

## How RPA aids in E2E Business Process Management

A powerful tool, a game-changing technology. Robotics Process Automation (RPA) has been a buzz word for years now. By definition, it's a software robot that does what a user tells it to do – autonomously performing activities the same way a human user would on a machine. It is frequently used for manual, predictable and repetitive tasks to allow a more productive use of the process owner's time. Its adaptation has allowed companies to gain significant improvements in their operational metrics such as increased speed, quality, and functionality.

Robots execute work by mimicking the way a human process owner would do the task. They are programmed according to a set of streamlined and rules-based business process logic, which is why, prior to implementation, it is important that business rules are well-defined. If business processes are poorly managed and undocumented, it will result to gaps and inefficiencies which will pose as roadblocks from the onset of a company's RPA journey.

The reality is that many processes are broken. This burdens process owners since they have to do manual, unequal and often redundant workarounds to accomplish the same purpose or amount of work. It also leads to inefficiencies in tasks that are carried out, and the lack of ability to provide the required output in a consistent fashion. Truth be told, whenever these challenges present themselves, the usual road that many organizations take is to add new resources in the process like man hours -- an approach that directly impacts the balance sheet, and indirectly, kills employee morale and productivity.

One of the many factors contributing to broken processes is the level of process complexity and volume of unstructured data which process owners have to work with. This includes the large number of interactions among process steps, and the variety and inconsistency of inputs handed off from one process step to another. Working with voluminous data and complex processes is also made even more challenging by the absence of a detailed and updated process documentation that also leads to confusion and ambiguity on how a process is supposed to be done.

Far from the popular concept, an RPA Center of Excellence (CoE), which centralizes governance and best practices for RPA implementation, does more than just developing, deploying and monitoring robots; it actually operates on an end-to-end business process model. It constructs a streamlined and harmonized process where robots and humans can work together – effectively aligning people, process and technology. Continuous process improvement is among its core philosophies and is seated at the center of every automation initiative for optimum value.

As a standard, deep process analysis and process standardization are rolled out by the RPA CoE before the actual robot development. Process standardization essentially is the establishment of rules that dictate how people should complete a sequence of tasks. To do this, business rules are sometimes re-defined and data are re-structured so that they can be tested in different scenarios. An effective process standardization means that there is one precise approach to complete a task defined in terms of a clear and measurable end result -- a unified way of doing a procedure, reducing process variations that normally lead to inconsistency in the output.

Embedding RPA in the operations challenges business units to re-evaluate, document and update their processes because a detailed process design is a prerequisite of robot development. In practice, this is done by an RPA Business Analyst who also tracks process performance, identifies major gaps and provides solutions. Upon deployment, a comprehensive documentation of the re-engineered process is introduced showing how robots can work side by side with their human counterparts. Process documentation is an established way to sustain the value created in every process step over time.

An RPA CoE simplifies processes. Having a robot in production do transactional procedures eliminates some layers of an end-to-end process. Often, multiple process checks and other steps are rooted out in some parts of the map. This reduces non-value adding activities that may cause potential errors. Using less time and fewer manual intervention, the goal of process simplification is to make work easier to understand and reduce process bottlenecks. This allows human workers to make more efficient use of their time and focus more on value adding activities.

RPA is parallel to process excellence. The collaboration of developers and process technicians give life to an RPA CoE's mission of building smart robots and optimizing processes. As powerful as it is, RPA alone is not a solution to enhance productivity. It will fall out of alignment if implemented without good business process management. Subsequently, this will cause inefficiency, contrary to its promise. The best cases for RPA implementation are processes that are mature and stable. When RPA is merged with effective business practices, immediate positive impacts are realized which include the company's overall employee experience and increased economic value.

Clearly, to realize the full potential and value of RPA, companies will need to re-evaluate and re-think their process optimization initiatives and focus more on streamlining processes-- the first step all businesses must take in order to keep up with the fast paced evolution towards digital transformation.