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"Leading the Conversation"

The Essentials Series

Communications Enabled Business

by Ken Camp

Communications-Enabled Business Processes in the Enterprise Environment

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Today more than ever, businesses are seeking measurable results from their investments. Communication-Enabled Business Processes (CEBP) is a rapidly emerging approach to delivering business value through connecting the people, information, and workflow processes that support business objectives. In early CEBP deployments and other similar work on Software Oriented Architecture (SOA) and Software as a Service (SaaS), we've seen increased revenue, improved efficiency, and rising customer satisfaction. In the manufacturing sector, a decrease in defect rates has also been noted.

CEBP Benefits	Working Example	Measurable Business Result
Increased efficiency in business workflow process	During a system outage, link repair team automatically via communications tools	Critical business systems can be repaired quickly and proactively
Enhanced customer experience	Eliminate the need for customer callback after consultation	Single call service, measurable in call center
Improved decision-making tools	CEBP enables bringing experts together when needed	Repeatable decision-making processes

Table 1: The Business Value of CEBP.

Saving time, increasing productivity, satisfying customers, and increasing revenues each present a compelling focus to the business enterprise. That CEBPs can indeed bring them all to bear makes it absolutely vital for the competitive business organization of today to take proactive steps to begin integrating their business applications and network services.

CEBP tightly couples communications technologies with business processes and applications to enable better communications channels among customers, suppliers, and employees. The benefits of this integration can include business techniques, best practices, administrative and management tools, and third-party utilities. CEBP is a vital approach in the competitive enterprise environment. It can provide focal areas of business process re-engineering that are ripe for change to make an organization more effective and competitive.

The Business Environment of Today

Although all businesses go through cycles, there are some basic tenets of business management that simply never change. Return on Investment (ROI) is a driving business motivator that impacts every decision. Investment can be many things, and it isn't always capital expenditure (CAPEX), which is easily quantified.

Business applications are investments. They're investments in process and methodology. They require money, but they're also investments of human capital. We invest resources of our business in working through our established workflows and processes.

As businesses implement enterprises applications, in parallel they build an array of network services. These services include everything from Web and email solutions to human resources management tools. CEBP is about bringing things all together. There's a maturity model to CEBP deployment that every organization is participating in.

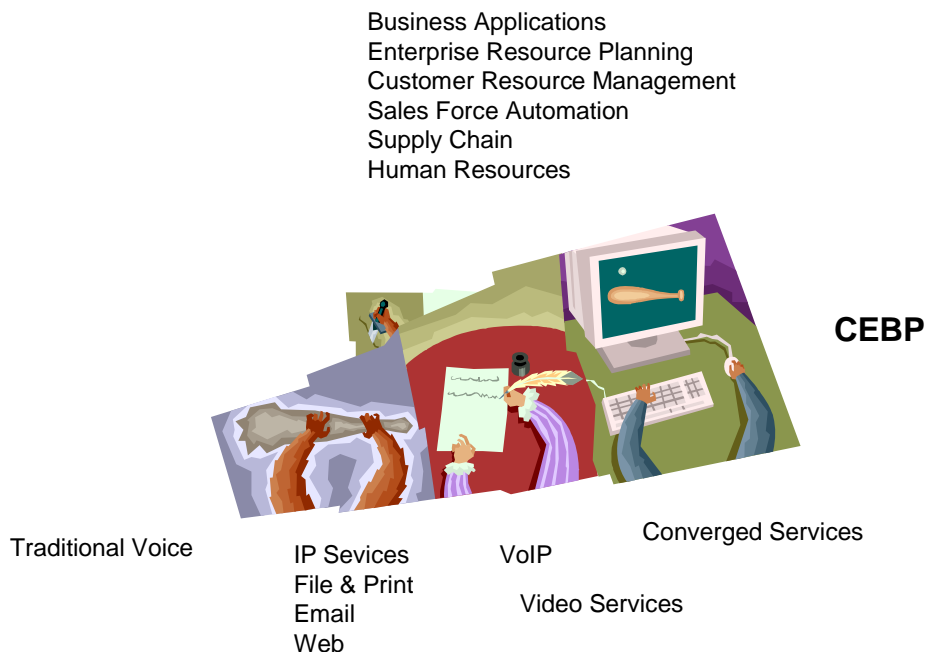


Figure 1: Maturity model to fully unified communications.

Figure 1 provides a high-level representation of the sort of maturity model involved in achieving fully integrated CEBP deployment. An organization probably began with voice services as a basic business tool. IP networks grew from simple file and print services to email and Web applications. Along the way, enterprise applications emerged. Although they may vary in form between large and small enterprises, the fundamental roles they play in workflow remains consistent across all industries and organizations of all sizes. Voice may have already moved to VoIP, and video services may exist in some fashion. As the services converge on the IP-based network, we find ourselves exercising a fully converged network. CEBP is the next step in this evolution and integration of business applications and network services.

VoIP Convergence as a Catalyst

Many industry leaders have seen VoIP as a key element and a disruptive technology. VoIP convergence is a catalyst—not as a technology but as an integrator. VoIP is simply an alternative delivery mechanism for voice as a service. Voice is one of the many services available on the high-performance fully converged enterprise network.

The advantage of VoIP is that, for companies already using this technology, their network requirements have often already been considered. They have, by implementing VoIP, already staged the enterprise for the fully converged data, voice, and video network. Today, VoIP isn't a necessity, but the integration of IP services as the single, core service delivery platform in an enterprise sets the stage for the most vital aspect of thinking about change—how we view services.

Services are the things the network can do for us—for our business. These services support the core competencies in an organization that process operational activity through established workflows and procedures. In the past, it's been easy for organizations to become enamored of a particular technology and then to be distracted by the technology. The technology is not the end game. The end game is the core business objectives of the organization. These objectives are supported by network services and enterprise applications.

The Power of CEBP—Process Re-Engineering and the Corporate Culture

Process engineering or redesign has often been one of the most frightening and deleterious exercises any organization might ever undertake. For employees of large corporations, the term process re-engineering has been the sound of a bell tolling cutbacks, layoffs, or worse.

CEBP positions a different era and trend in enterprise evolution. CEBP truly allows the enterprise to proactively invest time, energy, and resources in reinventing itself. It stages the re-creation of the corporate culture. The organization that has moved through the maturity model to a fully converged data, voice, and video network can effectively embrace these services as tools to further integrate with core business applications.

Enterprise Resource Planning

The goal of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems is to integrate all data and processes of an organization into a single unified system. This system is essentially the nervous system of the enterprise. One key component of most ERP systems is of one unified enterprise database to store data for all outlying system modules.

The most basic ERP software system has to include at least two sub-systems. A solution combining payroll and accounting functions might be considered an ERP software package for some organizations. More commonly, the term *ERP system* encompasses more broadly based enterprise applications.

Customer Relationship Management

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is the practical method of thoughtfully locating and targeting customers. It's a very broadly used term that covers the framework organizations use to describe how they manage their relationships with those with whom they interact. There are a number of technologies used to support CRM, ranging from data gathering and collection to data mining to data warehousing. Knowledge management plays a key role in customer relationship management methodologies.

CRM has three distinct aspects that might be implemented either separately or together. The operational aspect describes business process automation. The collaborative aspect of CRM defines how an organization communicates with customers. The analytical aspect leverages knowledge management techniques to provide business intelligence about how the business is doing. Together, these three are ripe for CEBP adoption.

Sales Force Automation

Sales force management systems are typically a subset of CRM. They provide an information technology system to support sales and marketing efforts. Sales Force Automation (SFA) most commonly includes a means to automatically record each stage of the sales cycle. It includes contact management capabilities to track every interaction with a given customer, the purpose of the interaction, and any follow up work that may be needed. SFA often includes some type of sales lead tracking system. Other functional components might include forecasting and order management.

Supply Chain Management

Supply chain management (SCM) is methodology for effectively planning, implementing, and controlling the operations of the supply chain as efficiently as possible. It's an efficiency model most commonly associated with a manufacturing environment where component supplies are used as parts of a larger product. An automobile manufacturer, for example, has many suppliers for the myriad smaller parts that make up an automobile. SCM covers the movement, inventory management, and storage of raw materials. It also commonly provides tracking for the finished goods to point-of-sale or consumption.



One professional organization describes SCM as a practice that "encompasses the planning and management of all activities involved in sourcing, procurement, conversion, and logistics management."

Human Resources Management

Human resource management (HRM) is the enterprise approach to managing what many companies view as their most important assets—the employees who work together every day to meet the business objectives of the organization. In the past, this role might have been referred to as personnel management. It's a business area that is evolving rapidly both in practice and as an academic theory. From a practical standpoint, it includes the techniques for managing people in the workforce: Seizing competitive advantage using the weapons of technology.

What's Ahead for CEBP

The future of CEBP is powerful and formidable as a competitive tool. Enterprises that adopt CEBP principles will be the ones that are quicker to streamline business processes, quicker to adopt new workflows, and quicker to adapt to a changing landscape. CEBP portends an era of competition wherein the quick will get quicker, the nimble more nimble, and the gap between leaders and losers in the environment will widen quickly. What lies ahead is a window of time that will see spectacular leaps forward as innovative companies seize leadership positions in their respective markets from competitors who fail to adapt as quickly. We'll see large wins and large losses ahead that will directly correlate to how aggressively CEBP principles are adopted.

In a Full CEBP-Enabled Enterprise

The vision of the CEBP-rich enterprise of the future presents a new kind of company, a new business that has self-reinvented to become a virtual call center across the company, around the world. In such a global enterprise today, to reach a product specialist, a customer needs to know who to call. In a CEBP-rich enterprise, a call into the company can lead to a directory front end, complete with interactive voice response systems tied into corporate resource databases. Imagine calling a financial services institution looking for information about 401k programs. Regardless of how the call comes in, minimal information can be gathered in the unified communications front-end call processing system. Account information, geographic data, demographics, and an array of data can be collected quickly and seamlessly from a caller.

With complete integration of CEBP tying not just the communications but all the information technology resources of the corporation together, call routing can incorporate new intelligence. A repeat customer can quickly be identified and routed anywhere in the company. If there are only a half dozen employees who can answer questions of this nature, the CEBP system's approach can instantaneously group these few people into a call center based on presence and availability information and pass the call to the ad hoc group just established.

In short, a database schema can contain all the metadata about employees everywhere. The CEBP process tools can integrate unified communications systems to link enterprise applications, like the CRM tool, to voice and data networks to establish ad hoc pools of skills to meet fluctuating business needs.

This dynamic capability can dramatically alter the workflow of the business and its corporate culture. This organization doesn't need to plan and design a call center environment, then deal with staffing and management. The call center becomes an enterprise-wide ad hoc resource, created on demand from known information about the organization's resources.

CEBP holds the potential to be one of the most disruptive changes to hit the business process landscape in many years. As companies work to adopt the Information Technology Information Library (ITIL) framework, press for ISO17799 compliance, tighten controls to meet Sarbanes-Oxley (SOX) requirements, and other business process changes, the evolution of CEBP will allow many organizations to redefine themselves and reinvent their corporate culture. Those that seize this advantage may well be able to seize the reins of market leadership within their business segment.