Robotic Process Automation

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NowWeComply / Whitepaper: **Robotic Process Automation**

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Much is being said about how Robotic Process Automation can transform businesses. According to Research and Markets¹, The global IT Robotic Automation Market is expected to reach $8.75 billion by 2024. 40% of respondents to a Deloitte survey expected to increase their use of RPA in the coming year.²

RPA is also proving to be a disruptive technology with the potential to make significant, double-digit cost savings over the use of humans.

It is of immense interest to what Computer Business Review called the ‘age-old problem for the C-suite to solve: how do you do better and do more with less’ – citing the four big benefits that enterprises should be able to draw:

- A more consistent experience than ever before with a standard level of output.
- Deeper insights into business / IT performance and customer experience.
- A reduction in the level of human error.
- More speedy execution than ever before, with potential to run some 24/7 operations.

This white paper looks at the different types of RPA tools, their potential impact on operations, enabling effects for business and high-level use cases.

We hope you find it useful in helping to assess the practical applications and potential benefits of automation within your organisation.

². [https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/finance/deloitte-uk-finance-robots-are-coming.pdf](https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/finance/deloitte-uk-finance-robots-are-coming.pdf)
Gartner’s market guide on RPA tools summarises robotic process automation tools as a way to cut costs, eliminate keying errors, speed up processes and link applications together.

Typically, the term RPA also embraces tasks that go beyond standard automation, to include those that can also sense and respond to other conditions or the surrounding environment. This is sometimes called machine-learning – a form of artificial intelligence (AI).

So, at its core RPA is a technological way to get important but mundane jobs done better, making operations run faster and far more efficiently. However, smart technology doesn’t just automate all the tedious stuff and unburden costly human resources. It also paves the way for new organisational thinking.

It’s important to acknowledge the business-enabling potential that intelligent RPA brings to the table. It offers the prospect of enabling ordinary people to really drive innovation, collaboration, agility and value.
Operational impacts

RPA represents a gear-change in operational efficiency because it delivers streamlined consistency. The vagaries of human behaviour are substituted with the metronomic certainty of the software robot.

The Institute of Robotic Process Automation\(^4\) describes the impact like this: “RPA provides dramatic improvements in accuracy and cycle time and increased productivity in transaction processing while it elevates the nature of work by removing people from dull, repetitive tasks.”

In this way, RPA can be transformational for organisations with a long-standing dependency on legacy systems or other operational constraints. Imagine an organisation reliant on a deeply entrenched, manual-based legacy system that is perceived as core to the business.

Often, migrating away from this would be seen as prohibitively costly, risky and disruptive. RPA offers a truly practical and achievable way to address these kind of problems that can hold business back.

RPA eliminates what’s been referred to as ‘swivel-chair integration’ – manually rekeying data out of one system into another. This in turn drastically reduces headcount costs in back office operations, enabling knowledge-workers to be redeployed onto activities that make a higher contribution to value-creation.

Estimates vary, but suggest that robots save between 20%-80% of the FTE cost of manual processing tasks. There can be positive consequences for employee engagement, satisfaction and retention attendant on this too.

Automating operational processes not only cuts cost, it also enables firms to run mission-critical process with complete accuracy and reliability. This doesn’t entirely eliminate people: robots are designed to escalate exceptions where intervention is needed.

Many RPA systems are intelligent too. Machine-learning algorithms mean that smart automated solutions continuously improve, even when literally left to their own devices. That also implies less effort is needed to make adjustments and updates when required, for instance if there is a change in requirements or regulations.

Enabling effects

RPA brings with it the prospect of greater management confidence and control. It represents a step-change in the ability to deliver on SLAs, and to meet governance and compliance criteria – even in complex, dynamic operations. It also signals a new era in the availability and transparency of analytical data, driven out of the ‘digital workforce’.

All of this has important benefits in terms of risk management, on one hand, and financial estimating and forecasting on the other. As such, it enables managers and leadership teams to function, be responsive and make decisions from a base of greater certainty.

Moreover, RPA has the effect of engendering a truly connected enterprise. With RPA, it’s perfectly feasible to create connected, end-to-end processes that unify operations across a business.

This need not entail investment in large-scale IT initiatives and adoption programmes. RPA tools are typically provided as Platform-as-a-Service solutions. This also means they are usually highly configurable to specific requirements.

By contrast, packaged solutions such as traditional BPM systems are seldom a perfect organisational fit, and require some degree of adaptation by the business.

This may also partially explain the accelerating growth in demand for RPA tools.

Organisations already utilising RPA tools have become more capable of running 24/7 operations, more able to deliver on SLAs, and are better equipped to interconnect with other digital systems both internally and externally.

This is another attraction of RPA tools: they are relatively easy to use and require almost no integration effort. They can sit on top of and across enterprise applications such as CRM, ERP, supply chain management, finance and HR systems.

This is usually achieved through the use of native database connectors and preferred API protocols - helping to drive efficiencies throughout the organisation. The use of an RPA also makes it simpler to achieve integration between in-house systems, web services and external databases – even partners and suppliers. Coupled with the ability to digitise real-world inputs, this means RPA can be a catalyst for creating an end-to-end digital eco-system for the business.

Ease-of-use also democratises the development of new business applications. The best RPA solutions reduce dependency on IT resources. Instead, they enable business and operational areas to build their own new processes and workflows, often from core RPA templates.

In this way, RPA can help foster a culture of innovation, encouraging and enabling business growth, for instance, by gaining entry into new markets or offshoring/outsourcing operations.
Intelligent Platforms

RPA tools broadly fall into two categories:

At one end, there are relatively simple software robots able to perform a task, or a sequence of steps to achieve a task. Typically these are repeatable tasks that need to be executed in volume and with accuracy – and are therefore of low-value and prone to human error through fatigue, absence or distraction.

Increasingly common are smarter tools that incorporate elements of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and cognitive computing. These tools perform automated tasks too, but they can also interpret inputs, activities and conditions and respond in different ways, according to parameters set by the business.
CBR Online captures it like this: “In effect, RPA with AI emulates a human operator, or acts as a tool to carry out repeatable processes or tasks.”

Machine-learning gives intelligent RPA tools the capability to drive highly complex, non-linear process applications. These kind of tools behave more like a human operator – but with the rigour, accuracy and speed that only automation can provide.

Intelligent tools are also better at interacting with other business systems and software agents. This is how a digital eco-system can be created. What happens as a task gets performed, is that the data around it is automatically fed into business analytics, management and governance systems.

Data can also be fed into external systems to help manage complex supply chains, for example, or to make regulatory submissions, or ensure compliance with client SLAs.

The smartest solutions also provide data reusability. Very simply this means that, where some robots simply complete tasks, more sophisticated ones capture and store all the related data – so that organisations can access and use it for any purpose, indefinitely.

This capability to reuse and share data assets, documents, process objects and audit-trails in other business applications – and between other automated processes – builds an organisational knowledge-base that can be used to help create business value.

Another driver of demand growth for RPA tools is the Platform-as-a-Service delivery model. This offers user organisations dual benefits. The first is that it gives business users access to powerful tools through simple, well-designed web-interfaces. These encourage more agile working practices by making it faster and easier to prototype and create new process applications.

The second is that it offers an enterprise-class trust architecture for everyone using the service. That means the highest levels of security, data integrity and resilience over multi-tenant distributed architectures. Plus, of course, the performance capability to continuously process millions of mission-critical instructions, with high availability and scalability on-demand.

Practical Application

There are very many ways that RPA can be used in organisations. Here are a few of the most prominent general use cases across key areas such as operations, finance, HR, and IT.

**Cost Management**

**Reduced Deployment Costs** – RPA applications are typically quick and easy to configure because the tools are designed for non-technical users. That means lower cost of implementation and faster speed-to-market.

**Lower Operating Costs** – Automated back-office processes are more streamlined and efficient, and can be run 24x7 at no incremental cost. Improved accuracy further helps eliminate workflow delays. There is also the potential to reduce headcount, as well as costs associated with staff turnover and training in areas of low value-add to the business.

**More Accurate Forecasting** – Operating costs are more predictable because RPA processes are more reliable. Intelligent RPA tools also generate detailed management information enabling improved analysis and planning.

**Resource Management**

**Resource Utilisation** – RPA delivers the capability to do more with less. So, aside from potential head-count reduction, there is a real prospect of redeploying staff to more profitable activities.

**Reduced IT Dependency** – RPA takes away the reliance on IT to develop applications that address basic operational challenges. This frees up key technical resources to focus on delivering change projects and business transformation.

**Finance and Risk**

**Risk Management** – RPA can have a significant effect on how organisations meet applicable governance, risk and compliance (GRC) standards. Their consistency and reliability can virtually eliminate the risk of non-compliance with Health & Safety or employment regulations, client SLAs or any other operational framework. This in turn reduces your overall risk profile and minimises exposure to financial penalties.

**Advanced Analytics** – According to IRPA, ‘advanced analytics is an essential element in achieving regulatory compliance, cost effective growth and optimized operations.’ Process automation makes gathering and organizing data easier, which enables improved monitoring, planning and reporting. Some RPA solutions also provide smart audit and reporting tools that greatly increase transparency and so further minimise risk.

**No Capital Expenditure** – Intelligent platform architectures allow organisations to access all the benefits of RPA with no capital outlay. It also solves the build-or-buy dilemma that often confronts businesses with relatively large IT functions. Above all, it delivers enterprise-class service and assurance in terms of availability, performance, resilience, security and data integrity.

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**HR and Workforce**

**Onboarding Compliance and Competency** – RPA is the surest way to navigate the complexity of conforming to all legal, regulatory and other required standards such as right to work, health and safety, training and more. This de-risks onboarding of both permanent and contingent staff, but also ensures ongoing compliance throughout employee lifecycles.

**Distributed Workforce Management** – Intelligent automation makes it easier to manage a high-churn, transient workforce over multiple remote locations. However complex your operational processes might be, intelligent RPA tools can deliver data-driven behaviour that ensures optimal performance.

**Employee Engagement** – RPA tools can promote employee satisfaction by replacing routine tasks with smart, accessible self-service tools. This also reduces training costs, encourages collaboration and promotes retention – driving productivity across the organisation.

**Operational Performance**

**Consistency and Integrity** – Centralised control of processes, data and documentation de-risks any task, even those carried out by non-specialists. This means you can confidently manage remote distributed operations in an end-to-end connected organisation – and are more able to guarantee and demonstrate service quality to customers.

**Performance and Productivity** – RPA eliminates operational errors, workflow delays and repetitive manual tasks – with data-driven behaviour driving improved efficiency and reliability. The consistent underlying technology platform also helps to unify and streamline operations, because it is capable of addressing multiple challenges across all business areas.

**Legacy Integration** – RPA tools have the capability to integrate legacy systems together with existing business systems, new processes and external databases. This can resolve long-standing issues around outdated systems, practices and training. Often it will digitise rather than replace a deeply embedded process, and so make it part of an emerging digital eco-system.

**Controlled delivery of complex projects** – Key decisions can be taken promptly and effectively through process transparency and data-driven analytics.

**Innovation and Growth**

**Business Agility** – RPA tools are inherently flexible and typically provide on-demand scalability. This facilitates a more rapid response to dynamic business situations or sudden changes in demand. It allows firms to adapt more quickly to challenges, threats and opportunities, by creating new processes to cope with change whenever required.

**Innovative Technology** – RPA is a disruptive technology able to change the way people think about, build, connect and run their business. Machine-learning and data-driven decision-making drives greater operational process efficiency across the business.

**Supporting Business Growth** – RPA is also an enabling technology, capable of powering expansion through rapid innovation of new processes without IT. This can create a reliable platform for new propositions that help gain entry into new markets or to offshore operations in new territories.
About NowWeComply

NowWeComply is a leading provider of intelligent RPA solutions with over a decade of experience in developing and delivering high-quality, cloud-based, enterprise applications.

Our ethos is about enabling our customers to win by using the very best technology to deliver competitive advantage.

NowWeComply RPA is a unique, intelligent technology that comfortably deals with complex, non-linear applications. It enables you to rapidly create applications that cross people, systems, data and operational boundaries.

NowWeComply can automate any process to support growth, enable innovation and cut cost across your organisation. Its unique, object-based approach enables users to design, build and implement ‘run-time’ business applications – without the constraints of IT infrastructure, environments or resources.

By delivering unique RPA technology solutions, we enable you to free your people to focus on the things that create 90% of your value and difference, that need the human touch, that build your brand and reputation.
Taking the next step

As Gartner and others have identified, RPA adoption is growing exponentially. With many organisations already running pilots or POC exercises, there are signs that the early-adopters will gain competitive advantage and the gap will be hard to close.

One initial step could be to start by identifying which business areas or processes could benefit from introducing RPA – and go from there. Deloitte published a simple 5-step plan with a useful infographic in their RPA guide for business leaders.7

The key points were:

1. Assess for automation opportunities
2. Build your business case
3. Determine the optimal operating model
4. Identify your automation partner(s)
5. Plan the automation roadmap

NowWeComply is ideally placed to help guide you through the discovery phase. If you’d like to learn more about RPA in the context of your business, please contact us now.

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