

2008 WebSphere System z Podcasts - 'Did you say Mainframe?'

TITLE: WebSphere Process Server and WebSphere Business Services Fabric version 6.2 Product Announcements for z/OS

HOST: Hi, and welcome to the "Did you say Mainframe?" podcast series. This is where we regularly interview IBM technical experts who can help you to understand important IBM mainframe hardware and software issues. I'm your host Sherrie Abshire.

Today we're going to talk about the new release of WebSphere Process Server and WebSphere Business Services Fabric, version 6.2 for z/OS.

Our guest today is Rob Rowe from IBM System z BPM Marketing. Rob, it's great to have you here.

SME: Thank you; I'm delighted to be here.

HOST: Before we begin, I'd like to mention to our listeners that there are product announcement letters on these new releases which provides additional information. I'll be giving out more information at the end of this podcast.

HOST: [Question 1] On Oct 1 we announced new versions of our BPM products. Tell me why this release is important; how does this help customers using System z?

SME: [Answer 1] To begin with, installing these products on System z is beneficial to our customers for the same reasons that they deploy any other mission-critical products on the mainframe. Co-location, scalability, availability, security and all the other reasons that our customers use the mainframe. In addition, since our mainframe customers already have knowledgeable z/OS system administrators, installing the process server and Fabric on the mainframe may be easier than going through the purchasing, installing, administering, running and maintaining these products in a distributed environment. In addition, the installation scripts now offer the choice to perform a fresh install or an upgrade which may save some time when doing an upgrade from a previous version. And there are enhancements to make it easier to migrate from heritage products, such as WebSphere Business Integration Server Foundation, WebSphere InterChange Server, WebSphere Business Integration Server Express and WebSphere Business Integration Server Express Plus and WebSphere MQ Workflow to the new versions.

HOST: [Question 2] Ok, so we now know why to deploy on the mainframe. Could you tell me what is new in this release?

SME: [Answer 2] There are several new features and enhancements in all of the BPM products. But in this podcast, we'll focus on the runtime products that install on z/OS. Let's talk about WebSphere Process Server first, since that is the foundation product for WebSphere Business Services Fabric.

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The process server is the deployment environment of your business processes. Once the business processes are modeled and the SOA services are assembled, the Business Process Execution Language, or BPEL, is then imported into the process server for runtime execution and ensures that your business processes are executed consistently, reliably, securely, and with transactional integrity.

A brand new feature of WebSphere Process Server version 6.2 is a new out-of-the-box, ready-to-run, Web 2.0 BPM client for business users which is called the Business Space. This new client, for the process server, enables business users to configure their worklists and views, as well as being able to support dynamic human interaction scenarios with ad-hoc tasks. Key productivity capabilities include configurable work lists and detailed work item views, with support for collaboration using pre-built human tasks. There is even a graphical process view for the business users for viewing and changing the tasks. This includes multiple detail levels depending on the usage scenario, from the complete BPEL to a "task only" view. So you can have a collapsed view or an expanded view, whichever you choose, for each task. This new Business Space is a replacement for SVG based process views and in contrast to SVG, requires no browser plug-in. It is not a separate product, and comes with the process server, Fabric, the publishing server and Monitor. The first product installed installs the business space, and the applicable widgets get installed with other BPM products. So for example, task widgets are installed with the process server, and monitoring widgets get installed with Monitor.

HOST: [Question 3] What else is new in this release of WebSphere Process Server?

SME: [Answer 3] Another feature of version 6.2 is an enhanced flexibility for modifying the flow of in-flight process instances, or processes in execution. You can now skip activities and jump forward and backward between activities. You might do this when there is some sort of bottleneck that you can resolve manually by bypassing or side-stepping it, for example. It even provides the capability to make process-relevant data changes to variables for in-flight processes. For example, if there is a problem with a process due to incorrect data, you can now make updates to correct the problem by changing the data value accordingly. This enables solution administrators to override the modeled navigation of a process, adapting a business process to a changed situation easily. Typically, this would be used in human workflow scenarios.

For another product update, there is a new business calendar that would be created in the modeling or assembly tool. WebSphere Process Server can use the business calendar for defining specific time-based settings (for example, durations and timeouts) in business processes and human tasks. This is good for setting weekends as days unavailable

2008 WebSphere System z Podcasts - 'Did you say Mainframe?' for human task progress, adding reality and better control of process duration. Timers on the tasks are aware of the "Business hours", to avoid escalations on weekends and to avoid expirations on public holidays. The timers can be set to run only Mon-Fri, from 9am - 5pm. So again, it recognizes that human tasks are not running 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

HOST: [Question 4] I heard that there was CICS integration with this release. Can you tell us more about that?

SME: [Answer 4] Yes, to support easier and quicker integration with legacy back end systems, there is now support for MQ CICS headers (MQCIH). This is required for asynchronous CICS invocations via MQ imports and the WebSphere MQ-CICS bridge. The header can be set on the properties panel for the MQ import in the WebSphere Integration Developer, or WID Assembly Editor, which eliminates the need for custom data bindings or mediation flows to set the header information. So it enhances the integration of CICS applications in your business processes and makes it easier to use them without doing a lot of extra work.

There is also a CICS SupportPak that emits events to be consumed by WebSphere Business Events and Monitor, but that is something else and is huge for our 3000+ CICS customers, because it extends the value of CICS, extends the value of System z, and it provides a new entry point to BPM through WebSphere Business Events. And we'll cover that in another podcast.

HOST: [Question 5] It sounds like there are a lot of new features in this release of WebSphere Process Server. Can you tell us a little bit about is new in WebSphere Business Services Fabric for z/OS?

SME: [Answer 5] Well, as we know, WebSphere Business Services Fabric is built upon, and extends the functionality of WebSphere Process Server. Besides the Industry Content Packs, it's primary value is policy management and to provide dynamic SOA service selection at runtime, based upon user and business context. So for a policy management example, an insurance agency providing an insurance quote will provide the correct information based on the geographical location of the requester as well as whether the requester is an agent, someone with no recent claims or someone who has filed numerous claims in the past few years.

One new enhancement related to policy management is that you can now define policy business variables. In version 6.1, there was no such thing as a Business Variable; policies only contained fixed values. The policies had to be changed directly to make any changes to the values. But now, in place of fixed values, there are Business Variables that you can use. These are created by the "Create Wizard" and can be changed with the "Business Variable editor" in the Fabric

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Composition Studio. The value of the Business Variable is that the particular service selected at runtime can be influenced by the Business Variable, furthering the capabilities of dynamic service selection.

This release also provides enhanced compatibility with the other BPM products. For example, there is new interoperability with WebSphere Business Modeler that allows the client to define a dynamic assembler implementation type in "fabric mode". This provides the ability to specify that there will be dynamic service selection for tasks within the Modeler tool. A complementary interoperability with WebSphere Integration Developer provides support for exporting WID modules using the Fabric Dynamic Assembler component for service invocation. This means that business processes can be specified and designed at the start to perform dynamic service selection.

HOST: [Question 6] Is it true that WebSphere Business Services Fabric now support events that can be monitored through dashboard KPIs and alerts?

SME: [Answer 6] Yes. This latest version provides the ability to emit common base events which can be consumed by WebSphere Business Monitor to be illustrated through Key Performance Indicators and metrics in the dashboard. These Fabric generated events can be used by Monitor to create Fabric-aware monitor applications which can display service selection activity in the dashboards within the Business Space. The event types include: Context Extraction Events, Dynamic Selection Events, Endpoint Not Available Events, No Endpoint for Policy Events and Technical Error Events. These new events can be enabled or disabled through a WebSphere Business Services Fabric policy. These events are different from the "normal" types of events that are generated from running processes in that these are directly related to the dynamic service selection activity of WebSphere Business Services Fabric and is meant to alert the recipient of the event of a service selection problem. So there would be different fro the normal business events that would be processes.

And as for relevant event interoperability with other products, integration enhancements with the WebSphere Service Registry and Repository include new policy assertions to decide when these events should be fired. Another enhanced interoperability with WSRR is that you can now specify a new Web Services Description Language, or WSDL 'source' when creating Service Interfaces. This is the ability to search and look for Web Services Description Language documents in the WebSphere Services Registry and Repository and then import a selection of them into the Fabric Composition Studio for creating and editing the interfaces. There is new runtime support for these WebSphere Service Registry and Repository-based endpoints in the Fabric Dynamic Assembler engine which can even be tested from the Fabric Composition Studio to make sure that it all works as intended prior to deployment.

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HOST: Thank you Rob, that was really interesting.

SME: Thanks for giving me the opportunity to talk about the latest release of WebSphere Process Server and WebSphere Business Services Fabric, version 6.2 for z/OS. There are additional enhancements to each of the products that we discussed; please refer to the announcement letters for more information about the other new features.

HOST: Well, that wraps up this podcast discussion. To find out more about the product announcements I mentioned earlier, please go to the description for this podcast at: <http://www.ibm.com/software/os/systemz/podcasts/websphereonz/>

There you will also find the URL for registering for upcoming regional BPM technical seminars where you can learn more about Business Process Management and how it can help to make your business more agile.

Internal URL to Seminars:

ibm.com/software/systemz/seminar/aibpm

Join us next time as we talk about another important mainframe topic. For now, this is Sherrie Abshire saying "Thanks for listening".