

Part 3: The Court Organization, Users, and Roles

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There have been serious design deficiencies in Court Case Management Systems. This is a bold statement but one that has been borne out in the real world when for example a state wide or national implementation finds that they have to design a separate customized system for the big urban courts. That's why the basic CCMS design will take this into account from the beginning.

Let's first look at the basic differences in courts and the tension that a "standardized system" model introduces. Court administrators (presiding judges or actual administrators) have very few tools to work with to manage and improve their operation. These tools again as mentioned in [Part 2](#) of this series are:

- Process
- Organization and
- Money for more people

We will focus first on court organization which of course is made up of people (and yes, judges are people too). In each court people have work roles (duties). And those work roles will vary based on the size of the court and its caseload. A court work role might be to accept incoming cases while others are scheduling hearings or presiding at a hearing or trial. Thus in a small court one person will have multiple roles while in a large court one person will have one role. We see this in many places where a judicial "commissioner" may do nothing but criminal release hearings as there.

So the concept of work roles is the key to system flexibility and [scalability](#). In turn, once the work roles are defined (such as case creation, notice production, etc.) they are assigned to the court's organizational structure definition stored in the database. The organizational structure may for example include court type, location (county/city), branch, division, department, chambers, unit, etc. If these distinctions can be configured into the system, the system is capable of organizational scalability because it captures the fact that in small courts there may only be a few organizational units, while in the large court there will be many. In a small court multiple roles can then be assigned to a specific organizational unit. And in the large court, a scheduling role for civil cases may be specifically assigned to a calendaring/scheduling unit (or even more specifically, a civil case scheduling unit) within the court organization.

Next, persons (as stored as system users with unique identification, security level designation, and digital signature) are assigned to the work roles. Groups of persons may also be created for shared work roles.

We have tried to capture very generally the relationships in the graphic below.

Now that the system should know the organization, the work roles, and the person or groups that do the work, the CCMS can send work tasks to the right place . This means that the system can also monitor when a person signs in and, if not, can potentially automatically reroute work to users in the group or to a person with a “backup work role” assignment.

Lastly, we go back to the issue of organizational scalability. This design approach allows one system to handle all levels and locations of courts.(organizational units), case types, and persons, because it allows all the organizational elements to be localized for each court. Thus it avoids the need to have a special version for large courts that reflects their more complex organization and staff role structure. And it allows the organizational elements to be redefined as needed again and again at each court level and location within the jurisdiction. The result is that it empowers court managers to adapt their judges and staff as needed because the CCMS supports different work and organizational approaches in the unending need to improve court operation.

Picture: CCMS 2

