

RPA Vs BPM: What Is The Difference Between RPA and BPM?



The pursuit of excellence often carries with it a concurrent commitment to continuous improvement.

In procurement, finding ways to achieve more efficiency, greater profits, and higher productivity in the age of digital transformation has increasingly meant finding the right mix of technology and technique.

Both *Business Process Management* (BPM) and *Robotic Process Automation* (RPA) are essential to this search, with each playing a distinct but interconnected role in effecting positive change within procurement, other business units, and organizations as a whole.

Comparing BPM vs RPA

Before you can implement BPM or RPA successfully in procurement (or anywhere else), it's important to understand their individual capabilities and limitations.

Both use digital tools designed to help you glean insights from your data to improve efficiency, productivity, and your overall return on investment (ROI) from your spend, but they play very different roles.

- **Business Process Management** is:

- *Holistic*: BPM is a comprehensive set of technologies and processes designed to integrate and manage disparate business functions within a single, cohesive whole. It is a core component of digital transformation, creating a bridge between legacy systems and emerging tech to remove waste and needless expense while simultaneously improving performance and profitability. BPM solutions are strategic, connecting business analytics, workflow automation, machine learning (artificial intelligence), and other automation tools in order to achieve a positive business impact.
- *Process-Focused*: BPM is used to map out end-to-end process automation. It is used in charting a course focused on re-engineering and streamlining complex processes, simplifying communication and collaboration, improving decision-making, and achieving enterprise-wide gains in productivity and profits by removing bottlenecks, inefficiencies, and excessive risk exposure.
- *Long-Term and High-Effort*: Effective BPM requires an eye for the big picture and a healthy measure of patience. BPM platforms are deeply transformative, and therefore disruptive; in organizations wedded to legacy systems, a successful digital transformation strategy may require cultural shifts, educational initiatives, and

obtaining buy-in from both management and staff, separate from efforts to implement automation technology. That said, BPM is rapidly becoming non-optional for any company wishing to compete in the global marketplace.

▪ **Robotic Process Automation** is:

- *Software-Driven*: A subset of business process automation, RPA is a set of technologies designed to support and execute the improvements developed using BPM. RPA relies on the use of software robots (often abbreviated to “bots”) to automate and streamline high-volume processes.
- *Task-Focused*: RPA bots excel at automating manual, repetitive tasks, and have some capacity to accommodate contingencies. Rule-based processes (such as approval routing) that don’t require advanced decision-making are ideal for RPA technology.
- *Low-Effort, Speedy, and Tactical*: RPA tools can be quickly and easily integrated to work with specific existing applications. They can be used to address specific tasks without requiring an overhaul of your entire IT system or corporate culture. So, for example, you can use RPA to create an automated user interface for providing answers to common customer questions through your web page’s user interface (improving customer experience), or tackle the low-value, repetitive tasks in your procure-to-pay (P2P) process in order to free your staff for more rewarding and strategic labors (workflow management). Standalone RPA solutions are usually less expensive than comprehensive BPM platforms as well, both in actual cost and expenses related to corporate cultural changes.

When it comes to digital transformation, the dilemma to be faced isn’t “RPA vs BPM” or “Is robotic process automation as important as business process management?” so much as it is answering the question, “How do we intelligently

and strategically achieve better BPM with support from RPA?”

It's important to remember that RPA and BPM are meant to be complementary, rather than competitive, technologies.

In many cases, companies in the early stages of digital transformation may choose to begin with targeted RPA tools to address their biggest bottlenecks, and then work toward a more complete integration as their BPM platform expands and their BPM strategy matures.

In others, particularly small businesses, investing in RPA technology in the form of a purpose-built software solution can provide the bulk of improvements necessary to fulfill the company's current goals for streamlining workflows and lowering costs—leaving the door open for more ambitious BPM down the road while realizing measurable value in the present.

Whatever the case, while both RPA and BPM have their respective merits, they work best, and provide the most benefits to their users, when used together.

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A Match Made in Procurement Paradise

Imagine RPA as a fleet of tiny robots, each performing a single task. Some of these robots are equipped to handle minor bumps in otherwise standardized processes, rerouting files as needed or generating alerts if an approval languishes for too long in any given inbox.

Others are used simply to connect information between different applications and

workspaces, automatically populating data fields in new contracts, generating reports, or searching for, retrieving, and automatically pasting information.

BPM is the strategic element, working to coordinate the efforts of the tiny robot army in pursuit of organizational goals.

It forges connections, relentlessly refines business processes in the name of even greater efficiency, and optimizes existing applications and systems to integrate process improvements from, and share information with, new ones.

The BPM platform you choose will have a major effect on the business impact of your RPA efforts, both individual and collective.

For example, a complete and customizable P2P solution like Planergy offers the best of both worlds.

Combining a complete BPM solution with bespoke RPA tools, Planergy makes it possible for users to:

- Fully automate their procurement processes, including data entry, approval workflows, and verifications (three-way matching).
- Collect, organize, and analyze all their spend data.
- Use powerful data analysis tools to extract insights that improve decision making, financial planning and reporting, and product innovation.
- Foster collaboration and communication—both internally and with vendors, customers, etc.—by providing role-appropriate, totally transparent access to all essential information from both desktop and mobile platforms, across applications. This leads to fewer miscommunications and misunderstandings, and more effective supplier relationships and opportunities for innovation.
- Reduce risk exposure and improving compliance by simplifying supply chain management, eliminating rogue spend and fraud, and tightening internal controls.

- Generate process improvements that spread to other business units by connecting all systems to a shared data environment.
- Extending efficiency improvements outside the organization by providing a vendor portal to integrate suppliers with the system and data management tools that allow users to track vendor key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor performance and compliance.

Smarter, Swifter, and More Strategic Procurement Awaits

Who knew that robots would one day be so important to the success of your business—or that you’d need a new kind of map to get the best return on their digital labor?

Chart your course with BPM, and build your RPA fleet to sail the seas of Big Data to the promised land of productivity and profits.

With careful planning and the right software solution, you can be confident you’ll reach those distant shores at full speed rather than sinking below the waves.

What’s your goal today?

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