

HR bots: the new super power for the workforce?

Introduction

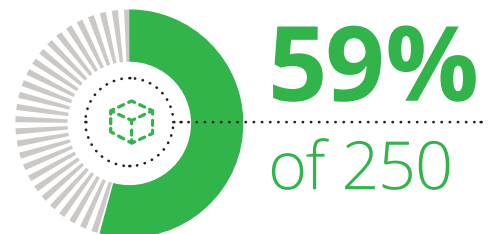
Superman has the power of flight, Spider-Man has agility, and Wonder Woman has strength. Every super hero seems to have a “special power.” For the workforce of the future, could that power be bots?

A new era has emerged. This “4th Industrial Revolution,” or “Business 4.0,” brings with it highly innovative, incredibly powerful technologies, many of which have the potential to change the way work is done. And organizations are starting to take notice. Advancements in emerging technologies, from Robotic Process Automation (RPA) and chatbots, to more sophisticated technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning, are opening up new business opportunities for organizations – in many cases, simply by streamlining processes and tasks previously performed manually by humans.

Considerable investment has been put into emerging technologies, demonstrating how fast moving and significant they are becoming. One study suggests that

investment in robotics will double by 2020, growing from \$91.5 billion in 2016 to more than \$188 billion.¹ We’re also seeing greater usage across business lines. Of the 250 “cognitively aware” organizations (early adopters) surveyed in the 2017 Deloitte State of Cognitive Survey, “59 percent are exploring mature cognitive technologies such as RPA.”²

While the HR function has shown strong interest in some of these technologies, with a number of early adopters, Deloitte’s 2017 Human Capital Trends report found that only 17 percent of global HR executives are ready to manage a workforce with people, robots, and AI working side by side.³ Embracing this new way of working may seem daunting. But the benefits can be significant.



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Adapting to “robotic” powers in the workplace

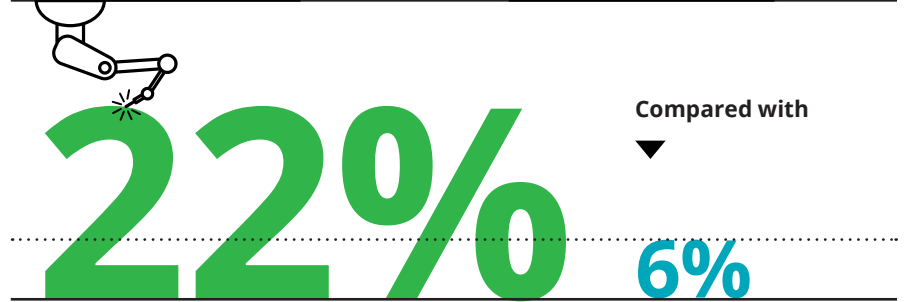
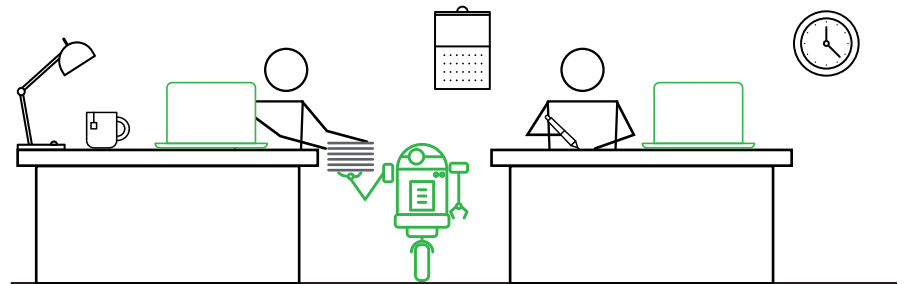
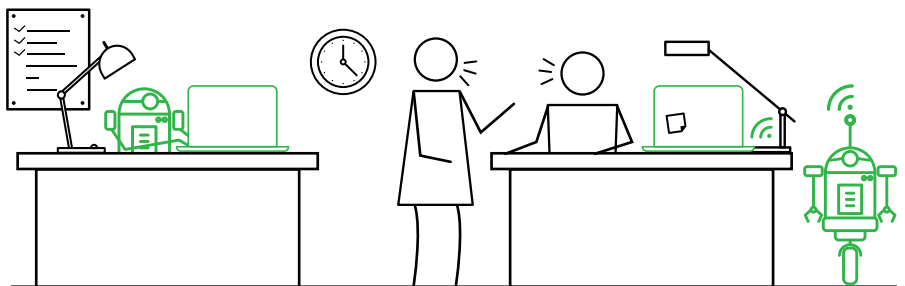


For HR organizations, RPA is a good first step.

This robotic technology automates manual, rules-based, and repetitive activities, and it can be implemented via a desktop or in a virtual environment. With RPA, the bots – or software – can gather and collate information, analyze and record data, communicate with users, even anticipate outcomes – interacting with applications just as humans would.

RPA gives HR organizations the capacity to do more with less. And it can help HR move toward an augmented workforce and build capabilities required to manage other “smart” technologies.

While adoption of RPA is growing, HR appears to be lagging behind other areas of the business. Our research found that 22 percent of the highest-performing organizations are currently implementing or have implemented RPA for use in HR, compared with just 6 percent of the lowest-performing organizations.⁴ It's time for HR to step up.



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Can RPA save the day?

RPA has the potential to transform HR if it's deployed strategically and managed with effective governance processes

When one thinks of the various services and tasks performed by HR today, a lot comes to mind. Deliverables and workflows like benefits enrollment, recruiting, onboarding, training, and payroll processes all require massive amounts of manual effort. By implementing RPA technology, the HR function can reduce some of, if not most, of the repetitive tasks that often consume time from full-time equivalents (FTEs), which can lead to meaningful savings. In fact, we found that almost half of Global Shared Services executives believe RPA will deliver 10% to 20% of savings to their respective businesses.⁵

RPA can be quick to implement, relatively low cost, and applied in a way that doesn't disrupt an organization's existing technology platform.⁶ By taking over manual, time-consuming tasks from humans, RPA can reduce human error, improve employee morale and decision making, and create efficiencies and process improvements, resulting in cost savings and increased productivity.

RPA can have a substantial impact on an HR organization. And yes, it can "save the day," freeing hours of HR employees' time and finding a way to rise above the grind to deliver a faster, better service to the business.

RPA benefits



Cost reduction

Operating costs can be significantly reduced with scalability



Capacity & scalability

Capacity can be rapidly increased without long build-up phase



Internal control

Can easily perform central compliance checks with operational audit trails



24/7 operations

Non-stop performance



Short payback period

RPA implementation ROI can be achieved within 6-18 months



Operational speed

Turn-around time and service speed can be improved



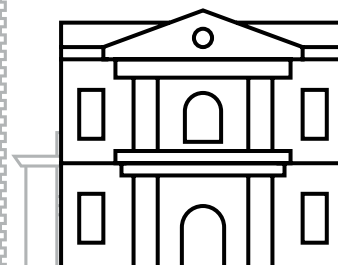
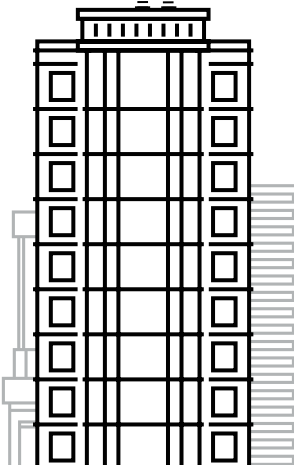
Refocuses highly skilled people

Supports effective use of human capital by shifting effort away from routine tasks



Quality

Increases quality by avoiding human errors and allowing humans to focus on exceptions



Activating RPA's full power

Leading organizations that recognize that the workforce is changing and are open to "new talent" – augmented by technologies – may well be ready to activate an RPA mission. We suggest first evaluating potential opportunities to increase automation in the context of a broader HR transformation journey. Depending on progress, we also recommend conducting an assessment to identify and prioritize opportunities for automation.

To complement the benefits of RPA, organizations may wish to utilize other smart technologies, such as self-service platforms like Deloitte's ConnectMe™, a digital workplace product that can help the workforce access what they need, when and where they need it. These solutions can create a better experience for employees on the front end, while RPA automates work on the back end. This dual approach will likely create efficiencies for the organization and better prepare it for the future of work.

Another win-win partnership

Much has been written about "bots taking over," resulting in massive workforce reductions. We don't think that will be the case. In fact, our recent Cognitive Survey found that, of all the potential benefits of cognitive technologies, reducing headcount came in at the bottom of the list. People want cognitive for things like business improvements, enhancing existing technologies/processes, helping humans make better decisions, and reducing tedious tasks—not to replace their human workforce.⁷

And the vast majority of HR executives surveyed in our 2017 Human Capital Trends report – 77 percent – expect to retrain or redeploy the human talent displaced by new forms of automation.⁸

Organizations can build capabilities to help employees prepare for new roles in the workplace of the future. This means countless employees—from full-time to contingent workers, will have the flexibility to focus on strategy, creativity and innovation—areas that

Bots and humans, together, may well become the new super heroes of the workplace.

will likely enhance employee satisfaction and add value to the organization. At the end of the day, both bots and humans – working hand in hand – can form a partnership that benefits employees and their employers. As the RPA market matures, the interest in other emerging technologies will grow. And the interplay of these technologies will lead to fundamental changes in how businesses operate, enhancing their capacity to deliver exceptional goods and services to customers.

Bots and humans, together, may well become the new super heroes of the workplace.

CASE STUDY

Deloitte helps a healthcare company "save the day" – developing an RPA solution to verify applicants' nursing licenses

The challenge

A healthcare company checked nursing applicant licenses twice during the interview process to verify their ability to practice in the assigned state. The company's recruiters were responsible for navigating various state verification websites, taking screenshots of applicants' licenses, and manually inputting data into the talent system.

The solution

Deloitte helped this company bring in an 'HR bot' – in the form of RPA – to drive efficiencies in the process of verifying nursing licenses.

The result

RPA made a significant impact, cutting costs, reducing the risk of errors, and freeing up time, allowing for a focus on higher value-additive activities.



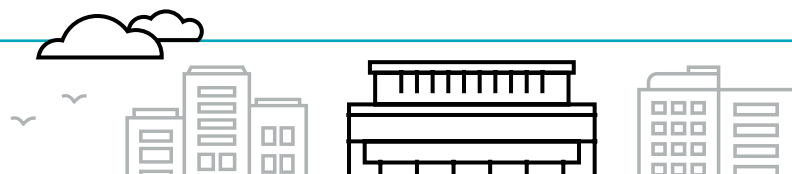
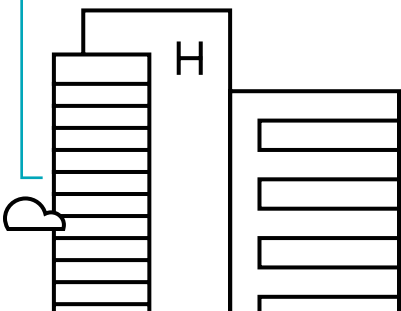
Automated 80% of the process



Reduced labor costs by 65%



Freed up 1 full-time equivalent worth of capacity



Endnotes

1. Worldwide Semiannual Commercial Robotics Guide, International Data Corporation, January 2017. https://www.idc.com/getdoc.jsp?containerId=IDC_P33201.
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6. Ibid.
7. 2017 Deloitte State of Cognitive Survey.
8. 2017 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends.

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