The BPM NEXT GEN Podcast Transcript

Season 1: Episode 1
Digging Into The Top Process Tools for 2022

Lloyd Dugan

We're here to talk about the nifty little paper that they have published, which was also posted on the BPM Next Gen site titled Process Tools in 2022. We're also gonna talk a little bit at the end about the survey, which is also posted with the article, which is designed to get additional information about specific tools for data visualization. But we'll reserve that for the tail end of the podcast.

So my quick summary, which I will ask Holly to correct, as needed, is to just sort of describe in brief with the article is about. It talks about the results of their own survey, about process tools and interest and areas to explore and doing process related work. Everything from process management to ERP systems to the use of AI and other forms of automation.

And the survey was designed to sort of give an indication of where the various interest levels are, and to what degree is represented by the percentages. These represent things of greater interest versus lesser interest. So we'll talk about relevant technologies and their purpose, which was the first set of data that pops up in the article. And then we'll also talk a little bit about the purpose of the tools in question and what they would be used for, which is the second part of the article.

So is that a fair enough summary Holly to get started, and by all means just contribute what else you think would be needed to describe it?

Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland

Yeah, and that's a pretty fair summary. One kind of nuance that I would add is what the the question that we ask people around these tools is, which ones are they going to be using this year? As far as what they're going to be, you know, what are the ones that are gonna have high impact on their process work in 2022. And that's kind of where the percentages came from.

Lloyd Dugan
Excellent. So let's get into it. The top five technologies for process teams in 2022. First off was data visualization tools, and I gather Holly that this is something that's probably been climbing the ranks over the years, I was a little surprised to see it at the top, especially since it beat out a process automation, which is what I would have thought would have been at the top. But just barely. So it's almost like a tie. But still, the the importance of data visualization not typically thought of as a thing in in the BPM space, the business process management space, more as an afterthought, that then then a key analytical tool or component of the toolset for BPM work. Whereas Process Automation is naturally in that space.

Did you find it surprising was was that? How did APQC sort of interpret that result?

Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland
I agree, I really thought process automation was gonna be number one, especially with what you see differently, growth over the last few years. I think some people say it's grown like 7%, as far as automation tools in organizations. But kind of taking a step back and thinking about data visualization. I mean, people are still trying to really learn how to make decisions around their process work, right. And so process teams are also getting tapped into that kind of data analytic space. And when they're trying to talk to people about making kind of data based decisions around improvement opportunities, what needs to be automated, and things along those lines, they're going to need some kind of visualization to help with the storytelling, right, to help convey that kind of complex information. So it's easier to digest by the people in the business. Or at least that's kind of my hunch, as far as like kind of where that was going.

Lloyd Dugan
That's fair enough. Just fill out the other three, and then we'll come back to the point you just raised. The third and fourth and fifth were workflow tools, ERP systems and collaboration tools in order and there's not a lot of daylight between these things, these five things I mean, it they're, they're all just behind each other by a point or two. So it's a close race. But still, the visualization at the top is a business, right? So here's the thing, right? The BPM suites of the past whether we call them business process management systems or case management systems, whatever, long ago incorporated a kind of business analytic component to their dashboard, dashboard reporting capabilities. And so that was mostly oriented around the or focused rather on the process instance, where it is what kind of state it in. What kind of aggregated, aggregated statistics. Can you get off of that? Then you throw in a little bit more sort of business intelligence reporting. It becomes a kind of business analytic analysis component to the suite, it was never really much beyond just about what's moving through this, you know, the system itself, whatever application has been built on top of the platform.

Separate from that, right, we had business intelligence reporting, becoming a kind of thing unto itself built on top of a rare from things like data warehouses or cubes, whatever, you know, some some residual derive store of data that was assembled through some kind of sort of ETL bits of logic. And then the business intelligence tool was a kind of reporting capability on top of that, which had to varying degrees, again, some kind of visualization aid. All that seems to have now been proven, inadequate enough to take over, too inadequate to take over the market. But

adequate enough to maybe have given rise to this ascendancy. Right? Because if visualization can be made that easy, and it wasn't before, I would think, right, if it can be made that easy, maybe that explains the rise. And I'm particularly thinking like something like Power BI, because leave it to Microsoft figure out the lowest common denominator component of a tool, or capability and then sell the hell out of it.

Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland
I think I mean, that's definitely got a valid point. I think also, a lot of it is you want to see organizations are trying to strive for some consistency in the tools that they're using. So if you're going to be using data visualization tools, from the process side of the house, as well as, say, some of the performance report outs, and things like that, you want to be having a consistent reporting mechanism, and, and visualization mechanisms so that everything kind of can tie together. And that's another potential reason why we're seeing data visualization tools being pulled out of this kind of traditional BPM toolset, as well.

Lloyd Dugan
That's an interesting point. Right? So it was brought in it wasn't, it kind of receded into the background. And now it's being pulled out to give it its own sort of purpose for being.

Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland
Right. Well, I think some of it's also tied where I mean, where you see, so because one of the other questions we asked them a survey was asking how teams support the organization. And up improvements are, of course, are like the big one. But teams are also being tapped into some broader projects that have multiple partners, so like strategic initiatives, transformation offices, technology implementations, and all of these things. So that you need to have a consistent toolset across all of those groups that support those, as well.

Lloyd Dugan
So I wonder, so let me just pose a question to you then is this. Were the old were the tools that were there before? Particularly, I'm thinking like the business intelligence reporting tools? Did they just lack enough ease of use? Did they just not probe and structure the data well enough? Or were they just never that will framed around the sort of process centric view of the enterprise or the organization. And so when you see this kind of thing show up in your survey, it's really reflecting that they want to see this as a way of kind of process discovery or insight. And they just weren't getting that. Right. So maybe they just had too much going on elsewhere, but not enough in this specific areas of process. Would that be fair?

Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland
I definitely think the ease of use is a major component. And that point as well, like so there's the silo issue of process using a specific tool and other parts of the organization using different tools. And I think the ease of use is incredibly important in this place. Reporting mechanisms through BPM tools haven't always been like you said, the easiest to use, or have a broader reach as far as kind of like the layman can can use the same tool set.

Right, but then I agree. I always kind of get sad every time we do one of these kinds of tools surveys, because process mining ends up falling so far down. I think in this particular survey, it was like 22% of people said they were going to be using it. But I do think it's an amazing analysis and visualization tool for the type of work that BPM teams do. Because it is it does, it does more than just give you kind of like performance data and how that's going along. It really visualizes how the different parts of the process are flowing. So you can identify things like bottlenecks, repetition, where things get stalled in a way, I think it's probably one of the tool most of people in process aspire to. But they don't always get the investment to be able to do process mining as much as they'd like to a lot of ways.

Lloyd Dugan
And I totally agree with that it two strikes me as very strange, because I just see the power of it in a very intuitively satisfying way. That seems to be very natural. And so I'm always weirded out by how it's just not gotten more traction, particularly it because it's been around long enough to have, you know, achieve some kind of critical mass.

And it's also something that is popped up on a lot of other sort of related tool sets, you find a lot of process modeling tools have them as a component, or BPM suite has a component or, you know, ERP systems have it as a component. And one of the things we were talking about before the call was the the marriage of something like Signavio and SAP, what did you think of that.

Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland
I thought it was a really smart move. I mean, as far as that goes, I mean, if you're looking at process mining, you have to have like, certain requirements, right, you have to have the processes laid out. You have to have the steps laid out, you have to have timestamp data. You have to have case ID numbers, and all of those things that are found in ERP systems, as far as you know, measuring and going through explosive processes. By then kind of looking at that and connecting those two pieces, it solves some of the problems a lot of organizations have on the try to do process mining, without an ERP system or something similar. Because a lot of organizations are still struggling with, like getting standardization of their processes in order, right and having those laid out in a consistent way. And then tying data and incidences to those. And people still struggle with having high quality data that lines up. But the marriage between those two seems a really brilliant move as far as then being able to have that objective data at their fingertips to make those kinds of decisions, and use that kind of analysis tool.

Lloyd Dugan
Well, it certainly does enhance the sort of all in one toolbox capability of something like SAP to have that as part of what's what's available.

But just speaking for myself, I still, I feel for the loss of the Signavio as a standalone toolset because I was one of its earliest users. And so I felt somewhat abandoned, I guess, with it being sold to Big Brother SAP, but I but I get the argument you're making.

I said the second half of the paper deals with top five purposes for process tools. And paralleling the first set of data in much the same fashion, the top two are data driven decision making by a fairly significant margin 5%. So that's it 60%, and then replace manual processes at 55%. So that's tracking with the One Two of of data visualization and Process automation in the first list. The other three being improved the efficacy of process work, that's a standing long term, long standing rather, reason for doing BPM work and projects, enhanced visibility into operations, which is, which is interesting, because I would have thought that would go hand in hand with data driven decision making. But here it is at fourth at 48%. And then improved data quality 44% Same thing.

So it's it would suggest in this you know stratification of the results that they're not so much worried about the having the data anymore, or having good data anymore, they're worried about is it the right data? Right. So that's what would be needed for for data driven decision making. And, and you and I are both contributors to Zbignew's site for the hot new things for the upcoming year of bpm. And the data science is something that has been increasingly showing up in the list of of everybody mentioning it. What they think is is going to be hot for the year. And that seems to go very much hand in hand with the results you have here. What do you think that is?

Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland
I think data analytics is an absolute skill set that we have to have in this business, right. And the long run our job any more and more of our toolkit is technology based. A lot of the decision making and the things that go around it are data linked, right, whether we're looking at making using data to to visualize, like with process mining, where things are and using objective information to make smart decisions about improvements, or to even kind of like, then help provide objective information, then an improvement work. So we have that ability to select the right projects that are going to be a good fit for the organization, as well as tie that information into the ROI and the benefits of the work that we do. One of the biggest kind of struggles BPM teams in particular have had over I think my entire career is been making sure that the value of what we do is transparent to the business. So that we're seen as something that's helped support and scoot around the organization goals. And one of the ways we can do that is by having clear analytics tools that help us then help them solve their problems effectively.

Lloyd Dugan

I tend to think that we are particularly in this information over abundant information age, where, you know, we're surrounded by water, in the same sense that a man on a raft is at sea, who's thirsty is also surrounded by water, we can't, you know, it's not good enough. And I, so I get the emphasis on making it more relevant, more accessible, more usable, to to be applied in particular context.

So what is it that you all think, over at APQC is the long term direction of this drift towards more data, and more precise analytical tools are built around the data for things in the BPM workspace?

Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland

I think it's a natural fit. So the researcher I cover is process and performance management. So we already kind of link measurement, and data with process as far as being able to objectively do that. And if you look at kind of like the biggest gap in organizations, and they're looking at BPM maturity, it's jumping from standardization, to managing and measuring process performance objectively, and how we use that to support decision making in the organization. So I think they go hand in hand you have, you have to have one and the other. I do think technology and the vast amounts of information out there are making that easier, and driving more and more that connection between the two of those, those disciplines.

Lloyd Dugan

So this is something that you'll be doing this survey is something that you'll be doing year to year for a while, at least.

Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland

So this is part of a bigger survey that I do every year, which is what I call a priority survey. And what we do is we look at some of the big challenges and in like a lot of key spaces like process, strategy, measurement, analytics, and things like that. I always include a specific section like this, which looks at kind of a topic that people are interested in. And that's where we came up with, and looking at the tools. And particularly because there's always been a lot of questions about what tools people are using, and sometimes what tools people are using, versus what's the hype out there, as far as what are the tools that people should be using. So that is definitely a piece that I like to ask at least every other year. And that big survey is to look at tools and skill sets. As far as that goes.

Lloyd Dugan

So let's, let's see if we can close on the poll survey that's also attached to the paper. And again, I think it's available on both sites is a dive into data visualization tools poll. So it's asking folks to talk about or to respond to the poll, which will cover data visualization tools that create visual representation of information or data covers a variety of features and potential tools themselves are some examples are cited.

The one I mentioned earlier, Power BI is cited. And the other that is maybe on the other end of of complexity and scope is Tableau and there's a bunch of ones in between. But again, those are just sort of examples to help people inform people about how to potentially answer these questions. So those listen to the podcast, please take this take the poll help fill out the data. This is how the community can help shape the tool sets of tomorrow.

So then in closing. Any any thoughts about where this will take us into the next year or two in terms of tool sets? And I'm going to give us a specific angle to this question, which is, since data visualization is overtaking process automation, which is where RPA, the previously hot topic was, was was king. What will it mean, if anything for this displacement will have any effect on the RPA adoption as a consequence of overtaking it in terms of interest?

Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland
I don't think so. Honestly, I think the the data visualization and all the data pieces in particular, are really helping us get everything, all of those things that we need in order to be able to to launch into some of those other technologies moving forward into next year. So looking at things like the process mining becoming more easily realized for teams and adoption, things like simulation, as far as a decision making tool, and an improvement tool, machine learning and some of the other pieces that that require us being able to get all of this data visualization and get all of our data house is in order so that we can then move forward with some of those more complex, almost sexier type of technologies over the next couple of years.

Lloyd Dugan
Okay, well, that was great. Thank you so much, Holly. Again, for those interests and looking at the paper go to either either location, either APQC or BPM Next Gen. And, upon reading, please take the poll to help us figure out what you all need for tomorrow. Thank you very much.

Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland

Thank you.