

Audit of the key ICT project SUPERB – Specialist applications sub-project

Federal Office for Buildings and Logistics, Federal Office of Information Technology, Systems and Telecommunication

Key facts

The specialist applications project is part of the SUPERB (federal ERP support processes) programme, and was set up in light of the introduction of SAP S/4HANA software for support processes. Led by the Federal Office of Information Technology, Systems and Telecommunication, it is aimed at adapting the multiplicity of linked specialist applications to these processes. The aim is to repatriate to the extent possible the roughly 250 applications concerned to the SAP standard and harmonise the interfaces. The use of centralised master data must also be ensured. The programme costs are estimated at CHF 485 million for the 2020–2027 period. The project has a budget of CHF 18.5 million and is scheduled for completion at the end of 2026.

The project work is being done in a complex environment. In December 2021, a new step-by-step project approach was adopted. This envisages a minimum viable product (MVP) from September 2023 onwards, and the implementation of the target processes and innovations from 2024. Using this approach, the programme aims to reduce the risk of major disruption when the new system goes live.

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) assessed whether the specialist applications are being aligned with the SAP standard where appropriate, and whether synergies have been identified and implemented. It also evaluated the work on standardising the interfaces and introducing business partners' master data. It observed that this work was under way. However, it noted an increased risk of only minimal changes being made, and of the project's original objectives not being pursued with sufficient vigour.

Standardisation, synergies and harmonisation have not yet been achieved

The introduction of the MVP in September 2023 represents a first phase, which includes the centralised management of business partners' master data and the harmonised chart of accounts. The priorities for the specialist applications project have changed. The first phase must ensure the continued operation of these applications. The objectives, namely standardising, harmonising and using business partners' master data, will not be pursued fully until later project phases, starting in 2024.

For the project, the return to the SAP standard mainly affects the specialist applications run on the SAP ECC6 platform. The principles have been described, but very few candidates have been identified to date. The non-SAP specialist applications, and their possible implementation using the SAP standard, have not yet been considered. Moreover, the specific potential for synergies between specialist applications has not yet been identified.

As regards the harmonisation of interfaces with the non-SAP specialist applications, minimal migration is planned for the time being, with the move to harmonised technologies

being done at a later date. The use of business partners' master data by the specialist applications has not been achieved either. The principles have been defined, but their implementation is proving complicated. A temporary tool (dispatcher) is being developed to facilitate the transition. This tool will allow the client/supplier data to be dynamically converted into business partner data. Despite this, the service users intend to request exemptions to the use of business partner data. This would compromise the implementation of the once-only principle.

Mechanisms should be established to ensure the vigorous pursuit of the objectives regarding standardisation, synergies, harmonisation and the use of business partners' master data from 2024 onwards. The SFAO has issued recommendations on these points.

Project foundations in need of updating and an application list currently being stabilised

Following the new implementation approach for SAP S/4HANA, the key elements of the project governance were in the process of being updated. The project implementation mandate is therefore not up to date. The details of the governance and the breakdown of the financing are likewise incomplete and have yet to be validated.

The list of applications to be dealt with forms the basis for the project scope. Various characteristics (type, complexity, state of progress, risk, office involved, etc.), plus the working documentation, are used to describe them. Maintenance of the list is challenging, and the list of applications – and hence the scope – continues to evolve. The project team is working to stabilise the list.

Project monitoring and supervision need to be reinforced

The project work is progressing and the detailed steps to be taken are being drawn up, as are the planning schedules for each application. One application has been used as a pilot project, in order to gain experience. By contrast, the monthly reports only partly reflect progress, and are not very transparent. The quality of progress reports needs to be improved.

The project has identified risks of delayed implementation. A multitude of results have to be provided for each application, and the planning of resources is being revised. A reliable overview of the outstanding points must be drawn up for each specialist application and operational monitoring needs to be strengthened.

Project communication has been defined and information meetings are organised regularly. A wealth of documentation is available in various formats. Despite these efforts, numerous stakeholders (departments, service users) find the information insufficient. Firstly, the documents are scattered and there is often no indication of their validity. Secondly, there is not enough information to allow robust planning for following up on incidents, particularly as regards testing. The project has identified the problem and is trying to remedy it by defining the steps to be taken and drawing up detailed plans. It is still too early to tell whether this measure has been a success.

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