

Robotic Process Automation (RPA) can feel like it is purely the business of the technologists and process wizards that deploy it but the People function is key to recognising its long-term benefits.

## An overview of the key role that the People function can play in successful automation within an organisation.

### Introduction

**"Automation is good, so long as you know exactly where to put the machine"**

Organisations of all shapes are on an automation journey. Whether it is managing internal IT or communicating with customers, organisations have identified opportunities to automate activities that were once done by humans. The benefits of doing so are well established:

- Greater accuracy in performing tasks
- Cost savings
- Greater job satisfaction through the reduction of menial tasks
- The ability to free up employees for more valuable work

However, due to the profound impact automation can have on resourcing, both in terms of the volume required and skills needed, some organisations can struggle to move from a pilot to full scale implementation. In these scenarios the people function is critical to any automation project to help manage the organisational change required.

### The Challenges

Before we look at some of the ways in which the People function can play an active role in the automation cycle it is worth considering some of the key challenges faced by organisations:

**Scaling** – whilst undertaking automation pilots is relatively easy to do in isolation, moving it to full scale implementation across the function or organisation can be challenging both in terms of the operational and financial impact.

**Organisational culture** – automation is often not well understood within an organisation and requires a culture that is adaptive to change. Without this there will be scepticism about the benefits and poor adoption.

**Capability** – automating processes will ultimately change the nature of the work people do. For some this may mean their entire job is automated and for others only certain aspects. They may also be required to manage the bots now doing their job. The result of this is that certain functions will need to be scaled back and other scaled up. This will require retraining and recruitment of different capabilities.



### Conclusion

All functions within a business are constantly under pressure to demonstrate the value they are adding and how they are contributing to its growth. The People function is incredibly well placed to enable the development of the organisation as new technologies become available and allow it to operate in a more streamlined manner. To do so People leaders just need to look at the broader impacts of automation projects and how their function can help to manage these.

### The role of People

Whilst there are a number of aspects to the successful implementation of RPA, one that is often not well considered is that of the People function. RPA is generally viewed as a joint effort between the Technology function and the business process owner that is looking to automate the process.

The People function, engaged early, can however play a key role in the following ways:

**Building the business case** – central to this is demonstrating the reduction or redistribution of FTEs through the automation of a process. This is ultimately how savings will be generated and the People function is best placed to provide guidance and information with regards to projecting this.

**Training** – where automation will result in employees having to retrain or undertake additional training to manage the automated process, the People function can manage this by understanding requirements across the organisation and coordinating retraining to achieve economies of scale.

**Change management** – the biggest success factor for managing change is bringing the organisation's people on the journey. To do this requires a combination of clear messaging, coaching, and empathy – it is vital therefore to have a centre of excellence that can help deliver this and it is appropriate that this sits within the People function.

**Workforce planning** – any successful automation project will have a major impact on how an organisation's human resources are distributed and planning for this is key to ensuring that a viable pilot moves to full scale implementation. The People function can be a key partner in helping to plan for this change at an organisational level that will minimise disruption and redistribute resources effectively.

### Things to consider

Given the scope to enable automation, the next question becomes how forward-thinking People leaders start to help their organisations capitalise on the opportunities.

The first step is to understand where your organisation is on its automation journey.

There are then a number of approaches worth considering:

- Creating a playbook for how to manage the human aspects of automation
- Building a People Function centre of excellence either independently or within an existing automation hub
- Assessing the People function as an area ripe for automation
- Developing the capability of the People function to deliver training, workforce planning and partnering with technology projects

