

Several times we have discussed “where” EDI falls in a company. Usually a simple choice of EDI under the CIO or EDI under the business. Well! There are a lot of other ideas also. I researched numerous alternatives so that if you are involved in planning an EDI Department you might want to consider using (or further changing) some of these options.

Below are six different structures that may work for your organization, depending on the size of your organization and your strategic direction.

Matrix / Embedded

The EDI team is structured in a hierarchical manner, with the members reporting up to an individual (director, VP, etc.) in the chosen department (usually under the CIO, but not necessarily). The team members are then embedded within other departments / sites where they dotted line report up to the management within that department. The main benefit of this structure is that the EDI team member is often viewed as a member of that team, becomes a subject matter expert, and can use a built up rapport with that team to get work done. The big drawback of this structure is that for it to work you need to have as many EDI specialists on the team as there are departments and sites (assuming there's enough work to be done to keep the EDI specialists busy).

Centralized / Internal Agency

The other end of the spectrum is to have no embedding whatsoever. Under a centralized structure the EDI team can take work based on corporate prioritization of workload, or perhaps just on a first in, first out (FIFO) system, with the next EDI specialist in line taking the next project to come up. The main benefits of this structure are that departments that may otherwise not get the help that they need get it, and the EDI team can step back a little and work on the bigger picture unencumbered by loyalties to particular organizations. You can also structure the team in such a way as to allow for specialization in particular areas (i.e., one member of the team handles EDI for all suppliers, while another handles sell side EDI). The biggest drawback is that you lose the ability to build and maintain a rapport between EDI and the individual teams, as it may be a different EDI specialist that works on different projects each time.

Direct Report

This is similar to the matrix structure, with the difference being that the EDI specialist instead reports directly to the department, and is matrixed into the EDI hierarchy. This means the EDI isn't directly accountable to an EDI organization, but is instead measured by the goals of their department, which may not directly align with those of the EDI organization.

Training Organization

If the EDI team is too small to handle the work that needs to be done within your company, then help needs to come from somewhere, and where better than from within your own organization? Set your EDI team up to identify advocates within each department (suppliers / logistics / sales) or site and train them up to act as an extended team. It's a great idea to incentivize them and also to make them accountable for the EDI performance of the areas they work on. What's also great with this structure is that if you need to grow the core EDI team then you have an internal pool of applicants that you can pick from, rather than having to find someone on the outside.

Vendor Management Structure

If your team is small, and you have mission critical EDI work that requires far more resources than you have available, then there are plenty of EDI agencies that would only be too willing to work with you on whatever basis you need (project by project, retainer, etc). Just be prepared for your EDI team to spend some of their time on vendor management, as you'll have to have regular meetings, reviews, etc., in order for this to be successful.

Hybrid Structure

These structures aren't set in stone. You could potentially have some members of your EDI team focus on mission critical work, while having other members of the team identify and train up advocate for the rest of the organization. This may also give you greater flexibility in case one form doesn't appear to be working as well as others, you can then make the case for redeploying resources. Whatever structure you decide is best for your organization, make sure that it's communicated effectively, so that everyone within your company knows what to expect and from whom. Only then will your EDI effort be successful.