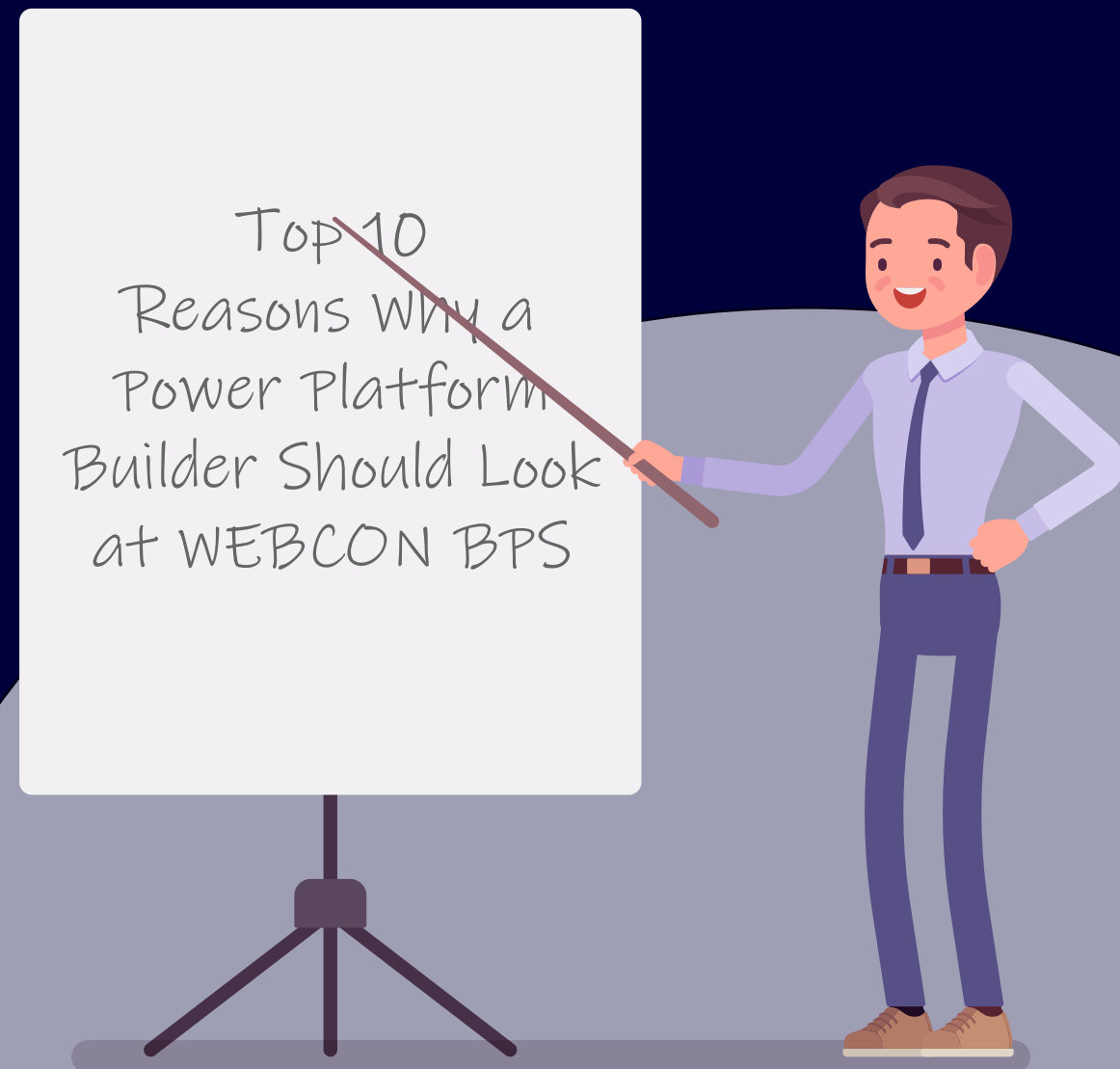WEBCON®

WORKFLOW, BUT BETTER.

TOP 10

REASONS WHY A **POWER PLATFORM** BUILDER SHOULD LOOK AT **WEBCON BPS**

We at WEBCON actually **like** the Microsoft Power Platform. It's a nice tool for editing data, automating activity, and connecting data/APIs.. It complements WEBCON BPS very nicely. But we get asked – a lot – how we compare to it.

We think that's like comparing apples (data-centric forms and automation tools) to oranges (business process management suites).

But if you're truly looking for oranges, or rather digital process management software, here's what you'll find when you examine what WEBCON offers.

Top 10
Reasons Why a
Power Platform
Builder Should Look
at WEBCON BPS

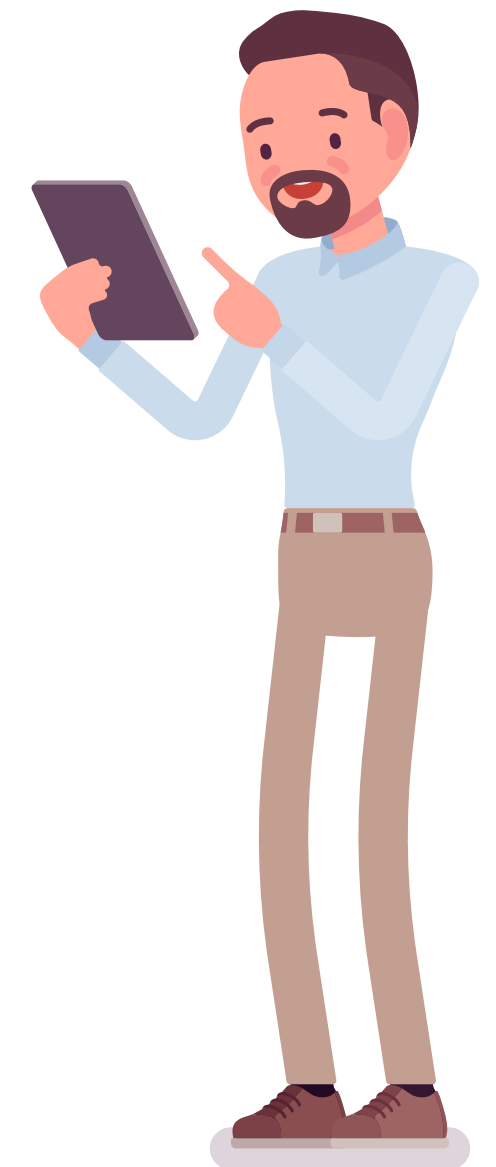# 1. Change is easy, immediate, nondestructive, and even nondisruptive.

Do stakeholders know exactly what they want in advance? Are business conditions stable enough that new needs won't emerge? Does scope creep never happen in your environment?

We didn't think so. Which is why WEBCON developed InstantChange™ technology. You can modify a workflow model, data schema, form layouts, connections, data sources – pretty much anything – and have the change take effect immediately upon deployment. Even on instances that are already in progress.

It allows you to deliver something quickly and change it based on user feedback until it's exactly what they want. Does any other methodology even work?

Try doing that with Power Automate. Some settings cannot be changed after they've been made. Other changes could disrupt the forms you're using (likely Power Apps) and possibly the data/apps you're connecting to. And if those things change, you won't know about it until something breaks.

Admittedly, for a short-running burst of automated activity, being able to change an application while it's being used might not seem so important. But when that becomes a medium- to long-running business process (e.g., employee lifecycle, contract management), it becomes a much bigger deal.

CONSISTENT EVERYWHERE

2. Your applications run exactly the same in our multitenant SaaS offering, in a dedicated Azure solution, or in your on-premises data center.

As much as we love the cloud, not everyone wants to do everything there. As much as we love multitenant software-as-a-service offerings, not everyone is comfortable letting their data mix with someone else's. So WEBCON BPS runs as a multitenant SaaS offering, on an on-premises server, or in an Azure (or other IaaS vendor) environment dedicated to you.

But wherever you use us, it's the same stuff. Same models. Same user experience. No gateways, relays, or half-ways. You can migrate work done in one place to another place and lose nothing. Current running state? We preserve it. All history? It'll still be there.

Mind you, WEBCON loves the cloud. But virtually every guru, pundit, and thought leader will – when pressed – admit that we're living in a hybrid world for the foreseeable future. It doesn't matter if the reasons why are political or technical; it is what it is. After a policy audit, you may be told to move an application into your on-premises data center, or at least a different cloud environment. WEBCON BPS applications will run everywhere, can be migrated anywhere, without losing history and without needing to be restarted.
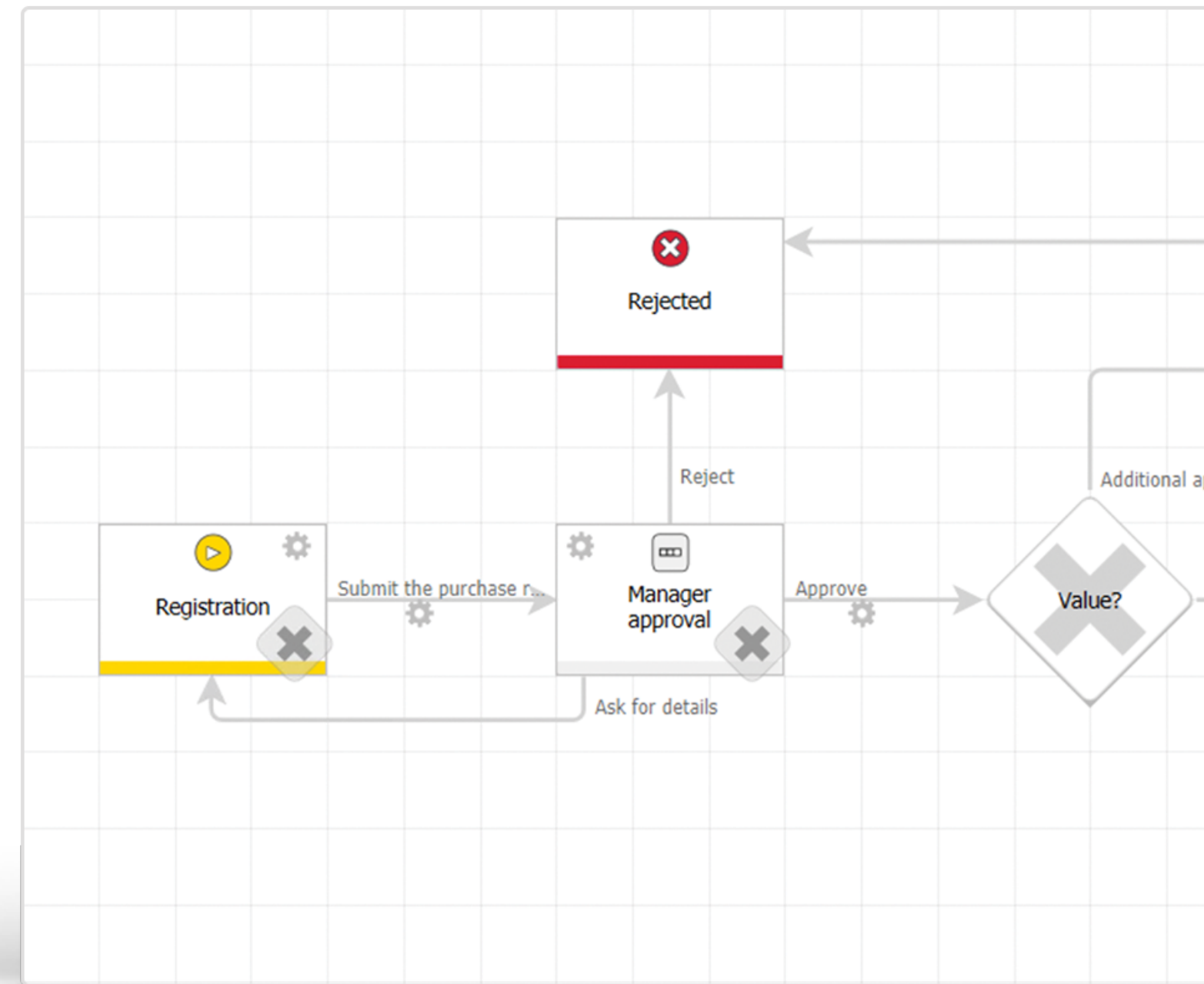
3. You can **understand** our models.

Power Automate diagrams (actually, most tools' diagrams) look like program flowcharts. They 're very busy with one icon/box/artifact for each activity taking place along the way.

It makes it very hard to use an automation diagram for ***communication*** purposes.. Designers have to jump over to Visio to draw out simplified diagrams for illustration purposes – and keep them manually in sync when things in-evitably need to change. Assuming they don't just give up trying to keep documentation current.

With WEBCON BPS, you create one diagram. It's easy to read. And it's smart enough that it can still tell the workflow engine what to do. It can also tell forms what to do, too – but more on that later.

This isn't just a matter of convenience. You build better applications when you can refine the requirements via conversation and negotiation. You can't do that without common reference points. Ours are easy to produce.

RESPONSIBILITY

4. We understand compliance, auditability, transparency, and responsibility.

Business processes are as much about understanding and documenting as they are about automating. A row in a table that claims an action took place isn't really enough. Especially if database maintenance means purging logs from time to time.

WEBCON BPS keeps a record of everything. Everything.

The way a form looked when it was first submitted vs. what it looks like now? Yes.

Who did what, when, and how? Yes.

We even preserve audit history when migrating/archiving.

How about how long a process has been running, along with how long it 's been stuck in a par ticular step – and who's responsible for it at the moment? We do that, too.

What about when you want to change a business rule, or a field, or a workflow path, or any other application element. Wouldn't it be handy to know where it's being used? Wouldn't it be more than merely handy if it became necessary to prove that something happened (or didn't happen) and there were fines or jobs riding on being able to do so? We do, too. And WEBCON BPS is built for it.

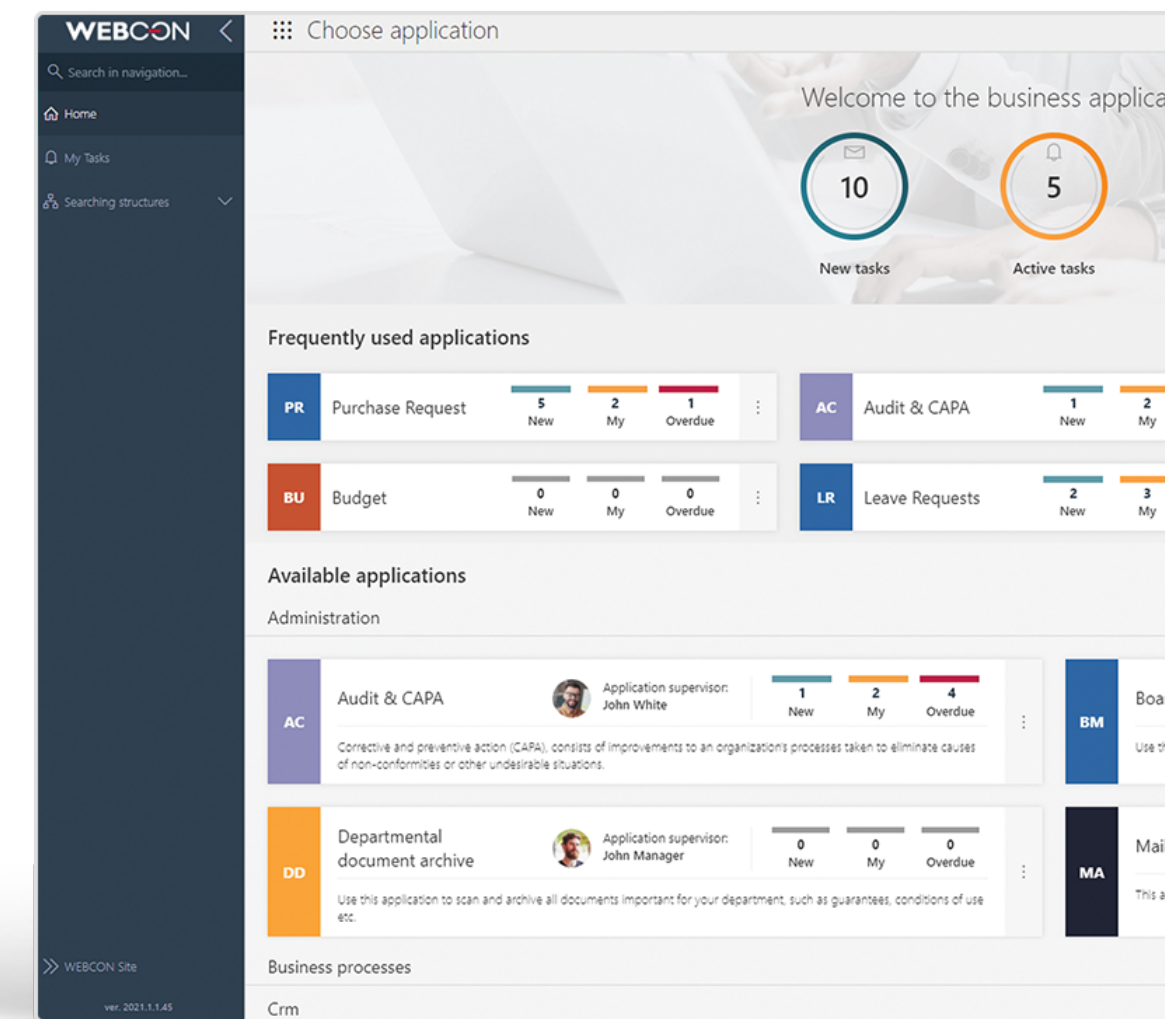## 5. A WEBCON application is one deliverable, not a bag of mixed ingredients.

There's been a decent amount of work done to get things to the point where you can deploy a Power Automate flow, a Power App, and perhaps some Dataverse entity definitions together using Azure DevOps.

That's good. But it's not enough. Those are still three independent development efforts, and the glue that ties them together is made up of your own sweat.

And again, making changes isn't fun. If you make a change in a Power App, you'll need to adjust any Flows you're using accordingly. Ditto any schema changes to Dataverse entities. And if you rely on Azure functions, LogicApps, or other components, well, that's out of scope.

An application built with WEBCON BPS contains the workflow, the forms, the data schema, the business rules, the data source mappings, the reports and presentation layer… **everything**. We've thought this stuff through.

When you deploy a WEBCON BPS application, it can contain just the updates, and they can be applied in a non-disruptive, non-destructive fashion. We can even warn you when a proposed change would be disruptive – and block it by default. You can even register distinct connection settings for development vs. test vs. production environments, and as you deploy, the changes will take effect gracefully.
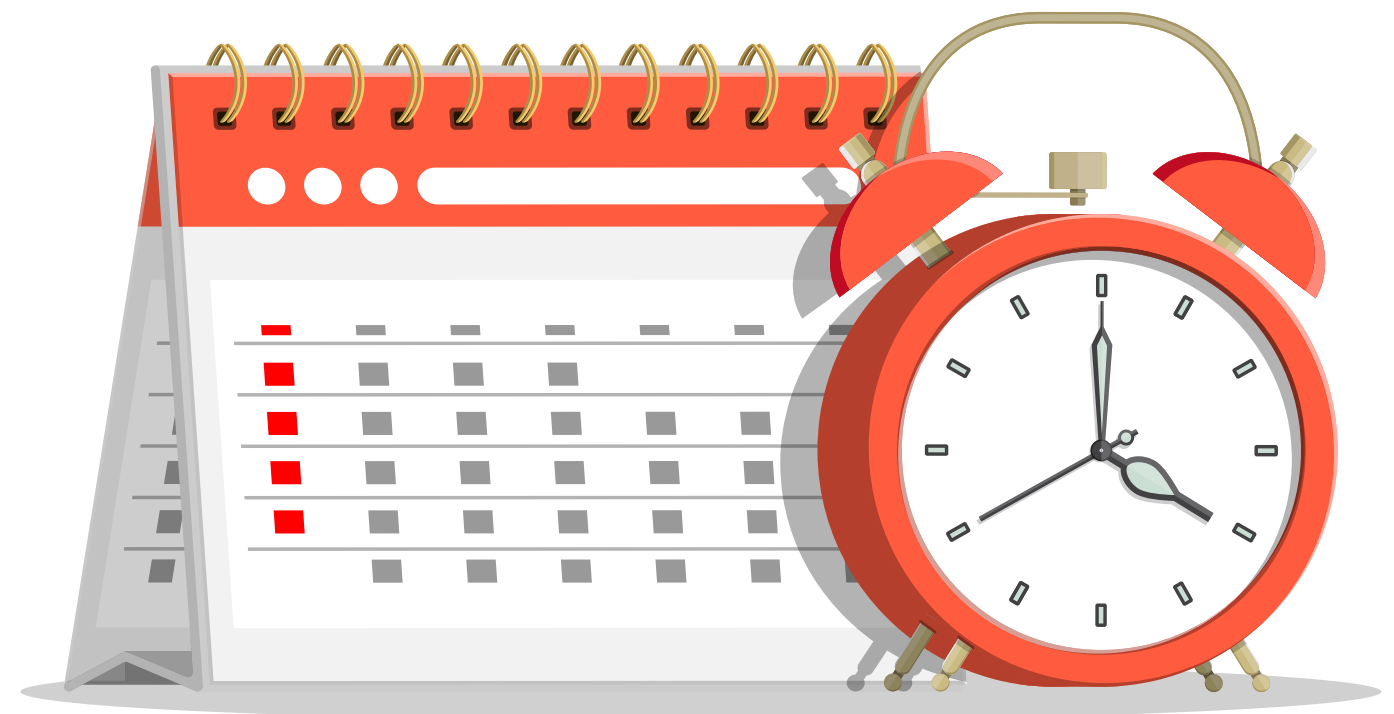
6. Long-running processes are not a problem.

30 days? 90 days? Those make sense in the world of Power Automate and Logic Apps.
They're queued instructions that are meant to automate data transfers, calculations, and transformations. If it takes too long, that's an exception decision that needs to be handled.

Which is fine for a burst of automated activity — but not a business process.

Business processes run for as long as they need to.
They can adapt to changing circumstances without being disrupted, let alone derailed.
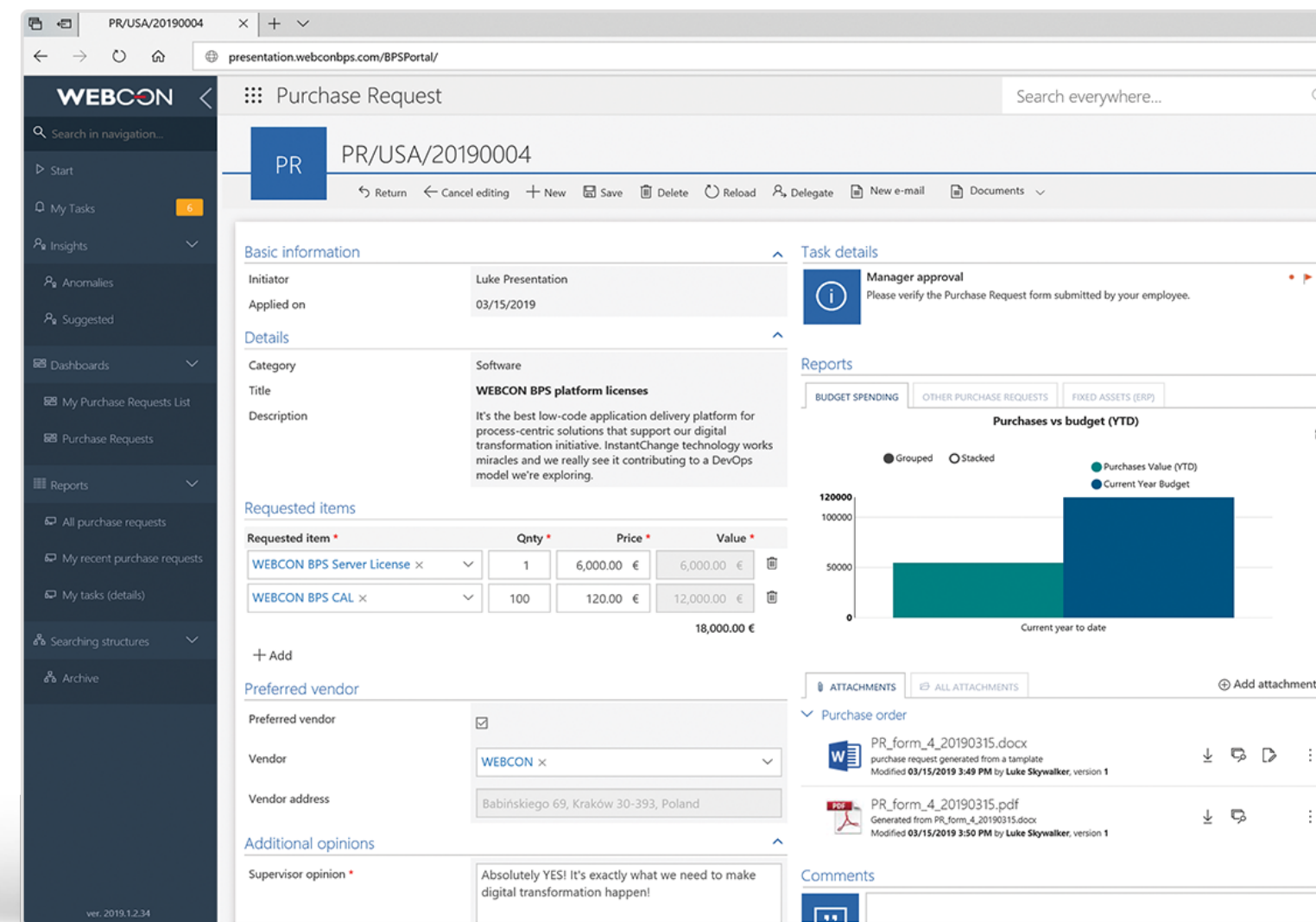And yes, WEBCON knows how to do this.

7. Our forms are model-driven —
but we're talking about the process model, too — not just the data schema.

Model-driven Power Apps are great, and a step in the right direction. The data model spawns and maintains a user interface tightly coupled to it. But if you want the form to look different depending on which step in a process you're currently in, well, you're going to add a lot of extra logic. You may opt to go back to a canvas-based app so you can just create one screen for each workflow step and add some formula logic to determine which screen to display.

And that's great — until you start making changes.

WEBCON BPS has the data model describe the form, but it's the workflow model that tells the form how to adapt itself as it runs. Check a checkbox to hide/show a field during a given step in a process. Instant, adaptive form. Make a change to the model and the form adapts. In real time.

WEBCON®

8. A workflow instance is a full-blown case file.

It's more than a list item or document set, but it's nevertheless usable within Teams or SharePoint sites as if it were one.

When you look at a form in WEBCON BPS, you're seeing master data, repeating detail rows, attached documents, attached email, an audit trail, membership, permissions, current status information, and links to reports/charts/data from other places. It's a package. You can export it, archive it, restore it, transfer it — and it'll keep all that info together.

It's like an item in a list that behaves like a mini site (or a super document set). It's amazingly useful and extremely compliant. And it's there by design. Any running workflow instance already has comments, multiple attachment types, and an audit trail before you define your first field.

REAL WORLD LOGIC

9. We can model real-world logic and respond to a lot more events than just "new" and "changed".

WEBCON BPS is not limited to linear, sequential flow with perhaps some looping and branching along the way. You indicate which steps make up a business process. You indicate how you transition from one step to another. If that means going backwards, sideways, or anything else, it's fine. It's a true state machine approach.

Power Apps and Power Automate can respond to UI element actions, web service calls, inserts to data, updates to data, and timer events. WEBCON can do all of that, too, but we can also trigger actions when entering/exiting a workflow step. Or deleting something. Or adding/changing an attachment. Or cancelling a workflow instance.

10. We know how to do much more interesting tasks than mere approvals.

What many people call an approval is really the second-simplest form of task (the simplest is "do this and indicate when you're done"). What do you do when you need more than a simple single-choice decision?

Seriously – oftentimes you don't just ask for a decision, you ask for input and action. It might involve supplying new information and a decision. Often you need to first provide information for someone to do what you've asked. There might be subtasks. There might be delegations or substitutions, and they might be permanent or just temporary (e.g., while a task worker is on leave).

Tasks are serious business, and are **not** to be taken lightly.

You could create a custom Power App for each task, but you'd soon find yourself juggling a lot of small one-off apps. You could create one Power App that adapts itself to where in a workflow an instance currently is, but that will involve a lot of screens and button formula logic to keep track of.

WEBCON BPS tasks are instructions on what to do to a form being routed around (and again, it's more than a form; it's a full-blown case file). As we mentioned earlier, the model tells the form how to look at each step, and the task assignment tells someone what they're supposed to do with that form at that point in time. There are fewer things to juggle, and plenty of options to choose from.

REASONABLE PRICING

11. Bonus reason: reasonable pricing and simple licensing.

As of mid-Februar y 2022, Microsoft 365 customers don't pay extra for Power Apps/Power Automate if and only if they're essentially using them to automate Microsoft 365 itself. To oversimplify, storing data anywhere else but lists (or a limited version of Dataverse) means you'll need a paid plan for these tools.

Figuring what that'll cost requires combing through multiple web pages. Simple per-user pricing looks like it could run around $35/user/month, but you do have the option to engage in careful application design to bring per-app and/or per-flow pricing into a range you can tolerate.

Or you could just use WEBCON BPS. It costs a lot less than that. No hidden costs, no unforseen surprises, and no licensing specialists necessary.

That said, we weren't kidding about liking the Power Platform, too.

We don't make comparisons like this to say one tool is better than another. Really. We make comparisons like this to explain when to use one vs. when to use the other. Sometimes you need a wrench (a.k.a. a spanner) and sometimes pliers are the right tool to use. Many jobs will require both.

Power Automate is fantastic for being able to react to a wide variety of events from a wide variety of applications and data sources. The Power Automate team built and regularly enhances near-seamless integrations across the Microsoft 365 and Dynamics spectrum. For automating many kinds of activities, it's a hard tool to beat.

But an activity is not the same thing as a full-blown business process. We can easily see a WEBCON business process being started by a Power Automate flow, then calling out to other flows at different steps in the process to perform specific actions. It's an easy win/win.

Similarly, Power Apps are great at creating user interfaces for editing data or calling out to web services. If an application is UI-forward, a canvas-based Power App is hard to beat. If an application needs to be data-forward, and you're willing to use the full (not stripped-down) Microsoft Dataverse, model- driven Power Apps are excellent. But when you need a *process*-forward application? That's WEBCON's focus, and our forte.

Visit webcon.com for more information, including links to documents, videos, and even a express version of our product you're welcome to deploy and use for as long as you like.

Let's talk!

About the author

Mike Fitzmaurice is the Chief Evangelist and VP – North America for WEBCON and is a recognised thought leader in workflow/business process automation, citizen development, and low-code/no-code solution platforms and strategies. He has three decades of product, consulting, evangelism, engineering, and IT management expertise. His 11 years at Microsoft included being the original technical product manager for SharePoint, helping launch and shepherd its first three releases; it was Mike who birthed, developed, and led developer evangelism on SharePoint, positioning it as a development platform. Other gigs included a decade at Nintex as Vice-President of Workflow Technology, and a year as Chief Technology Officer at the National Association of Broadcasters.