Do businesses really have to choose between RPA and BPM?

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17 Jan 2020

In the current era of digital transformation, enterprises everywhere are striving to digitise their operations to achieve greater productivity and improved efficiency through the automation of routine and repetitive tasks.

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Business Process Management (BPM) technologies have, for some years now, formed an essential part of digital transformation strategies for organisations. At the same time, with companies constantly looking for new technologies to optimise their business processes, Robotic Process Automation (RPA) has recently seen a sharp rise in popularity as automation technology.

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According to Gartner research, RPA software revenue grew 63.1% in 2018, to $846 million, making it the fastest-growing segment of the global enterprise software market. The research and advisory company said it expects RPA software revenue to reach $1.3 billion in 2019.

While distinct in their own right; when deployed together, RPA and BPM can complement each other and deliver a powerful platform to enable digital transformation across an entire organisation.

Yet, many companies seem to confuse the two, or simply assume that they are one and the same. Most likely, this is because both technologies deal with automation, both involve optimisation of business processes and drive increased workforce productivity, and both are increasingly leveraged in digital transformation.

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However, it is important to note that there are key differences between these technologies. RPA is a software that is enhanced with artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, and its job is to handle repeatable tasks automatically. BPM, on the other hand, is not a software, but an approach to streamlining business processes for maximum efficiency and value.

In terms of their respective automation focuses, RPA is aimed at repetitive manual and rule-based tasks that do not require complex decision-making, whereas BPM aims to improve existing business processes by monitoring and assessing these for adaptable optimisation.

Similarly, a clear distinction can be drawn between the impacts that RPA and BPM have on business. The former delivers return quickly and cost-effectively, but its implementation may not always address underlying process inefficiencies. Conversely, BPM helps to address an organisation's internal and external concerns by continuously improving and optimising processes to meet new and updated needs.

Despite these differences, enterprises should keep in mind that both technologies can be harnessed to achieve increased productivity and efficiency, and are not competing approaches, but can work together in harmony. RPA can be a valuable tool to boost gains achieved with a traditional BPM system.

Although BPM and RPA technologies can be deployed separately in digital transformation initiatives, it is when they are strategically implemented together that their individual benefits are compounded. They can, in fact, be integrated seamlessly to leverage their advantages for intelligent automation.

In this sense, it can be said that BPM and RPA complement each other by forming a powerful duo that can help

organisations to deliver further on their process automation goals. When deployed together, RPA and BPM can help you build a powerful platform that can support digital transformation throughout your entire organisation. For example, when using BPM to automate an entire business process, you can use RPA for one or two steps of the process that are rule-based.

Organisations that are implementing digital transformation should keep in mind that BPM and RPA technologies go hand in hand. BPM allows for complete process automation that re-engineers and digitises end-to-end business processes, while RPA closes the gaps between a mostly-automated and digitised business process and manual tasks.

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