

The Challenges of Business Process Automation And How To Face Them



Business process management (BPM) is a relatively complex but necessary undertaking for companies of all sizes.

Part of the way to get the most bang for your buck is to invest in business process automation, or BPA.

BPA can be broken into three phases:

- **Phase 1:** Getting Started
- **Phase 2:** Aiming for Success After You're Up and Running
- **Phase 3:** Reviewing and Adjusting

Most businesses are within the first two phases because of different challenges that come up during the digital transformation. It's only when properly implemented that you can truly reap all the benefits of business process automation.

Let's take a look at 9 of the biggest challenges businesses face with BPA.

Automation Won't Fix Poor Processes

BPA and procurement automation will do wonders for your organization. It can help you make things more efficient, save money, and free your staff for more value-added activities.

But, if your processes are broken, to begin with, it won't do you any good at all.

Automating a bad process still leaves your business vulnerable to all kinds of issues.

To be successful, you must focus your efforts on your long-standing processes that have established rules and data inputs.

Put your attention on the processes that don't need extra coordination between multiple departments and teams. This way, you can deliver real results in a shorter period of time.

Limited Adoption Throughout the Company

For the adoption of new technologies to really work to better your company, you need to get everyone on board to use it. But more importantly, everyone must use it consistently. Change is difficult, but not impossible.

Before diving into the implementation stage, make sure you have executive buy-in. Getting key stakeholders on board with the process is key to full adoption. Your stakeholders are the real evangelists here, to help you spread the word and get individual departments involved. They will also help make sure that your initiative is aligned with your overall business strategy and goals. They'll also help you with change management as you work through process optimization.

Keep the change management process transparent and put your people first. Talk with your employees to make sure you're addressing their concerns. This also helps them feel like they are part of the project's success, which strengthens engagement and adoption.

Deploying Confidently

Technology deployment is where many businesses spend a lot of their time. It's somewhat ironic that the technology intended to free up time and boost productivity poses the greatest challenge.

Before you make any changes, it's crucial to know the payoff you can expect. It's a good idea to use technology that allows you to simulate processes based on your data. Using this, you can see the exact value you can bring to your business, along with any potential downstream bottlenecks and other issues that could come up as a result of the automation. These simulations can help you make changes with confidence before you push the first automation live.

Your business needs will always evolve. Before you begin process automation, examine your actual processes to ensure you build efficient workflow automations.

Using a One-Size-Fits-All Solution

Automation is sometimes used as a catch-all when it refers to multiple types of tech. For instance, there's robotic process automation or RPA, intelligent workflows, execution management systems, and low-code or no-code application and integration platforms. There's also process mining that powers intelligent automation.

Using a one-size-fits-all approach can set you up for failure before you even get started. Take the time to match the automation technology to the need.

Technology like RPA is great for taking care of your basic repetitive tasks, but it is often not enough for more complex, time-consuming tasks.

If you're automating tasks that are part of larger processes, make sure to examine the underlying processes beforehand. If not, you'll just be automating the inefficiencies in your current system, which won't solve anything.

Slow Adaptation for Remote Work

As the pandemic took hold, we saw a major increase in automation across manufacturing and supply chain companies. Though the world is starting to resemble “normal” as we navigate the pandemic, many people are still working remotely. That leaves many companies that are still adapting collaboration practices alongside the core activities their businesses rely on.

If working remotely has significantly affected your business processes, then you need to find opportunities to implement automation within content services. Prioritize ease of use for each employee.

Law firms, for instance, heavily rely on the ability to share, review, edit, and sign documents. Automated workflows that pull documents from DocuSign and send push notifications to Slack help to keep everyone up to date with what’s going on with each contact and agreement without additional work.

Tackling Too Much at Once

Acquiring powerful automation tools is often the result of an equally powerful wish to solve complex, large process issues, or to overhaul everything at once. This temptation often proves to be too much for many companies, leading to too many projects getting mixed up in complicated workflows that frustrate everyone.

If this happens, a company’s enthusiasm and support for automation and more widespread digital transformation will dwindle, and fast.

To keep things moving, start small, but think about the bigger picture. Start with one simple process so that your business can understand the challenges of business process automation. Learn the lessons quickly, make the changes quickly, and you’ll find yourselves becoming experts.

After you’ve done that, and found ways to overcome the most common pitfalls associated with introducing BPA into your organization, you can move confidently to transforming the bigger, more complex processes.

Systems and Infrastructure Integration

Implementing automation initiatives isn't something you can do without a scalable and flexible infrastructure. Integration and automation go together because most business processes will touch multiple systems. You must be able to seamlessly connect systems across your workflows.

Avoid on-premises infrastructure that limits you with automation roll-outs, ease of use, and scalability. You're much better off using cloud-based solutions. Not only are they easier to scale as your business grows, but you save time, money, and hassle compared to an on-premise version.

Look for an automation solution that makes it easy to integrate with your current systems. Whether you're connecting APIs or apps, ideally, you need to be able to make the connections with a few clicks, rather than code. It should be something where you can easily visualize your integrations and workflows.

Success Isn't Defined Ahead of Time

When you're excited about making changes and streamlining your business processes, it can be easy to dive into implementing it. But if you don't take the time to define what success looks like ahead of implementation, how will you ever know that you achieved success.

Even if your project seems to be going well and your team is feeling the positive impact of automation, if you don't have success metrics in place, it will be hard to demonstrate the ROI to your stakeholders. That will come back to bite you if you want support for future automation projects.

Take time to define your specific success metrics - whether it be risk reduction, cost savings, increased productivity, or better customer satisfaction - or a combination thereof. This gives you a way to quantify how much value the automation efforts add to your business.

For instance, if you use automation software to handle procurement and invoicing, you're capable of processing a high volume of purchase orders and invoices without human error. Because of this, success metrics could be things like:

- AP department time savings
- Cost-savings from early payment discounts
- Reduction in maverick spend

Not Planning Ahead to Scale

If you're too focused on the short-term, it can be difficult to implement process automation solutions that will scale with you as you grow. You run the risk of building the project for a certain number of users on your current IT structure and ending up with something that lacks flexibility.

Yes, it's true that business leaders want to see quick returns on their investments, but if those quick wins prevent you from reaching your long-term objectives, they won't be happy.

In the beginning, create a plan for how you will scale the project as your company grows. That's another reason to use cloud-based solutions. You can scale them up and down as you add or remove team members, based on your current business needs.

By being aware of these eight challenges, you can adjust your implementation plans according to your use case. You can create a plan of action to address each potential challenge you face, working methodically to implement process automation in a way that keeps everyone happy.

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