ACOSS

> **"COGNOS APPLICATIONS ARE CHARACTERIZED BY EASE OF IMPLEMENTATION AND QUICK USER ACCEPTANCE. THESE ARE TWO ESSENTIAL CRITERIA FOR THE SUCCESS OF OUR DECISION-SUPPORT PROJECT AND, THEREFORE, FOR OUR GOAL OF EXTENDING ANALYSIS TO NEW AREAS, INCLUDING PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND THE OPTIMIZATION OF THE SERVICE WE PROVIDE TO OUR CLIENTS."**
>
> **—PIERRE BISSON, IT DIRECTOR, WITHIN THE ACOSS/URSSAF ORGANIZATION**

Established in 1945, the French Social Security Agency oversees the provision of old-age pensions, health insurance, and maternity pay for workers and their families. Under the supervision of the French government, it is managed by the trade unions and representatives of employers' organizations. Since 1967 it has been headed by ACOSS (the central umbrella body for social security organizations), which manages a network of 106 local URSSAF offices responsible for collecting employee contributions and other payments that flow into the funds used for social security. Overall, the URSSAF handles about 5 million contributors, and employs 13,700 people at 118 locations.

CHALLENGES FACED

In order to monitor the performance of its duties to the government and the national social security authority as instituted by the reform act of 1996, ACOSS introduced a set of business intelligence tools. The project was intended, as a first step, to simplify access to data. "We chose decision-making above database-driven tools, which were too complex for our particular end-users," explains Pierre Bisson, IT Director within the ACOSS/URSSAF organization. Very rapidly, however, the project grew in scope and became an indispensable aid in understanding client needs, monitoring litigation, managing the risks involved in non-recovery of contributions, and measuring performance on the part of the URSSAF service providers. Now known as the "Galaxy"

project, it relies on eight data repositories (one for each IT centre), built around the central repository managed by the ACOSS team.

STRATEGY FOLLOWED

In 2000 the URSSAF decided to undertake a full-scale reorganization of its infrastructure. "At the time, the URSSAF offices were using an architecture that had become layered over time," explains Bisson. "The data marts had gone in different directions, leaving us with a complex and untidy situation to deal with. Rather than trying to put this right, we chose to start again from scratch." The initial architecture, which was already built around Cognos Impromptu and PowerPlay, was originally made up of the 103 different repositories used by the URSSAF offices. At that time, URSSAF was mainly using the reporting facilities for monitoring litigation proceedings.

The restructuring project was undertaken with the aim of implementing a more centralized infrastructure for the organization's data that could cope flexibly with changing requirements and work with new applications for optimizing business process management. "Since 1996, the technologies used by

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URSSAF and especially the tasks it has to carry out have changed considerably," explains Bisson. "The new architecture had to allow us to introduce new services that could primarily help those making payments with their declarations. However, it also had to let us analyze our processes so we could optimize them."

As part of the restructuring process, it was necessary to reconsider the value of the Cognos solution which had been in place since 1996. Following a tender process, URSSAF decided to continue working with Cognos, because of the simplicity of its applications and open and cooperative attitude. "We issued an invitation to tender in 1996, and at that time the only business intelligence tools available were client/server based.

"The Cognos solution represented the best value for money, as well as being straightforward and quick to implement—a key factor as our infrastructure is complex," explains Bisson. "This is still a factor and, what's more, Cognos is Web-based. This is also a basic requirement for incorporating the toolset into today's IT systems and also for making deployment easier.

Area of activity:
• Public sector

Geography:
• Europe

Information Needs:
• To restructure its IT architecture and simplify control

• To respond to new service requirements

• To optimize management of business processes

Solution:
• Cognos DecisionStream

• Cognos ReportNet

• Cognos PowerPlay

• Cognos Metrics Manager

Platforms:
• IBM AIX

• Oracle 9i

Users:
• 2,000+

Benefits:
• Architecture that is more easily managed and is more flexible

• Optimization of the organization's services and performance

• Fewer demands in terms of development and maintenance

Now, in fact, we are so convinced of the superiority of Cognos in terms of ease of implementation, deployment, and of use, that we deploy virtually all of their applications!"

The data warehouses rely on UNIX AIX four-way pro servers, with an Oracle 9i database with a partitioning option. There are also data repositories based in eight regional IT centers (the "Galaxy" project) holding more than one terabyte of data, as well as one central repository managed by ACOSS. The repositories are housed in an Oracle 9i/IBM AIX environment with a partitioning option. Cognos ReportNet is deployed on a Windows 2 CPU server. Cognos DecisionStream runs on the same platform as the repositories: a UNIX AIX four-way processor with 16 Gb of memory, which may be extended in order to benefit from the "dimensions" process offered by Cognos DecisionStream.

Initially, the organization remodeled its central architecture on an area-by-area basis. The 103 data repositories (and certain other data marts) were streamlined down to only eight. All of the data feed processes were handled automatically by the Cognos DecisionStream ETL solution. Each of the interregional IT centers looks after several URSSAF offices, with the same software and hardware architecture deployed everywhere. This first stage took four years to complete, with users finally moving to the new architecture in 2005.

BENEFITS REALIZED

It is expected that the previous system will be decommissioned once and for all in 2006 when users have moved their local data on to the new architecture. As part of the process, URSSAF is replacing its 2000 Cognos Impromptu licenses with Cognos ReportNet licences and extending the use of multi-dimensional analysis with Cognos PowerPlay to new areas. These include calls from clients by area and by hourly time-slot with the aim to better understand and meet clients' needs.

In parallel with optimizing the level of services provided to its clients, URSSAF also wishes to exploit the new architecture and to put performance indicators in place. "We are not yet taking an approach based purely on balanced scorecarding, though we are getting there," states Pierre Bisson. "The aim is to speed up all of our processes so that they can be optimized to enable managers to improve

service quality and rationalize costs. This strategy of delivering an enhanced service at the lowest costs took shape in 2005, before an initial prototype model was developed using Cognos Metrics Manager.

"We've only made a start in terms of moving towards performance management, but the results are already very clear. To take this further, we are planning to roll out dashboards without delay," adds Bisson.

Benefits to the solution have been manifold. With Cognos ACOSS now has:

- **An architecture that is flexible and easily managed:** Their architecture has been developed to adapt to all requirements, the decision-support infrastructure is easier to administer, and its radial design is better suited to cope with future change.

- **Fewer demands for IT in terms of development and maintenance:** the introduction of the Cognos DecisionStream ETL tool helped the organization to avoid the use of batch processes for extracting and manipulating data, processes that are almost always responsible for delays and maintenance complications.

In addition, where it once took hours to extract and manipulate the data used to feed the data warehouse, this now takes only a few minutes. The ETL tool and the radial design allow high levels of responsiveness in gathering data on new events and analyzing them.

- **An effective way to optimize the organization's services and performance:** the use of a Web client combined with analysis tools and key performance indicators has enabled the URSSAF offices to improve their levels of service to clients while allowing internal processes to be optimized.

ABOUT COGNOS

Cognos is the world leader in business intelligence and enterprise planning software. Our solutions for corporate performance management let organizations drive performance with planning, budgeting and consolidation, monitor it with scorecarding, and understand it with business intelligence reporting and analysis. Cognos is the only vendor to support all of these key management activities in a complete, integrated solution. Founded in 1969, Cognos now serves more than 23,000 customers in over 135 countries.

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