



ae

**AE NEWS**  
CSR AT AE | AE FINANCIAL SERVICES  
INDUSTRIE 4.0 | AE AND FLUXYS | DATA-ANALYTICS  
BRUSSELS AIRPORT COMPANY | SESVANDERHAVE



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

04 - 05	Interview Bruno Denys
06 - 07	CSR at AE
08 - 09	Innovation blog - Seth & Dunn
10 - 11	AE Financial Services - Frictionlessly digital
12 - 15	Why the energy transition in Belgium is proving so difficult
16 - 17	Market trends: Why we're focussing on the human talent sector
18 - 19	Industry 4.0
20 - 23	AE and Fluxys: Partners in Crime
24 - 25	Thank you AE!
26 - 27	Data-analytics: d-sides goes beyond the buzz
28 - 31	Brussels Airport company
32 - 35	Our AE colleagues take the floor!
36 - 37	SESVanderHave
38 - 39	10 questions for quality challenger Joeri Wijns
40 - 41	Technovate & Feel the Vibe
42 - 43	20 years AE



AE - Architects for Business & ICT  
Interleuvenlaan 27b  
3001 Heverlee

+32 (0)16 39 30 60  
www.ae.be  
inspire@ae.be  
#20jaarAE

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## Introduction

For 20 years, working together works better. With that catchphrase we are celebrating our anniversary this year. Twenty inspiring years of co-creation, not only with our customers but also with each other. Joining forces in creating qualitative products and services and ultimately becoming a stronger organisation: with and for each other.

In this edition of our AE Magazine you will meet some of our customers. On the one hand, we have had the privilege to call some of them our partner for a long time. On the other hand, we dive deep in recent & new relationships. In order to continue our accomplishments in the upcoming decades, we will also look forward into future trends in our current sectors and shine a light on a few new initiatives.

At AE, we are extremely proud of our hardworking and dedicated people. For that reason, we pay special attention to festivities such as our 20th anniversary. To emphasize this, we will highlight some colleagues and representative AE initiatives. Why? Because it is our people that make AE the Great Place to Work it is today. Together we build a pleasant workplace every day.

We wish you a lot of reading pleasure with this XXL edition and we are looking forward to your own AE memories on social media using the hashtag **#20JAARAE**.

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# INTERVIEW BRUNO DENYS

**20 years of AE means 20 years of Bruno Denys. And so we couldn't publish this AE Magazine without an interview. Today we look back on the journey Bruno and AE have taken together and look towards the future.**

**Hello Bruno, 20 years ago you founded your own company. Was this a childhood dream come true?**

A childhood dream might be a bit strong, but entrepreneurship has always been a part of me. When I was 12 I sold 'bangers' in the playground. A few years later, around my 16th, I sold the sheep we bred at home. And at university I started organising ski trips. So I've always been an entrepreneurial type.

I'm triggered by the search for added value. When I see an opportunity to create value, it's hard not to take it.

**Now we're 20 years on. Looking back on the road you've taken, what are you most proud of?**

There are many things I'm proud of, but if I must choose one, then I have to say our junior training programme we launched back in 2006. It's not easy placing new graduates with clients. Which is why we started thinking about the most efficient way to train our juniors and ensure they are ready to tackle the client's problems. It's what gave rise to the annual starters class; a training period of three weeks during which our juniors enjoy lots of training and workshops by fellow AE'ers. This way they undergo huge growth in a short period of time and close bonds are formed between peers. Thanks to this approach a lot of colleagues have immediately applied the AE culture and knowledge in their first project, which really strengthens homogeneity.

**AE was crowned a Great Place to Work for the 9th year running. I can imagine that's another source of pride?**

I'm absolutely proud of that, but the Great Place to Work award is just the cherry on the cake. The survey results are a valuable tool that gives us insight into what works and what doesn't, so that within AE we can define our action points for the coming year. Only this way can we continue to grow and create a pleasant working environment for every AE'er.

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**Undoubtedly the role of CEO is occasionally accompanied by stress. Yet you seem to be calm personified. What's your secret?**

The best way to reduce your own stress is to start recognising the causes of your stress. If you can put those causes into perspective or remove them, you'll have a lot less stress already. An important aspect here is ensuring you're not alone. I have a lot of colleagues within AE who understand my shorthand and can take over quickly and effortlessly. It brings peace of mind on the one hand, and allows me to focus on new things on the other hand. For me it's a constant that I try to pass the things I do today on to my direct employees tomorrow, so I can go explore on a next level. This way everyone learns quickly, which is an important factor in feeling good at work.

**Were we to ask an AE'er to describe you, what would you hope to hear?**

I hope my colleagues see me as healthily ambitious in particular, but also as a pleasant person who has helped them grow. That, if they hadn't met me or hadn't gotten to know AE, they would not have been able to realise x, y or z. That would be a really nice compliment.

**How do you think AE distinguishes itself from the competition?**

It's the combination of competence, eagerness to learn, unpretentiousness and action orientation that makes AE'ers so special. Thinking and doing. Helping each other. Growing faster. One of our clients put it into words rather nicely a few years ago: an AE'er doesn't blindly execute your orders. If something's not right, they'll analyse the situation and propose a better approach. They really act as though they were a co-owner of the company.

**It's official: in 2020 you will be passing the torch to a new General Manager. What made you decide to step down?**

That decision was made because, besides my duties at AE, I am also involved with a number of other projects. As a result, there's not enough time for the task of General Manager. I really see it as an opportunity to have someone with complementary management skills strengthen the Executive Team. Adding a role model from whom we can all learn. This way I hope to make extra time available for new projects within AE. Take 'kuori' for example. We're looking into how we can expand this and I enjoy being a part of this thought process.

**Handing over the role of General Manager means letting go. How will you handle it?**

The process has already begun and I feel it's going rather well. I rarely take part in work meetings any more. I see that things are handled well and that the complementarity within the Executive Team is being done justice. The phased approach means we avoid 'throwing the baby out with the bath water'. This way I can confidently prepare for my next steps inside and outside AE. And don't worry, you'll be seeing enough of me around AE!

**On behalf of the whole of AE, we would like to thank you for the past 20 years and wish you a happy birthday!**



# CSR at ae

## CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY!

CSR is not just a buzzword for AE. It's something we're truly passionate about. Since 2012, our committed CSR team have been launching dozens of initiatives each year to help us contribute to three CSR dimensions close to our hearts, namely **people, planet & charity**.

The endless dedication and enthusiasm of our staff have been the driving forces behind these initiatives from the get-go – just check out what we've been up to in the past year!



## PEOPLE

We strive to make employees happy at work

We provide free yearly flu vaccines for all AE team members

We offer fresh fruit & Fairtrade products at our HQ

A "start to run responsibly" workshop prepared the AE team for a sporting year

All employees get free eye exams carried out by DOAH during our "Traeningdays"

We're proud of our very own sports teams, including the AE running club, the AE indoor soccer team, the AE volleyball team, ...

We installed an AED device and trained everyone to use it

Everyone's welcome to work out in the AE Fitness room

We organized a workshop to improve our posture at our desks and while driving

We supported each other all the way through "Tournée Minérale"

Our relaxation room (featuring ping pong & kicker table, surround system and hammocks) invites everyone to blow off some steam

## PLANET

We're conscious about the environment and our ecological footprint

AE sorts all plastics, metal, cardboard and residual waste

We use biodegradable cardboard cups in the coffee rooms

Instead of garbage bins at each desk, we offer centralized waste collection points throughout the office

AE houses a collection point for empty batteries and old mobile phones

We support Meat-Free Days

We encourage our employees to look for alternative mobility solutions

We applaud carpooling whenever there's an event

We organize clean-up campaigns among colleagues to reduce litter

Each year, AE participates in "Dikketruendag" (Wear-a-sweater-to-work Day)

We collected bottle caps to help finance guide dogs

We took part in "CurieuzeNeuzen" to map the air quality around our office

## CHARITY

We support ecological & humanitarian initiatives

On our Halloween Evening, we collected € 500 for Foster Care Flanders

25 AE team members donated their birthday gift to a charity, good for a total revenue of € 2,500

We make our headquarters available to the police of Leuven as a training location for their drug dogs

By taking part in the Warmathon, the AE team raised € 230 for Foster Care Flanders and Villa Clementina

Our cocktail & mocktail campaign at Feel the Vibe brought in € 312 for Watafrik, and € 219 for Traffic Victims

Transplantoux received a donation of € 566 thanks to 35 AE team members who ran the Antwerp 10 Miles

We organized a charity fair in collaboration with 7 charities, reeling in a total of € 3,000 in donations

We designed and sold an AE running shirt for € 1,628 in favor of Transplantoux

We make an annual contribution to Dertiende Ster and Let us Change



## WHAT WILL 2019 BRING?

We asked Ayla, one of our CSR team members:

"Next to our traditional initiatives, 2019 will see us focus even more on sports themes. Last year we organized various running events which proved a huge success. Naturally, though, our AE team loves to practice other sports as well, and we want to give members every possibility to do so in 2019. We've already taken the first steps, for example by launching a digital space where colleagues can invite each other to work out together. In this way we hope to motivate our people to exercise more on the one hand, and on the other hand to strengthen the bond between them. In a next step, we will devise a process where AE team members can apply for sports budgets as well as practical support."





# SHAKE THAT TREE!

## 6 REASONS TO INNOVATE

**"WE'RE ON TOP OF OUR GAME! OUR COMPANY IS DOING EXTREMELY WELL, SO THERE'S NO REASON FOR US TO INNOVATE. WHY SHOULD WE CHANGE OUR BUSINESS WHEN EVERYTHING'S WORKING JUST FINE AS IT IS?"**

A legitimate question indeed... Why develop and implement new ideas if you're still working hard to implement the ones you previously agreed on? And why even bother to take the risk of starting something new when there's nothing wrong with the status quo? Preoccupied with the hustle and bustle of their daily operations, many companies, unsurprisingly, struggle with innovation. While pretty much every manager considers it a cool buzzword to throw into the conversation,

### 1 INNOVATION IS THE ENGINE OF ORGANIC GROWTH

It's every manager's worst nightmare: one day you're experiencing tremendous growth, the next your success rate is declining for no obvious reason. Most managers respond to this type of situation by stopping to explore alternative growth paths within the company, and instead acquire smaller companies which are in the middle of a growth spurt. Too often, however, the (already considerable) Legacy problem only becomes bigger as a result. To make matters worse, trying to create synergy between the two organizations to cut costs and thus remain profitable, is usually to no avail. Sooner or later, even the toughest acquirer must look for a way to kickstart organic growth.

What's more, betting on takeovers often leads to increased operational complexity, and workers becoming overwhelmed by the bigger picture. Focusing too much on cost savings (a logical consequence in this situation) and too little on organic growth also has a rather perverse effect, as it tends to chase away the company's most innovative people. Thus, organic growth becomes even more difficult to achieve.

only a handful are brave enough to actually take the needed risks. Most managers prefer to stick with the old, because it is what they know best. Admittedly, it's not hard to think of reasons not to innovate. "We're too busy." "Now is not the right time. We have a reorganization coming up." "We don't need to innovate because we already have plenty of customers." "We've got to meet this deadline first." "There's simply not enough time to tackle innovation projects on top of our schedule as it is." But no matter how many reasons you can think of ... the fact remains that everything around us is continuously changing. So, the real question is: how prepared are you to take a leap and become a pioneer? Are you a dinosaur waiting for extinction? Or do you prefer to stay ahead of the competition by making innovation your strongest weapon?

Meanwhile, all kinds of research show that innovation can be a real engine of growth. Developing and applying new ideas and technologies enables companies to generate a larger output with the same (or even less) input. Increased productivity naturally means more profit and, hence, the ability to invest bigger sums. The more innovative a company, the better its chances of gaining a larger market share.

### 2 DISTINGUISH YOURSELF

Smooth and solid operations no longer suffice. To continue to appeal to your customers, being extraordinary is a must. Knowing the needs of your target audience through and through is key, as is meeting them with the necessary creativity and flexibility. This requires consistently staying ahead of the game, and organizing yourself to be able to do so. In other words: capture feedback from your customers day in and day out, focus more on early adopters and ensure your product development continues to move in the right direction. Fun to know: many internal struggles will evaporate once you let your customer's voice be heard. It goes to show that the best advice can be free!

### 3 IF YOU DON'T INNOVATE, SOMEONE ELSE WILL

In addition to the competition you know, there's always some other rival lurking around the corner. Due to the rise of the internet, it might even be a student who just started their own business at home, using nothing but a laptop to suck your entire business dry before you even realize it. After all, all it takes to turn an idea into a viable enterprise these days is creativity and a determined mindset. If you really want to stay ahead of the competition, timely and continuous innovation is indispensable.

### 4 STANDING STILL IS GOING BACKWARDS

There's no progress without change. We live in Darwinian times where the golden rule is to adapt or die trying. Holding on to past methods simply because they've always worked, is risky – not to mention short-sighted. Things tend to keep working until they no longer work. Starting to adjust your ways when that moment arrives is too little too late.

Moreover, changes occur at a record pace nowadays. Peer to peer economy, robotics, home automation, IoT, nano technology, microservices, cloud computing, autonomous vehicles, renewable energy, the automation of knowledge work, genomics, virtual and augmented reality, big data, drones, ... Great things are happening and they're happening fast, so you can surely expect a tsunami or two no matter the sector you're in.

Sticking to old ways and staying in your comfort zone is, then, not your best strategy. No matter how good your products or services may be, nobody works in a vacuum. If nothing changes and nobody dares question the status quo, you will never be able to excel beyond past results.

Smart companies know that innovation, if structured and rightfully approached, only improves their chances of financial growth. They also organize their innovation processes in such a way that their chances of success only increase with each day.

### 5 CUSTOMERS CHANGE, MARKETS EVAPORATE

Do you still buy CDs? Or still use a fax machine? Play video tapes every week? Or DVDs, perhaps? Probably not ...

Things change and so do people. Traditions are lovely, but being stubborn about them doesn't do any business any good. Increasingly aware of this important fact, more and more entrepreneurs and true innovators are placing their bets on thorough innovation. Having a clear innovation strategy in mind, they know exactly how to use trends and changes to their advantage. If you notice your customers are adopting new technologies, then it's high time to start using those technologies yourself. But it doesn't end there.

Another crucial step is building new products and services that help your customers to innovate themselves, making them more creative and innovative, and achieve better results because of it. Your customers will not only be grateful to you, but also more than happy to pass on the word!

### 6 DURING THE WAR ON TALENT, ONLY THE MOST INNOVATIVE COMPANIES WILL ATTRACT THE RIGHT PEOPLE

Last but not least, as far as your organization and employees are concerned ... True innovators prefer to work in truly innovative companies – a self-fulfilling prophecy. Talented people love – no, need – the occasional challenge. Working a typical office job with predictable hours in a conservative and mediocre company is not what they're after. They want to build things, radically transform products and services into something the world has never seen before, and make a real impact accordingly. And the best part of all: they are willing to work hard to achieve those goals. Hire an innovator, and your company will learn a lot from them. Innovate as a company and the right people will love to come and work for you. The most sustainable examples of innovation are, after all, always the result of a collaboration.

**"OK THEN, INNOVATION IT IS. BUT HOW DO WE GET STARTED?"**

It's actually quite simple and not unlike running a marathon: one step at a time. Perhaps you feel a bit overwhelmed having read this all the way through, and maybe you recognize your own company in some (if not all) of the examples we listed of what not to do. Indeed, thinking about innovation and determining what your objectives will be is no easy feat without the proper tools at hand. Should you focus mostly on strengthening your organization in terms of innovation readiness? Or should you first set out to fill a gap in the market now that a unique opportunity has presented itself? With the help of our daughter company Seth and Dunn, we can take care of both for you. We can help you predict your customers' wants and needs well in advance, so that you can translate them into the right kind of product development before the competition beats you to the punch. Using various techniques for drastically reducing the risks of your innovation process and achieving customer centricity, lean and agile product development, product roadmapping, minimal viable products, ... we've got what it takes. We also love to coach organizations to become better at innovating themselves.



**WE CO-CREATE, VALIDATE AND ACCELERATE**

Be sure to check out our website to find out how we can take your business to the next level.

**SETHANDDUNN.COM**



# AE FINANCIAL SERVICES FRICTIONLESSLY DIGITAL

One could argue that change is of all times. We’ve seen a lot of it over the 20 years AE has been active in the market. However the speed and intensity of change in Financial Services over the past years has been huge. And nothing announces for the pace to slow down ... on the contrary.

Financial services organizations continue to be challenged, with external threats affecting their ability to remain competitive and impacting profits. With new regulation, low interest rates, changing customer behavior and growing competition, financial services organizations are challenged to adjust their business, organization and infrastructure to differentiate their organization and make it future-proof in an increasingly digital and VUCA world.

The next coming years the footprint of “digital” in our daily live will undoubtedly continue to grow. Therefore financial services organizations can’t afford to miss out and need to truly rethink their positioning, offering and services to remain relevant to customers.

Let us take you through a few examples ...

## NEW BUSINESS MODELS TAP INTO NEW TECHNOLOGY

“TREAT DIFFERENT PEOPLE, DIFFERENTLY” - DELIVER YOUR CUSTOMERS A RELEVANT, PERSONALIZED EXPERIENCE

Security and trust still remain the top requirements when it comes to banking and insurance services, so does quality. Multiple studies and reports though point out the importance of new customer values: financial services need to be frictionless (convenient), personalized (relevant) and omnichannel (consistent and time/place independent).

The evolution in client expectations and behavior, the increased need for innovation and engagement are accelerated mainly by forces outside of the sector and are irreversible. Consumers want to be treated ‘special’ in every business relationship. Bye bye one-directional, automated push communication and one size fits all interactions and offerings. Consumers are

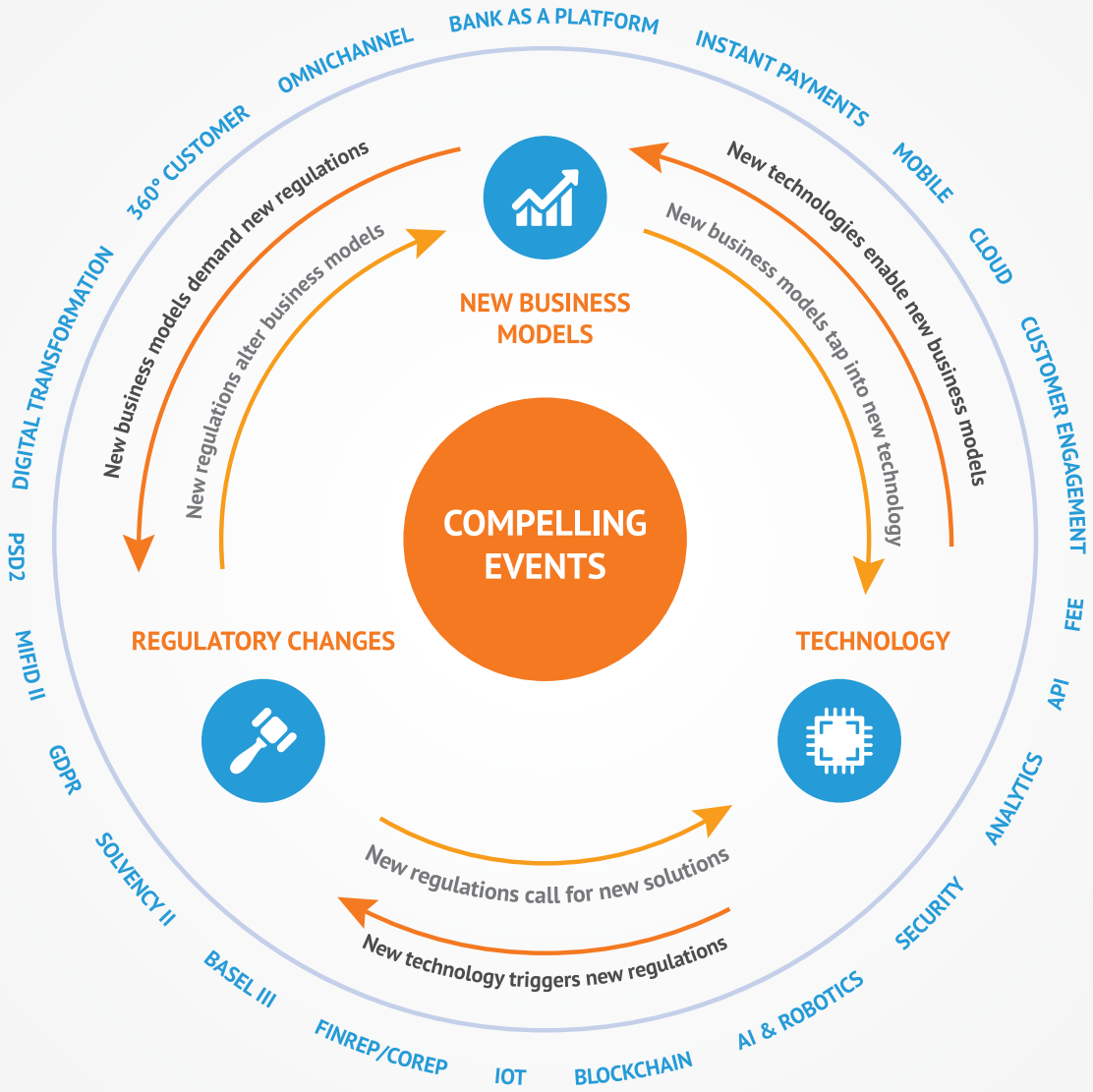
increasingly adept in cracking the façade and recognizing mass, automated messaging. Financial services providers deem to be well positioned, since they sit on a vast amount of internal data which, if structured and efficiently accessible, they can intelligently combine and achieve new levels of insight. Predictive analytics, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning can be combined to provide a hyper-relevant capability that is delivered in real-time using digital devices.

The AE maturity model for personalization helps to define your current level and starting point. From there, we design a roadmap and action plan with 5 steps to take your organization in an iterative way to a higher maturity level.

Reach out via [inspire@ae.be](mailto:inspire@ae.be) to draw your personalization roadmap.

“AE brings its expertise to our KBC projects with an experienced team. There is a group with varied profiles, but they all present the same quality and approach, the sense of ownership and good services. The people of AE distinguish themselves by their attitude. They want to help and think, organize and manage at a higher level”

– Pat Geysen,  
Head Delivery Big Data Intelligence, KBC



“Different technologies are currently creating the perfect storm for financial institutions, who are forced to rethink their model and even their relevance in society. The choices they make today will determine viability and success of tomorrow. Based on its expertise and approach, AE recently acquainted participants in The Banking Scene with proven methodologies to innovate intelligently.”

– Rik Coeckelbergs,  
Founder of the Banking Scene

“Financial institutions need to be mature digital organizations, investing in technologies of tomorrow. However, this will not be enough to guarantee success. Understanding client needs, client behaviour and adapting your organization accordingly, made possible by new technologies, is the real key for sustainable success.”

– Karel Van Eetvelt,  
CEO of Febelfin

## NEW TECHNOLOGIES ENABLE NEW BUSINESS MODELS

PLATFORMS AND ECOSYSTEMS - WHAT IS ALL THE BUZZ ABOUT? WHY DOES IT MATTER?

If you ask yourself why companies like Google, Amazon and Apple are so successful, it is because they were the first to understand about platform strategies and how to best implement them.

While in the 20th century a larger scale was a prerequisite to be competitive, this seems no longer the case in the 21st century. The democratization of infrastructure did not only take away the most important competitive advantage of large scaled companies. The complexity, inflexibility and required maintenance of the legacy infrastructure actually becomes their single largest disadvantage. This shift is so fundamental that a lack of understanding, a clear strategy and a roadmap to adapt, might herald the end of your business.

There are two main platform strategies: the “product/service platformization” and the “ecosystem orchestration” strategy. The first one is a strategy where you take some

particular data, activity or knowledge, or more generally a specific capability, productize it and build an ecosystem around it. The standardization and commodization of mobile app development by Apple and the success of its iPhone is one of the most well-known examples.

The second platform strategy is the ecosystem orchestration strategy. Here the mission is to mobilize an ecosystem by removing any friction or hurdle that makes the interaction within the ecosystem suboptimal. Commonly known examples are Uber and Airbnb. They both remove friction in their ecosystem.

Combining the two strategies in such a way that your transformation journey becomes an ever-growing virtuous circle, leads to a situation where the hard, expensive and risky work is actually done by the different players in your ecosystem while you can focus on capitalizing on the insights derived from the ecosystem.

Reach out via [inspire@ae.be](mailto:inspire@ae.be) to brainstorm around your platform/eco-system strategy.

## NEW REGULATION CALLS FOR NEW SOLUTIONS

DISRUPTION IN PAYMENTS FOLLOWING PSD2

Before the end of 2019, financial players must be compliant with the Payment Services Directive II, commonly referred to as PSD2, the European directive concerns the development of new products and payment services. PSD2 is an update which has come about for various reasons, including changing consumer behaviour, the emergence of innovative technologies and the presence of new players in the payment market. PSD2 requires banks to make their payment applications and customer account information available to third parties via APIs.

PSD2 will have a major impact on financial players in two areas. Although the APIs that are now being requested by PSD2 are quite similar to the existing ones, they do require a large number of adjustments before external parties can gain access to the same functionalities. Moreover, not all banks are equally adept at using restful APIs. A second challenge will be consent management.

Account owners will have to give banks permission to make certain changes to their account and to make their data available to third parties. This principle actually doesn’t exist today, and thus requires a new module to be added alongside the current infrastructure.

End customers will also experience the changes PSD2 brings about at first hand. By authenticating through a card reader or itsme®, they grant new parties access to their data. Customers are enabled to consult their current accounts at various banks and transfer money within one single environment.

PSD2 requires banks to review their internal business processes, to choose a strategy and determine how far and fast they want to go in unlocking and opening up for other parties and platforms.

Reach out via [inspire@ae.be](mailto:inspire@ae.be) for expertise in getting your infrastructure ready for the payment disruption.

The good news is that change creates opportunity. AE’s focus is on using its expertise and methodology to help financial services providers in getting ready to embrace the opportunities of the future, in resolving the challenges they face and in providing them a frictionless experience during their digital transformation process.



# Why the energy transition in Belgium is proving so difficult

There's no doubt about it: disruption is in the air for **Belgium's energy market**. When it comes to utilities, our country is facing numerous challenges in different areas, including technological, topological, regulatory and sociological changes. At the same time, we have been struggling with **persistent paradoxes** for quite some time now. Consider, for example, the almost exponential growth of alternative energy sources, while Europe is confronted with energy overcapacity. The debate concerning a nuclear power phase-out, too, is far from over, and our idea to rely more on gas-fired power stations is in no way consistent with the increasing pressure Belgium is under to drastically reduce its CO2 emissions.

Although we are eager to change course, the energy transition in Belgium is proving much more difficult than in other countries. The reason? There are at least four obstacles holding us back.

## 1

### WE LIVE FROM ELECTION TO ELECTION

A successful energy transition requires political ambition combined with a straightforward plan. A **common vision**, in other words. Getting everyone on the same page, however, is not evident in a country that shuns long-term commitments and lives from election period to election period.

A rise in awareness and permanent, active involvement of public opinion are more necessary than ever. **Regulators** must assume an entrepreneurial role, adopting a more visionary and strategic approach. The energy market must, of course, also ask itself whether it will continue to watch from the sidelines, or actively start to enforce the new regulations themselves instead. Perhaps it's our **entrepreneurs** who should be molding Belgium's political landscape and thus establish a definitive framework for our future energy supply, which will then be constantly evaluated and adjusted?

In any case, exceptions within the current legislative framework are crucial to create **innovative trajectories** that will allow the energy market to experiment with new, more **future-oriented business models**. So, why wait any longer to let innovation work its magic?

### THE CUSTOMER IS NOT YET KING

## 2

The growing focus on **sustainability** and **affordability** means that every player will have to do their bit to meet the needs of the rapidly changing energy market. In the near future, customers will pay for a certain comfort level and no longer per amount of energy used. And by 'comfort', we mean more than just an adequate supply of gas and electricity. Heat, cable distribution, maintenance services, etc. will all be part of the offer. The customers' choice for more or less comfort will determine the price they pay.

Producers, suppliers and new market players will therefore have to take on a significantly more important role than before. New durable energy sources must be integrated into a **personalized offer** for customers, just as raising awareness among prosumers (consumer that is also a producer of energy) with the help of the digital meter will become a must.

If today's energy players want to survive in tomorrow's landscape, they must evolve into **full-fledged partners** for their end customers and provide them with the comfort level of their choice in a personalized manner. Being able to redeem that customer expectation in the near future will undoubtedly require an enormous effort, because every player will have to expand their offer and adjust their operational activities accordingly.



## 3

## WE HAVE A LOT OF CATCHING UP TO DO

Belgium faces numerous challenges in the area of energy transition in the coming years. Compared to our neighboring countries, we have fallen behind considerably and urgently need to catch up to remain **competitive**. Important decisions must be made as soon as possible – a difficult exercise which will unfortunately require more than five minutes of political courage.

However, what our country lacks most is leadership. The entire energy sector is fully engaged in a digital transformation in which the integration of existing and new infrastructures, as well as new forms of organization and partnerships, take precedence. Technological innovation will provide the necessary support in this regard – utilities, after all, meet technology through innovation! Individual organizations will have to work in an ecosystem of partners looking for solutions and new models together.

## COST REDUCTION TOO OFTEN REMAINS A PRIORITY

## 4

The question remains which role grid managers will (or should) play in this energy transition. Belgium is currently experiencing a **consolidation wave** initiated by regional distribution system operators whose main objective is to **save costs**. Further cross-border integrations are likely to be the next step. The **gap between electricity and gas** on the transmission side continues to grow as we speak, raising many questions. What will the role of gas in the future energy landscape be exactly, and will it be able to solve our current electricity problems? How can we use the gas network to make other forms of energy feasible? As long as the big players remain in it for the money, all these questions will be left unanswered for quite some time at least.

## FINGERS CROSSED FOR ENERGY TRANSITION À LA ELIA

Undoubtedly, the energy players who are daring enough to take on a **pioneering role** by actively responding to the challenges mentioned above will turn out the most successful in the long term. The energy market is clearly in need of brave leadership beyond that of the technical experts and network operators who have been dominating the sector so far. It will take true **entrepreneurs** to smoothly guide organizations through the chaos and pave the way for a whole new kind of energy landscape.

The further decentralization of electricity generation already provides a strong innovative drive in the market, with **Elia** as the initiator. Their “Internet of Energy” ecosystem is already supported by both traditional and new market players. But as benefits innovation, it's not always immediately clear how certain efforts are valued. Elia, too, will have to wait and see what the future brings, but nevertheless the market's enthusiasm about their initiative is promising, to say the least.



# Market Trends

## Why we're focussing on the human talent sector

Change is a constant in our world. A change that has now found its way to the labour market. Many jobs that were popular just a few years ago have today become superfluous due to various disruptions. In addition, companies are faced with the challenge of retraining employees with outdated competencies so they may once again match the ambitions of the evolving business. And then there are trends such as the rise of the gig economy and job crafting, where companies are transformed into a network of clients, employees and external talent, all with their own needs and expectations.

These are changes that force companies to transform. But how can you, as an organisation, successfully move around this complex tangle? How do you manage your employees in such trying times? This article provides an answer to some of those questions.

We delve deeper into the various trends that have drastically changed the labour market and are still influencing it. Afterwards, we share how we approach this challenge in co-creation with our customers and the way we tackle these hurdles in our own context.

### A drastically different labour market

If we look at today's labour market, we see quite a few changes compared to a few short years ago. Different trends are creating unrest. The well-known **War for Talent** is in full swing. Never before have companies fought so hard for (top) talent. HR is an emerging challenge faced by all: in what direction is our company evolving with its employees?

In line with the previous trend, **employee expectations** are also subject to change. People are no longer merely looking for a guaranteed wage to maintain their standard of living, but for a meaningful activity. They're willing to spend part of their free time, provided appropriate financial compensation is provided. Subsequently, our always-on world and the alarming number of burnouts are making employees increasingly aware of their work-life balance. More than ever, they expect their employer to invest in their personal growth so they can take those next steps in life.

We're also seeing a sharp rise in the **independence of profiles**. More and more people are marketing their skill set as a service, allowing them to offer their competences directly to a company. Moreover, the additional globalization means that our (physical) boundaries are blurring more and more.

Finally, the **speed at which business transformations** follow one another and the disruptive technologies that arise force companies and employees to reinvent themselves. Employees must undergo additional training in order to master new competencies. Organisations have a facilitating role in this: how can you maximise your internal talent, giving it room and support to flourish, so that it can be utilised in a meaningful way and set your evolving company on the road to success? There is however a downside to this: can companies still trust that the employees they invest in will remain on board? How can they convince young people to choose for them?

### AE supports organisations in their human talent journey

It's clear that aforementioned trends entail a lot of challenges for companies. Organisations need a multitude of competencies to stay afloat in this digital world. Nevertheless there are many possibilities for countering these uncertainties. AE's strength today is to play a role

in facilitating the strategic and future-oriented roadmap (determining, developing and implementing strategy), both for corporate goals and for innovation within the organisation and the implementation of related platforms of the future that focus on human talent.

With the Human Talent Services (HTS) offering, we want to support companies that specialize in servicing Human Talent (for example the Social Secretariats and the interim sector) to develop new services and thus play a distinctive role on the B2B and emerging B2C market. In addition, AE also focuses on the HR departments of organisations in their optimisation of services to their own employees.

We can, for example, easily limit the chance that people leave your company by proactively focusing on the biggest challenges that employees face within your company. Insights from HR Analytics can help map out a workable and balanced policy.

In addition, we can support companies in their digital (human talent) journey from a **strong technological basis and applied business knowledge**. In the past, we helped companies in digitizing their HR processes, using new digital channels & tools and the transformation to a network of self-managing teams, to name a few examples.

As well as boasting the necessary know-how, we can rely on experience thanks to the transformation we ourselves have undergone. As a fast growing consultancy, the number of colleagues doubled in just five years time. It turned out to be quite the challenge to continue to know everyone, in terms of knowledge and ambitions, in times of such accelerated growth. Crucial when you realise that matching knowledge to a specific customer demand is our core business.

Within AE, we have worked out a solution to map an AE employee experience. We invested in self-made tooling to digitally tag the skills of our people, to map our network organisation and to easily match people to customer projects. This tooling is unique in our market, a combination of our experience as a learning organisation and our knowledge of the development of such platforms means that we can offer this as an integrated solution.

Kenny Follet is Human talent services expert at AE. As intra/ entrepreneur with a focus on Human Talent, Wellbeing and Social Secretariats market, he has experience to help companies set up and implement business and HR strategies, eco-systems and platforms.

For more information about our Human Talent sector, please reach out to us via [inspire@ae.be](mailto:inspire@ae.be)



# INDUSTRY 4.0

For some time now AE has been active with a number of companies within the manufacturing and logistics sector in Flanders. One of the most important emerging trends for this sector is undoubtedly Industry 4.0. What does this umbrella concept mean for the organisations within the Supply Chain sector, and more broadly, for all companies that benefit from the progress of industrial technology?

Industry 4.0 is everywhere. Launched in Germany, it's the term that indicates that our logistical and manufacturing companies are entering a new era: the first Industrial Revolution brought us the steam engine. During the second Industrial Revolution, the rise of electricity followed, succeeded by extensive automation, and now hyper connectivity. This trend is closely monitored by all supply chain players and for good reasons: the possibilities seem endless.

In essence, Industry 4.0 stands for various technological disruptions in the industrial sector. One of the key trends is the dropping price of sensors, which are becoming easier to connect with the systems inside and outside of their own company walls. These sensors generate essential data that can tell a company more about the performance of its machines and vehicles. Improved computer power enables us to capture this data and process it quickly. Finally, the internet of things - as the driving force that ensures devices can communicate with each other - gives you the blueprint for new ecosystems.

Manufacturers and logistics players will have to work with their suppliers and buyers to complete the full data picture and take the next steps towards a new form of operational excellence. In addition, new opportunities and challenges arise from unexpected places: which companies from other sectors benefit from the data, thus becoming part of the ecosystem?

But we're not there yet. In other markets we've seen one player leap into a vacated position and take a large market share, but the logistics and manufacturing sector remains largely fragmented, with many smaller players in an often long supply chain. This has a lot to do with the physical component of the sector: a product still needs to get from A to B, and many parties play their part in this today.

Until a business model is found that allows multiple parties within the ecosystem to benefit, these organisations will continue to keep a close eye on one another. Only by working together across business boundaries and by setting up small-scale initiatives to try out new business models, the sector will make progress. At AE it's our ambition to make valuable use of our capabilities such as Lean Innovation, Analytics, Integration, Information Management to help form a Smart Supply Chain and thus help shape the future of Industry 4.0.





# AE AND FLUXYS:

# PARTNERS IN CRIME

AE and Fluxys work well together. The utilities player and AE have been partners for almost 20 years. The perfect time to place this collaboration in the spotlight. Together with Albin Vico, IT Program Manager, and Vincent Mahieu, IT Project Leader, we zoom in on this co-creative partnership and look towards the future.



Hello Albin & Vincent. Let's kick off this interview from the beginning. Who is Fluxys and what do you do?

**Albin:** We are a Belgian gas infrastructure group headquartered in Brussels and are active throughout Europe in pipeline transport of natural gas, gas storage and the transhipment of liquefied gas. We are responsible for financing, construction and exploitation and we sell the capacity of the infrastructure to producers, suppliers and wholesalers. Continuous improvement is our message, because the gas and energy market is in full swing. Today we are active in a dozen European countries, but we are also looking forward to opportunities outside of Europe. At the same time, we are working hard on initiatives to improve the energy transition: projects to use natural gas as low-emission energy in truck transport and in shipping, for example. Or projects to convert excess green energy into carbon neutral green gas that can be stored easily. In short: a range of innovative routes with which we can make a difference in an energy system in which the gas and electricity networks complement each other optimally.

It's a fact: the utilities market isn't an easy market to operate in. What are your greatest challenges at the moment?

**Albin:** We're faced with a multitude of challenges today. Over the last few years, the way we work with clients has changed completely. Where we primarily used to provide services with underlying long-term contracts, today we tend to increasingly work with much shorter contracts in a market where competition has increased considerably. In that context, our range of services is constantly evolving and the underlying IT support must be constantly up-to-date. At the same time, we have to be prepared for what is to come tomorrow.

**These sound like serious business challenges. When did you realise that you needed to find a partner to help shape your story?**

**Vincent:** That realisation came a long time ago. We had started the liberalization of the gas market at the time and had to implement Third Party Access. Those responsible at the time had a clear vision of what they wanted to do to achieve that goal. We were using local applications and the intention was to build an integrated software environment. At that point,



we realized: more architectural coordination and direction are needed here and we will need a framework. That is how we started our search. AE then emerged as the best option because they had already developed such a framework. It was also the start of Microsoft. NET and AE already had experience with that.

**What convinced you to choose AE?**

**Vincent:** I have to say your way of thinking immediately matched our way of working. We realised that AE has a similar strong vision, put forward good ideas and was really strong in terms of architectural thinking.

**So you quickly signed the contract?**

**Vincent:** I wouldn't say quickly (laughs). No fewer than 17 versions of the contract were drawn up. Never in my life have I seen that many track changes in a Word document, all in a different colour. But we got there in the end. I think we made our respective legal departments very happy that day. And we were finally able to get started.

**And then what? The ink has dried and AE starts at Fluxys. Where did we primarily offer support in those early days?**

**Vincent:** AE started with us under a technical architecture assignment. Specifically, you provided support with the design of the initial

framework for our TPA application, better known as the current G-smart suite. This was challenging for us because it was a totally new framework that required a new way of thinking. AE's support was invaluable. We soon realised that analysis, to properly capture the why of the framework, would be interesting too.

**Over the years our collaboration has evolved massively. As partners, we've been able to achieve a lot. Where does that enormous confidence in AE as a partner come from?**

**Vincent:** I think the success lies in the fact that AE people are extremely well trained. To me they operate at a significantly higher level than other consultancies. They're not just analysts or developers in my experience.

**Albin:** I fully agree. The complexity of our environment is not always easy to understand, but in most cases they succeed in gaining and managing sufficient knowledge in a reasonable period of time to offer concrete added value. A positive attitude is also important for us and the integration within our teams works very well, both for junior and senior profiles. It shows AE has a qualitative selection procedure and passes that quality on to its clients.

**Vincent:** I'd like to add that this level of quality remains stable over time. Even though not all the people from the early days are still on board, the right spirit, positive attitude and high quality have always remained. This means it's not just linked to a few people, but that it's specific to the entire organisation.

**Thank you for these kind words. Are there any other things in which AE differentiates itself from the competition?**

**Albin:** Another positive I'd like to mention is the attention AE has for the problems in our sector. At Fluxys we really notice there is a broad knowledge of the challenges of today and tomorrow. And not only that, you use that knowledge by exchanging ideas with us, advising us or making suggestions on how we can do even better in the future. That really is an added value!

**Co-creation is central to our organisation. Is that how the collaboration between AE and Fluxys works too?**

**Albin:** By definition we work in co-creation with your teams for most of our activities. Co-creation is structurally ingrained with us too. We only have a limited number of projects that we've fully outsourced in the context of our G-smart suite. Usually it's a case of bringing together the "big brains" within the teams and looking for a solution together.

**That being open to cooperation is strongly felt by our teams, as is a well-founded interest in where the world is going and our joint ideas on this.**

**Albin:** That's entirely correct. And it'll probably become even more necessary in the future due to the rapid evolution of the market and technologies. It's becoming increasingly important to be quick to respond and pick up on trends in time.

**Looking back on the partnership with AE so far, what milestones have you achieved together?**

**Vincent:** For me, the creation of the first TPA suite, which later became the G-smart suite, was a milestone. It wasn't easy because we were faced with a very tight deadline. I remember it began April first, 2004, which is a strange date to launch a first version of something. It was a real challenge to get ready on time and deliver a necessary quality product. But we succeeded and we learned a lot. We then invested in testing and project management to further grow that application.

**Our consultants know you for your progressive mentality of 'it's OK to make mistakes'. Do you think that's important?**

**Albin:** Absolutely. The remarkable thing is that everyone, both internal employees and external consultants, feels highly responsible for what they are doing. Mistakes can happen and we need to learn from them and grow.

**Vincent:** The beauty of this is that there is no difference between our internal and external people when it comes to collaboration. Everyone helps each other to get to the best result possible, and that's wonderful.

**Of course we're curious about the future. How do you see the partnership with AE evolving?**

**Albin:** Fluxys will certainly face many challenges in the upcoming years. Our priority remains to continuously respond to the needs of our business. At that level there are also many projects and new ideas that we want to investigate and implement together. Moreover, we want to further modernize our systems. All these elements together indicate that we will certainly need reinforcement in the future. So hopefully we can count on the help and support of AE here too.

**Last but not least: You have been a client of AE for almost 20 years now and as it happens we're celebrating our 20th anniversary this year. If you could offer a birthday wish, what would it be?**

**Vincent:** Just stay the way you are, really. Keep attracting the best people and safeguard that positive mindset! If you do that, it'll be your guarantee of success for the future.



To celebrate our many years of collaboration, we visited Fluxys and enjoyed a delicious piece of cake together.

THANKS FOR THE GREAT PARTNERSHIP AND ON TO THE NEXT 20 YEARS!



# A GREAT PLACE TO WORK WITH

# A GREAT PLACE TO WORK FOR

# THANK YOU AE!

**Gerhard Steinrücken**  
Research Director  
SES VanderHave

“Part of what makes AE so special is their unique culture of constantly striving to improve themselves. They're a flexible partner who's willing to move mountains to help us succeed. We are more than pleased with our partnership with AE, and view our joint efforts as the foundation for our continued collaboration in the years to come.”

**Ilse Rubben**  
Head of Business Architecture  
Fluvius

“Right from the get-go, our relationship with the AE consultants has been excellent. We work in co-creation, where AE maintains a good balance between introducing their expertise and knowledge, and respecting what we have built up here. Thanks to their collegial attitude, the consultants have become full members of our business architecture team.”

**Renaat Sohl**  
Manager Processes & Technology  
E-LLIS

“The collaboration with AE is particularly stimulating. AE brings us ideas that offer our teams new opportunities. From our side, we ask AE challenging questions, which requires them to think out-of-the-box. It works well together.”

**Stefan Kennis**  
Head of Data & Analytics  
BAC

“AE is a partner who thinks along with us. Besides the fact that they're strong in establishing the link between business and IT, it's mainly the AE people who have made the difference. Their enormous drive and enthusiasm to take on the project with us made them stand out from the crowd.”

**Albin Vico & Vincent Mahieu**  
ICT Program Manager and  
ICT project Leader  
Fluxys

“AAE people aren't regular consultants. They're well trained, are quick to learn, integrate seamlessly and always do so with a positive attitude. Moreover, the quality has remained stable over time. The success rate of new AE consultants with Fluxys is extremely high, both for junior and senior profiles. In addition, we see a broad knowledge of the challenges of today and tomorrow in our sector. They use this knowledge to exchange ideas with us, advise us and make suggestions for improvement. That's real added value.”

“I don't think there are many companies that so meticulously map out their employees' growth and challenges, and work on them together. It really makes me a better consultant.”

**Maarten Aerts**  
Consultant  
AE

“I feel lucky: going to work with a smile the majority of the days and being proud of my job. And even on the lesser days there is comfort: there's always room to vent in the AE café at the end of the day.”

**Valerie Taerwe**  
Consultant  
AE

“I started with AE as a brand new graduate. That was almost 15 years ago. AE is a little like coming home: doing the things I like, enjoying great interactions and all in a very pleasant environment.”

**Isabelle Vansteenwinkel**  
Fleet Manager  
AE

“I can really be myself, which is AE's strength. I get to discover my strengths and in particular determine a lot about my own development. I greatly appreciate this. I also know that there are a lot of people who want the best for me. You don't find that everywhere.”

**Annelies Schupp**  
Consultant  
AE

“AE really works with and for its employees, both at the customer and at AE itself. Again and again we get to map our own path through interesting projects, at our own pace. And you can find a sounding board for any kind of question or problem with a fellow AE'er, which is great.”

**Oliver Belmans**  
Consultant  
AE





# Data-analytics: d-sides goes beyond the buzz

The domain of analytics is trending, with many companies seeking a partner who can help them get started in the world of Artificial Intelligence. There's no doubt this innovative technology will give their organisation a huge boost.

Bram Vanschoenwinkel is experienced in the field of Analytics. After his academic career, he saw the domain begin to advance, slowly gaining in popularity. With the recent hype surrounding Machine Learning and Deep Learning in particular, Bram and his d-sides crew are going beyond the buzz by critically challenging data analytics.

## The rise of Analytics

Bram briefly situates the eventful rise of Analytics. "When I graduated, Analytics, or Data Mining as it was then called, was still in its infancy in the Belgian market. This was partly due to the heavy focus that the academic world placed on the techniques and statistical models to approach data. Their approach was rather data-driven."

However, this doesn't mean there were no early applications of data mining.

**Bram:** "In the 1980s, neural networks were already used to detect fraud in banking. In addition, there were several early adopter companies that applied the models with varying degrees of success. Internet companies in particular quickly conquered the market by using highly targeted Analytics or Data Mining. Product recommendations and personal advertising became possible. In addition, the first applications were developed in the health sector and biology. However, the domains remained niche. Analytics clearly hadn't yet found its way into the wider business world."

Bram Vanschoenwinkel is a Computer Scientist with a Phd in Machine Learning from the VUB. After spending a number of years in the academic world, Bram closed the university doors behind him and entered the business world. Here he focused on process optimisation and organisational development in both the private and public sector. Bram draws his energy from uncovering complex patterns in data in order to gain insights that help people and society advance.



## Analytics as driving force

This is in stark contrast to today's status quo. Analytics is interwoven in many common apps without us realising it, both in the professional and private sphere. In addition, Analytics solutions are the driving force behind today's (r)evolutions such as Industry 4.0 or Virtual Assistance. We asked Bram why Analytics is so popular right now.

**Bram:** "Today the approach to a data project is much more business driven. The focus is on the possible insights that are translated into concrete actions that benefit a company's daily operations. Analytics is used more widely in the implementation of processes in different sectors and domains and in business operations in general. The technology used is often secondary to the kind of insight that people seek. Add to that the constant technological developments and you have a setup in which companies can easily store large amounts of data and process them at high speed."

## The new data scientist

This impacts the data scientist profile, Bram knows: "In addition to mathematical and programming skills, a data scientist now also needs creativity, storytelling and social skills. With a good understanding of the business, they have to be able to come up with tailor-made smart solutions."

Bram is critical of the buzz. "The techniques that were used 20-25 years ago are still in circulation today. Of course they've been refined and improved, but at heart they remain the same. If you look beyond the surface, you realise that the number of techniques required for 95% of the projects can be counted on two hands."

## Deep learning unlocked

Deep Learning is the crown on the Analytics trend. Bram nuances the new class of Machine Learning. "It's true that Google Deep Mind has taken a big step forward by using the graphics card in the training of Neural Networks. Yet the

technology remains embedded in the same robust principles of a few decades ago. Deep Learning has certainly given Artificial Intelligence a boost, but it's not really new. Moreover, the vast majority of projects continue to be managed by more traditional Machine Learning techniques. Now that analytical models have become integrated into our daily lives and boast a user-friendly user interface, the domain is creating a lot of buzz."

## Custom Insights

With d-sides Bram wants to introduce customers to the diverse world of Analytics. Bram: "I define Analytics as the process for extracting activating insights from data. How you do it is secondary. There are a lot of out-of-the-box solutions that allow companies to tackle a very specific problem. We want to distinguish ourselves by focusing on problems that require a customised solution, by looking at the story behind the figures. We want to start from the client's specific business context and challenges, so that together we can extract the insights from the data, with a focus on translating those insights into actions."

That drive is made concrete in their experiment with a Minimal Viable Data product. Bram: "We've noticed that many companies have a lot of data. Often they have no idea how to use it to create value. We believe data-driven companies do better than others. The data added value is often just below the surface, ready for the taking. By listening to a customer's challenges, by placing it against one of our solutions and linking it to data, we work out a Proof-of-Value. Such Proof-of-Value is only the starting point of the road to a data-driven company where we help our customers on their way to make better decisions based on their data in order to excel in their domain."

"We look forward to guiding customers throughout their data journey. Our entire team relies on a number of techniques that allow us to build a solution tailored to the project."

d-sides

www.d-sides.be



# Brussels Airport Company

In charge of operating Belgium's largest airport, which is located in Zaventem, Brussels Airport Company provides for the construction and maintenance of all necessary infrastructure and systems, and facilitates the coordination of (and collaboration between) all partners present at the airport to ensure its safety and efficiency. Each year, around 25 million travelers pass through Zaventem airport, and their number will only increase in the future as traveling, both for leisure and business reasons, is on the rise. To offer passengers the best possible experience and gain capacity as well, Brussels Airport Company is working diligently on an Airport Operations Plan (AOP). A so-called 'rolling plan', the idea is to predict how much manpower will be needed at what time and at what location for all airport operations to run smoothly. The plan is gradually refined as the effective date of the operations approaches.

## AIRPORT EFFICIENCY THAT FITS THE EUROPEAN AMBITIONS

The AOP fits in perfectly with the European community's current ambitions. Through the SESAR (Single European Sky) initiative, the EU wants to optimize aviation in Europe to increase efficiency. To help achieve this goal, Brussels Airport Company's AOP will be tuned to the Network Operations Plan at European level and thus to other airports' plans as well.

To make this ambitious project a success, Brussels Airport Company enlisted the help of AE. AE managed the necessary changes by first setting up a structured framework and looking after the collaboration between business and IT.

## CO-CREATION IS KEY

The AOP is certainly not the first step Brussels Airport Company is taking to optimize collaboration within the airport. In an earlier phase, the organization set up the so-called Airport Operations Center (AOC), which ensures all parties who operate at the airport have representatives working together in one and the same room. Such a joint operations center is vital to usher in the AOP, explains Bruno Lefever, Enterprise Transformation Coach at AE. Bruno initially was the project manager to the preliminary study, but he was soon asked to become program manager for the entire AOP project. "Bringing the

right people together and setting up a co-creative atmosphere is crucial to this kind of program, especially in the early stages. Thanks to the AOC, we can follow up closely on the development of the AOP, set clear priorities and incrementally build up the product quarter per quarter."

## THE ROLE OF THE AIRPORT OPERATIONS CENTRE

AE found itself facing an especially challenging task. Airport operations, after all, consist of a complex tangle of planning and collaborations between the many different parties present at the airport. The APOC must enable landed aircraft to depart as quickly as possible (turn-around time), with all passengers and their luggage on board. The AOP comes into play to enable those countless flows of people and goods to circulate in very narrow time slots. The plan ensures that desks and posts are sufficiently staffed to guide passengers through the controls with minimal queues. Thanks to the AOP, travelers find their gate as quickly as possible and experience a pleasant service to boot. But the Brussels Airport Company's ambition doesn't stop there. The plan is to extend the AOP's action radius to total airport management, or 'home to home', in the near future. That means the traveler's journey to and from the airport will come into the picture as well.



## AE AT WORK: AGILE COLLABORATIONS

Before initiating the project, all challenges the AOP had to meet were defined by means of a referential framework comprising all processes and information required. To manage the processes in an orderly manner and to define priorities, program manager Bruno relies on a basic principle: "Business and IT must work together so that they can make the best decisions together."

Bruno elaborates on how he plans to make the difference: "It's important to gather all parties around the table and, by doing so, create added value and scalability in a very short time. Which is exactly where the Airport Operations Center's biggest asset lies. Once all noses are pointing in the same direction and a clear vision and concrete objectives have been defined, we translate that vision into a number of complementary, agile empowered teams who have all the right competences. While each team has an end-to-end responsibility and depends as little on the other teams as possible, continuous collaboration remains the key to success."

In order to convince not only the teams, but also the management of the new agile

way of working, AE initially relied on visual tactics, says Bruno: "We ordered a number of large boards on wheels and used them to present the initial backlog, making it more visual and tangible for everyone involved. The boards also helped make everything more scalable and less complex in terms of planning. Currently, however, we are working digitally to be able to handle the larger volumes."

## AE AS THE ORCHESTRATOR

AE supports Brussels Airport Company in different ways to further develop the AOP and to perpetuate the collaboration between business and IT. Our focus lies on integration, data platforms and machine learning; models which we design in collaboration with the various parties. Thus, the AOP platform will be assisting the airport with forecasting, operational planning, monitoring and mitigating potential problems with operations. AE takes on an organizational role to orchestrate the development of the AOP by providing structured insights to all parties involved. Moreover, we assist the airport in setting up an insightful monitoring platform (HELI) that meets the highest demands in terms of user experience (UX).

## CHANGE MANAGEMENT AND ITS CHALLENGES

Nevertheless, the AOP process is not without challenges. On the one hand, there's the human aspect of it all. Nobody's keen on changing their habits. External consultants hired to help a company transform must therefore set out to gain in-house team's trust from the get-go. It's exactly the type of situation that requires consultants to put the customer first and turn to change management techniques, Bruno explains "In every sector, knowledge and know-how always stems from the shop floor. That's why aligning all employees must be a priority. In addition, the customer must be kept in the loop at all times so that they can properly grasp what changes are imminent and why making those changes is so important. Another challenge for AE is to get all the new internal environments and infrastructures ready before the deadline to frequently deliver results. Fortunately, Brussels Airport Company leaves AE free to take the lead in this area of the project while continuing to collaborate closely.

The effortless transfer of PAX (passengers) and BAG (their luggage) is currently a top priority. Brussels Airport is, after all, an especially

important hub for passengers traveling to Africa yet not always hits the mark in this area. To offer said passengers a pleasant connection, AE, in co-creation with Brussels Airport Company, has set out to find the cause of their current dissatisfaction and to find alternatives accordingly. Specifically, our so-called 'transfer matrix' will be launched shortly. It will offer the Airport Operations Center, the airlines and the ground handlers the necessary insight into which passengers might experience problems with their transfer. Ultimately, the matrix will enable the airport to, insofar as it is legally allowed to do so, proactively handle risky connections and offer travelers a pleasant connection at all times.

## HAPPY WITH THE (INTERMEDIATE) RESULTS

Bruno Lefever is pleased with the work done so far: "By starting small, we were able to quickly offer added value. I am particularly proud of the way in which we've been able to get so many different parties to work together so smoothly. Then again, we often work with dedicated project resources that have a clear focus. Today, still, we keep our finger on the pulse with surveys to follow up on team spirit and remain one team striving towards a clear, common goal."



# PIETER PEREMANS

**You've been with us for five years now. Was joining AE in 2014 an easy decision for you?**

I must admit that AE was not an obvious choice for me. I'm an industrial engineer in electromechanics, which means I specialize in dismantling diesel engines, product development and production techniques. At first glance, I didn't see how that would fit with IT consultancy. Still, I took my chances and I'm still very happy I did.

**What was the dealmaker for you?**

On the one hand, it was AE's unique work culture that did it for me. I could already sense it during my first job interview and noticed it early on in small things like employees having a chat at the reception, coworkers having fun at the kicker table, everyone treating me to a warm welcome and people asking me over and over if I wanted to have a drink. The atmosphere here is very open and warm while remaining professional. On the other hand, AE firmly believed in my abilities and potential from the get-go. My 'untraditional' degree, so to speak, posed no problem whatsoever. AE's confidence in me made me realize that a good fit with a company's culture is indispensable for me in the long term, and I was certain that I would feel right at home with them.

**Which aspect of your job as an AE consultant do you find the most energizing?**

I especially appreciate the freedom I get here in terms of self-development, considering I have lots of interests and my focus often changes. At AE, I get to choose which project I sink my teeth into. Also, it usually doesn't take long before some enthusiastic colleagues team up with me and I find that very stimulating as well. AE even encourages this way of working, because they know that if you let people do what they enjoy doing, they will automatically perform better. In short, being able to determine my own focus and work on projects that intrigue me, that's what energizes me the most.

**It's been five years since Pieter Peremans took his first steps as an AE consultant. Through his former Chiro leader Bram Vanschoenwinkel, an AE business analyst back in the day, Pieter first got word of the Leuven-based IT company. It would prove to be a not-so-typical yet very successful match.**

**In what areas have you grown the most during your career at AE?**

My substantial knowledge has increased rapidly thanks to the many evening sessions, trainings and courses provided to me. The culture of knowledge-sharing AE thrives on is very mature, which for me was ideal because of my non-IT related background. In addition, I've learned how to deal with various corporate cultures and types of people. Every customer is different, and you have to learn to adjust your way of working accordingly. Bringing the right people together and using the best possible arguments to convince decision makers is an important soft skill I definitely learned to apply here.

**What has been your favorite project so far?**

That would have to be my assignment with an international bank insurer, which focused on home loans. It gave me quite a lot of freedom in terms of development, and at the same time it enabled me to fully experience the power of AE as a network organization. I knew that within AE I would find the right people with the necessary knowledge, expertise and experience to help me define the problem and its solution. Hence, I spent my first week with the customer continuously calling my colleagues for backup. I learned a lot from them at the time, and the customer was very satisfied with how the project turned out. I can honestly say the AE team always helps each other out.

**Last March, AE was named a Great Place to Work for the 9th time in a row. What makes AE a good employer in your opinion?**

Firstly, I find AE is truly devoted to the well-being of its employees. I myself have had a hectic year and was able to count on a lot of understanding and support from the management and my coworkers. In my opinion, that's quite unique in the world of consultancy. Secondly, AE continually questions its way of working and is not afraid of change. They have a huge drive for continuous improvement, and that's exactly what I find satisfying in my job too.

**Sophie has been with the AE crowd for no less than ten years. When she was still a student, AE convinced her to start working for them, and the rest is AE history! What drew Sophie in was the good feeling she had about the company's corporate culture, which up to this day still makes all the difference for her.**

**How has your career at AE taken shape over the years?**

As a junior AE consultant, I was able to get a taste of many different aspects, from business intelligence to traditional business applications and even an integration project. After that, I gradually moved towards .NET and eventually rolled into front-end engineering. I've been specializing in the latter for more than five years now.

**At what point did you know the direction you wanted to go within consultancy?**

In my early days, I wasn't sure whether I wanted to become a technical consultant or an analyst. But my doubts quickly disappeared. To be honest, I've never really been concerned with where I want to be within X number of years. I mostly try to follow my heart and do the things I like to do. AE has always given me the space I need to determine my own path while also helping me decide what that path might look like.

**Do you see yourself continuing to grow in front-end engineering in the coming years?**

Definitely. Technology is evolving very quickly, and front-end is no exception. It's mainly the tangible aspect of it all that attracts me the most: writing a piece of code and watching it transform into something that looks great and delivers real value to the end user.

# SOPHIE TRAEN

**In addition to customer projects, what would you still like to achieve with AE?**

I am very interested in people management, coaching in particular. The AE team has always been close to my heart. In a growing organization such as ours, making sure everyone can benefit from individual coaching is crucial. I'd like to put my shoulder to the wheel to bring about (future) initiatives in this area.

**What do you consider the highlights of your 10-year career at AE?**

I've had the pleasure of being involved in lots of fun projects. For example, InvoiceOne was my first dream assignment at Wolters Kluwers. I also fondly look back on projects at Parcify and Intago where, on Sundays, I was really eager to go to work the next day. Of course, I'm also proud of what I've achieved so far within AE, including creating and supporting the AE Build community and building "Joey", AE's people barometer. The latter is my personal favorite, because Joey – regardless of the technical aspect – is completely in line with what I find important within any organization: having an eye for the people who make it all possible.

**What do you appreciate the most about AE?**

Aside from the personal growth you get to experience, along with the many knowledge-sharing initiatives AE organizes, I think the overall support you receive here is amazing. By this I mean small things like the cookie jar never being empty as well as bigger opportunities including optimized pay packages, e-bikes and the many afterwork events you can attend. Being a part of AE means you're being looked after, and to me that truly is the icing on the cake. In short, I'm hoping to add at least another ten years to my career here!



# ROBRECHT DAVID

## How did you wind up at AE fifteen years ago?

I started my career working for Bolesian, a company that was explicitly looking for someone who had a background in both Psychology and Computer Science. Bolesian Belgium, however, remained in existence for only three years. My next job was at Mediagenix, where I got my first taste of Agile Development, Extreme Programming in particular. I traveled a lot during that time, so after having worked there for a while, I decided it was time for a shift in gears. Knowledge and innovation having been the main focus in my previous jobs, I wanted my next job to be similar. I eventually wound up with AE because in a way I already knew them. When I was still working for Bolesian, I had met the people who eventually launched AE, and so one thing led to another.

## Have you always wanted to become a consultant?

Back in my days as a Psychology student, I already dreamed of becoming a consultant for companies going through a merger or takeover. So yes, I did see myself taking on an advisory role. I find it hard to imagine spending my entire career at the same company. As a consultant, however, I come into contact with different sectors while retaining all the freedom to express my opinion and have a major impact on processes in a short period of time.

## As an AE consultant, how would you describe your career path?

My very first project was with Acerta and consisted of mapping around twenty processes end-to-end. I've also spent a long time working with bpost as a functional and business analyst. Then I ended up at Test Aankoop, where things really took off for me. I started as a functional analyst, then was offered a position as business analyst and eventually became team manager. Evidently, the latter role gave my self-confidence a real boost. And to my great surprise, I really enjoyed working in that position too. Currently, I'm placed at SESVanderHave, where we're implementing some very exciting innovations in the field of R&D.

Although Robrecht David has a background in Industrial and organizational psychology, he developed a strong interest in Computer Science over the years as well. He has been with AE for fifteen years now, and has become a fixture within the organization.

## How have you grown at AE?

I especially notice that my interpersonal skills and self-confidence have greatly improved over the years. My 'political' skills – influencing others in their decision-making in the interest of the organization as a whole – have undoubtedly improved as well. As time goes on, I realize that my greatest added value lies not so much in my technical knowledge, but rather in the way I approach people, teams and organizations.

## AE has, of course, experienced tremendous growth over the years, and is still growing as we speak. What are your thoughts on that?

I applaud the evolution AE is going through right now. Because you can't expect that after twenty years we'd still be that small 'club' of experts focusing on the same domain, can you? I do admire the enthusiasm of the younger generation who start working for us and their ability to look at things with a critical view. I've always been fascinated by the challenges a growing organization faces. I am, of course, still an organizational psychologist at heart and would very much like to stay involved in making AE the best possible organization yet.

## How do you imagine your future with AE?

In the future I hope to support organizations more explicitly in their transitions and advise them in the field of change management, in terms of communication, coaching, innovation and leadership. I want to continue to specialize in these areas in the coming years and build the necessary expertise accordingly. That's why I'm all the more grateful to AE for giving me the opportunity to attend the Change Leadership courses given by Daan Sorgeloos as well as a master class in Change Management.

20 years ago, Gert Van Deuren didn't start working for AE, but with AE. Gert himself, about fifteen other AE consultants and CEO Bruno Denys laid the foundations for what was then called Application Engineers and later became AE Architects for Business & ICT.

# GERT VAN DEUREN

## You are one of the few people who have been with us from the very beginning. What was AE like in those very early years?

In the beginning there were about fifteen of us. Everyone knew everyone, including each other's wives and children. We didn't have an office yet, so meetings took place at the co-founders' homes. Annual Saint Nicholas parties were thrown at the family's homes, too – there were only two children, come to think of it. Eventually, we moved to Haasrode Research Park, not far from our current head office.

## Have you always wanted to become an IT consultant?

Yes, that's always been my plan from the very beginning. As soon as I obtained my degree in Computer Science, I started my career in IT consultancy. I find being a consultant fascinating: you can really sink your teeth into a specific question and help clients improve in a relatively short period of time, or even make a huge impact on their business in the longer term. Also, working with colleagues who really know their stuff and achieving things together with them is quite rewarding, to say the least.

## How have you grown during your long career at AE?

I believe I've grown the most in terms of soft skills. You know, working constructively with people, communicating clearly and giving and receiving feedback in the best possible way. I learned all that mainly from experience, but also from the many training courses AE provides. Not to forget the open feedback culture that prevails within our company, and that has nourished and strengthened those skills over the years as well.

## Is there a project you feel particularly proud of?

Yes, that would have to be the project we completed for CM. As a mutual insurance company, CM have the legal obligation to check whether the invoices they receive are in line with the laws that apply before reimbursing them. As social legislation continues to change at a rapid pace, correctly applying it immediately after publication is no easy feat. IT-wise, it means adjustments to production must be made almost every week. We therefore developed various components to automate the validation of medical invoices. If I'm not mistaken, the system we set up continues to run smoothly up to this day. So, we did manage to make a major impact there, if I may say so myself.

## How do you imagine your future with AE? Are there any challenges you look forward to taking on?

I prefer to evolve at a steady pace instead of with leaps and bounds, so I have no problem working for the same customer for years in a row. I've been placed at VDAB for around 6.5 years now, and I'm currently part of their solutions team designing their IT architecture at Enterprise level. We're still looking into ways to improve the organization of the company. I would very much like to take on similar projects in the long term and become even more experienced in them.

## What makes AE a great employer in your opinion?

What I appreciate the most about AE is that colleagues and management always treat each other respectfully. You might call it an unwritten mutual care agreement. "AE team members always help each other out": those are not some hollow words. At least, that's my experience and I have yet to come across another company like this. I feel that AE always has realistic expectations as well. You're allowed to make mistakes, and dumb questions don't exist. AE consultants share this common drive to build something our customers really benefit from, helping them to move forward and make a difference. I think that shows real team spirit.



# This is how SESVANDERHAVE prepares for INDUSTRY 4.0

A leading global player in the agricultural sector, SESVanderHave specializes in every aspect of the production process of sugar beet seeds. The company's success speaks for itself: one in three sugar beets in the world comes from a SESVanderHave seed.

Needless to say, SESVanderHave is strongly focused on research. Yet Industry 4.0 is lurking around the corner and the company must do whatever it can to keep up with recent developments. This is where AE can provide guidance and expertise.

## THINKING AT LEAST 12 YEARS AHEAD

Worldwide, SESVanderHave sells 360 seed varieties in over 50 countries, the result of a dedicated comprehensive research process. With no less than 190 years of experience, it's no surprise that the company invests more than 20 percent of its annual turnover in its extensive R&D team which is constantly looking for genetic lines in sugar beets to ensure a good harvest for the customer. The researchers pay special attention to a good sugar yield, resistance to numerous diseases and the plant's ability to survive in different climates. To bring the **perfect seed** to the market, the R&D team must think at least 12 years ahead. Until recently, however, the team disclosed their data in a multitude of Excel sheets, which made **updating** the data quite difficult. Until now, however, numerous steps of the breeding process involved time-consuming Excel-based data processing due to a lack of end-to-end support of the software supporting the breeding activities.



## THE SEARCH FOR THE 'SINGLE SOURCE OF TRUTH'

AE initially appeared on the scene to develop a platform that would give SESVanderHave's researchers more control over their data as well as provide them with a single source of truth. To be able to support such a shift, however, SESVanderHave's technology required a **substantial update**. AE is therefore helping the company to gradually introduce various new technologies and a new way of working as we speak. In due course, these innovative technologies and process changes will enable SESVanderHave to attain its goal of increasing the 'genetic gain' in R&D, for example by foreseeing how seeds will perform based on predictive analytics and current data.

## IT MEETS BUSINESS

The AE team also supports SESVanderHave on a business level by perpetuating streamlined communications between their IT and business operations, and by helping the organization claim ownership. The search is not easy, but thanks to extensive feedback we know exactly which **approach and set of functionalities** will best suit the company in the long run.

## INDUSTRY 4.0: PLANTING SEEDS FOR TOMORROW

The partnership between AE and SESVanderHave is already bearing fruit and continues to grow. Next to contributing to the **product strategy** for the **data platform**, the AE team is currently involved on a general strategic level as well. AE not only helps SESVanderHave overcome the difficulties it faces today, but is also working on an agile plan for the company to face the many changes tomorrow will bring. **Industry 4.0**, after all, teaches us that industrial companies should not only focus on the automation of current processes, but should also have smart devices interconnect in order to provide hyper-personalized services.

## AGRICULTURAL CUSTOMER JOURNEY

The agricultural sector is in full swing. It's only a matter of time before self-driving tractors and drones scanning fields to detect germs will become the new norm. Traditionally speaking, SESVanderHave has a strong focus on **genomics**. However, the world of farmers, the company's end customers, is no longer as traditional these days.

For SESVanderHave to become more customer-centric in the future and think outside-in, it must start to take the entire **customer journey** of farmers into account. Only then will the company be able to offer its customers, in addition to quality seeds, professional advice and numerous added services in the near future. Possible new projects can relate, for instance, to crop management, the detection of diseases by drone, or the best time to harvest. In this way, SESVanderHave will ultimately help farmers achieve the highest possible profit – today as well as tomorrow.

SESVanderHave is more than pleased with its partnership with AE, says Research Director **Gerhard Steinrücken**:

*"To stay ahead of the competition, SESVanderHave has to deliver the best products. We must develop high-quality seeds and increase our R&D efforts, without significant cost increases, to be able to do so. Thanks to AE who reviewed, simplified and refined our research process, we will have just the IT support system we need to manage R&D more efficiently."*

## UNCONVENTIONAL CO-CREATION

To co-create this support platform, AE applied the unconventional method of challenging SESVanderHave to see their processes from a **whole new perspective**. Gerhard explains:

*"We were not used working this way. Step by step, though, AE gained our trust through open discussions and by asking us plenty of questions that helped them to better understand our expectations. Their refreshing approach resulted in a tool that is perfectly tailored to our needs, and will be useful to us for years to come."*

## FUTURE-PROOF PARTNERSHIP

While sceptical at first, SESVanderhave is now more than convinced of the added value AE's challenging approach brings to the table:

*"Part of what makes AE so special is their unique culture of constantly striving to improve themselves," Gerhard continues. "They're a flexible partner who's willing to move mountains to help us succeed. We are more than pleased with our partnership with AE, and view our joint efforts as the foundation for our continued collaboration in the years to come."*



# 10

## QUESTIONS FOR QUALITY CHALLENGER JOERI WIJNS

At just 29 percent, the success rate of the average IT project is significantly low. Companies these days are losing tonnes of money to IT projects that go awry, not to mention the sums needed to clean up the consequences of those failed projects. As the CEO of Quality@Speed, Joeri Wijns guides organizations in their transition to deliver more efficient and high-quality software. In short, Joeri transforms IT departments from bottlenecks into crucial enablers for digitization in all types of sectors.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR TODAY'S COMPANIES TO DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY BUSINESS VALUE AT RECORD SPEED? WHAT ROLE DOES IT PLAY IN THIS?

The time between coming up with an idea and the moment when that idea effectively starts to generate value for your organization, the so-called 'time to value', has become more important than ever. In a world that revolves around digitization, the 'winner takes all' principle applies to everything and everyone. Only companies that know how to stay ahead of the competition will ultimately grow into successful giants, making it impossible for their competitors to survive in the long term. Take a company like Amazon, for instance. Without a sound IT department, achieving a time to value that ensures a lasting competitive advantage would be out of the question for them. I think this is exactly where most companies' ultimate challenge lies.

### WHY ARE SOME IT DEPARTMENTS BOTTLENECKS RATHER THAN CRUCIAL ENABLERS?

The gap between business and IT is still very much a reality for many companies. More often than not, business and IT are hardly in tune with each other and fail to communicate adequately.

On the one hand, IT is still too often considered a 'supporting' part of business. The business department launches an idea without thinking it through strategically. Then, they claim little to no ownership in terms of follow-up. They thus expect IT to come up with an appropriate solution which, to their immense surprise, fails to live up to expectations, suffers a significant delay or turns out to be unsuccessful.

On the other hand, I notice IT departments are still set up in a traditional way. Their SDLC (software development life cycle) process functions like a waterfall that consists of multiple disciplines between which there's no interaction.

### WHAT'S THE BIGGEST RISK FOR COMPANIES WITH A TRADITIONAL SDLC SETUP?

In a traditional setup, quality assurance equals testing, which only covers the final stage of the process – after analysis and development. Mistakes have already been made by then, so quality assurance is reduced to detecting what went wrong. This purely reactive approach causes companies to lose both valuable time and money, as repairing a defect in production costs up to two-hundred times more than fixing a defect discovered during the analysis phase.

### IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO SET UP A SDLC?

A SDLC must be set up in such a way that it allows for errors to be identified as quickly as possible. A proactive approach like this is often referred to as 'shift left', where the focus lies on error prevention rather than error detection. However, organizing an SDLC in this way is only possible if every link in the process has a quality mindset. QA is an attitude, not a role. The chain is only as strong as the weakest link, so all parties involved must take ownership of quality, whether they're in charge of analysis, development or testing.

Of course, I'm well-aware that adopting a shift left mindset requires a certain discipline. For example, developers must document their work and important guidelines, as well as write unit tests. Too many organizations still consider this a redundancy, while in fact it saves them time in numerous areas in the long run. In other words, there's no point in immediately shifting to the highest possible gear if it means you'll not only lose quality but a lot of time (and therefore money) as well. To create and maintain speed, having the correct quality approach in place is vital. Striking a balance between quality and speed may not be easy, but it is necessary nonetheless.

### WHAT DOES QUALITY@SPEED DO TO RAISE AWARENESS IN THIS FIELD

Organizations are not always aware of their own needs. We encourage our customers to take a look at their operations from the get-go, and together with them set out to discover where the deeper issues lie. In most cases, we carry out an awareness exercise in which we quantify various factors based on the current way of working and compare those to the added value an improvement process would create.

In addition, our consultants contribute to this awareness day in and day out, by continuously challenging the status quo. That's why we position ourselves as 'the constant itch': we make a point of always speaking our mind and questioning everything that crosses our path with plenty of drive and the firm belief that there is room for improvement in every situation.

### HOW DO YOU GET THE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS STARTED?

An inherent part of our approach is getting everyone involved in the SDLC story on the same page from the very beginning by means of a stakeholder exercise. Listening to every player's needs, we reassure them that all we want is to evolve towards a better way of working together with them. Additionally, we look for existing elements or processes that we can build on. Starting from something that's already there is, after all, always easier than starting from scratch. I believe this is the best, if not the only way to achieve the necessary level of commitment within the organization and to rally everyone behind what you're trying to accomplish. I cannot stress enough how important receiving proper support is in this context. Unless people truly want to be part of the story, improvement processes are a lost cause even before implementation has started.

### WHAT'S THE BIGGEST HURDLE WHEN IT COMES TO IMPLEMENTING A NEW WAY OF WORKING?

I'd have to say, once again, that getting everyone on board is the biggest challenge. Tech is the easy part. A technical problem may not be simple to solve, but it will always remain a purely technical affair. Dealing with people correctly, by contrast, is a deciding

factor. 'Imposing' your expertise while sitting in an ivory tower doesn't work. It's all about connecting with people. That's why Quality@Speed looks beyond hard skills when hiring, and makes a point of excelling in soft skills, too.

### 2019 IS QUALITY@SPEED'S THIRD YEAR RUNNING. WHAT TRENDS OR EVOLUTIONS HAVE CAUGHT YOUR EYE IN THE LAST FEW YEARS?

The 'shift left' story is a vision Quality@Speed has shared since the very beginning, but it seems companies, not to mention our competitors, are slow to pick up on it – which I think is rather odd. Also, I've seen the so-called skill gap in companies only grow, with painful consequences, such as 1,000 people getting sacked, only for 800 new profiles to be subsequently recruited. That's why Quality@Speed encourages our consultants to keep up and evolve into hybrid, T-shaped profiles.

But there's also been a positive evolution which I can only applaud, namely an increased focus on people and culture. What's more, I find there's a shift going on in test automation, from a focus on the GUI (Graphical User Interface) to the deeper layers involved. In the past, test automation on the GUI was the only way, but more and more people are becoming aware of the many disadvantages this approach entails. We, too, have become smarter in this area and now concentrate much more on service or integration tests

### WHAT EVOLUTIONS DO YOU THINK THE FUTURE WILL BRING?

Due to the ongoing digitization, our dependence on software is constantly increasing. I believe that, as a result, the tension between speed and quality will only grow as well. Companies will have to take the ball even earlier and quality will become even more important. An app crashing on someone's smartphone is one thing, a plane with 500 passengers that suddenly comes crashing down is something else entirely. As the potential impact of software errors only increases, the quality of the software we deliver can become a matter of life and death.

Furthermore, I sincerely hope that the traditional roles within IT and the tendency to think in boxes will soon make room for a definitive shift towards more T-shaped, hybrid profiles. The importance of people and culture within organizations will not diminish, on the contrary. I am convinced that technology will no longer be central to IT, but rather the people who make it all happen.

### WHAT'S YOUR RECOMMENDATION FOR ORGANIZATIONS LOOKING TO KICKSTART AN IMPROVEMENT PROCESS?

The best advice I can give companies is to subject new initiatives to a thorough strategic thinking exercise well before technical implementation. It doesn't matter how efficiently your SDLC is set up or how much you focus on quality if an idea is bad to begin with. It won't result in added value for your company and neither will it enable you to retain your competitive advantage. If you want to truly tackle the SDLC process, you must get all important stakeholders – management, business as well as the IT department who will have to implement the changes – involved in the process as early as possible.



# TECHNOVATE 2019 CIRCULAR ECONOMY

AE's Technovate challenges students in their graduation year to come up with an innovative idea and develop it from A to Z, both from a business and a technological perspective. The main objective of this competition is to give the younger generation a taste of entrepreneurship and innovation. All participants are coached in innovative thinking by AE consultants who also guide them through the development process step by step.



The Technovate 2019 edition was entirely devoted to the **circular economy**. The process started in November 2018, when the AE Reboot Sessions took place in Leuven and Ghent. We inspired the attending students by presenting them with real-life cases and workshops within the framework of the Technovate theme, after which the competition was officially launched.

In February of this year, we welcomed all Technovate participants at the AE headquarters for a full day of coaching. Mid-March, the moment of truth arrived as all teams competed for the main prize in what turned out to be a true 'battle of the pitches'. In the end, it was Team Re-Bottle who won the exciting student start-up trip to Singapore.

## Why Technovate?

By organizing the Technovate competition, AE opts for an atypical recruitment process. In the past, companies searched for candidates with a certain profile and then sent them along a so-called 'funnel'. Recruiting was a linear process through which people passed over and over until the right match remained. Technovate, by contrast, presents AE as an innovative company to tomorrow's working generation. Figures from last year show that candidates are indeed particularly attracted by our content-driven strategy and knowledge-sharing culture: in 2018, we onboarded no fewer than 52 new employees.







20





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