

Audit of the DTI key project Cloud Enabling Office Automation

Digital Transformation and ICT Steering Sector of the Federal Chancellery

Key facts

The Cloud Enabling Office Automation (CEBA) project was launched in 2019 and is managed by the Digital Transformation and ICT Steering (DTI) Sector of the Federal Chancellery. The aim is to replace the Microsoft Office LTSC Professional Plus 2021 product suite currently in use on the Federal Administration's workstation systems with Microsoft Office 365 (M365). The new version is connected to the public Microsoft Cloud.

The technical implementation of the project is taking place in two subprojects with ICT service providers for the Confederation, the Federal Office of Information Technology, Systems and Telecommunication (FOITT) and the IT section of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. The project was classed as an ICT key project in 2022. This was not due to the volume of CHF 26.5 million, but because of its effects on the way in which practically the entire Federal Administration works.

The audit results reveal a mixed picture: The implementation of the project is progressing with minor delays, with the roll-out in the departments scheduled from 2024 onwards. The project is based on the assumption that it will no longer be possible to operate the Microsoft Office product range locally as of 2026.¹ There are now indications that this may be possible for longer.² This will be validated by the project. The (residual) risks involved in using the cloud, some of which are considered significant by the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO), had not been fully ascertained and accepted at the time of the audit. In some areas, there is no common understanding with the future users. As the original conditions may have changed, the project could gain more time to resolve this situation and others.

Risks and supervision of the service providers must be clarified before roll-out

According to Microsoft's roadmap, support for the existing versions of Office will be discontinued from 2026. The project is based on the assumption that it is necessary to introduce M365, as support will subsequently only be available for cloud-integrated, subscription-based installations. The project gives the departments the opportunity to change over to the cloud-based solution M365. At the time of the audit, one of the manufacturer's websites stated that there would be a further release of the Microsoft Office suite available for one-time purchase. This would change the basis for the project. The SFAO recommends that the DTI Sector clarify with Microsoft how long and to what extent this release will continue to provide a solution without having to connect to the cloud. Depending on the outcome, approaches may become possible that would give the Federal Administration more time to prepare for the changed risk situation associated with moving to the cloud.

¹ See Microsoft roadmap: <https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/lifecycle/products/?products=office>.

² See Microsoft FAQ website: <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/office-2021-and-office-ltsc-for-windows-and-mac-faq-d574cf0b-3ebc-42cf-9035-a3b837e0463c>.

The roll-out of CEBA will mean a change in Microsoft's position as a partner for the Federal Administration. While this was previously a relationship between a purchaser and a software provider, this will now become a closer relationship with a service provider. Federal Administration data that was previously stored on its own systems will be transferred to the service provider and its sub-contractors. This will require enhanced supervision and monitoring of the service provider. The contractual assurances and security measures in particular will need to be monitored by the Confederation. There is currently no coordinated concept for this. The SFAO recommends that the DTI Sector should draw this up and implement it, taking into account the responsibilities of the two offices.

Residual risks of cloud use must be entered into consciously, and parallel operations should be minimised

The residual risks involved in using the cloud were ascertained by the project, and their status at the end of the concept phase disclosed to the Conference of Secretaries General (CSG) and the Federal Council. They still need to be accepted and approved by the Federal Chancellor and the DTI delegates before the roll-out. As the success of the project depends on the offices responsible bearing the residual risks, the analysis involving all the departments needs to be finalised and accepted quickly. It is important that the completeness and possible measures receive broad support, and that a consistent understanding of the residual risks is achieved. In the event of significant changes, at least the CSG and the Federal Council, which were previously informed, should be notified again.

The introduction of Microsoft Teams will create new duplications: The replacement of the current Skype for Business telephony solution will take place in a separate project with its own timetable outside of CEBA. According to the DTI this is to avoid increasing the complexity of CEBA even further with the 70-plus individual telephony solutions at the Confederation. Both solutions will be used in parallel at first. The SFAO recommends that the DTI Sector keep the period of parallel operation as short as possible.

Federal Administration infrastructure may only be opened up in a controlled manner

The use of M365 services from the public Microsoft Cloud requires the automated opening up of the Federal Administration's network infrastructure. To avoid having to create any general exceptions for this, DTI has expanded the existing directives. The addition states that the infrastructure should be opened "as much as necessary, but as little as possible".

However, it is still unclear how compliance with this principle can be monitored. The SFAO recommends that DTI specifies how it intends to ensure that the automated opening of the federal infrastructure does not go beyond the minimum level required.

Stakeholders should remain adequately involved in the project

Attention should be focused on the Federal Data Protection and Information Commissioner (FDPIC), who was consulted as part of the clarifications on the data and information protection issues in the CEBA project. It is important that the project takes sufficient account of the feedback received from the FDPIC and continues with the ongoing coordination.

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