It's about more than just modernising systems

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When planning major modernisation projects for specific applications, companies should always think about which organisational changes will also be needed. Viewing systems in isolation is a common mistake.

Extensive modernisation of certain applications or central application landscapes can be necessary for various reasons, ranging from difficulties managing specialist requirements through to technical debt. This is often the case when an organisation grows quickly and needs its applications to start serving new purposes. It can also be the result of disruptive changes to the business environment.

Make or buy

A lack of specialists or technical experts, both internally and externally, can make things more difficult. Furthermore, a silo mentality can often arise among different departments with different external partners that can lead to internal problems and sensitivities. Due to tunnel vision and developer's pride, for example, making the required system changes can be unimaginable for some stakeholders.

Many companies – more so in Switzerland than in Anglo-Saxon countries – overestimate their abilities and insist on developing software themselves, even though it is much more effective to purchase ready-made systems in the vast majority of cases.

Support from senior management

What all scenarios have in common is the need to adapt the organisation at the same time as changing the applications. After all, a software project should first and foremost be about the people rather than the technology – particularly in light of the current shortage of IT specialists. That's why a modernisation project must have strong backing within the company, especially at the top of the hierarchy. The sponsor and steering committee must be made up of senior management.

All too often, however, the company has little experience of conducting such a transformation project and they also lack the necessary internal resources and capacities. It therefore makes sense to involve an external partner with the right skillset to accompany the transformation – especially due to the time constraints in change management.

External perspective on transformation

It is important to get an independent, outside perspective of the transformation process on a regular basis. An external QA review should examine all aspects – both internal and external – that are relevant for the entire organisation and report on them accordingly. These transformation reviews are needed by the sponsor or representative of the department tasked with applying the findings within the company. It is essential that these people are also represented on the steering committee.

In short, if a company is planning a major modernisation project for its applications or systems, the project must always be supported at organisational level as well. In an iterative process, the organisation and the application landscape must evolve together for the project to be successful.