Nintex Over SharePoint Workflows

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Contents

Acronyms

The following are the acronyms used in this document with the full descriptions.

Acronym	Definition
SP	SharePoint
WF	Workflow

Abstract

A workflow is a sequence of steps where each step is connected, and is designed to automate processes.

Organizations use workflows in their day-to-day activities to handle multiple processes. Be it a leave request or the on boarding of a new resource, or the exit of an employee, or the placing of an order for IT, everywhere a process needs to be followed. This process is automated using workflows.

This is where SharePoint is relevant. It offers multiple ways to create workflows. But also has multiple limitations. The need for a better alternative resulted in Nintex.

Types of SharePoint Workflows

SharePoint offers three ways to create workflows. A brief description of the workflows and their advantages and disadvantages [1]:

Workflow	Advantages	Disadvantages
Out of the box workflow	• Business users can set up • Easy and quick for small workflows.	• No version control • Attached to one list • Limited configuration options • Limited to most basic options
SharePoint Designer workflow	• Trained users can implement • Quick for low complexity workflows	• Sequential workflow only • No state machine • Difficult to deploy to different environments • No source control • Difficult to debug

Custom workflows using Visual Studio	• Completely customizable • Sequential and state machine workflows • Deployable to different environments as solution and feature • Based on Windows Workflow Foundation • Integrate with asp.net forms and InfoPath forms • Easy to debug	• Overhead of learning .Net Windows Workflow Foundation • Slow speed of workflow • High cost of learning • Time to develop

In addition, a major disadvantage is the loss of workflow history after 60 days. Business users may perhaps need the workflow data at any point of time (days, months, years later). However, in SharePoint, the workflow history cleans up after 60 days. With a SharePoint workflow as discussed above, data cannot be tracked beyond this period.

Challenges for SP workflows [2]

Although SharePoint workflows, specifically the custom ones, are completely customizable and capable of meeting almost any functional requirement, the cost to implement it goes way beyond expectations. A simpler solution was required, that

- Could be deployed to various environments
- Handle the data loss after workflow history deletion
- Easy to troubleshoot
- Is easy to learn and implement (no specialization required for Windows Workflow Foundation)
- Can maintain versions of the workflow
- Doesn't affect the in-progress workflows by the current change
- Needs lesser effort to develop

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Nintex – Benefits and How Nintex fits with SharePoint [3]

Nintex has built an absolutely excellent workflow product/tool that addresses the pain areas of SharePoint workflows (challenges as discussed above), and at the same time provides super relevant features for any organization using workflows.

1. Intuitive workflows - List down the various workflow processes in any firm : whether it's the request for approval or denial of leave, an IT tracker, a new employee's on boarding; any workflow can be made simple with Nintex' s 'easy to use and follow interface and functionality.

2. Ability to customize with CSS and create custom workflows - Nintex is also capable of providing a consistent branding across the organization. Developers using CSS can customize the workflows.

3. Drag and drop capability leads to easy adoption - The graphical interface is very intuitive as you drag and drop "workflow actions" onto nodes in your workflow diagram and then configure their properties. This 'drag and drop design' ultimately increases the likelihood that they will be embraced quickly.

   In addition, all designing of the Nintex workflow can be done right within the SharePoint user interface. No separate client application is needed to install it.

4. Integration with various platforms - One very stimulating feature about Nintex is the way it integrates with the other platforms that we use every day. To be specific, it allows you to connect to web service, CRM, Excel services, BCS, LDAP, active directory, XML, and BizTalk. Moreover, the best thing about these integrations is that they require no code, thus allowing any of the users to incorporate them easily into workflows.

5. Comprehensive workflow actions – The all-inclusive set of workflow actions include running if conditions, loop and for each, parallel actions, action sets, snippets, workflow variables, constants, and integration. With these, the rich configurable workflow actions drastically speed up the process of building workflows

6. Nintex has EXCELLENT support for the cloud. Nintex runs on Amazon Web Services and integrates with Office 365 SharePoint Online. [4]

7. Retention of history – The history being erased after a period of 60 days is a major setback in SharePoint. Nintex Workflow guarantees a "No Data Loss" policy. It uses its own SQL database that stores a complete history of Workflow Actions and Task History

(among other things), which is available (in both text and graphical form) from the "View Workflow History" link on the context menu of an item.

8. Mobile capabilities – Nintex apps are available to ensure that the Nintex workflows are available everywhere. Nintex apps provide an amazing way to access the web based version. This ability to be present just about anywhere and be mobile is a great pull for organizations.

9. Debugging and troubleshooting - It reduces the effort in debugging and troubleshooting through explicit log messages, and the ability to easily disable specific workflow actions / branches.

10. Other advantages - Features like state machine multi-level approval, Lazy Approval (reply to approvals via email), Workflow visualizations, scheduled workflows, constants, delegation and so on, are available out of the box, without the need to write a single line of code, which makes it very appealing.

Moreover, Nintex provides multiple predefined workflow templates;, and also comes with the capability to create custom actions in case the action you are looking for is unavailable. This custom action can be re-used as a normal workflow action.

Happiest Minds as your Nintex Solution Expert

Happiest Minds Technologies offers rich experience in workflow development using Nintex and has proved it repeatedly in its existing projects. This enables Happiest Minds to provide solutions that are smart and robust in relatively less development time.

The Credits: Acknowledgement

This white paper highlights the challenges and limitations of SP workflows and benefits/features of the Nintex WF tool. The reference blogs used for the whitepaper are given below:

- http://habaneroconsulting.com/insights/sharepoint-workflow-and-limitations-with-the-standard-toolset.aspx
- http://habaneroconsulting.com/insights/evaluation-of-nintex-workflow-for-sharepoint
- http://blog.nonlinearcreations.com/2013/11/top-5-benefits-nintex-integration/
- http://www.slideshare.net/orbitone/share-point-2010-workflows-nintex

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