Accelerating the digital transformation leveraging Citizen Development

Background and Summary:

The digital transformation is one of the most important agenda points for companies. To support the internal transformation, the Elia Group has established a Center of Excellence (CoE) for Citizen Development. The term Citizen Development is relatively new and describes an employee outside of the IT that is realizing his / her ideas on platforms that are approved by the IT. With Citizen Development, the group wants to empower every employee to develop digital solutions / apps by themselves. To provide the right tools and support on the one hand but also ensure security as well as reliability on the other hand, we developed a CD governance based on the Gartner framework[1]. In addition, Citizen Development also supports the group to overcome the developer shortage that will increase over the next years.

The CoE was established by three main pillars **(1) Strategy**, **(2) People** and **(3) Technology**. In summary, these pillars are focusing to provide every employee a clear guidance what can be developed in terms of Citizen Development, enabling people to realize ideas on their own as well as provide the right technology based on the requirements. The Citizen Development initiative has been started around one year ago and we already have several ideas realized by Citizen Developers that are running in production.

Main pillars

We aim to continuously adjust our main pillars based on the feedback we receive from Citizen Developers itself. Currently the pillars are defined as following:

1. **Strategy**
    We are ensuring a low barrier to submit and realize new ideas by Citizen Developers by providing them a single point of contact in form of the CoE that is also jointly determining the criticality zones risk-based criteria. These zones are divided into three sections:

Green zone	Yellow zone	Red zone
The Citizen Developers can realize the idea on their own. However, the CoE is conducting a "code review" before the App is being used in production to ensure the Citizen Developer improves the way of development over time.	The Citizen Developer can realize the idea with support of the IT.	The idea can only be realized by the IT.

The criticality zones are part of our established governance that describes the usual process from the idea of a Citizen Developer to the deployment on the productive environment.

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[1] How to Define and Guide Citizen Development Practices, (Wong, Ray, Chan, & Leow, 2021)

NAME : Tobias Caliskan
COUNTRY : Germany / Belgium
REGISTRATION NUMBER : 6350

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In addition, we also created a Community of Practice for Citizen Development to provide Citizen Developers a platform to exchange with each other. We also conduct workshops and events for the platforms we are offering, to showcase their capabilities and share new best practices as well as templates.

2. People

We are onboarding employees that are interested in realizing their own ideas on different ways including internal trainings for the different platforms we are offering as well as comprehensive knowledge base.

In addition, we also provide dedicated support during the realization of the ideas to answer all the questions that come up especially at the beginning and communicate our best practices.

When Citizen Developer become experts in the platform they are using, we grant them several benefits (e.g., using advanced features). In addition, these so-called **Pro Citizen Developers** can also create templates for other Citizen Developers and conduct **Share & Learn** sessions in the Community of Practice.

3. Technology

At the Elia Group we have a lot of employees working in engineering related positions as well as traditional areas including HR, finance and controlling. The engineering colleagues have already some coding knowledge leading to ideas ranging from quite simple to more complex ones. To cover all these requirements, we build a toolset that consist of low code platforms (to create apps, workflows, and dashboards) and traditional code environments.

For each platform we are offering, we have a dedicated team that consist of professional IT developers and that is providing support for Citizen Developers. We have also defined guidelines and best practices ensuring a consisted way of realizing ideas.

Results:

Over the last months we were able to push the Citizen Development more and more to the different departments. We conducted internal hackathons and workshops to showcase our employees what Citizen Development can offer and how it can support them making their daily life more efficient. So far, these events already helped us to bring several ideas to production. The number of new submitted ideas is increasing and the departments that are already realizing their ideas by themselves are also very likely to submit additional ideas. We also leverage these productive ideas to show case them in our Community of Practice as well as internal events.

With Citizen Development our employees can leverage our internal big data platform to gain more insights using the different platforms we are offering. So far, we have realized ideas in production ranging from simple dashboards to machine-learning based apps to forecast the grid loses. The topic also supports the Elia Group enabling employees becoming more digital native.

NAME : Tobias Caliskan   SC REF. : SC D2

COUNTRY : Germany / Belgium   Pref. Subject : PS1

REGISTRATION NUMBER : 6350   QUESTION N° : 1.5

However, we are still at the beginning of this journey and already plan further activities to increase our visibility within the group and extend the platforms we are offering.

NAME : Tobias Caliskan   SC REF. : SC D2

COUNTRY : Germany / Belgium   Pref. Subject : PS1

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