



System Interfacing

The critical need for interfacing across information systems and processes

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Introduction

Effective scheduling and resource optimisation is dependent on accessing the right information at the right time. A lack of information or an inability to exploit it will adversely impact business performance. This applies to all sources and types of information drawn from existing Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and other systems used to communicate with, deploy, administer, and schedule a workforce and associated resources. In complex industries these dependencies are even more important and underscore the critical need for effective interfacing across multiple systems. Fortunately, leading software solutions such as Allocate OneView, can assist in meeting these challenges through both standardised and bespoke interfacing cloud-based solutions, which greatly simplify workforce management and related decision making.

The Need for Shared Information

By the very nature of complex industries and the array of challenges faced, information systems have been developed incrementally to support business processes far beyond traditional ERP and HR systems. Such systems can be as varied as the industries involved, but examples include ship management in the maritime sector, building information management in construction and tracking/ evidencing systems in the security sector, to name but a few.

A common challenge in all complex, resource intensive, and regulated industries is the need to schedule staff and associated resources effectively and efficiently. Advanced solutions, such as Allocate OneView, have been developed to help management overcome these challenges by delivering workforce and resource optimisation coupled with full regulatory compliance. Whilst these industry specific management information systems help address key challenges, a frequent theme is also the need to work with common information across multiple systems.

With a multi-skilled, diverse workforce operating in a regulated environment, effective resource scheduling requires up to date information covering demand requirements, resource availability and personnel deployments. The complete range of resourcing options need to be properly evaluated along with full cost implications in order to deliver an optimised workforce solution. Once agreed, the schedule needs not only to be communicated to those involved, but must also cover deployment, travel, and other logistical issues before updating payroll and wider HR records. Each of these activities are likely to involve interaction with different systems beyond the core scheduling and optimisation suite.

**Optimal scheduling
of staff and
resources is a
challenge in all
complex, resource
intensive industries**

Integrated or Interfaced Systems

In managing different information systems that need to access common data, organisations face the option of either seeking a fully integrated application suite (frequently based around an existing ERP system) which addresses all of their requirements, or the best available applications to provide discrete system interfacing between associated systems. Both approaches have merits:

- In an integrated system, the functionality of each component is not typically as advanced as specialist applications, but conversely the information interfacing challenges are largely removed. In stable situations which do not demand the most advanced application approaches, this can bring advantages for both IT and users. But when it comes to life-cycle improvements, the scale of such integrated systems can result in a major and costly enterprise event if effective change and adaption is to be delivered.
- In the best available discrete system interfacing approach, specific applications are selected to deliver separate requirements based on their own merits. In this way, the most advanced and up to date application can be selected for different requirements such that full system capability is maximised. This offers the ability to gain a greater operational advantage but carries with it added challenges in terms of ensuring effective information exchange between the systems. When it comes to life-cycle improvement, the smaller scale of operational change means specific applications can be replaced more readily than integrated systems so that the latest capabilities can be harnessed for business advantage. An added benefit for the largest organisations is the ability to tailor the best available applications to business unit need, thus breaking down cultural barriers to adoption (the 'we don't do it that way' syndrome). Such systems also add value when used as a tailored application layer for business units to get the best outcome from the data of the integrated systems described above.

Although there are no hard and fast rules (and there are merits of both approaches), in complex industries the breadth of requirements and the potential operational advantage available through new applications can favour the best available approach. Such an approach also offers the potential to overlay new applications to derive incremental benefit (for example in advanced resource optimisation) without compromising existing applications.

Fortunately, the latest systems such as Allocate OneView can greatly ease the systems interfacing challenges. OneView provides interfaces with most of the leading ERP and HR systems as standard, enabling easy information exchange for core financial, HR and payroll requirements. But it also enables other bespoke interfacing capabilities with the many specialist systems used in complex industries. Although case-by-case development is required for bespoke interfaces, the core capability is present to enable effective interfacing as required.

The characteristics of complex industries mean the benefits of the best available solution can be amplified when fully deployed

But, accessing the benefits can be difficult due to the challenges of deploying, interfacing and indeed investing in new systems

Easing the Barriers to Change

As organisations compete in complex, regulated and resource intensive industries, they can readily identify the benefit of more advanced approaches to resource optimisation which offer the potential to improve service and enhance margins. But accessing the benefits can be difficult due to the challenges of investing in, deploying and interfacing new systems with the existing information infrastructure.

Leading systems such as Allocate OneView reduce these barriers on multiple levels to make the benefits accessible. Complementing the information interfacing capabilities set out above, OneView is provided on a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) basis, accessed via either public or private clouds. This approach overcomes the financial barriers associated with capital purchase, as well as the IT implementation and management challenges resulting from an in-situ renewal. Collectively, these approaches mean the benefits of leading-edge resource optimisation capabilities are now more accessible than ever to organisations operating in complex sectors.

Allocate OneView offers leading edge capability but also greatly simplifies the interfacing, deployment, and investment challenges

Conclusion

A common challenge in all resource intensive industries is the need to schedule staff and associated resources efficiently and optimally. This process is however information intensive with much of the required data distributed across different information systems. This creates a challenge when selecting optimisation software between a more general integrated application and the best available application interfacing with other systems. The characteristics of complex, regulated and resource intensive industries imply greater benefit can frequently be derived from advanced applications, but the interfacing requirements can be challenging. Fortunately, new systems such as Allocate OneView not only provide leading edge resource optimisation capability, but also greatly simplify the interfacing task.

About this paper:

This is one of a series of papers exploring key business issues faced by complex organisations in resource scheduling and discussing the ways in which Allocate OneView can help address these challenges.

To find out more about any of the topics discussed in this report, please email: marketing@allocatesoftware.com
