track is key. Accordingly, the project team's approach to delivering the transformation is described below.

Firstly, we made sure to master the reality of VDAB's way of working, from strategic over tactical to the operational level. We worked closely with VDAB stakeholders to map the AS IS-situation. Moreover, getting a feeling about the organization's culture regarding its customers 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 and experience and convinced stakeholders. Additionally, we conducted a pilot project to find out which service design methods, tools and techniques can work in the organization.

Eventually, we scaled up and made sure that the transformation would sustain. We lifted the initiative to a higher level by moving from operational to strategic level. We elaborated on the changes to the entire organization and its processes in co-creation with internal stakeholders. We implemented those changes in the organization with the right level of empathy and determination. It was a deliberate choice made by the project team to aim for moving steps forward and gradually implement the changes both structurally and operational to expand the customer experience mindset in the organisation.

We employed innovative techniques during the transformation. For instance, the creation of a CX maturity model for the VDAB organisation. This was based on a compilation of different maturity models, but tailored to the needs of VDAB. Further, we found best practices of other government organizations with customer-centric culture, like UK Gov, the American government and studies of the Flemish government. We didn't limit ourselves to looking at the same industry: we also were inspired by outside-in best practices from other industries. Besides, we upskilled employees to make them as self-sufficient as possible, by CX-training and CX-coaching since a CX-mind becomes a very valuable asset these days. We involved the employees in designing the way-of-working of the CX-cell by co-creation to guarantee buy-in: having a clear vision, leaving enough room for stakeholders to contribute during several workshops. Furthermore, we integrated the service design method and other CX techniques as much as possible into the methodology of VDAB. Additionally, we are measuring the outcome, not just the output of the project, by getting customer feedback.

## Key achievement
## Why do you think this initiative should receive the award?

Remember the last time you came into contact with a government agency? How did it feel?

Public services generally have a bad reputation if it comes to customer experience. Citizens are mostly obliged to be a customer of public services, so the 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 clear governance with top management endorsement, it is transforming itself into a customer-centric organisation. There is still a lot of work to be done (and quite frankly, it will probably never be finished), but this first major step is something to be proud of. It could serve as an example for other public service providers and ignite a wildfire of customer centricity in governments.

A true transformation of an entire organisation takes a long time to complete, but we can already see the positive impact on the customer. In one particular project concerning the training service that is delivered by VDAB, we measured customer satisfaction before process redesign and afterwards in a pilot. We saw a 10% increase in satisfaction and gathered some valuable feedback as well. We expect to see a further overall increase in customer satisfaction during the following period.

Next to the improvement in customer experience, we also wanted 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 more customer experience mindset and approach. It's reflected in the comments about the training.

To conclude, the change in the organisation is reflected in the feedback from trainees:

"The training clarified why CX is needed and how valuable it can be for your own work in the organization."

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

VDAB and AE have a sustainable relationship. That's why we are submitting this case together.