

Impact of the revised Federal Information Technology Ordinance and effectiveness of the IT Steering Unit

Federal IT Steering Unit

Key points

The FITSU is not yet fulfilling its new role consistently

The Federal IT Steering Unit (FITSU) has been assigned new tasks since 1 January 2012 as a result of the revision of the Federal Information Technology Ordinance (FITO). The previous decision-making bodies, where all departments are represented, have been downgraded to consultative bodies. The FITSU is the central steering body for the organisation of the Confederation's information and communications technology (ICT). It takes policy decisions or prepares such matters for the Federal Council. It also regularly reports to the Federal Council on the implementation status of the Federal ICT Strategy 2012-2015. The FITSU is now also responsible for the management of standard services, which include products and services that are required and used by all of the Confederation's administrative units. The centralisation and standardisation of these services should ensure that synergies are exploited and costs thus reduced.

The SFAO invited over one hundred key people in the Federal Administration to take part in a survey to assess the impact of the revision of the FITO and the effectiveness of the FITSU. About 30 interviews were conducted based on the some 70 questionnaires received.

The new organisation is generally seen as wise and rational by the important players and is broadly accepted. Those surveyed gave a primarily positive opinion of the FITSU's strengthened position. The SFAO has found fault only with the considerable autonomy of the departments in their choice of IT service providers, as permitted by Article 9 of the FITO. There is no other major need for action with regard to the formulation of the FITO.

However, a mixed picture emerges for the implementation of the FITO. Although the FITSU's new leadership role is recognised, criticism is levelled at how consistently the role is being fulfilled. For those surveyed, the FITSU currently does not have the desired level of effectiveness. A competent specialist unit such as the FITSU is expected to appear considerably more decisive and bold. At present, it is perceived as rather slow to respond, too willing to compromise, tardy, and at times lacking in practical relevance. The SFAO also shares the opinion of the departments and administrative units. The FITSU has room for improvement in this respect.

The central management of ICT and the further introduction of standard services must ease the burden on the departments

While the management and steering of ICT for the entire Federal Administration is becoming more tangible, task fulfilment is still not satisfactory. The criticism of those surveyed – also shared by the SFAO – was that previous interdepartmental services that were already up and running were standardised further rather than priority being given to unaddressed issues such as architecture. No concept and only one instrument have been made available to date for identifying the overarching needs of the entire Federal Administration. This lack of strategic steering means that the opportunities for real savings in the future are still not being exploited.



In recent months, the FITSU has established further project controlling with the ICT Cockpit instrument. However, as the SFAO sees it, two essential elements are still missing for effective IT steering: portfolio management instruments should be developed and the FITSU should step up its work on the issue of long-term, comprehensive architecture planning.

The newly created ICT Cockpit could serve entirely as a basis for identifying not just future needs but also duplications at an early stage. Beyond this, it could provide input for developing other standard services. However, the FITSU should also ensure that its information requirements are covered with a reasonable workload for the departments. Initially, the strengthening of the FITSU was also designed to ease the burden on the departments. Nevertheless, these have complained about an increasing workload for reporting and as part of project controlling. The information in the ICT Cockpit should not be used only by the FITSU for steering at federal level. The departments and administrative units should also be able to use it to manage their ICT projects. This is currently not the case everywhere, which is leading to duplications.

Last November, the Federal Council instructed the FITSU to show by spring 2015 how the departments' collective synergies could be exploited more in the future. The FITSU is fulfilling this request by developing a concept for "IT Architecture Governance in the Federal Administration". The SFAO welcomes these efforts. The concept must show in particular how common needs can be identified at an early stage as part of a Confederation-wide cost-efficiency analysis and can be brought together for the greatest common benefit in the medium and long term. In order to give the FITSU legitimacy in this area, an amendment to the FITO may need to be contemplated.

The cost efficiency of standard services has not yet been proven

Despite the sometimes divergent views on what should be included in standard services, those surveyed had mostly positive opinions on the standardised solutions. However, many of those surveyed doubted that the savings identified in the market model could actually be achieved with the standard services (especially office automation, including UCC). In order to further enhance the acceptance of standard services, the FITSU should therefore use clearly measurable and demonstrable bases for the cost-benefit calculations in the market models and Confederation-wide projects. Effective controlling should be developed for the achievement of objectives so that the actual final costs can be clearly accounted for. The results must be incorporated into the strategy planning accordingly.

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