

## **Robotic Process Automation (RPA): The Next Big Thing in Digital Transformation?**

What's the one thing that's common in almost every industry today? It's the emphasis on digitalization, automation, and digital transformation.

While going digital is hardly a new concept in the business world (and in life), 2020 significantly accelerated the process. Fully digitized platforms is what every organization looks for these days in an attempt to bring more operational efficiency, enhance customer experience, and steal a march on competitors.

But, what does “digital transformation” really refer to?

Simply put, it's the practice of “using technology to dramatically improve business performance, increase value, streamline work processes, and enrich customer relationships.” We've all seen how digital advances can disrupt industries in an instant. And that is unlikely to change anytime soon.

### **Robotic Process Automation (RPA) and Digital Transformation**

Robotic process automation (RPA) has been in the technological spotlight in recent years. The industry has been growing at breakneck speed and is estimated to be worth over \$4 billion by 2022. In fact, companies like *Blue Prism*, which offer RPA software, are already valued in the billions of dollars. Furthermore, 53% of the respondent firms in a 2017 study by Deloitte revealed that they had already started their RPA adventure.

So, what's robotic process automation software all about?

RPA software aims to automate time-consuming manual work processes by eliminating human intervention. Things like collecting and sorting data, file management, etc. can be fully digitized with the help of RPA. As a result, your team will have more time to perform strategic and value-driven work.

According to an estimate by PwC, about 45% of all work activities could be automated in the coming years. This could potentially lead to saving \$2 trillion in global workforce costs. And RPA is expected to drive this next wave of digital transformation.

### **A Look Back on Digital Transformation Phases (RPA vs. Standard Automation)**

Automation and digital transformation have gone through phases, or waves, over time. In the past, automation was “centered on workflow.” For instance, if you had to seek approval for a particular task or policy, the required documents would be scanned and electronically attached (without any hard copies changing hands) once the procedure was completed.

This was the “first wave” of digital transformation where paperless work processes and automated filing systems considerably improved work efficiency. It was driven by what is now called “standard automation.” And, as already mentioned, the idea was to digitize workflow using various technical tools.

On the other hand, RPA is more of a business need nowadays. With it, the goal is to “completely automate work processes” so that human intervention isn’t needed.

Keep in mind, however, that robotic process automation is not to be confused as a replacement for human resources. The idea is to take time-consuming operational tasks off your team’s hands so that they can concentrate on things that bring real value to the firm.

### **What’s Driving RPA?**

Businesses are constantly trying to become more efficient. And as stated earlier, RPA can help by quickly as well as accurately performing the mundane day-to-day tasks. Apart from this, there are different factors responsible for the emergence of robotic process automation.

For instance, there’s the issue of disconnected systems. Most workplaces have one or more software setups. While they all perform important functions for a company, data sharing between them can be problematic. This is because they don’t communicate well with one another and RPA can be one effective solution.

Moreover, robotic process automation tools are surprisingly simple to use. So much so that non-technical individuals with zero programming experience can easily establish automation sequences through straightforward drag-and-drop functionalities.

### **RPA in the Pakistani Context**

It started somewhat late but RPA is now well-positioned to drive the next phase of digital transformation in Pakistan. Together with artificial intelligence (AI), it will be the pivot around which the tech industry will unleash this new wave of digitization.

A handful of organizations have taken the jump towards RPA-driven digital transformation and more are set to follow in this decade. As a result, there will be lots of demand for IT professionals proficient in tools like artificial intelligence, robotic process automation, etc.

To that end, it's important to follow a two-pronged approach with regard to the available (and upcoming) human resource. On the one side, the skillset of the existing workforce must be built up so that they seamlessly transition towards an RPA-backed work culture. In addition, quality industry-academic linkages must be developed so that a whole new talent pool can be created. These young guns would know RPA and other related technologies like the back of their hand.