



## EuSpRIG 2008 conference report

### Enterprise Spreadsheet Management: A Necessary Evil?

"The best yet", we say every year, and never truer than this year. Of particular note were the experiences of two banks that started the journey to end-user controls – neither of whom finished the journey.

The EuSpRIG 2008 conference sponsors, *Q-Validus*, demonstrated their Spreadsheet Safe examination, and the highest marks in the test were obtained by EuSpRIG regular, Neil Lynam, of Lloyds TSB who won a bottle of champagne.

Grenville Croll, now with *Trintech (UK) Ltd*, showed a statistical test: if you sample five spreadsheets from an organisation and none of them have any material errors, that is an indicator of spreadsheet excellence. (Or maybe of non-random sampling!)

Andrew McGeady of *AIB Capital Markets* described their End User Computing (EUC) project which used a proprietary spreadsheet control environment. Critical EUC applications were analysed and documented in a Functional Specification, Technical Specification, and User Guide. Considerable soft skills were required too, as shown by these quotations: "*Business owners do not want to cede control over their applications while IT does not want to become foster parent to applications in whose development it has played no previous part.*"; "*Making the effort to talk personally to all involved is of vital importance in ensuring the success of EUC in the organisation*" A policy has been proposed (subject to ratification) that Operational Risk should be responsible for permitting a business area to develop critical EUC applications.

Bill Bekenn and Ray Hooper of *Fairway Associates* described their **FormulaDataSleuth**, a tool to assist in improving the integrity of changes to formula reference areas during restructuring.

Dick Moffat of *Personal Logic Associates* described his rules for a business engagement in Excel development, including a useful list of application design and workbook design rules.

David Colver of *Operis* described the truly impressive amount of self-checking they build into their spreadsheets. Far in advance of common practice, it approaches (as Ray Panko pointed out) the level of investment in testing that characterises mature organisations working in conventional software development. A key take-away message is that anyone can start now, just by learning from bad experiences by designing tests that will prevent errors and building them into every new spreadsheet from that point on.

Derek Flood of *Dundalk Institute of Technology* presented their Intelligent Assistive Technology for Voice Navigation of Spreadsheets.



Karin Hodnigg of the *University of Klagenfurt* gave a paper on Metric-based Spreadsheet Visualization.

Jocelyn Paine of *Spreadsheet-parts.org* presented a web-based component architecture.

Tom Grossman of *USFCA* described Spreadsheet Analytics such as Sensitivity Analysis as applied to model analysis.

Brian Bishop of *Dundalk Institute of Technology* presented the findings of their T-CAT tool that monitored user behaviour while debugging, in order to arrive at what one might call the Skills of Highly Effective Spreadsheet Debuggers.

Jamie Chambers presented the other case of an EUC project at a bank. One of his key points is that mitigating the risks of EUC Applications (EUCAs) may mean reworking the processes used to create them. They set up an Excel User Group of six experienced users to act as an internal source of expertise and a discussion forum.

Mbwana Alliy of *Microsoft* and Patty Brown of *Two Degrees* gave their opinions on controls and compliance, standards, and end user training, assessment, and certification. They gave a set of twelve questions that guides the assessment of criticality and risk in the use of a spreadsheet.

Pat O'Beirne's paper on Information and Data Quality started with the Information Quality attributes that can not be automated, but rely on human judgment. He then went on to show how Data Quality can be more easily assessed through his own XLTEST with Computer Aided Audit Tools and Techniques (CAATTs). The appendices of this paper give some useful techniques in Excel for checking data - what Ray Butler refers to as 'Excel auditing for free'!

Éric Bruillard and François-Marie Blondel of *ENS Cachan* presented the results of their DidaTab project to research spreadsheet usage levels in French secondary schools. For example, when students have low competency, the teachers simplify the task so they do not have to use spreadsheets. Science researchers and the government department of education assume that spreadsheets are too simple to need explanation.

Ray Panko brought his taxonomy of spreadsheet error types up to date. He takes into account research into human mistakes, slips, and lapses. Ray considered how different types of errors appear during the life cycle.

EuSpRIG 2009 will be our tenth anniversary - it's amazing that it is still the only conference of its type in the world!