

Ease of Integration: A Key Principle for BPM

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If you believe the industry analysts, business process management (BPM) is already a billion dollar industry. But even if you are skeptical of the true size of the market, it will not be long before BPM concepts will change the way your company rolls out new business solutions. The compelling case for BPM lies in the theory that today's sophisticated (yet user friendly!) BPM tools will allow your IT group and your business users to work together to create new solutions. Business and IT alignment, a topic that has received its fair share of discussion, will become more of a reality as BPM takes a foothold in companies looking to receive more from their IT investments. The claim is that these new solutions will be delivered faster using fewer resources plus will be more flexible and responsive than today's systems. Faster, cheaper, and better . . . and you don't have to settle for just two out of three!

Migrating from a Data Perspective to a Process Perspective

Many applications being used today were built from a "data-centric" perspective. In short, this means that programmers coded business process logic directly into the applications. While this provided IT a means of "controlling" the solution, in many cases it made it difficult for companies to react quickly to the changing needs of the business. To top it off, many companies will relate horror stories of IT development projects requiring thousands of hours of programming and still being delivered late and over budget.

In business today, there is an ever-pressing need to provide business users with tools and technologies that allow them to become more self sufficient in the design, implementation and management of the ultimate solution. Market pressures are such that businesses can no longer afford to wait for critical

process changes that require substantial IT involvement. To compound this, many IT staffs have been downsized to the point that these unplanned, unbudgeted, ad hoc updates of the past are no longer feasible or realistic. As business operations change, so too must the processes and solutions that support them.

Enter Business Process Management (BPM) suites (such as Automated Work Distributor [AWD] from DST Technologies). BPM suites fulfill the requirement of allowing business users to be actively involved in managing their environments without requiring the constant involvement of programmers and other IT personnel. For the business side, this means being able to model, create, monitor and change the underlying processes as market needs change. For IT, this means improved productivity by focusing technical resources where they are most valuable—maintaining the underlying infrastructure and technology platform while enabling the integration points that will be accessed by the business people using the BPM tool.

Transformational Thinking

The million-dollar question attached to the BPM promise is "can businesspeople become not only the users of core applications, but also the developers and managers of them as well?" Business self-sufficiency—once only dreamed about in the realm of systems development—is becoming a reality with BPM. Empowering business users to be the stewards of new business solutions requires tools no more complicated than today's traditional desktop applications. Included with these tools is functionality that allows non-technical users the ability to model business processes and connect BPM solutions to existing legacy applications and data stores.

The ease of integrating into existing and future systems will be critical for extending BPM as the pervasive platform for developing new solutions. The model for application integration will be a many to one approach. Build the application integration interface once and then provide it to the business community to reuse again and again as they develop new solutions and maintain existing ones.

Unlike business reengineering efforts of the '90s, BPM does not promote a "rip-it-up-and-start-over" approach. Rather, the benefits of BPM come from the fact that incremental process improvements in organizations can be equally or more effective than large scale reengineering efforts. ROI from technology investments has become such a driver that companies can no longer look more than a year or two out for a positive return. Paramount to achieving such returns is the reality that solutions must be implemented quickly. Increasing the chance of success and achieving a fast ROI requires the business users to take a proactive role in analyzing and designing their solutions. This can only be accomplished through effective application of business process management principles and technologies.

Moving from Modeling to Execution

For business users to adopt BPM, the tools they employ must be straightforward and easy to use. Interfaces cannot be complicated. The languages business people use day-to-day must be intuitive to the BPM tool. Business users don't know programming languages; they know the language of the business that they are charged with operating and growing.

Business users who are comfortable using tools such as Microsoft Visio need the same comfort level when using the modeling tools found in BPM applications. Unlike Visio,

***"Business and IT alignment
will become more of a reality."***

AWD and the Importance of Integration

Robust integration capabilities are as important as business rules engines to managing process execution. Companies continue to implement a variety of diverse enterprise applications—Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), Supply Chain Management (SCM), Customer Relationship Management (CRM), etc. These applications often have incompatible data stores and create major obstacles for organizations as they try to coordinate business processes that span them. Organizations looking to connect disparate applications can rely on the integration capabilities of DST's Automated Work Distributor (AWD) and other BPM suites.

Flexibility of Integration with AWD

AWD provides multiple integration options for organizations implementing business process management solutions. This flexibility ensures that AWD can be adapted to address virtually any integration challenge. Examples of integration methods employed by AWD include:

Data Integration—The existing data structure of the business can be mapped into AWD's data dictionary. Business users can establish data elements such as business areas, types of work, and business-related index fields. Data elements can be extended to contain external business data that is required during workflow processing. Tasks to access, update, and delete the extended data can be easily added to a workflow using AWD's imbedded business rule engine. This flexible, business-driven approach enables the business users to define the data used for workflow, research, and monitoring.

Application Integration—AWD supports standard adapter technology across all user interfaces and services. This allows data integration with multiple systems within the customer's technology framework. AWD can access and aggregate data from different business applications or databases within a process and combine this information with data captured in AWD. A graphical wizard enables

rapid construction of adapters, which can then be reused by business administrators in AWD's process management and business-rule facilities.

Flexible Technology Infrastructure—AWD has the open architecture to operate within each organization's messaging, component architecture, application server, EAI, Internet and business application environments. AWD supports modular integration components such as EJB's and servlets. These modules, combined with our support for open industry standards, allow AWD to maintain compliance with our customers' technology infrastructures and initiatives, such as J2EE, Microsoft .NET and Web Services.

Reporting and Activity Monitoring—AWD addresses a business unit's reporting and monitoring requirements by employing an event-based architecture that drives real-time information into an operational data store. Events and reports can be easily added or customized. AWD has optional adapters for enterprise data warehouses and analytic and workforce management applications. In addition, this event-driven architecture enables proactive business activity monitoring and supports executive cockpit/dashboard views into the operations environment.

Imbedded BPM Functionality—With its component architecture, AWD BPM functions can be imbedded into an organization's existing applications or user interfaces. An XML interface, ActiveX objects, and the AWD software developers kit (SDK) program make it simple to develop a unique user experience that utilizes the power of AWD without requiring users to log on to or even know about the underlying BPM infrastructure.

Application Integration with AWD

AWD deploys "adapters" to integrate with application systems. Adapters (sometimes called "connectors") are software components that specify the method of integration (i.e., middleware, IP socket-level, ODBC, proprietary API, etc.), define the data to be sent or retrieved through integration, and facilitate the

translation of data elements between disparate systems. AWD's adapter management facility makes integration more intuitive by providing:

- ◆ A graphical facility to define the adapter and to deploy it within a business process. The adapter is initially built by a technologist familiar with the underlying application, the transport mechanism, and the definition of the data being sent to or received from. A key component of the adapter builder is the mapping module that relates the data to be sent or retrieved to its AWD counterpart;
- ◆ A graphical business rules engine administered by business users to add data integration tasks (via adapters) and business rules to the underlying BPM processes. This facility provides business users the ability to reuse adapters and to incorporate multiple adapters into a single process; and
- ◆ A data aggregation and integration service which collects and maintains data from AWD and other applications in a transient data store. The data can be used for additional processing within the business process. A published XML interface allows the data to be accessed internally by AWD-driven processes or externally by other applications.

With its flexible adapter-based integration management functions, AWD:

- ◆ Transforms and maps data between disparate systems;
- ◆ Mix-and-matches connection and transformation components to accommodate a wide range of business systems;
- ◆ Serves as a complete integration broker that ties together disparate applications, corporate divisions and business partners;
- ◆ Merges completely different Information Technology (IT) environments so they act as one integrated system;
- ◆ Ensures that AWD will coexist with today's most contemporary architectures and communication methods; and
- ◆ Provides end-to-end process integration capabilities.

which creates static representations of business processes, the process modeling capabilities in BPM tools need to take visualization to the next level: process execution.

Being able to execute a business process from a process model requires robust business rules engines and application integration capabilities. Business rules engines provide the required functionality for moving process and decision logic out of the application and into an environment that can be more easily managed by business users. Business rules engines manage process and decision logic not only from a data transformation perspective (i.e. the business rules that live behind the scenes of the application), but also—and more importantly—from a knowledge-worker perspective. Business rules can guide knowledge workers through complex business processes that require skilled human involvement at critical

steps in the process to make crucial business decisions. Business policies—both those that can be automated and those that cannot—can be captured and stored in business rules engines as part of BPM solutions.

Integrating People and Systems

Business processes don't, won't and can't live in a vacuum. Companies looking to automate their business processes using BPM solutions must integrate the functions and tasks performed by both people and systems. People functions can be improved through process and work management technologies. Systems functions can be automated through integration technologies. Non-value added tasks—those that don't require active human involvement—are easily automated via BPM by combining business rules engines with inte-

gration adapters. Combining sophisticated tools into a complete BPM framework that is easy and intuitive to use greatly increases the chance of success for new business solutions. Demonstrating this success, proving a faster ROI, and ensuring that the business people who own the processes can actively manage and change the processes will ultimately enable BPM to reach the levels that the analysts and industry experts are predicting. ■

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