

TECHNOLOGY AUDIT

EdenSOA version 6.16

DATADIALOGS

BUTLER GROUP VIEW

ABSTRACT

EdenSOA from Datadialogs is a solution for creating process-driven services that can be used within a Service Oriented Architecture (SOA) or using a Web services access approach. The solution adopts a code free, drag-and-drop, and at the same time a GUI approach to building re-usable services that can be loosely coupled in order to design, develop, and build processes. As business processes continually change, the solution has been designed to incorporate a strong reuse capability, enabling updated and new processes to be built using pre-existing components. EdenSOA makes use of JAVA-based screen developer facilities that enable business users, with various levels of technical knowledge, to build and develop rich browser-based applications. As a company, Datadialogs takes a flexible approach to process development, recognising that it can add value to the service delivery model by providing development-outsourcing services. The solution is suitable for all types of organisation and its SOA-led approach makes the product business-process agnostic.

KEY FINDINGS

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|  Adopts a totally code-free approach to process development. |  JAVA-based developer facilities are used to deliver Rich Internet Applications (RIAs). |
|  Provides process design and build facilities as an outsourced service. |  Facilitates integration across DLLs, applications, XML documents, .NET DLLs and TCP/IP servers. |
|  Features a rule repository with good version control and reuse capabilities. |  Supported databases include: Oracle; Sybase; Microsoft SQL; and Informix. |
|  Chooses not to work with pre-defined industry templates. |  Business Activity Monitoring sits outside the scope of the EdenSOA product set. |

Key:  Product Strength  Product Weakness  Point of Information

LOOK AHEAD

With two planned releases scheduled for this year, new development will focus on improvements to the existing EdenSOA user interface, the addition of extra transaction management facilities, and extending the products Web Services functionality.

FUNCTIONALITY

Business Process Management (BPM) and SOA are seen as key business-enabling technologies for organisations across all sectors of industry. Their combined use enables businesses to extract more value from existing business systems and legacy processes, whilst at the same time providing the potential to improve operational efficiency, raise service levels, and reducing costs. While many leading BPM and SOA vendors appear to be involved in a race to incorporate an extended range of process management services, either organically, or through OEM relationships, there remains a continuing need for solutions that address the requirement for low Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) and the rapid development of critical functionality based on existing core business applications; in fact solutions that align themselves with the real build, development, and integration needs of the end-user community.

Product Analysis

A key functional component of the EdenSOA solution, as with any SOA-driven BPM offering that is worth its salt, is Enterprise Application Integration (EAI). Business processes developed using EdenSOA bring together a combination of existing services and processes and/or the addition of newly designed facilities. However, in Butler Group's opinion, the real strength of the solution comes from its inherent ability to forge controlled links and work with all required back-office data sources.

The Datadialogs EdenSOA approach to building and deploying services is twofold. In the first instance, services can be built to provide complete business processes or they can be called to participate within a business process. If EdenSOA is being used to provide a complete end-to-end business process or integrated set of business processes, then its facilities are provided as a loosely-integrated set of services using the Eden Service Bus. Where EdenSOA is used to create individual or general services with a common usage and availability model, then such facilities can be made available using a Web services access approach.

Fundamentally, the Eden Service Bus delivers facilities that are accessible from within a common framework and by separating the business logic of process services from their operational 'plumbing', and providing a code less environment, where business professionals can define the required business logic, EdenSOA provides organisations with an agile environment to design and develop business processes.

Across the board, EdenSOA allows the creation of services that can vary in their complexity, from the basic and simple, through to the most compound and complicated, all using a completely code less, drag-and-drop, user-interface approach. In this context, a simple process or service could involve accessing data from a specified table and returning a particular value, whereas a more complex process or service could for example, involve accessing customer data from all relevant databases and then returning the updated customer data. Butler Group considers that the code-free build and development capabilities of EdenSOA, alongside the products file access and legacy integration capabilities to be its most significant selling points, and indeed its largest practical advantages.

The use of pre-built models and templates that in other solutions can be used to help address corporate, industry, business, and regulatory specific issues, is not currently available from EdenSOA. Such an approach is quite commonplace within the process-centric BPM sector; it is used to speed up process development and to deliver a quick-start architecture that can then be adjusted to meet specific business needs. Its absence does not necessarily represent any sort of major product shortfall but today it is seen as unusual.

Indeed, in the case of many significant players in the BPM space, the maturity of their available pre-built models and templates only represent strengths in specific business areas, areas where the vendor has prior market experience. It could be argued that the fast-build capabilities within a pure-play BPM build and development environment can obviate the need for all but the most complete of template-driven approaches.

Also worthy of mention, given the extended functionality that is now commonly available in many competitor solutions, is the absence of BAM within the EdenSOA offering. Such facilities are often provided to monitor and measure process execution.

Architecturally, EdenSOA has adopted a three-layered service delivery approach involving The Eden Server, Eden Modeller/Orchestrator. The server layer consists of the Eden Service Bus and Rules Engine, all of which have been developed using C++. The Modelling layer provides a codeless environment in which services can be built, modelled, and tested. In addition, the combined Orchestration layer provides the ability to link service components together, as well as providing a graphical interface to data sources and pulling together the functional capability for process interactions to take place and for resulting process updates to be executed.

Product Operation

One of the key strengths of EdenSOA is provided by the product's ability to interact with core back-office systems, enabling it to work directly with most commonly available file structures. The solution has strong communication facilities that enable it to interoperate directly with software servers and their data sources, wherever they may reside within an organisation's system and network infrastructure. Using EdenSOA for the first time, it is important to identify key operational processes and the structure of supporting files. Once these processes have been defined and all connected resources – for example: databases, network resources, e-mail servers, Web services, etc. – have been identified, logged, and recorded – the starting point for process modeling is achieved.

Functionally, the Eden Server and Rules Engine are the main components of the Datadialogs solution. They are used to take responsibility for the creation of processes and services and for linking in and integrating existing applications, enabling such legacy applications to participate on equal terms as an integrated part of services that can be used within an SOA. The Eden Server and Rules Engine facilities are platform and database independent, and as such they are capable of providing support for multiple platforms and databases simultaneously. The number and range of servers in use is not physically constrained by the system; operational issues, for example the type and range of process services that an organisation chooses to deploy and the supporting infrastructure that these services require, determine it. Indeed, in this context, complementary services can be broken down into individual service components that are supported by individual servers. Each live server then links to connected databases that store the rules and processes that are used to provide the various simple-through-to-complex EdenSOA services.

EdenSOA Process Modeller/Orchestrator uses a completely code-free approach to developing new and updated process models, building out to the delivery of processes that are made up of loosely-integrated services/models. Each set of services/models is, in effect, made up of groups of process components. Process designers are aided in their work through the availability of a drag-and-drop User Interface (UI) that enables business users to build up tree-like structures of all components that make up each service/model and at the same time, the approach provides the ability to define all properties and functions of the underlying service components.

Typically, such service components may contain data in the form of numeric values, text values, XML documents, and data tables etc, whereas functions may be responsible for integrating with resources to obtain or transfer the data contained therein. Each function will normally have rules associated with it which control how or when a process action is to be implemented, with the EdenSOA Rules Engine managing all execution services. EdenSOA maintains a common repository of all business rules and processes, and these are fully maintained using an appropriate range of version control facilities that operate across the EdenSOA development, modelling, and live environments.

In operational use, the Eden Process Execution Engine analyses all rule sets, properties, and functions that exist within each set of components associated with a business process, and compiles a runtime execution network of individual process elements, which are executed as and when required. Based on the required actions, associated server functions load up information from the relevant databases during execution. This just in time, run-time approach of the Eden execution engine removes the need for rules to be defined for the middleware layer during the integration process. Also, using the system's Notification Engine as an integral part of the run-time processes that are supported by EdenSOA, the solution provides a range of reporting and alerting facilities that can deliver performance, threshold, and other reporting information directly to nominated personnel.

EdenSOA takes an interactive approach to the relationship between the user/developer and their operating environment. The solution also supports a prototype approach to process development, this allows continuous activity to take place up to the point where a particular model is authorised to be passed over into the live production environment. Once a model is passed into production, a copy of all the rules that have gone into defining the final model are captured and maintained in the control database.

EdenSOA provides an impressive range of version control features, with all versions of processes and rules being retained and stored in the database. Users can, therefore, roll back to previous versions as and when this becomes a requirement. The system's full reuse capabilities allow authorised process owners and developers to search for previous and latest versions of process models, download the rules associated with these and where appropriate, merge them with new rule sets that have been designed to build and develop new and updated processes.

Product Emphasis

EdenSOA is tasked with providing BPM-based build, modelling, and deployment services that are capable of operating across any process-engaged business environment. Using a combined SOA and BPM approach, the solution provides a range of business-driven services that are capable of discovering, organising, and bringing together data sets from a wide range of different information sources. Then, utilising the solution's code-free build, modelling, and delivery services, which are fully supported by the EdenSOA rules engine, the product enables business professionals to build and deliver services into the live environment whilst striving to minimise the impact on the organisation's IT resources.

DEPLOYMENT

Datadialogs has designed its EdenSOA solution to have an out-of-the-box look and feel; it does not require high levels of technical expertise in order to get the product up and running during the implementation and deployment phases.

Specific requirements that the end-user organisation can expect to be asked to provide include a reasonable knowledge of database management techniques, in order to attach the solution to the organisations database of choice. Once established and connectivity has been achieved, normal process build and model creation activities can be undertaken using the skills of the end-user organisation's own business analysts and process designers. Personnel should have a good understanding of the company's internal business and process requirements. This, Butler Group recognises as an ongoing activity, because once the first process models have been developed, there is likely to be a continuous need to re-define, modify, and update these processes and add new ones when business requirements change.

The nature of the EdenSOA solution and its operational focus towards the delivery of business processes for business users means that it can be deployed using a modular and business-driven approach. Average implementation and phase-one project deployment time-scales vary dependent upon the size and complexity of the processes that of an organisation chooses to run with. However, Datadialogs quotes 15 to 40 man-days as the average implementation timescale for sample processes, e.g. a quotation or order entry processes, with between three and ten of the days being taken up by data integration tasks.

In support of its product set, Datadialogs offers classroom and on-line training facilities. Classroom Based Training (CBT) is normally split into two sessions and includes one course of two and one of three days duration. In addition, CBT-based services can be supplemented with tailored, on-demand Webex sessions. The company is also able to provide ongoing technical support through its secure Web site facility.

The EdenSOA product runs on any Microsoft Intel platform, however, the business process creation and integration services are capable of operating across various platforms including: UNIX and the IBM iSeries. Databases that can be supported by the solution include: Microsoft SQL, Oracle, Informix, and Sybase. Functionally, the product can be used to build business applications by leveraging an organisation's existing legacy systems; EdenSOA can be used to integrate and facilitate information exchanges between applications; DLL's; .NET DLL's; XML objects; and TCP/IP servers.

Customers wishing to procure the EdenSOA solution can take one of two purchasing options. The first option available is to take on an owned-and-run-by approach by purchasing both product modules (Eden Server and Eden Modeller/Orchestrator) and then performing ongoing process design, modelling, and process delivery services in-house. Alternatively, clients may purchase the Eden Server with process design and modelling operations being outsourced to Datadialogs, thereby enabling users to leverage the experience of the Datadialogs team and approach, while opting for an outsourced consultancy approach to service delivery.

PRODUCT STRATEGY

The target market for the Datadialogs EdenSOA product set is said to be organisations with an annual turnover of UK£20 million and above, there is no restriction on industry or business verticals. However, given the nature of the solution and its ease-of-use credentials, Butler Group believes that the solution would have significant appeal to SMEs, for example, the manufacturing or utilities sectors, which also represents industry segments where the company has already undertaken a number of successful deployments.

The EdenSOA solution has been designed and developed entirely by Datadialogs and, as a result of this approach, the company currently maintains no technology partnerships for the development of the solution. Its route to market uses both direct and indirect partner sales channels, and current partners include: Oracle; Civica; IBM CSG; Softbrands; Microsoft; Dexton BV; and Differentia Consulting.

The costs associated with the EdenSOA solution are made up of software license costs and training and consulting support services for the creation and modelling of business processes during the initial project. The Eden Server, Eden Modeller/Orchestrator products are sold using a perpetual license model and their respective costs are UK£12,000 (Server), UK£32,000 (Modeller/Orchestrator), and Developer Licences are UK£2,000 per seat. Training costs are expected to come in at around UK£5,500 and consulting support is available at UK£850 per day. Annual support and maintenance is provided at 20% of the original license cost, and entitles customers to future product releases of the solution, with two new releases normally planned each year.

Deployed examples of EdenSOA so far demonstrate a focus on medium sized manufacturing and utilities companies. Ease of build and deployment from within EdenSOA, without the need for heavy IT involvement have proved key to the company's success in these particular verticals. The enterprise BPM sector is recognised as being very competitive with several solutions providers claiming ease-of-use within a code-free development environment as part of their sales approach. Therefore, Butler Group supports the company's own view that it needs to work on its long-term strategic vision as well as expand its existing sales and partner channels, in order for the solution to retain its current competitive positioning and to extend the business' profile.

COMPANY PROFILE

Originally founded more than 10 years ago, Datadialogs is a privately-held company with its head office located in Christchurch, Dorset, in the UK. The company started out as a developer of rules engine facilities that it supplied to the industry using an OEM approach. Datadialogs has a team of 14 staff. With a primary focus on the SOA and BPM spheres of operation, the company currently invests in excess of 50% of existing revenues in product development.

Meridian Corporation, a US organisation based in Chicago has a shareholding in Datadialogs. As part of its working relationship with Datadialogs, Meridian provides some implementation, deployment, and consulting services to its customers. The company is currently reliant on UK sales to reach its revenue targets with 85% of current sales being generated here and the other 15% coming from the rest of Europe.

As a privately-held company, Datadialogs does not make public its sales figures, but was prepared to state that it expects to turn a profit in the current trading year. The company currently has 63 customers using EdenSOA, reference customers include: Trend Communications; CDMS/JML (Littlewoods); Romec; Telent; Kiers; Southern Print (NewsQuest); Four Square (Mars); Bournemouth and Hampshire Water; and Comet.

SUMMARY

Datadialogs EdenSOA solution provides a strong, well-rounded approach to the build and delivery of BPM- and SOA-driven processes. The solution provides a unique looking approach to back-office and legacy systems integration and to the management, set up, and use that can be made of original data sources. Both the EdenSOA business rules services and its somewhat unusual screen designer approach to rapid application build and development also makes it stand out from the crowd.

Fundamentally, the BPM marketplace is densely populated with extremely competitive enterprise offerings that now often extend to the inclusion of complementary technologies, such as BAM, process analytics, and the extensive use of predefined industry and process templates, making it necessary for all players to remain as competitive as possible. Overall, Butler Group’s opinion of Datadialogs and its EdenSOA solution is that the company presents a good integration and services composer and that future initiatives to expand the company’s sales channel and the enhancement of its transaction management capabilities, will only strengthen its competitive positioning.

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