

The art of business architecture

ARTICLE

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The Office of Youth and Careers in the canton of Zurich has its eyes on the future and aims to enhance its many services in the spirit of digitalisation, remaining true to its customer-centric approach. How can this bold vision be accomplished? Jean-Claude Nüsperli, Head of Application Management, talks about the dynamics of centralisation, society's increasing diversity and how the application of Mondrian affects its future.

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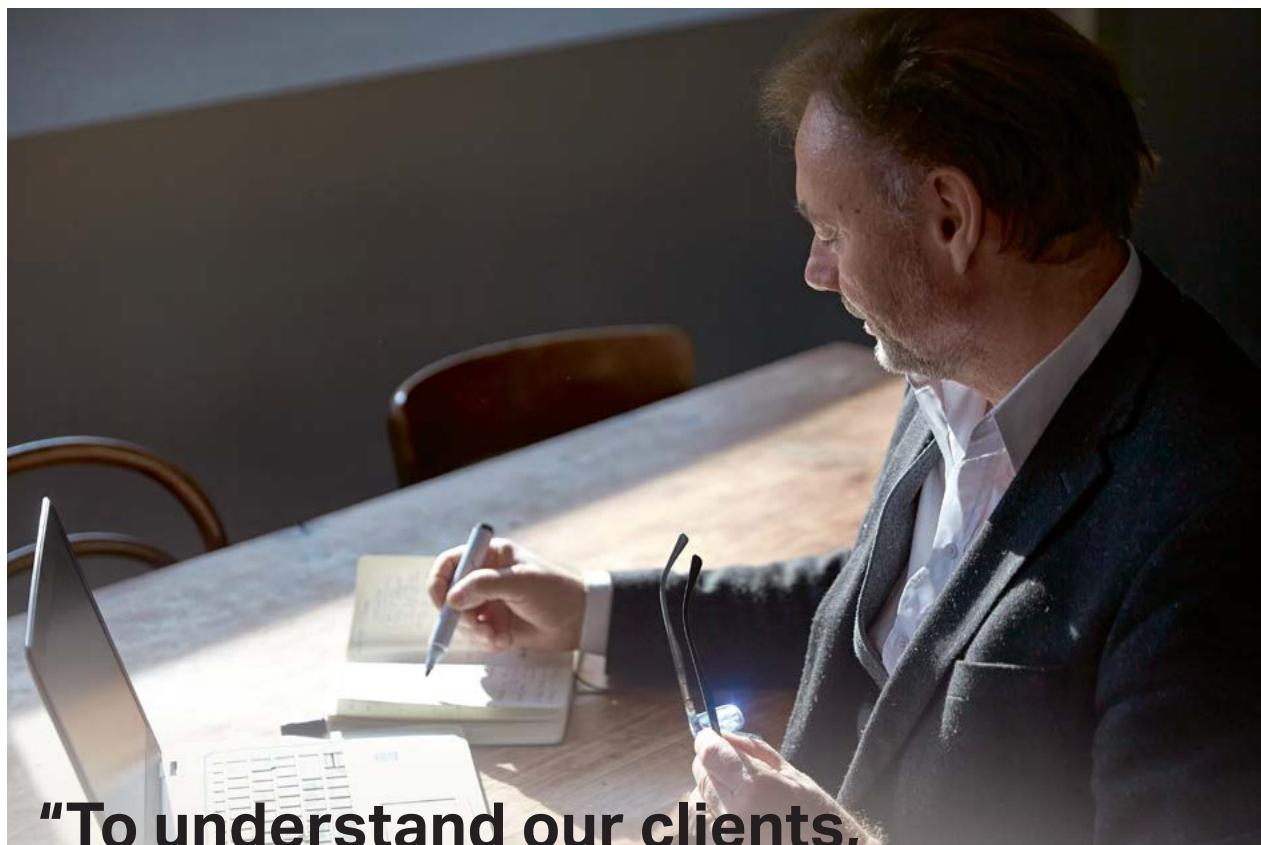


-JEAN-CLAUDE NÜSPERLI, HEAD OF APPLICATION MANAGEMENT AJB AT DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND MEMBER OF THE CORE PROJECT TEAM, IN FRONT OF VISUALISATION OF "NEXTAJB" VISION.

One of the canton's largest departments, the Office of Youth and Careers, has over 1,000 employees. Its experts, across 28 branches, inform, consult and support local people on all matters to do with family or work: career advice, social work, education, parenting, you name it. Even though these services are similar, many different IT systems are being applied. This "application jungle" is a huge challenge for the department's digital transformation strategy.

But which applications are relevant, primarily, to the whole canton and which to individual branches? It is quite an undertaking to blend these two worlds together, especially since basic IT structure and access management are provided by another party – the Office of Informatics. So, how do you merge smart functionality, different business segments and IT requirements beyond office boundaries?

-IN AJB'S MODERN CAFETERIA IN OERLIKON
THERE IS PLENTY OF SPACE FOR REFLECTION.



"To understand our clients, we need to look at the bigger picture; how they use our many products and various channels, how we can facilitate their journey."

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From a technical standpoint, digitalisation means nothing but centralised data storage, smooth workflow and integrated systems. Nüsperli believes, the sweet spot lies half way between centralisation and autonomy of single branches – if their business is flourishing, why weaken it by centralisation efforts? Yet, he thinks that bespoke IT solutions for each and every branch would benefit neither employees nor clients.

"To understand our clients, we need to look at the bigger picture: how they use our many products and various channels; how we can facilitate their journey. Our highly diversified product range demands an IT

platform of superior flexibility. Once we have that, an efficient and engaging customer journey can be made possible."

Vision "nextAJB"

It is all about a modern-day, customer-centric infrastructure that allows efficient data exchange, yet empowers the individual offices with greater flexibility. How can one navigate through such complicated circumstances? Let alone create suitable solutions?

The Office of Youth and Careers' management board chose a bold vision for the future. First, they took an

"It is motivating to see something small is growing and then suddenly hear everyone is raving about it."



- TEAM MEMBERS DISCUSS THEIR PLAN, WHICH THEY HAVE NICKNAMED "MONDRIAN" BECAUSE OF THE WAY IT LOOKS IN THE VISUALISATION.

in-depth look at relevant changes in today's society – the so-called megatrends. Based on these insights they drafted a future picture of their brand, including many ideas that would take their services to another level. That is how the vision "nextAJB" came to life. Some of these identified megatrends, such as Digitalisation and Multi-Mobility, that would directly affect existing workflows, as well as related systems and technologies. Others would need new platforms and IT architectures to be built.

Another big trend is the ever-increasing diversity of our society. Today's family models can be more

diverse than a classic core of just mother, father, child. What if a family is composed of multiple caregivers and educators: Who would then be the target group or point of contact? Nüsperli comments: "The rise of new roles, relations and needs affects our work in both consulting and administration. We need to be able to process such new roles."

Centralisation is tricky

While IT solutions of the past had to satisfy mainly internal demands, nowadays one needs to operate in a more client-centric way. It is the opening of interfaces that paves the path to success. Many hurdles stand

in the way, mainly legal, and countless stakeholders still need to be convinced. Good relationships and open dialogues, with all parties involved, are key. This way, discussions can go in the same direction and a common goal can be defined.

"Imagine a person files for divorce and needs legal advice, so the office collects her personal data. As a teenager she had career coaching but that information is in another system," explains Nüsperli. "These two systems don't know each other, so the administrative overhead of multiple data collection is big. Ergon opened our eyes and urged us to optimise it. So, together we developed a new business architecture called Mondrian."

The art of inspiring everyone

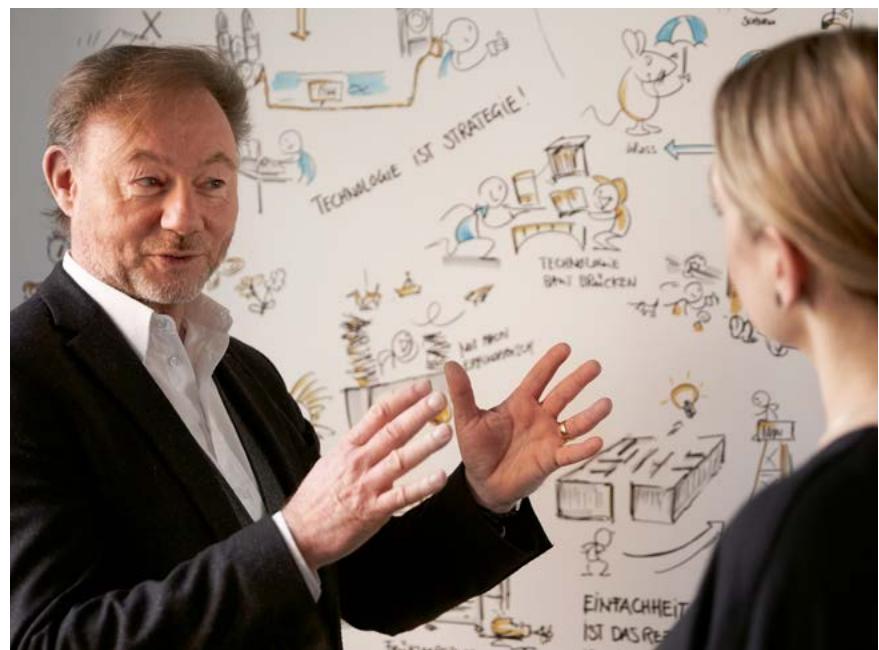
The business architecture gives a holistic view of the bigger picture, so one can quickly comprehend how IT works in conjunction with the core business. It provides an overview of systems, procedures and benefits throughout all levels of the organisation. The plan is called Mondrian because, from afar, it looks like one of Piet Mondrian's paintings – a black grid filled with coloured rectangles.

The plan is to facilitate the common understanding of all stakeholders, so representatives from all of them were brought to the table. With the aid of Mondrian, the different points of view could quickly be made tangible to everyone. Pain points become opportunities, which are quickly transformed into tangible results. Everybody wins.

Nüsperli highlights: "We implemented a framework with smart data and IT architecture across our entire organisation. This approach was a decisive factor in implementing the business architecture E-Government uses at all administrations across the canton. Now we have sparked the interest of administrations in other cantons, such as Bern. It is motivating to see something small is growing and then suddenly hear everyone is raving about it."

It's about involving stakeholders

Quickly, a dedicated architecture group was formed, consisting only of members familiar with internal processes. To make sure the group was up to speed, colleagues working out in the field were not brought to the table. Instead they were visited at their local offices and shadowed for a day; for comprehensive user research and for a more detailed understanding of their workflow and daily needs.



IT HELPS TO VISUALISE: AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE "NEXTAJB" VISION CHARTS ALL THE GOALS THE TEAM HAS JOINTLY DEFINED.

This led to the sorts of insights one would have never dreamed of. It's been three years now with Mondrian and the organisation has never seen an IT project that sparked so much enthusiasm among all stakeholders. And it is only the beginning. One day, the branches might be able to develop applications themselves. Sounds utopic? Twenty years ago only experts could develop a website but now everyone can do it on Jimdo, within minutes. "It will be the same for software applications, I believe the road to the future is paved with determination and agility," says Nüsperli.

In the end, it is about letting go

To create a new business architecture, you have to be able to think freely. It is about letting go of old ideas before we even speak of applications. Letting go is as important for digitalisation as it is for life. It keeps you young and on your toes. Just do it. />

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_CODE TO SUCCESS
by Jean-Claude Nüsperli

_LISTEN TO YOUR NETWORK
Some of the best lessons in life come from experienced people around us and, whether colleagues, providers or trusted friends, they are more inspiring than you think.

_WITHOUT EMPATHY, WITHOUT ME
I don't care how good your technology is, if I don't like you, it won't work. The same goes for companies; it is key to sustainable partnerships. That is also why I collaborate with Ergon - we work at eye level.

_AN OPEN MIND EMPOWERS ALL
Innovation is like a bud: it starts small and, if not nurtured by an open-minded culture, it might never grow. You need to water it and, if you see it grows, then present it to the managing board. Nothing is more powerful than an idea when its time has come.

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