What It Is, What It Isn’t, and How to Do It Right

Using CRM as a platform for deploying line of business applications across the organization? Make sure you get the most from your investment by putting a governance strategy in place.
Introduction

You’ve chosen a CRM solution as a standard platform for implementing Line of Business (LOB) applications. CRM will be used throughout the organization for recording, managing and reporting on engagements with clients and will be made available interdepartmentally for knowledge sharing and to ensure consistent process flow.

There are many moving parts, departments, and stakeholders involved in this scenario. So, how do you:

> Stay on top of the CRM needs of everyone within the organization
> Align those needs with standard functional modules and master data
> Support and evangelize reuse and development standardization
> Disseminate industry best practices along the way

The answer is governance. Often misunderstood, governance—in essence—provides a vehicle for managing and optimizing an organization-wide IT strategy.

A solid governance process is not limiting; rather, it:

> Enables disparate CRM development efforts to capitalize on existing development components
> Fosters consistent and effective communication to all stakeholders
> Allows you to continually profit from ever-expanding and improving CRM platforms
Governance, Defined

Perhaps it’s best to start out with an explanation of governance. “Governance” does not mean “regulation.” It is multifaceted and, in fact, includes many aspects other than the term “governance” might imply. For example, it:

- Fosters cohesive communication across the organization
- Ensures adherence to the goals set out by program leadership and sponsors
- Results in reusable tools, techniques, and services to meet common business requirements—processes that eliminate rework and duplication of effort
- Enables you to rapidly respond to project change, risks and constraints and define a proper escalation protocol
- Facilitates smooth and rapid resource reassignment and the ability to adapt to future initiatives with distributed effort
- Reduces the total cost of ownership by making solutions more maintainable and by consolidating functionality to reduce licensing expenses
- Aligns your business for organizational change

Governance might vary depending on the organization and its culture, structure, and processes, but it will always follow the consistent tenants of standardization, reuse, sharing, and “thinking globally while acting locally.”
If Not Governance, Then What?

So, maybe you’re still asking why you need a governance strategy for an IT-managed platform. First, let’s answer the inverse question. “What happens if you do NOT employ governance?” In short—a lot of things you do not want to deal with. As more LOBs engage a CRM platform without governance, these issues multiply exponentially and quickly spin out of control:

> Disorganized architecture
> Non-standard development practices and business processes
> Redundant work streams
> Proliferated system bugs

If LOBs decide to share CRM tenants to optimize processes, their development efforts will create unplanned consequences as disparate yet interdependent functionality adversely affects performance and usability. Eventually, the platform will become unstable and need to be re-created.

CONSEQUENCES OF NOT USING GOVERNANCE

> Customizations written for a specific LOB could interfere with those written for another
> Unplanned recursive and endless loop database calls could cripple performance
> Business rules for one LOB could conflict, contradict or supersede those for another
> Testing will become unpredictable and unrepeatale
> Usability and adoption will fall sharply
> Conflicts caused by interdependencies could create unnecessary development delays
> Lack of standards like undocumented code, unsupported development methods, and non-standard design approaches could hinder future development efforts
Why is Governance Important for Organizations Using CRM?

It’s clear that a governance strategy could be beneficial to IT in general, but what about CRM specifically? CRM solutions with the capability to serve as an operational platform can also typically be customized. Microsoft Dynamics CRM, for example, is a highly extensible platform and can be quickly configured to address a myriad business processes and functional requirements. Developers do not necessarily need training to extend and customize the platform. Also, it is human nature to want to satisfy your constituents quickly and efficiently, and Microsoft Dynamics CRM is a great tool for this.

However, there is a downside to this capability. Applications can be easily deployed—think Excel, Access, and SharePoint—and do not require the stringent setup process of typical IT infrastructure-based projects. Therefore, the desire for quick deployment overshadows the upstream processes of evaluation and analysis to ensure consistency. Often, this issue is amplified when individual development groups with directives from their LOBs are decoupled from global visibility. Governance is vital to keeping a CRM platform from becoming an organizational mess that will eventually need to be cleaned up and reorganized at a considerable cost.

**COMMON PAINS DUE TO LACK OF CRM GOVERNANCE**

- Highly customized and difficult to maintain solutions
- Decentralization of systems design and development
- Feeling of “reinventing the wheel” with every new development effort
- Organizational change management pain and low user adoption
- Absence of strong policy enforcement
- No centrally available master database (global contacts, organizations, optionset – business attributes and pick list values)
The Benefits of CRM Governance

Now we have established that CRM without governance could have some significant and costly consequences, let’s discuss the benefits—which are well worth putting a governance strategy in place.

Centralized Communication Strategy –
A governance model facilitates a consistent message throughout the program’s execution. This is important because it is critical within larger programs that a common vision, solution roadmap, milestones, risks, constraints and changes are communicated efficiently and effectively with all stakeholders.

Centralized Master Data – A governing body assists with creating a common data schema that can be used across solutions, allowing for a master client record that can report on all interactions by the client. This helps organizations avoid the issue of losing sight of the customer due to LOB solutions being viewed independently.

Disconnected Applications Supporting One Global Goal – Teams connected by governance have the ability to make decisions on whether to join applications through integration or merge LOBs into a single supporting solution. Without governance, organizations risk losing the ability to identify functionality that addresses common goals across business units when development teams are broken apart to meet LOB needs.

Centralized Technical Expertise – A group that can provide development and deployment best practices in relation to the CRM platform, as well as a governing body that can assist in communication, capture, and leadership of a program of projects, helps avoid the pitfall of separate teams “reinventing the wheel” in development efforts.
Putting Governance into Action: A CRM “Center of Excellence” (CoE)

There are many models for program governance, and all attempt to resolve the same challenges regarding multiple CRM deployments and diverse groups of candidates for new deployments and shared infrastructure. Without proper planning and thoughtful consideration of challenges and goals, many have fallen short. Efforts fail for many reasons—lack of understanding of the organization’s culture, politics, or internal policies; established programs acting as a “policing” organization; or an organization’s adoption of strong project management principles. Developing a Center of Excellence (CoE) with the right goals, the right people, and the right process is crucial to creating a successful governance strategy.

Large organizations that use CRM as a platform commonly adopt a model similar to that illustrated in the figure on this page. When LOB programs demand functionality and development teams need to provide solutions quickly, splitting the teams up is necessary to meet demand.
In order to maintain solutions and deliver new enhancements once programs go live, it is critical to have a development operations (DevOps) model where new build and maintenance teams are split. This is where the chaos can begin and what necessitates the need for a governance model that goes beyond the traditional Program Management Office (PMO). It requires a consolidated team of technology experts along with the PMO. The Center of Excellence provides a foundation to promote the benefits of the CRM platform along with project management processes that are critical to enterprise communication, architecture, and structure.

**Goals of the CoE**

Goals should be consistent with meeting the needs of the LOBs while maintaining order through the governance process, including:

- Facilitating communication and direction of the executive leadership goals and vision
- Designing, enabling, and providing common capabilities
- Providing guidance and best practices to enable project success
- Cataloging and sharing common functional modules to accelerate the development process
- Providing technical leadership through best practices
- Documenting and managing inter- and intra-solution configuration dependencies
- Providing and enforcing common entity design methodologies and physical infrastructure
- Managing and providing services: Enabling quick and cost-optimized development, designing and managing repeatable testing, and ensuring predictive platform upgradability
The CoE Team: Key Roles and Responsibilities

This team will leverage a program-level group responsible for assessing CRM-related projects, standardizing processes and ensuring delivery best practices to advance the mission of the governance program and create a unified approach. This will require a central team consisting of experts in the CRM platform and the organization’s business experts. Depending on the size of your CRM program, the following roles can be centralized within the CoE to assist smaller development groups building specific LoB solutions on the platform.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROLE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tr>
<td>Program Manager</td>
<td>A critical role for managing several related projects. Ensures that business goals and objectives of the program are being met and that communication is managed seamlessly across the organization. Can also manage the execution of the governance team.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRM Solution / Architect</td>
<td>Provides support and guidance around the technical direction of the development and maintenance teams, ensuring they are abiding by code standards, leveraging reusable assets, and creating maintainable solutions. Works closely with the CoE developer to identify, package, and document code that can be reused across the program and teams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRM Senior Developer</td>
<td>Provides technical support, insights into the product’s architectural roadmap, and manages best practices regarding its configuration and extensibility. Leads the effort of cataloging, standardizing, and evangelizing shared components and modules. Plays a part in testing and training as necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRM Functional Analyst</td>
<td>Often works with the business in early stage requirements development to refine them into more consistent and tangible work items, document them in a standardized toolset, and promote the reuse of any previously built solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test Manager</td>
<td>Responsible for quality of technical deliverables across the program. Defines Master Test Plans (MTP), coordinates support for test efforts while supporting testing of reusable assets and ensuring proper test scripts are created.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Manager</td>
<td>Provides training guidance, coordination and support for CRM training across the governance program, beginning with maintaining a proper Training Plan from which all plans will derive. Supports creating training materials, recorded sessions and labs. Responsible for each team’s trainers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Release Manager</td>
<td>Provides expertise, relationship management with other system owners, and advanced notification to any release board or interfaced system. Coordinates with technical writers, architects, and analysts to finalize release documentation and form a library, reducing the need to recreate documentation assets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Assurance Analyst</td>
<td>Provides expert information security and policy guidance to ensure development teams are compliant with internal security standards. Creates relationships with the organization’s Information Security teams and officers to ensure understanding and providing a forward outlook. Guides leadership through Authority to Operate issues and works on their behalf to present and broker solutions to issues.</td>
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The CoE Process: An Integrated Approach

Once roles have been identified and filled, the CoE process needs to be tightly integrated with the current development methodology. Start by choosing the issues and processes that can get the greatest impact from the team. The goal is not to complicate but to improve efficiency and lower the project’s total cost of ownership.

CoE Engagement at Different Project Phases

- **Needs Assessment** – When a need comes in, CoE provides the necessary help and support to accelerate this process, providing reusable components and helpful tools.

- **Requirements Definition** – CoE assists in requirements definition and verifies cross-organizational similarities to accelerate development and standardize processes.

- **Design** – CoE augments design and development teams to recommend and enforce the use of vetted strategies and architectural standards, as well as evaluating existing modules and shared components.

- **Development** – CoE helps define and enforce code standards and methodologies; CoE senior developer helps augment the LOB’s development team with advanced topics and methods, suggesting alternate solutions if there are standards to be reused or new functionality to be explored.

- **Testing** – CoE helps the testing efforts by providing standard test procedure documentation tools, regression testing tools, and standard testing methodologies where appropriate.

- **Release/Deployment** – CoE provides support and best practices regarding deployment to create consistent and error-free releases.
The Ongoing Benefits of a CoE

Continuous Improvement

Another valuable aspect of the CoE is its effort to continually build reusable assets based on global needs which can be offered as standard modules. These standards are generated from best practices outside of the organization, from effective processes that are identified within the organization and as common needs are discovered during the many LOB requirements phases.

These inputs are prioritized within the CoE process with input from the LOBs to create individual continual improvement development projects. Upon completion, these new components become part of the standard catalog of offerings to all LOBs. As new functionality is discovered, analyzed and determined to be valuable as a reusable asset, the CoE will propose these new assets into the continual improvement process.

Common Schemas

When many CRM instances are being created, the CoE team will design a common schema of entities with attributes, leverage reusable components, and locate system settings and reference data into a base CRM solution that can be implemented quickly into a new instance. In some cases, these instances will follow completely different processes, security requirements, and data needs, but they could still benefit from a quick-start solution.
**Reusable Component Repository**

To facilitate requirements analysis and solution design work performed by the LOB’s project development teams, the CoE team should create a repository of reusable modules, code snippets, and packaged solutions that would be easily demonstrable within a CRM deployment. This repository would contain coded solutions and documentation, as well as requirement, functional, technical, and test documentation, enabling project teams to quickly identify them as potential solutions during early stages of planning.

This will ensure modules are identified for use, creation, and modification throughout the planning, development, and support phases of the product’s lifecycle. One of the CoE’s goals is to analyze current implementations, determine where components (or groups of components) are to be standardized and/or reused and then store them as a solution in a reusable manner for other projects to leverage in the future.
**Integration Methods**

It is crucial for the long-term stability of the overall CRM platform and the reduction of duplicated efforts to build reusable integration methods for both internal and external data sources as well as third party applications.

The CoE team works with the LOBs to determine the shared integration needs and evaluate where reusable methods are to be developed.

**Platform Upgrades**

One of the features and strengths of the Microsoft Dynamics CRM online deployment structure is automated scheduled upgrades. If your CRM platform offers the same benefit, typically updates can be scheduled by the CRM System Administrator. However, there are caveats to consider.

Some upgrades involve deprecating form scripting methods and other changes to the underlying structure, which may cause unsupported customizations to malfunction. One of the roles of the CoE team is to help LOBs plan for and resolve these errors. More importantly, the CoE must enforce the CRM software manufacturer’s development standards to minimize, if not remove, the possibility of these issues arising during the upgrade process.

The CoE team works with the LOBs to determine the shared integration needs and evaluate where reusable methods are to be developed.
**Configuration Management**

The CoE will establish a long term, viable application lifecycle management process based on the software manufacturer’s best practices for solution management. To optimize visibility, sharing and reuse, this process includes organizing a global code repository—in the case of Microsoft Dynamics CRM, utilizing Microsoft’s Team Foundation Server (TFS).

**Development Best Practices**

A development best practices document specific to the operating paradigm of the organization is established to support future development efforts. This document must include operating guidelines and standards for development that minimize risks of code conflict and platform limitation encounters. At a minimum, this would include guides for:

- Solution design considerations
- Form configuration
- UI standards
- Client scripting
- Code conflict anticipation and monitoring
- Security and role configuration
- Data schema management
- Reporting
- Performance monitoring
- Automated regression testing development
Conclusion

If you have chosen a CRM solution as a standard platform for LOB application implementation, it will be more critical to be aware of and help manage the needs of everyone in the organization, aligning them with standard functions. It will also be important to champion reuse and development standardization as well as best practices.

Governance is the ideal vehicle for helping you manage and optimize your IT strategy. As you implement CRM into LOBs across your organization, it will become clear that establishing a governance strategy will help you avoid costly mistakes and duplication of effort. A well-planned strategy and the right team to implement it will help meet the needs of everyone while ensuring solutions are aligned with those needs. Most importantly, a governance plan and team will help you take advantage of shared knowledge and logical standards, optimizing your CRM investment.

For help implementing a governance strategy, contact AKA. We are experts in using CRM to operationalize business strategies and have guided many organizations through the process.
ABOUT AKA ENTERPRISE SOLUTIONS

AKA helps clients transform the way they do business by providing world-class, practical solutions built on Microsoft Dynamics CRM and ERP, as well as Office 365, business intelligence, and mobility. By combining deep technical expertise with years of experience in a range of industries—from the public sector to financial services—we work closely with organizations to put their strategies into operation. This highly collaborative approach has earned us an unmatched reputation for delivering ongoing return on investment.