

Audit of the implementation of the IT architecture and portfolio management

Federal IT Steering Unit

Key facts

Corporate architecture is a practice which aims to guide organisations towards the changes required in order to realise their strategies. It allows the existing and desired status of work and IT issues to be described, as well as the required transitional stages. Its controlled implementation of synergies and the elimination of undesirable duplications means it can help reduce expenditure charged to federal IT. In the 2018 fiscal plan, this expenditure exceeds CHF 1 billion. By reusing existing components, corporate architecture can also help keep the complexity of platforms and IT projects under control. This practice therefore acts as an aid in the planning for sustainable federal IT.

The Federal Council tasked the Federal Steering Unit (FITSU) with defining the directives concerning corporate architecture. The FITSU is also responsible for developing and maintaining the architecture for the "Federal Administration IT" and "IT services for the entire Federal Administration" planning areas. The audit of the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) does not concern the contents of the Confederation's corporate architecture but rather its progress and implementation. It also relates to the links between the corporate architecture and other elements of IT steering.

In this audit, the SFAO notes uncertainties surrounding the framework conditions and the process of establishing the corporate architecture within the Confederation. This assessment is directly linked to the limited efficiency of cross-departmental offices which has already been the subject of criticism in previous audits¹.

Corporate architecture positioning generally correct although unfinished for various reasons

The FITSU correctly described the global positioning of the corporate architecture within the content-based IT steering. The IT strategy incorporates the corporate architecture planning and development plans in its IT steering description. This is based on the planning areas, another essential architectural concept.

However, the descriptions of the complex links with and between the steering elements are still too simplistic. This also applies to interactions between the corporate architecture and portfolio management, integral and financial IT planning and capacity management. According to the SFAO, the FITSU must finalise its detailed descriptions and adapt the steering process accordingly. Furthermore, it needs to decide on the way in which the corporate architecture's point of view is taken into account in major federal IT projects. In particular, the mechanisms used to validate the conformity of architectures of solutions of large projects with corporate architecture must be defined.

¹ Cf. in particular the report «Umsetzung der Weisungen der Querschnittämter – Informatiksteuerungsorgan des Bundes» (PA 15562) of 11 April 2016, available (only in German) on the SFAO website (www.sfao.admin.ch).

Directives pending since May 2016 and governance issues to be settled by the Federal Council

The concept of content-based IT steering and the directives prepared by the FITSU form the initial basis for the running of the corporate architecture in the Federal Administration. The broad objectives listed reflect members of parliaments' expectations concerning synergies and cost savings. The directives, pending since May 2016, have encountered resistance from the federal departments on the subject of resources. Furthermore, the organisation of federal IT is currently under discussion. The SFAO considers the approval of the directives, postponed until the fourth quarter of 2017 at the earliest, to be uncertain.

In view of the ambitions concerning interdepartmental synergies, the SFAO also questions the efficiency of the current decision-making mechanisms in terms of corporate architecture. The FITSU does not have the characteristics or decision-making powers of an executive body in this domain. The federal architecture board is limited to a consultative and informative role. The SFAO recommends that the Federal Council enhances the FITSU's legitimacy to oversee the federal IT architecture and rethink how the federal architecture board operates. Implementation of this recommendation is a prerequisite for other recommendations in this report.

Finally, the SFAO finds that the objectives set for the corporate architecture are not specific, concrete or prioritised. In these circumstances, it is difficult to define the work assigned to the architects. The mechanisms which verify whether the objectives set have been achieved are also missing. These need to be defined.

Roadmap and development of the approach

In the SFAO's view, the general terms of the Confederation's architectural approach have only been very partially defined. As a result, the concrete way in which the corporate architecture will contribute to achieving the IT steering objectives is unclear. This situation also results in significant uncertainty in the federal departments. The FITSU must develop the details of the architectural approach.

Furthermore, the SFAO highlights the importance of aligning the corporate architecture's capabilities with the relevant objectives. It considers the expectations of the corporate architecture to be contrary to the capabilities and resources available at the various levels of the Administration. The SFAO recommends that the FITSU draws up a three-year roadmap for the development of the capabilities of the Confederation's corporate architecture.

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