Whitepaper

Using RPA to Put People at the Center of Your Hyperautomation Strategy

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I have long been skeptical about many of the claims around Robotic Process Automation (RPA) as a transformational tool. Sure, it offers organizations a way to automate repetitive and often mundane tasks that might otherwise need to be done by hand, but it always seemed to be just a pure-and-simple efficiency play.

Nothing wrong with that, of course, but far short of transformative.

However, a recent conversation with the Chief Digital and Information Officer for a UK-based healthcare provider may have changed my mind.

During our conversation, he explained how he had deployed a set of RPA bots to "create space," as he put it. The idea was that by deploying digital workers, he could improve efficiency and free his team up to consider how to improve the process on which he had applied the bots.

The ultimate goal, he explained, was to fundamentally change the process. It was a transformative undertaking, and deploying RPA was the initial step.

This concept of deploying digital workers to free up human workers to do higher-value tasks has long been a part of the RPA pitch, but I don't think I entirely bought it until I saw it happen. But it also brought into relief the how of that dynamic, and what organizations must do to realize this promise.
RPA, Hyperautomation, and the Digital Worker

If you've been following the RPA space, you're probably also aware of a newer (but just as buzzy) term that has become its sidekick: hyperautomation.

While there are a few schools of thought around it, hyperautomation is generally accepted as a strategy in which organizations leverage multiple types of technology, which typically complement one another (e.g., process mining to discover automation opportunities, RPA to automate routine tasks, etc.) to automate as much as possible.

Likewise, this automation often comes in the form of digital robots (e.g., RPA) that are doing repetitive tasks that a human would otherwise be doing, so many have called these bots digital workers.

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Therefore, the advent of hyperautomation has led to a conversation about the strategy that enterprise leaders should employ as they attempt to bring their human and digital workers together.
It's a conversation that brings to the foreground two critical management concerns. First, every manager on the planet is consistently focused on how to improve efficiency and optimization. Almost all forms of automation serve this objective in one way or another. However, those efficiency gains often come at a cost to the human workers that automation is displacing.

This challenge leads to the second critical management concern: creating a positive work experience for the employee.

And, in the era of the so-called "great resignation" this concern may be even more important than efficiency gains. After all, you must actively contemplate the impact that automation will have on both their day-to-day experience, as well as how they perceive their work as you automate (and therefore eliminate) many of their routine tasks.

If automation has often led to worker displacement, and we are now talking about hyper-automation, well, it's not hard to understand how addressing the first concern can run entirely counter to the second and leave your team a bit jumpy.

Which is why my conversation with that healthcare executive was so insightful.

The Right Person or Bot for the Job

My skepticism about RPA vendors' claim that you can use the technology to “free up people for other, more valuable work” was rooted in the disparity that often exists between the work an organization is automating and the skills they need to do “more valuable” work.

In an abstract form it might hold true, but in the real-life form the displaced worker may be unqualified to do the work now needed. But the approach my executive friend took flipped this upside down.

His goal was to transform a cumbersome and broken process so that he could improve efficiency, but more importantly, so he could improve the patient experience and transform the way the entire organization worked. And who better to lead that transformational process than the people who had performed those same tasks for years?
The process transformation that he was undertaking required creativity, innovation, and deep awareness of the issues at hand — precisely his team's skills. The problem was that they were so busy executing the process that they had no time to transform it. Thus, by deploying RPA, he created the space he and they needed to drive a business transformation.
That understanding is critical to both the use of RPA and to the broader deployment of a hyperautomation strategy within an enterprise.

By recognizing that bots are fantastic at doing the routine and mundane, and that humans are great at those activities that require creativity and domain expertise, organizations can craft a hyperautomation strategy that makes the best use of each type of worker and simultaneously achieves both management directives.

**The Intellyx Take: Putting People Upfront**

One of the significant challenges facing enterprise leaders today is the mental shift they must make as value drivers shift. Throughout the industrial age, operational efficiency and optimization have been the driving force of business value — making the deployment of technology to drive efficiency a primary use case.

However, in today’s experience-driven economy in which enterprises compete for both customers and employees, the employee experience and talent retention have arguably shifted the balance and unseated efficiency as the primary driver of automation investments.

Therefore, an effective hyperautomation strategy must put the people of the organization upfront.

The employee experience, which includes engaging teams in creative and transformative work, is now an essential element of an organization’s management strategy — and leveraging hyperautomation can be a vital part of realizing it.

Focusing your energy on leveraging technology to "create space" for your teams and augment their ongoing activities, you can create an environment that simultaneously reduces costs and improves efficiencies — while enhancing the employee experience and setting the stage for transformative growth.
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Charles Araujo is an industry analyst, internationally recognized authority on the Digital Enterprise and author of The Quantum Age of IT: Why Everything You Know About IT is About to Change.

As Principal Analyst with Intellyx, he writes, speaks and advises organizations on how to navigate through this time of disruption. He is also the founder of The Institute for Digital Transformation and a sought after keynote speaker.

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