Title

Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service: the road to freedom

Moonshot: Retool management for an open and world without boundaries.

The Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND) initiated a revolutionary change program. As a result, the IND became the first Dutch government organization to completely overhaul its primary process and organization model, making IND an award-winning public service champion and a frontrunner in customer orientation and employee empowerment.

By Kees Zoeter

Summary

"Borders and boundaries" are part of the daily routine for the Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND). In all its complexity, managing borders is what they do every day. If someone applies for a residence permit in the Netherlands, his or her country of origin and other background information triggers a number of treaties, laws and regulations to be applied. Customers may apply for many different residence statuses, ranging from expat to refugee, from student to spouse and from citizenship to medical treatment.

During the last decade managing borders has become more complicated for the IND. Not only because the IND had to implement new policies on migration either encouraging or discouraging certain types of migration and had to streamline the asylum procedure, but also because the IND faced a substantial expansion of tasks. In 2004 the IND took over the responsibilities of the Aliens Police and foreign nationals began to report in to the IND instead of to the municipalities. As a result, the IND came into direct contact with the customer. The IND was not equipped for these changes due to limitations of its information system (INDIS) and business processes. And in 2005, the IND was confronted with a devastating report on its operations by the Dutch Court of Audit Board. It was time for change.

Realizing INDiGO, has not only been a unique experience, but has also provided an answer to dealing with its primary processes in an innovative way. Unique, because INDiGO is one of the first projects within Dutch government replacing the entire primary process support. INDiGO's success, in a dynamic world of frequently disruptive change, is an inspiration to organizations facing similar challenges. One of the critical success factors of the program was the absolute belief in transparency and openness. Mistakes were not to be avoided, but faced and openly discussed in order to learn from them. INDiGO has proven to be an example of management innovation, both in the way it was developed, and in the way it works in practice. The notion that the change program was successful thanks to everyone's involvement, adds to the inspirational effect.

Of course, we do not live in a borderless world, and quite a few applications for residence permits will still be rejected. But the IND is dedicated to provide swift and transparent feedback on any request, regardless of its context. And the IND allows its professionals to do their job in the best possible way, as they see fit. In that sense, IND paradoxically but proudly states it offers freedom instead of limitations.

Context

The IND ensures that the immigration and naturalization policies are carried out accurately. To do this the IND implements the relevant policies and applies rules as objectively and consistently as possible.

In the public sector, the definition of "fairness" has changed. Traditionally, rules have been drawn up and implemented in order to treat every individual equally. The disadvantage of this orientation, however, is that every individual has a unique story and therefore represents a unique case. The Dutch Government has expressed the ambition to aim at doing justice to the specific situation of the individual applicant. "Fairness" now means treating customers and cases as unique instances, taking people's specific context into account.

Immigration policy aims at processing applications quickly and accurately. To achieve this goal the IND has formulated three priorities and has adapted its organization accordingly.

- Working from the outside to the inside. The IND works for both foreign nationals and society. It must therefore be available at all times. People who need information must be able to reach IND quickly.
- Working towards a result. The IND meets the decision deadlines and aims at realizing shorter processing times.
- Working with people. The IND has a keen eye for its workforce in realizing its targets.

Since the IND is a process-driven organisation, there are no differences between different offices or regions. The process dictates how the employees think and act, coercing them into more accurate and quicker processing. There are three primary processes:

- Asylum: processing applications for asylum: interviewing, verifying, deciding.
- Naturalization: processing applications requesting Dutch nationality.
- Managed Migration: processing applications for residence permits to live and work in the Netherlands.

Triggers for change

A number of triggers were the key to initiating IND's change program:

- In 2004 the IND took over the responsibilities of the Aliens Police
- Foreign nationals now have to report to the IND instead of the municipalities. This means the IND is now in direct contact with the customer
- A third change came as a result of the new policy on migration, which encourages or discourages certain types of migration
- The asylum procedure needed streamlining
- Finally, The Dutch Court of Audit critically reviewed IND's operations in 2005; the time to adapt to new legislation was too long, arrears were increasing and error rates were too high.

Timeline

2005

In its critical review the Court of Audit urged the IND to take the time to structurally work on improvements.

Part of the problem was IT support of the primary processes. Because of changing regulations, growing complexity and expanding responsibilities, IT support of IND's primary process did not suffice any longer. This resulted in arrears, leading to complaints which taxed the organizations capacity beyond limits. Errors and incidents were picked up by the media, leading to a feeling of isolation.

2006

From 2005, IND started an elaborate change program. First, all arrears were cleared and urgent problems were solved, providing the necessary stability to the organization. At the same time, a new vision on the organization and IT systems was developed and an innovative tender procedure for IT environment supporting the primary process was prepared.
IND initiated a twinning program with the Dutch executive organization for social security, leading to a number of insights which, in combination with internal analysis, resulted in a new awareness of the bureaucratic, internally oriented and formal character of the organization.

In 2006-2007, IND decided to embrace a Greenfield approach: completely abandoning the traditional way of working and the supporting legacy systems in order to reinvent an immigration service with an open attitude towards its environment that would be customer oriented, leading to satisfaction with both its workers and its principal.

Concerning the workforce, IND's top management spoke of 'derobotization'; giving back to its professionals the full responsibility for their decisions. This called for a working environment which would allow them to determine for themselves how to organize their work. This vision of the role of the workforce was crucial for the development of the new information system, but also for the future organizational structure of the IND.

2007-2010

The Greenfield approach allowed the IND to invite IT suppliers by tender to enter into a dialogue on how to solve these organizational and primary process issues through co-creation. Not with IT staff, but with the professionals active in IND's primary processes. This approach required an open and transparent attitude from all parties concerned: management, workforce, and suppliers. A hands-on, learning-by-doing way of working, where errors and mistakes had to be openly signalled and discussed in order to proceed in the best possible way and a radical change from the traditional way of risk-avoiding, isolated and formal working of the organization. It also required benevolent leadership; everyone involved was convinced of the importance of the success of the change program. Managers would make way for each other, if the program required them to do so.

2011

Eventually, in the spring of 2011, INDiGO, which is how the program and the IT solution were named, went live. Not marking the end of the change program, but the start of yet a new phase in which the organization will be able to continuously improve itself. Through so-called Straight Through Processing, the IND will be able to process an increasing number of requests automatically, allowing professionals to focus on applying their knowledge where it is most needed. No longer will knowledge capacity be wasted on routine activities. Instead it will be engaged in further development of a service organization without internal borders.

Key Innovation

Realizing INDiGO, IND's new way of processing applications, has been a unique adventure. Unique, because INDiGO is one of the first projects within Dutch government where the entire primary process support has been replaced. The success of INDiGO, in a world of dynamics and disruptive change, is an inspiration to organizations facing similar challenges. One of the critical success factors of the program was the absolute belief in transparency and openness. Mistakes should not be avoided, but faced and openly discussed in order to learn from them.

From an information system perspective, a better alignment between the business and IT was created, through a clear separation of tasks. This is achieved by a complete separation of the "know" (all the business rules in the system that are maintained by the policymakers themselves) and the "flow" (the process itself that is strictly managed by IT).

All of IND's activities were standardized from 165 processes to a single one, eliminating overlapping and duplicate activities between departments, while at the same time creating countless combinations within that process through the use of "business services".

INDiGO has proved to be an example of management innovation, both in the way it was developed, and in the way it works in practice.

Business services

Traditionally, similar activities would be carried out by different parts of the organization in different ways. An interview, for instance, where asylum seekers are invited to explain their application, could be subject to different rules in different circumstances, but still be recognizable as the same activity.

With in a small team, IND took inventory of all activities across all departments and developed a clear understanding of them. The team came with a revolutionary organizational design, consisting of "business services". A business service is a unit of work that leads to a transferable result: the result is sufficient for the next person to continue with, even if the next person is the customer. Viewed from the IT perspective a business service represents the functionality to be developed to support the task. And from the perspective of the organization model, a business service represents the role an employee performs to complete the task. In addition, the business service represents a number of information elements: to perform the task, you need certain information, and performing the task also leads to more or new information to be registered in the system.

There can be no duplication of a business service; there is only one interview activity, only one application activity, only one decision activity, and so forth. But as every case is different, the way a business service is performed can be different every single time. In fact, IND has some 65,000 business rules that apply to the various business services, carefully modeled in an enterprise "ontology".

Because of this innovation, the business performance of IND has not only greatly improved; it marks a complete transformation of its way of working. There is only a single business process left, but it has the flexibility to process all kinds of combinations of business services. Furthermore, these generic business services are completely tailored for each case by the business rules.

At the same time, IND professionals have much more freedom in the way they to handle cases. However, because all the business rules are semantically modeled and accessible, it has become much easier to collaborate with a colleague or transfer a case to another professional.

Finally, even though the IND applies some 65,000 business rules, legal and regulation changes are processed in a matter of days or even hours, instead of months. Business services are also recognizable for the IT professional: the business service requirements and desires are drawn towards realizing system functionality.

Challenges and Solutions

Practice shows that the Dutch government continues to have difficulty implementing massive changes in the organization, processes and IT systems successfully. In recent years, several major IT projects within the government were not finished, causing the waste of tens of millions of public money. INDiGO became successful through a number of critical success factors that are mainly related to leadership style, approach and culture.

Paradox

IND's change program is characterized by a paradox. Designing INDiGO, it became clear that freedom could only be achieved by standardization. Standardizing the workflow, would enable professionals to operate more autonomously. In order to develop an information system and an optimal way of working, the intelligent design was in fact done by only three people. IND's conviction that the basics for the new way of working should be outlined by a small team of visionaries, taking into account every relevant aspect of the organization, has proven more effective and less time consuming than any form of interactive design. After this phase, everyone at IND was involved for optimization, creating a working atmosphere

characterized by IND as Brian Eno's concept of 'scenius': *Scenius stands for the intelligence and the intuition of a whole cultural scene. It is the communal form of the concept of genius.*

Seducing is the key

Despite the necessity for a new way of working, no one at IND is forced to do things differently. All those involved with IND's change program were convinced that trying to change people would not be successful. This means that trying to force people into a new way of working would always be less effective than trying to seduce them towards a way of working which promises and proves to be more effective and more fun. Everyone is free to do their job the way they want, but a monthly benchmark never fails to provide insight into the performance; the new way of working just proves to be significantly faster.

Open and transparent

The whole change program was lead by IND management, not by external or interim-managers. There was a core team of varied composition, dedicated to making the program a success. The team was a mix of both IND and external specialists, paired to each other in an evenly matched way. The external professionals had sufficient power within their organizations to be able to take decisions that were in the interest of the program. They worked in complete openness towards the same goal, regardless of blood type and in a mix of fun and many sharp disagreements. Significantly, there were a lot of mail and text exchanges to solve problems even during the weekends. The core team was accustomed to question any standard or tradition in legislation or IT project and abandon all existing paradigms. The question was always: 'Why are we doing this?' The Royal Decree is a good example of this process. , The Royal Decree (RD) states the names of people to be naturalized. The Queen signs the RD for ratification of acquiring Dutch nationality. For many years, this list had included 99 names. Why not more or less? Nobody could answer this question. The Royal Cabinet were asked, if they had determined the list to be 99 names. This was not the case. Eventually an employee recalled that one of INDiGO's forerunner could not handle more than two digits.

Benefits

IND used to be confronted with the limitations of their information system, INDIS. Embarking on an uncertain journey for change, the IND successfully transformed from a formal, bureaucratic and process oriented organization towards an open, connected and customer orientated service provider.
The focus for the IND workforce shifted from following the rules towards using the rules in order to decide adequately and timely on requests. INDiGO helped to achieve this not only as a tool, but also in the process of being built, challenging the IND to take a revolutionary view of its business processes.

Major benefits of IND's change program include:
- More autonomous workforce, resulting in a dramatic increase of working spirit which in turn has lead to more customer satisfaction
- more freedom for the IND professionals to do their work, and make the right decisions, while at the same time greatly increasing control in a business environment with shrinking budgets.
- Open and transparent working culture; everyone focuses on serving customers in the best possible way. This leads to a satisfied workforce and a satisfied principal
- A reduction of the time to apply changes from 9 months to 3 days. Whenever a law or regulation changes, IND adapts almost instantly.
- With INDiGO, IND can do more work in less time, making more effective use of the vast knowledge of the workforce.
- Coming from a total of 165 core business processes, IND now runs all unique cases through a single business process.
- IT costs have dropped dramatically, up to 60%.

The focus for the IND workforce thus shifted from following the rules to using the rules. IND's work culture has shifted from a 'No, it is not possible' to a 'Yes, we can' attitude.

Of course, we do not live in a borderless world, and quite a few applications for residence permits will still be rejected. But the IND is dedicated to provide swift and transparent feedback on any request, regardless of its context. And the IND allows its professionals to do their job in the best possible way, as they see fit. In that sense, IND paradoxically but proudly states it offers freedom instead of limitations.

Lessons learned

Through the INDiGO program, IND has been able to solve a number of tough paradoxes.

· The IND professionals are now able to take everyone's personal circumstances into account, creating a unique process for each applicant, while at the same time laws and regulations are met.

· All of IND's activities have been standardized from 165 processes to a single one, eliminating overlapping and duplicate activities between departments, while at the same time creating countless combinations within that process through the use of "business services".

· INDiGO has provided professionals with more freedom to do their work, and make the right decisions, while at the same time greatly improving control in a business environment with shrinking budgets.

· A better alignment has been created between the business and IT, through a clear separation of tasks. This is achieved by a complete separation of the "know" (all the business rules in the system that are maintained by the policymakers themselves) and the "flow" (the process itself that is strictly managed by IT).

If it's good, use it again. Not only is the IND sharing its knowledge and expertise of the change program with other public institutions, it also launched a Lab, a technical environment similar to INDiGO where experiments can be initiated to boost functional innovation across the Dutch Public Sector and for immigration services in other countries.