



Vendor Insight

Process modeling tools: Software AG's ARIS

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This report assesses the capabilities of ARIS by Software AG, from a business and process improvement perspective. The report forms part of a series of reports from MWD which assess vendor offerings in the area of professional Process Modeling tools – that is, technology capabilities that provide support for organisations looking to capture, document, analyse, improve and publish process models, in support of process improvement initiatives.

This premium report is published as part of MWD's BPM research program. You can find out more about how to access related research at <http://www.mwdadvisors.com/ec/membership.php>.

Please note: the focus in this report is on tools to understand and improve process rather than tools to automate process. For more information or advice on tools to assist with the automation of processes, please see the reports *What drives BPM technology requirements?* and *Assessing BPM technology*, which are available free of charge at www.mwdadvisors.com.

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Summary

A public company with a proven track record

Headquartered in Germany, Software AG (through its acquisition of IDS Scheer) now owns the most well-known business process modeling tool on the market today. *ARIS* has been supporting business and process modeling and improvement since 1992. In addition to the core business process analysis and design (BPAD) functionality of *ARIS* we review here, the company also supports modeling in other specialist arena, such as enterprise architecture and business process automation too. Software AG has many products in their portfolio, so modeling is only one of their focus areas.

Good support for large enterprise and SAP installations

ARIS is a comprehensive tool, with a full range of features, many of which are aimed at looking after and protecting key assets. With the best project lifecycle support of its category, *ARIS* is very well suited to supporting larger enterprises. With a long history of successful partnering with SAP, *ARIS* is still the product that provides the greatest modeling support to SAP installations.

Wherever you are in the world, the chances are that you are never very far way from an experienced *ARIS*-trained consultant. This level of security will appeal to those who may be relying on the product for critical business transformation or systems implementation projects.

A rich feature set brings complexity

There is no way to avoid the fact that *ARIS* is complex. The richness and complexity of the product may mean that for smaller teams, the overhead in getting started and the steepness of the learning curve may be too great. However, to compare *ARIS* with easier to use products, we must first ask what functionality we are willing to forgo. This is the question users have to decide, if you want a rich feature set that fully supports large teams, and comes with comprehensive reporting and lifecycle support, then complexity is something you have to accept. Software AG has done quite a bit to try and make *ARIS* easier to use, but as with others in the professional modeling market, they must do more and better if they are to prevent their core market from being eroded by lower-cost products with fewer features.

Overview

Background and market positioning

Software AG entered the modeling tool market through their 2009 acquisition of German-based vendor IDS Scheer AG, which first brought its original process modeling to market in 1992. Unlike many vendors that started with product and then considered how to support methods, IDS started out with the method developed by Prof. Scheer and then developed a product to deliver support for his methodology. The company went on to establish itself as the dominant player in the process market, thanks to its rich consulting offerings and then later through its partnership with SAP. It is estimated that SAP customers account for around 50% of ARIS licences in use in the market today. Through the SAP connection ARIS also became widely used within the systems integrator community.

IDS and now Software AG have invested a great deal of effort in extending ARIS into other areas that can add value to business and process transformation. With modules such as *ARIS Business Optimizer*, *ARIS Business Strategy*, *ARIS Process Governance* and *ARIS Six Sigma* being among the notable non-IT related modules, there also several that are more IT-oriented.

IDS Scheer had always believed that the key to delivering value to customers was the ability to provide a rich service offering and work with them to ensure maximum value. With Software AG it seems that the focus is more on a pure product play. It remains to be seen whether this change of focus will enable ARIS to remain as a leader in the long term. Our research suggests that in the professional modeling tool arena customers are increasingly looking to their vendors to provide better project support. Should Software AG continue to push services then customers are still likely to benefit from being able to get direct support in many more countries than they could previously with IDS Scheer.

This report focuses on the core functions of ARIS related to business and process improvement, but like other professional modeling tools ARIS also includes offerings for enterprise architecture, and with other Software AG products, process automation. For more information on Software AG's process automation (BPMS) capabilities see our report, *BPM technology: Software AG*¹.

Target audience

Individuals & Consultants	Small Teams & Enterprises	Large Teams & Enterprises
●	● ●	● ● ●

ARIS is better suited to larger teams and enterprises than smaller ones. The richness and complexity of the product may mean that for smaller teams, the overhead in getting started and the steepness of the learning curve may be too great. Although ARIS can be used as a standalone tool, we would not recommend the tool for those who simply wish to work as individuals.

The target audience for ARIS is larger enterprises wanting to tackle significant process and business problems. Within those organisations ARIS offers support for a number of different business roles, such as Lean/Six Sigma belts, Process Analysts, and Business Architects etc.

¹ <http://www.mwdadvisors.com/library/detail.php?id=445>

Geographical coverage and installed base

IDS Scheer always had the largest geographic coverage of the mainstream modeling tool vendors. Now as Software AG that footprint is even larger, with offices in most major countries around the world. However, the level of consulting support for ARIS from Software AG offices will vary by country and is still strongest in locations that previously had a large IDS Scheer presence.

Software AG claims to have around 15,000 customers worldwide for the ARIS product, suggesting that around 50% are under active maintenance agreements. A typical ARIS installation comprises around 20 modeling licences and 200 reader licences. Software AG does not provide any breakdown of customers by geography, but it is known that they have long been the dominant player in their German home market. What is not known is how strong the ARIS customer base is in a market like the USA, if one were to discount SAP-related customers.

Software AG considers itself a generalist and provides support across all industry sectors; where there is a sector focus will depend largely on geography and sector maturity in any particular geography.

Challenges and opportunities

The professional modeling tool market is facing increasingly stiff competition from less functional but free or low-cost tools. Software AG is responding to this challenge by offering a lightweight but compatible version of ARIS – ARIS Express. It remains to be seen whether this will result in a cannibalising of revenues for ARIS. Certainly ARIS is seen as one of the more difficult tools to get started and continue to deliver value with and ARIS Express may help to negate some of the issues around these perceptions.

With Software AG in competition with Oracle and SAP in other domains, there is now less interest in these two companies promoting ARIS to their clients; indeed some suggest that SAP and Oracle are now actively looking at alternative offerings. ARIS has always addressed a broad set of business and process transformation initiatives, but under Software AG ownership there is a perception of a lowering of investment in the ARIS products and more focus on the use of ARIS in a purer process automation role. This may of course simply be as a result of the time taken to complete the integration of the two organisations, and indeed Software AG suggest that revenues from ARIS licences, post acquisition, continue to grow in excess of 20% per year.

It is interesting to note that since the Software AG acquisition and the uncertainty surrounding the SAP relationship a number of ARIS competitors are now starting to look at competing head on in the SAP market, something that would not have happened had IDS Scheer remained independent.

Functionality

Capture & Document	Analysis & Design	Publication & Sharing	Team Support	Method & Frameworks	Extensibility & Customisability	Automation Support
● ●	● ● ●	● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ●

ARIS is a repository-based professional modeling tool. The tool has rich heritage and over the years has developed into one of the most feature-rich products of its kind. It is often talked of as a leader in the BPAD sector, but as ever such things are more dependent on your particular needs – a great fit for one company will not be a great fit to another. There are times when the benefits of the richness of ARIS will outweigh the complexity; in other situations users might prefer an easier to use tool, and be willing to sacrifice functionality.

Although Software AG has made it easier to customise and configure the product, there is no getting away from the fact that ARIS was originally designed around a particular method and so it may not be as easy to bend the product to suit your purpose as with other tools of the same type.

Over recent years the ARIS interface has undergone a bit of a refresh and ARIS includes some nice user interface (UI) features that certainly make the tool easier to use and more pleasing on the eye. But there is no getting away from the fact that this is a complex tool and will require time to get used to.

Process capture and documentation

The starting point for creating an ARIS model is most typically within the tool itself. There is limited support for automated process discovery, which is unsurprising given that ARIS is not focused purely on IT processes. With the SAP link it is possible to import SAP processes, functions and tables in order to use them as part of your model. There are also links with ARIS *Process Performance Manager* (PPM), which can also be used to assist in initial model creation. With such a varied range of diagrams and models you are highly unlikely to encounter a process documentation scenario that ARIS will not support.

As with other modeling tools, if you are simply capturing and documenting processes then the probability is that you will be disappointed. The benefits of modeling come when you start to understand the value of linking those maps and adding richness to them so that you can answer real business questions. In addition to creating maps and models you can also link or attach documents and other artefacts to objects within your models and use the ARIS repository to assist you in managing them.

ARIS does include other features to help speed up your initial model creation with the use of a nice tabular input mode called smart design. This enables you to simply build out tables of text and then have your diagram constructed for you.

As with competitive products ARIS provides the ability to import models from competitor tools.

Process analysis and design

As you might expect from a high-end product such as ARIS, the functionality to assist you with analysis and design is extremely comprehensive. Full simulation is provided via an additional module thanks to a custom OEM version of Lanner's *Witness* product.

Software AG is not alone in outsourcing the simulation piece of the jigsaw and Lanner is almost becoming a de facto standard for vendors in this space. Whilst using Lanner does not provide any particular uniqueness, it certainly means that ARIS delivers best-in-class equivalence. Simulation is always a challenging area for modelers – the balance of effort required vs. value gained is not always clear cut.

Simulation is just one area though. ARIS also provides many other features that can make your life easier. Features like the ability to easily compare two models and visually identify differences between them will certainly aid roadmap creation. Matrix views and the ability to update or create relationships via matrices are well covered, and you also have the ability to write your own macros to enable analytics and change models should you have specific requirements.

When it comes to process design then ARIS comes with the ability to simply drag and drop process fragments onto your canvas, massively accelerating your potential productivity. These fragments can be shared locally, across projects or across models as you choose.

With a repository full of information it is important that you ensure consistency; in that respect ARIS provides semantic checks for models, some rules come as standard, while others can be added or deleted to suit your needs.

Although ARIS was designed and created to support process and business transformation rather than technology implementation, ARIS does provide a number of options to support process automation. These include generation and integration with Software AG's own process automation offerings and of course the integration with SAP. For those with other ambitions then there is the standard ability to generate, BPEL and XPD. Of course, as with other tools, work will still need to be done to enrich these models once they are imported into your chosen execution environment.

Process publication and sharing

ARIS provides a rich array of options when it comes to publishing and sharing models. These range from the built-in report templates to the creation of rich intranet sites. ARIS ships with over 150 report templates as standard, and includes the ability to generate PDF files, a feature that is often requested by MWD clients. Should you wish to create your own reports then ARIS includes a sophisticated WYSIWYG editor to help you.

Perhaps the most impressive part of the reporting options comes from another of the modules: ARIS *Mashzone* (see figure 1 below for a sample screenshot). ARIS *Mashzone* enables you to create very rich dashboards that not only enable you to view model data, but to link this with data from external sources. This ability to view operational data and then drill down into process models when needed adds real value. Many of the complaints that are levelled at process modeling tools relate to the disconnect between models and the operations they describe – ARIS *Mashzone* helps overcome this gap and provides real management insight.

For those looking to provide access to mobile workers ARIS provides the ability to “pack and go” models so that they can be provided to staff without Internet access, whether on notebooks or mobile devices.

For those who want more than simple reporting and instead need to be able to query the repository directly, ARIS provides the ability to perform real-time searches, not just on the model data but on embedded documents too.

Method and framework support

Although ARIS is most associated with its support for Prof. Scheer's own method, the tool does in fact support a wide range of methods, approaches and notations. Software AG offers ARIS customers what they call their “Prime Methodologies”. These include product configurations, best practices and method guides aimed at improving productivity in your modeling project. The two key ones are related to BPA and SAP projects.

As with other tools of this type ARIS provides a rich array of diagram types than enable users to create rich business models from which they can improve their businesses. ARIS has always promoted a strong hierarchical approach to process documentation, and when used correctly this can help to break things down into manageable chunks and aid readability.

The ARIS toolset provides extensive support for all manner of industry and technology frameworks, including eTOM, SCOR, ITIL, TOGAF, MoDAF, DoDAF, Archimate, etc. Due to the size and breadth of their customer base and its relationship with SAP, Software AG has also developed a number of industry frameworks of its own and offers these to help customers speed up their process analysis and design. The tool also provides specific support for Lean and Six Sigma, although it may be that the price point of the tool is too high for it to be used regularly by this community. As one might expect, in addition to ARIS's own notation the tool also supports BPMN as an alternative process notation. Indeed ARIS provides the ability for users to create models in one notation and then to switch them to another with minimal effort.

Team support

ARIS provides comprehensive team support. The tool has an embedded workflow engine, which is used to provide support for project lifecycles, change management and release management. This support is important in a premium tool and is used to set the tool apart from much of the competition. All tools in the ARIS platform make use of the same shared repository, so the sharing of information across teams and enterprises is a given.

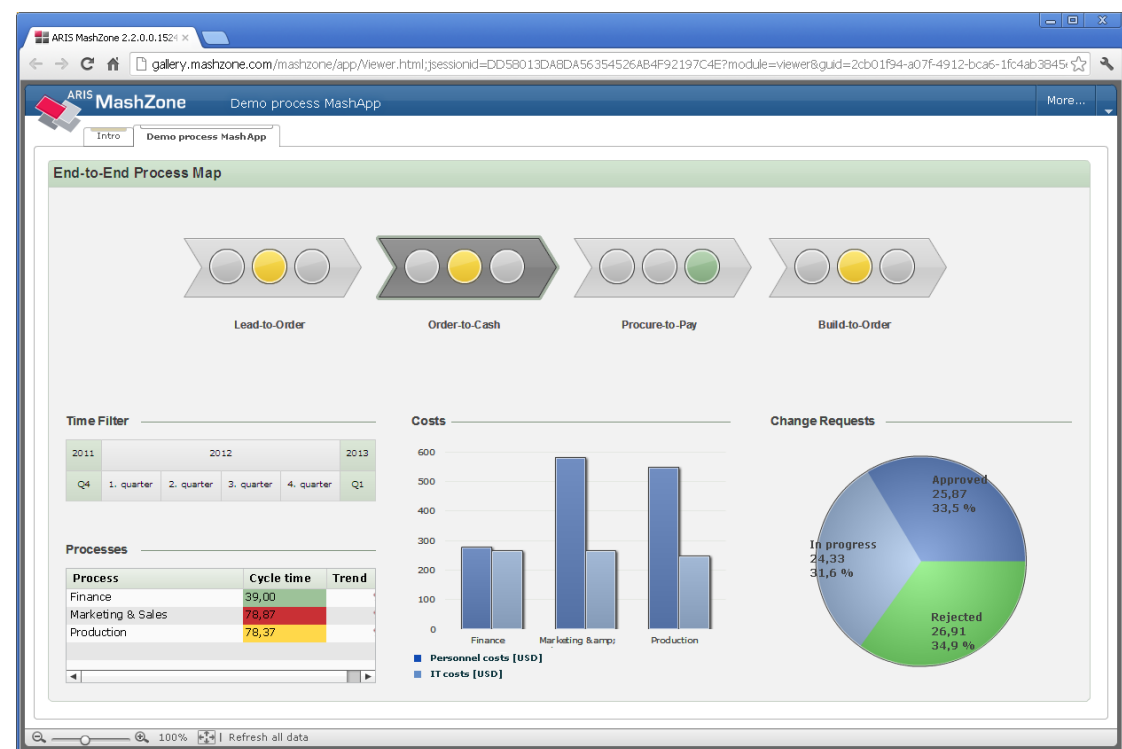
In many ways it is the provision of the features required to fully support large teams that can lead to the tool being seen as unattractive to small teams or individual users. Smaller teams tend not to want to be forced into the rigour that large teams need. Software AG recognises this and positions the tool very much at the larger enterprise tool domain – the average customer buys 20 licences in the first instance.

In order to make it easier for different teams to make use of ARIS, Software AG utilises the same user interface across all products and all products are built on a single codebase. This can mean that the interface is not ideally suited to all team members.

A particular feature of the team support within ARIS is the ease with which processes and parts of processes can be shared across projects, prompting easier reuse of knowledge – a feature often lacking in competing products.

The underlying repository can be used on a wide range of databases including SQL Server, Oracle, DB2 and Sybase.

Figure 1: An example of an ARIS Mashzone dashboard linking operational data with process models



Source: Software AG

Services, support and pricing

Services and support

Services have played a major role in the success of *ARIS* over the years. Prior to its acquisition by Software AG it was estimated that up to 60% of IDS Scheer revenues were derived from consulting. As Software AG, it seems the company is more focused on licence revenue than services and it remains to be seen whether this will have a negative impact on the acceptance of *ARIS*. In part this focus is understandable, given the challenges of trying to scale up services offerings in so many countries where there had been none before. Traditional *ARIS* customers have in the past relied heavily on such services and our research suggests that with high-end tools services are a key factor in determining customer satisfaction.

Software AG has taken steps to embed greater method knowledge into the tool and enhanced community and web forums in an effort to provide knowledge for customers.

For many customers the question of services from Software AG may not be an issue, as it is likely that they will have purchased licences via SAP, Oracle or mainstream system integrators, in which case they will continue to obtain their services from them.

Platforms and pricing

ARIS is licensed and used as a desktop product, although the product is said to be “cloud ready”. With the sheer range of products in the *ARIS* collection, trying to provide specific pricing information can be a challenge. In order to assist you we asked Software AG how much it would cost to equip a team with the licences and modules they would typically need to equip a team. The cost to get started with a modeling team of 5-10 people would be around £35,000 (more if you want central administration options). Note that this team size is slightly different from the typical installation of 20 modelers and 200 readers cited earlier – we do this in order to provide you with the ability to compare pricing across modeling products.

What should you do?

There are three particular scenarios when you should consider using ARIS. In the first instance if you are looking at automating processes and plan on using the Software AG automation platform, then ARIS would make a lot of sense. In the second instance if you are focused on an SAP implementation then chances are that your system integrator will have skills in the tool and recommend it to you. The third situation is where you are a large enterprise with a large and diverse modeling team that needs the power and flexibility that ARIS brings – even more so if you are considering bringing Software AG consultants on board to assist with your project.

A point of note would be that in many ways the ARIS product set can appear to be very confusing with multiple terms and products appearing to offer the same thing. For example in the process area we have *ARIS Business Designer*, *ARIS Business Architect*, *ARIS Business Strategy*, *ARIS Business Optimiser*, *ARIS Six Sigma*, *ARIS Business Publisher*, *ARIS Business Simulator* and *ARIS for SAP*. While it is nice to see that Software AG is enabling people to identify the initial product by role, at the enterprise level it is more likely that people will need “a little bit of everything”.

For individuals and smaller teams the overhead of installation, customisation and training may be higher than many are willing to pay. Software AG does offer free versions of a lightweight version of ARIS, but that is not included as part of this review of professional modeling tools.

Key considerations

Rich feature sets bring complexity

As suggested previously, due to the richness of ARIS some people may find the product complex to use. This is true not just for ARIS but for other professional-grade modeling tools too. In larger enterprises the value afforded by the feature set will usually outweigh the additional overhead in getting teams up to speed.