



(Foto: Lars Jacobsen)

The Municipality of Copenhagen benefits from smart IT user access management to save 20 full-time positions

The Municipality of Copenhagen has achieved significant savings by investing in a new, automated user access management solution. The project has also provided considerable benefits to strengthen the IT-security. "We are not finished yet, but we are already very satisfied," stated Morten Ellgaard, head of department and member of the management team at The Municipality of Copenhagen Corporate IT unit.

7. januar 2022 kl. 08.45



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The article is a translated version.

The Municipality of Copenhagen with 37,500 IT users can now categorically prove that efficient management of user access rights is a good investment.

It is not just a good business case, but also an integral part of a digital "barbed-wire fence" that protects against increasing threats to IT security, according to The Municipality of Copenhagen Corporate IT unit.

When a new employee is hired, a second leaves the workplace and a third is promoted to a higher position, this can lead to major risks if user access rights are not updated and follow the individual.

Previously, a heavy manual process was used in The Municipality of Copenhagen, which typically required managers to inform the IT department about changes to user access rights for employees. This led to risks that this task could be forgotten as well as being an inefficient and lengthy process.

With the new, automated solution for user access rights management the situation is very different in Denmark's largest municipality.

The Municipality of Copenhagen Corporate IT unit implemented an Identity Governance and Administration (IGA) solution a few years ago, which is today integrated with up to 150 of 210 systems in The Municipality of Copenhagen.

The new solution has led to 438,000 fewer manually handled cases every year.

The economic benefit has been so significant that the project has financed itself. This is according to Morten Ellgaard, head of department and member of the management team of The Municipality of Copenhagen Corporate IT unit.

“We have gone from 30 employees in the old user administration down to 6 today. This optimization has financed the purchase and implementation of the solution including all associated development work,” stated Morten Ellgaard, who continued:

“We are not finished yet, but we are already very satisfied”.

Critical security gaps have been closed

Previously, user access to systems were administered using a classic, in-house developed ticketing system, which resulted in a heavy, manual process.

Changes to user access rights had to be requested and then an IT supporter needed to click their way through the various IT systems in The Municipality of Copenhagen to grant or revoke employee access rights.

This didn't just lead to an inefficient process. It also led to security gaps in IT security when, in the case of The Municipality of Copenhagen, user access rights must be managed for thousands of employees.

“Employees are typically considered one of the greatest threats in our annual threat assessment for The Municipality of Copenhagen. Not because they are expected to actively commit something illegal, but because they can inadvertently do so if they have the incorrect user access rights,” Morten Ellgaard explained.

Every week over 2,500 user access rights are requested on average, but these rights must adhere to HR policies, which ensure that user rights are automatically granted and revoked in connection with the start and end of an employment.

At the same time, it is important that there is an efficient management of user access rights when The Municipality of Copenhagen is bound by governance regulations to monitor the user access rights of each employee.

“All of the hundreds of managers and leaders in The Municipality of Copenhagen can now quickly perform a review where the quality of information is also higher. It's no longer an old Excel sheet. In addition, changes to user access rights take effect at the same time as you push the confirm button,” stated Morten Ellgaard.

13% of user access rights in The Municipality of Copenhagen have been revoked after management reviews in the organization's salary system, OPUS.

Rights removed automatically

Since the solution is aligned with the HR process, it is possible for managers to be informed, for example by email, when a new employee has been granted access rights.

At the same time, all user access rights are automatically revoked 10 days at the latest after an employee has resigned or has changed departments.

This has had a noticeable impact on IT security in The Municipality of Copenhagen, explained Anders Reuter, manager of operational IT security and user administration in The Municipality of Copenhagen Corporate IT unit.

"In the past, we could see that when someone had been employed for 10 to 15 years, there was a risk that they had inherited old user access rights. This is no longer possible. Everything is deleted and user access rights need to be requested again."

The new solution also provides the advantage that if a terminated employee is intent on harmful actions, their rights can be revoked to nearly all systems immediately.

This could take days in the past.

The solution is also beneficial when it comes to preventing phishing.

"When we are alerted about a phishing attack, it is a huge advantage that we can quickly look up the affected users and check which systems to which that user has access. If they are non-critical, then we do not need to worry. If it is an ERP system, we can immediately revoke the right to access that system. That was very difficult for us in the past," explained Anders Reuter.

Last system connected before the summer break

About 50 IT systems in The Municipality of Copenhagen still remain to be connected to the new solution.

But that will be accomplished in a few months, Anders Reuter stated.

"We expect to reach that objective before the summer break. At that time, all systems where user access rights can be managed automatically will be connected. Beyond that there are a number of national and regional shared systems that we do not control. There will be a handful of systems left that cannot be connected," stated Anders Reuter, who continued:

"In the public sector, we are one of the first of our size to achieve as much as we have."

It has also taken a significant amount of work to realize the more efficient and automated user access rights management that the Municipality of Copenhagen has today.

Anders Reuter explained that it has required a considerable development effort and intense focus on data cleaning.

But that work has in itself been of great benefit.

"It has been an added bonus of the project that we have achieved better data hygiene. We have progressed from having many system domains to just one single "kk" domain. This provides a security and governance advantage," stated Anders Reuter, who continued:

"The whole point of building this is that our master data is now established. You can only align your HR policies with user access rights if the master data is correct."