

BriefingsDirect Analysts Discuss Solutions for Bringing Human Interactions into Business Process Workflows

Edited transcript of BriefingsDirect Analyst Insights Edition podcast, Vol. 37 on aligning human interaction with business process management.

Listen to the podcast. Download the podcast. Find it on iTunes and podcast.com.
Charter Sponsor: Active Endpoints. Additional sponsor: TIBCO Software.

Special offer: Download a free, supported 30-day trial of Active Endpoint's ActiveVOS at www.activevos.com/insight.

Dana Gardner: Hello, and welcome to the latest BriefingsDirect Analyst Insights Edition, Volume 37.

This periodic discussion and dissection of IT infrastructure related news and events, with a panel of industry analysts and guests, comes to you with the help of our charter sponsor, Active Endpoints, maker of the ActiveVOS, visual orchestration system, as well as with the support of TIBCO Software.

I'm your host and moderator, Dana Gardner, principal analyst at Interarbor Solutions. Our topic this week, the week of Feb. 9, 2009, returns to the essential topic of bringing human activity into alignment with IT supported business processes.

The need to automate and extend complex processes is obvious. What's less obvious, however, is the need to join the physical world of people, their habits, needs, and perceptions with the artificial world of service-oriented architecture (SOA) and business process management (BPM). This will become all the more important, as cloud-based services become more common.

We're going to revisit the topic of BPEL4People, an OASIS specification that we discussed when it first arrived, probably a year-and-a-half ago. We'll also see how it's progressing with someone who has been working with the specification at OASIS since its beginning.

I'd like to welcome our guest this week, Michael Rowley, director of technology and strategy at Active Endpoints. Welcome, Mike.

Michael Rowley: Thank you.

Gardner: I'd also like to introduce our IT analyst guests this week. Our panel consists of regular Jim Kobielus, senior analyst at Forrester Research. Welcome back, Jim.

Jim Kobielus: Thanks, Dana. Hi, everybody.

Gardner: And someone who is beginning to become a regular, JP Morgenthal,

independent analyst and IT consultant. Welcome back, JP.

JP Morgenthal: Thanks, Dana. Hi, everyone.

Gardner: Let's go to you first, Mike, as our guest. I've pointed out that Active Endpoints is the sponsor of the show, so I guess we will try to be nice to you, but I can't guarantee it. Tell us a little bit about your background. You were at BEA for some time. You've been involved with SCA and a few other open standards around OASIS. Give us the bio.

Rowley: I was at BEA for five years. I was involved in a couple of their BPM-related efforts. I led up the BPELJ spec effort there as part of the WebLogic integration team. I was working in the office of the CTO for a while and working on BPEL-related efforts. I also worked on the business process modeling notation (BPMN) 2.0 efforts while I was there.

I worked a little bit with the ALBPM team as well, and a variety of BPM-related work. Then, I've been at Active Endpoints for a little over half a year now. While here, I am working on BPEL4People standards, as well as on the product itself, and on some BPMN related stuff as well.

Gardner: Let's just jump into BPEL4People. Where do we stand, and is this getting traction to people? Not to be a punster, but do people grok BPEL and BPEL4People?

Rowley: We've had some very good feedback from our users on BPEL4People. People really like the idea of a standard in this area, and in particular, the big insight that's behind BPEL4People, which is that there's a different standard for WS-Human Task. It's basically keeping track of the worklist aspect of a business process versus the control flow that you get in the BPEL4People side of the standard. So, there's BPEL4People as one standard and the WS-Human Task as another closely related standard.

By having this dichotomy you can have your worklist system completely standards based, but not necessarily tied to your workflow system or BPM engine. We've had customers actually use that. We've had at least one customer that's decided to implement their own human task worklist system, rather than using the one that comes out of the box, and know that what they have created is standards compliant.

This is something that we're seeing more and more. Our users like it, and as far as the industry as a whole, the big vendors all seem to be very interested in this. We just recently had a face-to-face and we continue to get really good turnout, not just at these meetings, but there's also substantial effort between meetings. All of the companies involved -- Oracle, IBM, SAP, Microsoft, and TIBCO, as well as Active Endpoints -- seem to be very interested in this. One interesting one is Microsoft. They are also putting in some special effort here.

Gardner: I want to ask you a question, but at two levels. What is the problem that

we're trying to solve here? Let's ask that first at the business level and then at the technical level?

Rowley: At the business level, it's pretty straightforward. It's essentially the promise of workflow systems, in which you can automate the way people work with their computers and interact with other people by pulling tasks off of a worklist and then having a central system, the BPM engine, keep track of who should do the next thing, look at the results of what they have done, and based on the data, send things for approval.

It basically captures the business process, the actual functioning of a business, in software in a way that you can change over time. It's flexible, but you can also track things, and that kind of thing is basic.

Gardner: Before you go to the technical issues, one of the things that's really interesting to me on this is that I understand the one-way street of needing to take processes, making that understood, and then finding out who the people are who can implement it. But, is this a two-way street?

Is it possible for the people who are involved with processes in the line of business, in the field, to then say, "Listen, this doesn't quite work?" Sometimes you can't plan things in advance. We have some insight as to what we think the process should be, how to improve it, and how can we then relate that back into what the SOA architecture is delivering." Are we on a two-way street on this?

Rowley: Absolutely. One value of a BPM engine is that you should be able to have a software system, where the overall control flow, what's happening, how the business is being run can be at the very least read by a nontechnical user. They can see that and say, "You know, we're going through too many steps here. We really can skip this step. When the amount of money being dealt with is less than \$500, we should take this shortcut."

That's something that at least can be described by a layperson, and it should be conveyed with very little effort to a technical person who will get it or who will make the change to get it so that the shortcut happens. I'm leery about the end user, the nontechnical person, going in and mucking with fundamental control flow, without at least collaborating with somebody who can think about it from more of an IT angle.

Gardner: No. Clearly, we want to have a lifecycle between design, requirements and refinements, but not just throw the keys to the locker room out of the window. What is it technically that we need to overcome in order to solve those problems?

Rowley: I'm going to take this from a standards aspect, because one of the hardest questions is what you standardize and how you divvy up the standards. One thing that has slowed down this whole vision of automating business process is the adoption of standards.

Let's say a business school wants to describe how to do management and how to run your organization. Right now, I don't believe any of them have, as part of the coursework for getting an MBA, something that says, "Here's how you deal with the BPM engine to design and control your organizations."

The reason it isn't at that level of adoption yet is because the standards are new and just being developed. People have to be quite comfortable that, if they're going to invest in a technology that's running their organization, this is not just some proprietary technology.

Gardner: We're at that chicken and egg stage, aren't we, before we can get this really deeply adopted?

Rowley: Yes. I think we're spinning up. We're starting to get the kind of momentum that's necessary, with all the vendors getting on board. Oftentimes, with things like this, if the vendors can all get on the same bandwagon at the same time, the users get it. They see that, "Okay, now this is real. This is not just a standard that is a de jure standard, but it's actually a de facto standard as well."

Gardner: Let's go to Jim Kobielus. Jim, how important is this, and how might this chicken-and-egg conundrum get jump-started?

Kobielus: It's extremely important. One thing that users are challenged with all the time in business is the fact that they are participating in so many workflows, so many business processes. They have to multi-task, and they have to have multiple worklists and to-do lists that they are checking all the time. It's just a bear to keep up with.

It's a real drag on productivity, when you've got tasks coming from all angles at you and you're floundering, trying to find a way to manage them in a systematic way, to roll them up into a single worklist.

BPEL4People, by providing an interoperability framework for worklisting capabilities of human workflow systems, offers the promise of allowing organizations to help users have a single view of all of their tasks and all the workflows in which they are participating. That will be a huge productivity gain for the average information worker, if that ever comes to pass.

That's why I agree with Mike that it's critically important that the leading BPM and workflow vendors get on board with this standard. In many ways, I see BPEL4People as having a similar aim to business intelligence in general. Where business intelligence environments are geared towards providing a single view of all business metrics. BPEL4People is trying to provide a single view of all business processes that either you participate in or which you might manage.

A term that I have batted around -- I don't think it's really gained any currency -- is the notion of a process steward, somebody whose job it is to define, monitor, track, and optimize business processes to achieve greater productivity and agility for the

business.

What Mike was getting at that was really interesting is the fact that you want an environment, a human workflow environment, that not only wraps up all of your tasks in a single worklist, regardless of a back-end execution engine. You also want the ability of not only the end user but especially the process steward, to begin to do what-if analysis in terms of reengineering. They may have jurisdiction over several processes and have a single dashboard, as it were, looking at the current state and the dependencies of the various workflows they are responsible for.

This is critically important for SOA, where SOA applications for human workflows are at the very core of the application.

Gardner: JP, do you agree with me on this two-way street, where the users, the people who are actually doing the work, feel like they are empowered at some level to contribute back into refinement? It seems to me that otherwise workers tend to say, "Okay, I can't have any say in this process. I don't agree with it. Basically, I do an end run around it. I'm going to find ways to do my work that suits me and my productivity." Then, that value and intelligence is lost and doesn't ever make it back into the automated workflow. How important from your perspective is this two-way street capability?

Morgenthal: I'm going to answer that, but I'd like to take a step back, if I could, to answer the business problem. Interestingly enough, I've been working on and researching this particular problem for the past few months. One interesting aspect from the business side is that this has been looked at for quite a while by the business, but hasn't fully been identified and ferreted out as a niche.

One key term that has been applied here industry wide I found only in the government. They call this "suspense tracking." That's a way of saying that something leaves the process and goes into "ad hoc land." We don't know what happens in there, but we control when it leaves and we control when it comes back.

I've actually extended this concept quite a bit and I am working on getting some papers and reports written around something I am terming "business activity coordination," which is a way to control what's in the black hole.

That's what you're talking about -- controlling what's happening in that black hole. It ties into the fact that humans interact with humans, humans interact with machines, and data is changing everywhere. How do we keep everything on track, how do we keep everything coordinated, when you have a whole bunch of ad-hoc processes hitting this standardized process? That requires some unique features. It requires the ability to aggregate different content types together into a single place.

An example that was mentioned earlier, where you have this thing that happens and somebody does something and then something else. The next step is going to analyze what that step does. The chances are that's related to some sort of content, probably

semi-structured or maybe even unstructured content, something like a negotiation over what date something will occur. It's often human based, but when that date locks, something else will trigger, maybe the release of a document, or an invoice, or something out of an automated system.

So, you have these ongoing ad hoc processes that occur in business everyday and are difficult to automate. I've been analyzing solutions to this, and business activity coordination is that overlap, the Venn diagram, if you will, of process-centric and collaborative actions. For a human to contribute back and for a machine to recognize that the dataset has changed, move forward, and take the appropriate actions from a process-centric standpoint, after a collaborative activity is taking place is possible today, but is very difficult. I don't necessarily agree with the statement earlier that we need to have tight control of this. A lot of this can be managed by the users themselves, using common tools.

One thing I'm looking at is how SharePoint, more specifically Windows SharePoint Services, acts as a solid foundation that allows humans and machines to interact nicely. It comes with a core portal that allows humans to visualize and change the data, but the behavioral connections to actually notify workflows that it's time to go to the next step, based on those human activities, are really critical functions. I don't see them widely available through today's workflow and BPM tools. In fact, those tools fall short, because of their inability to recognize these datasets.

They'll eventually get there. What you see today with regard to workflow and these BPM and workflow management tools is really around enterprise content management. "Jim approved this, so now Sally can go buy her ticket." Well, whoopie do. I could have done that with Ruby code in about ten minutes.

Gardner: It tends to follow a document trail rather than a process trail, right?

Morgenthal: Exactly. So, BPEL4People, from a standards perspective, is a standard route suspense tracking? All I'm controlling is going into the black hole and coming out of the black hole. Neither WS-Human Task nor BPEL4People addresses how I control what's happening inside the black hole.

Rowley: Actually it does. The WS-Human Task does talk about how do you control what's in the black hole -- what happens to a task and what kind of things can happen to a task while its being handled by a user? One of the things about Microsoft involvement in the standards committee is that they have been sharing a lot with us about SharePoint and we have been discussing it. This is all public. The nice thing about OASIS is that everything we do is in public, along with the meeting notes.

The Microsoft people are giving us demonstration of SharePoint, and we can envision as an industry, as a bunch of vendors, a possibility of interoperability with a BPEL4People business process engine like the ActiveVOS server. Maybe somebody doesn't want to use our worklist system and wants to use SharePoint, and some future version of SharePoint will have an implementation of WS-Human Task, or possibly

somebody else will do an implementation of WS-Human Task.

Until you get the standard, that vision that JP mentioned about having somebody use SharePoint and having some BPM engine be able to coordinate it, isn't possible. We need these standards to accomplish that.

Gardner: Mike, doesn't governance come into play in this as well? If we want to reach that proper balance between allowing the ad hoc and the worker-level inputs into the system, and controlling risk, security, compliance, and runaway complexity, aren't policies and governance engines designed to try to produce that balance and maintain it?

Morgenthal: Before he answers, Dana, I have one clarification on your question. "Ad hoc" is going to occur, whether you allow it to occur or not. You've got the right question: How can the business attain that governance?

Gardner: Okay.

Rowley: There is governance over a number of things. There's governance that's essentially authorization for individual operations or tasks about how can who change what documents, once its been signed. Who can sign? Who can modify what? That's at the level of an individual task.

Then there's also who can make a formal change to the process, as opposed to ad-hoc changes, where people go in and collaborate out of band, whether you tell them they can or not. But, in the formal process, who is allowed to do that? One nice thing about a BPM is that you have the ability to have authorization decisions over these various aspects of the business process.

Gardner: This strikes me as hugely important, particularly now in our economy. This is really the nub up against which productivity ends up getting hamstrung or caught up. If we're looking to do transformation level-benefits and bring business requirements and outcomes into alignment with IT, this is the real issue and it happens at so many different levels.

I can even see this progressing now towards complex event processing (CEP), where we want to start doing that level of high-scale and high-volume complex events across domains and organizational boundaries. But, again, we're going to bring people into that as well and reflect it both ways. Jim Kobielus, do you agree that this is hugely important and yet probably doesn't get a lot of attention?

Kobielus: The CEP angle?

Gardner: No, the overall issue of, if we can get transformational and we can get productivity that helps make the business and financial case for investing in things like SOA and CEP, than the issue of the interactivity between the tactile and the human and the automated and the systems needs to develop further.

Kobielus: That's a big question. Let me just break it down to its components. First, with CEP we're talking about real time. In many ways, it's often regarded as a subset of real-time business intelligence, where you have the consolidation, filtering, and aggregation of events from various sources being fed into a dashboard or to applications in which roles are triggered in real time and stuff happens.

In a broader sense, if you look at what's going on in a workflow environment, it's simply a collection of events, both those events that involve human decision makers and those events that involve automated decision agents and what not.

Looking at the fact that BPEL and BPEL4People are now two OASIS standards that have roughly equal standing is important. It reflects the fact that in an SOA, underlying all the interactions, all the different integration approaches, you have this big bus of events that are happening and firing all over the board. It's important to have a common orchestration and workflow framework within which both the actions of human beings and the actions of other decision agents can be coordinated and tracked in some unified way.

In terms of driving home the SOA value proposition, I'm not so sure that the event-driven architecture is so essential to most SOA projects, Dana, and so it's not clear to me that there is really a strong CEP component here. Fundamentally, when we're talking about workflows, we're talking about more time lags and asynchronous interactions. So, the events angle on it is sort of secondary.

Gardner: Let me take that back to Mike Rowley. I'm looking for a unified theory here that ties together some of what we have been talking about at the people process level with some of this other, larger event bus as Jim described at that more automated level. Are they related, or are they too abstract from one another?

Rowley: No, they're related. It's funny. I bought into everything that Jim was just saying, except for the very end, where he said that it's not really relevant. A workflow system or a business process is essentially an event-based system. CEP is real-time business intelligence. You put those two together and you discover that the events that are in your business process are inherently valuable events.

You need to be able to discover over a wide variety of business processes, a wide variety of documents, or wide variety of sources, and be able to look for averages, aggregations and sums, and the joining over these various things to discover a situation where you need to automatically kickoff new work. New work is a task or a business process.

What you don't want to have is for somebody to have to go in and monitor or discover by hand that something needs to be reacted to. If you have something like what we have with ActiveVOS, which is a CEP engine embedded with your BPM, then the events that are naturally business relevant, that are in your BPM, can be fed into your CEP, and then you can have intelligent reaction to everyday business.

Kobielus: Exactly, the alerts and notifications are inherent in pretty much, any workflow environment. You're quite right. That's an eventing infrastructure and that's an essential component. I agree with you. I think the worklist can be conceptualized as an event dashboard with events relevant to one decision agent.

Rowley: It's more than just alerts and notifications. Any BPM can look for some threshold and give somebody a notice if some threshold has been exceeded. This is about doing things like joining over event streams or aggregating over event streams, the sorts of things that the general-purpose CEP capabilities are important for.

Gardner: JP, do you agree that we have some commonality here between CEP and its goals and value, and what we are talking about more at the human tactile workflow level?

Morgenthal: From my experience, what I've been looking at with regard to this is what I'm calling "business activity coordination." I think there is important data to be meted out after the fact about how certain processes are running in organizations. When companies talk about waste and reengineering processes, a lot of what they don't understand about processes, the reasons why they never end up changing, is because these ad-hoc areas are not well understood.

Some aspects of CEP could be helpful, if you could tag this stuff going on in that black hole in such a way that you could peer into the black hole. The issue with not being able to see in the black hole is not technical, though. It's human.

Most often, these things are distributed tasks. It's not like a process that's happening inside of accounting, where Sally walks over to Joe and hands him a particular invoice, and says, "Oh look, we could have just made that electronic." It's something leaving this division and going into that division, or it's going from this department to that department to that department. There is no stakeholder to own that process across all those departments, and data gets lost.

You're not going to find that with a CEP, because there are no automation tags at each one of those milestones. It could be useful to postmortem and reengineer after the fact, but somebody has got to gain hold that there is stuff happening in the back hole and automating in the black hole has to get started.

Kobielus: I've got a slightly better and terser answer than the one I gave a moment ago. A concept that's in BPM is business activity monitoring (BAM), essentially a dashboard of process metrics, generally presented to a manager or a steward. In human workflow, what is the equivalent of BAM -- being able to view in real time the running status of a given activity or process?

Gardner: There are also incentives, how you compensate people, reward them, and steer them to behaviors, right?

Morgenthal: On the dashboard, it's like a remedy, when you have operations and you have trouble tickets, and how quickly are those trouble tickets are being responded to. It doesn't work. I'll tell you a funny example, which everyone out there is going to kick out of. At Sears, when you pick up stuff, after buying something big in the store, they have this monitor with this big flat screen and a list of where you are in the process after you scan your receipt. It shows you how long you're waiting.

What happens is the guy has learned how to overrun the system. He comes out, collects your ticket, and you are still sitting there for 30 minutes, but the clock has stopped on the screen. All of a sudden, behind you, is the thing that says, "We have 99.9 percent response rate. You never wait more than two minutes." Of course not. That guy took my ticket at 1 minute and 53 seconds and let me sit there for 30 minutes until my product came out.

Gardner: I think we're looking out for the best of both worlds. We want the best of what systems automation and documentation and repeat processes can do, but we also need that exception management that only a person can do, and we have all experience of how this can work or not work, particularly in a help desk situation.

Maybe you've have had the experience where you call up a help desk and the person says, "Well, I'd like to help you with that, but my process doesn't allow for it," or "We have no response for that particular situation, so I will have to go back to my supervisor," versus someone who says, "I've got a good process, but I can also work within that process for an exceptional level," and then perhaps bake that back into the process. Back to Mike Rowley.

Kobielus: Actually, Dana, I haven't finished my response, I just want to tie it to CEP. CEP is a core component of BAM quite often, event processing. BAM is basically the dashboard to aggregate events relevant to a given business process. In a human workflow, what is the equivalent of CEP and BAM? To some degree, it's social networks like Facebook, LinkedIn, or whatever, in the sense that I participate as a human being in a process that involves other human beings, who form a community -- my work group or just the workflow in which I'm involved.

How do I get a quick roll up of the status of this process or project or that matter in which I am just one participant? Well, the whole notion of a social network is that I can go there right away and determine what everybody is doing or where everybody else's status is in this overall process. Shouldn't that social network be fed by real time events, so I can know up to the second what Jean is doing, what Joe is doing, what Bob is doing, within the context of this overall workflow in which I am also involved?

So, CEP and BAM relate to social networks, and that's the way that human beings can orient themselves inside these workflows and can coordinate and enable that lateral side-to-side, real-time connection among human beings that's absolutely essential to getting stuff done in the real world. Then, you don't have to rely simply on the clunky asynchronous back-and-forth message passing, that we typically associate with

workflows.

Gardner: Mike Rowley, we have a new variable in this, which is the social networking and the ability for people to come up with efficient means for finding a consensus or determining a need or want that hadn't been easily understood before. Is there a way of leveraging what we do within these social networks in a business process environment?

Rowley: Yes. Tying event processing to social networks makes sense, because what you need to have when you're in a social network is visibility, visibility into what's going on in the business and what's going on with other people. BPM is all about providing visibility.

I have a slight quibble in that I would say that some of CEP is really oriented around automatic reaction to some sort of an event condition, rather than a human reaction. If humans are involved in discovering something, looking something up, or watching something, I think of it more as either monitoring or reporting, but that's just a terminology. Either way, events and visibility are really critical.

Gardner: We can certainly go into the whole kumbaya aspect of how this could all be wonderful and help solve the world's ills, but there is the interoperability issue that we need to come back to. As you were mentioning, there are a lot of vendors involved. There is a tendency for businesses to try to take as much of a role as they can with their platforms and tools. But, in order for the larger values that we are discussing to take place, we need to have the higher level of interoperability.

Realistically, Mike, from your perspective in working through OASIS, how well do the vendors recognize the need to give a little ground in order to get a higher value and economic and productivity payback?

Rowley: There seems to be a real priority given to getting this thing done and to getting it to be effective. The technologists involved in this effort understand that if we do this well, everybody will benefit. The whole market will grow tremendously, because people will see that this is an industry wide technology, it's not a proprietary technology.

Active Endpoints is really at the forefront of having an implementation of BPEL4People in the user's hands, and so we're able to come to the table with very specific feedback on the specs, saying, "We need to make these changes to the coordination protocols," or "We may need to make these changes to the API," because it doesn't work for this, that, or the other reason. What we haven't seen is people pushing back in ways that would imply they just want to do things their own way.

Gardner: With all due respect, I know Active Endpoints is aggressive in this, but a company of your size isn't too likely to sway an entire industry quite yet. What about partnerships? People aren't pushing back, but how many people are putting wind in your sails as well?

Rowley: That's exactly what they're doing. They're basically adopting it wholeheartedly. We have had, I would say, a disproportionate impact on these specs, primarily because the people involved in them see the technical arguments as being valid. Technical arguments that come from experience tend to be the best ones, and people jump on.

Gardner: How about the professional services, systems integrators, and people like McKinseys who are organizational management focused? Wouldn't this make a great deal of sense for them? If you have a good strategic view as a vendor, you say, "Yes, we'll grow the pie. We'll all benefit. But, there is another whole class of consultant, professional services, and integrator that must clearly see the benefit of this without any need to maintain a position on a product or technology set.

Rowley: Through the standards effort, we haven't seen very much involvement by systems integrators. We have seen integrators that have really appreciated the value of us having a standard and knowledge, knowing that if they invest in learning the technology, they're not stuck if they invest and develop a framework.

Integrators often will have their own framework that they take from one to the other. If they build it on top of BPEL4People and WS-Human Task, they really get substantial investment protection, so that they don't have to be stuck, no matter what vendor they're picking. Right now, in our case, they pick Active Endpoints, because we have the earliest version.

Gardner: JP, we've been hearing how the role of systems integrators and consultants is important in evangelizing and implementing these processes and helping with interoperability across the business as well as the human, as well as the systems. Do you see yourself as an evangelist, and why wouldn't other consultants also jump on the bandwagon?

Morgenthal: Well, I do take that role of helping to get out there to advance the industry. I think a lot of system integrators though are stuck with having to deal with day-to-day issues for clients. Their role is not to help drive new things as much as it is to respond to client need and heavily utilize the model.

Gardner: You've hit on something. Whose role is it? As Jim was saying, BAM makes sense at some level, but whose role is it to come in and orchestrate and manage efficiency and processes across these boundaries?

Morgenthal: Within the organization?

Gardner: Yes.

Morgenthal: It's the management, the internal management. It's their job to own these processes.

Gardner: So it's the operating officer?

Morgenthal: The COO should drive this stuff. I haven't yet seen a COO who takes these things by the hand and actually drives them through.

Gardner: Mike Rowley, who do you sell your Active Endpoints orchestration tools to?

Rowley: Primarily to end users, to enterprises, but we also sell to system integrators sometimes.

Gardner: But who inside of those organizations tends to be the inception point?

Rowley: Department level people who want to get work done. They want to develop an app or series of apps that help their users be productive.

Kobiellus: It hasn't changed. I've written two books on workflow over the past 12 years, and workflow solutions are always deployed for tactical needs. The notion that companies are really itching to establish a general-purpose workflow orchestration infrastructure as a core of their SOA, so that they can then leverage out and extend for each new application that comes along isn't how it works in the real world. I think Mike has laid it out there.

As far as the notion that companies are looking to federate their existing investments - whether Oracle, IBM, SAP, or others workflow environments -- by wrapping them all in a common SOA standards framework and make them interoperable, I don't see any real push in the corporate world to do that.

Morgenthal: One thing I really like about SOA is that it really should be the case that if you have got an overarching SOA mandate in the enterprise, that should enable lower-level, department-level freedom, as long as you fit with providing and consuming services.

BPM doesn't have to be an enterprise-wide decision, because it just gets clogged, too many decision makers have to sign off. If you get something like BPEL4People, it's really oriented around not just workflow in kind of the older workflow systems, but its workflow in a way that fits in a SOA, so that you can fit into that larger initiative without having to get overall approval.

Gardner: We're going to have to leave it there. We are about out of time. We've been discussing the issue of BPEL4People and better workflow productivity, trying to join systems and advances in automation with what works in the field, and somehow coordinating the two on a lifecycle adoption pattern. I'd like to thank our guests. We've been discussing this with Mike Rowley, director of technology and strategy at Active Endpoints. I appreciate your input, Mike.

Rowley: Thank you.

Gardner: We have also been joined by Jim Kobielus, senior analyst at Forrester Research; thank you Jim.

Kobielus: Yeah, thanks Dana, always a pleasure.

Gardner: Lastly, JP Morgenthal, independent analyst and IT consultant. You can be reached at www.jporgenthal.com. Is that the right address, JP?

Morgenthal: That's the right address, thank you, Dana.

Gardner: I'm Dana Gardner, principal analyst at Interarbor Solutions. I would like to thank our sponsors for today's podcast, Active Endpoints, maker of the ActiveVOS, Visual Orchestration System, as well as the support of TIBCO Software.

Listen to the podcast. Download the podcast. Find it on iTunes and podcast.com.
Charter Sponsor: Active Endpoints. Also sponsored by TIBCO Software.

Special offer: Download a free, supported 30-day trial of Active Endpoint's ActiveVOS at www.activevos.com/insight.

Edited transcript of BriefingsDirect Analyst Insights Edition podcast, Vol. 37 on aligning human interaction with business process management. Copyright Interarbor Solutions, LLC, 2005-2009. All rights reserved.