

Nimble Business Process Management Delivers the Promise of Rapid Productivity Returns

Transcript of a BriefingsDirect podcast on how BPM can help enterprises solve immediate problems and adapt to changing economic conditions.

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Dana Gardner: Hi, this is [Dana Gardner](#), principal analyst at [Interarbor Solutions](#), and you're listening to BriefingsDirect.



Today, we present a sponsored podcast discussion on the importance of [business process](#), especially for use across a variety of existing systems, across a complex IT landscape, and for building flexible business processes in a dynamic business environment.

The current economic climate has certainly highlighted how drastically businesses need to quickly adapt - and change. Many organizations have had to adjust internally to new requirements and new budgets, but they have also watched as their markets and supplier networks have shifted and become harder to predict.

So, to better understand how business processes can move at and with the pace of business and for how BPM needs to be nimble enough to enable those processes, we are joined by a panel of users, BPM providers, and analysts.

Please join me in welcoming our guests today. We're joined by [David A. Kelly](#). He is a senior analyst at [Upside Research](#). Welcome to the show, Dave.

David A. Kelly: Thanks Dana, glad to be here.

Gardner: We're also joined by Joby O'Brien. He is the VP of Development at BP Logix. Hi, Joby.

Joby O'Brien: Hi, Dana, how are you doing?

Gardner: Good. We are also joined by Jason Woodruff, project manager at [TLT-Babcock](#). Welcome Jason.

Jason Woodruff: Thank you, Dana.

Gardner: Let's start off with you, Dave. Tell us a little bit about how the business climate that we are in that has made agility and the ability to swiftly adapt not just a nice-to-have, but a must-have.

Kelly: You hit it on the head in the intro there, when you talked about dynamic business environments. That's what people are facing these days. In many cases, they have the same business processes that they have always had, but the landscape has shifted. So, some things may become more important and other things are less important.



What's important in any case is to be able to drive efficiency throughout an organization and across all these business processes. With the economic challenges that organizations are facing have had, they've had to juggle suppliers, products, customers, ways to market, and ways to sell.

As they're doing that, they're looking at their existing business processes, they are trying to increase efficiencies, and they are trying to really make things more streamlined. That's one of the challenges that organizations have had in terms of streamlining what's going on within their organization.

Gardner: Dave, just as a sort of level check on IT, as more organizations have elevated data and applications and infrastructure even into services, IT has become a bit more nimble, but what we are really focusing on are the processes. How we can utilize these services, create workflows, apply logic and checks and balances across how things are conducted, and pull together people and process as much as it affects what IT does at its core.

Two levels

Kelly: You've got two levels. As you said, there are core IT operations and applications that are out there, but the real business value that's happening today is being able to tie those things together to be able to add on and address the business needs and the business processes.

In many cases, these processes cross applications and services. As you said, some organizations are even getting into [cloud](#) solutions and outside services that they need to integrate into their business processes. We've seen a real change in terms of how organizations are looking to manage these types of processes across applications, across data sources, across user populations.

That's where some of the real pressure has come from the changes in the economy in terms of being able to address those process needs more quickly and in a much more flexible and nimble approach than we have seen previously.

This is probably a good point to talk about the fact that BPM solutions have been around for quite sometime now, and a lot of organizations have really put them to good use. But, over the past three or four years, we've seen this progression of organizations that are using BPM from a task-oriented solution to one that they have migrated into this infrastructure solution.

This is great, if you can support that, but now with the changes and pressures that organizations are facing in the economy and their business cycles, we see organizations look for much more direct, shorter term payback and ways to optimize business processes.

Gardner: Let's go to Joby O'Brien at BP Logix. Joby, Dave just mentioned the fact that we have sort of an infrastructure approach to BPM, but where the rubber hits the road is how business processes get adapted, changed, implemented. This also cuts between where the business side sees value and where the IT side can provide value.

Perhaps you could tell us a little bit about where you see the BPM market now, and how things are a little different than they were a few years ago.

O'Brien: Actually, the points that Dave made were great, and I agree completely. We're seeing that it's difficult sometimes for an organization, especially right now, to look at something on a one-, two-, or three-year plan. A lot of the infrastructure products and a lot of the larger, more traditional ways that BPM vendors approach this reflect that type of plan. What we're seeing is that companies are looking for a quicker way to see a return on their investment. What that means really is getting an implementation done and into production faster.



One of the things we are also seeing is that part of that thrust is being driven heavily by the business users. Instead of being a more traditional IT-oriented approach, where it's again a longer-term implementation, this new approach is being driven by business needs.

When there are particular business needs that are critical to an organization or business, those are the ones they tend try to address first. They are looking for ways to provide a solution that can be deployed rapidly.

Same level of customization

One interesting thing is that they are also still looking for the same level of customization, the same level of flexibility, that they would have in a much larger or infrastructure-type approach, but they still want that rapid deployment of those applications or those implementations.



We're also seeing that what they are doing in a lot of cases is breaking them apart into different pieces based on priority. They take the processes that are most critical, and that are being driven

by the business users and their needs, and address those with a one-at-a-time approach as they go through the organization.

It's very different than a more traditional approach, where you put all of the different requirements out there and spend six months going through discovery, design, and the different approaches. So, it's very different, but provides a rapid deployment of highly customized implementations.

Kelly: It's almost a bottom-up approach to BPM, instead of taking the top-down, large-scale infrastructure approach. Those definitely have their place and can be really powerful, but, at the same time, you can also take this bottom-up approach, where you are really focused on, as Joby said, individual processes that can be aggregated into larger business processes.

Gardner: Let's go to Jason Woodruff at TLT-Babcock. First, Jason, tell us a little bit about your company. You are in the industrial space. Then, as an IT project manager, tell us a little bit about what your business side has been looking for.

Woodruff: Sure, Dana. First of all, just to give a background of what TLT-Babcock does, we are a supplier of air handling and material handling equipment, primarily in the utility and



industrial markets. Our spectrum of products range from new product to after-market, which would include spare parts rebuilds. We rebuild our own equipment, customer equipment, and competitor equipment as well. So, we have our hands in a lot of markets and lot of places.

As a project manager, my job, before I got involved in our BPM solutions, was simply to manage those new product projects. Serving in that capacity, I realized a need for streamlining our process. Right now, we don't want to ride the wave, but we want to drive the wave. We want to be proactive and we want to be the best out there. In order to do that, we need to improve our processes and continuously monitor and change them as needed.

So, the direction was given, "Let's do this. How are we going to do it? What do we need to do? What is it going to take? Let's get moving." After quite a bit of investigation and looking at different products, we developed and used a matrix that, first and foremost, looked at functionality. We need to do what we need to do. That requires flexibility and ultimately usability, not only from the implementation stage, but the end user stage, and to do so in the most cost-effective manner. That's where we are today.

Gardner: Okay. Jason, you didn't just write down one day on a blackboard or a white board, "We need Nimble BPM." You probably started with whatever the requirements that your business side gave to you. What allowed you to get from a long-term perspective on BPM to being more proactive and agile?

Needed a change

Woodruff: As I said, the drive was that we needed to make a change. We knew we needed to make a change. TLT-Babcock wants to be the best. We looked within and said, "What can we change to achieve that? What are our weaknesses? Where can we improve?" We made a list of things, and one of the big ones that jumped out was document control.

So, we looked at that. We looked at why document control was an issue and what we could do to improve it. Then, we started looking at our processes and internal functions and realized that we needed a way to not just streamline them. One, we needed a way to define them better. Two, we needed to make sure that they are consistent and repetitive, which is basically automation.

The research drove our direction. We evaluated some of the products and ultimately selected BP Logix [Workflow Director](#). The research really led us down that path.

Gardner: Let's go back to Dave Kelly. Dave, for this sort of requirement of faster, better, and cheaper, what is the requirement set from your perspective in the market for Nimble BPM?

Kelly: An important thing for Nimble BPM is to be able to embrace the business user. Jason just referenced being able to bring the end users into the process in a cost-effective manner and allow them to drive the business processes, because they are ultimately the beneficiaries and the people who are designing the system.

Another aspect is that you have to be able to get started relatively quickly. Jason mentioned the need for that terms of how they identified this business need to be competitive and to be able to improve the processes. You don't want to spend six months learning about a tool set and investing in it, if you can actually get functionality out of the box and get moving very quickly.

Another thing that's important is to be able to handle ongoing changes and to define potential solutions relatively quickly. Those are some of the key drivers.

O'Brien: There's one thing that Jason said that we think is particularly important. He used one phrase that's key to Nimble BPM. He used the term "monitor and change," and that is really critical. That means that I have deployed and am moving forward, but have the ability, with Workflow Director, to monitor how things are going -- and then the ability to make changes based on the business requirements. This is really key to a Nimble BPM approach.

The approach of trying to get everybody to have a consensus, a six-month discovery, to go through all the different modeling, to put it down in stone, and then implement it works well in a lot of cases. Organizations that are trying to adapt very quickly and move into a more automated phase for the business processes need the ability to start quickly.

Monitoring results

They need the ability to monitor results, see what's going on, and make those changes- without having to go through some type of infrastructural change, development process, or rebuild the or retool the application. They need to be able to provide those types of real time monitoring and resulting changes as part of the application. So, that phrase is so important -- the concept of monitor and change.

Gardner: Joby, to Dave's point about getting the tool in a position that the end user, the business driver and the analyst, can use, are we talking about compressing the hand off and the translation between the business side requirements and necessities, especially in a dynamic environment and then implement and refer back? How do we compress this back-and-forth business, so that it becomes a bit more automated, perhaps Web-based and streamlined?

O'Brien: That's a really good question. One of the things we see is that, especially for somebody who's just moving a manual process or a paper-oriented process to an electronic process or an automated one -- people who haven't actually done that yet and this is new to them -- it's difficult sometimes for them to be able to lay out all of the different requirements and have them be exact.

Once they actually see something running, they see it as Web-based, they see their paper-based forms turn into electronic forms, they see their printed documents stored electronically, and they have different ways of getting reports and searching data inevitably there are changes.

The idea or the approach with the Nimble BPM is to allow folks like Jason -- and those within IT -- to be able to start quickly. They can put one together based on what the business users are indicating they need. They can then give them the tools and the ability to monitor things and make those changes, as they learn more.

In that approach, you can significantly compress that initial discovery phase. In a lot of the cases, you can actually turn that discovery phase into an automation phase, where, as part of that, you're going through the monitoring and the change, but you have already started at that point.

Kelly: Dana, I'd just add that what you are saying here is what you've seen in the development of agile development methodologies over the past 10 years in the software arena, where organizations are really trying to develop applications more quickly and then iterate them.

I think that's what Joby's talking about here in terms of the Nimble BPM is being able to get out of the starting block much more quickly. The thing can then be adjusted dynamically over time, as the business really discovers more about that process.

User expectation

O'Brien: I completely agree. The other is the expectation of the users, even if it is nimble, for something faster, Just getting out of the block quicker is not sufficient. There is usually still an expectation about a relatively high degree of sophistication, even with doing something quickly. In most of these cases, we will still hear that the customer wants integration, for example, into their back-end systems.

They've got applications. They've got data that's stored in a lot of different systems. In a lot of cases, even when they're trying to go do something very quickly, what they are doing is still looking to have some type of an integration into existing systems, so that the BPM product now becomes that coordinator or a way of consolidating a lot of that information for the business users.

Gardner: I'd like to drill down a little bit on how this affects process. Jason, at your organization, when you started using BPM, did you notice that there was a shift in people and their process? That is to say, was there actual compression from what the business side needed and what the IT side could provide?

Woodruff: Yeah, that comes with the territory. We saw this as an opportunity not just to implement a new product like Workflow Director, but to really reevaluate our processes and, in many cases, redefine them, sometimes gradually, other times quite drastically.

Our project cycle, from when we get an order to when our equipment is up and operating, can be two, three, sometimes four years. During that time there are many different processes from many different departments happening in parallel and serially as well. You name it -- it's all over the place. So, we started with that six-month discovery process, where we are trying to really get our hands around what do we do, why do we do it that way and what we should be doing.

As a result, we've defined some pretty complex business models and have begun developing. It's been interesting that during that development of these longer-term, far-reaching implementations, the sort of spur-of-the-moment things have come up, been addressed, and been released, almost without realizing it.

A user will come and say they have a problem with this particular process. We can help. We'll sit down, find out what they need, create a form, model the workflow, and, within a couple of days, they're off and running. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

Gardner: It strikes me that when you demonstrate that you can do that, you open up this whole new opportunity for people to think about making iterative and constant improvement to their jobs. Before, they may not have even tried, because they figured IT would never be able to take it and run with it.

A lot more work for IT

Woodruff: It's interesting that you say that, because that's exactly what's happened. It's created a lot more work for us. One of the things we just implemented -- and this was one of those couple-of-day things -- involved a lot of issues where there was some employee frustration. Things weren't getting done as quickly as we thought they could be. People were carrying some ideas internally that they hadn't shared or shared through the existing channels, and results weren't being presented.

Sort of at the spur of the moment, we said, "We can address this. We can create an online suggestion box, where people can submit their problems and submit their ideas, and we can act on it." We got that turned around in a week, and it's been a hit. Within the first couple of days, there were well over a dozen suggestions. They're being addressed. They're going to be resolved, and people will see the results. It just sort of builds on itself.

Gardner: Now, in some circles they call that [Web 2.0](#), [social networking](#), or [Wikis](#). Collaboration, I suppose, is the age-old term. I want to go back to Joby at BP Logix. Do you see that the Nimble BPM approach, and this invigorated collaboration, is what gets us to that level of productivity that, as Jason pointed out, lets them push the wave rather than have to ride on someone else's?

O'Brien: Actually, we do. It's funny that Jason had mentioned that particular process. We see that also with many of the other customers we are working with. They are focused on the initial project or the business area that they are trying to address. They will take care of that, but then, as people see the different types of things that can be done, these small offshoots will occur.

A lot of these are very simple processes, but they still require some type of a structure. In some cases, some degree of compliance is also associated with them, and they need the ability to be able to put those together very quickly. Some are simple things, the things that are one-off type of workflows or processes that have originated within an organization. It just happens to be the way they do business.

It's not something traditional, like an IT provisioning or some type of sales-order processing. There are those one-off and unique ways that they do business, which now can provide a degree of collaboration.

Gardner: So, we need to marry the best of ad hoc in innovation, but keep it within this confines of "managed," or it could spin out of control and become a detriment.

O'Brien: That's probably one of the key pieces to almost all of these. With everything somebody is doing, having some degree of management, some degree of control, visibility, auditing, tracking, is important. Inside an organization, there can be hundreds of different processes, little ad-hoc processes that people have created over the years on how they do business.

Some of those are going to stay that way, but with others there needs to be more of a management, automation, auditing, or tracking type of approach. Those are the types of processes, where people don't initially look at them and say, "These are the types of things that I want to automate, so let me bring a BPM tool in."

Getting control

They walk into that area because they realize that a Nimble BPM tool can address those very quickly. Then they start getting some degree of control almost instantaneously, and eventually work their way into full compliance within their industry -- tracking, auditing, automation, and all of the goodness associated with the traditional BPM tool.

Gardner: Jason, this all sounds great in theory, but when you put it into practice, are these small improvements, or what are the metrics? What is the payback? How can you rationalize and justify doing this in terms of a steadfast, predictable, even measurable business result?

Woodruff: I don't know if anybody can really answer that question in black and white, but there are several paybacks. We haven't spent a lot of time doing a calculation of our [return on investment \(ROI\)](#) financially. It's so obvious that the number doesn't really matter as far as we are concerned at this point.

We save a lot of time. To put a figure on it is tough to do, but we save a considerable amount of time. More importantly it allows us to reduce errors and reduce duplication of work, which improves our lead-time and competitiveness. It's just a win-win. So, it doesn't really matter what the number is.

Gardner: Well, how about your relationships with the rest of the organization? When the folks at TLT-Babcock think of IT, do they perhaps perceive you a little differently than they may have in the past?

Woodruff: While I do have a background in IT, that wasn't my role at TLT-Babcock, and still isn't. As a project manager working on customer-driven projects, I am the end user. This current situation came about when I expressed not just my and several other people's comments that we could improve here.

Because I had that background from a previous life, so to speak, I became the natural choice to head this charge. Now, I don't spend as much time in project management. I spend very little time doing that and focus, primarily, on troubleshooting and improving processes.

I've got this role that Joby talked about -- management of these ad hoc things. Bring me your ideas and bring me your problems and we will be the umbrella over all of this and coordinate

these efforts, so that we're implementing solutions that make sense for everybody, not just on a narrow focus.

Gardner: Perhaps, I oversimplified in referring to this as business versus IT, but a better way to phrase the question might be how has this changed your culture at your organization from where you sit?

In the early stages

Woodruff: It's interesting, because we're in the early stages here of implementation. We have a couple of processes out and a couple in testing. In the last couple of weeks, just for the first time, we gave a company-wide demonstration of Workflow Director, what it does, how we're going to use it, and, looking down the road, how the processes we have known and grown to love, so to speak, will be changing using this new tool.

That really was a spark that gave each of the users a new look at this and an idea of how this tool is going to affect the tasks that they do each day, their own processes. That's when these ideas started flowing in, "Can you use it to do this? Can you use it to do that?" When they see that, they say, "Oh, that's cool. That's slick. That's so easy." So, we're right at that turning point.

Gardner: Well, we'll have to come back in a while and see how that cultural shift has panned out. Meanwhile, let's go to Joby. For those organizations like Jason's that want to take a Nimble BPM tool and make themselves nimble as a result, how do they get started? Where do you begin to look to implement this sort of a benefit?

O'Brien: Let me make sure I understand the question. How do they typically get started or what organization brings us in?

Gardner: How do you get started in saying, "We like the idea of Nimble BPM that then enables as a catalyst nimble business processes. Where do we begin? How do we get started?"

O'Brien: Almost always, that request will be initiated or driven from some business need, a lot of times from a business unit, and occasionally from IT. So, it's going to be driven from a lot of different places, but it's almost always going to be geared around the idea of the ability to respond quickly to some type of automation and control around a particular process.

In most cases, at least in our experience, there is usually a primary factor that causes the organization to bring in the product and start the implementation, and that's what they are focused on addressing. From there it grows into other areas, very much like Jason just described. When people start gaining visibility into the types of things that can be done and what that actually means, we generally see the tool growing into other areas.

Gardner: Now, David Kelly, that gets back to your earlier statements, if you are going to start from a tactical pain point and then realize benefits that can then be presented perhaps more horizontally and strategically across the organization, you can't do that sort of crawl-walk-run approach, if you've got to do a two-year multi-million dollar infrastructure approach, better to have something you can do at that more iterative level.

Kelly: Exactly. I think Jason highlighted that in terms of what he just said, in terms of getting these workflows and processes out there showing them to the rest of the company then watching as, all of a sudden, the idea started exploding in terms of how those could be applied. It's the same kind of thing.

From what I have seen, a lot of organizations -- Joby has mentioned this -- start with any process in the organization that needs automation. There are probably multiple processes that need automation, monitoring, or some kind of control.

Just look around

You don't have to think big-picture BPM solution. Just look around. It could be a request management. It could be tracking something. It could be sharing documents or controlling access to the documents. It could be something that adds on to an [enterprise resource planning \(ERP\)](#) system that you need to have additional control over.

There are multiple processes, even in highly automated organizations, that still need automation. You can start in an area like that with a task and with a specific kind of scenario, automate that, use a Nimble BPM product tool like this, start down that road, and then expand beyond there. Jason provides a really good example of that.

Woodruff: If I can jump in again here to expand on that point, something comes to mind here. The question was asked, how does this process start, how do you get started on this path? The two years prior to even looking at BP Logix, we had brought in two, maybe three, different subject matter experts to develop our current in-house system. This was to do just what you said David, do a little something here, a little something there, not necessarily as a global approach to streamlining everything, not workflow software but just something to get results.

Well, we weren't getting anything done. We would get one little thing that wasn't very useful to somebody and something else that wasn't useful to somebody else, and we were just sort of spinning our wheels. Within a few months of getting BP Logix products in our hand, we are off and running. It's pulling us through in some ways.

So it was just the lack of results that said, "We've got to find something better." So we went out and did that research I talked about earlier, and here we are a few months down the road, and I can say that we are now driving that wave.

Gardner: Okay. Well, I'm afraid we are about out of time, but we have been discussing how in dynamic business environments a nimble approach to BPM can start at the tactical level and even lead to cultural change and swift paybacks. Helping us understand the ability to draw down processes into something that can be measured and used in a managed environment, we have been joined by Joby O'Brien, development manager at BP Logix. Thanks Joby.

O'Brien: Thank you.

Gardner: David A. Kelly, senior analyst at Upside Research. Thanks again, Dave.

Kelly: You're welcome, Dana. Great to be here.

Gardner: We also appreciate Jason Woodruff joining us. He is the project manager at TLT-Babcock. Thanks for your insights and sharing, Jason.

Woodruff: Thank you. It's my pleasure.

Gardner: This is Dana Gardner, principal analyst at Interarbor Solutions. You've been listening to a sponsored BriefingsDirect podcast. Thanks for listening and come back next time.

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