

5 Reasons You Cannot Wait Any Longer to Add RPA to Your Finance Operations



Written ahead of the:



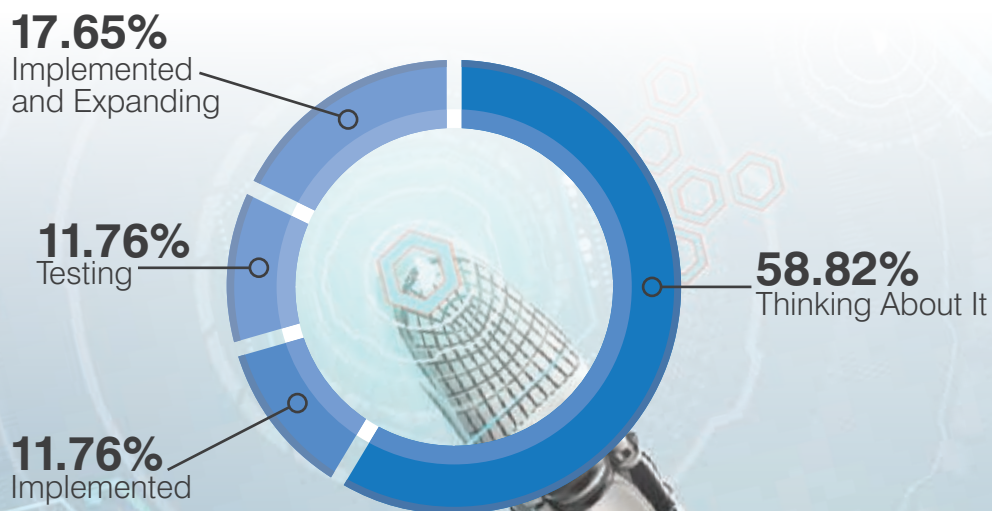
While technology has been a primary driver and enabler of performance across Finance, we have not yet seen it embraced as a *modus operandi*, as is happening with many of the new start-up businesses that have so quickly gained global prominence.

However, with new, robotic-enabled automations making headlines, this is a moment that presents itself as an opportunity – not for incremental, continuous change, but for the kind of step-change that transforms Finance, shifting the focus onto value-adding insights while automation takes care of the rest.

The true leaders, you could argue, will be the ones that recognize the challenges of the present, and find an innovative way out of them.

A key driver for today's Finance leaders is the need to get more out of the workforce – and the ability to empower staff through technology has never been greater than today. RPA is such a hit *precisely* because it can automate a number of process steps otherwise carried out by humans, and free up employees to concentrate on the knowledge work that provides far more value to business units and the enterprise.

A recent SSON RPA survey* identified a majority of companies as yet to take first steps towards robotic process automation.



*Survey from SSON's RPA and Artificial Intelligence Summit State of the Industry Report



Here are five reasons why waiting much longer would be a mistake:

1

Finance functions are under considerable pressure to adhere to security and data quality protocols.

The regulations to which Finance are subject are some of the clearest drivers in favor of automation. Anything that takes the human touch point out of the equation and eliminates subjective error is an advantage in adhering to rules and regulations. As a result, many Finance leaders are keenly evaluating RPA's applicability to processing.

"You have to deliver the core of your finance service well – reporting business results, providing financial control, and transactional support," explains David Lain, Finance Business Partner, at the BBC. Automating reporting is a big step towards best practices in governance as well as adhering to rules and regulations.

This is confirmed by Tuomo Sievilä, Strategic Partner and RPA Concept Owner at Sweden's **Nordea** bank, who emphasizes that in an industry as regulated as banking, RPA marked a clear opportunity. At the same time, it was important to choose a partner well-versed in the banking industry and its inherent regulations. "A strong track record in banking and robust mechanics around compliance, security, and governance were key," he says. "As the largest bank in the Nordic region, we are hugely sensitive to the need for tight security around regulations. Whether employing staff or adopting process automation tools, this was one area we had to have complete confidence in."

2

The ability to create a short-term solution to a far-reaching problem. One of the great advantages of robotics is that it offers an affordable, relatively easy to implement, cost-effective solution to ERP's inflexibility. While, traditionally, the latter has called for significant human resource investments to create manual workarounds, robotics works quickly and effectively, as a band aid of sorts.

Where it can really make a difference, explains Brian Halpin, Head of Robotic Process Automation at the **Bank Of Ireland**, is in its ability to connect a modern, web-based platform with a clunky legacy ERP. "As more and more businesses give in to the pressure to digitalise, and embrace mobile, virtual, and the cloud, it's shone a spotlight on the fact that traditional ERP just can't keep up with the demands of a digital workplace," Halpin says. "Once we started hearing about RPA we thought it was worth exploring."

It's a sentiment that is echoed by Niclas Sjöswärd, COO of **Getinge Group**: "Anyone struggling to automate without the benefit of a single ERP system will tell you that short of investing a fortune, robotics is the fastest way to address some of the burning challenges we face," he says. "Of course it's not the sole solution nor is it the ideal long-term solution. But in terms of being able to address the problem and move on it's been great for us."

These opportunities result from fragmented, legacy systems, Sjöswärd explains, for which the 'fix' of robotic process automation drives quick returns: "You might say RPA is a short-term fix, but given that we expect to recoup our investment within eight months, across 14 processes we've identified, the strategy will pay off."

It's not about unpopular job losses, but about increasing the scope and scale of work without adding headcount.

Time and again the promise of “fewer FTEs” creates anxiety within corporate enterprises sensitive to the backlash associated with job cuts. The majority of practitioners who have implemented robotics to date tell another story, however. Rather than cutting back on FTEs, staff are redeployed into roles where, free of the mundane, transactional work, they can leverage their know-how and expertise to deliver far greater value.

“Our RPA project is not really about reducing numbers,” explains Simen Munter, who oversees **ANZ**’s four global service centers (Bengaluru, Manila, Chengdu and Fiji). “Rather, it’s about creating *meaningful work* for people, many of whom, with university degrees, are essentially overqualified for transactions processing. As an employer, it’s our responsibility to offer people the opportunity to do work that optimizes their skillsets. Robotics is key to doing that,” he explains.

The experience is similar at EMC, where one of the measurable impacts of robotics has been that activity has increased while headcount has stayed constant. “In fact, we are creating a lot of headcounts that can be more valuably deployed into other parts of the service equation,” explains Tilak Banerjee, Director of GBS based in Bangalore, who is setting his sights on business insights, and is currently developing a training plan to develop more skill sets around data analytics.

“Shared services sits on so much data - we are privy to so many insights that the business could use to make far smarter strategic decisions. RPA makes it possible for us to finally tap into this,” he says.



4

Robotics provides an exciting and lucrative new career for ambitious talent.

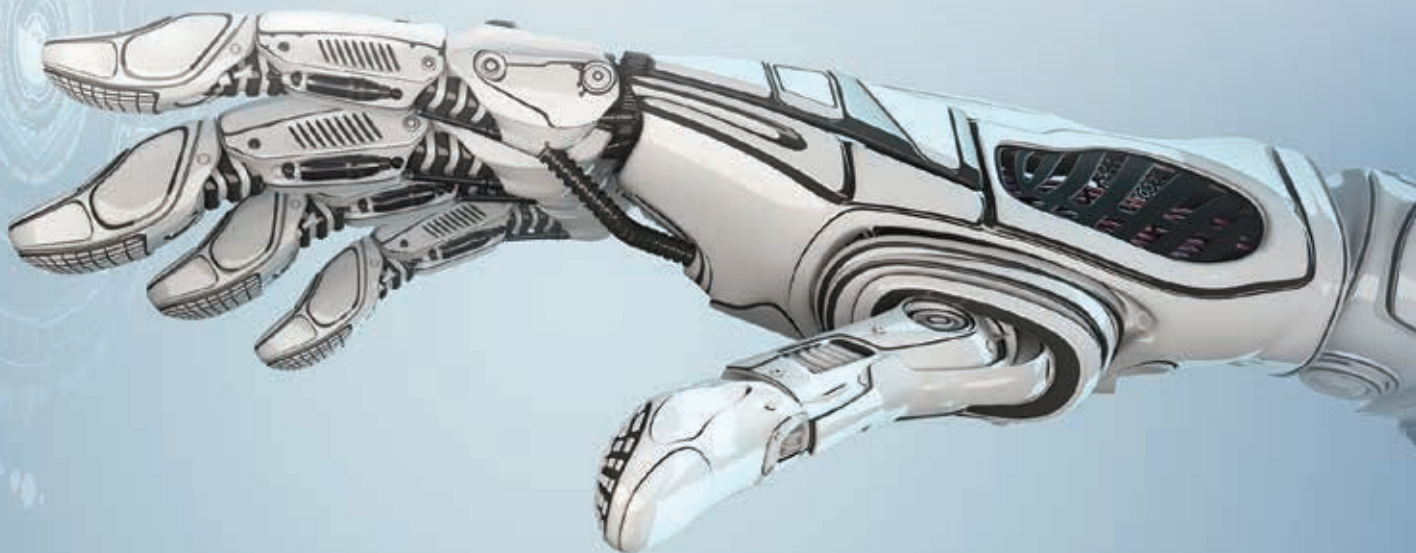
In SSON's RPA survey, nearly 2/3 of all respondents listed the key to successful RPA implementation as having the right team with the right skills. There is a double whammy, however. Not only do 'up-skilled' employees drive better performance, the promise of more skilled jobs also acts as a career magnet.

Staff turnover or attrition can be costly to a Finance organization that depends increasingly on its teams to proactively manage customer relationships, based on intimate knowledge and understanding of the customer's business. Robotics provides an alternative career path that retains the best talent by offering the opportunity to develop new, in-demand skillsets within a Center of Excellence-type environment.

Simen Munter, who oversees **ANZ's** four global service centers (Bengaluru, Manila, Chengdu and Fiji), sees robotics as key to providing the kind of interesting and challenging jobs that keep employees engaged. It also means that ANZ's services centers are developing a growing resource of robot specialists. "It is a brand-new pathway for careers that offers more value to the enterprise and greater opportunities and satisfaction for employees," explains Munter.

At ANZ, GBS team members are encouraged to build their own robots as part of a strategy to 'go wide' in implementing robotics. Individuals are encouraged to get personally involved in the implementation of robotic solutions that benefit their workflow. As a result, ANZ is building up a valuable resource of individuals skilled at building robots. These employees are being absorbed into the Business Excellence group, whose impact these days is more than likely to be 'bot-driven. "You simply cannot think about Business Excellence without assuming the benefits of robotics anymore," claims Munter.

As robots remove mundane work, a new set of jobs is emerging, explains Munter, and these are better paid and more interesting than those they've replaced. "The [RPA] tools do exactly what they say they'll do – they empower our people," he says.



Key finance processes like procure-to-pay or order-to-cash can potentially deliver far more value than they do today.

While automation can drive down errors, duplications, or high processing costs, the additional benefit of refocusing staff on analytics means that all-important business insights and intelligence concerning customers' operations can be leveraged for improved decision-making. This means not just taking advantage of discounted payment terms, identifying the most valuable suppliers, or gaining more transparency into customers who drive up costs, but it also means improving end-to-end process efficiency and effectiveness.

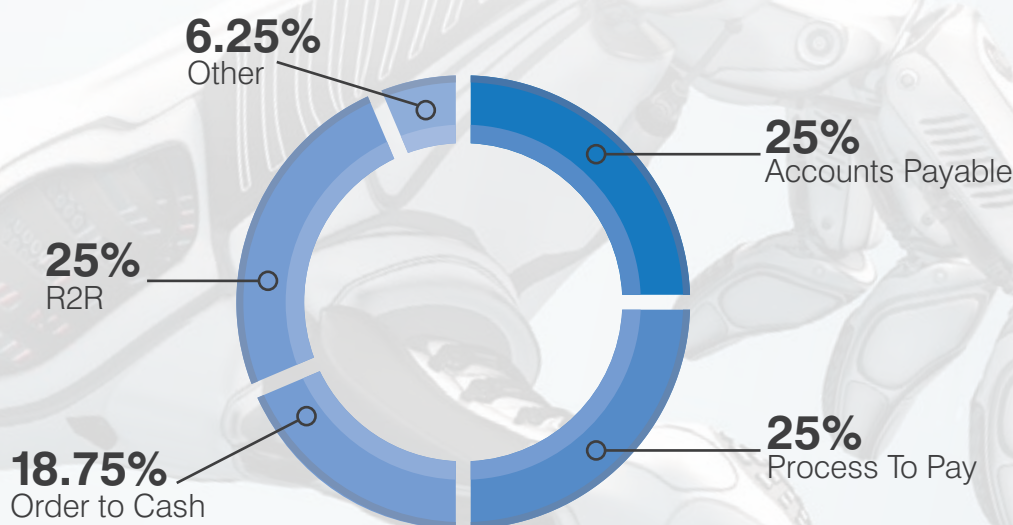
For Niclas Sjöswärd, COO of Getinge Group, order handling within order-to-cash was a key candidate for RPA because of its repetitive and transactions-oriented characteristics. "In addition, we experience peaks at certain times which drive up the need for human resources. We could showcase that this process could be automated to almost 100%," he says.

Michael Hyltoft, Director of Operations at **Ultra Electronics**, thinks RPA combined with big data can drive significant benefits in the short term, specifically around challenges like, "Who can use their data in the best possible way to drive competitive advantage? Can I forecast which of my customers will struggle to pay and then act accordingly before it becomes a problem? And: Can I see which skills are needed in my business in the long term, and start developing my staff so I am ready?"

Niclas Sjöswärd, at Getinge Group, sees RPA as a key tool to support his five-year GBS cost reduction targets. "Robotics came along at just the right time for us," he explains. "We have very aggressive efficiency targets to meet and automation is an obvious solution."

What processes are set to be automated?

The three main functions identified by the finance industry as the most primed for automation were accounts payable, orders-to-cash and purchase-to-pay. This is very much in line with wider industry trends, with these functions topping our industry-wide research too.





Conclusion

Robotic process automation is neither a temporary trend, nor is it an objective for its own sake. Rather, it is an extension of the continuous evolution of technology in support of vastly improved business performance. As such, RPA represents the latest and greatest in innovative solutions that support Finance's transformation into a more informed, and influential strategic partner to the business. The future of finance is RPA-driven.

What next?

Did you find this interesting? This report was created ahead of the **Future of Finance Summit**, previously known as the Finance Transformation Summit.



Whether you're looking to incorporate RPA and Artificial Intelligence into your finance department or are already piloting this pioneering technology - no matter what stage you are at, by joining over **150** of your peers you will learn from real-life case studies, to help you implement your RPA strategies.

The summit will also support you to align finance strategies with the overall company objectives, in order to be more efficient, improve talent management and show you how to provide a better service to your internal customers by redefining governance and new business growth. Overall...saving you **time** and **money**!

If you have any other questions, please email events@ssonnetwork.com

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