

## Intelligent Workflows

# Intelligent Workflows Empower People to Work at the Intersection of Skills, Data and Insights

Break processes out of silos to create integrated, transparent and agile end-to-end workflows that drastically cut costs, increase speed, and improve experiences.



This Q&A is part of the Built for Change Perspectives series that is exploring trends in business transformation. To learn more, go to [IBM.com/smarter-business](https://www.ibm.com/smarter-business)

**Dominique Dubois is a Partner in IBM Services focused on bringing digital transformation to clients in the form of Intelligent Workflows. Dominique has spent over two decades in strategic consulting and managed services.**

## Q: What significant changes in workflows has the Covid-19 crisis caused?

A: The biggest change is the sense of urgency to digitize and modernize that many companies have now. We've been talking about digital reinvention and intelligent workflows for quite some time, but in the past six months, it has resonated with more enterprises as something that they really needed to have achieved before the crisis—and now, something they need to do with urgency.

Companies are coming to us and saying, "We were not ready for this major disruption." Their gaps could be around supply chain, or how they service and engage with their customers, or around talent and how they hire and manage their people, which is virtual now. If a business is not running on digitized intelligent workflows, the ability to be flexible is hugely limited, as is the ability to generate tangible benefits from real-time opportunities. So, unprepared businesses have experienced a lot of pain due to the pandemic.

## Q: What is an intelligent workflow?

A: Workflows are how work gets done. An intelligent workflow is the orchestration of automation, AI, analytics, and skills to fundamentally change how work gets done. It minimizes friction through automation. It drives insights for immediate action, not to drive action in the future. It's transparent. And it's agile and flexible. At the heart of it, implementing intelligent workflows is really about unlocking value that hasn't been unlocked before. Today, by combining the emerging technology and hybrid multi cloud infrastructures we have at our fingertips with process and workflow, we can do things that we couldn't do five years ago—and in some cases, even three years ago.

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## Q: How do intelligent workflows give businesses end-to-end visibility on work processes?

A: Intelligent workflows have a high degree of integration and visibility that, historically, most business processes have lacked. Traditionally, your enterprise applications

deploy standardized processes that stay siloed in their individual areas. They aren't transparent or integrated. Now, you can put a thin layer of technology over that enterprise application—using automation, AI, analytics and other workflow orchestrators—and connect those processes, and data, into an integrated end-to-end workflow that gives you great visibility.

**Q: In numbers, what kind of performance improvements can businesses realize by implementing intelligent workflows?**

A: The benefits and ROI are really significant, even exponential. You're decreasing operating costs by 40% to 70% within six months; that's pretty universal for our clients. We recently helped a U.S.-based telecommunications company reduce labor costs by 50% within one year.

Companies are also achieving huge increases in speed. For example, we helped a U.S. government agency implement intelligent workflows that reduced the average claims processing time from over 15 days to five minutes.

Importantly, companies are seeing gains of 10-plus points in their net promoter score [NPS], a baseline metric that measures how willing a customer is to buy from the company again or recommend the product or service to family, friends, coworkers or business partners.

Finally, we're also seeing much faster deployments leading to greater speed to benefit. We can get machine learning into production four times faster than we could in the past—and get it to scale. Those are just a few examples of the more pervasive benefits of intelligent workflows. And all of them drive growth.

**Q: What's an example of a disruption in workflow that a business experienced and used an intelligent workflow to overcome?**

A: Think about the delivery of beef. We have a client that recently decided to switch from selling frozen to fresh beef. The disruption this change is causing in their supply chain, from the field to the grill, is huge.

Our client could not deliver on the promise that "The beef you buy from us has never been frozen" without digitally integrating every single point of the entire workflow and having end-to-end visibility. For every box of beef, you need constant real-time data on its temperature range. If the analytics see that a box or an entire shipment in, say, a truck is out of that range, it will immediately send an alert to the driver. So this intelligent workflow uses AI, IoT, automation, and analytics to drive very specific insights that cause real-time actions.

And that's a very different way of running processes, because we're talking about changing the trajectory of work. It's changing the outcome. And we can also do this in processes that have high variability—which, to me, is the most exciting area.

**Q: What's so exciting about tackling high-variability workflows?**

A: If you think about Six Sigma and how we've performed process engineering for years, what do we do? We look for what's standard and we standardize it. Then we centralize it. Then we automate it, with bots doing different tasks related to it. But when there's a process with high variability, all of that gets pushed to the side. We say, "Humans have to do that" because it's too complicated. There's too much exception handling because the work is too variable.

Today, when you combine AI with the data, analytics and automation, you can deal with a lot of that variability. The task no longer has to be inefficient, ineffective and handled by humans. We can add AI-based algorithms and AI-based automation to a highly variable task and make it more efficient and effective. We may not be able to automate it 100%, but we'll bring it up 30%—and that will unlock value that we couldn't unlock previously.

And remember, that unlocks the value of your people, too. Because you really are freeing them up to do more valuable work versus just executing tasks. We've talked about this particular benefit in process engineering for a long time, and now, finally, I feel like the human-machine partnership is really delivering on that benefit.