How to Do Better With Automation
Tips & Takeaways

Automation can help agencies save time, improve operations and give employees the freedom to focus on higher-level tasks. But automation has to be implemented thoughtfully, so it actually helps. In a recent GovLoop online training, three automation experts shared their wisdom about how to get started successfully and keep the momentum going.

Find Out Where Automation Adds Value

When you start automating, it should be used as frequently as possible, in as many processes as possible, right? Nope!

"The myth that automations will make your life easier is not always true," said Blakeley. "The other myth, I would say, is [that] it's worth automating everything. I don't think that's quite the case. And it's also not always cheap."

How do you discover where automation adds value?

- It tends to be most beneficial in manual processes where you're receiving data and entering it into a system each week, month or even day — or another type of process where you're doing something over and over again, Blakeley advised.

- When you choose to automate a process or task, it should be one that doesn't require complex, nuanced decision-making, Perret said. Because the goal is to allow employees to focus on the decision-making tasks that rely on their specific knowledge and intellect while more routine, mundane tasks are automated.

- Look for where the lack of automation seems to inhibit the agency's mission. Reimagine the processes so that automation is, as Alboum said, "a real driver of effectiveness."

"Get on the horse and start riding it, and be ready for the ride that's coming, because it's going to get better and better."

— Blakeley

Communicate the Change

Automation and artificial intelligence (AI) have people worried about their jobs, that these new technologies will take them away. That's not how you want workers to see it.

Instead, "it's about using technology as a colleague, as a supporter for the employee, so they can get their job done faster," said Alboum. And an effective introduction will help workers see how automation can give them new and different opportunities.

To instill that new perspective and show the value, there must be lots of communication with people whose jobs are affected and those served by the technology.

"If you don't talk about it, I think there's a real risk that the introduction of these new technologies will be slowed, or maybe even stalled," said Alboum. "So, I think first and foremost, we have to communicate why this is good for the organization, why it supports the mission."

Speakers:

Gabrielle Perret, Director for the Federal Robotics Process Automation (RPA) Community of Practice, General Services Administration

Chris Blakeley, Program Manager for Intelligent Automation, Robotic Process Automation, NASA

Jonathan Alboum, Federal Chief Technology Officer for ServiceNow

Fix Any Issues Before Automating

Sometimes we need to realize what automation *can't* do.

"It helps to reduce manual and tedious work within a process, it helps us work more efficiently and accurately. It does not automatically fix a bad process," said Perret.

The golden rule is: **"Don't automate a bad process."** So, before you think about having automation help, make sure that the process works well to begin with.

Automation for the People

Part of what worries employees may be that they didn't create or ask for an automated approach, and that it will descend on them from above and require them to play by its rules.

Some level of autonomy for employees can improve the experience of using automation. Many platforms give users the ability to create apps through low-code development.

The more workers can automate or develop applications on their own, "the higher their job satisfaction is, and the better their work experience is," Alboum said.

"When you're automating tasks within a process, you can plan where federal employees can best use their time — to analyze, make the decisions."

— Perrett

"We have to not just understand what [automations] can do, but we have to understand how they can really be used in our organizations."

— Alboum

Find Groups to Join

Federal employees and contractors can join the Federal RPA Community of Practice to connect with RPA teams in their agencies.

The CoP also offers webinars and office hours with RPA experts and a playbook to help agencies implement and scale RPA, as well as newsletters and an annual report on the state of federal RPA.

"If your agency is new to automation, ... we have some great resources to help you start a pilot, build and scale your program," said Perret.

"There's a lot of people that have already figured out the pitfalls," added Blakeley. "If you're in the government, you know that we do a lot of similar things that we can probably help you with — security, funding, how you get these tools rolled out."

Quick Tips:

- With a pilot, start small and with simple use cases at first, then scale up from there. Look for the low-hanging fruit.

- Review progress and build on success.

- Build relationships with IT early, and throughout the entire process.

- Loop in stakeholders. Document and communicate the benefits of your automations.

- Share results with your agency.

- Don't automate a bad process. Make sure that your process is sound and optimized before you start automating.

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