



Putting the “E” in Enterprise Content Management

Finding Improvements using an ECM Center of Competency

By [Kevin Craine](#)

Organizations around the world use Enterprise Content Management systems to improve the cost, performance and efficiency of essential operations. Since the inception of ECM technology nearly 30 years ago, companies from all industries and markets have adopted the tools to remove the burden of paper, digitize the workflow, and protect the information underlying many critically important functions. As a result, the content management business has grown into a \$7 billion market and essentially all leading global enterprises have invested heavily in the technologies and solutions.

Most applications of ECM have until recently been limited to rather isolated and process-specific applications, however; like those supporting claims processing, financial accounting and contract management. One reason for this has been the complexity and cost of implementing the tools. A long learning curve was often needed along with specialized staffing and technical support, not to mention an enterprise-sized budget. These barriers have traditionally led to fragmented pockets of technology and process in even the most ECM-savvy organizations.

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Putting the “E” in ECM

But a new approach to ECM is emerging today that is helping organizations find success in putting the “E” in Enterprise Content Management. This new approach is less contingent upon the technology involved than it is upon the organizational planning approach used to take advantage of ECM. Organizations are leveraging their existing investments and expertise in new and more expansive ways by working cross-functionally to replicate the capabilities and techniques found to be effective in one area to include other important applications within the enterprise. The result is a next generation of ECM that is propagating beyond the confines of process-specific application.



Overcoming Cultural Challenges

One of the biggest challenges organizations face when working to implement ECM is cultural, not technical. This is because for many people “ECM” is a technology, not a process, and frontline users often feel that they are forced to adopt new technologies and solutions that they do not fully understand or find value in. This lack of user-acceptance can derail even the most well-crafted implementation plan. Companies find the most success overcoming these cultural challenges when the business benefits of both ECM discipline and technology are clearly communicated and understood by everyone involved.

Content Governance

In addition to being a valuable approach to replicate technologies and processes, an ECM Center of Competency also fosters a higher level of content governance across the enterprise as well. Organizations find that the cross-functional forum results in an emphasis on more clearly defined standards regarding the identification and categorization of information and how the organization manages the business changes pertaining to the content. The group as a whole is responsible for establishing standard guidelines and practices while facilitating and supporting these practices with technology remains the task of IT.

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This distinction is important since many organizations fall into the trap of putting ECM technology implementation ahead of the standardization of content governance. This is because organizations often do not have clearly defined stewards for content and lack a governing body that monitors and maintains content governance enterprise-wide. With a Center of Competency the scope and value of ECM expands beyond just a technology toolset to perform as a standard organizational platform to guide and bound the processes of creating, recognizing, categorizing, handling, processing, and archiving valuable enterprise content.

Success Story – A Leading Bank in Asia

How does an ECM Center of Competency work in the real world? One success story of note is one of the leading banks in Asia, which operates a global network of more than 500 offices in 19 countries and territories in Asia Pacific, Western Europe and North America.

The Bank recently adopted a Center of Competency approach that allows it to more easily leverage and replicate ECM-based process improvements across other critical activities within the enterprise. As a result, the Bank has dramatically improved processing time, savings and service; all with the tools they



already had. Since it operates globally, there are significant advantages to be gained by replicating, standardizing and automating common processes and controls.

The solution was to establish an “Enterprise Workflow Factory,” an operational approach and platform designed to encourage cross-functional competency in ECM. The goal is simple: As more and more streamlined processes come online, the organization will be transformed into a more automated and efficient enterprise thus increasing its competitive advantage in the market.

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This Center of Competency approach is driven by top-down executive sponsorship, and a team consisting of members from IT, finance, and a number of varied business units. Each member is empowered to represent the interests of their particular scope or discipline, while tasked with the overall mission to leverage and replicate the benefits of proven techniques in ECM to other critically important activities and processes. The aim is to standardize systems and processes, reduce costs by creating a more paperless environment, and drive improved service quality.

The Center of Competency approach has helped the Bank be successful replicating ECM techniques and improvements across their enterprise. One clear result is a 30% reduction in processing time. This is an important improvement. For the Bank, staying competitive in a tough market means running operations as efficiently as possible, and their Enterprise Workflow Factory is enabling them to do just that. The ECM Center of Competency approach helps boost service, save money and speed the pace of business.

Goals of an ECM Center of Competency

How can you begin to take advantage of an ECM Center of Competency approach? It takes thoughtful planning and goal-setting. Here are some important goals to consider:

Goal #1 - Enable Enterprise Excellence. It’s not enough to view ECM through a process-centric or department-only lens. A great deal of important improvement opportunity is lost with this limited view. You can turn this around by replicating techniques and benefits proven effective in one process to other activities that are also critically important to organizational performance. So one goal for any organization using an ECM Center of Competency approach is to enable enterprise excellence via truly “enterprise-wide” ECM.

Goal #2 – Boost Cross-Functional Teaming. One important success measure for any ECM Center of Competency is how effectively the different constituents work together. Most ECM approaches in the past were primarily IT-driven. Organizations today are finding much broader success by bringing



business users, compliances officers and operational personnel together with the technology team in a common group effort. In this way ECM functions as a business approach for strategic transformation versus just another technology toolset. The cross-functional teamwork provides an inherent focus on a shared standards and methods which in turn allow for better governance of each ECM initiative and implementation regardless of changes in technology or procedures. The result is a sustainable model that drives long-term benefit regardless of changing resources or technology.

Goal #3 – Enable Process Efficiency. Any organization must work efficiently and effectively in order to compete. But that is difficult to do if you rely on antiquated and costly paper-based systems that slow the pace of business and impeded your ability to deliver excellent service. An ECM Center of Competency encourages cross-functional initiatives to remove the burden of paper and reduce manual and mundane tasks the plague process efficiency. By replicating ECM techniques in a thoughtful and methodical way, organizations enable important efficiencies and savings one process at a time.

Goal #4 - Establish Platform Reusability. With an ECM Center of Competency approach the techniques used successfully in one process are more easily replicated in other areas. This platform reusability is an important distinction from the past; solutions are no longer isolated and process-bound. While there are certainly many unique requirements for each individualized process, companies find that a majority of the important capabilities can be reused and repurposed to accommodate other activities. The payoff occurs by creating a platform for the development of ECM-based improvements that is cross-functional, agile and reusable.

Goal #5 – Reduce Time, Cost and Risk. An ECM Center of Competency is a powerful approach to reduce implementation time, cost and risk. Without this unifying structure organizations tend to operate in a much more fragmented way with sub-optimal results. The use of a standard operational model narrows requirements and reduces misunderstanding, and the reuse of service components drives faster implementation with much lower risk. Fewer variations and changes require less testing. And since services are developed once and reused, both training and adoption is simplified; costing less and getting to the benefits more quickly as common capabilities can be deployed to multiple business units at one time.

ECM Center of Competency Success Characteristics

Once you establish an ECM Center of Competency, how do you know when you are on track? Here are a few success characteristics to consider.



Strong Executive Sponsorship – Any important process improvement initiative needs a clear vision with sponsorship and support from the top. A strong executive sponsor or sponsors is essential, and especially critical for ECM-based solutions and initiatives that span multiple departments, technological and business systems, and geographic locations.

Close Working Relationship between Business Units and Technology – An ECM Center of Competency requires cross-functional team members to work closely together. But this is not always easy. Successful organizations work to break down the barriers that can exist with an established group of business analysts, IT solution architects, and system developers for the singular goal of providing ECM services to the organization.

Shared Services Implementation to Promote Standardization and Replication – The key to all of this is the ability to replicate successful ECM capabilities across the organization and apply the functions and improvements to a variety of processes and activities. A shared services approach where common capabilities and expertise are standardized and reused provides the most value, the least risk, less time to implement, and generally greater savings and improvement overall.

The value of using a Center of Competency approach is found by taking advantage of an organizational platform from which to drive ECM capabilities across the enterprise, build consensus on priorities, and enable shared ECM services across the organization.

Moving Forward

Are you ready to take the next steps and establish an ECM Center of Competency? While there are a great many ECM tools and solutions to consider, remember that your success may indeed be more dependent upon thoughtful organizational planning and cross-functional teamwork than it is on the technology involved.

The value of using a Center of Competency approach is found by taking advantage of an organizational platform from which to drive ECM capabilities across the enterprise, build consensus on priorities, and enable shared ECM services across the organization. The benefits include better alignment of valuable technologies with important organizational strategies, improved responsiveness to a changing business environment, and clearer accountability for business results and execution. Look for providers and partners with the right combination of capabilities, expertise and vision to help you put the “E” in Enterprise Content Management.



About the Author

[Kevin Craine](#) is the author of the book [Designing a Document Strategy](#), and the host of [Everyday MBA](#) on C-Suite Radio. His books have sold in over 30 countries and he is a respected authority on document management and process improvement. Kevin holds an MBA in the Management of Science and Technology and a BA in Communications. He is the executive director of Craine Communications Group. For more info visit CraineGroup.com.



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