



# ENHANCE SMART CITY DIGITALIZATION WITH MULTI-PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Interview with Jochen Geißer, Key Account Management & Sales Germany/Austria at PLANTA Projektmanagement-Systeme GmbH

**I**n particular during the pandemic, many municipalities have realized that the implementation of a modern software and the digitalization of public administration that goes along with it are about to become two of the main challenges of our time. Whether we talk about the modernization of data collection and exchange or the implementation of online services for citizens or other digitalization projects, public institutions will have to pull off many projects in the future. The restructuring of processes and the securing of an integration of all systems for successful digitalization presents the persons responsible with a mammoth task. The transparent and reliable organization of such projects in governmental organizations at municipal, state, or federal level is part of the know how of IT provider PLANTA.

Since 1980 PLANTA has been developing innovative multi-project management software. PLANTA's core product, PLANTA project, was developed in the course of a BMFT research project at the Karlsruhe University and has continuously been extended. Meanwhile, PLANTA products are used by more than 600 customers from all economic sectors and an approximate number of 60.000 users. Today we will talk with Jochen Geißer about current aspects such as project management 4.0, the future of the business world, decentralized work routines of project teams, home office, or new work. Implemented in a clever way, these aspects can speed-up the process of sustainable transformation also in the administrative sector.

**DIGITAL FUTUREmag:** Even prior to the COVID-19 Crisis, project management has been a challenge for many decision makers in public service. According to your perception, in what way has project management changed in the course of the pandemic so far?

Jochen Geißer: Administrative processes and structures are becoming more and more complex, procedures become more stringent and municipalities and cities must react more quickly to political regulations while often facing a downward trend in staff numbers at the same time. Project management becomes an indispensable device for responding to such challenges. It provides a basis for decision-making which helps to choose appropriate projects, prioritize them, and use available resources or budgets more efficiently. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the increasing numbers of internal projects and tasks raised the awareness of the importance of an implementation of methods, processes, and tools for efficient project and resource management among heads of authorities. Often, however, there was not enough time to pursue this enterprise with due emphasis. In the wake of a profound crisis, many decision-makers now realize that existing procedures must be improved and begin to successively envisage planned or suspended process optimizations.

**DIGITAL FUTUREmag:** Many developments have been greatly accelerated during the last two years. This has particularly benefited internal digitalization measures in companies. What fields will be retained in the future, especially in terms of the process stage of project management?

Jochen Geißer: There is no doubt that Corona has changed our working life substantially. We have, for instance, seen facilitations when it comes to working in dispersed teams. The questions of leadership as well as the coordination of project teams and the persons involved will certainly gain in importance: moving away from “control” towards “trust”. What is important here is a transparent communication between project managers and their teams and also among the team members. This way, everybody can be kept up-to-date in terms of decisions made and these decisions become comprehensible. Digitalization in project management and the integration of new methods lead to optimized planning, decision making, and informational processes and provides persons responsible with a clear project overview. This allows for more personal freedoms but also requires a higher level of individual responsibility. If the new approaches are accepted by everyone, they are successful and lead to increased efficiency.

**DIGITAL FUTUREmag:** You are referring to hybrid project management here. What is that exactly and what are the benefits of the solution you propose?

Jochen Geißer: Hybrid project management (PM) combines traditional PM, i.e. detailed, standardized, and phase-oriented PM, at planning and controlling level and agile PM at operational level. Hybrid project management allows project teams to control and complete their tasks in a flexible manner while enabling managers to keep a better track of budgets, costs or resources in order to make more reliable decisions. The benefit of this approach is that all relevant data is available in a shared system and is readily retrievable. With *PLANTA project*, project managers can easily track planning effort and expenses. *PLANTA pulse* allows the project personnel to handle tasks in a flexible manner. Both applications are automatically synchronized and updated via web services.

**DIGITAL FUTUREmag:** Many authorities now plan to implement new software to modernize their administration beyond COVID-19. This presents a great challenge for project management. How exactly does your software assist project team members who are still working in home office for the most part?

Jochen Geißer: In order to make dispersed work, as it is increasingly entailed by New Work, become a success and to allow dispersed customer projects to be processed more productively, with better motivation and quality, it is inevitable to implement suitable technologies and introduce the right mindset. Teams the members of which are not working door-to-door require a software solution which assists them in their collaboration. *PLANTA pulse* is such a collaboration tool based on Kanban boards which allows team members to keep track of their own task statuses as well as those of others at the click of a button. Furthermore, reliable predictions on dates, costs, and resources are also of great importance for heads of authorities. Our hybrid PM model which integrates *PLANTA project* and *PLANTA pulse* supports both project teams and management.

**DIGITAL FUTUREmag:** Experience shows that there are also ambitious digitalization projects in small municipalities. However, they still lag behind since authorities still rely on Excel tables. Do you have any tips for public institutions which want to go for a professional PM solution?

Jochen Geißer: We often find that the implementation of our software serves to replace typical office tools such as Excel, since they are simply not designed for project planning. Municipalities see themselves confronted with challenging official or area specific tasks for the management of which default applications for text processing and the creation of tables and presentations often prove to be insufficient. They do not provide substantial PM functions like assignment of work packets, dependencies, time recording, project reporting, etc. Such tasks can often only be realized manually by means of quite complex and error-prone adjustments in Excel. What is more, if the items to be managed become more complex or more numerous, or if the same resources are planned for different projects, it gets more and more difficult to stay on top of things.

If the maintenance of projects becomes the main task and the identification of key figures and information causes a lot of effort, then implementing a professional project management solution becomes an absolute necessity. It is absolutely essential for the success of such an implementation that an adequate solution is decided for on the basis of a list of requirements, so that the solution fits in with established processes.

**DIGITAL FUTUREmag: As we know, the motivation of employees involved is crucial for the success of project management. How does PLANTA project support employees?**

Jochen Geißer: Here, important factors of motivation are the awareness of all persons involved with regard to the project objectives and their benefit for the institution. Apart from that, it is important that the current project and the greater project landscape are transparent. Furthermore, it is essential to assign tasks to colleagues based on their competences and to be at their disposal. Showing appreciation for accomplished work is also a great motivational factor. PLANTA project benefits all of these factors: Project objectives and resulting benefit can be determined, evaluated, and communicated in a transparent manner. All persons involved in a project receive the same information and have a corresponding overview. Everyone, including employees who work in home office, is always up-to-date in terms of project progress, simultaneously running projects, and projects which are already in the pipeline. Via individual reporting, employees have a direct influence on the project status and, if necessary, they can report additional effort and specify the reasons for its incurrence. This individual feedback is directly integrated into status reporting. Last but not

least, PLANTA pulse allows project teams to organize themselves, to discuss arising questions directly on the card of a task, and to assign adequate tasks to each team member.

**DIGITAL FUTUREmag: In the economy, project management technologies have been used for a long time now to improve software operation. Do you have any best practice examples of the use of PM in the economy?**

Jochen Geißer: PLANTA software contributes to the business success and the preservation of competitive advantages of numerous companies from all economic sectors, especially in machine and plant construction, in research and development projects, as well as in IT, organizational, and service projects. Our customers include renown medium-sized companies as well as global players. To name but a few well-known users: Deutsche Rentenversicherung Baden-Württemberg, Signal Iduna insurance group, or Stadtwerke Rostock. Find additional case studies at <https://www.planta.de/en/references>.

**DIGITAL FUTUREmag: Thank you very much for providing insight into your interesting approach.**



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