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AUTOMATION IN OIL AND GAS

EPISODE 1:
AN INTRODUCTION TO RPA

strategy | consulting | digital | technology | operations

WHAT IS ROBOTIC PROCESS AUTOMATION?

RPA stands for Robotic Process Automation. But what does that actually mean? Many of us have been automating processes for years, whether it's using an excel spreadsheet and doing a V-lookup or perhaps even using an accessed database or an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system to get data from one place to another.

RPA is different in this respect. It allows you to go from one application to another. For example, I can extract data from an SAP system by logging on. I can put that data into an excel spreadsheet, I can save it to SharePoint and then I can send it via an email. RPA allows you to basically mimic a user within a system to complete an activity.

HOW IS RPA RELEVANT TO THE OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY?

There are two things that I think make this type of technology very pertinent.

First, over the last three year this [oil and gas] industry has undergone one of the most significant economic challenges in its history. We've seen a lot of workforce reductions as a result of that. The industry has now learned how to survive – at least the companies that are still here – with the current price of oil.

As transactions start to increase and business starts to get better, what they want to avoid is bringing on new talent to do those tedious, monotonous and repetitive tasks. Instead, what most industries are really focused on is *How do I allow automation to take that activity so I can handle the additional volume and can use my talent to do the more complex, interesting work that is remaining in the organization*.

Now the second reason why a lot of companies – in addition to that cost-avoidance of handling new work – are looking at RPA is for controls. When you think about this industry, this industry works in almost every possible environment in the world including in the most difficult, frontier countries that you can possibly imagine under tuff conditions.

Having standard ways of doing things, making sure that the right data is in at the right point in time is incredibly important to not only help simplify processes but to get the right data at the right time to people.

Bots can help with that type of quality control across the organization.

WHAT TO THINK OF BEFORE IMPLEMENTING RPA?

RPA is an incredible exciting technology and many people want to jump on the boat because it's fast to implement. Sometimes within a matter of a couple of weeks you can get an RPA up and running. But before you do so it's important to think of 5 key things:

1. **Business case:** What is my businesses case and the benefits the RPA is generating, as well as the total cost of ownership.
2. **Process optimization:** Am I truly optimizing my process to be automated? That can be through RPA, but it can also be better using the technologies you currently have.
3. **Bot management:** How am I managing the bots? A 'bot' workforce needs the same type of management that you have today in many ways.
4. **Operating model:** Roles and responsibilities will change with the people in your organization. How are you changing the operating model to meet the new workloads that RPA will create, but also to make sure that RPA can be part of the co-workers that you have within an organization.
5. **Scaling RPA:** How to scale RPA effectively and throughout the organization?