The Benefits of Establishing and Digitizing an RPA Center of Excellence

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The modern age of disruptive technology has upended centuries of corporate wisdom. While predictions of an artificial superintelligence may seem far-fetched, one thing is clear. Technological innovation is fueling the implementation of agile methodologies in the workplace. According to a 2018 Deloitte survey, 64% of participants admit that disruptive technologies will affect their businesses in the next three years. In particular, innovations like robotic process automation (RPA) will leverage human-technology interactions to transform the consumer experience. At its core, RPA may sound simple, but it can potentially disrupt every aspect of your business. Yet, implementing RPA to achieve operational efficiency and long-term growth may seem an impossible quest. This is where an RPA Centre of Excellence comes in.

First, the challenge: How do you embed RPA into your workplace culture so that it delivers tangible value permanently? The answer may be simpler than imagined. Although we are far from realizing Kurzweil's vision of tech singularity, human-technology collaborations will be key to digital transformation. At its heart, an RPA Centre of Excellence is an organizational response to innovation. Below, we detail the process of building an RPA Centre of Excellence that's scalable and delivers results.

What is a Centre of Excellence (CoE)?

A Centre of Excellence (CoE) is a designated unit within an organization that leverages various skills to realize specific goals. In particular, it merges lean methodologies and automation to facilitate operational excellence and long-term growth. There's a lot to unpack in that definition. Let's break this down into three sections.

To begin, CoEs are **lean business units** — not just a group of employees. These are skilled professionals who share expertise and resources to realize business objectives. Typically, CoEs exist to deliver hyper-disruptive business innovation (such as IoT, AI-based immersive technologies, or RPA).

Second, a CoE **specializes in the implementation of innovative technologies**. Most commonly, that includes robotic process automation (RPA). There are a few reasons a CoE remains a critical driver of RPA innovation. RPA is a transformational technology that can impact nearly every workflow in your business. It promotes transparency, creates a shared vision, and monitors critical performance indicators to measure success. However, long-term, holistic, and comprehensive RPA bot orchestration requires collaborative effort across business units. These are all areas where an RPA Centre of Excellence has an opportunity to shine.

Finally, CoEs **use lean methodologies and automation to realize business goals**. Obviously, automation is a core part of the CoE playbook. But, the "lean" concept is also glued to the CoE framework. Ideally, you would leverage a small, dedicated team to share resources and provide critical employee support. Weighing a CoE team down with daily operational concerns can inhibit its ability to deliver agile change. In fact, CoEs generally excel when innovation teams form "competency centers" apart from the functional units they support.

The overall goal of a CoE is simple: provide thought leadership, vision, and the roadmap to realize digital innovation.

Understanding the Crossroads of CoE & Digital Transformation

Digital transformation has lost some of its meaning over the past few years. It's become a buzzword synonymous with large-scale overhauls and the adoption of complex technologies like blockchain. But, at its core, digital transformation is simple. It centers on transforming conventional analog practices using digital solutions. For digital transformation to take place, it has to be all-encompassing in nature. You plant technology into the "soil" of your business. And, like a tree, you want its roots to extend widely.

A CoE exists to "water" your digital acceleration "tree." According to Deloitte, RPA will achieve near-universal adoption within the next five years. But, despite its obvious value, the majority of businesses struggle with RPA implementation. Less than 3% of adopters have managed to scale with more than 50 robots in place. The problem isn't the technology — and it certainly isn't something you can just throw money at to fix. The challenge lies in the ability to scale efficiently.

A Roadmap for Digital Innovation

A well-oiled CoE team should act as a centralized unit that identifies RPA opportunities, builds use cases for automation, and prioritizes the right RPA investments to make. You need to know which process to automate consecutively. "Which business process should I automate next?" is a complicated question. Some businesses start with minor processes first. Others try to realize business value by tackling highly repetitive processes first — regardless of how ingrained in the core business model they are.

A CoE should be able to answer important questions about improving delivery times, reducing maintenance costs, and increasing efficiencies. And, a CoE should be able to answer these questions using a consistent, repeatable method for scoring and prioritizing processes. When you decide which processes to automate, your CoE should be able to track the delivery of those RPA bots and measure their ongoing performance. In other words, your CoE should act as a center of leadership with a standardized framework for RPA deployment and performance optimizations to measure the efficacy of your RPA program.

A Standard for an RPA Centre of Excellence

An RPA CoE has three primary pillars of responsibility:

1. **Operations Management:** A Centre of Excellence has to develop, deploy, and assess RPA within the context of your organization. This includes governance, monitoring, support, and process prioritisation.
2. **Change Management:** A Centre of Excellence has to be a beacon of leadership for RPA deployment. This includes training, funding, executive buy-in, competency assessments, and benchmarking.
3. **Systems Management:** A Centre of Excellence has to be able to leverage the right technology to deploy RPA, measure its success, and understand its business value. This section is heavily focused on automation and requires a blend of human talent and technology.

How you organize your team will depend on your needs. Typically, you'll need at least three core roles:

1. **Leaders**
2. **Developers**
3. **Analysts**

The larger your organization, the more roles you'll need. These can include sponsors, project managers, architects, engineers, and support staff. However, you'll need to strike a balance between size and agility. You want to keep the team small enough to remain agile, but you also need to give your team the right resources to effectively deploy an RPA framework. So, your team could be as small as five and as large as 25. It depends on the overall size of your organization, the number of unique daily workflows, and your opportunity to leverage RPA technology.

Operations Management

> "Operations Management involves managing and distributing RPA across your business architecture."

The primary goal of an RPA-focused CoE is to integrate RPA into an organization in a structured and methodical manner. When you first begin building an RPA CoE, you'll have some important questions to answer.

- Which vendors should you use?
- What documentations do you need?
- Where will your RPA team fit within the context of your hierarchy?
- Should you implement RPA locally or via the cloud?
- What type of support does your CoE need?

These are all questions that will impact your team's operations. You'll need to establish a baseline before you start building competencies. Of course, there are multiple ways to build a team once you find answers to these questions.

3 RPA Centre of Excellence Models to Consider

- **Decentralized:** In a decentralized model, your CoE acts as a support pillar. The primary goal should be leadership and training. Under this model, your CoE will engage and empower employees to leverage RPA in their own environments. In other words, the employees are the ones implementing RPA and choosing which processes to automate. This method has some important benefits. For starters, employees can offer pragmatic input because they have practical experience on the ground. They know which processes monopolize their time. All things considered, employees are generally receptive to RPA and understand its
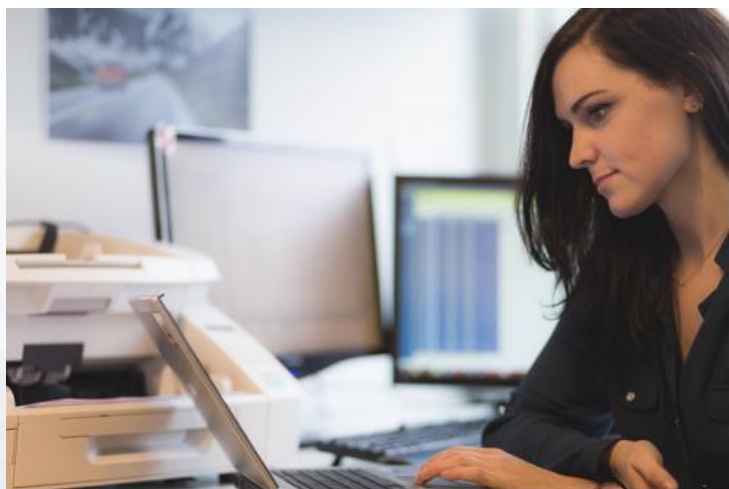
immediate benefits. Deloitte surveys show that a mere 17% of companies that deploy RPA meet with employee resistance. Your CoE should be able to train and encourage employees to utilize RPA while driving a culture of automation into your core business model.

- **Centralized:** In a centralized model, your CoE acts as your primary RPA deployment team. RPA process orders will be selected by your CoE, and they will be the primary driver of your entire RPA framework. This method can work extraordinarily well, but only if you empower your team with buy-in from managerial staff and important stakeholders. Centralized models are heavily reliant on change management.

- **Hybrid:** In a hybrid model, the CoE acts as the primary RPA deployment team. However, employee feedback is leveraged during the RPA selection process. Your employees will use practical experience to inform your CoE about the processes that are in dire need of automation.

3 Factors to Keep In Mind When Establishing an RPA Centre of Excellence

1. **Start small, measure early:** The single most important element of a successful CoE is the ability to track performance. Essentially, it's important to establish baselines against which to compare your CoE's performance. This impacts buy-in and stakeholder opinion, but it also drives your CoE to make the right decisions. We always recommend starting small. Don't create grand bot orchestrations in the first few months. Use small successes to fuel large transformations.
2. **Encourage scalability early:** Consider creating a scalable CoE framework. The easiest way to enable scaling is through technology: use process analysis tools to identify inefficiencies in business processes before scaling with RPA. This step ensures successful scaling.
3. **Figure out your process methodology:** The first step is to determine what you'd like to automate first. Would you start with the processes that offer the best ROI or the ones that give employees the most headaches? You'll need to rally your team to answer these questions.

Change Management

"Change Management involves preparing, training, and supporting your CoE to enable Operations Management."

When you approach CoE Change Management, you have to balance resources with results. There's no clear-cut path to RPA success. However, a successful CoE requires top-down support and C-level buy-in. Your CoE has the potential to completely reshape your organization. For it to succeed, it needs to be an integral part of your overall business strategy.

There's a reason only 17% of organizations are ready for the merging of AI and human intelligence in the workplace. To successfully implement an automation-friendly culture, C-suite staff must work collaboratively with managers to develop procedures that identify processes for automation.

5 Factors to Consider for Successful Implementation of an RPA Centre of Excellence

- **Training:** You obviously need training for your actual RPA team. Ideally, it's comprised of several developers with RPA experience. But you also need a framework for training that the CoE can use to educate employees about how RPA will impact them and how they can use it to their advantage. In the context of a CoE, training is outward-facing.
- **Leadership:** Your CoE should have C-level buy-in. All things considered, support from C-suite staff is critical. According to Forrester Research, 25% of employees maintain their companies lack a clear strategic vision for RPA implementation. This has led to gaps in alignment and readiness for transformational change.
- **Cross-collaboration:** RPA success is built on cross-collaboration. Your CoE needs the ability to interact with every team in your business unit, whether through workshops, brainstorming sessions, or collaborative platforms (like Microsoft Teams).
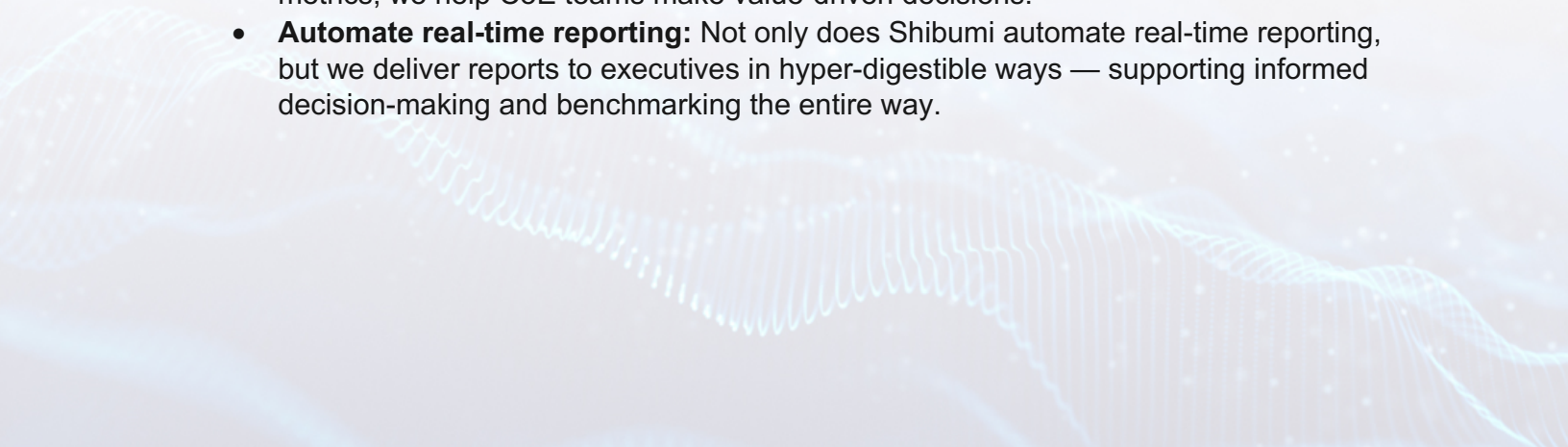
- **Feedback:** Essentially, you need to know what's working and what's not. Your CoE needs a roadmap to identify failures and successes and determine a path forward. Generally, the CoE management team is responsible for eliciting feedback from employees and C-suite staff.
- **Milestones:** You need clear-cut goals and consistent milestones. Success in agile constructs like CoEs must be measured regularly. And, if challenges arise, you should have systems in place to communicate and correct those challenges.

Systems Management

"Systems Management involves providing the right systems to CoE teams to enable both Operations Management and Change Management."

Perhaps the most important variable, Systems Management, is the technology you use to fuel your CoE and RPA framework. This is where we come in. Shibumi's RPA Accelerator is a cloud-based RPA acceleration tool that helps you measure the efficacy of your overall CoE program.

With Shibumi's RPA Accelerator, you can:

- **Track automation program data:** To make effective RPA decisions, your CoE needs real-time visibility into how RPA performance is measuring up against clear-cut KPIs. Shibumi can measure RPA performance against metrics to inform your decision-making process.
- **Manage your RPA pipeline and delivery:** Get complete visibility into your RPA opportunity pipeline from one single frame. We help your CoE team identify where RPA opportunities lie and how they can effectively target them across your entire process architecture.
- **Support value-focused decisions:** With baked-in KPIs and plenty of observable metrics, we help CoE teams make value-driven decisions.
- **Automate real-time reporting:** Not only does Shibumi automate real-time reporting, but we deliver reports to executives in hyper-digestible ways — supporting informed decision-making and benchmarking the entire way.

Work with Shibumi to Implement a Successful RPA Centre of Excellence

You CoE has decisions to make. You need to know what processes to automate. Plus, you also need to identify the value of each RPA deployment. Generally, you need to know what value is being driven by your Centre of Excellence. At Shibumi, we've built our RPA Accelerator to support CoEs and enable them to tackle more complex, business-centric, and value-driven objectives. RPA is the first step towards full-scale automation. If you'd like to see how Shibumi can supercharge your RPA Centre of Excellence, request a free demo today.