
CUSTOMER-CENTRIC CURRICULA: THE STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE FOR MODERN ACCOUNT EXCELLENCE

Lessons from Arcadis on building consistent, insight-led client engagement

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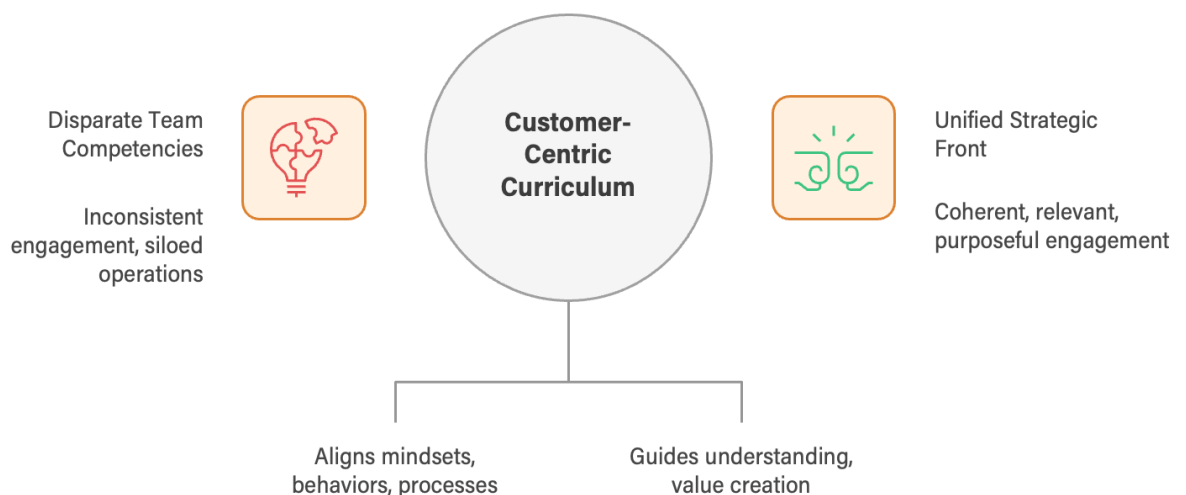
Arcadis

Organizations across industries continue to face unprecedented complexity in how to engage and create value for their customers and clients. Hybrid interactions, rapidly evolving market dynamics, and the increasing interdependence of customer ecosystems have accelerated the need for more strategic, insight-led, and co-created relationships. Today, customers and clients do not want to be sold anymore, but they want to partner differently to solve the real problems and find broader solutions. In this environment, traditional commercial training models — often fragmented across roles and functions — are insufficient to support the level of partnership customers and clients now expect.

When I first introduced the five critical success factors of a strategic account management (SAM) Center of Excellence (COE), one factor consistently emerged as central to enabling sustainable transformation: the development of a customer-centric curriculum. Such a curriculum is not a training program in the conventional sense. Rather, it is an integrated capability framework that aligns mindsets, behaviors, and processes across all customer-facing roles, enabling organizations to engage with coherence, relevance, and purpose.

This concept has only grown in significance. In many organizations, commercial and technical teams continue to operate with disparate competency models, varying definitions

Implementing a Customer-Centric Curriculum



of value, and inconsistent engagement approaches. These silos create discontinuity in the customer experience and hinder the organization’s ability to present a unified, strategic front. A customer-centric curriculum resolves this by providing a single, cohesive foundation — anchored in an outside-in perspective — that guides how teams understand customer context, create joint value, and orchestrate complex account relationships.

The experience of Arcadis in the United Kingdom illustrates how such a curriculum, when intentionally designed and embedded, can become a powerful catalyst for organizational transformation.

Arcadis is a leading global partner driving some of the most transformative projects of our time. They help clients make sustainable choices by combining digital innovation, human expertise, and future-focused skills across environment, energy, water, buildings, transport, and infrastructure sectors. Taking design, engineering, architecture, and consultancy to the next level, they use data-driven insights to co-create environments that reflect their clients’ business and stakeholder needs. With 36,000 people, they unite global expertise to tackle challenges like climate, energy

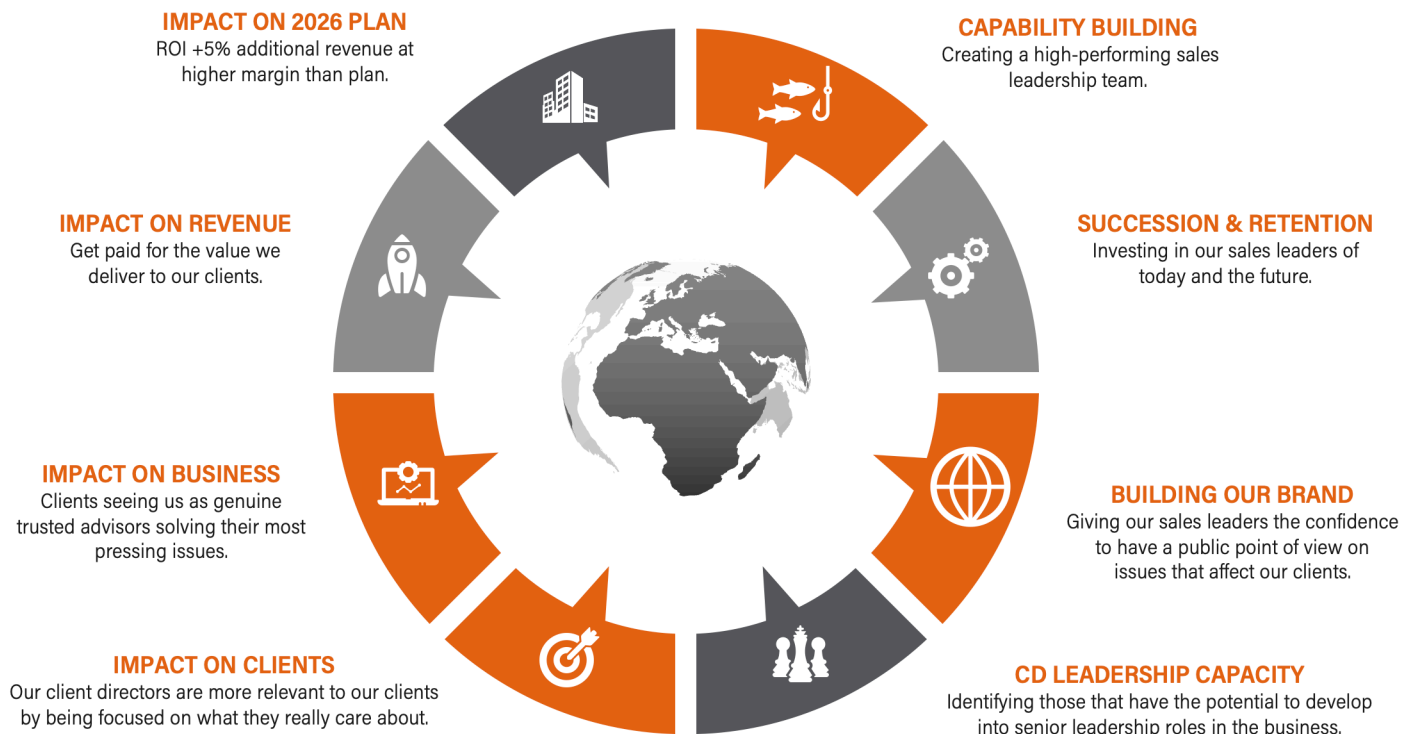
security and diversification, and livable cities, improving quality of life through their presence in 30+ countries. In 2024, they achieved €5.0 billion in gross revenues.

An evolution from general training to strategic customer focus

Before COVID-19, Arcadis had several development initiatives in place, including a broad client-focused academy. While valuable, these efforts reflected a common challenge across the industry: Training content was largely generic, fragmented, and not explicitly connected to the company’s strategic-account ambitions. The curriculum did not yet provide a unified, customer-centric engagement philosophy capable of shaping how teams collaborated, planned, and delivered value.

Recognizing this gap, Arcadis made a deliberate decision to elevate its development architecture. Instead of adding more courses or modules, the organization reframed its approach around a cohesive customer-centric curriculum, culminating with SAMA’s Certified Strategic Account Manager (CSAM) certification. This curriculum would serve as the backbone of its capability-building strategy —

Summary Growth Accelerator Program (GAP) - benefits



one anchored in internal relevance and aligned with external best practices from the SAM discipline.

A tiered and integrated development architecture

Arcadis' curriculum evolved into a two-tiered structure that enabled both scale and depth. The Client Focus Academy became the entry point for a wide population of customer-facing professionals. Its purpose is not merely to introduce tools, but to establish a consistent language and mindset across teams. Participants work directly on their own accounts and are supported by coaches who help them link concepts to their daily responsibilities. This early alignment ensured that customer-centric thinking permeates broadly and quickly across the organization.

For account leaders managing the most complex and strategic relationships, Arcadis developed a more advanced, immersive curriculum aligned with the CSAM pathway — the Growth Accelerator Program (GAP). This program integrates business simulations, internal co-creation work, coaching, and formal assessment. The emphasis is not only on elevating engagement skills but on application: Participants are expected to use the curriculum in real situations, co-develop value with customers, and demonstrate measurable progression in strategic thinking and account orchestration throughout time. They continue to grow and enhance their engagement skills as they make them part of their DNA — essentially becoming the sherpas for Arcadis to go through this business transformation.

“Our SAMA accreditation development program is designed to build a sales force that communicates consistently, adopts a unified approach, and changes the mindset necessary for ambitious growth,” said Nora Taylor, Sales Director at Arcadis. “Gathering a diverse group of delegates fosters networking, knowledge sharing, and new client opportunities through a strong, well-connected network. Effective sales require strong leadership — both within our teams and in guiding our clients toward valuable outcomes for their organizations and businesses. The program incorporates leadership development through 360-degree assessments, structured training, and coaching, which has contributed to our impressive results.”

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What distinguishes Arcadis' approach is the balance between internal specificity and external rigor, thought leadership, and benchmarking. Global SAM principles are adapted to reflect Arcadis' strategic priorities, commercial models, governance processes, and customer/client realities. This localization ensures that the curriculum does not remain abstract, but becomes a true enabler of how Arcadis engages its markets.

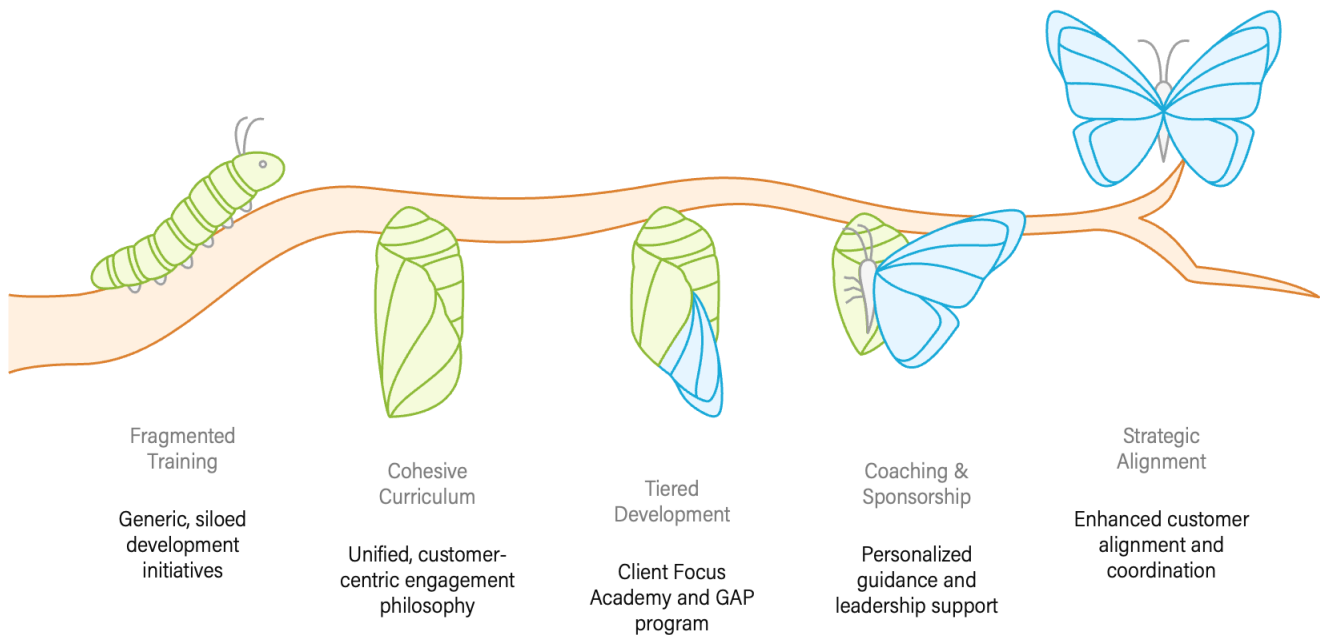
Coaching and sponsorship as structural enablers

A defining feature of Arcadis' curriculum is the role of coaching. Rather than positioning coaching as optional reinforcement, Arcadis institutionalized it as a core component of its development architecture. It's another critical success factor when a behavioral switch is needed. Coaches — experienced internal practitioners — provide continuity, contextual insight, and personalized guidance. They support learners in translating the curriculum into decisions and behaviors within their own accounts and challenge the learners to go outside of their comfort zones.

Leadership sponsorship further reinforces the system. By actively participating in the journey, modeling expected behaviors, and advocating for the program, senior leaders signal that customer-centricity is foundational to the business, not simply an initiative. This level of sponsorship aligns with CoE principles and is critical to success — something that we see as a must-have in the work we do, if the investment in skilling up is to be successful and sustained. Without visible leadership engagement, customer-centric curricula, and a strong Center of Excellence, organizations struggle to achieve sustained impact.

“SAMA training has helped to transform my high-performing account leaders into strategic influencers and converted our accounts into powerful growth engines,” said Darren Cook, Sector & Market Director at Arcadis. “It has built greater confidence to lead with insight, convert deep client knowledge into visionary and impactful solutions, and inspire my team toward shared goals. For my part of the business, this targeted leadership impact has accelerated growth, strengthened collaboration and strategic partnerships, and set a benchmark for excellence.”

Arcadis' Customer-Centric Transformation



Impact on capability, culture, and customer engagement

Over six years and multiple cohorts, Arcadis' customer-centric curriculum has contributed to a notable evolution in how teams think, align their way of thinking and working, and collaborate and engage with customers and clients. Account plans reflect deeper insight into customer objectives and contexts. Engagements are increasingly structured around joint value creation. Internal collaboration across functions has strengthened, supported by a shared vocabulary, ways of working, and consistent expectations of strategic engagement. Importantly, the program has also become aspirational within the organization. Demand now exceeds available cohort capacity, reinforcing its credibility and demonstrating that capability-building rooted in customer-centricity can shift culture as powerfully as it shifts skill.

They also created GAP program alumni who continue to elevate the skillset through peer-to-peer exchanges, sharing, and an ongoing refresh of thought leadership by bringing speakers and ideas that cultivate constant closeness to changes in its clients' ecosystem.

While outcomes in professional services environments cannot always be isolated to a single variable, the organization has experienced enhanced customer alignment, increased strategic opportunity shaping, and improved internal coordination — hallmarks of a mature SAM environment.

“Becoming accredited with the Strategic Account Management Association has been transformative for me,” said Andrew Dutton, Sector Leader at Arcadis. “The SAMA tools have helped me plan and develop accounts more effectively, particularly in understanding what truly drives our clients. More importantly, though, SAMA has given me the confidence to engage and operate successfully with clients at board level.”

The broader implication: Customer-centric curriculum as a strategic enabler

What Arcadis' experience underscores is a broader truth: Customer-centric curricula represent one of the most powerful levers for enabling SAM excellence and transforming commercial organizations. They bring coherence across roles, ensure global consistency with local relevance,

Arcadis' Customer-Centric Curriculum



empower account leaders to act strategically, and embed outside-in thinking into the organization's culture.

"I lead a highly complex multi-disciplinary account with a large account team. Adopting SAMA tools has driven a robust and structured approach consistently across a diverse range of areas on the account," said Will Waller, Account Director at Arcadis. "The impact has been consistently rigorous assessment of client need, our response, and the competitive field. Outputs have materially impacted our strategy on specific pursuits, and applying SAMA techniques is helping us increase win rate."

A well-designed curriculum does more than develop skills; it shapes the organizational identity. It reinforces the belief that value is co-created with customers, that insight precedes solutions, and that partnership — not product — is the foundation of sustainable growth. As companies continue to navigate increasingly complex markets, the organizations that will differentiate themselves are those that build integrated capability systems — systems that align learning, coaching, leadership, and process around the customer. Customer-centric curricula sit at the center of this alignment. They translate strategy into behavior, equip teams to engage with sophistication and empathy, and ensure that the organization consistently shows up in ways customers recognize as valuable. ■

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