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Human Capital Management

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AUTOMATING HR CORRESPONDENCE

Experiences in HR at
ZF Friedrichshafen AG



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AUTOMATING HR CORRESPONDENCE

Overview: A new correspondence management system for the HR team at ZF Friedrichshafen

How can you automate the creation and distribution of HR documents at a technology corporation that has more than 40,000 employees in Germany alone? What is more, the company is set to double in size thanks to its acquisitions around the world. Challenges like these require dedicated efforts in HR and a flexible, high-performing correspondence management system.

Back in 2011 the modules being used by ZF Friedrichshafen AG for SAP E-Recruiting and form management in HR were being stretched to their limits. The company's Smart Forms-based applications were also proving to be too rigid to accommodate the adjustments required in text modules and the management of signatures on contracts and correspondence. A great deal of programming expertise was necessary to make the right changes to meet the company's needs.

These shortcomings prompted ZF Friedrichshafen to automate its HR correspondence and implement Accenture Quick Document Builder (AQDB).

Over the past seven years, the company's HR administrators have been using this application successfully to manage both individual and mass correspondence for its more than 40,000 employees in German-speaking countries. AQDB makes it possible not only to use text modules and document templates that are standardized throughout the ZF group, but also to create local templates consisting of protected text modules that relate to specific operating locations. Such templates appear in the SAP system as soon as an employee begins creating or maintaining master data or carrying out HR activities—from the hiring of employees to terminating employment contracts and beyond.

Without clear structures and workflows in HR, correspondence management is impossible

The benefits of using AQDB are a result of careful planning and attention to detail. Around 10 locations within the ZF Friedrichshafen group were involved, each of which had its own processes and document templates. The HR processes needed to be optimized and synchronized across these different sites, and text modules had to be defined and harmonized. This was no small feat, considering that ZF wanted to be able to organize documents for all its employees and issue them both as individual letters and in broad communications. It was also looking to move all of its applicant correspondence in e-recruiting to a standard correspondence management system that would integrate with SAP HCM and leverage the SAP E-Recruiting module (→ ■ E-Recruiting).

“AQDB supports each individual instance of recruiting at ZF Friedrichshafen.”

Manuel Gerner, Application Center for HR – E-Recruiting, ZF Friedrichshafen

Achieving this synergy required a vision, a defined objective, and a collaborative effort (between the company's template managers and labor law experts, for example) to create the final templates. In the course of implementing AQDB, the various areas of HR involved worked together to assemble a standardized catalog of modules and drastically reduce the number of necessary templates. For instance, the 10 different templates they had been using for internal and external job interviews were reduced to just one.

During this transition, it became clear to those responsible for ZF Friedrichshafen's HR project that one major and simultaneous effort to harmonize the documents used at the company, along with all the parties in question, was unfeasible. It made much more sense to have a team of "template innovators" who could handle the preliminary work on a given document and then optimize it according to the needs and preferences of the other template managers involved.

The reward for this approach? Adjustments and other modifications are now made in one single, central location and then populated in myriad templates (and, eventually, in individual

documents). Today, ZF Friedrichshafen is profiting from its one-time investment in defining and synchronizing its generally binding text modules—for each situation, there is just one template for all locations. Text modules are managed centrally rather than in the 20 or so places in which they are used; this includes any changes made to them, which are then replicated across the other relevant areas at ZF Friedrichshafen. In other words, this is not just an IT solution, but a technical catalyst for the harmonization and optimization of HR processes throughout the corporate group.

Correspondence management system requires no programming effort

Those responsible for the HR project at ZF Friedrichshafen are happy with how flexible and adaptable AQDB has proven to be. Making adjustments no longer requires programming expertise; everything is much simpler and takes less time to carry out. The company's HR administrators also have an easier time working with their Word templates. In contrast to the application they used previously (which required further programming), it is possible for those who are new to the tool to get their bearings quickly. When configuring new templates, for example, the document preview feature offers assistance that was lacking in ZF Friedrichshafen's old systems. Advantages like these also mean that it takes much less time to introduce new colleagues when they join the HR team.

"Making adjustments to AQDB templates is a really fast and easy process."

Template manager, ZF Friedrichshafen, Saarbrücken

The interface with SAP is also easy to manage. The Accenture solution is based on the concept of using personnel numbers as the main criteria by which employee-specific data is populated into predefined templates. ZF Friedrichshafen's administrators in HR have direct access to accurate and up-to-date versions of all the data, text modules, and correspondence they need from the system. It even works in reverse, too. After being scanned, personnel documents marked with barcodes are automatically entered into the electronic personnel files of the respective employees (→ ■ Flawless allocation of documents to electronic personnel files).

Flawless allocation of documents to electronic personnel files (ePA) — A “dream come true” for HR administrators

The application of personalized barcodes to documents has been a key benefit for ZF Friedrichshafen's HR administration processes. Documents will now be automatically scanned and stored in the electronic personnel file (ePA) of the corresponding employee.

This approach saves time, prevents errors (particularly in transmission), and makes documents easy to handle: it does not take long to call them up in SAP's master data management, process them, or print or e-mail them, as necessary - whether for individual letters or company wide distribution of routine HR communications.



What about data protection and confidentiality?

In ZF Friedrichshafen's SAP system, every employee in HR has defined roles and authorizations that provide data access in a way that optimizes his or her ability to perform the necessary tasks.

This means that HR employees see only the data they need, which is essential as some data is sensitive and requires a well-established means of protection within the system. (→ ■ Bonus Procedure for Managers).

Bonus Procedure - Handling incentives for managers in a compensation and benefits program

Can a correspondence management system help to inspire greater motivation within a company? The answer is yes. In fact, the implementation of ZF Friedrichshafen's correspondence management system was a particularly noteworthy success with respect to the company's performance-based compensation and benefits program. Managers now receive two different documents in this regard. The first document announces the bonus they are going to receive, and the second informs them that it has been paid out. This requires the use of 20 different national and international templates in a sophisticated tabular format. It is a formal process that involves many letters, but thanks to the Accenture correspondence management system, ZF Friedrichshafen is now handling the process in a fast, harmonized manner, with little effort, all around the world.



How the correspondence management system is used for everyday HR activities

In their day-to-day work, ZF Friedrichshafen's HR departments make use of their Accenture solution in various ways. Whether it is used in administration, health management, or payroll processing, AQDB is an indispensable resource. The tool assists not only in creating HR correspondence for individual employees, but also in processing mass documents for large numbers of recipients. One example of this can be seen in the standard extension of employment contracts for part-time employees, which is required on a regular basis.

“AQDB is one of our HR users' favorite tools.”

Ms. Badent, Template Manager, ZF Friedrichshafen

Some other typical use cases include instances of new employees joining the company; the creation of employment contracts; changes in remuneration, payroll slips, and monthly information on tax-related circumstances. Also, the solution provides an efficient means of managing communications that are necessary

in connection with parental leave, secondary employment, or changes in certain contractual provisions. Finally, AQDB has proven highly useful in the HR departments' written correspondence with governmental authorities.

“AQDB has been a big help in our written HR correspondence with governmental authorities.”

Ms. Kaiser, Template Manager, ZF Friedrichshafen, Saarbrücken

At ZF Friedrichshafen, a total of around 160 Microsoft Word templates have been defined and integrated into AQDB, where they can be used by the company's six HR departments in a number of different ways. All the templates are required and used based on current demands. Here, administrators need to be able to create letters and e-mails with the certainty that the templates are appropriate and correct. This is where the company's template managers come in.

Template managers—the masters of the process

In addition to their main tasks, some HR employees take on the role of a template manager. Around a dozen of them manage creating and maintaining the templates, which enables some 100 HR administrators to be more productive while saving time. Besides adjusting existing templates or adding in new fields as they become necessary, the managers create new templates to meet the latest requirements.

The template managers also have their own favorites—the base template for letters at ZF Friedrichshafen, for example, which serves as the foundation for nearly half of all the other letter templates.

This standardization greatly simplifies the process of creating new and reusable letter layouts.

Meanwhile, the number of people tasked with managing templates varies considerably across the different areas of HR: In HR administration there are template managers at every location (which adds up to 10 to 12 HR employees overall), while two or three additional managers oversee all the correspondence modules in e-recruiting, a more centralized area.

Dynamic organizations need flexible correspondence management

The template managers' primary responsibility is to ensure that their templates meet users' needs. That said, companies are "living" systems with large numbers of employees, different standards, and constantly evolving processes. This means that a continuous effort to optimize templates—or "fine-tune" them, to use the ZF's phrasing—is essential. The Accenture solution supports this type of dynamism by typically requiring less than five minutes to make the necessary adjustments. Overall, the template managers at ZF Friedrichshafen describe the process of adapting templates as "really fast and easy."

"We've never had any major problems with the solution; it's all been very smooth, technically speaking."

Kevin Wetzel, Application Center for HR,
ZF Friedrichshafen

Of course, a dynamic company and a flexible IT system also requires service, maintenance, and the occasional new release upgrade.

ZF Friedrichshafen has not experienced any major issues in this regard; in technical terms, everything has run smoothly. High praise indeed, coming from HR project managers and users who have been working constantly with AQDB for nearly seven years.

"In integrating AQDB into SAP and its system landscape, installing new releases, and performing the necessary maintenance, ZF Friedrichshafen has never had a major problem."

Kevin Wetzel, Application Center for HR,
ZF Friedrichshafen

Imagining a worst case scenario

There is perhaps no better way to appreciate the true value of a correspondence management system than to imagine what would happen if it crashed completely. Emergency! Chaos!

The responses from the HR managers at ZF Friedrichshafen are extreme—it would be impossible to process a single application in e-recruiting, and HR administration would be a disaster zone. The temporary loss of productivity and the convenience the Accenture tool provides in processing would be the least of the company's problems; the long-term decline in document quality (where ZF has just managed to make significant strides) would be far more detrimental. Luckily, AQDB has not suffered a single outage in its seven years of service at the company, reducing such a scenario to pure speculation.

"Not having access to AQDB would be the worst possible scenario. We wouldn't be able to send a single e-mail in e-recruiting, and all the harmonization we've achieved in our workflows and templates would be gone."

Manuel Gerner, Application Center for HR – E-Recruiting,
ZF Friedrichshafen



E-Recruiting today—A high-volume business in HR

Finding the best talent is getting harder every day. This is certainly true for ZF Friedrichshafen, where e-recruiting and applicant communications now need dedicated attention. Its interactions with applicants involve more than writing to them now and again; in fact, the scale involved is far greater. In handling its internal and external applications, ZF Friedrichshafen sent out around 120,000 e-mails in the first half of 2018 alone. Whether by e-mail or letter, every applicant interaction is handled entirely by the company's correspondence management system from Accenture. This can include everything from accepting or rejecting prospective employees to reimbursing their travel expenses, issuing employment contracts, and completing the hiring process. In this way, the system supports each aspect of recruiting at ZF Friedrichshafen.

Location-specific processes present a particular challenge as more than 100 employees or temporary workers join the company at different locations on certain key dates. Providing information on where these newcomers need to go and who they need to find is just one example of the challenges. ZF Friedrichshafen has solved this issue with text modules that are created in a standardized, centralized format, but can be applied to individual locations based on corresponding variables. These standardized document templates and centrally defined text modules are now helping the company present a consistent image in its external e-recruiting processes. With an employer's branding becoming increasingly important, such advantages should not be underestimated.

A correspondence management system that keeps its promises

AQDB is proving invaluable every day. Processes run more quickly than before—and for HR users, there is no such thing as “too fast” when it comes to the efficient completion of routine tasks. Another key advantage of the system is that administrators can handle the implementation and changes themselves, instead of having to call in their IT department. Meanwhile, AQDB has reduced the document error rate to nearly zero. Ultimately, this is why the system has resonated so well with the IT specialists and senior executives at ZF Friedrichshafen.

“Once you make a change, you can use it everywhere. The ease-of-use is a dream come true!”

Florian Schmitt, Head of HR Systems/Technical Team, ZF Friedrichshafen

HR administrators believe the Accenture correspondence management system has made their work easier. According to those who know best, the people responsible for ZF Friedrichshafen's HR project, they are thrilled with the outcome. — There is simply no alternative to their new correspondence management system.

Apart from one, perhaps. While the system is currently installed on the company's computers as Accenture Quick Document Builder, it will soon be possible to use its functionality in a cloud. Either as Accenture Quick Document Builder with an extension for SAP SuccessFactors, or on SAP Cloud Platform as Accenture Document Composer.

ACCENTURE'S CORRESPONDENCE MANAGEMENT: MAIN FEATURES AND BENEFITS

The Accenture correspondence management solution significantly reduces the effort required to create employee correspondence, regardless of whether mass communications or individual correspondence is needed. It makes templates and text modules available to various users throughout the company based on their respective roles as template or document creators. Accenture Quick Document Builder also supports full integration into SAP and SAP SuccessFactors' infrastructures. The user-friendly interfaces it provides for different roles means that it is quick and easy for employees to start creating and customizing documents, templates, text modules, and related rules on their own, while mapping to the latest information from your HR system.

Accenture Quick Document Builder

- **Automation and data integration:** Upon entering a personnel number, users gain access to the relevant HR data from SAP ERP, SAP E-Recruiting, and SAP SuccessFactors. The solution comes with more than 600 preconfigured data fields, and more can be added on a company-specific basis.
- **Interface to SAP SuccessFactors**
- **Create templates in a familiar environment:** Templates (for example, for employment contracts and certificates and bonus letters) can be created and formatted in Microsoft Word—no programming skills are necessary.
- **Quick, easy creation of ready-to-use documents:** The relevant data and text modules are automatically incorporated into the document at hand, which eliminates errors by default. This helps shared service centers and HR departments to save time and money.
- **Effective content management:** A central repository stores and manages the templates in SAP. A standardized interface facilitates long-term storage in all the archiving and digital personnel file systems approved by SAP.
- **Reduced total cost of ownership:** The solution runs on SAP NetWeaver and is compatible with leading SAP ERP systems.

For more information see

- **Accenture Quick Document Builder**
<https://www.accenture.com/us-en/software-hcm-accenture-quick-document-builder>
- **Accenture Document Composer**
<https://www.accenture.com/us-en/service-software-accenture-document-composer>



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Combining experience and knowledge about how to optimize HR processes, Accenture Software for Human Capital Management offers add-ons for SAP ERP HCM and SAP SuccessFactors solutions to help HR business processes work more efficiently and effectively. For more, visit: www.accenture.com/hcmssoftware

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ABOUT ZF FRIEDRICHSHAFEN

ZF Friedrichshafen is a worldwide leader in driveline and chassis technology and active and passive safety equipment. It employs 146,000 people at some 230 locations in nearly 40 countries. In 2017, ZF Friedrichshafen— also one of the world's biggest automotive suppliers— generated €36,4 billion in revenue. Its corporate group has over 49,000 employees in Germany alone.