

# Robotic Process Automation (RPA) & Human Resources

How RPA Will Create a More  
Human-centric HR Profession and  
a More Human Workplace



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The Human Resources and RPA white paper has relied on the expertise of Human Resources professional John J. Gillen.

**UIPATH IS LEADING THE “AUTOMATION FIRST” ERA**  
– championing one robot for every person, delivering

free and open training and collaboration and enabling robots to learn new skills through AI and machine learning. Led by a commitment to bring digital era skills to more than a million people, the company's enterprise Robotic Process Automation (RPA)

platform has already automated millions of repetitive, mind-numbing tasks for business and government organizations all over the world, improving productivity, customer experience and employee job satisfaction.

# RPA Will Create a More Human-centric HR Profession and Workplace

“There is tremendous automation opportunity in the underlying aspects of running an HR function, but the real opportunity this creates is elevating the people in the HR team to spend more time with people in the company, driving talent development, and creating a better employee experience.”

– Mandy Sebel, Chief People Officer, UiPath

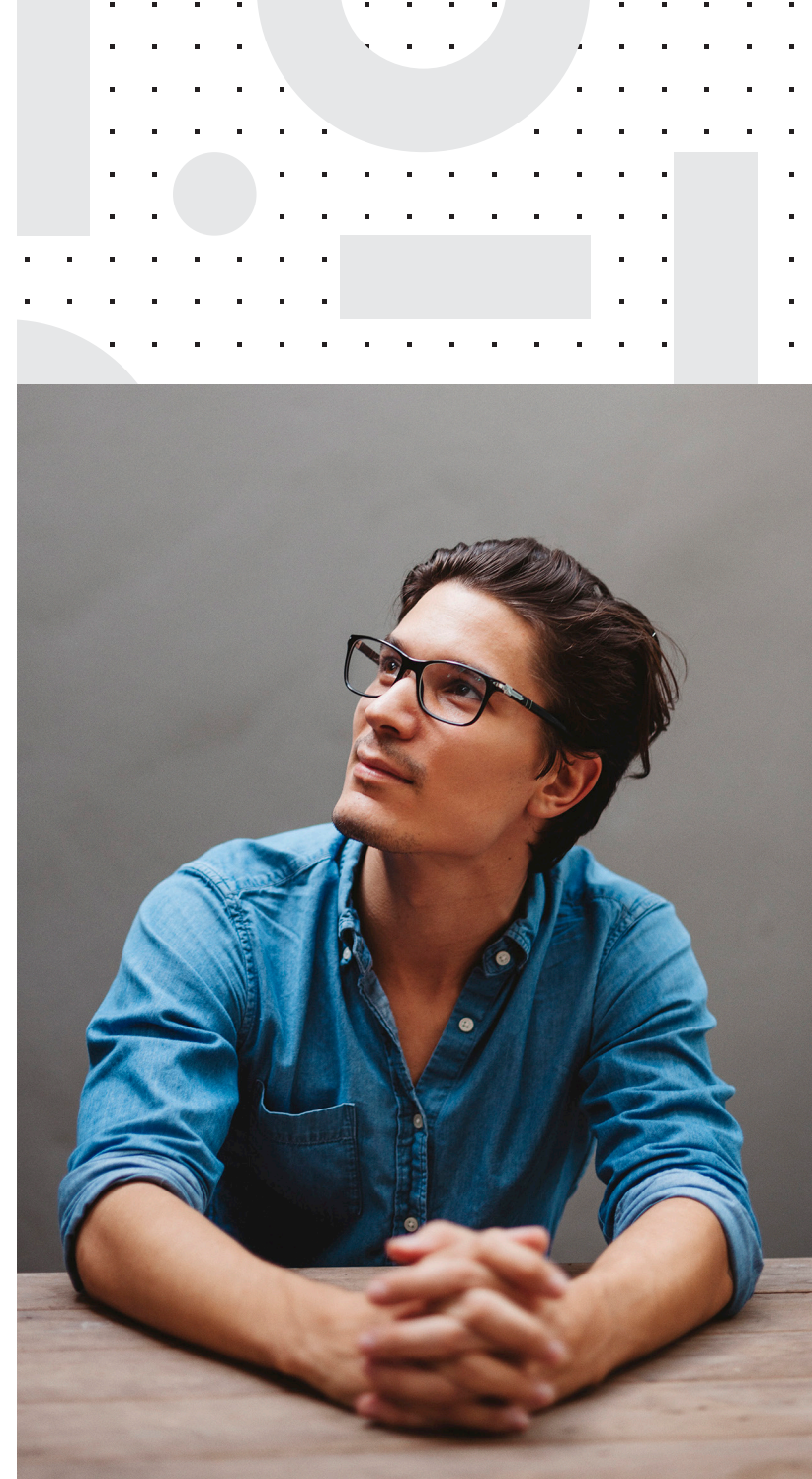
**The world is in the middle of a major revolution in the way that work is done,** much like it experienced with transitions from the Agricultural Age to the Industrial Age. Unlike previous labor shifts, the technologies driving this latest one are now digital. Technologies like Robotic Process Automation (RPA) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) open up new horizons for organizations and their workers. They take over the mundane and repetitive work normally performed by people,

freeing up humans to focus on more strategic, value-added activities. In this time of rapid change, maximizing humans’ potential to focus on important matters is critical for organizational competitiveness and survival.

The shift is a game changer for workers in general, and it fundamentally impacts the Talent Management and Human Resources (HR) functions.<sup>1</sup> As a driver for recruiting and retaining employees and

influencing the company’s brand, the HR function finds itself in a unique position in the modern workforce. HR professionals can take advantage of emerging new technologies to drive their organization to develop a competitive edge in the digital age. These new technologies should increase HR’s capability to focus more on the experience of their candidates and employees, and to make the workplace itself, more human-centric.

<sup>1</sup> George Graen and Miriam Grace in their paper “New Talent Strategy: Attract, Process, Educate, Empower, Engage and Retain the Best,” state that in practice, Talent Management is often used as a new term for HR. For the sake of our paper, we will use HR for an umbrella term to include the functions and responsibilities of the Talent Management functions





# From human resource managers to employee-experience builders

The way businesses view the role of the human worker has changed significantly from the Industrial Age to the Digital Age. During the Industrial Age, a company's access to natural resources made it competitive. Companies created a sustainable competitive advantage through proper management of its tangible assets. People, on the other hand, were viewed as a cost of doing business. Companies often considered its labor force important when they could accrue workers for a lower cost than the competitor.

In the Digital Age, industries shifted from a workforce organized around manual labor to one built around knowledge-based work. Companies compete over intangible assets: their intellectual property (IP), their culture, and the talent that is inherent in its workforce. Talent has risen to the top of the agenda of many corporate board meetings, and many Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) now see a company's top talent officer as an invaluable manager of the entire talent lifecycle.<sup>2</sup> In order to compete in the Digital Age companies have to remain an employer of choice to attract and retain the best available talent.



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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbeshumanresourcescouncil/2018/05/16/the-rise-of-the-chief-talent-officer/#27bcc36c5c37>

# Companies can harness new technologies to create optimal employee experiences

Set against this landscape, businesses are competing in a limited labor pool to recruit and retain the best employees, and the best companies will win the competition by embracing technology to create a positive employee experience.<sup>3</sup> In fact, in a study that surveyed 500 chief human resource officers (CHROs), the common thread was the belief that improving employee experience increases a business' success for winning the war on talent.

Employee experience refers to the degree to which the employee enjoys a personalized, pleasant, and digital experience on the job.<sup>4</sup>

The employee experience becomes even more central to a competitive HR department due to changes in generational norms. Millennials and Post-Millennials grew up with immersive consumer technology that places a premium on usability and usefulness. In 2017 Millennials surpassed Baby Boomers and Generation Xers as the largest percentage of the working population, climbing to 35% of the workforce.<sup>5</sup> The percentage of Millennials and Post-Millennials in the workforce will only increase, and analysts predict that by 2025 these two groups will comprise 75% of the labor pool.<sup>6</sup>

But the goal of creating a seamless and digital experience is only going half of the way.

**With new technologies such as RPA and AI, companies can actually create a more human-centric workplace.** A human-centric workplace means that businesses can minimize their employees' time doing monotonous and repetitive tasks. Robots can do the tasks they were designed to do well while empowering people to do work that humans are uniquely better at doing: innovating, negotiating, empathizing and critical problem-solving, and other examples.



<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/attracting-and-retaining-the-right-talent>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.servicenow.com/content/dam/servicenow-assets/public/en-us/doc-type/resource-center/ebook/ebook-chro-report-comp.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/04/11/millennials-largest-generation-us-labor-force/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://apac.aonhewitt.com/home/insights-at-work/millennial-workforce-increase-employee-engagement>





HR departments often lack sufficient staff to focus on the processes and services that are known to create competitive advantage in the marketplace.

## HR professionals can free up their time by automating

New technologies such as RPA offer significant implications for HR professionals. By and large HR departments remain saddled with an excessive amount of routine and repetitive work that is invaluable to the functioning of an organization. Too often

viewed as a cost center rather than a driver of competitive advantage, HR departments often lack sufficient staff to focus on the processes and services that are known to create competitive advantage in the marketplace.

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**When the HR professional is not overburdened, they can dedicate time to a wide range of value-added tasks** like talent management, performance optimization, rewards, culture, and workplace design and training. In digitally transformed companies, it's these more strategic roles that create the competitive advantage. In this context, the software robot can:

- **Create a better employee experience** to recruit and retain talent,
- **Create more time** to understand which further processes can be automated,
- **Give HR professionals more time to train** on cutting-edge tools available in the digital age,
- Give HR professionals more time to spend more time on HR tasks that **enhance business performance.**
- **Increase job satisfaction** by reducing repetitive tasks that no one wants to perform,

## Employee Engagement:

According to Gallup, 87% of employees worldwide are not engaged. Disengaged employees cost U.S. companies \$450 billion to \$550 billion per year in lost productivity. Moreover, companies with highly engaged workforces outperform their peers by 147% in earnings per share.



# Focus more on employee engagement by automating routine tasks

Digital transformation has created new opportunities, and the combination of RPA and AI technology can change all that. The value for HR functions is that RPA fuses a set of cutting-edge technologies that can minimize the repetitive and redundant tasks that HR professionals perform, if not completely eliminate them. The technology can free up an HR department to

focus on the work that boosts employee productivity, keeps employees engaged, and improves a business' reputation in a globally competitive job market.

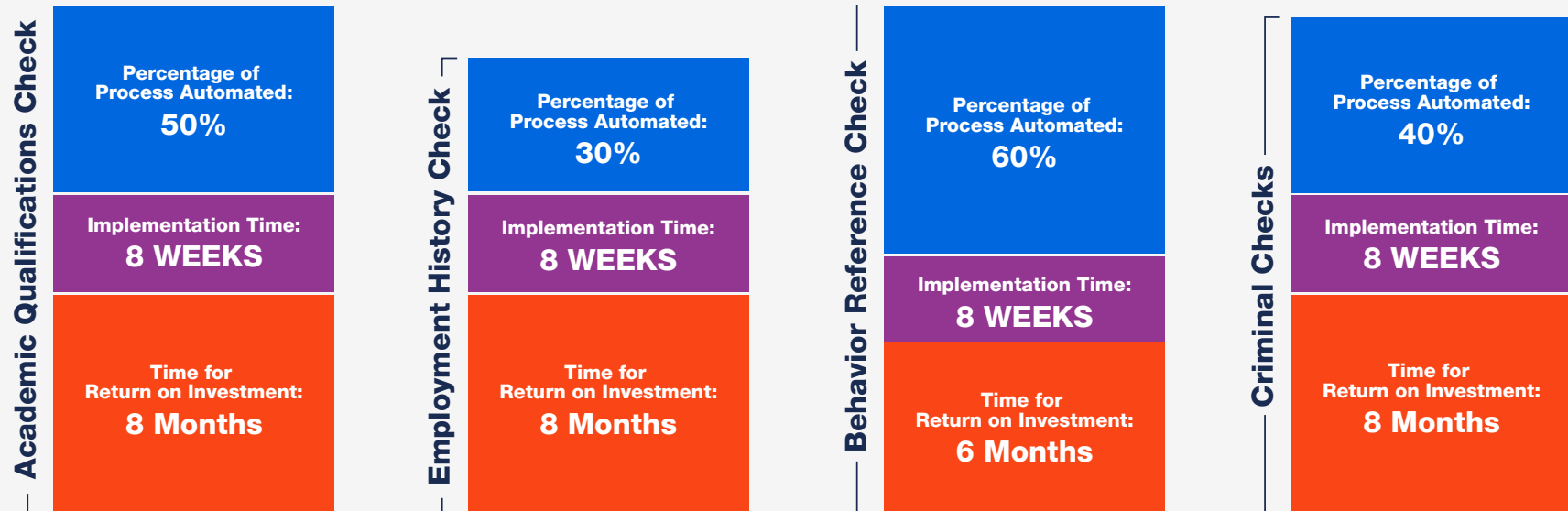
**One major HR service provider partnered with UiPath to deploy a fleet of software Robots to automate a series of employee verification processes.**

Employees performed a number of background checks on a potential employee for its clients. While each process had different sub-processes, they required intensive manual work to set up appointments, verify and scan documents, and enter data into the company's system. Automation led to higher process standardization, and it gave employees more time to spend on valuable analytical work.

“Forward-thinking HR executives want our employee experience to be digital and easy, so everyone can focus their own time and energy not on the tactical, but on the strategic, on the customer.”

– Mandy Sebel,  
Chief People Officer, UiPath

## Results of RPA automation with one HR service provider



## UiPath's own HR Automation Story



**“Don’t be scared to automate. It just makes it [the job] better.**

I can focus on other projects or processes that are more valuable. I can focus more on interacting with people...”

At UiPath, the Europe, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) People Operations Team automated aspects of the onboarding process for new employees. The paperwork was previously being filled out manually by one person, taking up much of the individual’s time that could have been spent on more valuable work. This is the type of work no one wants to spend time on day after day. CHROs know that an HR department wants to offer a digital and easy experience.<sup>7</sup>

“The task was replete with copy-paste activities. There was really no added value to what I was doing, and to top it off, it was very time consuming. Basically, I was taking nearly 30 minutes to prepare the documents, and at that time we were growing at a rapid pace. We had around eight to ten new employees join the company per day. I was working on the task alone, and the volume was simply huge.”

–Mari Ambrose, People Operations Leader EMEA, UiPath.

New employees were scanning their documents and sending them to UiPath electronically for processing. Since UiPath robots are enhanced with optical character recognition (OCR), they can recognize what is on the computer screen, which meant that the process could be successfully automated. The RPA experts configured the Robot to recognize the information that HR needed from the scanned documents and then enter it into the necessary HR database. After automation, the only step the HR personnel had to do was verify the veracity of the information entered into the system by the Robot.

The new Robot completed the onboarding paperwork in one-sixth of the time, allowing Mari Ambrose to focus more of her time on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiatives, which attract talent, enhance a company’s reputation, and increase employee retention.<sup>8</sup> When asked about the benefits of the automation, Mari, who oversaw UiPath’s automation project, recommended:

“Don’t be scared to automate. It just makes it [the job] better. I can focus on other projects or processes that are more valuable. I can focus more on interacting with people, or thinking about CSR projects... I would automate all the paperwork or all the processes that are just copy-paste.”

In fact, automating with robotics and AI is an increasing business trend in general, with specific HR applications. In this case, the RPA robot currently serves as a user-friendly technology that HR personnel can run on their laptop while attending to more important business.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with HR specialist Nov 29, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> <https://blog.hrps.org/blogpost/How-Corporate-Social-Responsibility-Drives-Business-Performance>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/at/Documents/human-capital/at-deloitte-human-capital-trends-2018-ai-robotics-automation.pdf>



# So, what is RPA?

**RPA is a technology** that allows businesses and organizations to configure software Robots to carry out routine, rules-based computer tasks in a way similar to a human employee. Robots can fill out documents, read and send emails, enter data into business applications, and much more. Below are some common myths about the characters and functions of RPA.

## Three Myths about Robotic Process Automation

1

**We're discussing physical robots: No. RPA is software, not humanoid robots** that are going to staff an organization. It's equipped with a variety of components that enable human activities, like sending an email, but it runs on a computer, with no physical form.

2

**RPA automates processes:** True, but that's not all. While RPA does address process-related work, it **focuses on the task- and activity-level of work more than on a process or even on the sub-process level.** Process work still takes human intervention and decision-making, even on an elementary exceptions basis that RPA cannot perform on its own. Robots facilitate the processes that humans carry out.

3

**RPA automates jobs:** Here too, there is a more nuanced answer. **RPA does not automate jobs, it automates tasks.** Most jobs are a set of responsibilities, accomplished through projects, initiatives, and programs. They contain repetitive and rule-based tasks. The work that an HR professional is educated and prepared to do only occurs after the compliance and operationally required work is done in a precise way. RPA can take on some of these tasks, but not the larger job.

RPA does not automate jobs, it automates tasks.



**The top-ranking RPA technologies also incorporate a variety of AI components to facilitate the Robot carrying out human tasks.** Technology such as computer vision helps the software make sense out of the visual elements on a computer screen, so the software can recognize a login screen, for example, or whether a document is an order or an invoice. OCR gives the robot the ability to read the words

and understand the context in which the words appear. Robots can be both attended and unattended. Attended robots interact with an employee to accomplish certain tasks. They are triggered by certain events, actions, or commands in the workflow and require human intervention to complete the task. Unattended Robots can carry out tasks on a 24x7x365 basis, with minimal or no human intervention.<sup>10</sup>

RPA is a tool to free up a business' employees of doing more mechanical and tedious work. There are a number of tasks in each process that an employee does that can and should be automated because a configured Robot can perform them faster and with greater accuracy than a human. People tend not to like these mechanical and repetitive tasks anyway. Because of its rapid and demonstrable time-

to-value, RPA is also growing in scope and spreading across a wide variety of industries. Leaders across all industries and functions are beginning to realize that Robots and humans should be working side by side, and that ultimately, all employees could benefit from having their own Robot. The aspiration to provide each employee with a robot resembles Microsoft's early vision of putting a computer

in every home. Robots should continuously learn and adjust to new business needs, just like their humans do. And, as Robots free up people from these repetitive tasks, HR and other business leaders will have to reconsider how to help their people spend their newfound time wisely.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.uipath.com/blog/unattended-attended-automation>

## Rethinking Work



### Talent acquisition professionals

Spend less time sourcing and assessing candidates and more time meeting qualified candidates and attending talent scouting events.



### Benefits professionals

Focus more on well-being initiatives rather than on health and wellness program administration.



### Employee relations professionals

Focus on developing programs that prevent issues from happening rather than investigating cases after incidents have occurred.



### HR business partners

Participate in business-unit unique initiatives they never would have had the luxury to attend before.



### Learning and development professionals

Focus on reskilling the current and future workforces for the digitally-transformed enterprise.

# What specific benefits can RPA provide for HR?

In the HR sector, companies have used RPA to automate a number of tasks. In fact, a significant portion of the top-performing HR departments have implemented or are currently implementing an RPA solution to automate a process.<sup>11</sup> Companies have automated payroll updates, sick leave certification, and employee onboarding.<sup>12</sup>

## Additionally, an HR organization can use RPA to automate:

- Sick, leave, and vacation time requests
- Expense and reimbursement processes

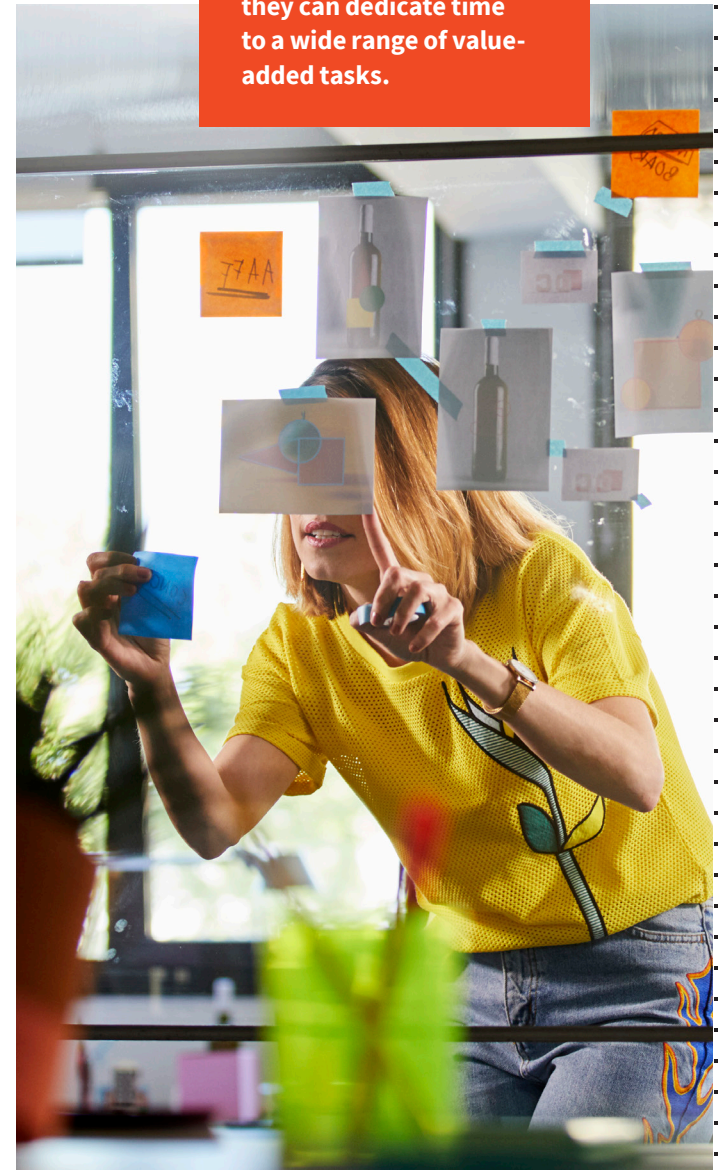
- Onboarding and offboarding processes
- Applicant sourcing
- Responses to frequently asked questions from job candidates or employees with the help of chatbots
- Many more processes where data entry and other repetitive processes are central<sup>13</sup>

RPA is a technology that transfers data from the human to the system and back. Analysts from McKinsey & Company have called the category of this technology a “third arm” for HR organizations because it works with HR to

amplify the department’s capacities.<sup>14</sup> The results of the RPA deployments studied have shown a significant decrease in process time, a major reduction in errors, and a high potential for scalability.<sup>15</sup>

**Automation also increases job satisfaction for HR employees.**<sup>16</sup> Some research has shown an increase in employee job satisfaction among HR employees after RPA has been implemented.

When the HR professional is not overburdened, they can dedicate time to a wide range of value-added tasks.



<sup>11</sup> <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/technology/pages/robotic-process-automation-hr.aspx>

<sup>12</sup> <https://uiopath.com/blog/hr-automation-rpa>

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/As\\_we\\_say\\_robot%2C\\_will\\_our\\_children\\_say\\_colleague/%24File/ey-as-we-say-robot-will-our-children-say-colleague.pdf](https://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/As_we_say_robot%2C_will_our_children_say_colleague/%24File/ey-as-we-say-robot-will-our-children-say-colleague.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/digital-mckinsey/our-insights/how-bots-algorithms-and-artificial-intelligence-are-reshaping-the-future-of-corporate-support-functions?cid=other-eml-alt-mip-mck-oth-1811&hlkid=a214ffef34fa4418b3bacffe56be12d&hctky=9653147&hdpid=e7907fc7-7f94-4d63-a845-e2913105cc0d>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.uiopath.com/blog/hr-automation-rpa>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/pages/hr-software-bots-increase-job-satisfaction.aspx>



# With automation, HR can become a strategic change agent

Leading Human Resource and Talent Management organizations are quickly relying on a digital transformation approach to improve the effectiveness and productivity of their processes. More importantly, it's when HR departments advocate an automation-first approach to enhance competitiveness that makes them strategic agents of change within an organization.

**The future of work is digital, which entails sweeping impacts for HR professionals** because the entire concept of the workforce has to change. The workforce will soon be populated with both human workers and digital workers. HR must prepare the workforce

for a future where people and Robots will work together. It is inevitable that Robots will take on more of the routine, repetitive, and transactional tasks that employees don't really want to do. In fact, one Deloitte report highlighted that up to 50% of an employee's tasks are mundane, manually labor-intensive, and less satisfying for the employee.<sup>17</sup>

The days of HR being an administrative, compliance, and policing function need to come to an end and not soon enough. The HR function is at the nexus of this revolution. All aspects of work that will be affected by this revolution are within HR's domain of knowledge, expertise, and ownership.

HR plays a critical role as the link between the organization and its employees.

## The future of HR in the world of automated work

The path forward for a technologically-engaged and strategic HR function is clear:

**Embrace automation:** Before HR can lead the change to create a more human workplace, HR has to change itself by embracing these new technologies. With well-documented use cases and RPA deployments in this domain, HR professionals can automate processes that other organizations have successfully demonstrated automation potential and gained a rapid return on investment. HR teams should start with the processes that are repeatable and based upon structured data. Then as they learn, they can add AI to

the mix to expand to processes that have less repeatability and more unstructured data.<sup>18</sup>

**Leverage new resources:** As automation frees up time for HR professionals, they should spend their newly acquired time to determine which, if any, further processes can be automated. Secondly, they should spend more time focusing on additional strategic HR activities that enhance business performance.

**Drive organizational change:** HR plays a critical role as the

link between the organization and its employees. Thus, HR departments should aid the organization in adapting employees to a robot-enhanced workplace. HR should champion the role automation plays in creating a competitive advantage within the organization and enhanced employee experience.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/Financial-Services/gx-fsi-automation-here-to-stay.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> <https://hbr.org/2018/01/artificial-intelligence-for-the-real-world>

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