Energy supplier "Verbund

Holistic approach to SAP security

The energy supplier "Verbund" uses Swiss technology
for a holistic implementation of the compliance and security concepts of
its central SAP system.

→ **BY SALOMÉ WAGNER**

THE AUTHOR

Salomé Wagner
is a freelance author
and communication
consultant.
→ **salomewagner.com**

The expectations placed on operators of critical infrastructures, such as energy suppliers, are in an unusual area of tension.
resource-saving and environmentally friendly production, which can be realised through innovation and the use of new technologies. D i g i t a l i s a t i o n can create such freedom - and at the same time increase IT security.

"Verbund is Austria's leading electricity company and one of the largest hydropower producers in Europe. Innovation and sustainability are at the top of the group's agenda. In this context, the topic of security means more than just IT security, because at
"Verbund" there are also many physical safety issues. In addition to hydroelectric power generation with the maintenance of reservoirs, there are other plants such as photovoltaics and wind power. This results in numerous interdependencies, on the one hand between the departments within the company and on the other hand with external partners. One of the most important foundations for this interplay is the SAP system, which has to meet high requirements in terms of compliance and security in a highly regulated business environment.

HOLISTIC SAP SECURITY

"We are very aware of the responsibility regarding compliance and IT security. In addition, there are numerous dependencies and connections to departments at 'Verbund', which of course have to be taken into account in a role concept," says Thomas Zapf, Director Digitalisation and Information Security at 'Verbund'. For this reason, the SAP Basis security concept was expanded.

The new concept not only fulfils the security requirements, but also the compliance requirements and measures. The objective could be met through the step-by-step project development, which included organisational and technical elements.

LONGSTANDING COOPERATION

A holistic SAP Basis security concept not only includes a security framework and corresponding documentation, but also has an e f f i c i e n t technical component. At Verbund, the software has been re-evaluated for this purpose. In this evaluation, "mesaforte", the governance/risk & compliance suite from the Swiss provider wikima4, scored the highest, as it also met the high security standards.

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was valid. In the meantime, the soft

The new software was also implemented in the "Verbund" computer centre, after having been hosted by a partner.

The good foundation and the objectives for the project are based on a long cooperation between "Verbund" and the SAP security experts from wikima4. The first version of the "mesa- forte" software went into operation over ten years ago. In the meantime, not only have the regula-

"A homogeneous IT landscape helps us to avoid single points of failure".

Thomas Zapf, "Verbund

toric governance requirements, but also further develops the software. The regular evaluation of the cooperation and the technical components creates a solid basis of trust on both sides.

The existing documentation of "Verbund" was integrated into a security framework within the framework of the project. For this purpose, various workshops on risk assessment and migration were held at the electricity company together with wikima4. "The support processes between the two companies have been established," explains Priska Altorfer, Managing Partner of wikima4. "The focus is on optimising existing con- cepts and their implementation." The operational support, which enables the ongoing adaptation of security measures, amounts to a few days a month, depending on the i n t e n s i t y of the tasks. With this approach, the project costs are clearly calculable.

NO "SINGLE POINTS OF FAILURE"
With "Verbund", the pragmatic approach was high on the agenda.

"As an operator of critical infrastructure, there are many security issues at 'Ver- bund'. A homogeneous landscape is important to us in order to avoid single points of failure," says Zapf. For this reason, when choosing a partner, it is not only the software with its technical functionality that is in the foreground. Only the package of technology and know-how, i.e. the clear focus on IT security and the corresponding technical expertise, were decisive. On top of that, wikima4 provides the independent solution with which the hosting partner's monitoring can also be carried out.

"The financial burden of the new software and the external support on a case-by-case basis is kept within limits," Altorfer emphasises. "These costs are constantly subject to a perfor- mance analysis. Flexibility is another key. Thanks to many years of cooperation, we can design the operational support flexibly and, depending on the intensity of the tasks, it reaches a few man-days per month." Zapf would take the same approach to the project again. For companies in the same situation, he recommends: "We would already start working with the manufacturer at the basic level. We have to incorporate these considerations earlier in the design process.

IT SECURITY IS TEAMWORK
IT security is an ongoing issue for all companies. The benefits are difficult to quantify. This makes company-wide awareness of this issue all the more important.

"Verbund" employees on inspection tour at Europe's largest urban power plant in Vienna Freudenau

This is a key issue so that it can be anchored in the company in a holistic and sustainable manner. "In order to be able to master the associated challenges, the commitment of all management levels is needed - both from IT and from the business. At Verbund, Thomas Zapf has created awareness for security and ensured that the topic is very broadly and sustainably positioned," Altorfer emphasises. The interdisciplinary coordination of k n o w - h o w and requirements among the departments should not be underestimated. The prerequisite is good project management and smooth interaction between departments, the business, IT with its know-how and implementation partners in order to bring all relevant i n f o r m a t i o n i n t o a harmonious implementation.

A next step towards holistic compliance and IT security is the simplification of the temporary assignment of authorisations in SAP, especially those of critical roles. Two goals are being pursued: On the one hand, the business can gain flexibility. The months with home offices and the associated, sometimes urgent external access requests have raised awareness of the need for a flexible solution. On the other hand, IT can create new freedom with a technical solution - and at the same time fulfil all the high security and compliance requirements.

"Security needs the commitment of all management levels - both business and IT".