

RPA and digital transformation

Why immediate benefits do not translate into a long-term solution



Digital transformation is not any one thing. Every piece of technology must be carefully considered. To be successful, digital transformation needs to break down organizational silos and significantly optimize processes in a way that provides immediate short-term benefits while setting the stage for serious long-term success.

Let's look specifically at robotic process automation (RPA).



RPA has been surrounded by a barrage of hype in the last couple years, even though the technology is over a decade old. This is understandable; in the race to digital transformation, who wouldn't want an army of robots to do time-consuming, menial tasks around the clock so that employees can focus on higher-value work?

To understand more about the benefits and challenges of RPA, both unattended and attended (Robotic Desktop Automation or RDA), why it has seen such an uptick in growth, and how it factors into digital transformation, Pegasystems conducted a survey of 500 decision makers employing a range of RPA solutions across various industries globally. **When asked how RPA factors into overall digital transformation:**

63%
said it's a
major component

23%
said it's the
**most important
component**

14%
said it's a
minor component

On one hand, the results in this case aren't surprising; RPA promises to help organizations successfully connect all the dots of process and integration, relatively quickly and with little risk. Enterprises have been bombarded with messages to this effect. RPA extends the life of legacy applications by automating their UIs. However, long-term transformation will hinge upon adoption of APIs and other forms of application and process modernization such as low-code application development.

While RPA is considered by many to be a critical priority of digital transformation, respondent data has shown it is not being used optimally. For example:

87%

said they **deal with some type of bot failure**

On average,

only 39%

of planned bots **get deployed on time**

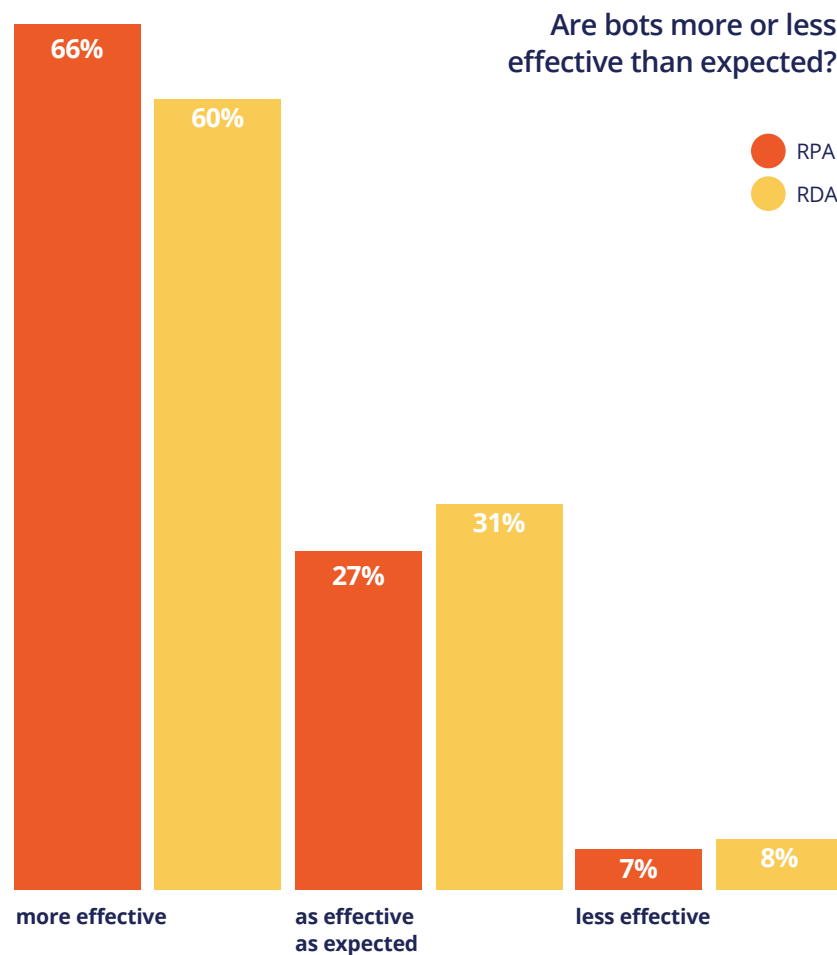
50%

said that **bots are harder to deploy than expected**

Over the last few years, RPA has become a go-to solution for organizations under pressure to optimize their legacy IT infrastructure and stay competitive. It's often positioned as a quick and easy way to streamline critical processes through automation, but in reality, executing an RPA project is often quite complex. RPA, while extremely valuable to paving the overall path to digital transformation, should be viewed as a temporary measure to automate legacy applications. The ultimate goal of transformation should be intelligent process redesign and application modernization.

Top line benefits of RPA

For most enterprises, deploying RPA has demonstrated benefits. The survey found most respondents realized value from automating some of their operations with bots. In fact, 66% said that bots are even more effective than originally anticipated, while only seven percent felt bots didn't meet expectations.



The top three benefits of RPA/RDA noted by respondents were:

51%

Work is more efficient, effective, and accurate

45%

Reduction in overall business costs

42%

Improvement to the employee experience

The more technical benefits of bots ranked a little lower: 30% said that fixing poor processes is one of the biggest benefits of RPA, and 30% indicated bots extend the lifespan of existing systems.

RPA CHALLENGES:

Deployment, speed, and maintenance

While RPA has some immediate benefits, there are still many challenges to navigate. Organizations struggle with deployment and maintenance of bots, along with getting them up and running quickly and efficiently.

When it comes to bots, respondents cited the following as the biggest challenges:



Hard to deploy



Difficult to maintain



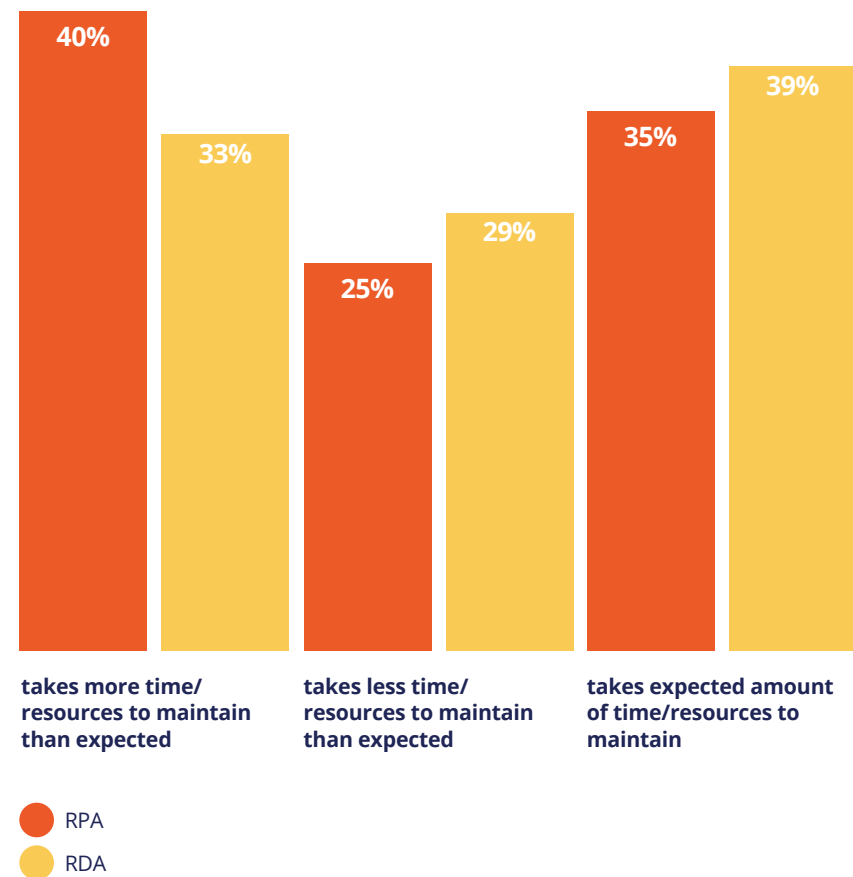
Introduces too much complexity

Half (50%) said bots are harder to deploy than they first thought.

While RDA is easier to deploy than RPA, 40% stated they both require more time and resources to maintain than expected.

This flies in the face of narratives of RPA being so easy that anyone can build and deploy bots with minimal training. Full-scale automation programs require experienced automation developers, extensive investments in training, and ongoing collaboration between business and IT to be successful.

Are bots harder or easier to maintain than expected?





Speed was another clear challenge with RPA initiatives. On average, respondents said it takes 18 months to push bots into production and only **39% of bots are deployed on schedule**. This lackluster rate of on-time delivery has enormous implications; delays in RPA deployment can delay broader transformation efforts. This takes time away from other necessary DX projects and can put a serious dent in already often low ROI.

Another significant challenge is that **87% of bot users experience some sort of bot breakage or failure**. With RPA, small disruptions in the end-to-end process lead to much larger problems down the line (as tasks get stuck in a queue, even during smaller bot breakages and outages).

Why so many broken bots? Bots typically serve as a bridge between two software applications. But enterprise software rarely stands still; a simple software upgrade, change to the UI, or business logic change can completely break a bot. This can lead to more maintenance headaches that will just compound over time as software continues to evolve.

And with organizations reporting only 1.8 years of bot experience on average, it's likely that the amount of bot breakage that will be reported a few years from now may be even higher.

RPA: Tactical or strategic?

It's been established that RPA initiatives factor into digital transformation, but is RPA considered a tactical approach or strategic? When asked, most respondents (70%) felt that it was both, with 23% viewing it as only strategic and a mere 7% as purely tactical.

Looking back, many common RPA challenges stem from a misconception that RPA is a magic solution to fix all bad processes. In reality, RPA will not fix a bad process; it simply automates a bad process that will keep breaking. IT should look to process redesign, and employ other intelligent automation tools depending on what the process requires.

There is a clear assumption that RPA is a long-term solution – 42% believe it is – whereas only 6% see it as a short-term fix. This can be attributed to RPA being marketed as a strategic, stand-alone, long-term solution for automation. But is it really?

Relying on robotic automation as anything other than a temporary fix can create a false sense of complacency.

For example, robotic automations within a longer-running process should be replaced by APIs as they become available to prevent disruption caused by process and business logic changes. Treating RPA as a long-term solution can end up being a very costly decision as technologies continue to evolve.

Bringing business and IT together

The RPA market tells another false narrative that anyone in the business can easily deploy bots wherever they need them. However, the majority of respondents (82%) said their overall bot strategy is managed by IT. Only 17% reported that the business-side of their organization managed their bot strategy.

Even with excellent UI and drag-and-drop functionality, it's best to have an automation strategy that has business and IT working collaboratively. While business teams can often learn to build simple automations and may even have some level of technical experience, building more sophisticated automations, enacting broader process transformation, and day-to-day maintenance of all RPA efforts requires IT expertise. Business teams should be involved in process design; IT should be responsible for building automations and putting them into practice. With this approach, both parties are in lock-step, with a clear understanding of the overall RPA strategy, business goals, and what success looks like.

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How to effectively make RPA part of your DX strategy

More than three quarters (79%) of respondents are trying to automate cumbersome and complex existing/legacy processes with RDA/RPA. RPA serves as a pre-API bridge, automating legacy application UIs where APIs don't exist. RPA bridges today's UI automation gaps. While that can lead to many short-term benefits, enterprises will find more success with a longer-term approach.

RPA unattended and RPA attended (RDA) are highly effective as a short-term fix, but the better strategic play is to shift towards long-term intelligent automation.

To fix underlying problems and eliminate bad processes, organizations need a framework built upon end-to-end process orchestration and business process management (iBPMs). Digital process automation (DPA), or intelligent automation (IA) as it's known now, provides a complete toolkit for digital automation and process transformation. Intelligent automation combines a wealth of easy-to-use technologies that provide the architecture that drives seamless automation across the organization.

Pega Infinity is a comprehensive platform for IA, complete with case management, low-code application development, strategic AI, multi-channel user experiences, desktop process analytics, and, of course, RPA. Today's organizations need something that doesn't disrupt systems they have in place or require them to tear everything down and start over. IA eliminates the need for RPA band-aids and gives organizations more flexibility to wrap and renew, adapting dynamically as customer demands continue to change.

The right combination of RPA/RDA with IA as the backbone enables businesses to meet today's challenges, while future proofing themselves for long-term.



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