



Ars Logica Benchmarks the Quality of an Internally-Developed CMS for The World Bank

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BACKGROUND

The World Bank's Knowledge Dissemination Group engaged Ars Logica to benchmark the business concept for - and application development of - an internally-built, Microsoft SharePoint-based CMS platform. The project consisted of three parts:

- Examining the soundness of the business case for building the platform internally
- Assessing the suitability of the system's architectural design for its intended purpose
- Evaluating the quality of both the application code base and the technical implementation of the system

Because the three-part goal of the project was to determine the feasibility of the internal development project at three points in time (concept, design, and implementation), we began by examining the problems to which solutions were needed at the time of the development of the original business case and then proceeded to considerations regarding architecture and implementation.

CHALLENGE

The World Bank had invested considerable resources into developing the CMS application, but because of usability and architectural issues, it was encountering resistance to usage the application from key staff in multiple business units – and precisely those for whom the project had initially been undertaken. What was the Bank to do? Invest more time and money in an attempt to rectify the problems, despite the possibility of continued user adoption woes, development delays, and budget overruns? Consider ripping and replacing the application altogether with a commercially-available product – a fairly risky and certainly expensive prospect? Or something in between?

ENGAGEMENT OF ARS LOGICA

Before arriving onsite at the World Bank, we reviewed the Bank’s analysis of the pros and cons of internal development, along with extensive documentation of the Bank’s application development process. Our assessment of the business case having been completed upon arrival onsite, we immediately turned our attention to evaluating the quality of system architecture and application code. After gaining a clear understanding of these, we began to focus on the reasons for lower-than-expected user adoption rates.

RESULTS

Shortly after the onsite visit, we delivered an in-depth, 29-page findings-and-recommendations document that:

- Identified the five fundamental reasons underlying the validity of both the internal “CMS concept” and the time-and-cost overruns of the development project
- Explained in detail twelve key contributors to shortcomings in system architecture
- Made critical observations on six discrete points contributing to acute implementation problems
- Presented practical and cost-effective suggestions for short-term improvements to application usability, while outlining options for a more strategic, long-term platform replacement

In the end, even though the benchmark was one best characterized as “full of acknowledging sobering realities,” the project gave the World Bank the clarity it needed to make effective short-term decisions for improving application usability and reliable long-term plans for replacing the platform.