

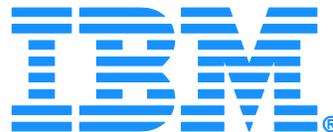


Strategies for building the best advanced case management architecture, Part I

As ebizQ contributor Alan Earls explains in introducing this topic, designing a case management architecture is more of an art—really, a balancing act—than a science. In this eGuide, readers will learn to:

- Address key principles and considerations involved in designing an effective case management architecture.
- Incorporate organizational values and priorities into such architectures.
- Build “bridges” to extend case management activity across the enterprise.
- Enable more effective collaboration and decision-making.

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Strategies for building the best case management architecture, Part I

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Crafting a DCM architecture: Principles, priorities and components to consider

By Alan Earls

Case management architecture isn't rocket science. In fact, experts say, it's actually more of an art—a dance involving business and technology priorities choreographed carefully over time.

Building an architecture for DCM involves the same principles as those used in other contemporary IT projects—namely, an emphasis on loose coupling and a clear separation of concerns, says Nathaniel Palmer, executive director of the Workflow Management Coalition, an industry group that focuses on BPM, workflow and related issues.

In a DCM architecture, Palmer says, the best-of-breed components are “doing their own thing.” Rather than using business rules in the user interface layer, you'll be defining business rules in a business rules engine—and not defining business processes where you shouldn't be (for example, in a document-processing system).

According to Keith D. Swenson, co-author of “Mastering the Unpredictable: How Adaptive Case Management Will Revolutionize the Way That Knowledge Workers Get Things Done” (Meghan-Kiffer Press, 2010), DCM architectures should include a set of protocols. Swenson always suggests considering OpenID, a single sign-on open standard that describes a decentralized way for authenticating users. Although Swenson is enthusiastic about that standard, he acknowledges that in the industry aren't happy with the lack of support available for it. Meanwhile, he says, OAuth, SSL and HTTPS can also be important to building a DCM architecture.

“You need to think in terms of infrastructure and the fact that everyone will have their own favorite case management system,” he says. As a result, you'll eventually need protocols to help with exchanging cases between systems. But he adds: “That is still very futuristic.”

Also important: activity streams, an idea borrowed from the social media world, or some kind of event sequence. Such streams “should be optimized to access case folders,” says

Swenson. Also, he says, you may want to “publish” within a DCM context through an RSS type of scheme.

Activity streams offer some standardization, allowing social tools to pull in information from various sources, Swenson says. “An activity stream doesn’t guarantee that you will have the information you need to do processing, but you can use activity streams to produce processes,” he says.

Build Bridges

Another consideration is the need to provide for cross-enterprise processes. That area is becoming more important because companies want to bring in outside expertise, which may require using a bridge from one organization to the other. “To use a police-detective example, if [a detective] is using a local case management system and sees an issue that could use additional help from the FBI, you want those FBI experts to be able to access the system and vice versa,” says Swenson. In fact, he says, one of the tragedies of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks was that the key agencies involved weren’t connected at the time and thus couldn’t share information across their case processes.

Echoing Swenson and Palmer, Dave Duggal says that DCM isn’t a standard. “Therefore, there is no common architectural approach to it,” says Duggal, founder of Consilience International LLC, which specializes in real-time application integration. “So we are talking about a movement, a collection of vendors, in which people share certain thinking about process technologies for the 21st century.”

Implementation of a DCM architecture can occur in many ways, he says. “This is still an emerging movement and there are many different DCM vendors doing these things with a variety of approaches,” he says. However, Duggal says all of them are cognizant of “the BPM marketing machine” and share some foundational beliefs that are at odds with that established sector. “The major one is that processes need to be more responsive in the 21st century,” he says. In other words, people know about the availability of collaboration tools and are starting to view contemporary enterprise software as rigid and non-responsive. Add to that perception the pressures from globalization and increased competition and “you quickly realize enterprises need to be more adaptive,” he says.

The closest thing to a general solution, in Duggal's view, is to increase the autonomy of workers, especially those with decision-making responsibilities.

To accomplish that, organizations must first accept that the real shift from depending on a flow chart to depending on a DCM tool is "mostly philosophical," Duggal says.

"Do you value structure, order, and consistency *über alles*? Are there things you absolutely must have?" he asks. All those traditional pieces and parts tend to be, effectively, static, he says. They don't change a lot and aren't responsive. "Of course, in biology, static equates with dying," he observes. "In the real world, businesses must respond to an environment they don't control. You can't confront dynamic environments with static software."

That implies that, because you value goals and objectives and effectiveness more than standardization, you must give up some standardization and consistency to build something dynamic. "We have all experienced situations where you run into a static process that doesn't meet your needs and you immediately think, 'It's bureaucracy. They aren't listening to me,'" Duggal says.

Focus on Flexibility

When people are working from fixed lists of choices, they are, in effect, automatons, Duggal says: "They are no more powerful than what you get punching a keypad button." Becoming dynamic doesn't mean that you give up on compliance or reporting or the controls that are necessary to business, but those elements must be flexible where they can be flexible (especially for people who have authority), dynamic where they can be, and limiting where there's a need to lock things down. "Historically, it has been either/or. You are either ad hoc or rigid," Duggal says. "Dynamic case management people see that as a false binary. Work isn't black or white. Sometimes there is a need for more latitude than at other times."

Conceptually, then, DCM is a system that supports that kind of ability to adapt. But Duggal emphasizes that that view doesn't mean that everything changes all the time. It doesn't lead to anarchy or mean that everything is constantly in flux.

However, if you can't make provisions for people to adapt within your architecture, then, by definition, you aren't adaptive. "The idea is to support that continuum of work and to provide what we call 'flexible as possible, procedural as necessary,'" he says.

Designing a DCM architecture for enhanced decision-making and collaboration

By Alan Earls

Crafting a dynamic case management (DCM) architecture involves a great deal of thought and consideration about multiple aspects of case management. But in bringing it all together, it's sometimes tough to discern where philosophy leaves off and action begins.

At the same time, that fuzzy line is part of the point. DCM is about subtleties and gray areas. It's about helping decision-makers respond in a world where perfectly clear-cut choices are rare.

Developing a DCM architecture isn't so much a technology challenge as a business challenge with a technical and measurement component, says John Lucker, principal and leader of the Advanced Analytics & Modeling National Practice at Deloitte Consulting LLP. Lucker cites at least six "streams of effort" to be considered in architecting DCM, just as in analytics. They are:

- 1. Determining the strategy** to solve the business problem and how DCM fits in that strategy.
- 2. Applying analytics** to figure out how you will dynamically control, alter, or route the case as it proceeds.
- 3. Integrating the signals** or actions from analytics into the technical infrastructure, whether it is local or remote or in the cloud.
- 4. Implementing with the business.** You have a strategy and solution; you also need to determine how you will make the business operational process change and what controls are in place. You need to determine how the business will adapt to use this new style of case management.

5. Managing organizational change—namely, how you’ll train your people and then manage improving the processes on the human side. That’s often the most neglected aspect of implementation, Lucker says, even though it’s a critical one. “In DCM, people are usually the ones who are involved in management of cases, whatever the case is,” he says. However, people aren’t always quick to adapt as a process is changing. As a result, the initiative may require some extensive training, especially if a new process deviates from past practice or requires a diversion around a traditional path.

6. Managing performance. This involves measuring how the new case management process is working and how to create a loop-back mechanism to improve upon or correct problems or streamline the new process. One best practice is arranging to have that type of roadmap across the whole project to make sure it’s executed properly and implemented effectively, Lucker says.

First Principles

In addition, there are some first principles that should always be addressed, cautions Michael Dortch, principal analyst at DortchOnIT.com and at Constellation Research. “If you don’t address those first principles, you can’t build a solid case management architecture,” says Dortch, an independent analyst and ebizQ contributor. For instance, in his view, if you’re addressing DCM architecture challenges “episodically or reactively,” you aren’t addressing them effectively.

“You have to use the defined goal of a dynamic case management architecture as both a challenge and an opportunity to revisit and refresh all of the people, processes, technologies, and providers supporting that case management architecture,” says Dortch.

That action can include asking about issues such as whether you have the right IT infrastructure in place to enable the level of dynamism you are seeking, or perhaps whether it needs to include a cloud component. “Just from a process standpoint, you need to determine who sits around the table to figure out how dynamic is dynamic enough,” Dortch says. “That decision-making should involve more than just the IT team; it should engage business.”

These days, every business strives to be more agile and responsive because more and more customers, prospects, competitors and influencers “live in that mobile, social cloud,” Dortch says. “It isn’t enough to move at Web speed, now you need to move at cloud speed.”

In fact, Dortch continues, all enterprise activity must be viewed from the perspective of whether it’s something that is sufficiently dynamic, agile and responsive to support overall business goals. “Everything you do in the warp and weft of the infrastructure potentially affects how agile and responsive you can be as a business,” he says. “That has got to be one of the drivers behind looking at dynamic case management architecture and how it can be improved.”

That situation can be one of the biggest challenges for IT people “because we have raised at least two generations of IT professionals who have developed a laser-focused ability to identify and solve specific problems in a very logical and straightforward way,” Dortch says. However, the issues related to DCM architecture are essentially the tip of the business iceberg: They’re the visible part of a deeper set of challenges: how to make the business run better and be more effective and responsive in the era of mobile cloud computing. “These are tough human and philosophical issues that are not as familiar to IT people, but they are going to need to get up to speed on them,” Dortch says.

Driving Effective Decision-Making

For example, explains Consilience International LLC founder Dave Duggal, rather than just following a chart, the case context can drive the decision-making process: “In other words, the sum of what is going on results in a certain kind of control.”

And, in his view, that amounts to a new kind of a process, which raises a question along the lines of the classic question of whether the chicken or the egg came first. In other words, Duggal says, “Is it a process if it is not first fully mapped out?” In fact, he continues, DCM devotees typically argue that it *is* a process that emerges from DCM, much as new processes evolve in other aspects of life. For example, when you’re traveling and must adapt your plans to due to an unanticipated storm, you’re inventing a new process.

“From a systems perspective, with DCM, you’re getting above rules to a constraint-based system,” he says. “It’s like the enterprise is a web with lots of relationships.” That set of relationships defines the context for the DCM architecture. You’re defining things by constraint rather than procedures—an approach that that he says sometimes dismays traditional BPM practitioners.

“What we are really trying to get to with DCM is what we refer to as joint optimization systems that are contextualized and responsive and allow users to be interactive, with feedback,” he says. As a result, says Duggal, with DCM, “people and systems are now collaborating to meet shared goals.”

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