MOZAIC

ACCELERATING AUTOMATION

Set the perimeter, prove operational concepts and communicate via benefits

Mozaic Whitepaper for business process leaders

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Future Ready

Your rate of automation is too slow

Your internal stakeholders are frustrated by the slow pace of efficiency gains. And they are bewildered by your obsession with operational matters and consequent low focus on strategic issues such as digital transformation of your services and products.

Your customers are disappointed by your lack of efficiency. Interactions that they expect to "just happen" seem to involve manual process steps undertaken by customer-facing staff.

And these perceptions are stoked by palpable and high expectations from your industry that there is an automation revolution taking place right now. Robots are barricading the streets! RPA is at the zenith of its hype cycle.

The opportunity is vast: a fully E2E digital experience rather than "digital veneer"; 80% lower service centre costs; eliminating errors to boost service quality; and assured process adherence.

You are motivated to grab it with both hands – not leave it on the table.

The challenge

So you are on the case. But there are challenges. In a parallel universe, you'd have time to explain.

You'd say that it's not clear which of your processes you would want to automate more than you have already done. You might forget to mention that some processes are not ready to automate because they are inherently inefficient or tacit and undefined today. And automating inefficiency is obviously a bad idea.

Then there is the question of which tools to use. The automation tools market is dynamic and nascent. For example, pure-play RPA vendors vie for position with more-general vendors who have automation offshoots. Perhaps your recent proof of concept project did not open the flood gates to implementation but, rather, turned into a tactical cul-de-sac; not suitable for enterprise-wide roll-out.

And just when you thought you had understood RPA, the conversation got hijacked by the topic of artificial intelligence. AI is clearly a strong area for opportunity. But it might be a distraction which further delays decision-making when there is so much task-level automation still to do.

What are the options?

Secretly, you are wondering whether to rely on yesterday's tried-and-tested efficiency methods instead of automation. Can more labour arbitrage be squeezed out? It's tempting to take a few heads out and hope for the best because you know your service representatives are incredibly resilient in switching across systems.

In which case, you could declare a pyrrhic victory on the efficiency KPI and try to distract everyone from the improved compliance they had anticipated - but was not delivered.

Alternatively, industry white papers implore you to take a "strategic view" of automation. Does this mean that the initiative requires another year of analysis, reports and engagement with stakeholders whilst taking and enterprise-wide view and assessing strategically robust technologies? If so, it will make the pace of automation adoption even slower. In any case, the shelf life of a detailed automation strategy is about three months; so much of this effort will be wasted.

Getting automation up to speed

No doubt, in anticipation of stakeholders' eagerness on automation, you will have considered steps to bring your organisation back up to speed. Here are some actions you need to take right now.

Set the perimeter for automation assessment

Setting the perimeter means defining a set of processes for your first tranche of automation assessment. It explicitly does not mean defining the entire space in the enterprise that might benefit from automation. Doing that would place too much institutional drag on your initiative.

And there is no great science in the perimeter you choose. The intent is to be representative of the processes in the organisation so that learning and tools can be re-used. There is no guarantee that any perimeter will be fully representative. The key is to be small enough to be manageable and measurable and big enough to be materially meaningful. The strategic context of product, market and operations is for the guidance of the wise - not to manacle you to the moribund.

Once the perimeter is set, automation assessment will tell you whether a process can be automated and whether there is a compelling case. Assessment tools will take into account the level of structure in the data used, the use of rules over judgement and the levels of stability, standardisation and compliance.

Crucially, automation assessment will also state a logical order for implementation. Again, no complex analysis required but, rather, a judgement call based on risk and benefits. And one that will need to be reviewed by the governance; learning lessons and speeding up, slowing down, updating priorities - at each cadence step.

Automation assessment of a group of processes can be done in a matter of weeks. And you don't need to wait until every process inside the perimeter is assessed before piloting and implementing automation.

Crucially, automation assessment helps to accelerate tool selection. Avoid the temptation to indulge in a time-consuming sourcing exercise for the tool with the intent that it will solve everything. The market is not sufficiently mature for that. Instead, focus on the specific requirements and select the tools to match those directly.

Proof of concept projects that help accelerate automation implementation

The most important but commonly overlooked aspect of PoC definition is to state precisely the concept which the project is trying to prove.

If your PoC is trying to prove that the technology works, then you need to rethink. Unless you are experimenting with a wildly radical approach, the technology will work. Proving that technology – which no doubt will have previous deployment credentials – works in practice will not accelerate automation in your organisation.

Concepts which, if proven, will accelerate automation are more likely to show that, for example, the bot developed can be accepted into service. Or that the labour that used to be consumed for the process can be re-deployed. Or that the governance model works or that the skills needed could be made available.

These proof of concept projects are also the best way to accurately craft and source the automation capabilities you need; matched to your exact requirements and not skilling-up at volume in abstract.

Benefits tracking as an accelerator

Critics of automation point to projects that cite man-hours saved but which have not reduced costs of the operational unit.

So to avoid hold ups that prevent further roll-out, it's important that the implementation business case and plan include re-deployment and workload reallocation – to be undertaken once any risk of post-implementation roll-back is eliminated. This needs to be calculated in line with the way in which operational finances report.

So instead of policing the transformation business case, benefits tracking is a communication which promotes initiation of the next phase of processes to be automated.

Dodging the functionally-enshrined mega-programme paraphernalia

So you can accelerate your automation by rapidly setting the perimeter for automation assessment, proving operational concepts and communicating benefits as you go.

To conclude, there is one more point to bear in mind.

For automation generally, and RPA specifically, the opportunity is made attractive now because of recent and significant developments in the enabling technologies. Put simply, those advances mean that less effort is required to implement. And the work is done quickly without relying on profound, technical skills.

Indeed, much of what we are doing today was possible before – but with more money and deeper skills. Now RPA is economically attractive to roll out broadly across the enterprise. Crucially, it's also able to realise significant benefits quickly at small scale; automating the enterprise piece-by-piece.

That last point is important. Previously, business process transformation meant industrial-scale sourcing, mind-numbingly complex transformation programmes which took years - and monumental budgets to match. In turn, they have generated – over two decades – a whole host of functionally-enshrined paraphernalia. These were vital for a global ERP delivery, for example, but they are entirely unnecessary, wasteful and procrastinating in this contemporary field of automation. Identifying those deep-rooted, enterprise habits and quickly eradicating them or explicitly avoiding them will certainly help to accelerate your automation.

If you are interested in learning more about Mozaic, contact us at info@mozaic.net or find more information at http://mozaic.net/our-approach/automation-practice/