

Blueprint Ep 6 Transcript

Matt Espley

Hey, everybody, welcome to the Blueprint. I'm Matt Espley. I have with me, fellow CMA, Nate Weldon. And in case this is your first time at a Blueprint, what we do is we break down the key aspects of navigating digital transformation with ServiceNow. And as certified master architects, we help understand the the what, when, and why behind the strategies that drives value on the platform.

Matt Espley

And for today, we're talking about Workflow Data Fabric. And really.

Matt Espley

Workflow Data Fabric is a suite of tools. ServiceNow calls it their new data foundation within the platform that unifies data across the enterprise to provide real time, secure governance access to any source of data. That translates to me really, as you know, how do we securely act on data that we get from the system without moving it or copying it?

Matt Espley

How do we unlock faster resolution times or, automation intelligence on the platform, all within one single platform being ServiceNow? How do we make it the system of action, which all of this data that we have around the business and, Workflow Data Fabric is, is a suite of tools that ServiceNow has packaged up to help you accomplish connecting to data and using it for action in the system, whether it's, integration hub for API based integrations or RPA for legacy systems, stream connect, for event streaming from Kafka.

Matt Espley

Doc intelligence, external content connectors, zero copy connectors. And you know, even doing custom spoke generation for you know, really any, any other, application that has an API documented that we can use. So all of these tools together provide this Workflow Data Fabric that that ties all the data together and allows you to leverage it for, for your enterprise, using ServiceNow to take, action and, and drive continuous efficiency and value on the platform.

Matt Espley

So, with that, Nate, you want to kind of give your 2 cents on, you know, what is what is Workflow Data Fabric to you and sort of like what what problem is it trying to solve?

Nate Weldon

Yeah, absolutely. Thanks, Matt. So, I think whenever, whenever I'm asked what is Workflow Data Fabric, you know, my, my immediate answer is it is a suite of tools that allow you to bring in external bits of information or

data into your ServiceNow environment, either for, you know, dedicated storage in ServiceNow, temporary storage in ServiceNow, using like a remote table situation or not bringing the data at all or zero copy data.

Nate Weldon

Which which is a feature when you're connecting to a data lake like snowflake or Databricks. And I think Google's data lake system is now supported as well, if I'm not mistaken. But the key term is workflow data. Fabric is it is new, but it but it it also includes a suite of tools we are already familiar with in integration.

Nate Weldon

So depending on what license, what level of integration hub you had, you know, you you will also have that and more with Integration hub. You know, so I think some of the things around zero copy, are, are very compelling because, you know, you don't need to worry about your four terabyte database limit or, you know, any database limits by bringing in this additional data.

Nate Weldon

A lot of the use cases, I have seen something like zero copy is when I'm using a Agentic AI flows and trying to bring in additional data to help the agent make the decision. Right. And, you know, in previous sessions we've discussed, you know, data normalization, data governance and these this is why those things are important.

Nate Weldon

Because when you bring in large quantities of data or, you know, an agent to analyze, you want to make sure things look consistent, you want to make sure things are correct so that you don't inadvertently get a hallucination on what your response is going to be. And then, you know, you look at something like a data stream, which is, you know, primarily looking at events and large quantities of events, but, you know, you it's not just like your Splunk event management tool or some steady stream of windows events or Linux server events or anything.

Nate Weldon

These can be other events that are related to your business. So think about events that could be related to logistics or, you know, shipping delays or a use case I recently heard of was, you know, a shipping company who has a large quantity of on billable shipments. Well, they use data stream to bring in those, potential on billable shipments and use the workflow around it to actually say, okay, we're going to use the agent to decide whether or not this is a potentially unreliable shipment or an unbilled shipment.

Nate Weldon

Well, then you use workflow to get the human involved and tasks, one via that via an extended table from task to say, okay, you need to go do something with this human. So these are just a couple of, you know, real world examples for using Workflow Data Fabric, and it goes well beyond your typical it use cases.

Nate Weldon

You know, we think, you know, like, you know, I said logistics, financial transactions, you know, anything where you are looking at an or a evaluating a constant stream of information coming into your environment, you know, Workflow Data Fabric is what's going to enable that.

Matt Espley

Yeah. And I think it's really important. Because, you know, we're always talking about how do we automate, how do we make better decisions or have the platform make decisions for us so we can involve people less. And it really depends on your ability to have the data right. We always talk about having good data, but in some cases we just need more data too.

Matt Espley

And Workflow Data Fabric is trying to solve that problem. ServiceNow is trying to solve for this. I focus, you know, automation revolution. And you can't do that if you don't have all that enterprise data available to enable it to make decisions. Right?

Nate Weldon

Yeah, exactly. And and, you know, ServiceNow is not looking to become the system of record for all of these, for all of these other data points. You know, again, they want to be that system of action. So, you know, don't make someone go to five different places to get a single bit of work done. Allow them to do it all from ServiceNow.

Nate Weldon

And, you know, ServiceNow has reliable data. And if the data is reliable than the outputs, conversely, can also be reliable. So that trust factor of oh my God, you can't write from ServiceNow to SAP or right from ServiceNow to workday. Those can be mitigated because we're using the data from those systems to make these decisions about what we're going to write back.

Matt Espley

Yeah. How do you think the Workflow Data Fabric helps to kind of contextualize and govern the data that it's getting? You know, I think one of the concerns we would hear from clients is really about like, the security of all the data that they'd be pumping into service now. Yeah. How do we broach that topic with, you know, stakeholders across businesses.

Nate Weldon

Well I you know, I think the, you know, encryption at rest, encryption at transit, you know, everything everything is going over, you know, an SSL or a secure socket layer or some type of encrypted traffic. Right. We're never going to send anything over the wire that's unencrypted. That's just boilerplate standardized security at this point. Yeah. Most of your APIs are or, you know, you're calling an Https endpoint.

Nate Weldon

In addition to that, you know, now now let's look at, you know, just your standard platform security capabilities that you as encryption contexts so that, you know, if you are writing that data to a table in ServiceNow, you can at the field level say, who can read this field only HR people can read the Social Security number field.

Nate Weldon

Other than that we're going to mask it, but we're going to mask the first six letters for, you know, most of the audience, or characters. Excuse me. You know, so encryption and then, you know, access controls or ACLs, you know, all those standard capabilities apply on the data that you're going to be storing inside ServiceNow. As far as viewing the data, you know, like a zero copy data connector type of situation, you know, that that I need to get a little bit more, let's just say smart on but it's my understanding that only an admin or a person that's actually monitoring the transactions can view whatever data might be

Nate Weldon

coming in and getting sent to your sent to your ServiceNow instance. So as far as data privacy and, you know, data concerns outside of data sovereignty, you know, I think it's there the same answers you, you would give to any, any normal ServiceNow situation.

Matt Espley

Yeah. I think that's, you know, the, the innate features that are already in the platform, I think is a really, really strong argument for pulling all of this information in here. ServiceNow has, you know, robust security and it's configurable as well. Right. So we can meet the needs of of the data security for the business.

Nate Weldon

Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. And and you know they're you know you compare them to a company like us. And I can I know for a fact they spend exponentially more on their security programs and their security platforms. Then, then then we and probably 90% of their customers do.

Matt Espley

Yeah.

Matt Espley

So as a platform owner or an architect thinking, you know, how can I leverage workflow data, fabric? What would you say they should be considering or looking at sort of, you know, out of the gate, like the first step to just saying, like, it might what am I going to get out of Workflow Data Fabric? Where can I actually achieve some value?

Matt Espley

Sure. Small steps.

Nate Weldon

I think the first thing to consider is the quantity of data you need to bring in for each step of it to to make that workflow possible, whether or not it's an a tick workflow or, you know, some other type of workflow, like employee changes and things like that. You, you need to understand how much data you're going to be bringing in because, you know, if you're doing this for the purposes of a genetic workflows, not only do you not only need to consider how many now assists the solution you're designing is going to cost that you know the customer.

Nate Weldon

But now if you're bringing in external data now you have to be cognizant of the transaction fees that go along with Workflow Data Fabric, which which are kind of a carryover from Integration hub. You know, and and the thing to keep in mind there is, you know, if you, if you're using something that requires pagination, normally I'm used to setting, 100 record limit for each page.

Nate Weldon

You will get what as you're going through each page, you're making yet more calls. So if you you know, I haven't heard too many customers head up against their transaction limits. But if you're not careful, you absolutely can. So.

Nate Weldon

Make sure you're you're looking at your source data, but bringing in the things that are relevant for that specific flow or that specific use case, don't just go in and bring in a bunch of data, even if it's good data, if if there's no value of having it, making sure make sure you're filtering out or you know, limiting the amount of information you're bringing back, bring back what's important for that flow and nothing else.

Matt Espley

And I think you know, that consideration around how many calls you're making, how much data you're you're pulling in, I think is also, you know, you can frame that as sort of a benefit too, in terms of scaling or paying as you go. I think, you know, there's it's the model is is set, at least to my understanding for pricing that you can start smaller.

Matt Espley

Right. So you're really only paying for what you're using. So you can find those really important processes. Obviously make sure you follow the the considerations for the architecture and what you're really trying to accomplish. So you're not, sort of making too many calls or wasting money in in the process, but it's set up to, to allow you to kind of take small steps with your pricing model so that you're, you're it makes sense from a cost perspective, right?

Matt Espley

Because you never want to do anything. You never want to build something that's going to cost more than it. Then the benefit of the cost reduction that you're trying to achieve.

Nate Weldon

Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, much like if you're working with an OpenAI or anthropic, if those things are transaction based too. But the the nice part is, is they, they give you the opportunity to, to look as you're building things and see how much, how many transactions, each capability is going to cost. So you can budget your transactions and OpenAI and anthropic the, the exact same way you can budget your analysis as well as your, you know, your, your integration calls, or transactions.

Nate Weldon

Sorry. And so check those dashboards as you're building things because you don't want to be surprised. And sometimes you can sometimes if you didn't set your filter up in your rest in your integration hub, spoke, you

might, might inadvertently bring back a ton of stuff that you didn't even realize you were doing. So, you know, obviously make sure you're checking these dashboards that are already there and, you know, now assist already has dashboards.

Nate Weldon

There are transaction dashboards for Workflow Data Fabric and Integration Hub that can tell you how much you are consuming. And you can do that as part of design. Yeah. So much like we get to budget our dollars, we have to budget our tokens. Our transactions are now assists. It's becoming very financial in nature.

Matt Espley

Yeah. I think that's an important call out. Right. You have to I think as a platform owner, you have to look at you can't sort of give a business requirement to, to an architect and, and expect it to just, you know, a technical solution to roll out. And it's, you know, maybe it fits the purpose of what you're trying to accomplish, but you have to go into it with a consideration of what the the licensing cost is going to be for all of these transactions.

Matt Espley

So I, I think it's really important as you go through whether it's, you know, if you're doing it in-house with your own development team or you're working with a partner to make that, you know, put that process in the front of your, discovery and design where you're making sure that you you're making this scalable and cost efficient.

Matt Espley

Nothing that you nothing that you build with, you know, this licensing model should just sort of be assumed to be cost effective, right? It might be a really slick, integration and AI feature, but you have to you have to walk into the architecture process with that, you know, transaction cost and run.

Nate Weldon

Yeah, absolutely. You know, it's it's it has to be a key consideration of your design and, and it should, you know, I, you know, checklist manifesto. I know we're we we love our checklists here. That absolutely needs to be part of your checklist when you're designing, you know, workflow data, fabric based solutions and especially a genetic AI or, you know, generative AI solutions, these are all, you know, the these are all things that can inadvertently drive up the cost.

Matt Espley

Yeah. And it should be part of your prioritization. Right. As far as what you want to work on and what what efficiency gains or you know, what business problems are you trying to solve. And you're looking at workflow data, fabric integrations, AI features that cost benefit analysis should drive what what your priorities are.

Nate Weldon

Yeah, absolutely.

Matt Espley

I think, you know, focusing on the quick wins that you can actually validate the cost benefit is there would be really good first steps for integrating or implementing, you know, AI and Workflow Data Fabric features.

Nate Weldon

Yeah. What are these days I'm going to have anthropic or cloud or ChatGPT. Give me a better analogy than crawl, walk, run. But you know, the concept applies, you know, start slow and then slowly start to increment or, you know, add things to your workflows, add capabilities, add more tools, add add more logic so that you're getting better results.

Nate Weldon

But yeah, start slow. And you know, if you know anything related to a genetic, you know, again, start supervised slowly move to autonomous. But start with your less is less critical or less impactful things for your business.

Matt Espley

Yeah I think it's important I know I think we talked about this in the last one in the last podcast. But you know, having also the analytics and the baselining upfront, right? Otherwise you don't know where you ended up later. If you do your cost benefit analysis upfront and then kind of lose sight of how it's actually performing later on.

Matt Espley

So I think it's really important to make sure you are framing what, what performance indicators and analytics you're going to be looking at and baseline where you're at now with your process and what efficiency gains you may have made. So that later on down the road you can actually validate what's been working and maybe that'll help you drive either improvements or you know where to focus next.

Nate Weldon

Yeah. You know, you know, you always have to document that starting point. You know, where do we start. And then how are we how are we going to demonstrate and show that value as, as we continue to go, you know, through the roadmap.

Matt Espley

And it's the easiest thing to skip, right. When you when you kind of get into the weeds and you start building it, the easiest thing to forget is how are we going to actually baseline track it later?

Nate Weldon

Well, I mean, what's the first thing we used to say when we would start a process workshop? Just because that's the way it always was doesn't necessarily mean that's the way it's going to be, or that's because that's the way we always did it. You know, we tend to want to avoid that, those parts of the conversation. But you you need to know where you are coming from.

Matt Espley

Definitely.

Nate Weldon

What's that statement about history? Doomed to repeat it?

Matt Espley

Yeah. You don't want to just repeat the same problems, but with a more expensive model that has too much cost and bad data.

Nate Weldon

Well, yeah. And just the sheer breadth of capabilities that AI is bringing, you know?

Matt Espley

I think it's, you know, what ServiceNow is trying to do with Workflow Data Fabric or what they are doing, I think is huge, because the problem that I've continually kind of, assumed is going to happen is with all these AI features capabilities, it's only going to be as good as the data that we have. And yeah, sometimes I feel like a broken record when I say it, but it's true because we already see data issues causing problems all around the platform without, you know, without trying to drive action with AI, just making decisions on the platform and having good data.

Matt Espley

I think it's a common problem across so many customers, and it's only going to make it's only going to be more obvious, and it's only going to cause more problems to have bad data or not enough data. When we start talking about all the automation that we want to do with AI. So if we're not normalizing and contextualizing the data that we have, and we're not pulling in additional data, that's going to help us make better decisions with our AI agents, then we're really we're not driving any sort of innovation.

Matt Espley

We're just building cool stuff that ultimately is going to not perform to the level that meets expectations. And we're actually gaining the efficiencies, the cost cutting in the in the speed of, you know, action.

Nate Weldon

Yeah. Well, and then, you know, some of the other capabilities that, you know, WEF is going to bring is also integration governance. Yeah. Right. So, you know, we everything lately seems to start off with a couple with either, you know, just a single shared key or, you know, a shared key and then a security key. Well, are you just supposed to leave those and just let them be for years on end?

Nate Weldon

Or should you be swapping those keys out periodically? Just as part of good security practices, Workflow Data Fabric can help ensure those things are happening. Which reminds me we we probably need to go through and cycle some of our API keys. But, you know, yet another capability that Workflow Data Fabric is bringing to make sure, you know, APIs, you know, is that a CI?

Nate Weldon

It's that's maybe a great question for our item folks or our, you know, our CMDB folks, because it's something that needs to be managed. It's something that needs to be maintained. It's something that can break. So, you know it, you know, yet yet another component of Workflow Data Fabric. You know that, you know, if you should be chain, you should be registering your APIs against changes.

Nate Weldon

They're impacted.

Matt Espley

You. Yeah. What do you think is is sort of like the, the, the main takeaway that we would want customers or people listening to, to understand with Workflow Data Fabric in their, their data strategy,

Nate Weldon

Understand the type of data you're trying to bring in and leverage the best mechanism for it, right? So if you if you have large volumes of data, you know, a make sure you're on Raptor DB, you kind of have to be for some of the stuff to work. Understand the, the type of data you want to bring in and how much of it first and foremost, because that's, that's really what is the ultimate, you know, design consideration for your transaction volume and that aspect of it.

Nate Weldon

I understand where your data may go wrong. Right. If you're bringing in a bunch of customer data from ERP and you're going to plop that, drop that into one of your CSM tables, you know, back to data normalization, back to data governance, those types of things. I think that's the most important thing is governance.

Matt Espley

Yeah. And I think CMAs and, you know, just ServiceNow architects in general should be positioned to help accomplish that. Right? The, the the governance and the the design upfront in the considerations when choosing the right path to, you know, integrate and pull in data. CMAs or. Enterprise service now architects are should be able to help navigate that conversation with the customer if you need if you need help to understand what am I trying to pull in.

Matt Espley

Can we accomplish this through Workflow Data Fabric? You know, I would encourage, anybody looking to leverage that to reach out to, you know, their their ServiceNow architect or their partner architect. Yeah. And, and figure out go ahead.

Nate Weldon

And even if there's no API, that's what RPA is for right.

Matt Espley

There's a Workflow Data Fabric has a tool for everything it seems like. And it's just a matter of matching it up to what the situation is.

Nate Weldon

Yeah. And exactly it's all it's always situational and it's using the right tool for the job.

Matt Espley

Yeah.

Nate Weldon

You know you don't you don't want to use a sledgehammer on a finishing nail I believe is a carpentry term.

Matt Espley

It doesn't really matter what hammer I use. I usually end up making a dent in the wood.

Nate Weldon

I break, I bend the nail no matter what. So I need to get a nail gun. Well, what are we talking about? Next time?

Matt Espley

That is a good question. What are we talking about? Next time? I think.

Matt Espley

I don't know. I think we had an OCM slated for the next one, but I don't I don't know if we landed on that. We're going to have to go back to the drawing board and figure it out.

Nate Weldon

Okay. Awesome.

Matt Espley

So yeah, in in summary, Workflow Data Fabric is not some big new scary tool. It's a suite of tools, some of which people are already familiar with, and integration Hub, and some new ones to help bridge that gap between all of your external data in in your systems to drive action on the platform. ServiceNow doesn't want to be the system of record.

Matt Espley

They want to be the system of action. And I think that's really where, you know, for us that it's, you know, platform owners and consultants, developers, we we see how ServiceNow can really revolutionize the way that the business operates because we can take action within this within one system. Right. And Workflow Data Fabric is just enabling us with a multitude of tools to bring in all of this information so that we can take action on it and further take action with more intelligent automation.

Matt Espley

And, you know, agents and other AI tools that are going to make it more effective, cut costs and really continue to drive value, for the business. So with that, thank you for joining another episode of Blueprints.

Blueprint. And, like we said, next time, we'll be unpacking the what, when and why behind, you know, other strategies that drive platform value.

Matt Espley

And until then, take care and keep building. Thank you everybody.