



VLAAMSE LANDMAATSCHAPPIJ (FLEMISH LAND AGENCY)

Moving to a new development platform with the whole team

“Certainly in a tight jobs market it is useful to be able to offer people a progressive working environment.”

At the end of 2006, Vlaamse Landmaatschappij (VLM) decided that from then on it would develop all new applications on one platform. The motive: efficiency. As if that challenge was not difficult enough, VLM was opting for an architecture of which its own knowledge was limited. How do you set about such a transformation? How do you build up an expert team that meanwhile deals perfectly with the day-to-day things? And how do you achieve sustainable efficiency gains as quickly as possible? In just few months thanks to a systematic approach VLM was able to see the first fruits of its modernisation operation.

Guido Clerx,
managing director and
CIO of VLM

NO IT, NO VLM

Vlaamse Landmaatschappij, the Flemish Land Agency, is a jack-of-all-trades in the policy domain of Environment and Nature. It has four big core tasks. One, organising and controlling the ever more thinly sown open space in Flanders. Two, helping to set on track and stimulate the countryside policy. Three, in imitation of the manure and fertiliser legislation, guiding farmers towards sustainable agriculture. And four, the ongoing expansion of the Flemish Land Bank.

“Decrees, laws and projects determine our every movement”, says Guido Clerx, managing director and CIO of VLM. “Our core business therefore consists of processes with deadlines. If we do not achieve them, it has serious consequences, sometimes even legal ones. In short: without advanced automation the legislation cannot be enforced. No IT, no VLM.”

STANDARD IS MORE EFFICIENT

Efficiency is therefore what it is all about in the IT team. An external audit in 2004 advised rationalising the development environment. Out with the diversity of development tools, in with the standard. “We opted for the .NET Framework”, continues Guido Clerx. “It had a broad customer base

and allowed us to continue building on our existing investments in Microsoft solutions. The plan was ambitious, for only two of our 24 developers already had any experience with .NET. Moreover, we had our hands full with ongoing projects and support. With that reason we wrote a procedure for external help in drawing and implementing a feasible migration roadmap. We came out at Ordina.”

SUCCESSFUL PROTOTYPE

At the start, Guido Clerx took a couple of strategic decisions. “We decided to spread the transformation over three years. We would retrain our developers in waves by partially releasing them for training and coaching. And we would invest in professional guidance. For VLM wanted to be absolutely certain of one thing: having a firm footing.” Ordina got the innovation project underway with a proof of concept (PoC). The PoC consisted of three parts. “A *study* defined the future application architecture and development standards”, explains Guido Clerx. “A *migration roadmap* described the current and desired situations and the path for closing the gap. Setting up a software factory was given a key role in this. And based on a *prototype* we were able to assess the architecture and the standards against the reality. Successfully

