

RPA Analyst Course

Written Guide

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Intent

This document is designed to augment your online learning experience and provide you with the opportunity to review and revise the content that has been discussed during the individual lessons of the course

Feedback

Please contact your WithYouWithMe RPA instructor if you have feedback on this document or any of your WYWM courseware.

Project Management

Overview

As we have discussed in earlier lessons, RPA project management is applicable to the entire delivery methodology and provides overarching governance and management from an organisational perspective.

The purpose of this lesson is to provide a better understanding of how to employ and deal with certain aspects of project management in regard to achieving the project objectives and deliverables. This lesson will provide you with the knowledge you'll need to lead a project within RPA through your professional development journey.

We have already briefly discussed the purpose of the Waterfall and Agile Project Delivery Methodologies and in this lesson will delve a little deeper in the Principles of Project Management.

In this lesson, we will also learn about project management principles, integrating RPA into IT architecture, scope creep and its concerns as well as stakeholder management.

Project Management Principles

Project management principles for an RPA project are no different from the principles for any other project. A good place to see the industry standard for project management principles is in the project Management Institute's Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK).

The PMBoK tells us that a project manager's role is a balancing act of managing each of the process groups shown in this table.

This is no different for an RPA project, however, there are a number of nuances. The iterative and scalable nature of RPA projects mean that the definition of project success can sometimes differ between what the delivery team is thinking and what the organisation is thinking.

It can cause unnecessary confusion when one party thinks the job is nearing completion, whilst the other is expecting much more work to be done. Furthermore, you need to be very upfront about cost and efficiency expectations.

Be transparent about the financial drivers. RPA has both direct and indirect benefits, but it also has direct and indirect costs. The only way to have a common understanding is to have a common way of calculating the business case for robotic process automation, and by this we mean what to include, what to exclude and how to evaluate viability.

RPA is not a silver bullet that can't solve an organisation's prioritisation issues. Remember that you need to look across functions and across the entire organisation to work out the priorities. This must align with the organisation's strategic focus and not just an individual business unit's wants.

RPA is very agile by nature, and priorities can change quite rapidly and frequently and RPA is generally able to adapt, however the organisation needs to properly organise its prioritisation methodology for RPA to be most effective. This responsibility falls on the organisation, or the RPA Governance Board where applicable.

Automation is completely dependent on existing IT Infrastructure and systems. Hence integrating RPA into IT architecture within the organisation is critically important as the RPA project is only as good as the architecture that it is built on.

Most of the processing logic still resides in current systems, and the digital workers role is mainly to act as a link between many systems. Application faults or changes in any of the systems utilised in the process may cause the whole process to come to a stop.

The same thing can happen if there are software upgrades and buttons moved to different places or wording changes, resulting in confusion for the RPA solution.

It's important to understand the IT change management policy and procedures so that you can understand how to be proactive to IT Infrastructure and enterprise application updates.

Iterative UAT

Next, it's important to conduct user acceptance testing every single time that there is a change made to the digital worker. It can be easy to skip this step, especially for minor changes, but this can lead to bigger issues and bad press for the digital workers.

Don't take the easy option. Ensure all the testing is done every time. All this integration will require a close relationship with the IT department at the organisation.

Again as the The RPA analyst or Project Leader, you should ensure that IT is kept closely informed on all digital worker changes in the architecture system. This is to ensure among other things that all relevant permissions are in place for the digital worker.

Risk Management

Risk management is an important part of project management when it comes to RPA projects. Risk management is usually a key concern for senior management within an organisation, especially when it comes to integrating robots into a process.

Questions to consider are “how much risk is being accepted to automate this business process?” “What are the implications if the robot fails whilst using real data in real time”, and “what will be the implications of that failure on the rest of the business?” This should be part of your questioning in the Define Phase when completing the FRQ and PDD.

Governance

It is a good idea to establish a robust governance framework to alleviate some of these concerns and minimise the risks associated with robot failures.

The Robotic Operating Model framework is a good place to start and this is the responsibility of the ROM Architect to establish, with constant feedback from the RPA Analyst to improve its robustness.

Simple governance tools that can be employed early in the project might be a robot register that can be used to help to manage total robot numbers and workloads. This register might include IDs for each robot, sponsor details, business process and business process owner details, licencing situation, what RPA tool was used and what applications it accesses.

Next it's important to ensure that there are clear actions that need to be taken in the event of a robot failure. These plans need to be very detailed and in place from the start, because often as use of the digital worker increases, the volumes can get so large that it's impossible for human workers to take over if something goes wrong. This is commonly referred to as Disaster Recovery and it ensures Business Continuity in the event of a robot failure. The Operating Handbook is where the detailed process and procedures sit for disaster recovery.

Next, the governance framework should ensure that all IT security policies are considered and bots are designed with these policies in mind. For example, how will the robot deal with timeouts or screensavers? How will it deal with confidential information or privacy requirements? All these questions need to be answered.

Next, the risk and compliance team must be integrated into the process so that their concerns and questions can be considered and responded to. As always, communication is key. Ensure the operation staff and IT staff are involved in the process.

Clearly articulate that RPA is the automation of keystrokes, so the bot that has been produced can only do its much damage as an everyday human operator with the same levels of access. A bot will only do what the instructions tell it to do in the automated process and as a human is required to build the automation solution, then there can sometimes be errors that are caused by the bot that weren't picked up in testing and UAT.

Furthermore, it's best to communicate early with operations staff so that they are aware of when new robots are going into production. This is so that they can keep an eye on impacts on the rest of the business and monitor from a performance perspective.

Finally, this governance framework should be applied in a light model to any pilot programmes that occur. This ensures that some level of governance and risk management is taking place, but not so much that it distracts from the speed of application, which is essential in a pilot programme.

Scope

As we've learned earlier on in this course, project scope, in the context of automating a business process refers to exactly what will be automated, to what degree and to what elements of a business process. This is of course detailed in the FRQ, PDD and IPA documentation.

Now scope creep is a major problem for project delivery management when automating a business process, and it is one of the most common reasons for suboptimal project performance.

Some of the reasons that this may happen is that organisations are just learning about RPA during the delivery phase of the project, and once they actually understand how the robot works, they may be tempted to change their business process. The flow on of this is they may change how they approach the automation strategy midway through the solution development and RPA capability implementation.

One example might be, the business process owners might realise that they can now run a report every day or twice daily rather than once a week now that a digital worker is doing the work. This may have not been communicated early in the Define Phase and might cause scope creep when delivering the automation solution.

Configuration management is another reason for scope creep. In some cases it may be tempting for the business process owner to amend the business process after the scope has been frozen because detailed review during the Functional Requirements questionnaire prompted them to make some changes now that they've had a chance to think about the process in detail.

This change in configuration after the solution has been developed inevitably leads to errors during the user acceptance testing, generally causing delays. All this is bad because redoing steps such as the process definition or the solution design and testing, results in unscheduled changes. There's also a quality issue involved in the UAT being wrong and not comparable to the configuration of the business process.

Tips to avoid this are articulating clearly from the outset that once the scope is frozen, it will remain so.

It is important to be up front about the cost of the change both in time and financial terms and be firm. As an experienced Analyst you will be able to assess the time it will take to deliver the end-to-end automated solution and funding will be needed to pay for the resourcing requirements. Particularly if you're consulting on an RPA project, the business unit has the prerogative to change their needs as required, however it's important to make sure that the flow on effects of any changes are clearly communicated so an informed decision can be made.

Note that all the above applies in the short term while the delivery of the RPA solution is being implemented. Once the RPA solution is working in the long term, there will of course be a requirement to change the digital worker from time to time as the business process evolves and develops new requirements.

To manage these circumstances, the RPA team should ensure that the business process owners understand clearly that they need to contact the RPA team each time they want to change their business process to ensure that the digital worker is updated along with the process. This must be scheduled with all the other competing priorities.

Funding

Normally, in many organisations, each business unit has a set operating budget per financial year, and this is generally the same for the RPA CoE. Thus, a business unit must provide the CoE funding to pay for the resourcing that will be used to automate their processes. This is common practice and is evident in both government and non-government organisations.

Another way we can look at funding the RPA CoE resourcing requirements is from an operations perspective. We refer to this as either CAPEX or OPEX and this will become more and more common to you, if it is not already. Capital Expenditure (CAPEX) is funding that is provided up front at the start of the financial year. It is requested via internal budgeting forecasts prior to the end of the financial year. This type of funding usually requires approval from senior business leaders and can take very detailed business case modelling, financial forecasting and ROI analysis prior to approval. It also typically has a discrete start and end point because the expenditure is generally tied to specific projects or initiatives.

OPEX is operational expenditure. It is where funding is provided routinely to support normal operations of the organisation. In this case, the RPA CoE would operate normally without having to seek funding for every new project undertaken. Thus, any processes that require automating across the wider organisation would theoretically already be funded by virtue of the RPA CoE's funding. Any additional resourcing on top of current OPEX funding would require a request for an increase in OPEX. An example of this might be a widening of the RPA CoE's remit which requires the addition of another two developers into the RPA Team. The additional OPEX pays the addition of these two salaries.

Depending on the appetite of the executive team and the business model of the organisation, funding models would be selected appropriately to support the RPA capability.

Finally, stakeholder management is part of every project and is no different in an RPA project. Stakeholder management requires an effective combination of formal and informal communication to achieve the outcomes required to ensure smooth RPA project implementation.

Communication is key and a stakeholder analysis is a good way to ensure that you are keeping up with all your stakeholder requirements.

A common methodology is the RACI method. This is where a matrix is created, with all the stakeholders placed against four categories: Responsible, Accountable, Consulted and Informed.

The RPA analyst and the RPA team must ensure all the stakeholders are managed accordingly to the RACI matrix as this will go a long way towards ensuring all the right stakeholders are being managed adequately.

Change Management

Overview

This lesson will cover the resistance to change, the job loss question, communicating and change management plans.

Change Management occurs at all stages of the RPA Project and Delivery Methodologies and it is essential to understand the principles behind it, because you as an RPA Analyst, will be part of the change management process at various stages of the project lifecycle.

Resistance to Change

Firstly, let's discuss the resistance to change. It's important from the outset that project managers understand that a resistance to change is only natural in humans. This is especially evident for very fast changes, and in the tech industry as well as RPA, changes to an individual's day to day operation can often be quite drastic.

This takes time to accept. A bigger challenge for a project manager is changing the mindset of employees who are employed within a business process that is scheduled for automation.

People will not accept or internalise the changes unless they fully understand the reasons why the changes are happening. It is your job as the RPA analyst to take the business process owners and the employees on the journey through the change and ensure that everyone understands where you are headed.

The Job Loss Question

The job loss question is an inevitable part of any automation delivery and involves employees being worried that the implementation of digital workers will result in the human workers being fired or made redundant.

As you can imagine, this can cause significant resistance to change and resistance to the implementation of the RPA delivery. And if the employees and the subject matter experts don't want to help you define a process and understand the organisational landscape, then you don't stand a very good chance as an RPA analyst of defining the business process.

Sometimes it's easy for analysts to forget that the term FTE actually represents a real person with loved ones to support. For these real people who may not have the proper understanding of what automation is, the threat of losing their job is very real and very threatening, and it must be dealt with appropriately and directly, otherwise, it can lead to significant resistance to change.

Automation teams often employ specially trained change managers to be the face of the change. But as the analysts who are interacting with the business process owners and employees on a daily basis, it's quite likely that the employees will trust you and ask you the question first.

It is vitally important that you deal with this question directly and openly. Robotic Process Automation requires change to take place at different levels.

It impacts the organisation's planning processes, changes individual roles and even drives changes at a process level. So the intent of RPA is not to replace people but to re-task or retrain them into roles which add much more value to the organisation.

It's important to explain that humans are much better at thinking and reasoning tasks rather than just menial and repetitive labour.

However, as a word of caution, you should not make promises that you cannot keep. Layoffs and redundancies are distinct possibilities in any project that involves making a system more efficient. So it's important not to set the wrong expectations when you couldn't possibly know the end result.

As is often the case, communication is a key part of the change management plan in an RPA project. Make sure you involve people in the planning. It's not just enough to tell people what you're doing, you should try to involve people in designing the new model.

Furthermore, the absence of communication can be disastrous as it can lead to uninformed and damaging rumours, not just around the RPA project, but potentially the business unit and the organisation as a whole.

RPA Supporters

Try to identify internal change champions. They're very important in a change management circumstance. Internal change champions are individuals in the organisation who are influential among the employees but are also supportive of the change process taking place.

Gaining the support of internal change champions can go a long way towards convincing employees the change will not necessarily be harmful to their individual circumstances. It is critical for change managers and RPA analysts alike to quickly identify the potential internal change champions and take them on the journey with you so that they can pass on the good aspects and benefits of being on an RPA project.

Finally, it's important to realise that communication is a two way street. You also need to be able to accept and action feedback that the employees can see. Try to have routine updates, but also try to have town hall meetings or places where everyday employees can air their real concerns and then importantly, have an effective feedback mechanism, which address their concerns quickly and efficiently, so that employees can be shown that real change is being done, but also that their points are being considered.

Change Management Plan

All these change management considerations should be contained within the change management plan. Often this is an annex to the operational impact document or the implementation plan itself and will more times than not will follow the organisation's change management policy.

This plan, if produced, should be made as public as possible as soon as possible to ensure a communications vacuum never exists, because remember, if change is managed poorly, resistance to that change can be one of the main impediments to achieving a return on investment for your project.

The plan should also outline how a silent team member such as a digital worker should be managed. And as we've covered in previous lessons, team leaders need to adopt new ways to monitor the team workload and team throughput.

An example might be that many more invoices can be processed over a 24-hour period than was previously achievable because of the limitations on what a human worker could achieve. But these invoices are being processed when there are no human workers in the office. There are additional considerations that need to be made particularly when considering exceptions. The change management process will highlight to the business process owner the need to define how to monitor and schedule the digital worker and the manual exception situations.

Finally, change management plans should have People and Culture involvement, especially if there are elements of the change that involve the retraining or moving of personnel internally within an organisation that are required.

It's just as important to involve the management of an organisation as it is to involve the employees of an organisation.