

# Strategies for addressing Key Challenges in IT Operations Automation

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# Abstract

In today's business world, every organization wants to have automated processes. Everybody gets started with automation as one of their strategic initiatives or as a transformational approach. But few succeed and are able to sustain it. To put it in context, automation is like an exciting voyage many embark on, but few reach their destination.

Now make no mistake, everyone starts their journey with a vision of how to travel, where to reach, and by when. But why is it that few reach their destination? Why aren't many able to complete that milestone?

Well, the reason is that every major transformation journey is faced with challenges, and so it is in the case of automation programs. The success of the journey depends on how organizations prepare to handle the challenges and how solutions are ultimately implemented.

While the challenges themselves are unseen, one way for organizations to prepare themselves is to learn from similar organizations that have successfully undergone automation programs and the kind of challenges they faced. This adds a lot of value and gives the much-needed confidence to overcome or prevent challenges.

Even in my IT operation automation journey, I have encountered many challenges while working with organizations in their automation programs. Below are a few of the most common ones faced and how our team overcame or prevented the challenges to reach the defined milestones.

## CHALLENGE 1

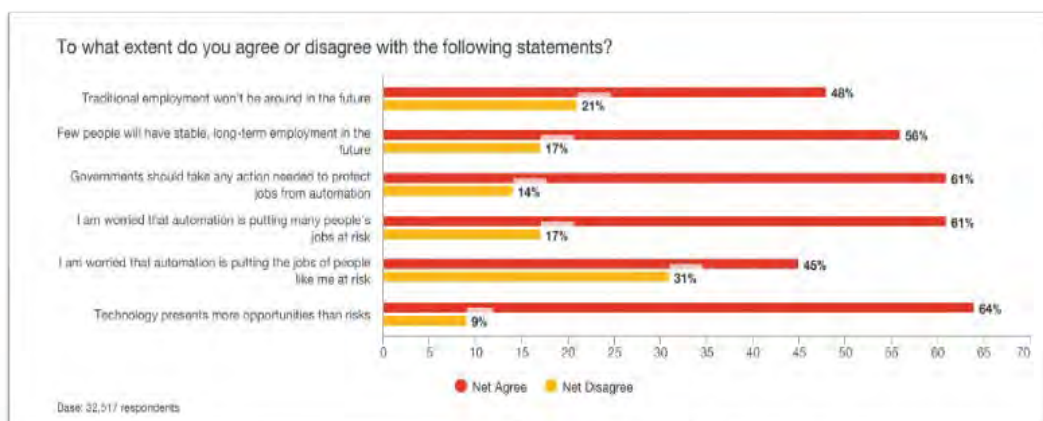
# Fear of BOTS replacing humans

Technology is developing rapidly. New products and services are produced every year, which may affect how employees work in organizations. Following and adapting to technological developments may be an individual challenge. People may even experience anxiety in this process. Also, automation technologies may lead to a perception that individuals may lose their jobs soon. This may affect employees' choices in the possible human-bot collaboration process.

Understanding the current IT operational process is critical for any automation (in general, transformation) to be successful. This can be best understood from the employees who carry out the process daily. The final automation solution will not be accurate or complete without a deeper understanding. Life of half-baked solutions is short, and, more importantly, they do not serve the purpose.

When conducting such due diligence, employees who are not aware of automation and its benefits to the organization and to them worry about it replacing them. Hence, they will be reluctant to provide their support and their knowledge of the processes. Many people think that a manual way of working is easier than using any automation because of their comfort and unawareness of its benefits.

According to a 2021 global PwC survey of 32,500 workers, roughly six out of every 10 (61 percent) respondents said they're worried that automation (of all types) will put many jobs at risk in the future.



Source: <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/upskilling/hopes-and-fears.html>

What's the most optimal way to handle this challenge? Employees need to be onboarded on how automation will enable them to be more productive and not actually replace them. Automating repetitive non-value add processes enables the employees to learn something new and take up more activities that add value. In short, automation takes away the BOT (read mundane) from humans and makes humans do the job they can only do.

Another way to find out why employees fear automation is to conduct a user empathy interview. This will help to understand the real intentions and will enable us to provide specific solutions to everyone.

As mentioned by a Gartner analyst, "automation can feel fuzzy and abstract, but by communicating how automation will help the organization achieve a larger goal, individuals can see why it is important and the role they play in making automation a success."

While automation will help move specific old tasks from manual to automated, new opportunities will keep coming. Reskilling and upskilling are the solution. With automation taking away menial tasks, people need to develop new higher-order skills to improve their confidence and readiness to take on bigger, more strategic roles. The interaction of digitally skilled workers and automation will unlock and expand human potential.

However, one of the simplest things you can do to avoid these issues is to be open to employees' concerns. Let them know how automation will supplement or help their jobs. Instead of replacing them, we should consider offering new opportunities for those individuals to train or reskill to other technology and utilize them in other activities.

## CHALLENGE 2

# Resistance from customers derailing automation

Support from the customers is very critical for any new initiative. Especially for automation, where we bring new tools, technologies, and change in processes, needs customer buy-in.

We may face resistance from the customers if they are kept in the dark or not given the overall objective of the initiative. Reasons could be a long list like security constraints, data protection, previous bad experience with automation, budget constraints, having a separate automation roadmap/objective, etc.

The best way out is to have a conversation with the customer to understand their concerns and give a big picture of the automation initiative, its benefits, and the positive impact it could bring to everyone involved. Clarity of how we approach this initiative, what it takes to automate (dependencies, approvals, etc.), and how the future will look ensures their buy-in.

We should not stop with one discussion and instead initiate frequent conversations where the progress, benefits, and challenges are made transparent to customers. Involving customers in the automation life cycle right from the automation design, development progress update, and interim demo on what is completed will help reduce major feedback from the customer and increase the time to deploy any automation solutions.

## CHALLENGE 3

# Disengaged stakeholders can slow down the automation journey

Automation greatly impacts an organization, meaning you must engage multiple stakeholders from across the organization for decision-making and sign-off. For example, HR should be involved if the adoption of new automation processes changes the nature of people's roles. Similarly, changes to access rights, IDs, or server requirements must involve security or IT. If we do not involve the right stakeholder during the automation initiative at the right time, getting the respective stakeholder's support will impact the solution design, development, and deployment.

Engaging all the right stakeholders involved in the current operation process will help everyone understand the process clearly, along with any dependencies and impacts. When we automate any manual process involving multiple teams and tools, we should onboard the respective team or owners to the automation journey.

## CHALLENGE 4

# Choosing an appropriate automation solution

The complexity of an automation program can vary depending on the activities/processes getting automated, the type of automation deployed, the tools/platforms required, and the development processes and standards used to develop the solutions. Identifying the right automation tool is critical to ensure the success of the automation journey.

***While automation is essential, picking the wrong tools can be disastrous.***

Nowadays, there are a variety of automation tools available in the market, but choosing the wrong tool which will bring adverse effects like high license costs, scalability issues, multiple-point solutions, security concerns, etc. When looking to deploy new process automation tools, we should fully evaluate and apply a process re-engineering methodology to ensure automation can deliver outcomes in the best possible way.

When we say IT automation, one tool will not fit all types of environments and objectives. There are various types of IT automation, such as Runbook Automation (RBA), workflow automation, and intelligent automation.

In our automation journey, we first prefer to use tools already available in the customer environment. If no automation tool is available, we suggest the appropriate tool(s) be used based on the customers' environment, objectives, and IT roadmap.



## CHALLENGE 5

# Unavailability of access and infrastructure for automation

During the automation journey, there will be a lot of touch points like applications, servers, and databases, and there needs to be appropriate access and privileges for the BOT to execute the tasks. There must be service accounts for tools and infra that the BOTs can use to access entities. The service account should have appropriate privileges, and every BOT activity must be logged for audit.

Apart from access, another important thing is the infrastructure where the development and deployment of BOTs need to happen. We should have a replica of the production environment simulated in the development environment to develop and test the automation solutions. If we do not have all the components, it's difficult to test all the test scenarios, and sometimes the solution will not work when we deploy it to the actual production environment.

When we are working on any automation solution where no orchestration tool is available, the script-based (Runbook) automation should always be preferred to have a centralized server to deploy the BOTs rather than keeping it locally. Availability of a lower environment is extremely critical during the development phase, especially where BOTs not just read but also write/execute.

Unavailability of any of these (service accounts, test infra, and access to external tools) will hamper/delay the automation development and may even derail the entire journey.

Again, onboarding the customers about why these factors are important at the very beginning will be critical. Stating the prerequisites for automation and getting sign-off from customers in the initial phases will avoid any delays later.

## CHALLENGE 6

# Inadequate and inefficient processes

A common misunderstanding from many organizations is that automation will fix inadequate and inefficient processes. Unfortunately, this is not the case. If you automate inefficient processes, you increase the likelihood of an inefficient outcome.

At Core Solutions, we thoroughly understand business and processes before developing any solutions, ensuring efficiencies are magnified instead of just automating the processes and tasks.

Automation is not meant to make up for failures in systems or defer system replacement. If used that way, it simply extends the life of suboptimal legacy applications by creating savings that mask underlying inefficiencies.

The development of an automation BOT should always start with analyzing the existing manual processes to see where inefficiencies exist, then fix them to ensure optimal automation performance. Process maturity plays a vital role while automating any process. If the process maturity is more, then the complexity of the automation will be less.

Below are a few points to validate the maturity of manual processes before automation,

- Does any formal process exist?
- Does the team practice that process?
- Is that process documented and easily accessible?
- Is that process already automated?

Process re-engineering professionals and automation consultants can use the above technique to understand the maturity of the current process. A detailed discussion with the people who do these manual activities will provide more details and clarify before we take a final call on whether to automate as it is or if it requires any optimization.

## CHALLENGE 7

# Minimal automation adoption

Measurement of the adoption rate of these solutions post-deployment is critical. The benefits of any automation will be multi-fold only when it is used for long and for all the intended processes instead of doing it manually. We should establish postproduction procedures to enable operations managers to continuously monitor and audit the automation Bot usage.

There could be problems once the automation solutions are handed over because of various reasons like no proper documentation on how to use, configure, and enhance, etc. We call this an end-user guide or document.

We have taken many approaches to avoid these challenges in our automation journey. The most common are

- Organizing workshops with all the involved and impacted stakeholders
- Create a proper end-user manual, conduct end-user training, and include the team in the solution development life cycle process
- Management should encourage automation adoption by setting KPIs on automation adoption and rewarding adoption
- Creating awareness through emailers and regular communication will make everyone understand the solution better and help improve the adoption
- Ensure automation teams actively communicate how they will implement change and involve change management where needed

# Conclusion

Organizations are adopting mature automation techniques like AI-driven workflow automation, intelligent automation, hyper-automation, and Robotic Process Automation (RPA).

In this journey of rapidly adopting automation to reduce manual effort and improve productivity, they should prepare and focus on different challenges and have a strategy to deal with them.

As a known fact, the above-discussed challenges are limited and the most common. Each organization could face many more unique challenges. How they are handled will drive this journey. To ensure success, prioritize initiatives that deliver clear, quantifiable business outcomes and for which the resources already exist within your organization. Failure generally results from three types of mistakes: approach, implementation, and impact.

Each type of automation comes with challenges from people, technology, environment, cost, competitors, security, regulatory policies, data privacy, etc. We should have a game plan to accept, mitigate, or reduce the impact of the challenge so that it doesn't hamper our vision and the mission ahead.

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