

Australian Red Cross Blood Service enables effective data management with Rational System Architect

Overview

■ The Challenge

During a data warehousing project commenced in 2006, the Australian Red Cross Blood Service (ARCBS) realised it needed a strategy to improve its ability to manage data by aligning its information systems more closely to business strategy.

■ The Solution

ARCBS selected IBM Rational System Architect software to model its enterprise architecture, which enabled it to identify the impact of changes, and where responsibilities lay. In what may be a first for an Australian organisation, it will connect IBM Cognos BI to its Rational System Architect-based data repository to generate reports and make better business decisions.

■ The Benefits

ARCBS can now quickly understand the broader impact of change within the organisation, which will lead to better decision making and staff productivity. With a centralised data repository for its data catalogue, the organisation will no longer be hampered by risks and inefficiencies associated with duplicated data and will have a solid basis for understanding the implications of change.



About the Australian Red Cross Blood Service

The Australian Red Cross Blood Service (ARCBS), along with its voluntary, unpaid blood donors, is an iconic organisation that plays a significant role in the quality and safety of the Australian health system. It employs more than 3,300 people in scientific, medical and support services roles.

The ARCBS was established in 1996. However, its antecedents date back to 1929 when the Red Cross Blood Transfusion Service was established in Melbourne. Prior to 1996, each Australian state and territory had its own blood service run as separate organisations by local Australian Red Cross Societies. To coincide with the 80th anniversary of blood collection services in Australia, the Federal Government has designated 2009 the Year of the Blood Donor.

Inconsistent data management, lost opportunities

In 2006, ARCBS commenced building a new data warehouse to meet the new reporting requirements of the Commonwealth Government's National Blood Authority. As part of the project, the organisation decided to take a fresh look at its business intelligence needs.

Although ARCBS is a national organisation, the legacy of its state-based structure meant there was a lot of fragmentation in the way business was conducted and the systems that were used. This included methods of reporting and the collection and maintenance of data.

To design and implement the data warehouse, the organisation's Business Intelligence Team, led by Paul Stewart, ARCBS Business Intelligence and Enterprise Data Manager, spoke to each part of the organisation about its reporting and analysis pain-points.

“Through the data warehouse project, we came to realise that issues went far deeper than just our ability to report and analyse data. We discovered there were multiple data repositories around the organisation with lots of overlap and duplication. We had no data standards and a fragmented approach to our reporting and analysis. In summary, there was an absence of any single source of truth.”

Paul Stewart, ARCBS Business Intelligence and Enterprise Data Manager

The bulk of inconsistent and overlapping data was mainly comprised of master and reference data, which included simple things such as country codes and salutation codes. This data was often different and was duplicated across applications.

What started as a side project of the ARCBS data warehouse initiative quickly developed into an enterprise data management program. Its primary goal was to define standards, recognise ownership and treat data as an asset.

ARCBS then decided that it wanted to use data to project into the future, to move away from a reactive state and respond quickly to predictable events.

“Change management was a key consideration,” says Stewart. “We wanted to introduce enterprise architecture (EA) modeling as early as possible. This was so we could capture our existing information systems environment within a baseline EA model, and tightly align it to our business strategy.”

Embracing the need for Enterprise Architecture modeling

ARCBS's first step was to gain understanding of its data and redefine what information was needed and how it was to be managed, used and extracted from multiple sources. The organisation looked at a number of different software tools and decided that IBM Rational System Architect offered the depth of functionality and flexibility it required.

ARCBS began its phased implementation program in late 2008 encompassing applications, data and hardware. The first step was to create a blueprint for the data management domain. This was done from scratch, as Stewart explains, because there was no existing blueprint to work from.

“Our new approach to enterprise data management included defining a set of data management principles and how to deliver to those principles,” he says. “This also included the creation of a catalogue of organisational data to understand what we already had, and to implement a centralised repository for that data catalogue in System Architect. The main aim was to ensure we were replicating data across systems from one master source, rather than duplicating it, and that all data was created in-line with defined standards.”

In what may be a first for an Australian organisation, ARCBS will plug IBM Cognos Business Intelligence (Cognos BI) directly into its System Architect-based data repository. The organisation will be able to write and deliver any type of report quickly and easily from its data warehouse. Even the most complex information can be quickly and simply communicated through Cognos BI's dashboard functions.

The first stage of enterprise-level strategic planning commenced in April 2009, with the creation of visual maps of the organisation's high-level strategies. These included Enterprise Direction diagrams and an EA cube-based architectural framework, which is used to define architectural views covering the strategic goals of the enterprise, and the people, processes and systems that deliver those goals.

Aligning Information Systems (IS) to business strategy

As ARCBS's Enterprise Architect Ken Lai explains, the creation of a strategic, enterprise-wide view of the organisation is a crucial first step for anyone embarking on an EA program.

"Prioritising the creation of a baseline model as the first step is a common mistake many organisations make," says Lai. "By the time they fill in the baseline model, it is six to nine months later and they haven't got anything to show for it.

"However, by using System Architect to model the enterprise view as a first step we can already visualise our business strategy and have started planning how to align our IS investments to it."

Smarter insights, intelligent decision making

Although System Architect has currently only been rolled out in the IS and Corporate Strategy and Planning divisions, the organisation as a whole will soon reap the benefits of smarter impact analysis.

Creating the EA model in System Architect means key stakeholders can more accurately assess how changes proposed for one project will impact another, or affect business operations generally. The team is then able to justify its decisions with fact-based data.

"We are already able to start analysing the impacts of change. If we take down a server or an application we can quickly see exactly what will be affected."

Paul Stewart, ARCBS Business Intelligence and Enterprise Data Manager

Data as a business asset, not a by-product

ARCBS's data management solution will play a critical role in ensuring the consistency and accuracy of data across the enterprise.

"We wanted to improve data integrity to eliminate the wasted time spent sourcing and dealing with potentially unreliable sources of information, and System Architect will help us achieve that goal. Ultimately it will lead to better, more cost-effective data management and better quality data, which will improve things for all our stakeholders."

Paul Stewart, ARCBS Business Intelligence and Enterprise Data Manager

When the organisation's EA is fully captured in System Architect, ARCBS will be able to better align its IS and business strategies. Once complete, it will be able to undertake appropriate planning to enable greater efficiency and cost effectiveness.

For more information

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55 Coonara Avenue
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Printed in Australia
09/09

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