

Challenge yourself als business development manager Energie

ERIC'S CHALLENGE: learning by doing with startups

Eric van der Laan, business development manager



As a Business Development Manager Energy at ICT Group, Eric van der Laan is no stranger to the corporate world: energy companies, grid operators, and major industrial companies alike are considering our energyNXT platform in order to monitor – and where possible optimise – their energy consumption. “I deal with all kinds of complex technical and organisational issues that often take quite some time to resolve.”



Adding intelligence to batteries

Eric continues: "That makes it all the more fun when you run into startups willing to work with us. One of these startups is iwel, a company that supplies batteries to housing associations and homeowners' associations. The business case focuses on using one of these batteries to reduce their peak load and operate with a smaller grid connection. The investment usually pays off in six to seven years in the case of straightforward implementation.

But what if the battery is equipped with additional intelligence? What if you could closely match the supply and demand of energy and use a fully automated process to adjust energy purchases to fill the battery during off-peak times at reduced rates and reuse that energy at peak times when the price is high? What if apartment buildings installed solar panels on the roof, thereby adding a third source of energy? How much more could be saved in terms of carbon emissions and costs? "This is exactly what we configure and make transparent with our energyNXT platform."

Learning by doing

"Working with startups gives me energy. That's because iwel sees the potential and shares our enthusiasm. While partnerships with energy companies and grid operators can be highly successful – but it can also take quite a while before you can reap the benefits – startups can adopt

an agile approach based on the mottos 'trial and error' and 'learning by doing'. That makes working with startups highly inspiring." Eric finds that they have a completely different energy level, pace and way of working than many major businesses. "And all things considered, it makes sense: they're two different worlds – and I get to work with both, which is great."

Conceptual and practical challenges

Thanks to the various stages of a project, Eric has a very varied job, in which he faces all kinds of challenges. During the preparation stage he focuses on the conceptual challenges. The implementation stage can present practical issues, such as a meter's response speed not being fast enough to use the battery at the right time. The next step is to tackle the conceptual challenges based on discussions, calculations and so on, which involves a great deal of desk work. Eric continues: "The practical challenges are best tackled using the previously discussed 'trial-and-error' approach: let's try this solution and see if it works. And if it doesn't, we'll just try something else. One of the great things about working at ICT Group is the tremendous amount of practical skills and knowledge we have available in our company; we'll even take out a soldering iron if that's what it takes to get the job done! I am supported at iwel by my colleague Leon Huijsdens, who knows a lot about both conceptual and practical matters – he's basically my technical conscience."

Win-win situation

"The Agile approach most startups use is a great match with our own processes at ICT Group. Similar to startups, we like to be quick on our feet. An added bonus is that we learn a lot from them, because the people at iwel and other startups we work with are extremely intelligent and know all about the latest technology developments. It's amazing how much I've learned about different battery technologies just over the last year!" Startups are very keen on adopting an open and transparent mindset in their partnerships with other businesses. They always aim for a higher level and anyone is welcome to contribute.

But startups can also learn a lot from ICT Group: how to produce robust and scalable solutions with wide implementation possibilities, what is involved in the administration of the solution in the long term, and how to be cost-efficient. Eric: "These are areas in which we can share our skills and knowledge with them – so collaborations with startups really are a win-win situation."

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