

Choosing smarter, executing better: how WDODelta is professionalizing its projects.

“Because the portfolio is in FCC, there’s more respect for each other and for the workload people carry. Now you can make the case, and show clearly, that ‘it doesn’t fit’.”

Helga de Boer
WDODelta



Water authority



www.wdodelta.nl



Zwolle, Netherlands

About WDODelta

Waterschap Drents Overijsselse Delta (WDODelta) is a Dutch regional water authority that ensures safe, sufficient, and clean water in cities and natural areas. It does so by managing rivers, canals, ditches, wastewater treatment plants, pumping stations, weirs, dikes, sluices, and quays. In this way, WDODelta contributes to a safe and healthy living environment.

The water authority reinforces dikes, regulates water levels, and monitors the quality of water and flood defenses.

The Organization

WDODelta's service area stretches roughly from Deventer to Assen and from Kampen to Hoogeveen. Around 639,000 people live in this area, spread across 22 municipalities. The area covers 255,105 hectares. WDODelta manages:

- 7,100 kilometers of waterways
- 16 wastewater treatment plants
- 438 pumping stations
- 1,980 weirs
- 1,020 kilometers of dikes and quays

The organization employs around 800 people. It consists of a board of directors, support services, and 9 departments, divided across two programs:

- Water
- Operations

Both programs carry out fixed tasks and work on change initiatives.

Planning and Horizon

WDODelta's governance term lasts four years. Administrative goals are therefore set for a four-year period, and many plans span multiple years. To keep costs as low as possible for residents, the water authority continuously looks ahead and works on ever better forecasting and management of costs.

The Road to Professionalization

Likemany public-sector organizations, WDODelta is going through a digital transition. This change agenda means it has become necessary to make sharper choices: which projects can be taken on, which cannot right now, and which take priority. To address this, the Information Provision department took the first step toward portfolio management, using a simple spreadsheet as a tool. This approach proved effective: by setting priorities, goals were achieved faster.

Since January 2025, **Helga de Boer** has held the role of Portfolio Manager. She has worked at the water authority for 16 years, and after half a year as an interim lead setting up portfolio management for Operations, she now focuses on implementing and improving portfolio management. The initial focus is on projects within Operations; later this year, the Water domain will also be added to the portfolio.

WDODelta deliberately chose a learning-by-doing approach. According to Helga, that has proven a valuable choice. “By gaining experience as quickly as possible, and adjusting both our approach and our setup along the way based on what we learn, we’re making a lot of progress. Rather than trying to think everything through perfectly first and then discovering that practice is really quite different, we started with a set of basic agreements.”

The first steps were:

1. Taking stock of the challenge
2. Setting up the process
3. Selecting and implementing Fortes Change Cloud as the supporting tool

Within Operations, several portfolios have since been set up. Each portfolio focuses on a specific change agenda, and larger initiatives are bundled into programs. This structure now serves as an example for other departments and programs, which are being brought into the new way of working step by step.

Capacity planning

When deciding which projects should and can be carried out, WDODelta takes an integrated view. Goals and frameworks are an important factor, but so is the capacity a project requires. Right now, the focus is mainly on the effort needed per department. This is assessed at team level and, where relevant, specifically at the level of critical skills. It provides insight into capacity demand and supports the conversation about bottlenecks and possible solutions, such as rescheduling projects or bringing in external capacity.

“Unlike in the past, decisions about project selection and timing are now better substantiated, and we are more effective and efficient,” says Helga. “We’re currently looking into the best way to handle the capacity question, one that gives us enough control while keeping the administrative burden as low as possible. That’s because we know what we can handle, and we keep getting better at predicting what a project will need.”

The quality of recreational water also falls under the water authority’s responsibility.

Source: WDODelta



The Approach, Step by Step

New departments are brought on board following a fixed approach:

Step 1. Stocktaking

All ongoing initiatives are mapped out. This prevents duplicate work and ensures a clear scope, clear goals, and clear sponsors.

Step 2. Project Definition

Projects are sharpened and grouped into strategic themes, such as asset management, energy, or organizational development.

Step 3. Three-Stage Portfolio process

Input: Initiatives are submitted to the portfolio. Advisors are involved early on. There is a standard model for the financial business case.

Throughput: Decisions are made before a project starts. A weighting framework helps set priorities. Strategic advisors advise the board.

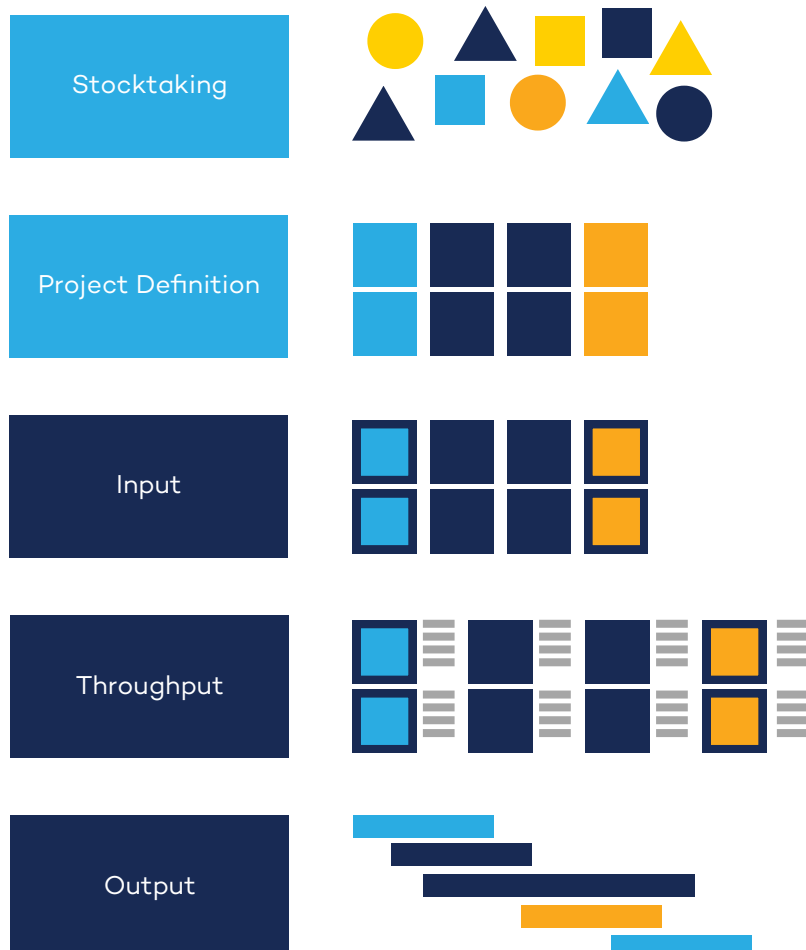
Charts and visual aids that illustrate the impact of choices and clarify alternatives support this decision-making.

Output: Projects are carried out according to a fixed methodology. WDODelta uses Projectmatig Creëren (PMC) – a Dutch project-based method – as its standard methodology. This has been translated into formats within Fortes Change Cloud, so that everyone works in a uniform way and data from project reports always comes together at the enterprise level.

The Meeting Structure

In the early phase of professionalization, WDODelta's portfolio team met with the full team every four weeks. These meetings helped gather information and make adjustments. Now that the foundation is in place and several departments have joined, WDODelta is aligning its strategic meeting structure with the Planning & Control cycle, and a monthly Operations portfolio board has been introduced.

In between, the organization monitors progress through dashboards and one-on-one conversations, so that bottlenecks are identified early.



Lessons learned

We asked Helga what recommendations she would give to other portfolio managers based on the experience gained in this professionalization project.

One important lesson she shares is that **not every initiative needs to be a project**. WDODelta takes a critical look at what does and doesn't belong in the portfolio. The focus is on the change an organization wants to achieve. The need to also include 'business-as-usual' activities in the portfolio differs per department. Fortes Change Cloud should above all help achieve goals; depending on the team and the objective, a decision is made on whether structural activities are included. Major change initiatives always belong in the portfolio.

WDODelta also makes deliberate choices about **which decisions run through the portfolio process**. Some decisions are deliberately kept outside this process to preserve speed. This also keeps discussions focused on the bigger picture rather than the details of every single project.

Helga also emphasizes the importance of **learning by doing**. WDODelta deliberately adopted a basic mindset that it's okay to make mistakes. In the beginning, every initiative was documented in great detail, but it proved more effective to look for the right level of detail instead. By experimenting and learning what works, the organization found a good balance more quickly.

Another lesson is **making clear agreements about how many portfolios – and which ones – an initiative may appear in**. WDODelta decided that a project only belongs in the portfolio of the entity that actually steers it. This prevents duplication and blurring of the data. Other involved departments get access to progress through dashboards and insights. This keeps everyone well informed, and project leads only need to report through a single channel.

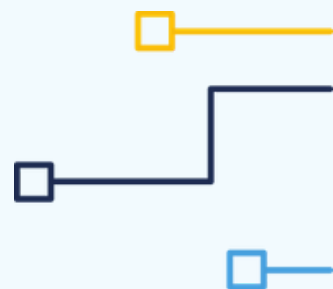
Finally: **involve people as much as possible**. WDODelta actively involves employees in the change. It brought in 2Sprint to help with implementation and onboarding. With the help of AI tools, demos and training materials were developed, including an AI assistant with screenshots, explanations, and short videos, so that everyone gets an accessible introduction. In addition, all employees, not just management, have access to Fortes Change Cloud. The information is visible and easy to find for everyone. This increases involvement and transparency, letting everyone see directly how projects are doing.

Ambition for the Future

In time, WDODelta wants to manage its entire change portfolio through Fortes Change Cloud. Helga de Boer developed a maturity model for this, with scores ranging from 1 to 6. The organization is currently at level 2, even though it has only been underway for a year. The goal is to reach a mature level across all components within three years, and to embed this firmly within the organization.



Rietberg pumping station
Source: WDODelta



ABOUT FORTES

For more than 25 years, Fortes has been developing solutions for the effective management of projects and project portfolios. Fortes Change Cloud is the number one solution for Strategic Portfolio Management at local and central Dutch government organizations. Fortes supports programs, projects, agile teams, and Strategic Resource Management, aligning available workforce capacity with current and future demand.

Fortes Change Cloud stands out for its ease of use, flexibility, and scalability. It supports everything from a small department with a handful of projects to a large ministry with dozens of portfolios and more than 1,000 initiatives.

Want to know how Fortes can help you gain more grip on your strategic steering? Request a demo today.

[REQUEST A DEMO](#)

One platform to connect the dots

THINK STRATEGIC

The easiest way to map your strategy, set clear change goals and drive growth.

DO WATERFALL

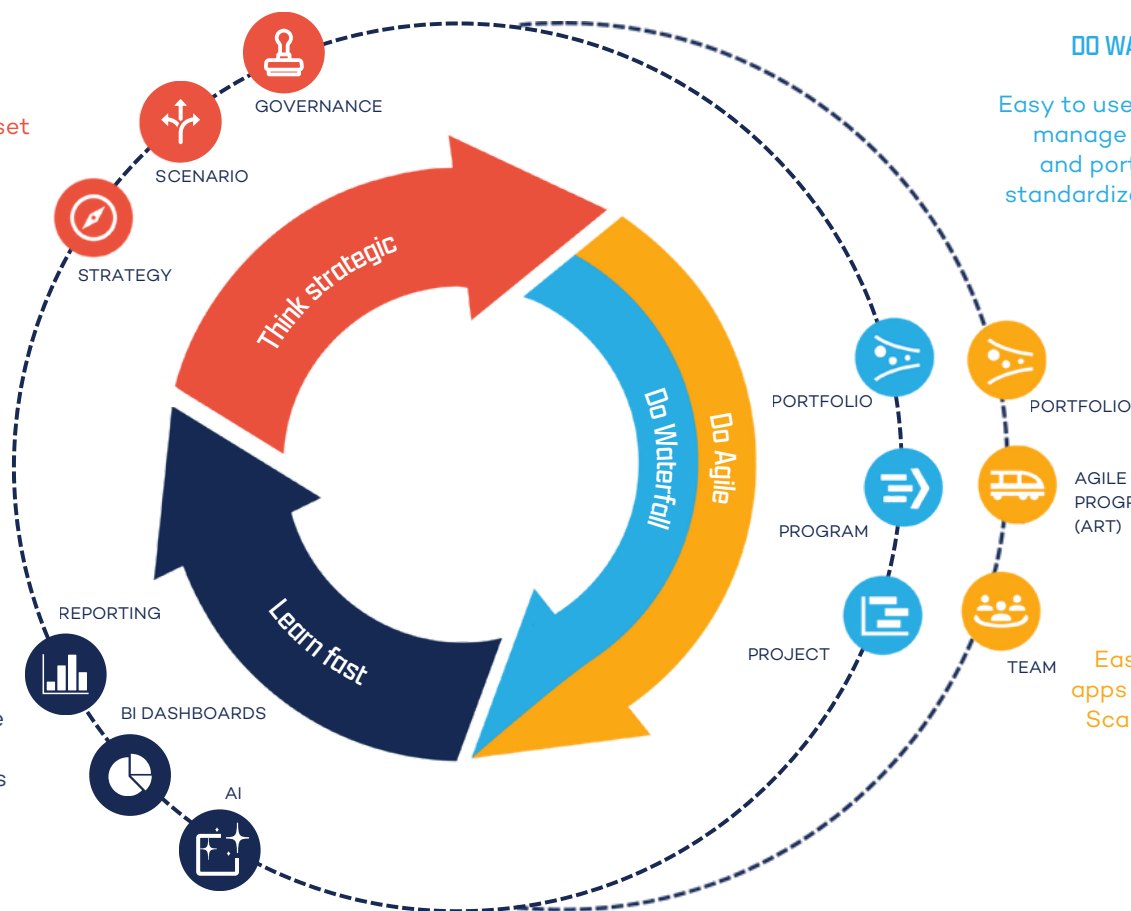
Easy to use apps to manage projects and portfolios in standardized ways.

LEARN FAST

Creating insights to get a grip on change processes and facilitate continuous improvement.

DO AGILE

Easy to use apps to apply Scaled Agile ways of working.



PERSPECTIVE

Focus on your priorities in any moment of the cycle.

