

The organizational management technique of process re-engineering led to discovery, documentation and emphasis on improvement of process flow within many business operations. The resulting 'process centered organization' focused on continual improvement of process systems with the end goals of reducing TCO and bettering customer experience. While process centering has offered many case studies of improved business operations it has also shown that many processes overlap or 'cross' functional areas of business. Further operational studies revealed that many of the largest process bottlenecks or slowdowns occur during the flow of a process across functional areas. In response to the finding that cross-functional process improvement provided a key to greater operational efficiency some organizations have established cross functional teams with members trained or aware of communication and management techniques needed to move a cross-functional process through functional channels.

As cross-functional structures have become more prevalent within organizations the need to improve access and knowledge sharing across functions has also increased. The greatest challenge to complex businesses is not just to become process centered or even cross-functionally conscious, but once improved process systems are in place the challenge comes down to the logistics of information sharing and access to the business user. The organization that rises to meet this communication and knowledge management issue is not only process centered, but also *user centered*; committed to providing its employees with access to tools and information that enable effective cross-functional process operation.

To hurdle the challenges of access and communication presented by the user centered organization model, companies have implemented various strategies to enable the user's communication with different functional areas. Some companies have addressed the challenge geographically by physically locating the necessary members and resources in relative proximity. While this approach has generated some success, it falls short of more comprehensively addressing the communication and access challenge by not providing effective *virtual* access to functional information.

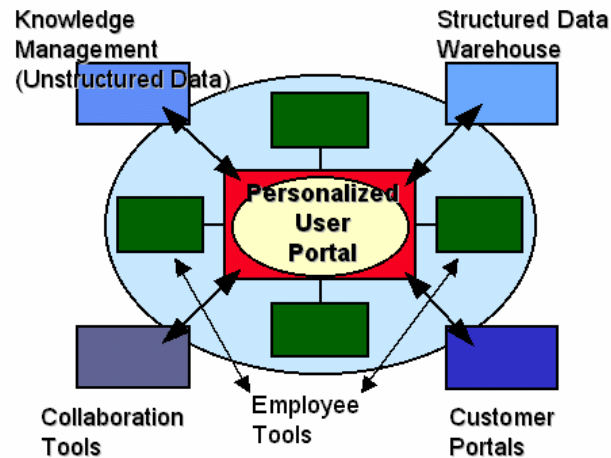
Virtual communication becomes even more of an issue as a company expands its presence with new locations or has frequently traveling employees. Those without access to the operational hub of a company can still be connected if content, collaboration and messaging (knowledge management) tools are provided online in an easy to use manner.

In the last several years, IT departments have endeavored to provide knowledge management tools through specialized application development. These developments have produced a maze of applications designed for specific needs. It is not unusual for large companies such as MetLife Insurance to report having more than 300 major applications designed to keep their users connected to their organization's knowledge and communication resources.

These data access, workflow, collaboration and communication applications are often developed independently of each other and do not have the same programming structure, user interface or log-on. The isolated applications may be effective and useful to the users for who they were designed (...or not), but to access each application in a different virtual area and with a dissimilar user interface is cumbersome.

Instead of connecting users through a tangle of disparate applications, many companies have begun to look to portal solutions that offer a fix to the problem of independent non-integrated applications. Portal solutions provide the common thread that can tie independent applications together while maintaining the autonomy of independent development; creating information empowerment for the user.

Information Organization in a User Centered Enterprise



Leading the portal is WebSphere (4.2+), which provides a solution that allows for development of easily personalized portals that provide a common user interface, a single point of sign on (SSO), and ultimately a primary location for knowledge and communication resources. In short WebSphere provides the platform that enables messaging, structured data and unstructured data assets to be accessed and interacted with from one integrated source using one log-on.

Cheat Sheet of the WebSphere Portal features:

- Combines application user interfaces together in one unified presentation.
- Users in different roles see different pages and content.
- Administrators can either lock or let users customize their portals.
- Each application, or group of similar applications in the portal is called a *Portlet*. Each Portlet is a separate application, can be developed independently of other Portlets, and can be placed anywhere on the custom portal page.
- The WS portal not only offers integration on the screen, but also behind the scenes by allowing information sharing between applications.
- The WS portal offers single server sign on (SSO); which means that users can sign on once for access to multiple applications utilizing a unified interface.
- WS portal can provide access to non-Lotus applications such as Enterprise applications including SAP, PeopleSoft, Siebel and others.
- The portal server includes Portlets and services to be used as the basis for a collaboration suite of tools. Collaboration tools support messaging, document libraries, user profiles, inboxes and calendars, planned and spontaneous meetings. Users can access these services in the context of what they are doing instead of using a separate application.
- Collaborative Portlets include:
 - iNotes (mail, calendar, contacts, notebook, to-do lists)
 - QuickPlace (Provides a workspace for sharing documents, discussions, calendars)
 - Sametime (Allows chat [IM] with other selected users w/o leaving portal)
 - Discovery Server (Allows for searches that can include documents, people and their profiles...can also reference data individuals view or publish as a method of developing an expertise map)
 - Document Organizer (offers extensive categorization, viewing and browser based editing of documents as well as document subscription-docs. are saved in the portal's document store.)

- WebSphere Everyplace Access proposes to provide connected or disconnected access of portal applications to mobile users.

The WebSphere portal server and its suite of applications/Portlets provide the base technology foundation for the user centered organization. The portal concept, if implemented and integrated properly, allows for a lowering of TCO by extending the cross functional concept of physical co-location to the virtual workspace. In servicing many types and areas of customer information requests, portal powered personnel can obtain easy access to the knowledge and tools to answer these questions. Internal operational time and expense is also reduced by the advanced collaboration features which allow users to more quickly locate and 'meet' with other users/resources in a virtual workspace. In short, the portal provides integrated access to those who are designated with carrying an objective across the functions of the company to its end with the customer.