

Digital transformation: Audit of process efficiency in dealing with conscripts

Defence Group – Armed Forces Staff

Key facts

The e-Pers-Miliz project dates back to 2007 and is intended to digitalise the military service book. In 2020, thirteen years later, the Armed Forces Staff approved the project budget of CHF 12.6 million. Until the "Digitalisation of the military service book" motion was adopted in March 2018, the Armed Forces Staff had found that there was no real need for digitalisation. The Defence Group (Group V) cancelled the project during the concept phase, at the end of 2021, in order to integrate it into the overarching programme for the digitalisation of the conscript armed forces. By then, the expenses with a financing effect totalled CHF 1.3 million.

In accordance with its Armed Forces Vision 2030, Group V aims to implement the programme in an agile manner in order to coordinate its various projects and eliminate existing redundancies. The detailed objectives, budget and timeframe were unknown at the time of the audit.

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) audited the project and the programme. The work is not yet at an advanced stage. Therefore, not all essential digital capabilities are in place yet and the risks are sufficiently mitigated to ensure success. In this report, the SFAO made five recommendations regarding the main risks.

Exploiting the potential for efficiency is challenging and should be measurable

The existing structural and process organisation is complex. The introduction of a digital end-to-end process that reduces costs and measurably satisfies the clients' needs does not depend solely on Group V. It is also dependent on the legal framework and the cantons. Without the appropriate framework conditions, there is a risk that the project will not sufficiently optimise the existing processes.

In order to manage the project's progress and use resources economically, it is indispensable, even in agile programmes and projects, to set concrete objectives and metrics in advance. Group V should determine these in good time.

The e-Pers-Miliz project team has already drawn up the basic principles. Where appropriate, Group V should ensure that it uses this technical knowledge in programme preparation and implementation.

Striving for client-oriented solutions

The e-Pers-Miliz project defined the stakeholders and included relevant representatives in the project organisation. Group V now wants to pursue the programme for the digitalisation of the conscript armed forces in a client-oriented way using agile methods such as human-centred design, design-thinking workshops and prototypes.

At present, Group V has not yet identified its clients' needs to the extent that it can clearly classify and prioritise them. In the SFAO's view, this is important in order to use financial and human resources in the most targeted way possible in the future.

An interdisciplinary team advises on the overall architecture

Since the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport (DDPS) data centres are not expected to be in operation until 2024/25, federal specialists are looking for an interim solution for architecture, development, deployment and operation. The architecture should be flexible, upgradeable, robust and secure, and should enable rapid results and a sense of achievement.

Likewise, a technology roadmap with the steps required to achieve the objectives is still lacking. This would enable the DDPS to monitor implementation at a later stage.

Resources and knowledge should be developed

Whether Group V can implement a comprehensive digitalisation project depends primarily on finances. Reliable and comprehensible information – including estimates that are as accurate as possible – forms the basis for the approval of further credits by Parliament.

The empowerment of the project members and management, as well as sufficient resources, are of central importance. Therefore, at least these people should soon be trained in agile procedures and ways of thinking. Furthermore, it must be ensured that adequate human resources are available in good time at the Armed Forces Command Support Organisation.

Framework conditions could prevent end-to-end digitalisation

Group V identified the legal obstacles and took initial measures. It should review the legal basis analysis from the e-Pers-Miliz project within the framework of the programme and in accordance with the HERMES specifications.

Original text in German