

ROBOTIC PROCESS AUTOMATION (RPA)

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INTRODUCTION

Who can play chess better than the greatest of chess champions? Who can play Jeopardy better than the smartest human? Who can dependably drive cars and trucks with less possibilities of accidents? Robots can. Without question, robotic process automation (RPA) is the next big technology movement. RPA emulates the way humans carry out tasks within processes with the ability to streamline business operations. RPA can repeatedly perform a task with greater efficiency, availability, and accuracy. Many large organizations have adopted RPA to enhance business processes and eradicate mundane tasks, freeing workers to concentrate their efforts on higher valued duties. Experts convey that RPA must entail proper design, planning, and governance if it is to boost business operations. In this Tech Insight, we present an overview of RPA, its key benefits, and the impact it will have at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

OVERVIEW OF RPA

Gartner's definition of RPA is a "preconfigured software instance that uses business rules and predefined activity choreography to complete the autonomous execution of a combination of processes, activities, transactions, and tasks in one or more unrelated software system to deliver a result or service with human exception management." In simple terms, RPA is a technology application that is ruled by business logic and organized inputs aimed at industrializing business processes. By utilizing RPA tools, a company can construct a "robot" to capture and interpret systems for processing a transaction, thereby changing data to make it easier to read, triggering responses, and communicating with other digital technologies.

USES OF RPA

RPA can be used in environments where enterprises have found that other automation opportunities are too expensive or take too much time. This technology should be taken into consideration due to other technical options and some process change management skills. When a company wants to work with structured data, RPA is useful to automate a current

manual process with slight process re-engineering. It can be beneficial when linking to external systems that cannot be connected to through other information technology (IT) applications.

Enterprises such as Walmart, Deutsche Bank, AT&T, Vanguard, Ernst & Young, Walgreens, Anthem, and American Express Global Business Travel are among the corporations adopting RPA. For example, David Thompson, Chief Information Officer (CIO) of American Express Global Business Travel, introduced RPA to his company to [automate the process](#) for canceling plane tickets and issuing refunds. Examples of processes that can be automated are customer order processing, call center operations, payroll processing, requests for overdraft protection, patient registration, compliance reporting, data cleansing, credit card applications, fraudulent account closing, and shipping notifications.

Considering all instances where RPA can be instrumental, it is best utilized in situations where humans make probable errors or apply inconsistent rules around structured data. Furthermore, RPA is advantageous when tedious repetitive tasks are utilized by a RPA software, and employees are tasked with knowledge intensive efforts.

BENEFITS OF ROBOTIC PROCESS AUTOMATION

RPA offers businesses the capacity to decrease staffing costs and human error, thus improving quality and reducing risk. The managing director at Deloitte LLP, David Schatsky, stated that a bank reorganized its claims process by adopting RPA. The bank installed [85 bots](#) to run 13 processes, handling a total of 1.5 million requests per year. Moreover, it added capacity equal to more than 200 full-time employees at roughly 30 percent of the cost of hiring more staff. Bots are automated programs that run over the Internet and are essentially cheap and simple to implement; bots do not need custom software or deep systems integration. Schatsky states such characteristics are vital as enterprises pursue growth, without adding substantial costs or stress among workers. Companies can also boost their automation endeavors by inserting RPA with cognitive applications, such as [machine learning](#), speech recognition, and natural language processing, industrializing high-level tasks that mandated the intuitive and judgement capabilities of humans in the past.

In 2016, Leslie Willcocks, professor of technology, work, and globalization at the London School of Economics' Department of Management, found that in 16 case studies, the return on investment (ROI) [was between 30 and 200 percent in the first year](#). She stated that companies in insurance and banking are discovering that automation is an economical and quick way of implementing superior capability to the problem of compliance. A corporation that receives many questions from customers can free employees to handle more complex inquiries.

Additionally, according to the cases, many employees benefited from the technology because they resented the tedious tasks that the machines now do. It gave them a sense of peace from the growing pressures of work. Moreover, there is an increase in audit guidelines and bureaucracy, and RPA is needed to relieve the pressure that is created by compliance. One online business observed many hours given back to the firm when measuring the success of RPA. Not only did shareholders, senior leaders, and customers benefit from the application, but employees also profited.

IMPACT AT VA

Government agencies are hungry at the prospect of revolutionizing their IT systems; however, modernizing large legacy systems is a slow process and usually requires large investments, while agencies also need to maintain current operations. Modernization can add an extra burden on Federal program managers to provide the essential resources to be allocated to upgrades or to locating vendors, and at the same time, they must meet high citizen experience expectations. In August 2017, VA expressed interest in RPA, and began searching for RPA software that [automates tasks and workflows](#), and integrates with its [Pega 7](#) Business Process Management (BPM) applications. VA wants RPA software to run on desktops.

[RPA can help manage and perform operations as a productive tool](#) in VA's modernization efforts. RPA application can rapidly pull and populate data, using artificial intelligence to create outcomes on where to place it, within and across VA systems, instead of requiring a manual transfer of information from one system to another. It is a quick, low-cost, low-risk implementation that makes some back-office tasks more effective.

Automating business process management will have a positive influence on Veterans. For instance, applying for a government benefit or appeal often requires stakeholders to utilize a system that holds personally identifiable information (PII), such as name, address, medical, or employment history. In the present-day system, government employees are tasked with retrieving the data from multiple databases to create a comprehensive profile and make a recommendation. A system using RPA can acquire and process that information with immediate results.

RPA is an asset that supports IT and business modernization in a way that eases the transition from legacy systems.

CONCLUSION

According to Garter, by 2020, automation and [artificial intelligence \(AI\)](#) will decrease employee requirements in [business shared-service centers by 65 percent](#). By then, 40 percent of large

corporations will have implemented an RPA software tool, up from less than 10 percent today. When McKinsey & Company, a management consulting firm, was asked what will be the long-term impact of RPA, a representative stated, “RPA means people will have more interesting work. The evidence is that it’s not whole jobs that will be lost, but parts of jobs, and you can reassemble work into different types of jobs. It will be [disruptive](#), but organizations should be able to absorb that level of change.” Adopting automation to business processes can eradicate many of the challenges to delivering fast, efficient Veteran results, while keeping humans at the core of government service. By providing government employees more time to devote to tasks that require their skillset, RPA can achieve higher quality results, create more productive operations, and improve life experiences for our Nation’s Veterans.

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