Employee Central and extensibility

Cloud HCM comes of age
Leading practice cloud functionality, enterprise-caliber data modeling, and more — all in one solution

The simplicity of cloud software has garnered mass appeal to companies large and small ever since Amazon introduced the world to Software as a Service (SaaS) back in 2006. However, along with the potential value came clear limitations. Out-of-the-box functionality and what-you-see-is-what-you-get administration left companies unable to address their unique business needs.

The SuccessFactors cloud suite has paved the way for more than a decade, providing leading-class Human Capital and Talent Management functionality. However, as larger customers have begun adopting cloud HR solutions for their core HR functionality, demand has grown for more flexible data and process administration. SuccessFactors needed a more extensible data model and features that customers could create and maintain themselves. With Metadata Framework (MDF) and HANA Cloud Extensions (HCE) at the core of its move to purposeful extensibility, SuccessFactors has become the first cloud HCM solution to effectively address this need.
SuccessFactors’ extensibility layers

The focus of this white paper will be on the MDF and HCE layers as they offer the most impact – significantly differentiating SAP from other cloud HCM vendors.

### SAP HANA Cloud Extensions (HCE)

The SAP HANA Cloud Platform enables creation of fully robust, complementary applications that integrate seamlessly with Employee Central. Moreover, several HCE applications have been developed and are available to Employee Central customer via the Extensions Market.

### Metadata Framework (MDF)

MDF enables the creation of custom data objects, but not in the way that has historically been the case with on-premise application customization. The MDF allows custom configuration that can be carried out by implementation partners and customers alike. These objects do not co-mingle with the SuccessFactors delivered objects, thereby removing the major concern that came with customizing on-premise applications – the dreaded upgrade.

### Basic extensibility at the application level

Allows you to add customer-specific fields as well as alter attributes of delivered fields, such as whether or not they are required or visible, field label text and maximum field length.
What is the SuccessFactors MDF?

The SuccessFactors MDF is the flexible framework to which Employee Central features (and other SuccessFactors suite areas) are being migrated. It allows for more robust user defined configuration of delivered features as they are migrated to the MDF. It also allows customers’ HR and business analysts direct access to configuration previously only available to implementation partners. Driven by the user interface, configuration changes do not require access to, or knowledge of backend XML or coding. This allows for more efficient and streamlined implementation and maintenance.

As it relates to SuccessFactors extensibility, the MDF is a set of data modeling tools that allows customers to define:

- Custom data objects
- Approval workflows and editable user interfaces for those objects
- Data management business rules for delivered and custom data objects
- Data entry warning messages and email alert triggers

Custom data objects can be employee-level data types that organizations need to track, additional levels a company requires for their organizational hierarchy, or other foundational objects (outside of the organizational hierarchy) that are key to the organization. Additionally, the SuccessFactors MDF allows customers to create data entry rules for system-delivered objects as well as custom objects. For example, data in one field can default based on the value of another field.

A significant advantage of the MDF is that delivered MDF Employee Central objects and MDF objects created by customers are maintained separately. This means that the SuccessFactors quarterly updates to existing delivered features, and delivery of new Employee Central features, does not impact an organization's custom objects. Nor do the organization's custom objects interfere with the successful application of quarterly SuccessFactors releases.
**MDF use cases**

**Extending your company’s organizational structure hierarchy and creating other foundational objects**

One of the most common uses of the MDF is to extend the organizational structure that is delivered with Employee Central. Below, left, is the delivered organizational structure. If a customer needs to add additional levels to their organizational structure, they can do so with the MDF and have it fully integrated with the delivered organizational structure. This means that values for fields in the delivered structure can filter for valid values for fields in the extended structure, and vice-versa. This facilitates and validates data entry across the entire extended structure.

Below, right, is an EY client example of an extended organizational structure. It also includes a custom foundational object that is not part of the organizational structure, but rather provides additional information and also drives other behaviors in their solution. In this case it is used as criteria in a workflow dynamic group to help route workflow to appropriate approvers. We can also see where this customer leveraged application level extensibility to change the label on one of the delivered organizational objects.

![Diagram of organizational structure](image)

**Custom people-level objects**

MDF objects can also be created at the employee level when the customer wants to track master employee data that is not delivered with Employee Central. This can be as simple as one portlet of information to an entire page with multiple custom portlets. In the example below, an EY client wanted to track employees’ Corporate Function assignments. Employees can have anywhere from one to seven Corporate Function Assignments.

![Corporate Function assignments](image)
Key considerations for extensibility

- A good master data management governance plan is essential
- Use Software Development Life Cycle (SDLC) principles when designing and developing custom objects
- Leverage extensibility to enhance, not dilute, global design and processes
Why is the SuccessFactors MDF a game-changing feature?

Before the SuccessFactors MDF, no cloud HR solution provided such a high level of extensible and customizable data modeling. With it, customers are no longer limited by a list of predefined and generically customizable fields. Customers are able to address their unique business requirements around data. Beyond having control of extended data modeling and management, customers can tailor their end-user experience and promote the right level of data accountability throughout the organization.

With the advent of MDF, the ability to decide how to best manage enterprise HR data widens to an even larger population. Now, HR and IT analysts can take an idea for better data management from inception to completion. They no longer need to understand complex programming languages, nor how to create relational database structures; they can use the MDF user interface to model and manage their company’s organizational and employee data. The power of data modeling and true data management means that SuccessFactors customers can completely control their data requirement changes over time with a cloud-based solution.

Leading practices with MDF extensibility management

The power of enterprise-scale extensibility in a cloud solution comes with greater responsibility for data oversight. There are two key factors customers should consider and implement procedures around so that they gain all the benefit of using the MDF without the potential headaches. A master data management plan and proper SDLC will go a long way toward facilitating effective use of the MDF.

A good master data management governance plan is essential. As with on-premise extensibility, this practice mitigates the risk of data confusion, redundancy and pollution. The design phase of a customer’s implementation should include discussions and documentation around desired master data to be stored in Employee Central. This plan should identify what delivered objects will be used, any custom data needs and consistent naming conventions for custom objects. The plan will serve as a guide throughout implementation so that custom data objects are not conceived and implemented without proper thought about how they fit in with the plan.

SDLC activity should precede the creation of MDF objects. This analysis and review will help ensure that custom objects are well thought out as independent objects. Additionally, their relationship to other delivered and custom objects will be vetted and optimized. SDLC practices will also help ensure MDF objects evolve with sustained integrity.

While extensibility can allow you to have a more robust global design for your HRIS, it should not be used in a way that dilutes your global design and global processes. An implementation partner can do the following to help you leverage extensibility without overusing it and creating the customization madness that has been common with on-premise solutions:

- Establish project governance so that localization is kept to regulatory and business critical needs
- Establish a change management program to help foster engagement and buy-in of the global design and processes from regional stakeholders and users
HANA Cloud Extensions (HCE) and the extensions marketplace

The SAP HANA Cloud Platform (HCP) enables creation of fully robust, complementary applications (HCEs) that integrate seamlessly with Employee Central. Moreover, several HCE applications have been developed and are available to Employee Central customers via the Extensions Marketplace.

HCEs allow customers to extend Employee Central with even more robust functionality that meets their unique business needs. They are typically created by an SAP partner. However, customers can also create and deploy their own HCEs using the SAP HANA Cloud Platform and Extension Package for SuccessFactors. HCEs can ease the transition from complex customized on-premise solutions to Employee Central by allowing customers to recreate, in SuccessFactors, business critical functionality from those systems.

Many HCEs are already developed and customers can learn more about them by accessing the Extensions Marketplace directly from SuccessFactors. Some example applications include:

- Employee engagement and recognition
- Occupational health and safety
- Demand and supply side project scheduling
- Capture of employee feedback

Conclusion + looking ahead

Beginning with the Metadata Framework, SuccessFactors has proven itself to have a key differentiator among cloud HCM solutions available today. It is powerful, and its benefits are clear: on-premise type data extensibility in a cloud solution, a single-source of shared data across the product suite, putting data accountability in the right hands and, ultimately, a solution that fits your business. With the SAP HANA Cloud Platform and HANA Cloud Extensions, SuccessFactors has deployed another power feature that will continue to keep their product suite at the top of its class.

With its unique and robust extensibility, SuccessFactors has found the key to making cloud HCM a viable solution for customers who might otherwise balk at leaving their on-premise world. This continual evolution is how the SAP/SuccessFactors HCM and Talent Management suite keeps up with ever-changing customer demands and stays ahead of the competition. We are excited to see how SuccessFactors evolves its extensibility layers to remain what we feel is the best option in combining the benefits of a cloud solution with flexibility to meet the needs of customers who require just a bit more to make the leap into the cloud.

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