# When to Use Workflow Software for Integration
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## Catalyst

Analyst collaboration

## Question

When should workflow software be used for integration?

## Answer

Workflow software is recommended for use when integrating business processes that include substantial human activity. Although workflow can be used for straight-through processing, its real strength lies in automating human-centric activities that span hours, days, weeks or even months. Companies that use workflow to integrate business functions for "people-less" processes usually do so because they have a combination of human-centric and application-centric business processes; implementing a workflow product enables companies to automate both types of business processes while using a rich tool for automating the human activities.

An example of using workflow to automate human work is when the workflow software delivers work items to an electronic in basket and directs users toward specific actions, such as changing the customer's address, making a call or mailing a letter. This level of automation requires few changes to existing processes and typically involves minimal integration with other applications. In contrast, a business process could be fully automated by using workflow to deliver work items, provide data with the activity, launch programs, automatically pass data to the applications and monitor the activities. Most organizations implementing workflow choose a level of automation somewhere in the middle of this spectrum and, if possible, move toward more automation over time. Yet, some companies have found that only a small percentage of their business processes can be truly "people-less." And many organizations, such as banks and insurance companies, are convinced that humans bring a crucial dimension to the business process like providing customer interaction and intimacy that differentiates the business, or involving knowledge workers in important decision-making activities. Also, many organizations recognize that business processes are not static, that "exceptions" are the norm and human involvement is routinely required for ad hoc and rapidly changing business processes.

Mid-range and high-end workflow products capable of supporting human-centric processes have been available for a decade and are provided by vendors such as **Action Technologies**, **Adobe**, **FileNET**, **Fujitsu**, **Handysoft**, **IBM**, **Oracle**, **Staffware**, **TIBCO** and **Ultimus**. Some of these vendors, such as FileNET and Staffware, have their roots in human-centric workflow but have added application integration support through partnerships and OEM agreements with integration vendors. The trend is for high-end workflow vendors to continue moving in the application integration direction either by offering software suites for business process management (e.g., IBM, TIBCO) or continuing to forge partnerships with integration vendors. At the same time, integration vendors, like **Vitria**, will continue to strengthen their support for human-centric workflow.

The primary reasons to choose a workflow vendor for integration are its ability to automate and support human activities and to process exceptions for straight-through processing. Other capabilities that workflow

provides are features for managing work in process (e.g., escalation, delegation, voting), integration with business process modeling tools, business process simulation, business activity monitoring and analysis and adapters for application integration. Although workflow can be used for application integration, it is not recommended if all business processes are machine to machine, or if the organization does not want to pursue a best-of-breed approach by using a combination of workflow and application integration vendors.