

Audit of the Innolink project

Innosuisse – Swiss Innovation Agency

Key facts

In 2021, Innosuisse, the Swiss Innovation Agency, approved subsidies totalling almost CHF 330 million. The agency is currently in the process of replacing its application management solution. The project is estimated to cost around CHF 7 million and was originally planned to be completed by the end of 2023. Led by Innosuisse in collaboration with external service providers, the project aims to develop a new portal called Innolink.

In this audit, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) examined the objectives and management of the project, as well as the alignment of the business and IT architectures. The project is generally on track, with the first module online since October 2021. However, a change in legislation in the autumn of 2021 will have an impact on the project's future. Risk management and information security should also be strengthened.

A project that is moving forward, with challenges linked to a legislative revision and IT security

Following preparations in 2020, a project mandate was validated in early 2021. It draws lessons from the weaknesses of the current platform and describes credible solutions to address them. Implementation work is now beginning. It is based on a cloud computing platform hosted by Microsoft. A first module of the solution has been online since autumn 2021. The planned deadlines and parameters were met, and there was a minimal cost overrun.

However, the revision of the Federal Act on the Promotion of Research and Innovation in autumn 2021 requires new tools to be integrated into Innolink. The priority of the project tasks will have to be reviewed, its completion will be postponed by one year and additional costs will be incurred. The SFAO considered the project's response to the legislative revision as plausible. The details of these impacts were being analysed at the time of the audit.

The new portal went live as planned. Significant work has already been carried out in terms of information security and an analysis of protection needs and information security concepts were drawn up. However, the SFAO noted that the basic protection measures are not sufficiently documented. The SFAO also highlighted the risks associated with the current wave of cyberattacks and the complexity of the cloud computing platform used. In this context, the SFAO considers it necessary to periodically check the effectiveness of the technical measures developed and issued two recommendations to this effect.

Steering and management are generally adequate, but risk management needs strengthening

The project organisation and the objectives for scope, deadlines and costs are defined. Overall, the project is being steered in an appropriate manner. The Steering Committee and the Board are regularly informed of progress, and the project managers monitor and manage risks appropriately. However, the SFAO noted that the project did not have a risk manager who reported directly to the project sponsor. The SFAO recommended that Innosuisse define this role in the project organisation in order to facilitate an additional risk assessment.

The project is conducted using agile methodology, and the principles and roles are defined. Various practices are applied, such as keeping a product backlog¹, short development cycles and regular software demonstrations. The platform infrastructure and tools support these practices. Project managers regularly monitor the progress of work in terms of quality, costs and deadlines.

A change management process is used. If stakeholders adapt the required functionality, the request is documented and analysed. If the project team validates the change, it is incorporated into the development process. For the more fundamental aspects of the project (scope, budget, timetable), change requests have to be validated by the Steering Committee. The incorporation of new tools after the revision of the legal framework followed this process, for example.

Management of requirements and tests are monitored, architectures are aligned

The project stakeholders and their expectations are identified. Current business processes are described, improvements identified and target processes defined, with input from business specialists. For each process, a minimum viable product is determined, which covers 80% of the cases of support request processing. These definitions are translated into work items and submitted for development.

The control points in the development process and a test concept are described and business specialists and external users are involved. The results are documented, corrections of defects are monitored and formal validations are carried out at various levels. The Steering Committee approved the production launch in October 2021.

The methods and stakeholders involved in the development of the architecture within the project are defined, and an agile approach is favoured. A reference technical architecture is defined, the infrastructure, basic services and development tools are identified. The IT architecture artefacts are based on the business architecture. The SFAO believes that the approach is appropriate and that the two architectures are sufficiently aligned.

Original text in French

¹ Product backlog: a prioritised list of tasks for the development team