

KuppingerCole Whitepaper

by Martin Kuppinger
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Assignment Management - think beyond access

Business-driven management of all assignments - from access to policies and assets.

*Enabling your users to manage what they need themselves.
For all users. For all services. From all devices.*

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Content

1. Management Summary.....	3
2. Today's challenges for organizations - IT is on the move	4
3. The need for new solutions - why we need Assignment Management	6
4. Identity and Access Management - not sufficient anymore	7
5. IT Service Management - still too technical	8
6. Assignment Management - one interface for the user	9
7. Assignment Management - it is about Business Services.....	10
8. Assignment Management - providing business benefits.....	11
9. The Avatier approach - Assignment Management becomes reality	12

1. Management Summary

The days when IT lived in an isolated silo within the enterprise and everything was managed from a technical perspective with only traditional computing devices are past. Today's reality is about more users and new ways to interact with them (Social Computing), more devices (Mobile Computing), and other deployment models (Cloud Computing).

But is IT out of control? Not if it is done right. It is about managing what everyone in this bigger and open ecosystem requires. It is about assigning what they need and what they are allowed to have. Devices and other assets. Access. Responsibilities and Ownerships. You can't manage everything centrally. This requires self service. It requires approaches which go beyond simple access. It is about assigning services, devices, and access to many more users than ever before. Your employees. Your business partners. Your customers. It is about one interface for the business - the way business needs it. It's about business-driven management of IT services.

This whitepaper explains the customer challenges and why Assignment Management is bigger than traditional Identity and Access Management and why it is bigger than IT Service Management. It uses Avatier's solution to showcase what Assignment Management can look like in practice.

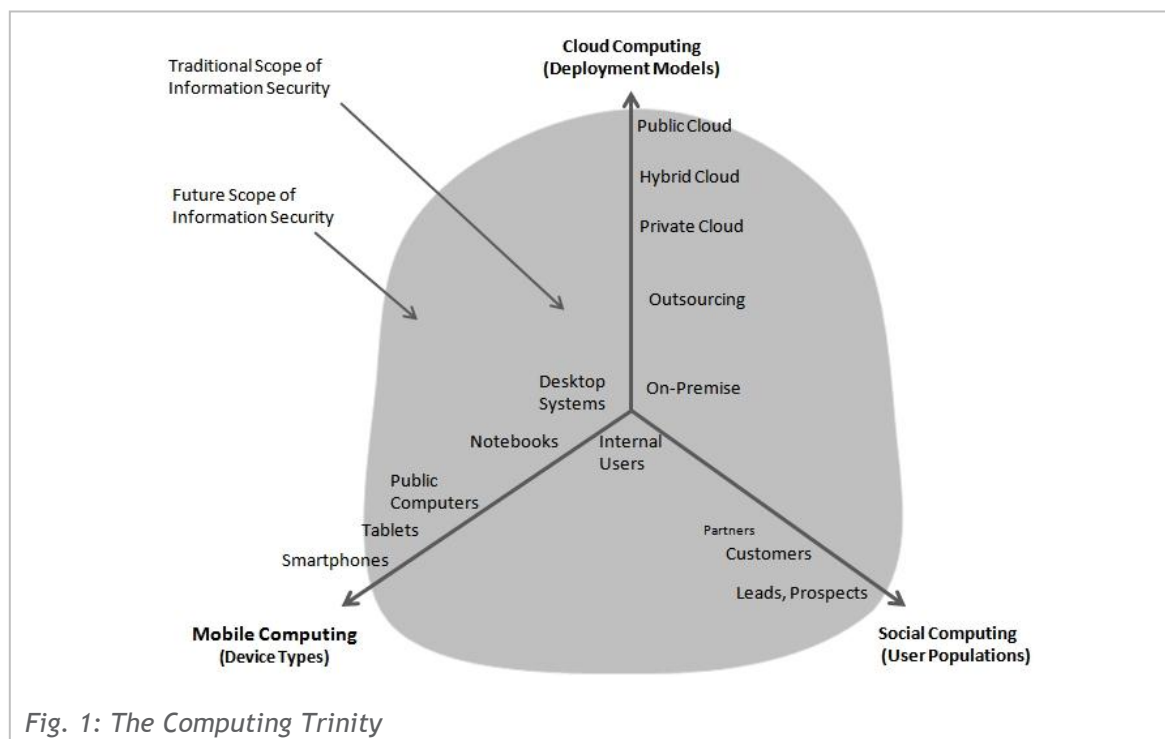
2. Today's challenges for organizations - IT is on the move

When thinking about Information Technology, we should not start with Technology. Information Technology is about implementing technology solutions that help us to better deal with information. We simply need this capability to compete in today's world and to improve operations. So when looking at new trends and topics within IT, the first question always has to be: Is there a business need and is there a business value here? The reality is that there are still many things which are done in IT but which don't provide good answers to this question.

The three fundamental changes we currently observe all are driven by business. These changes which form the "Computing Troika" or "Computing Trinity" are Cloud Computing, Mobile Computing, and Social Computing. Cloud Computing has become so popular because it challenges Corporate IT departments. It provides a way for businesses to gain access to services faster and cheaper - and in some cases it is the only way to gain access to services at all. Cloud Computing has led to competition for Corporate IT. It has also powered up business organizations to really get the business services they need.

Mobile Computing is based on the demands of users as well. They want to be able to work with a freedom of choice for location, device, and even working hours. Mobile Computing never has been a favorite of IT departments, at least aside from using such devices for themselves. But it is the new choice of business.

Finally, Social Computing comes into play, an evolution driven by the end users. Businesses are quickly finding value in exploring Social Computing, but they are also still trying to find their role in this fast-growing area. But again, IT is not in the driver's seat - it is the marketing departments and other parts of the business organization that are in the forefront.



These three trends lead to what is commonly called consumerization and de-perimeterization of IT. It is now all about users who have all types of devices, and all deployment models for services rather than the simple old model of employees, PCs and notebooks, and on-premise IT support.

This leads to a shift from a restricted, tightly controlled IT for the “inner circle” of users (like employees) which rely on on-premise services, to an open IT - not that IT in the past always has been good on providing a restricted, well-managed environment. However, to deal with the new realities, IT has to change. This affects many areas.

One of these areas is how all these users can request what they need and how these requests can be managed. That is where Assignment Management comes into play. Assignment Management is about assigning to users all the things they need. It is about access to services and information. It is about the assets they need to work - such as a notebook or smartphone. It is about policies which have to be signed before an employee starts or within a period of time after he has started.

Assignment Management is about making the user productive - in a controlled way, but which is simple to use for every user. It is about self-service, approvals, and a backend infrastructure which ensures that everything remains under control, even in the increasingly open and complex environments we are facing today. It is about enabling business to manage all the assignments with a business-centric tool. It is about business focus instead of IT focus.

3. The need for new solutions - why we need Assignment Management

You might argue that this challenge isn't that new and that there are solutions out there. Both points are valid.

The problem has been around for a while, but most organizations haven't completely solved the problem. Even for just a subset of employees or for a specific subset of assets or access management, organizations still struggle in this space. And the challenge today is bigger than ever before, so why should the established approaches work now?

And yes, there are solutions available. However, it is about the plural in solutions - there are solutions to manage access, there are solutions to manage business service requests. But in most cases it ends up with either customizing one solution to cover what isn't provided out-of-the-box or with integrating two or more solutions. Both ways are costly and complex, if at all possible.

What organizations need are integrated solutions which deliver what the business really needs. They need to manage all assignments, for everyone, to everything. They need to do it simple and business-oriented - where today's IT Service Management solutions still tend to fail. They need to integrate with what is out there - out-of-the-box and not by requiring complex integration projects. Assignment Management is about putting a new layer on top of what you have and of filling the gaps in your existing infrastructure. Assignment Management adds a layer which puts business into the driver seat.

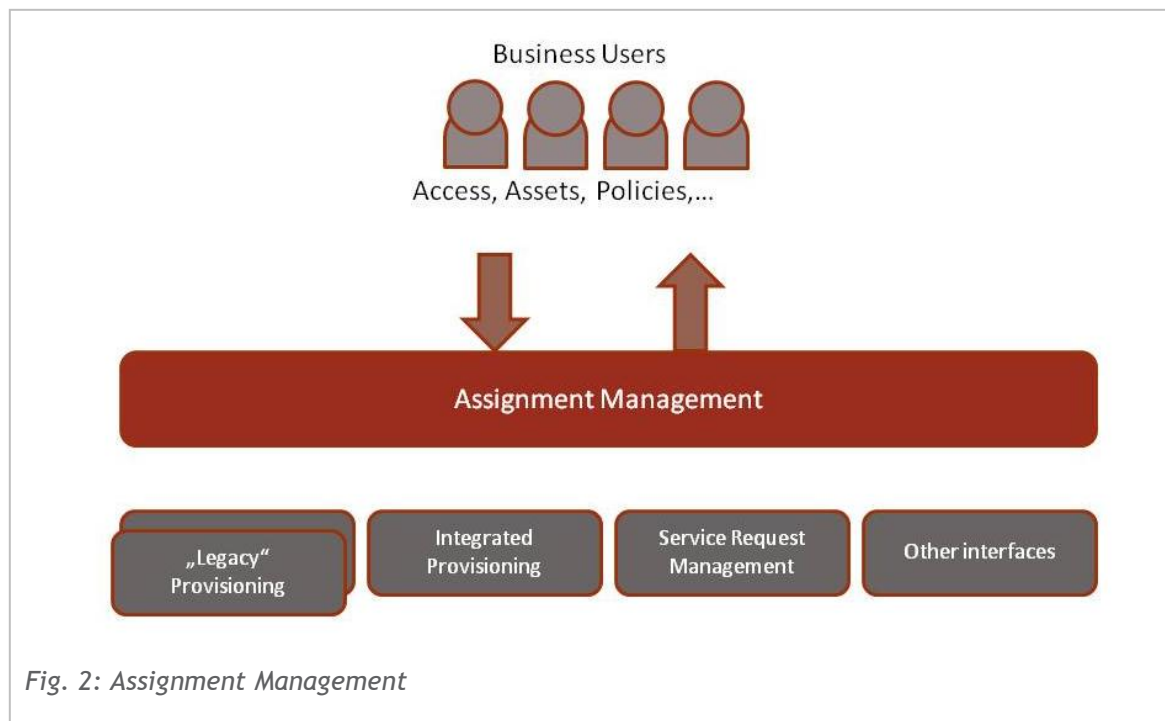


Fig. 2: Assignment Management

4. Identity and Access Management - not sufficient anymore

One of the common approaches found is based on Identity and Access Management tools, more specifically Identity Provisioning and Access Governance. While Identity Provisioning per se is a technical approach for synchronizing identities and access controls to target systems, Access Governance is more business-centric. However, Identity Provisioning and Access Governance tools increasingly are converging.

As of today, these tools allow IT to manage identities and assign them to groups, roles, or other constructs. Based on that, access rights in target systems are assigned to these users. Other features include approval workflows, access recertification, etc. Access Governance also puts far more emphasis on self-service interfaces which allow access requests by end users and the management of approvals and recertification by their line-of-business managers.

However: It is all centered around access. And access is just one facet of the challenge organizations are facing today. Honestly, there are a few vendors who have added shopping cart paradigms and even the capability to order assets besides the access rights. But even these tools typically lack full out-of-the-box support for the entire scope of Assignment Management, including out-of-the-box integration with the tools for the fulfillment of these requests.

Identity Management and the combined Identity Provisioning/Access Governance tools of today are a starting point. However, they don't provide Assignment Management out-of-the-box but require that rather complex integration and customization mentioned above. They also typically fail in more advanced scenarios like self-service registration of external users which then requires additional tools, like Web Access Management solutions. Simply said: These tools are point solutions for one part of the Assignment Management challenge.

5. IT Service Management - still too technical

The other common answer found today to the Assignment Management challenge is IT Service Management and, more specifically, Service Catalogs. These catalogs provide access to a list of IT services. Even while we have to admit that some vendors and customers have made some progress in moving from an IT service view towards a business-centric view, most implementations still are rather technical. They still tend to focus on IT services instead of becoming an actionable business service catalog.

While these tools - frequently still based on a respectable amount of integration work - might be used to request access to services, their primary focus is not about access. Some vendors provide integrations, but overall it is the same story as with Identity and Access Management: These tools solve a piece of the challenge, but they don't solve the overall challenge of Assignment Management.

Their focus is not about Access Management and far too often they are not business-centric enough, not to speak of the fact that virtually all of these tools are solely focused on the classical perimeterized view of the enterprise as a closed system.

So again we are talking about point solutions which can be extended and customized to serve the emerging Assignment Management requirements, but not about solutions purely focused on that challenge.

6. Assignment Management - one interface for the user

Assignment Management is about providing one interface for the user which he can use to manage all the assets and access he needs for his job. It is the same interface which is used for approvals, recertification and all the related tasks of business users which organizations need for a structured, compliant, auditable approach to Assignment Management.

From the user perspective, this is a big step forward. Even today, most business users and their executives aren't able to request what they need through one single, simple interface. Most are not even able to request only access or only assets in a consistent way, not to speak of a standardized way of handling all the policies which have to be signed for compliance reasons.

The time-consuming, lengthy, frequently far too technical ways to gain access and request assets found in today's organizations are not adequate anymore in the days of the "Computing Troika" or "Computing Trinity", with more services in different deployment models, more users to deal with, and an increasing number of devices in use.

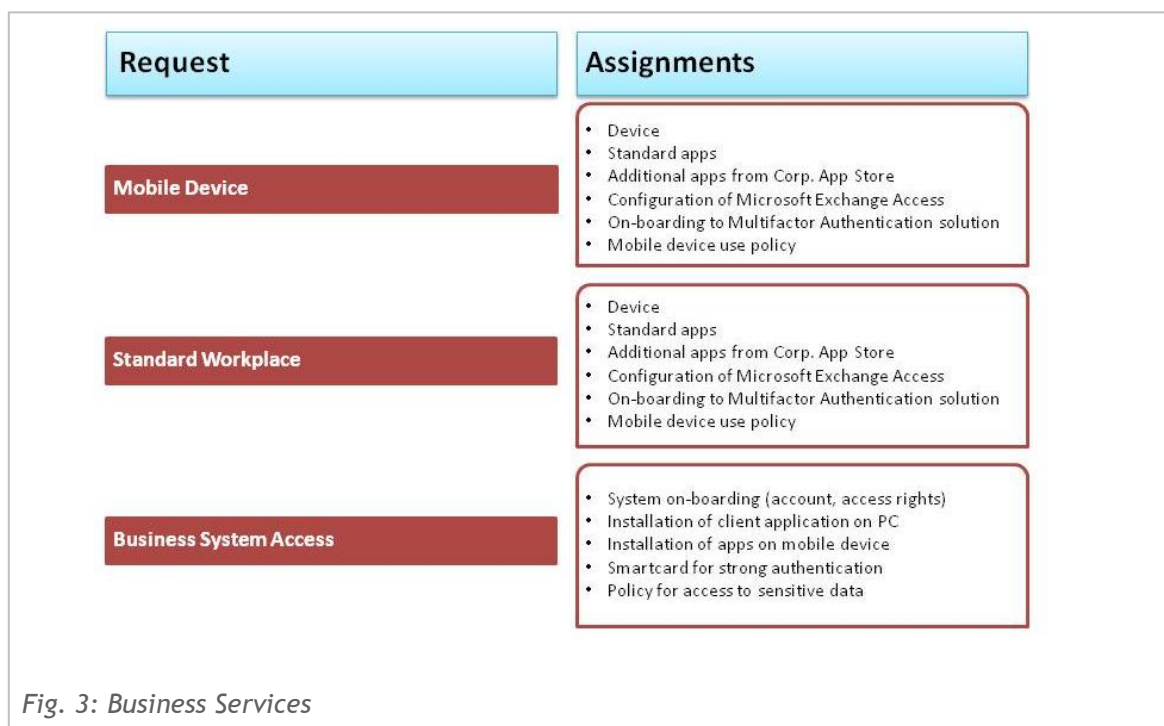
However, Assignment Management is more than just a request portal; think of it as an actionable business service catalog. It provides all the capabilities business needs. This includes approval workflows, auditing capabilities, and recertification support, to name some of the most important features. It also includes interfaces to the systems in the backend - for instance the systems the user needs access to, procurement, and service management.

It is the layer where the management of all types of assignments is standardized and centralized. It integrates what you have and closes the gaps in the existing IT environment.

7. Assignment Management - it is about Business Services

Assignment Management is where Business Service Management becomes a reality - and we are talking about real business services here, services that are well understood by business and not just the fact that some servers are running fast enough as some vendors define.

Business services are what users are requesting. They request assets like mobile devices that run seamlessly in the corporate environment. They request a standard workplace environment on their notebook or tablet. They request access to a system. Most of these requests are rather coarse-grained and combine a lot of fine-grained requests: A mobile device, some standard apps and maybe some additional ones from the corporate app store, configuration of Microsoft Exchange server access on that device, on-boarding to the multifactor authentication for these devices, and so on. The notebook, access to standard applications, access to some storage locations, and so on - all depending on their current job and other factors like projects they are involved in. Access to a system, installation of the fat client for that application on their notebook and a specialized app on the mobile devices they use, a smartcard for the strong authentication required for that application, ensuring that the specific policy for using that app with sensitive data has been signed, and so on.



Assignment Management provides simplified but still structured access to these services and enables fast, reliable fulfillment. It not only closes the gap between traditional Identity and Access Management and IT Service Management, it also fills the gaps left by typical implementations in this space.

As stated above: The idea isn't entirely new. But very few have delivered on that promise until now.

8. Assignment Management - providing business benefits

Going back to the initial question which was “Is there a business need and is there a business value here?” is the proof for any concept. When implemented right, with a business-centric view, the business need of simplified and faster onboarding and change management for users is met. This is an urgent need we observe in virtually any organization KuppingerCole is advising.

Increased automation, standardized processes and enhanced usability by using one consistent approach for all assignment processes will speed employee productivity and free resources to perform more value-added work. There is a clear business value, because Assignment Management - if done right - makes business more productive and finally delivers what has been promised for a long time. Even more, Assignment Management is about closing the gap between Business and IT.

But Assignment Management not only helps business by introducing real business “self-service” management capabilities. It also helps IT, by moving from complex IT-centric processes to ones that are triggered and driven by the business. IT just has to execute on this. It no longer needs to spend so much time trying to figure out what the business really needs.

Obviously, this requires that both business and IT are involved in these projects. But given that Assignment Management is about providing what the business has been requesting for so long, success of this type of project is far easier to achieve than in traditional IT-centric projects.

9. The Avatier approach - Assignment Management becomes reality

Among the very first vendors in this space is Avatier, whose key product is the Avatier Identity and Access Risk Management Suite. The Avatier approach has focused on a user-centric, request-driven solution to these challenges for quite a while. This approach goes well beyond access today - customers can order assets like office keys, hardware tokens, or smartphones as well as access to systems. Policies can be managed as well. Avatier has in fact managed to evolve from a traditional Identity and Access Management system towards what we call Assignment Management. It goes beyond the traditional access focus, without ignoring Access Management, Control, and Governance which are still among the major areas of concern for most organizations.

The business focus is best visible when looking at the frontend which works on tablets, smartphones, and traditional devices and which picks up modern UI and user interaction styles. It is clearly targeted towards the business user, enabling the self-service capabilities these users need.

On the other hand, Avatier has a good track record in integrating with existing IT environments. This is mandatory because assignment management is about extending capabilities to automate processes on every system possible.

This flexibility also allows for a roadmap to replace legacy solutions that only focus on specific assignment areas. It is about adding a new layer which really enables the business users - and that's what Avatier focuses on in its strategy: Enabling the business users - and enabling IT to deliver what the business users want.

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