Business Process Automation: What Is It, Examples, Challenges, and Benefits



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The biggest benefit of business process automation is freeing humans from busy work and repetitive tasks that are not the best use of manhours and in many cases, more efficient and error-free when automated.

That not only saves money and time, but it also frees humans from tedious busy work so they can best utilize their skills.

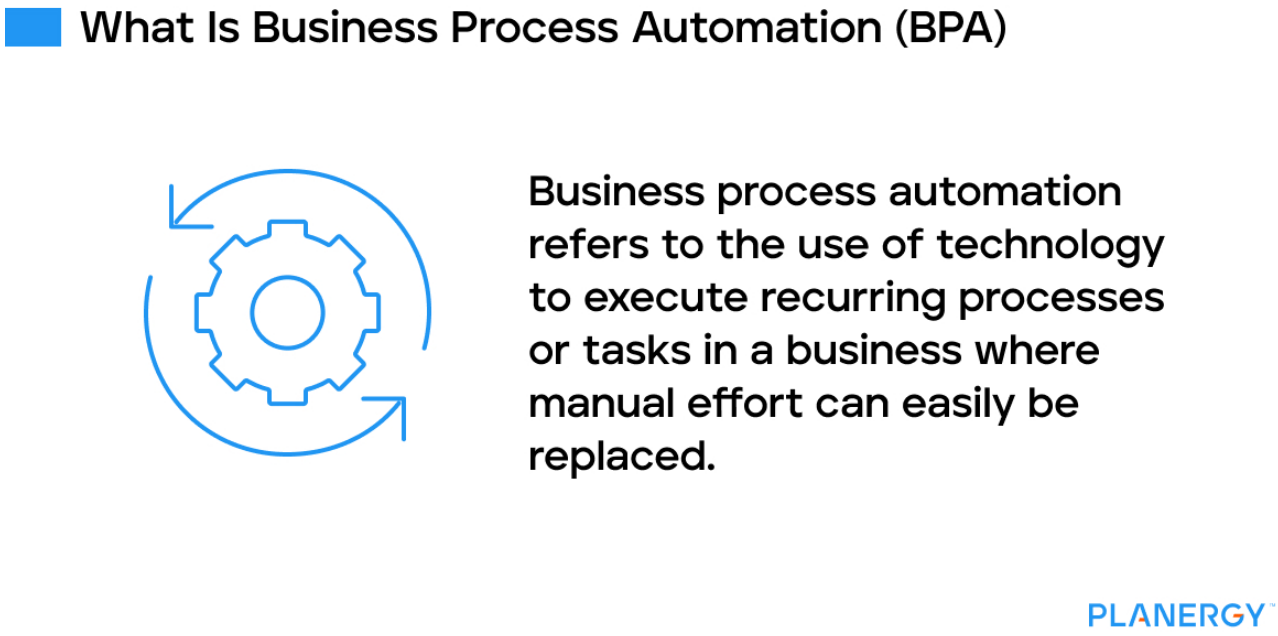
According to the 2023 Forrester Global Digital Process Automation Survey:

- Seventy-five percent of organizations expect businesspeople to engage in process optimization, yet 57% admit that they lack a clear strategy.
- Forty-five percent of respondents cited delays or reductions in automation investments due to constrained budgets.
- Only 8% of organizations require employees to undergo training in process automation techniques and tools. This highlights a training gap.

What Is Business Process Automation (BPA)?

Business process automation refers to the use of technology to execute recurring processes or tasks in a business where manual effort can easily be replaced.

This usually incorporates technology like robotic process automation and artificial intelligence.



Automating business processes by investing in BPA reduces costs, increases efficiency and scalability for a company, and streamlines processes.

Rather than seeing it as a formidable machine taking over your work, consider it a supportive partner streamlining tasks and making your life easier.

It is more like a helpful and reliable assistant who never calls in sick. BPA is designed to simplify, not complicate.

It’s important not to confuse business process automation with Business Process Management (BPM).

BPM is a larger discipline that involves the management of complex organization-wide processes using a variety of methodologies.

Business process automation is also distinct from Robotic Process Automation. That is a technology often used to achieve business process automation.

Examples of Business Process Automation

To help you better understand business process automation, take a look at these two popular use cases.

- ## Purchase Orders

  For most organizations, purchase order requests are a recurring process filled with tasks that are redundant and time consuming but necessary.

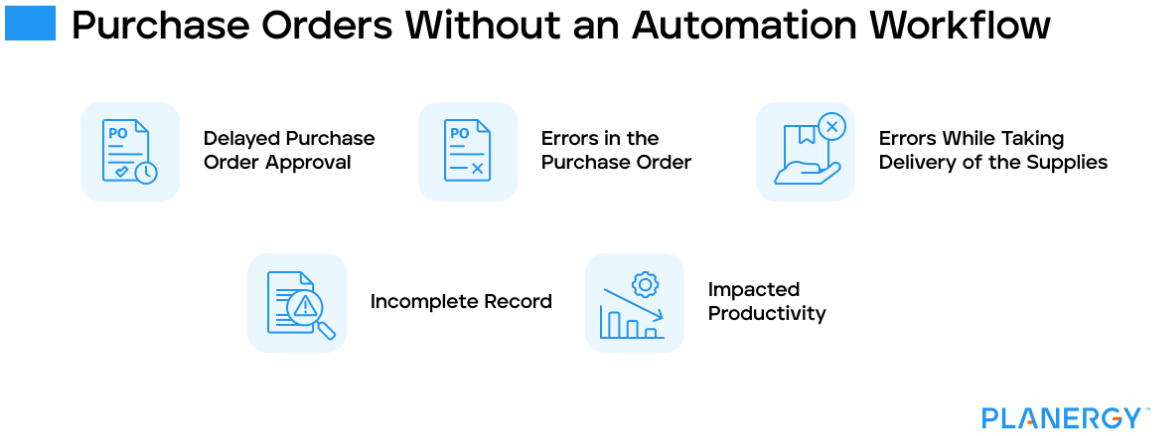
  There are many steps in the purchase order process that are important but not complex.

  Missing one step can negatively impact the entire process, which is where automation excels.

  1. The requesting team fills out a form and sends it to the purchasing department.
  2. The approver then takes a look at the request and rejects instances where there is not enough information, or the purchase isn’t in the budget.
  3. It is then sent back to the requesting team.
  4. If approved, the purchase requisition becomes a purchase order and copies are sent to the supplier and inventory team.

  Without an automation workflow for purchase orders in place, there could be any number of issues such as:

- Delayed purchase order approval
- Errors in the purchase order
- Errors while taking delivery of the supplies
- Incomplete records
- Impacted productivity



Employee Onboarding

Though hiring employees may seem like a relatively smooth process, it does involve multiple tasks.

You must fill out employee information forms, set up introduction meetings, a range training, collect relevant documents, set up bank accounts and direct deposit for payroll, assign mentors, and more.

Without automation, there is potential for the employee onboarding process to become chaotic, causing:

- Employee dissatisfaction
- Endless mountains of paperwork
- Lower productivity
- Missing out on certain tasks



Relying on business automation for employee onboarding ensures smooth transitions from one task to the next and keeps employees in the loop.

It provides visibility into the status of the entire process.

Why You Should Embrace Automating Business Processes

One common reason for people to be reluctant to implement BPA is the fear of complexity.

Many professionals worry that adopting BPA means diving headfirst into a labyrinth of intricate systems and technical jargon.

The truth is, BPA can be as straightforward as you need it to be.

And if you focus your efforts in a specific area you can find dedicated software that will already incorporate BPA.

PLANERGY's procure-to-pay software is an example of this where procurement and accounts payable processes are automated.

There are also user-friendly tools and platforms that cater to all levels of technical expertise. You don't need to be a tech guru to embrace BPA successfully.

Another concern is the fear of job redundancy. Will BPA replace the need for

human input?

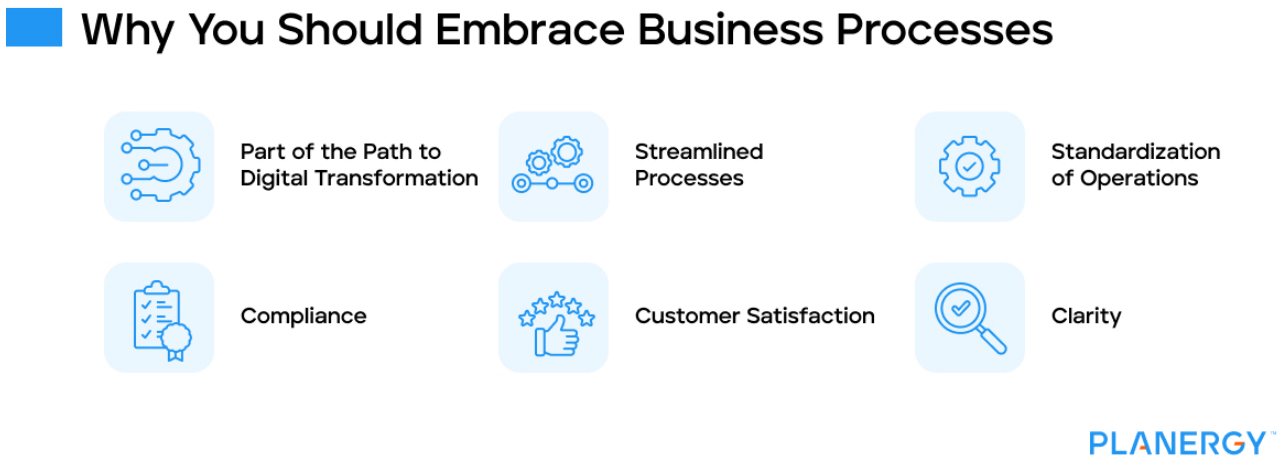
The answer is no. BPA complements human efforts. It’s a tool designed to assist, not replace. It handles the repetitive, time-consuming tasks, allowing you to focus on more meaningful, strategic work.

You’re in control, not at the mercy of automation.

As you design your automation workflow, remember that clarity is crucial.

Workflow analysis and process mapping offers insights into your operations, revealing gaps between current and ideal processes. It’s the path to efficiency and customer satisfaction.

In the realm of automation, solutions come in various shapes and sizes. Choose what aligns with your business needs, ensuring scalability and growth.



Part of the Path to Digital Transformation

If you’re not on the path to digital transformation, it can seem like a goal you’ll never achieve.

Automation is more than a buzzword; it’s a key step in a digital transformation business strategy.

Start with processes that deliver the most significant impact to your business, and gradually work your way to more complex workflow

automation and possibly eventually towards hyper-automation.

Streamlined Processes

Streamlined processes are a result of automation. Standardization of operations, improved compliance, and a clearer view of your processes are all additional benefits.

You can get customizable notifications, accountability, insights, and faster turnaround times so you can eliminate wasteful activities and focus efforts on tasks that add value to the organization.

Standardization of Operations

With business process automation, there is a consistent standard of outcomes every time. This standardization positions your company as reliable, which helps build a stronger customer base.

Compliance

When you automate your business processes, everything about the process is recorded. This not only holds everyone involved accountable, but the records and audit trail can be shown to demonstrate compliance in the event of an audit.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is projected to overtake price as the key differentiator in any industry.

Focusing on operational and process excellence ensures that you can meet and exceed customer expectations with ease.

When you’re able to consistently meet those promised standards, customers are likely to become loyal to your company.

- **Clarity**

  When you're designing your automation workflow, you need a certain amount of clarity about the process.

  If you don't know the tasks or the people involved for running the process, you won't be able to properly design and automate the workflow.

  Process mapping can give all the employees clarity and can serve as a training resource for new employees.

  The insights you gain from analyzing your process can clearly show you the gaps between how your process currently operates and how it should ideally run for process improvement.

> *Automation solutions come in all shapes and sizes to help you manage and automate your process workflows. The key is to focus on what your business needs are and find a solution that will scale and grow with you.*

What Business Processes Should You Automate?

The good thing about business process automation is that it isn't restricted to a small group of functions.

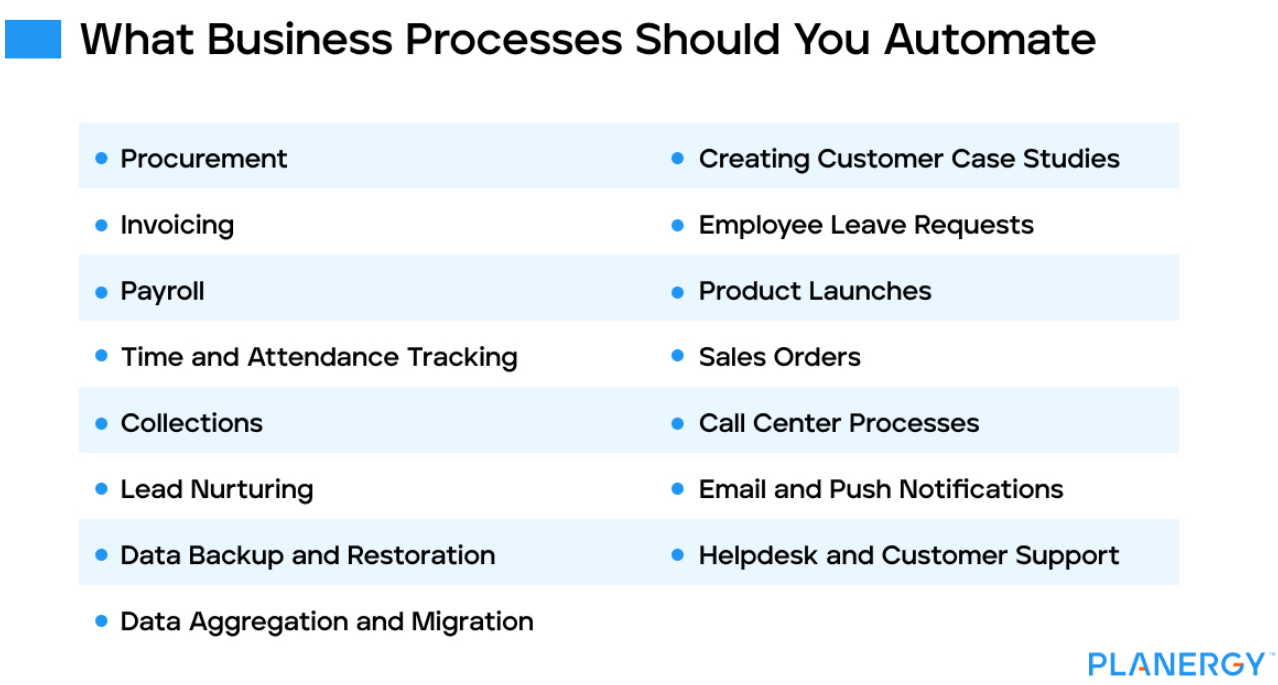
Factors that can indicate the need for automation include:

1. High task volume
2. Time sensitive nature
3. Multiple people required to execute
4. Significant impact on other systems and processes
5. Need for audit trails and compliance

Activities that meet all of the above criteria are likely to need automation.

Here are some of the commonly automated processes across organizations in a number of industries:

- Procurement
- Invoicing
- Payroll
- Time and Attendance Tracking
- Collections
- Lead Nurturing
- Data Backup and Restoration
- Data Aggregation and Migration
- Creating Customer Case Studies
- Employee Leave Requests
- Product Launches
- Sales Orders
- Call Center Processes
- Email and Push Notifications
- Helpdesk and Customer Support



Benefits of Business Process Automation

Once you've automated your processes for workflow efficiency, you'll see several benefits.

Increased Productivity

Enhanced access to data makes it easier for your employees to do more in the same amount of time.

Cloud-based process automation tools store your data in a central database that's accessible from anywhere there's an internet connection, from computers and mobile devices.

This makes it possible for employees to stay connected to data when they're away from the office, and even allows them to telecommute.

You'll ultimately have higher employee satisfaction because the team no longer has to worry about doing boring, monotonous repetitive tasks. Your employees will be happier and doing more meaningful work.

Increased Transparency

Business processes will become more transparent. It's easy to track and monitor processes while they're running, which improves visibility and accountability.

Faster Error Response

Being able to monitor processes from anywhere helps you keep an eye out for errors, allowing to fix them as they occur.

Performance reports give you the information you need to take preventative measures to prevent recurring errors.

Regardless of how much attention to detail your employees have, they are still human and have the potential to make mistakes.

There's always a chance someone will forget to send an email or forget another important detail.

The consequences can be relatively small, or they may be far reaching, depending on what was forgotten and when.

The right automation software reminds you of your tasks on a regular

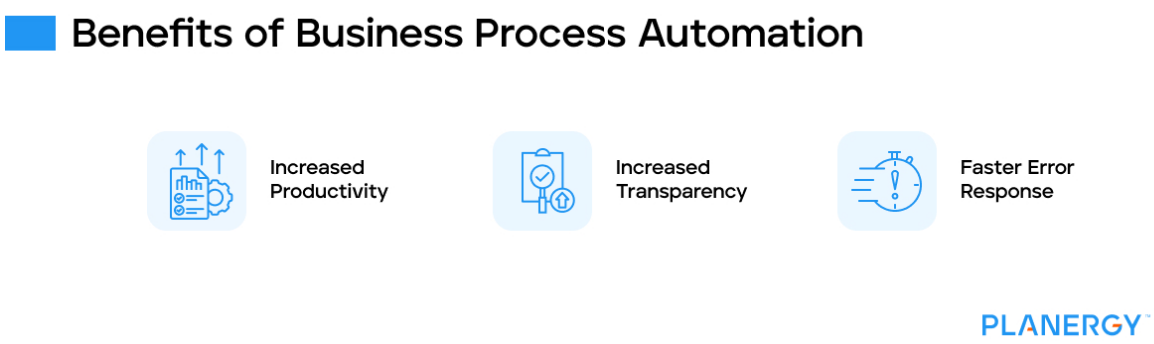
basis to reduce the chances of error because of things falling through the cracks.

Though you'll never be able to completely eliminate human error, automation efforts can go a long way toward reducing it.

Over the long term, you'll see faster turnaround times and cost savings because you'll have fewer manual interventions.

You'll be able to enhance workforce allocation because automation will handle the mundane recurring tasks. This allows you to redirect your team to tasks that require human intervention to add value to the company.

More money for your business means better value for your employee investment, and you may be able to foster more growth by investing the return into employee initiatives that will further increase employee satisfaction.



Business Process Automation Best Practices

Just signing up for a business process automation tool isn't going to guarantee you'll be successful. You'll need to look at your approach to automation and do some legwork to get the most benefit from it.

Use these tips to help you be successful with implementing automation in your business:

Review Your Current Processes in Detail

Start with a clear understanding of what tasks are involved, who is responsible for each part, and when each task must be executed. If you lack this understanding, start with process mapping to get you heading in the right direction.

Define Your Goals

Clearly define your goals when you automate a business process, so you can go back and measure your success toward meeting or exceeding those goals.

If you fall short, you'll be in a better position to analyze what happened and what you can do to fix it to reach your goals.

Take a Step By Step Approach

Use a phased approach to measure your results. Results won't materialize overnight, and thinking they will set your organization up for disappointment.

You may give up on automation too soon.

Train Your Team Adequately

Invest enough time in training employees, and factor in an adjustment period.

For better results, allow them to provide input on the solutions you choose to setup your automation – since they will be the ones working directly with the software platform.

The better their user experience is, the easier it will be to implement everything for better workflow management.

Be Patient

Adopt a long-term outlook and you'll get a much better return on investment.

- ## Use The Right Software

  Use ready-made solutions when available so you don't invest in an IT team or technology to build a custom solution only to have it fail to meet your expectations.

  While your business is unique the challenges you face are not completely new and there is no need to invest in redesigning the wheel.

  If you need to management procurement and accounts payable, look at existing procure-to-pay automation software solutions. If you need marketing and sales automation you should review existing solutions in that space.

  Also look for automation systems that integrate with software applications you're already using and that will talk to one another to increase efficiency.

What's your goal today?

1. Use PLANERGY to manage purchasing and accounts payable

We've helped save billions of dollars for our clients through better spend management, process automation in purchasing and finance, and reducing financial risks. To discover how we can help grow your business:

- Read our case studies, client success stories, and testimonials.
- Visit our Workflow Automation Software page to see how PLANERGY can digitize and automate your processes saving you time and money.
- Learn about us, and our long history of helping companies just like yours.

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2. Download our “Indirect Spend Guide”

Download a free copy of our guide to better manage and make savings on your indirect spend. You’ll also be subscribed to our email newsletter and notified about new articles or if have something interesting to share.

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