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Making sense of the Online Access Act (OZG)

First Contact

My first encounter with the Online Access Act (OZG) was definitely sobering.

The large number of players, whose exact OZG function was difficult to understand, both individually and taken together, and the way the websites were linked to each other caused me quite a lot of confusion to start with. Added to that the Excel spreadsheets, PowerPoint presentations and lengthy PDF files could be interpreted in different ways. There were also references to digitization programs from institutions I had not heard about until then.

All in all, there was a lot of text to digest and a patchwork of colors that was frustrating rather than motivating.

The Task

I was asked to introduce the awe-inspiring heavyweight called "OZG implementation" to my colleagues in other departments and to explain the tasks involved. The aim was to get to a position where it would be possible to compare this system with existing online services. It became clear to me that to create order out of chaos, I needed to put all this information in a mind map.

But what software to choose? There are many mind mapping programs available, each with their strengths and weaknesses, some free and some quite expensive.

The Right Program

After a few attempts with various mind mapping tools, I found that the display of the mind map in itself was confusing because of the large number of sub-items that had to be heavily filtered or packaged into separate slides for presentation to non-specialists. This involved using a second tool, and re-entering the information required a certain amount of effort.

At the same time – and independently from the OZG question – we were looking for an easy-to-use project management tool, roughly similar to Microsoft Project Server but not so costly.

To cut a long story short, I ended up choosing the MatchWare product "MindView".

MindView is one of the few mind mapping programs that lets the user work in different views (Mind Map, Outline, Timeline, Gantt Chart) according to their preference (not everyone likes mind maps). The program is astonishingly versatile and basically replaces the entire MS Office range (from Project to PowerPoint).

At the same time, it offers import/export options for these Office products in professional-looking, ready-to-use report formats (anyone who has ever had to write a report for an auditor will come to love the "export at the click of a mouse").

This export and reporting system places MindView above its competitors such as Mind Manager. It is really possible to create extensive project reports with just a few clicks.

In terms of look and feel, the program follows closely the MS Office interface, keeping the amount of training needed to a minimum.

Making Sense of the Data

Once I started to dig into the mass of data (which was quite tedious), a structure began to emerge.

The Excel format OZG Implementation Catalog (which can be downloaded from https://informationsplattform.ozg-umsetzung.de) was helpful.

In its current version (14/08/2020) the Excel sheet contains 6077 data records, representing 6077 individual services from the Services Catalog.

This sheet is a real killer at first. Even when filtering according to subject areas and other generic terms, it was nearly impossible to get an overview.

Here a mind map comes into its own, as it gives you an overview of the subject areas and their different layers, into which you can drill down deeper and deeper as needed.

Unfortunately, the information of the Excel sheet was not grouped in such a way that it could be imported into MindView in one fell swoop (at least my computer got stuck trying this). But with hard work and a lot of filtering and copy & paste, the map was created fairly quickly, and the first presentation slide emerged.

As is now the norm, the Implementation Catalog presents the information from the user's point of view. Thus the first layer is broken down in subject areas including life/business situations, which in turn contain the individual OZG services.

There are currently 575 defined OZG services. At first glance that

sounds manageable, but the actual number of services involved is much higher. Currently, as mentioned above, there are 6077 such services.

How does this difference come about? First of all, an OZG service can contain several different sub-tasks. These sub-tasks can have different states (e.g. an application is submitted, approved, changed, extended or rejected). Whereas from the user's point of view, this is one operation only, namely, "carry out the task", from the computer's point of view there are 5 different states, each representing a step in the workflow, that must be followed in order to deliver the correct result. Therefore each of these states has its own number in the Services Catalog.

This complex layered structure is much more legible in a mind map than in an Excel spreadsheet. If you throw long columns of numbers on a screen during a presentation, you can expect that a large part of the audience will switch off very quickly. By contrast, revealing each sub-item in turn in a mind map creates an "Advent calendar effect". Everyone wants to know what is "lurking" behind the next window.

Speaking of the Services Catalog: what is it anyway, how is it related to the OZG, what does the LeiKa type 4/5 mean and how do I transform all of this into a specific project?

The answer is in the 2nd article (coming soon...)