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Research projects, Cooperation agreements

Proactive public administration: let the bureaucracy work for you



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fortiss

fortiss scientist Peter Kuhn is working with IBM on a solution for proactive administration. | **Copyright:** Photo: fortiss GmbH | **Download**

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“As of 2022, everything here will be digital.” Is that a sentence that would be hard to imagine coming from a government representative these days? At the moment, perhaps not yet, but the regulation with the bulky name “Federal Act to Improve Online Access to Administrative Services”, which also goes by the German acronym OZG, can help. If the researchers from IBM and fortiss, the independent, Free State of Bavaria research institute for software-intensive systems, have their way however, that’s not all. The two partners are already working together on a solution for proactive public administration services, in which the process is not only digital, but is even initiated proactively.

The online access act, OZG for short, requires federal, state and community government authorities to also offer citizens their services digitally via an online portal by the end of 2022. To accomplish this, 600 services were identified in the OZG catalog, divided into topics and life situations, and then prioritized. The administrative services are being implemented step-by-step in two programs depending on whether a service is being handled at the federal or state level.

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According to the German Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (BMI), the focus is always on the users of the services. After all, success is possible only if users accept the administrative portals and gladly use them. That's not something that can be taken for granted, like this study from 2019 illustrates. While 78 percent of those surveyed want to complete government services online, only every second person is convinced by the existing services such as online forms. The pragmatic approach used so far is obviously not sufficient.

The fact is, digitalization is changing public administration services to an enormous degree and the realignment of the services to make them user-centric calls for more extensive concepts. IBM and fortiss have jointly developed and tested these concepts. The "Readiness Assessment Method for Public Administration Services" relies on a proactive role from the government side, thus taking it a crucial step further than the online form approach used to date.

Pilot project for proactive public administration: registering a business

In order to demonstrate the feasibility of the concept, the two partners first selected one of the services from the OZG implementation catalog with a high priority and which in many respects can be improved with a proactive, digital process in the interest of the users: the process for registering a business. A variety of documents have to be obtained and provided depending on the type of business, such as a skilled trade, gastronomy, or passenger transport. In addition, the process often requires applications that at least to some extent contain identical content, such as waste disposal, alcohol licenses or criminal record background checks.

IBM and fortiss then more closely observed the step required to register a gastronomy business. This observation showed that today, not only do users have to provide numerous information multiple times, generally speaking the process for registering a business is not always clearly structured. Neither the scope of the steps nor the processing time could be immediately recognized.

Using the actual scenario as a basis, they developed a digital, and especially proactive and application-free potential implementation of the public administration services. After roughly four months, the participants then introduced to the Bavarian Ministry of Economic Affairs, Regional Development and Energy a digital services platform that guides the entire process, largely without interaction. This video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZC3Smt54K1I&feature=emb_imp_woyt) shows what the future could look like.

Digital Readiness Assessment and Piloting (IBM fortiss Center for AI)

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ferred to other forms by the system and a central dashboard provides information regarding the status and the next steps.

Automating communication between the authorities and users

Uniform interfaces between the participating IT systems, automated data retrieval and new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and distributed ledger technology (DLT) make the vision of a user-centric, proactive public administration service already possible today. The solution also easily took into account the stringent requirements for data privacy.

Which services can be proactively designed in the future? In this case it pays to take a close look. From the point of view of the project participants, in all cases it's only the communication between the authorities and users that can be partially or completely automated, but not the activities that the authority has to carry out itself. This remains the responsibility of the authorities who are correspondingly trained and on occasion make discretionary decisions based on current law. Even in cases where the regulations appear to be clear, the degree of automation still has to be examined. One example is BAföG, Germany's federal program that provides financial assistance to students. According to the law, although many young people are entitled to the subsidy, they are still required to pay off the corresponding debt at a later point. Whether this model is suitable is a highly-personal decision and should remain that way. In this case it's conceivable that the first step involves only an automated service in the form of additional information or an offer for a consultation.

Automated processes offer especially significant potential not only for individuals, but for companies and organizations that have deal much more frequently with government processes, which are vastly more complex. If time and money could be saved with proactive public administration services, it would ultimately benefit the local business region and thus society as a whole.

With their project, IBM and fortiss have laid the foundation for a user-friendly public administration platform of the future. As a next step, the plan is to transfer the results of the project to government offices at the community and state levels. Let's keep our fingers crossed that in the future, the bureaucracy will work for us!

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