Dynamic Case Management

The term "case" means different things in different industries. In healthcare, for example, a case can be a patient. Medical workers go through a series of processes to figure out why the person is sick: information collected, tests, and knowledge compiled toward finding a treatment.

A case could also be an item, like a pair of shoes you ordered that never arrived. When you call customer service, the rep you speak with should be able to piece enough information together to determine what happened and the best course of action.

No matter your industry or circumstance, the common thread is the dynamic nature of interactions between people, processes, and data. Case management helps you unify these interactions, to maintain control and achieve better, faster, smarter decisions.

At a Glance

Key Challenges

Recent technologies have changed us all, giving consumers access to more information than ever and spawning new behaviors online and on mobile devices. To adapt to this newly dynamic and increasingly automated environment, businesses must learn how to leverage their employees' knowledge and intuition.

To do so, they first must look at process. Because it is impossible to predict every business scenario and challenge, it is impossible to predefine a process to respond to every potential situation. Therefore, companies cannot effectively address common needs—like handling service requests, managing incidents, and conducting investigations— with purely process-centric solutions.

In this realm of constant change, companies that supplement their traditional workflows with modern technologies, particularly ones that combine process with automation, and their staff's knowledge and intuition will be able to evolve more quickly and dramatically improve their business outcomes.

Solution

Case management makes this possible, uniting workflows, knowledge, and collaboration around a data record. Work can flow non-sequentially to accommodate dynamic changes in the business environment, and detailed audit histories capture collaboration and processes, both manual and automated, as they are taken. For any business challenged with constant change, case management offers a powerful solution.

Process is Not Enough

Traditional workflow technology relies on one key assumption: that all business interactions can be predefined into organized process flows. Although some processes may be predictable, many are prone to unexpected events and anomalies. Businesses traditionally isolate and remove these in their pursuit of efficiency and continuous improvement. But in a world where social media can turn an isolated incident into a worldwide conversation, they must re-evaluate how they approach the unpredictable.

Attempting to predict the unpredictable nature of every human behavior—and the world at large—is impractical and will not result in desired outcomes. Instead, businesses empower employees with knowledge and collaboration tools that enable them to better understand the context of unpredictable events. Second, they must concurrently trust their employees to handle ad-hoc events quickly and in the best interests of the organization. Finally, they should automate processes when possible to increase efficiency and let employees focus on the most challenging cases.

Today's business environment requires workflow solutions that see the world from more than just a process perspective. They must leverage human knowledge and insight to fill the grey spaces and ensure every interaction drives to a business goal. To this end, platforms that combine the best of workflow and automation technology with human knowledge will be well equipped to drive positive outcomes.

Key Elements to Case Management

Case management represents both an evolution and a convergence of technologies to meet the needs of dynamic business challenges. To effectively accommodate a wide spectrum of interactions, case management must include:

Business Process Management (BPM)
BPM is an important—though not the only—component for case management, assuring rules and policies are followed when important decisions are made.

Automation
Regardless of where a case falls on the spectrum between structured and ad-hoc, most processes within it can be automated. In fact, case management is itself one component of full-stack automation (the others are workflow, robotic process automation (RPA), artificial intelligence (AI), and decision rules). Automating various processes within a case reduces errors, boosts efficiency, and frees employees to focus on more complex tasks and positive outcomes.

Data Discovery
To facilitate informed decisions, case management should combine information from multiple systems into a single record. This allows employees to efficiently view all aspects of a case and understand the case's context in larger business goals.

Collaboration
Employees must be able to easily collaborate on a case, exchange professional opinions, and quickly reach conclusions as a group. Without such close collaboration, context—which is just as important as the information itself—can be lost.

Ad-hoc Activities
Case management should accommodate ad-hoc activities by allowing employees to create, assign, and complete work items in the context of the case, without a need for a predefined sequence of events.

Audit Trail
Beyond simply recording process events, case management should provide the history of these process events, plus the history of all content and collaborations in the context of the case. Case management software should bring these pieces together into a complete case solution.

Styles of Case Management

Not all styles of case management are the same, different styles will place different levels of importance on the various features of a case management solution.

The four most common styles include, process to decision, service requests, incident management, and investigations. These styles range from highly structured—BPM-intensive process to decision cases, for example—to more ad-hoc and unpredictable, like investigation-style cases. However, each style employs to varying degrees the key features of BPM, automation, data discovery, collaboration, ad-hoc activities, and audit trail.

| Process to Decision | Service Requests | Incident Management | Investigations |

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Case management styles can also be considered in terms of the level of context they provide related to the goals and objectives of the organization. Process to decision cases begin with a great deal of context while others begin with little to no context, meaning that investigators must discover the case's impact on business goals throughout the life of the case.

Process to Decision

Process to decision cases, such as order processing, generally flow in a predictable and reliable manner, with a high amount of context to a business goal. But even in this highly structured style, exceptions can occur in an unpredictable way that require ad-hoc activities, as well as collaboration between customers, vendors, and order managers for order resolution.

Service Request

Service requests have a relatively high degree of structure, but the context is not well known beforehand. Unlike a simple order management scenario, wide-ranging customer requests cannot be predefined and the request's impact on a business goal must be discovered by employees reviewing available data, communicating with the customer, and employing ad-hoc activities where appropriate. For example, a customer might inquire about a product they purchased that is now defective. To properly resolve this service request case, employees must review product information and discover the cause of the defect.

Incident Management

Incident management cases begin with even less context than service requests. Where service requests originate from a known source, a customer for example, incidents may originate from any source, in any form, with little context known before the incident occurs. Employees must follow a high-level process to identify and resolve the incident as it emerges. For example, someone posts on social media about the poor quality of one of the company's products. The company detects the events indirectly through social media monitoring, and does not know the identity of the poster. But the path to resolution is the same as with a service request: identify, address, and resolve the incident.

Investigations

Investigations have few to no predefined processes and little context, just a business goal. Here's one example. A business investigates the potential of a new product offering. What is the product? How will it fulfill customer needs? How will it generate more revenue? All of these answers are discovered in the course of the investigation. Structured processes are only employed in isolated areas and usually requested in an ad-hoc fashion as investigators gain more context into the case.

Conclusion

As organizations face more and more dynamic and unexpected behaviors in their quest for specific business outcomes, they must turn to case management for effective resolution. Case management software helps organizations ensure that even unexpected events lead to a desired business goal.

The Appian Low-code Automation Platform gives organizations the capabilities they need to support all styles of case management. Designed for ease of use, Appian makes building automated case processes, records, ad-hoc activities, and audit trails fast and intuitive. Furthermore, each case management application built on Appian inherits a powerful enterprise-class architecture, to make it highly secure and scalable. Industry analyst firm Forrester ranks Appian as the leader in Dynamic Case Management:

FORRESTER

“ ***Appian offers a flexible platform that accelerates programmer productivity with strong cloud options.*** ”

The Forrester Wave™: Cloud-Based Dynamic Case Management, Q1 2018

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Appian provides a low-code automation platform that accelerates the creation of high-impact business applications. Many of the world's largest organizations use Appian applications to improve customer experience, achieve operational excellence, and simplify global risk management and compliance.

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