

Gaining traction with automation

Automation continues to gain traction across industry and vertical. According to the Deloitte Global RPA Survey, the benefits of robot process automation (RPA) are significant with payback at less than 12 months alongside improved compliance (92%), improved quality and accuracy (90%), and cost reduction (59%).



Mandla Mbonambi, CEO of Africonology

Automation is increasingly being adopted, or considered for adoption, by most industries and disciplines thanks to these tangible business benefits.

According to Mandla Mbonambi, CEO of Africonology, it is time to put frameworks in place that make way for automation and digital transformation and to ensure that every aspect is tested for relevance and deliverable.

"Automation is improving lives in a myriad of ways," he adds, "It ensures that activities within a process are performed consistently to deliver high-quality results and ensure a high standard of product delivery, and it reduces the number of tasks required to do manually. This frees up time for employees to add genuine value to the business and improves engagement and motivation. It also minimises errors as manual processes are prone to mistakes."

Thanks to its consistency, automation can also inform improved reporting standards either using metrics or dashboards, and workflows and key business integration points can be reported more easily. Thanks to these improvements in operational efficiencies, automation has the knock-on advantage of helping the organisation define and streamline business

processes. This reduces turnaround times and supports the realignment of process steps to optimise the flow of information throughout production.

Do more with less at greater speed

“Automation’s ability to do more with less and at greater speed has, of course, the advantage of reducing costs,” says Mbonambi. “Setting up automation can be expensive, but its return on investment is significant and remarkably quick. This is not to say that automation is perfect – there is the risk of job losses – but there are ways of minimising the risks to allow for optimal implementation. Two of the most important are skills development and consistent software testing.”

The organisation should invest in upskilling and preparing its workforce. The modern worker needs to adopt a culture of learning – one of the most in-demand skills today is the ability to learn and evolve constantly within a role as it will ensure that the employee remains competitive in terms of both skills and industry relevance. There is no industry that will remain unaffected, no job that won’t experience the impact of automation, and this is not necessarily a terrible thing.

“The crux of RPA is to get a piece of software to take over the humdrum, everyday interactions of some applications,” says Mbonambi. “This minimises the need for a human to click buttons, cut and paste values, and type data into fields. RPA can be used to automate administrative workflows and processes, enabling the organisation to achieve faster execution of activities, reduce error and give employees opportunities they previously would not have had.”

RPA can empower employees and it opens the doors for them to develop fresh skill sets that can adapt to the evolving nature of both their roles and automation capabilities.

“The automation of processes is a key step in digital transformation, but it is equally critical that it be implemented intelligently and with all risks and obstacles outlined from the outset. This is why testing is a critical part of any automation investment and implementation,” concludes Mbonambi. “We have implemented the Test Automation Framework that enables us to address quality issues during the project lifecycle. It provides improved objectivity with regards to software quality and ensuring that it serves the purpose for which it was intended.”

BPA, intelligent process automation (IPA), automation as a whole – each of these adds value to the business and can exponentially improve the bottom line, efficiency, and deliverables. However, automation is not the panacea that cures all industry ills, it has to be implemented strategically and every aspect of the implementation tested to ensure it is aligned with objectives and relevant outcomes. Otherwise, it is just another piece of tech doing something that isn’t quite what everyone expected it to do...

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