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RPA Analyst Course

Written Guide

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Contents

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.

Process Management

Overview

Process Management is the framework we use to determine which process we should look to automate. So we use process management to work out which process is suitable for automation and should feed into the PDLC.

Process Management is the structure that an organisation puts in place to ensure there are suitable processes waiting in the pipeline ready to be automated when the automation team is ready to accept the next process.

Process Management is a cycle, but if we were to follow a process from start to finish, it would start with business units and everyday staff searching for processes to automate based on some foundational training and tools that would have been provided.

The process would then be shortlisted as potentially suitable, and go through Feasibility Analysis by the automation team, and then, if approved by a decision-making board would be assigned a priority for automation.

Process Management and the RPA Analyst

Process Management is an important pre-commencement step of the PDLC when delivering automated solutions to the business or the wider organisation. This ensures that any processes identified as potential candidates for automation closely aligns to the organisation's strategic direction.

The RPA Analyst is responsible for working with the business units to ensure that the funnel is full of potential process candidates for automation.

The RPA Analyst will be responsible for process analysis, business case modelling and managing prioritisation requests within the Prioritisation and Impact Assessment, or Feasibility Analysis stages of the funnel. THe RPA Analyst will also be required to produce documentation to assist the governance board in determining which processes should be automated.

When we refer to the Governance Board, we are talking about a decision-making group usually consisting of the Head of RPA as well as IT and Business Representatives, who meet, review the shortlisted processes and prioritise them to ensure the demand for process automation is carefully managed.

The Funnel

We can think of managing the demand pipeline as the process management funnel.

Each part of the funnel is shown here and indicates the various stages a process moves through, prior to commencing it's journey through the PDLC

Here, we will provide a brief overview of each part of the funnel. If you're interested in looking at process management in greater detail, The ROM Architect course elaborates on these points further

There are two triggers that would require an organisation to manage demand.

They are Proactive and reactive triggers.

Proactive triggers include Business Automation requests that are part of normal business operations and can be planned for.

The reactive trigger is exactly that. It's where the RPA capability needs to react to business process changes and systems changes. Sometimes occurring without wider organisation awareness until problems occur.

The stages that make up the funnel are:

- Demand Management
- Prioritisation
- Impact Assessment / Feasibility Analysis
- Governance Board, and
- Scheduling

A Process that is fed into this funnel will encounter each stage before it is ready for automation and the first phase of the delivery methodology.

Let's briefly look at each section of the funnel.

Demand Management

Demand for RPA comes from Demand Generation which is the responsibility of the Governance Board.

Prioritisation

This is where we prioritise processes that align to the organisations strategic direction. The benefits realised from automating a process needs to align with the strategic direction of the organisation before it will be prioritised. This will usually come from the quarterly RPA Meeting of the governance board and business unit managers to align processes to the organisation's strategy.

Feasibility Analysis

Here we follow a structured impact assessment process that evaluates benefits, delivery and ongoing support costs, as well as alignment to strategic business drivers and the potential impact of not automating. This is important as it provides a clear understanding of the required resources and costs to deliver the automated solution.

The Governance board

The section Enables key stakeholders to review all proposed automations and assess the projected value in terms of strategic business or organisational drivers. This is where processes are approved to move to the scheduling

Scheduling

The scheduling of processes for development is intended to Build and manage the RPA change schedule. This is a function of the governance board and is a balance for maximising business benefit, delivery resource availability, and the reuse of existing processes.

Once the processes are scheduled for automation, they await the commencement of the define phase of the PDLC.

Feasibility Analysis

Overview

Feasibility analysis involves assessing whether a process should be automated based on the organisation's needs as well as its actual suitability for automation.

Feasibility analysis is a stage within Process Management. Remember that Process Management is not part of the PDLC, it's come before and is used to determine which process should be automated. Feasibility analysis is led by the RPA Analyst.

An RPA Analyst can play an important role here in conducting level 1 deep dives that assess a range of business processes throughout the organisation and their suitability for automation.

This lesson will go through what makes organisations suitable, what makes business processes suitable, and just as importantly, what makes business processes unsuitable for automation.

It will also cover how to align targets within the organisation, setting project scope, and the Initial Process Analysis (IPA) document .

While the IPA is an important document, it is worth noting that it generally does not require delivery or approval by the business process owner and is not used in all automation projects or organisations. When the IPA is not specifically written, the considerations are combined into the process prioritisation steps of the demand pipeline. This is covered in more detail in the Process Management lesson.

Organisational Suitability for RPA

This section will cover what makes a new organisation suitable for RPA. High volumes is one of the first considerations as digital workers are much faster at completing tasks than humans. This is where the bulk of direct savings in the form of FTE savings are made up.

Examples of this are given throughout the lessons, but you should expect transactions or cases in the thousands when we talk about high volume transactions.

High quality data is also ideal. A digital worker cannot make inferences about incorrect, incomplete or missing data. So, if an organisation does not have good existing quality assurance processes, i.e. making sure there are checks and balances in place for data, then it can be very difficult for that process to be automated.

Organisations which are usually quite good at this are typically in highly regulated industries such as financial services.

Nonstandard servicing or awkward servicing times is another area where organisations may be suitable for automation.

For example, 24/7 customer service for basic functions where night-time execution is required, such as online services, reporting or archiving. Some other examples might be the activation of a user account or password resets.

All these processes, if automated, can save a human from having to work awkward shifts and save the business unit on overtime labour costs.

Finally, it helps if an organisation has a fragmented IT environment for automation purposes. By this, we mean environments where swivel chair operations are required because a member is using multiple applications. When using multiple applications, the workers are required to transfer data between applications which can cause transfer errors as well as incurring an additional time cost when the user is required to switch between systems.

In all these circumstances RPA can be of significant benefit. Once the delivery team has determined that an organisation is suitable for an automation project, they must turn their attention to the business processes within the organisation and decide which of those are suitable for an RPA solution.

Suitable Business Processes

Typical characteristics of suitable business processes are that they are rule based. This means that they have explicit rules with no grey areas and have structured data.

Business processes use digital data. Basic RPA Software cannot read non digitised data, so good examples of digitised data are web forms and excel fires where only data that can be read by software can be inputted. Some poor examples of data that can be used in automation are many free text fields in forms or handwritten data that is scanned into a pdf.

Suitable business processes are also standardised. Here we introduce the concept of the happy path, and while a process can have variations, the number of those variations should be small or quite limited.

Where the process primarily follows a single path, we call this the happy path. This tends to minimise the complexity of the process by limiting exceptions. If we have a suitable happy path, then the majority of cases fall into the mainstream.

As a general rule we're looking at 60% or more of the cases following a limited number of defined paths, with the majority of those being along the happy path. Again we're looking for a fragmented IT environment to get the most out of an RPA solution. We're looking for mainly routine business processes where the main work is carrying out tasks that involve copying or typing, cross checking and comparing values, with mostly straightforward rules and calculation logic.

Finally, it’s important to note that you do not automate a broken process. The business process might seem to require automation because it is poorly designed and inefficient. Automating such a process could simply perpetuate the inefficiencies. Seriously consider if the process should be optimised first, before RPA is applied, to get the most out of the situation.

Unsuitable Business Processes

Whilst we covered suitable business processes before, it's important to highlight the unsuitability of certain processes for automation. Firstly, non digital inputs and outputs generally make a process unsuitable for automation, this includes paper based inputs and outputs which are almost always no go criteria. If you have to, consider ways to create simple inputs for humans to help in transformation, for example, self service Web forms, excel templates or printing PDFs directly from the source system.

Next, unstructured data. Avoid hand written emails, freeform contracts without metadata, chat input and open ended Web forms with lots of free form fields. Make sure that at least key input fields like customer numbers, order numbers and so on are clearly structured into the input of a process.

A large number of exceptions is also unsuitable. The number of business exceptions reflects directly on the configuration effort. So it's likely that business processes with a large number of exceptions to the happy path are going to take a very long time to automate as well as becoming increasingly costly with increased complexity.

Poorly documented business processes are also unsuitable. The process needs to be clearly defined and well documented to go on to the next stages of automation. If decision rules are vague, it can lead to manual processing. Typically, existing documentation is at too higher level, and more detailed documentation is needed especially when creating our PDD, but as long as the process can be clearly defined this is okay.

Judgement based application of rules is also a warning sign when looking to automate a business process. As we mentioned previously, RPA cannot derive rules from data by itself, and rules often have complex processes of deduction or calculation, and these are very difficult to automate without explicit or clear direction.

Finally, if any of these unsuitable business processes must be automated, then there are options for making these business processes automatable. Some of these processes can be transformed with relatively small changes, but again, it’s important to consider optimising the business process first, before simply automating.

Priority Alignment

Another key part of the feasibility analysis stage is aligning targets between the RPA delivery team and the organisation itself. The automation strategy should serve the higher purpose, which is aligned with the organisation's goals and strategies. So it's important to consider more than just the direct benefits of an automation plan. You could do this by adding more targets or KPIs to articulate indirect and strategic benefits.

You may want to add organisation specific benefits that can be used in prioritisation and perhaps even remove some of the generic targets. Typical benefits can relate to cost savings, customer experience, resourcing bottlenecks and quality. However, once you've determined these targets, they still remain just

assumptions. Ensure you validate these assumptions by communicating with the organisation or the business process owners during the organisation's functional requirements stage, which we'll discuss later in this course.

The iterative and scalable nature of robotic process automation projects, mean that the project scope can sometimes be a grey area and a point of confusion. The feasibility analysis stage is the first time after the business case where we start to lock down the project scope. Start considering which business processes are likely to be automated and which business processes are likely to be easiest to automate and will produce the most significant benefits. All this information will help you determine a prioritisation order of business processes to automate, as well as give you an understanding of scope when in discussions with the organisation and the business process owners.

Furthermore, the project scope discussion should take into consideration the resource requirements for automating these business processes. How many robots will be required? How long will it take to implement each of these business processes? How many developers will be required to work in conjunction, to achieve these tasks and over what time frame? All these considerations should start to shape the delivery team's idea of scope and what needs to be achieved from the automation project.

Like we said previously, these remain assumptions until they're validated with the organisation or the business process owner. During the feasibility analysis, a list of candidate processes will emerge that, following a prioritisation exercise, will each require Initial Process Analysis documents (or IPA documents) before the implementation of the automation can be considered.

The IPA document is a means of framing the information available at the early stage of delivery into a succinct document illustrating the salient points.

It is, however, recommended as a summary for each business process. The objective of the IPA is to provide a high level analysis of the process solution, the automation efficiency, and the effort involved in delivering and supporting the solution. The analysis required considers the likely solution, likely benefits and likely resource requirements.

Again, whilst the IPA is not essential, you have been provided with a template to produce as required for RPA delivery in industry.

Organisation's Functional Requirements

Overview

As discussed earlier in this course, the FRQ is one of the key documents in the Define phase of the Delivery Methodology, but this lesson will cover the FRQ in a bit more detail.

The FRQ provides a framework for the RPA analyst to collect information, primarily from the process SME, about the process we're looking to automate. Put simply, the FRQ breaks down exactly what information is required about a process, so the RPA analyst and design team have the level of detail they need to effectively automate.

The FRQ documents the functionality and specifics of the business process, and is used by the designers of the digital worker to ensure that the automation solution will meet the requirements of the business. As we mentioned earlier, the information in the FRQ is typically collected in a structured way using interviews and process walkthroughs.

Capturing the Functional Requirements

The business units functional requirements need to be captured after the business process owner and if applicable, the governance board, have agreed on the business processes that will be automated, based on the work we've done so far.

The functional requirements are recorded separately for each business process, even though some requirements may be similar or even the same for related processes. This is to ensure that each Business Process maintains its unique set of requirements to avoid confusion or cross over during the solution Design and build phases.

The FRQ is effectively the exchange of information between the RPA analyst and the process SME. The main purpose of the Functional Requirements Questionnaire is to gather this information via meetings, workshops and walkthroughs.

The questionnaire contains questions ranging from automation metrics to business continuity and plans to enact in the event the robot resource is unavailable.

It is also a chance for the business unit to communicate all the functional and operational requirements required for the PDD.

As the key communicator, the RPA analyst is responsible for ensuring that the business unit can have its say on the functional requirements, and that these requirements are met by the automation solution once delivered.

The FRQ

The functional requirements questionnaire itself is a series of questions or prompts for the RPA analyst to work through with the relevant process SMEs. The FRQ document covers the essential questions, but when you're with the business unit you may realise that there are likely more questions to ask.

Of course, this is depending on the circumstances and the process identified for automation. All these functional requirements along with the process definition document will feed into the solution design, so it's vitally important that all the requirements are clearly annotated.

The FRQ document contains metrics, controls, execution, data management and business continuity headings, and is generally completed in the initial stages of the Define phase, but the RPA analyst has a number of tasks to complete before commencing the interview schedule.

Firstly, there's the data gathering plan. This is essential because the RPA analyst needs to have a good understanding of the business process so that they know what questions to ask and what to drill down further into during the FRQ and PDD walkthrough.

The analysts should identify all the necessary stakeholders. This includes business process owners, who will have the best overview of the process. We also have the Process SMEs who will generally be best placed to provide insight into the details of the process, including exceptions to the process and how any exceptions are handled.

Finally we have business unit managers. The business unit manager is typically responsible for final approval of the PDD. That said, depending on the organisation the business process owner may also be responsible for approving the PDD prior to the automation solution being developed.

Preparation is essential for the RPA analyst. If feasible, the analyst should provide the questions to the process SMEs well before the walkthroughs. This lets them prepare for the interview and also to put them at ease so as not to make them feel uncomfortable by asking questions that they may feel they won't know the answer to.

When conducting the walkthroughs, the RPA Analyst should take detailed notes throughout the process. You should also ensure that you agree on these notes and write down action items at the end of each walkthrough.

The Analyst should also provide opportunities for Process SMEs to ask questions and to give you any additional information if they feel it's necessary. Remember, the FRQ is not a script. It's simply a guide for information collection.

After this lesson, you'll find an FRQ template in word format and a completed FRQ on a very simple process provided by Blue Prism to give you some insights into the level of detail that is required at a minimum for this step.

Finally, it is important to remember that whilst the FRQ we have provided is complete, in the real world, very rarely will you have all the FRQ information upfront. There will generally be several question marks regarding information that the process owner simply doesn't know. In these circumstances, you will need to rely on your judgement and the advice of your team-lead to decide if you can keep moving forward

and add the missing data later, or if the information is so critical that you need to stop until you have an answer. Generally speaking, in an agile methodology, you will keep moving and circle back when the information comes to light.