TRANSFORMING BUSINESSES WITH RPA

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Robotic Process Automation (RPA) is becoming increasingly commonplace, and more and more businesses are turning to RPA for integration efforts to deliver business results. In the era of digital transformation, RPA is regarded by many business leaders as one of the more agile solutions to help organisations automate typically manual processes across business functions and integrate data across systems.

The competition is on for RPA providers to improve the scalability and user experience of their products. New capabilities are constantly being released to cater to the evolving and growing customer demands. Coupled with consequences of the recent COVID-19 pandemic and labour shortage faced in the market, business leaders are looking towards all of RPA's benefits as a quick-fix to automate tasks and optimise processes.

RPA works best in processes that require repetitive mundane work and where human intervention is not required. However, pre-maturely introducing automation into processes that require critical thinking and cognitive skills may also come with its risks.

Why RPA?

1. Time and cost of implementation

Robot licenses are generally inexpensive to purchase. As robots operate by mimicking how users interact with systems from a front-end interface, it keeps the cost of implementation manageable since no custom integration is required on the back-ends of existing systems. This also means that the time to market for robot implementation will be a lot faster compared to other digital solutions like Application Programming Interfaces (APIs).

2. Accuracy and reduced margin of error

When the robots are utilised to manage parts of the process, the efficiencies of these processes improve through the reduction of human error and ensures compliance when standardised frameworks and regulatory requirements are built into the automation process. Simultaneously, it improves productivity and reduces cost of operations when the man-hours required for these processes decrease. Employee fatigue is no longer a risk resulting from these processes; instead, employees will have more time to focus on high value and strategic core tasks.

3. Opening doors to other technologies

Robots interact with systems from the front-end interface. That means that RPA is a ready solution to integrate with legacy systems that organisations have previously invested in, whilst preparing the business for additional digital transformation initiatives. RPA is simply a first step in the digital transformation journey and opens the doors to integration with artificial intelligence (AI) and other cognitive automation technologies.

Strategic considerations

While RPA is a good starting point for many organisations, it may not value-add to the business if it is implemented arbitrarily without careful deliberation on a few key factors. Therefore, it is vital for business leaders to think about the following considerations before embarking on an RPA solution.

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1. Is there an overall digitalisation plan in place for the organisation?

In planning the stages of the automation roadmap, it is important to look at digital transformation from an organisation's standpoint. This identifies the technologies required either individually or collaboratively to fulfil the business needs in a manner that aligns with the overall business strategy. This also means getting all potential

> "The first rule of any technology used in a business is that automation applied to an efficient operation will magnify the efficiency. The second is that automation applied to an inefficient operation will magnify the inefficiency."
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> *- Bill Gates, Founder of Microsoft*

stakeholders onboard to build a coherent and integrated strategy that will be rolled out in organised successive steps. "New and shiny" technology implementations do not necessary equate to results. Lack of planning imposes a risk of having your automation solution become a silo function on its own rather than as an element of the overall plan, thereby impacting scalability in future digital endeavours.

2. Has an in-depth study of the organisation's processes been performed?

Not all processes are suitable for automation. For the suitable processes, not all are of equal importance to begin the automation journey with. Selection of the function to automate is a critical step as it will translate into the core benefits that the organisation will reap. Automating simple tasks limits the benefits only to individual users and processes rather than holistically transforming the process to optimise a business function. Automating complex tasks may appear to provide the best return on investments (ROI) but the complexity may return many possible scenarios that require dynamic decision making. Organisations will need to analyse their operating models and consult with the stakeholders or users to select the most appropriate function and begin designing the automation process in line with their overall strategy.

3. Post-implementation job redesign, governance and maintenance strategy

Once robots have been deployed, they will perform the same task repeatedly as long as nothing has changed. However, the hard truth is that in business, customer and employee expectations are always changing. Businesses need to continuously adapt; and adjustments to processes and systems will be expected to reflect the latest requirements. Without appropriate intervention and configuration updates to the robot, changes to system interfaces and process requirements will result in the robot being unable to recognise the changed interfaces or fulfil the new requirements. Jobs will also require redesign to ensure the right talents are placed at the right job.

Thus, organisations will need to ensure that they have the necessary strategy, talents and means to keep up with the maintenance of the robot even after deployment in order for the robot to continuously perform and deliver the intended outcomes.

In summary

RPA is a great way for organisations to get started in their digital transformation journey. For organisations who are new to digital solutions, there will be many opportunities to implement RPA in their processes as long as they perform an in-depth study on their operating model and develop a thorough and holistic digital transformation plan. If implemented and maintained well, RPA can prove to be a key asset to any organisation and a good lead-in for subsequent digital integrations and solutions.

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