AN AUTOMATION DRIVE WITH UNEXPECTED BENEFITS

Abstract

When Patrick Stefan, the Head of Mobile Infrastructure Delivery at a global telecom giant, mandated Infosys BPM to automate his order management operations a few years ago, the bots delivered the expected benefits: higher efficiencies, scalability, and savings. But another unexpected benefit emerged during the pandemic – resilience. The bots not subject to any social distancing norms, continued working at full capacity, ensuring the company's business continuity during those turbulent times, while also providing business benefits worth ~$3 Mn.

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Gunning for automation

For over 16 years now, Infosys BPM has had a very successful partnership with one of the largest global telecom firms, which provides fixed-line, broadband, and mobile services to millions of customers in the UK. As part of the collaboration, a growing team of Infosys BPM's experts, numbering over 100, has been managing several of the company's key business processes from delivery centers in India.
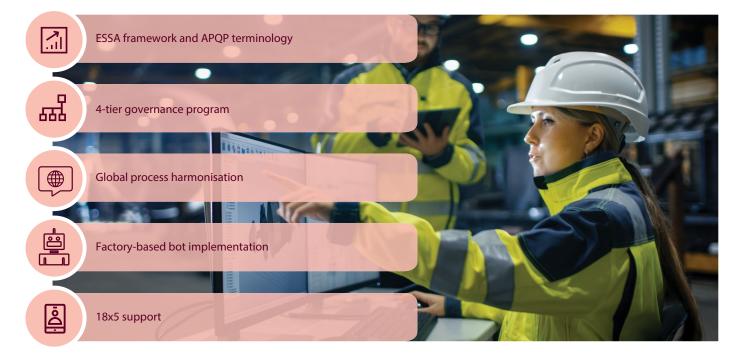
A few years ago, the £21 Bn+ giant embarked on an enterprise-level robotics process automation (RPA) journey with Blue Prism – the pioneer of using software bots to automate complex, manual-intensive operational activities. The ambitious automation plan envisioned reducing the costs of the company's global operations by 30% through implementing scalable bot solutions. The company also anticipated that achieving enterprise automation across all its domains would improve the efficiencies, accuracy, the ability to handle volume spikes, and the turnaround times for various critical processes.

As the automation drive progressed across the company and started bearing fruits, Patrick Stefan, the company's Head for Mobile Infrastructure Delivery realised the tremendous potential of the bots to improve the productivity of his own order management function. Soon enough, Patrick dialed Sarah Gupta, who with her Infosys BPM team had a successful track record over the years of exemplary service delivery for his division. He handed her the mandate to deploy the Blue Prism automation kit in his order management operations, clearly stating his objectives of lowering operating costs, improving efficiencies, and enhancing customer experience.

Simplifying a complex implementation

Immersing herself into the task, Sarah applied several design principles to achieve Patrick's ambitious goals. First, to standardise the business processes and identify opportunities for automation, she adopted the ESSA (Eliminate, Simplify, Standardise, Automate) framework to eliminate all unnecessary processes and simplify the rest. Then, she leveraged Advanced Product Quality Planning (APQP) terminology to categorise these processes and prioritise their automation use cases. Based on these assessments of the overall process, she believed that there was an automation potential of 50%- 70%, for processes spanning various operational areas such as Broadband, IP Voice, and Managed Ethernet Access Services.

Approach summary

- ESSA framework and APQP terminology
- 4-tier governance program
- Global process harmonisation
- Factory-based bot implementation
- 18x5 support

Then, to ensure a smooth, synchronised transformation program and the delivery of planned objectives, Patrick and Sarah instituted a 4-tier governance program. It comprised an executive steering committee, monthly reviews, weekly status briefings, and daily scrum meetings. This program level governance was designed to be rigorous, with the steering committee meetings having participation from both sides' leadership to set direction and minimise roadblocks. They also ensured strong program management by setting up boards for both change and release controls.

Next, Sarah and her team closely collaborated with the company's subject matter experts to define globally harmonised processes across different lines of business. These included the support helpdesk, lead to cash, trouble resolution, jeopardy management, wholesale hosted communications, and managed ethernet access services, and the team set up Centers of Excellence (CoE) to automate each of these operational areas.

For automation, Sarah's team utilised a factory-based implementation approach, focusing on the individual goals of each team in Patrick's division and developing small automation modules that could be reused across the different LOB processes. This approach helped them greatly reduce the project timelines as they implemented just 26 bots across over 60 use cases. The bots were built with scalability and resilience in mind, with any of the bots able to run any process, based on its availability, which helped to drive down the implementation costs.

Then, as the implementation sped towards the finish line, Sarah worked on building a strong automation support team with 18 hours by 5-day operations a week, to support the client through the transition and beyond.

The cup beyond the finish line

Using Infosys BPM's human-ware philosophy – the best of people and domain capabilities blended with the best of technology, Sarah and her team eventually deployed a digital workforce of over 40 Blue Prism bots, in over 66 use cases across regions, making the deployment rank among the largest and most complex RPA programs in the market. What is more, 23% of these use cases are completely automated, needing no manual intervention at all.

Key benefits

Business benefits worth ~$3 Mn over 3 years

70% automation coverage

27% improvement in customer satisfaction

24% improvement in productivity

Working concurrently, these bots have been successfully managing daily and monthly spikes in volume, delivering 70% automation coverage, which has resulted in an astounding 27% improvement in customer satisfaction scores. Patrick however was most impressed with the 24% improvement in his division's productivity, which allowed him to redeploy 40 of his staff to other lines of business. Also, the standardised processes that Sarah instituted through structured harmonisation amplified the value from automation, delivering business benefits worth ~$3M over 3 years.

Infosys BPM's automation approach also helped Patrick's organisation accelerate its business process automation drive and significantly shift from merely efficiency to business value and resilience. This was amply demonstrated when Covid-19 struck. At a time when other enterprises were still trying to come to terms with the impact of the pandemic, the telecom giant was able to successfully ensure robust business continuity, with the bots needing no social distancing and delivering 100% on key performance indicators.

Like they say, good work creates even more work. Patrick rewarded Sarah's

RPA implementation success with an invitation for her and her team to attend the company's Hackathon in the U.K. There, the Infosys BPM's team successfully demonstrated how the existing automation components could be replicated for future processes, wherever feasible, with only minor changes as required. Acknowledging the potential of this idea, the company then recommended replication of Infosys BPM's RPA solutions across all its onshore processes.

Names have been altered to preserve the identities of the people involved.

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