Key Utilization and Configuration Decisions (that don't always get made) in Applied Epic

SESSION HANDOUT

APPLIED NET
Client Network Conference

APPLIED NET
CLIENT NETWORK CONFERENCE
www.appliednet.com

Prepared for Applied Systems Client Network and Applied Systems

Applied Systems Client Network (ASCnet)
2340 South River Road
Des Plaines, IL 60018
Phone: 800-605-1045
Fax: 224.220.1443

Applied Systems, Inc.
200 Applied Parkway
University Park, IL 60484
Phone: 708-534-5575
Fax: 708-534-8016

Original Author:

Todd Arnold, CIC

AB SOLUTIONS, INC
AGENCY OPERATIONS CONSULTING

8/1/2013

Updated By:

Name	Where From	Date Done
Marcia Priest, CIC	AB Solutions, Inc.	8/15/2014
Todd Arnold, CIC	AB Solutions, Inc.	8/1/2015

Target Audience:

	Accountant/Bookkeeper		Producer
	CSR		Trainer
	Carrier		Vendor
	IT Manager/Systems Coordinator		ALL
X	Operations		Other: (describe)
	Principal/Owner		

Table of Contents

Seminar Type: Management

Seminar Level: Basic: An introductory level course is basic in nature and addresses fundamental concepts. We expect attendees to have a basic level of insurance knowledge, have been oriented to an agency's processes. For functional courses, it is *not* necessary for the attendee or participant to have previous knowledge of the agency management system or software program.

Class Description: In order to make certain that the full power of Epic is unleashed, it is necessary for the agency to understand how the account level features and functions, configuration choices, reporting, and workflow "philosophy" choices will all interact. This class will focus on attempting to "connect the dots" on some of these areas in order to help attendees make decisions that will boost efficiencies rather than drain them.

Learning Outcomes:

- Recognize the importance of establishing overarching "philosophies" on how workflows will be approached in the Epic system.
- Realize how choices in different configuration areas can either have a synergistic or productivity draining impact on each other.
- Realize how account level functionality should be reviewed and factored into configuration decisions.

Assumptions: This seminar is based on the following
Applied Epic 2013 R2
Microsoft ® Word Version 2010, 2013

Activities & Attachments in Epic

The filing of items and information is a comparatively minor task, but due to the number of times the average service team member will have to perform this task being so large, decisions related to efficiency here will have a noticeable effect on operational efficiency.

Maybe just as important, the decisions made here will have a profound impact on staff's perception of the agency management system "ease of use". A process that is generally perceived as being un-necessarily cumbersome, click-intensive, or non-intuitive can make training and adoption of new procedures much more difficult and painful than they need to be.

Account Level Functionality

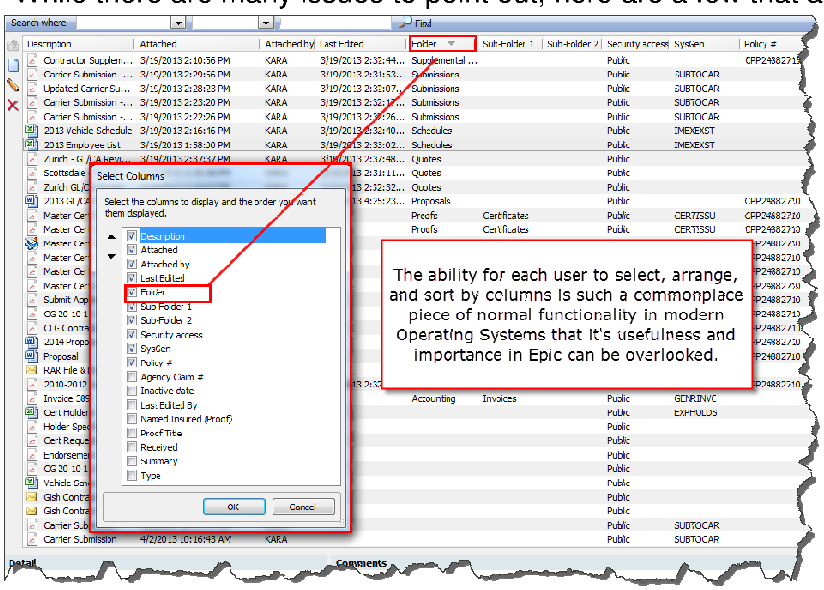
We've all heard the phrase "begin with the end in mind". So before we get into any decision making, let's first examine one of those ends; retrieval of information stored in the system more than 2 to 4 weeks in the past. If we are not conversant with the features and functions our users have available at the account level, then it is likely that our decisions on how items are entered into the system will be far from optimal.

Retrieval

Selecting and Sorting on Columns

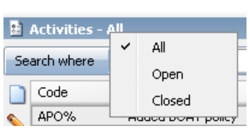
An understanding of which columns are available on the Attachment and Activity lists is important when considering the use of Folders and Descriptions.

While there are many issues to point out, here are a few that are directly relevant to the decision making we'll want to discuss later:



Folders & Sub-Folders: The ability to display and sort on folders is important when considering their usefulness.

Population of data: Some columns will only be populated if a specific workflow is used. For example, the Policy # column on the attachments list will not populate at all when associating to the Activity level.

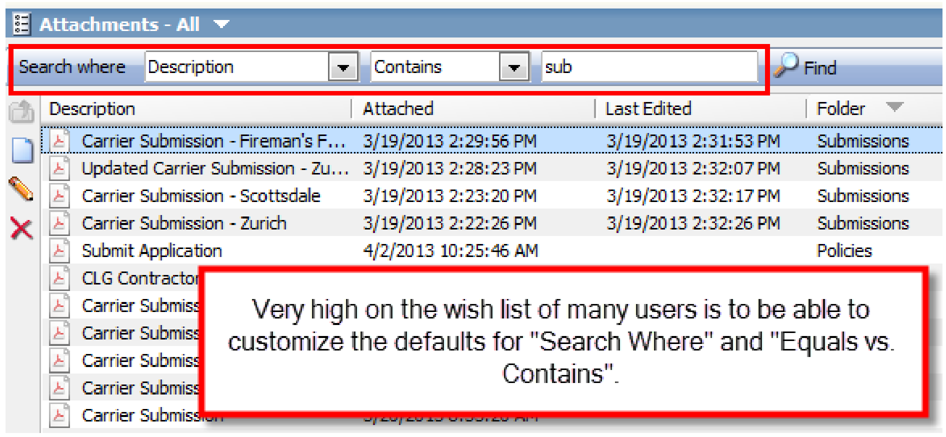


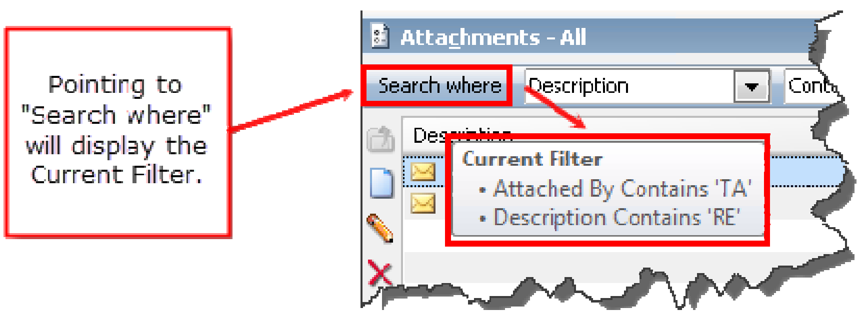
Title Bar Selection: The columns shown will vary on some screens depending on the Title bar selection.

Search Where

Search within Search Results:

Description: The option to search on the description field using "contains" is extremely useful. Keeping this feature in mind can greatly reduce the number of other fields that you might want to require users to enter every time something is entered into Epic.





Search within Search Results: If you are looking at a list that has a filter already applied to it, you can enter another Search criteria and it will be applied in addition to the existing filter so long as the "Search where" is not the same.

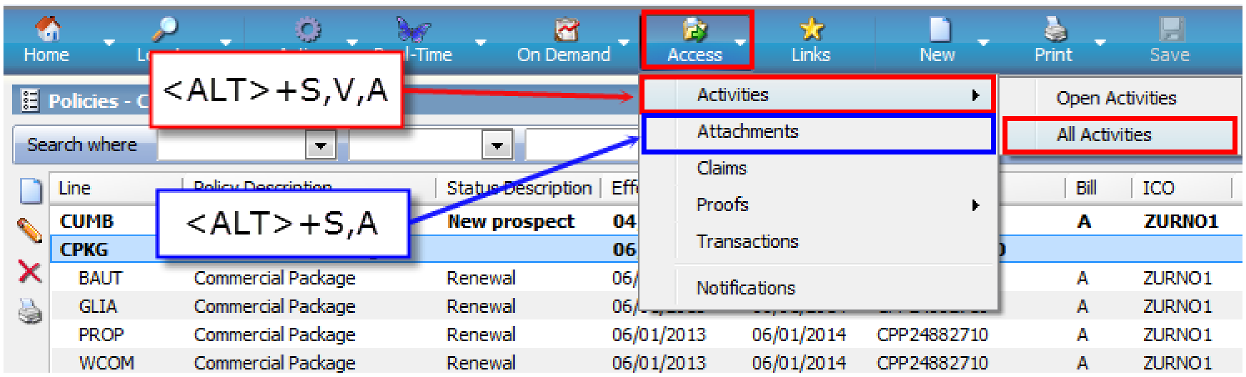
Meaning: If you do a search on Description, then try to add another Search on Description, you will end up with a filtered list only on your last description search. But if you do a search on Attached By, then try to add in a Search by Description, you will end up with a list filtered by both criteria at the same time.

Team members who do not understand when a Search will be applied in addition to an existing filter vs. when it will replace the existing filter may come to believe that the Search functionality is not reliable. But once known and remembered it is extremely useful and should be factored into the overall activity and attachment strategic planning.

Access Activities & Attachments

The Access drop down feature will take the user to another area of the Account file, and automatically apply a filter to show only the items related to the users highlighted selection when it was used.

With proper planning, this is one of the great retrieval features in Epic. But due to a “gotcha”, without proper planning it is next to useless. The “gotcha” is this: attachments associated with an activity will not be associated with a policy. This is true even when the activity is itself associated with a policy; the attachment does not inherit the policy level association from its activity.



Note that it is possible to use Access => Activities at the Policy level, then to use Access => Attachments from there. This is extremely useful for agencies that have written their procedures so that they extensively use key activities almost like sub-folders; where a single activity is noted and additional items attached to it over a process rather than adding a new activity for each step in the process. But for agencies who have not decided to take this approach, this two-step use of Access would not be useful.

Attachments Folder View

As of version 2013 R2, the Folder View shows all folders, regardless of if that folder has been used with the Account or not.

Using Folder View in conjunction with “Search Where” seems to be more intuitive than using the “Search Where” multiple times for many users.

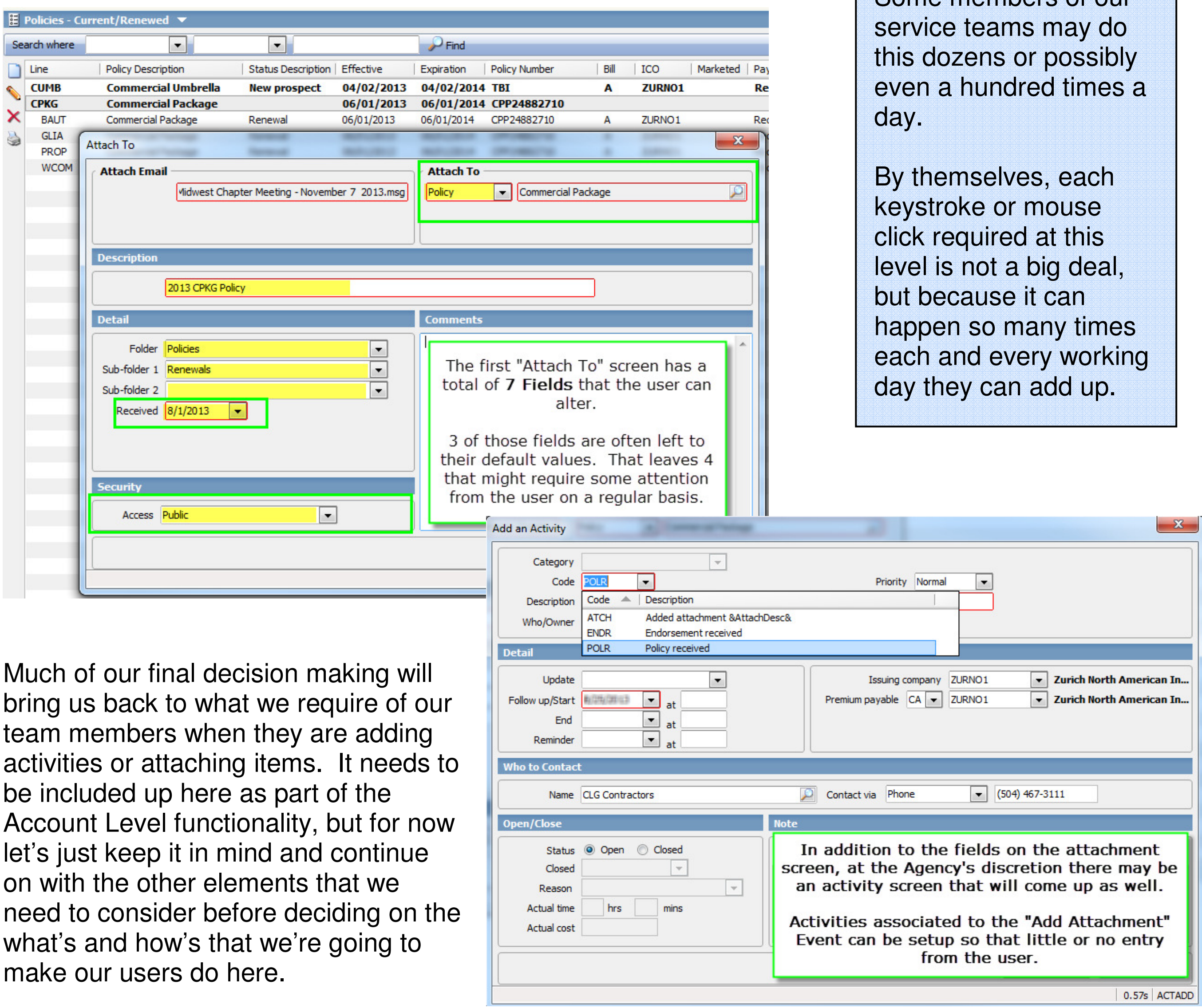
Attaching & Adding Activities

> Most of what we call management consists of making it difficult for people to get their work done.
>
> **Peter Drucker**

There are many different ways that attachments and activities can be added to an Account in Epic; system events that will automatically add attachments, Actions that update service summary rows, the proper use of the distribution manager, and of course the manual filing of received or sent items. For our purposes in this class, we will focus on the filing of received or sent items, but there is certainly overlap between all of these different possible vectors.

Some members of our service teams may do this dozens or possibly even a hundred times a day.

By themselves, each keystroke or mouse click required at this level is not a big deal, but because it can happen so many times each and every working day they can add up.

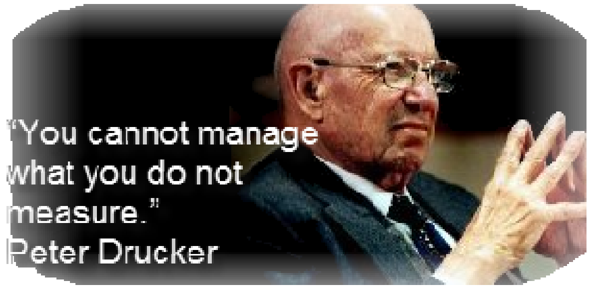


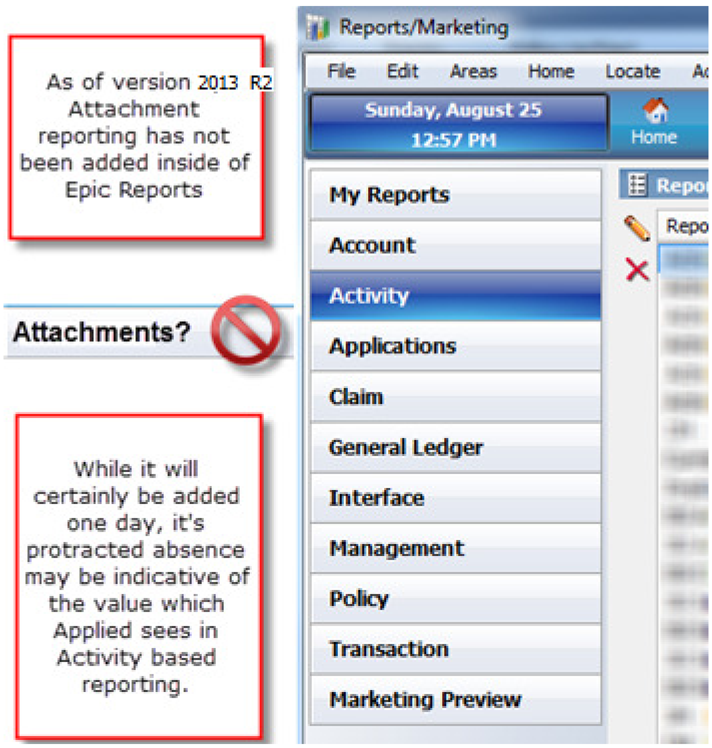
Much of our final decision making will bring us back to what we require of our team members when they are adding activities or attaching items. It needs to be included up here as part of the Account Level functionality, but for now let's just keep it in mind and continue on with the other elements that we need to consider before deciding on the what's and how's that we're going to make our users do here.

You don't have to enter something into every field just because it's there.

Reporting

When planning any agency procedure or workflow it is important to take into consideration what the impact of each decision will be on reporting. In some cases, there are promising workflow setups that run aground due to being difficult, or even impossible, to track via reporting.





Attachment Reporting

As of version 2013 R2, there is still no ability to report on Attachments from within Epic.

It is possible to create reports that will track attachments (or anything else for that matter) outside of Epic's built in Reporting, but many agencies may not wish to consider taking such an approach.

Activity Reporting

There are a wide range of activity reports available in Epic.

However, there is a criteria omission that should be taken into consideration when making decisions on activity use in our agency workflows; it is not possible to include date fields as a criteria for either Activity Notes or Activity Tasks. These note and task date fields can be included in the output (layout) of an activity report, and the report can be run to Excel where the tasks or notes added to existing activities can be taken into account. But since it's possible to envision a procedure that instructs the user to add a note today on a "milestone" activity that was entered months ago, this may not meet all of our desired reporting requirements.

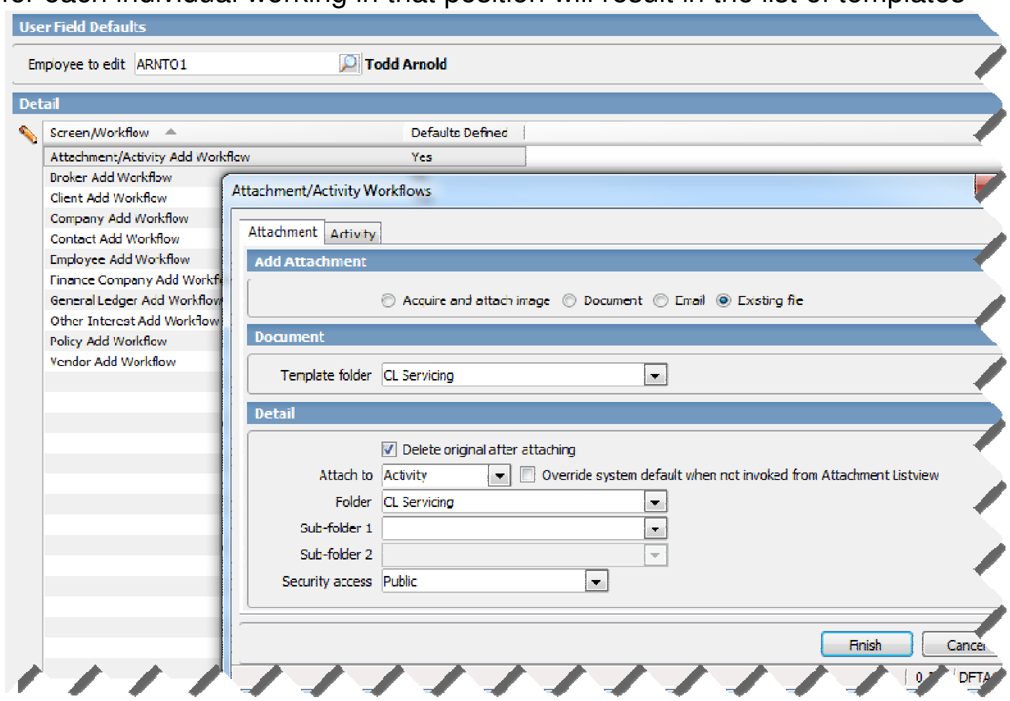
Configuration

User Options - Field Defaults

User field defaults are a tremendously valuable weapon in our battle to improve operational efficiency. Each of the relevant "… Add Workflow" screens should be reviewed and setup for each user. Our focus for this part of our class will be on the "Attachment/Activity Add Workflow".

Attachment tab

There is a Document Template default folder on this tab which can be used to setup a default for each user. It makes sense therefore to create your template folders to match with job descriptions within your agency. So if there is a position in your agency for "Commercial Lines Account Manager" then setting up a template folder to match that position and then setting the field default to match for each individual working in that position will result in the list of templates they view being limited to only those relevant to their position while requiring no additional step or keystroke from them.



If the use of Folders is desired, but the agency does not see a need to have 3 levels to their folder structure, it is possible to setup the "Folder" to serve the same function for attaching that the Template Folder does for selecting templates. Setup the main folder level to match up with specific job positions. This way, the sub-folder selections they will be asked to make will be only those that are relevant to that job position.

Activity tab

Under this tab, the "Category" can be setup as a default. You will probably not be too surprised to learn that this too can be setup by specific job positions within the agency. (Don't worry, I won't elaborate on the concept again. Besides, I'm at the bottom of the page so we need to move on! ☺)

Attachment Folders

One of the main objectives of this class is to assist agencies in thinking about how they will setup the folders in this configuration area.

Remember that the operation manager's job in this area is to keep the list as easy to navigate by the end users as possible.

The best way to do this is to keep the number of selections which the user will be presented with as short as it can be while still achieving all of the attachment retrieval and (eventually) reporting goals that have been set forth.

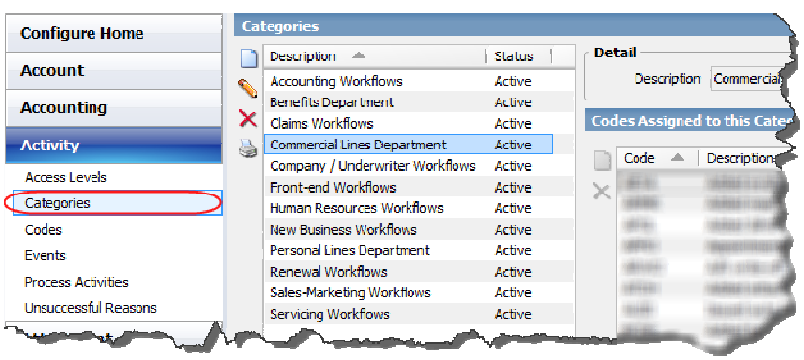
If a list of sub-folders must be longer than will fit on the users screen at one time, pay close attention to the naming of the folders; intuitive naming and/or careful deliberation over how the list is alphabetized should be employed.

Also, if you are reading this on your own and skipped over the section for User Field Defaults and how those might be used creatively with the Folder and sub-folder structure, [please take a moment to go back and review that section].

Activity

There is an entire class dedicated to the exploration of all the setup options related to activities, which every person engaged in operational planning for Epic should take. While we don't have time in this session to do this area justice, there are a few points that we need to look at before we get into the decision making area.

Categories



These will limit the number of activities a staff member will have to wade through when adding a user generated activity.

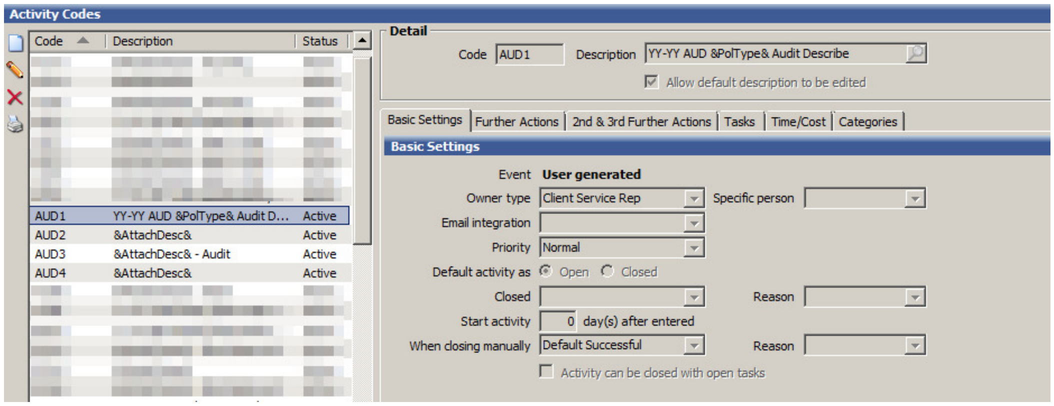
They can be set as a user field default, so if you set up categories by job position; it will require no extra keystrokes or clicks for the user while still keeping them from having to see codes that are not relevant to them.

Any single activity can belong to multiple categories.

Codes

Applied Systems has done a great job of building in features that keep the list of available activity codes that a user must choose from at any one time manageable.

Any activity that is tied to an event will not be available as a User Generated activity. So in some cases, you may have a need for a very similar activity depending on the method that applied in its creation.



For the last couple of years, I've been very happy using numbers for the 4th position. So it's just a matter of putting something in the agency procedures manual and then configuring activities accordingly once you've decided on your chosen numbering system.

Procedure Manual sample
The first three letters of the activity code provide the meaning to the code itself. For example, the code AUD stands for Audit, SUB for Submission to Company, UND for Underwriting Information, and so on. The last character (fourth position) will have a unique numerical code based on how the Activity was generated: 1 = Manual Activity (F9) 2 = External Email/File Attached (Drag & Drop) 3 = Event (Action) Related 4 = New Epic Document (Generated within EPIC) 5 = Real Time Related 6 = Download Related

There are several benefits from using this 4th character as a number indicator method:

1. Written agency procedures are a lot easier to both create and later read when there is a single 3 character activity code referenced instead of multiple 4 character codes
2. The configuration of activity codes is much easier when you can tell just by glancing at the list which codes are setup to be accessible by what user events or actions. Did we mean to add in a certificate code that could be used when doing a drag and drop attachment but forgot? It's easier to tell and keep track of when you're just looking for the number 2 at the end of one of the codes that start with CER.
3. Activity reports begin to tell us not just "what" was done, but also a little bit of "how". This is useful if your agency is allowing users to tackle the same task using slightly different workflows - like allowing either an F9 to create the activity then dragging an

attachment into that activity as opposed to doing the drag and drop of the attachment to the policy / claim and letting that event create the activity.

Description variables are very useful. Each activity should be reviewed to determine if setting up variables would be useful.

Events

Setting up which Events will automatically generate an activity, if the event will provide only a single activity or if there will be multiple choices, and when, Event driven activities is a stand-alone topic for consideration as well. Specifying an activity code that must be used, but then controlling which Event(s) will allow access to that code, is a subtle but powerful Epic feature. For now, let's focus on how it relates to attaching.

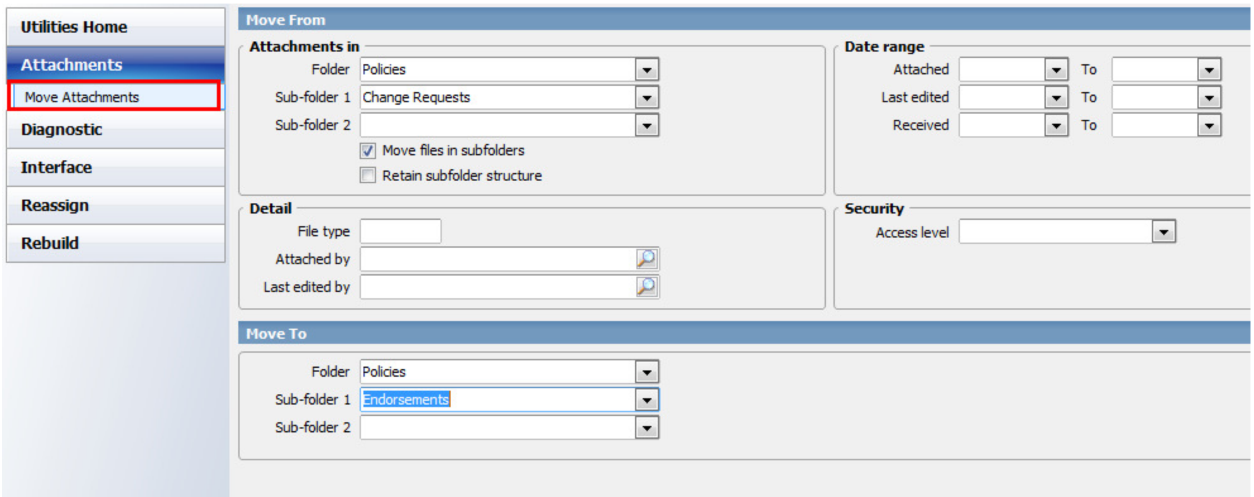
Decide on how your agency is going to utilize Service Summary Row actions & stages before you get too far into changing the Event settings. If your agency decides that when an agency processed request for change is done that it's important to create the Service Summary Row for the Endorsement right away, then…

- Make sure the Event for "Endorse/Revise-Existing Lines" is turned on
- That the activity for that Event is set to be generated automatically and required
- That the activity code required to record a change request in your procedures is the one tied to that event
- That the activity code specified in the procedures manual cannot be accessed in any other way

Remember the functionality of the "Access Attachments" and how it changes depending on the association. Keeping that in mind during the planning for Event configuration can be very beneficial. For example, if the attachment of "core" policy documents is setup to only be possible from an event that is triggered at the policy level with no option to add the activity first and then attach to the activity, then access attachments from the policy level will pull up just the main policy documents. So using the numbering system mentioned above, an agency wanting to pull up the main policy documents would never allow a POL1 since the 1 would indicate that they are added via F9 and then the attachments are associated to that activity. Instead, the POL2 would be the first in the POL series of codes, and it would be added under the Event for "Add Attachment".

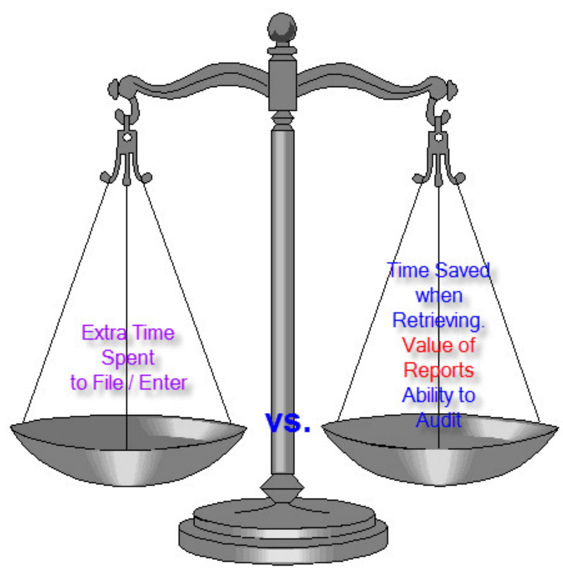
Utilities

The Move Attachments utility makes it easy to reduce/simplify your Attachment Folder Structure. It is far less helpful if you want to increase the complexity of your folder structure.



Agency Philosophy / Discussion points

There are some questions that we have to ask before we start making decisions that aren't really related to features or functions within the Epic management system.



- What percentage of the items attached need to be retrieved after more than 14 days?
- Does adding a step or two really reduce the efficiency of the staff?
- Will we audit in a meaningful way? If so, how often and in what manner?
- How do we view the agency employees? Do we view them as highly competent insurance professionals? Will they deliberately attempt to not use agency systems appropriately? Just how closely do we believe we need to track what they do and how they do it?

Activities & Attachments – Decision Making

Now that we have some information relating to system functionality, reporting, configuration, utilities, and a bit of thought about the larger philosophical views within the organization all bouncing around in our head, we're ready to make some important decisions about how we want attachments and activities to be used in the agency.

- Associate Attachments to Polices or Activities?
- Have fewer, but "bigger", activities with multiple notes/tasks & attachments; in effect turning some activities into sort of 'hanging file folders" under policies?
  Or have more "smaller" activities that track steps instead of just the milestones?
- Are folders a good thing for the agency? If so, how many of them and to what level?
- Should users be given the security rights to set or modify their own User Field Defaults?

Activity Tasks

Tasks would not have been out of place earlier during the discussion about Document Management. However, the Pro's vs. Con's list got a little bit long so tasks got their own section.

Epic Tasks as of version 2013 R2

Pros	Cons
A user will not see more than one listing per activity on the home base screen no matter how many tasks that activity has. This is true even if that user is viewing other users activities	A user with an open task will see the activity the task is a part of on their home base screen. There is no indication on the home base screen to let the user know that this is a task. Even the "Who/Owner" will show the employee that the main activity is assigned to. If the employee is viewing their activities as well as the open activities for an assistant, this means that they will not be able to distinguish between their activities and the tasks under those activities that they have assigned to the assistant.
Activities can be set so that they can close even if there are still open tasks.	In order to update a task to a status that will remove it from the home base screen (completed or not applicable), the user must: • Open the activity at the client level. • Select the tasks tab • Select the task they want to update (double click) • Update the status • Finish out. If you actually count the clicks, it's about 8. But it is not the clicks that is the problem; users report that tasks feel "deeply buried" to them. It's a perception of "PITA" level as much as a reality.

Pros	Cons
If it is enabled, Closing an activity with open tasks will remove that activity from the home base screen of all users with an open task.	If it is enabled, Closing an activity with open tasks will leave the task statuses in an open state. Note: This is not a big deal now, but if we get enhanced task reporting or home base functionality someday, we're going to be spending some time cleaning things up with the workload re-assignment tool. The current solution to this is to not check the activity configuration box to allow it to be closed with open tasks. However, the idea of using tasks only as a built in "checklist" of the steps to be performed / reviewed prior to closing an activity is distasteful when employee efficiency is considered. Since tasks cannot be setup with a status value of anything other than "Not Started", that means that the employee – the exact same employee as the Who on the main activity – would have to open each task and update the status prior to then closing the activity. If the closing of tasks was more streamlined this might be OK. But as it is now, such a decision on an activity with more than 3 or 4 tasks represents an unacceptably high "PITA" level for the affected employees. *What is really needed is for tasks that are open when the activity is closed to automatically receive a status update to let us know that it was "closed with activity".*
Notes may be added to a task on a closed activity.	Tasks on a closed activity cannot be edited. So you can't go in and update the status on a task if the activity has been closed without first re-opening the activity. *It really doesn't make sense that you can add a task note, but not update the task status on a closed activity.*

Pros	Cons
In Configure, task notes can be added to provide additional information related to the task. These notes can also be used to combine what otherwise might require multiple tasks to accomplish.	Tasks cannot be set with a Start date of 0. You have to use a start date of at least 1 if you want the start date to populate automatically and thereby show up on someone's home base screen.
	If the main activity follow up date is pushed into the future, tasks with dates prior to that follow-up date will disappear from the home base screens of any user with one of those tasks. *This one almost warrants a 3rd column for "Very bad".*
	Reporting on tasks is limited to including them on an activity report and they will show underneath the activity that they belong to. No task specific criteria can be used on the activity report.
	The On-Demand Activity Timeline is really not any better than just looking at the task list for the activity right now.

Conclusion

As of Epic version 2013 R2, tasks are still mostly useful only as a sort of "reminder list" inside of key activities. Activities may be set up with tasks to serve as a checklist for the same employee that owns the activity, but even if this is done the number of tasks should be kept very low out of consideration for the employee.

The huge benefits that tasks have the potential to become in Epic have not yet been realized. Hopefully, their day will come soon.

Events

If the decision was made that activities are to be "smaller" recordings of steps, then it will probably make sense to turn on most of these Events.

If the agency decided that activities are more valuable when they are "larger", with multiple notes and attachments to those that are considered milestones, then it will make sense to turn off a lot of these Events.

For best results, the decision to turn on or off the activity generation associated with each Event should be made with the context of the procedural steps surrounding it in mind. So regardless of the activity philosophy the agency has decided to pursue, it's important to keep Events in mind as agency procedure manuals are created or revised.

Authors Opinion

If your agency has not made some of these decisions, or if management has not had a chance to evaluate the value of tracking a type of Event, turn it off.

If I'm going to make an error in having an Event generated activity turned on or off before I'm certain of its value to the agency, I prefer to error on the side of not requiring the staff to interact with another activity.

I believe that activities are very important, and I want my service team members to share my belief. Because of this, I do not want them to be presented with activity screens that they view as meaningless. The more of these that we throw at them, the harder it will be for them to remember the value of the important ones.

[Description of Item(s)]

12. Attach all relevant items to the Attachments tab of the Master Marketing File. — Account Manager

Note: Be sure to do this prior to creating the individual carrier submissions. All attachments on the Master Marketing file will be copied to each of the carrier submissions. Individual attachments that are not needed for a specific carrier can then be removed.

13. If any of the information received indicate that a change in coverage is warranted, process a change request as per the Change Request Procedure to the incumbent carrier. — Account Manager

Note: It may be necessary to endorse the current policy term as well as the renewing next year term.

Submit to Carriers

14. Create Carrier Submissions in the Epic Master Marketing File area for each Carrier by using "Actions => Create Carrier Submission". Remove any attachments that are not needed for each specific carrier. — Account Manager

15. Submit to Carriers by using "Actions => Submit to Carriers" — Account Manager — Event Add STC

Note: A separate STC should be entered for each submission (not for each line in each submission)

16. As more information is exchanged with the Carrier or Producer related to the submission, add notes and attachments to the STC activity. — Account Manager — Association: Activity; Folder: Applications/Marketing; Sub-Folder: Not Required; Description: — Update STC

An example of a procedures manual where the system event is set to add a "milestone" activity.

The Action Submit to Carriers will automatically prompt the user to enter an STC activity.

Note that in the next step, the STC activity is designated to be updated, making it more of a "hanging file folder" for items related to that particular carrier submission.

Policy & Line Premium & Commission Fields

Epic has Premium & Commission fields for Billed, Estimated and Annualized (we'll ignore Download for now) at both the Policy and the Line level. The Estimated and Annualized fields can be manually entered or updated at the Policy/Line level. So for a commercial package policy with 3 lines of coverage (Property, GL & Commercial Auto for example), the user would be confronted with a total of 16 premium and commission fields. For this reason, making some decisions on what needs to be done and how it will get done in this area is crucial.

There is an entire class dedicated only to the topic of Epic Premium & Commission fields; it's a big topic with lots of moving parts, and it would be a very good idea to spend a few hours learning about this topic. For now though, we'll need to boil this down to the main points:

Policy vs. Line level:

- Epic reporting is better when entry is done at the line level
- Line level is a lot more work for the users; especially if you are doing agency bill invoicing since the transaction entry should follow

Not necessarily recommended, but it's worth noting that out in the wild, there are agencies that have decided to enter at the Line level, but to only use one of the lines of a package and to enter what would have been the policy level numbers on that one line. So basically, they are reducing the amount of data entry by working only the 4 fields just like a policy level agency would, but they are doing the entry at the line level in order to gain all the benefits of entry at the Line level.

Billed vs. Estimated vs. Annualized:

- Billed is easy since it can't be touched directly. All we need to decide is if we are going to configure our transactions to have Billed show total cost or just pure premium.
- Estimated is harder. Transactions can't be setup to touch the estimated fields. Policy download can be setup to update these fields.
  - Is there any value in having premium and commission numbers that are only updated manually for our non-downloading business?
  - Can / will our users keep the estimated fields updated manually on non-downloading policies well enough to run reports on even if we decide we want to?
- Annualized should be easy, but everything updates it and for some transaction entries that come in as part of Direct Bill Commission download the way the fields are affected is less than ideal.

Configuration:

- Transaction Codes can be set to update the Billed & Annualized automatically when a transaction is entered on a per transaction code basis.
  - Estimated fields are not touched by transaction entry
  - Transaction entry level matters. If you enter transactions at the policy level, the Line fields will not be updated, and the transactions will not "absorb" line level fields like Status which you might fine painful on

transaction based reports (but is that more painful than entering transactions at the line level – because that is dreadful)

- Policy Download can be set to update the Annualized and Estimated at either the Policy or Line level, or both
- Direct Bill Commission Download is sort of misleading at first glance. By checking the box for “Update premium/commission” all that you are doing is telling the system to go ahead and apply the Transaction configuration settings to update the Billed &/or Annualized premium and commission fields. And the Add to Policy vs. Line is just what level the transaction will be entered against

Reporting

- The Book of Business – Line is superior to the Book of Business – Policy. You can still pull the policy level premium and commission fields into the Line level report, but you’ll need to play with the results a bit to eliminate the duplication that will result from having the same policy level amount on the report once for each line that is part of that policy.
- The Policy vs. Line decision will determine if you have access to Line level fields in your transaction reports. Not being able to include Line Status on a production report hurts when the agency has decided to do all transaction entry at the policy level. And if you go “all in” on Policy level association, your activity reports will suffer from the same loss of Line level fields.