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Connectors

Robotic process automation

A quick-reference guide to how it plays out in global business services, shared services, and outsourcing

Service Delivery Transformation

Connectors

Real-time insights on hot topics in service delivery

Robotic process automation may sound like it's from the distant future, but for many organizations, it's already arrived. What does it really offer, and how should you be thinking about it?

For answers, start here.

Consider how labor-intensive repetitive tasks can be in any business, from the finance department to HR. Initiating a service request, filling out an invoice, keying in a transaction, responding to email queries, opening new jobs, reporting, you name it.

Today, thanks to big gains in performance and price, it's possible to rely heavily or completely on technology to replicate routine, predictable tasks—largely under the banner of “Robotic Process Automation,” or RPA.

For white-collar workers, the implications of this shift may be as profound as those that industrial automation brought to manufacturing. Today, robotic process automation is barely present in most organizations. But it's quickly becoming a likelihood that many forward-thinking service delivery leaders are planning for.

Here are some of the most important considerations as your organization takes its first steps toward robotic process automation.

1 Understand what RPA can and cannot do—and apply it accordingly

Automate the right stuff

There is a frenzy of interest in automation of all sorts these days. And there's no shortage of confusion on which new capabilities can be used to take on which tasks. Mention RPA to someone, and they're likely to ascribe to it the full range of advanced automation. In reality, RPA is often best used on "long tail" processes—repetitive, predictable but yet important. That can make it relatively easy to establish RPA capabilities, even on a small scale (as few as 5–10 robots), and have an impact on service delivery. Look for tasks that require manual intervention, are performed frequently, are rules-based, and eat up a significant amount of time.

Support human activities

Some knowledge workers performing more sophisticated tasks may still spend a significant portion of their time gathering, organizing and performing routing analysis on data before applying their insight and knowledge. Apply a robot to the mechanical aspects of their work and their productivity can likely increase dramatically. We have already seen this happening in investment advisory services, where some firms have mentioned seeing an improvement in productivity for their client-facing advisors, allowing them to reach more clients.

Start where it hurts

At this very moment, there are likely people all over your organization working on mundane, repetitive tasks that could be handled by a machine. Where is that level of effort taking place at the greatest scale, but for some reason never justified full blown replacement with an integrated custom or third-party app? Answer that question, and you may have identified your starting point for RPA. Just as important, look for opportunities to start applying RPA where the potential risks are low.

2 Seize the benefits

All the makings of greatness

In more mature industries such as automotive, banking, life sciences and healthcare, companies have many of the attributes that should be in place for RPA to be effective. Many have multiple legacy platforms that were never integrated from past acquisitions. They tend to have broad geographic diversity. Processes that were typically designed when the technology was fundamentally more limited than it is today. Manual connections to third-party partners, suppliers and customers are common. You get the picture. When legacy companies make these pent-up connections in the context of RPA, they often stand to achieve outsized benefits.

Younger companies got a head start

Meanwhile, many younger companies that had the benefit of being built on a foundation of more advanced technology tend to have far fewer people performing tasks prone to automation in the first place. Their processes, functions, and systems were generally designed in a manner that paved the way for built-in automation and smoother interoperability, which is why in some cases they have been able to reach millions of online users so quickly. For these companies, there is likely less value left to exploit.

When legacy companies are able to make pent-up connections in the context of RPA, they often stand to achieve outsized benefits.

3 Lead or be led

Good ideas get adopted no matter what

Think back to any number of significant developments in enterprise computing, from the current digital and mobile revolution back to the emergence of the PC. Once those capabilities gained momentum, companies literally could not and would not want to slow the rate of their adoption.

Create the infrastructure— or live with it

These companies were often left trying to make sense of the new infrastructure created in the wake of these developments, especially in terms of security, costs and maintenance. Many recognized the tidal wave heading their way and put protocols in place before things got too out of hand. We can likely expect the same when it comes to RPA. We are in the early adopter phase now—where the business world has not yet fully embraced RPA, or even understood it. But that time is coming soon. This is a key moment for guiding where and how RPA is adopted in your organization.

Robotic process automation may sound like science fiction, but those who are close to the technology know that it is already becoming a practical reality. Early adopters in many sectors are likely to gain a meaningful competitive advantage, not only in terms of cost and efficiency, but also as part of any strategy to create a more nimble, responsive business.

To transform your business, transform your service delivery model

Contacts

RPA can be an important part of any service delivery transformation. If you're looking to learn more or to plan your RPA journey, we should talk.

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