



FROM A GREEN FIELD EXPERIMENT TO A FULLY DIGITAL, AGILE AND CUSTOMER CENTRIC ORGANIZATION

AN INTERVIEW WITH KATJA SIZOVA
FORMER DIRECTOR DIGITAL AT VODAFONEZIGGO

BY GUIDO VAN DEN BOOM

FROM A GREEN FIELD EXPERIMENT TO A FULLY DIGITAL, AGILE AND CUSTOMER CENTRIC ORGANIZATION

At VodafoneZiggo digitisation evolved from a green field experiment to a fully digital, Agile and customer centric organization. Some of the principles from the early stages as organizational flexibility, business agility and early delivery of business value - still help the organization in their digitisation journey and prepares them to be part of a larger ecosystem.

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Digital Transformation soon will be celebrating its 21st birthday, making it a good moment to assess how Digital has transformed multinationals and how it has matured in the past decade. To celebrate this occasion, Xebia has decided to launch a series of interviews with top Digital Transformers in the market to shed light on the practical side of rolling out such transformations in large corporates.

Third in the series is Katja Sizova, who was Director Digital at VodafoneZiggo in 2017-2019 – VodafoneZiggo builds the network of the future, unlocking new ways of innovation for many industries. Based on experiences Katja shares her views on winning strategies and pitfalls in a Digital Transformation.

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VodafoneZiggo

(7.2M connected households, >7k employees, 3.9B revenue) is on a mission: enjoyment and progress with every connection. Connectivity and communication are important pillars of our society and economy. Aware of this pivotal role, VodafoneZiggo puts the customer first by living up to their customers promise and the aim to deliver fantastic products. Katja takes us on their journey in becoming a customer centric and connected organization.

Back in 2010, Katja had the opportunity to set up a new mobile telecom brand as separate player owned by Vodafone. Katja and her team took on the challenge to create a business plan and subsequently deliver an internationally scalable platform and go-live of the new hollandsnieuwe brand within a timeframe of only 6 months. The new provider entered the highly competitive market in The Netherlands, targeted on cost conscious and online first customers.

Katja shares her learnings and experiences from this period and other digital initiatives, pointing out main ingredients for successful digitisation: focus on continuous business value delivery,

free yourself from traditional (often water fall based) mechanisms and setup a scalable ecosystem.

“Free yourself from traditional (often water fall based) mechanisms, digitisation requires a paradigm shift from a fixed scope/time/gates project thinking to continuously delivering value for your customers”

“We had a challenging task to build a complete new greenfield, internationally scalable, telecom provider” Katja explains. “we accepted the challenge and were determined to deliver business value after only a few months. The project was set-up as an incubator within (back then) Vodafone and that gave us the freedom we required to innovate. We were the first team to use Agile methodologies; combining strategy, business, and IT in a cross functional team. While experimenting with and adopting to this new way of working we defined our operating model. Everything was focused to deliver the first Minimal Viable Product (MVP). The Agile way of working and strong focus on the customer brought positive energy - our biggest challenge was the connection to the rest of the organization, still unchanged back then. Not all functions were ready to accept new iterative ways of working, and this led to difficult conversations and trade offs. It cost efforts to explain Agile principles and continuously evolving offering and proposition. Slowly, the paradigm shift from fixed scope and time delivery to continuously releasing new features for our customers got accepted in the organization.

Board level sponsorship was important to apply our learnings to the larger organization. The new methodologies were a massive change in the way of working, and naturally we had to work with people at all levels to learn to work with that – not only project delivery methodologies were impacted, but also roles and responsibilities evolved, investment and finance principles, etc.. So it took time to make the organization ready, and to embed those.”

“Around that period the whole Vodafone organization started to focus more on online” - Katja continues - “the perception was that such a change was mainly around IT. The insights and learnings we gained from hollandsnieuwe taught us it was a combined business and IT journey to make this change successful. It was very valuable for people in all roles to gain more insights into what our customers’ needs’, and how we can differentiate in the competitive Dutch market.

The next major successful step was to move away from the idea of yet another website redesign project, using waterfall methodology and doom ourselves into a high-risk inflexible initiative. Instead, a cross-functional business and IT team was formed. And it started delivering small incremental customer journeys running on a new online platform and fully working in a new cross-functional way. In the end, we reshaped the full digital experience (web and self-care app) gaining strong increase in customer appreciation (constantly growing Net Promoter Score and app store rating growing from 1.5-2* to 4+)”

“A plug-and-play infrastructure helps to speed up and scale your digitisation journey”

Organizational speed and agility are key in today’s fast-evolving markets and developments of disrupting technologies. The ability of organization to respond to changes is essential for staying relevant for your customers. A solid digitalisation platform helps your company to respond to that change.

Katja: “It takes a lot more than a technical platform and so called APIs to become flexible and Agile. Especially having the skills and people with an adaptive mindset is critical. Your people and capabilities need to be connected throughout the whole organization or value chain. I encourage everyone, no matter what role they have, to know the market they operate in, what is relevant for customers and their experience, and increase awareness of trends and new developments”

"I always make conscious "make or buy" choices" Katja continuous. "Key questions are: How do you want to create a competitive advantage, and how do you deliver this? No one knows what the future looks like, so having flexibility is key. Then you can decide when you need to go fast and limit your time to market, try out things first. - in that case prototype or "buy" / plug-in specialised suppliers. Or to build (ideally) reusable components in-house. Always important to keep in mind the aspects of reusability and scalability. And to what degree it's important to your business and operating model – the challenge many "scale ups" run into if not considered from the beginning.

In my experience a modular design helped limit the impact when we entered the phase where we tweaked the in-house versus plug-in scenarios. Starting with many externally built capabilities, we created a roadmap to insource the components. And, as always essential, we kept focus on continuous improvements and new features released after go-live."

"The best in building ecosystems will be industry winners"

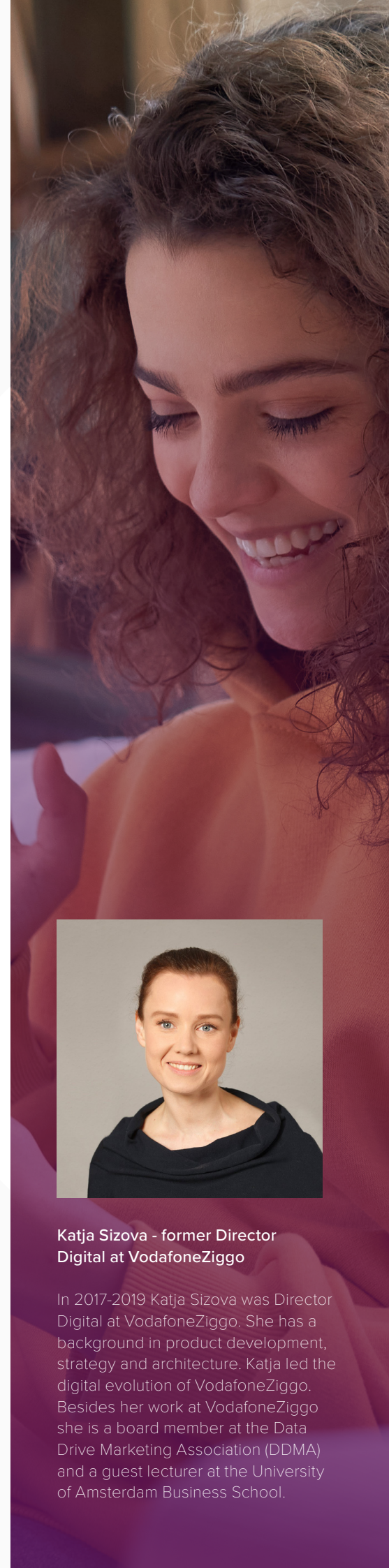
Katja: "Working with partners is not new. To increase the innovation speed, we are opening up the environment to create a proper ecosystem. Ecosystems help you to gain benefits from relevant developments in the market and strengthen your innovation power. Many brains with different perspectives are better than one. So working in an ecosystems gives richer results than solving everything yourself. Here we also must overcome traditional voices - the challenge is to accept your limitations. The best in building ecosystems will be the industries' winners. A challenge you often see however is to coordinate all players in such an environment, to translate an abstract concept into concrete actions, and start creating value. Be prepared for this change and ensure a flexible operating model to adapt to the constantly changing environment. Depending on the nature of the latest trend you can build a new capability or a team around it, or let existing teams absorb the new technology. But the plug-and-play nature is key. The organization needs to be ready to adopt new capabilities when needed, and easily remove them when no longer relevant.

"Keep focus on adding business value and have a clear proof for it!"

"When customer experience became a strategic priority at VodafoneZiggo, this helped us to accelerate the overall digital transformation" - Katja explains.

"We constantly focus on understanding customer experience behind any initiative, look at its business value and always measure the impact. Whether it's a small improvement, or a major one, always test and learn. Especially when smaller improvements are a part of a bigger plan, and add up to a sustainable and tangible result. This continuous evidencing and sharing of successes is essential for decision making as well as storytelling in the organization, which helps to drive the change."

"Often a full transformation is triggered by a "burning platform", which often requires multiple major changes across the organization. It could be hard to realise such a change at once, and quite overwhelming for everyone involved – everything needs to happen at the same time. In those situations, it is key to stay focused. As they say, "Think big, act small". If you spread too thinly, and you are likely to make little noticeable impact. Determine your focus, make a step, show results, and grow from there."



Katja Sizova - former Director Digital at VodafoneZiggo

In 2017-2019 Katja Sizova was Director Digital at VodafoneZiggo. She has a background in product development, strategy and architecture. Katja led the digital evolution of VodafoneZiggo. Besides her work at VodafoneZiggo she is a board member at the Data Drive Marketing Association (DDMA) and a guest lecturer at the University of Amsterdam Business School.

