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CHARTING A COURSE FOR GROWTH:

REALIZING VALUE POTENTIAL THROUGH ROBOTIC PROCESS AUTOMATION

An Infosys Consulting Perspective
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Abstract

COVID-19 has accelerated the journey to automation for many organizations. Robotic Process Automation (RPA) offers numerous benefits in the immediate term, particularly in terms of cost saving and building resiliency.

In this paper we look at the critical success factors for kickstarting your automation journey, including a clear roadmap and examples of best practice.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is forcing organizations to rapidly accelerate their digitization programs. Even before the crisis, AI and automation were on the agenda of most large enterprises, and many had already begun implementing programs across a number of business units.

> "RPA enables organizations of every size to quickly improve processes and generate immediate savings"

As we shift to a new normal, it is these digital leaders that have the ability to rapidly cut costs and build resiliency into their business models.

RPA, designed to automate high volume and repetitive tasks, enables organizations of every size to quickly improve processes and generate immediate savings. In the current economic climate, this opportunity to increase flexibility and ensure business continuity offers a significant competitive advantage. RPA, which can be implemented in months and even weeks, is also a solid foundation on which to build a long-term AI and automation program.

However, with many companies just 12-24 months into their automation journeys, there are a number of bottlenecks to overcome in order to build mature automation environments that deliver sustainable, scalable growth. We've helped organizations overcome the challenge of connecting existing clusters of automation within individual business units, or to align use cases and value with delivery.

In this point of view from our AI and Automation experts, we offer an overview of the benefits of RPA in the post-COVID-landscape, and advice on building a Center of Excellence (CoE) to help realize this value quickly and efficiently. We also outline a series of practical steps that can help businesses on their journey to advanced automation, and examples of best practice from industry leaders.

PIVOTING TO SHORTER TIME HORIZONS

COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACT

In the post-COVID-19 landscape, the infrastructure underpinning the economy will undoubtedly remain fragile for a long time.

"We are seeing a widened resilience gap between digital leaders and digital laggards"

To drive global productivity growth, we are likely to see a major shift in jobs and a heavy dependence on technologies and skills that can help businesses amplify the value of their existing resources.

AI and automation were already an agenda point for many organizations before the pandemic. Now, we'll almost certainly see a rapid acceleration of projects that can eliminate the costs of legacy operations and drive operational efficiencies at scale. There are three key trends behind this pivot to shorter time horizons.

1. Widening digitization gap

Before COVID-19, businesses typically took incremental steps towards rolling out digitization programs; this phased approach would take place over a number of years.

Those companies that were further along their transformation journey, with stronger automation capabilities, had a distinct advantage during the onset of the pandemic, as they were able to react quickly to the unforeseen situation. As a result, we are seeing a widened resilience gap between digital leaders and digital laggards—a gap that is likely to grow during an economic downturn.

Companies that built digital capacities on a case by case basis over the course of years often lack connection to the overall company strategy, mostly reacting to changes in the market environment. By shifting to a strategy-based approach, aligning with the needs of the company, the milestones for a roadmap to close the divide can be set within weeks in order to gain and maintain a competitive advantage.

> "By automating high volume and repetitive tasks, organizations can lower fixed operating costs and sustain these savings"

2. Focus on improved cost structures

In the immediate aftermath of COVID-19, we will see tactical actions to optimize cash flows and working capital. However, it is the companies that use the downturn for more strategic action that will position themselves for the long-term.

By transforming parts of the infrastructure to build in flexibility, such as automating high volume and repetitive tasks, organizations can lower fixed operating costs and sustain these savings over a number of years. Additionally, by shifting the focus of their highly skilled employees from robot-like work, to work requiring human skill and knowledge, they can also look at building new business for the new-normal.

CIOs in particular will need to assess their business-critical processes and prioritize what they can automate immediately. They should also consider how the use of advanced controls, technology and analytics can accelerate capital projects while ensuring more efficient use of resources and better decision-making.

3. Building organizational resiliency

Most organizations have had to drastically flex their business model to cope with the high volatility of the current environment. Successful recovery from locked-down economies will require us to maintain this increased level of adaptability for a long time yet. Now is also the time to consider rapidly scaling automation efforts, exploring different cost levers to build a more resilient infrastructure.

A clear example of this is in supply chains; by using AI and automation, businesses will be able to model and build elasticity into their supply chains while understanding the trade-offs between flexibility, cost and resiliency.

Rapid Adoption of RPA

As a result of this quickly changing landscape, we are already seeing the rapid adoption and acceleration of Robotic Process Automation (RPA) across businesses globally.

> "RPA has the ability to quickly improve processes and generate immediate savings"

RPA has the ability to generate immediate automation benefits for organizations in a difficult economic climate. In simplest terms, it refers to software that can be easily programmed to do basic tasks across applications just as human workers do.

RPA solutions are deployed cross functionally and work exceedingly well for specific types of use cases within an organization that contain tasks that have:

- High volume
- Highly manual, repetitive tasks
- Defined rule sets and business exceptions
- Standardized, machine readable input
- Structured data sets
- Mature processes and stable process environments

For almost every business, RPA is the best way to gain quick wins and build a solid foundation on which they can build their long-term automation program.

Benefits of RPA post-COVID-19

RPA has the ability to quickly improve processes and generate immediate savings, freeing up employee capacity by removing repetitive, low decision tasks and allowing them to focus on value adding activities that require human skill and decision making.

RPA is particularly helpful in the age of COVID-19, helping to make organizations more resilient in a challenging environment. Figure 1 demonstrates three key benefits.
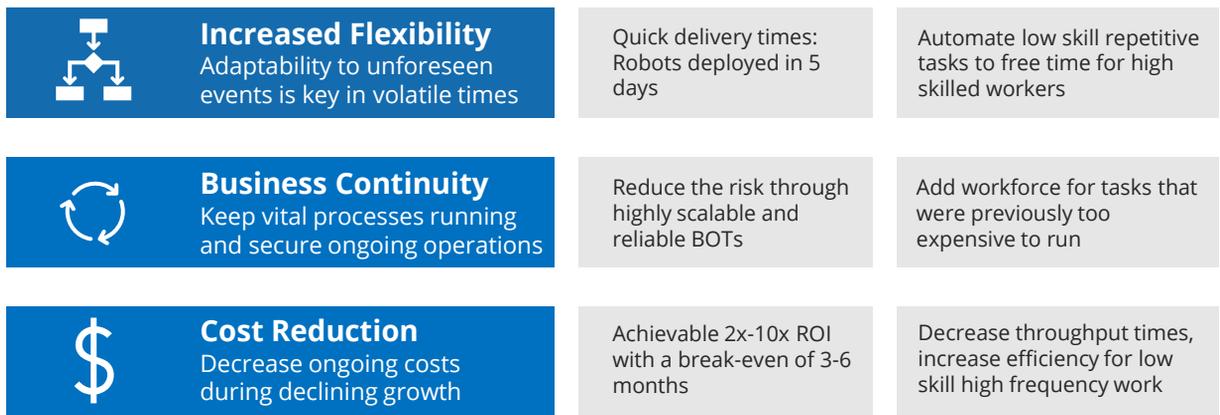
Benefits of RPA

|		
Increased Flexibility Adaptability to unforeseen events is key in volatile times	Quick delivery times: Robots deployed in 5 days	Automate low skill repetitive tasks to free time for high skilled workers
Business Continuity Keep vital processes running and secure ongoing operations	Reduce the risk through highly scalable and reliable BOTs	Add workforce for tasks that were previously too expensive to run
Cost Reduction Decrease ongoing costs during declining growth	Achievable 2x-10x ROI with a break-even of 3-6 months	Decrease throughput times, increase efficiency for low skill high frequency work

Figure 1

Since use cases can be developed in a number of weeks, RPA generates immediate benefits to the environment it's deployed in, with additional downstream benefits through improved operations.

Direct impact

RPA benefits connected departments directly through reduced workloads, decreased cycle times, and increased process quality. It also frees up employees' time to take on new initiatives while also increasing operational efficiency.

Downstream potential

As well as direct impact, RPA enables a number of downstream benefits, such as reduction of capital costs and improved customer experience due to quick resolution and error reduction.
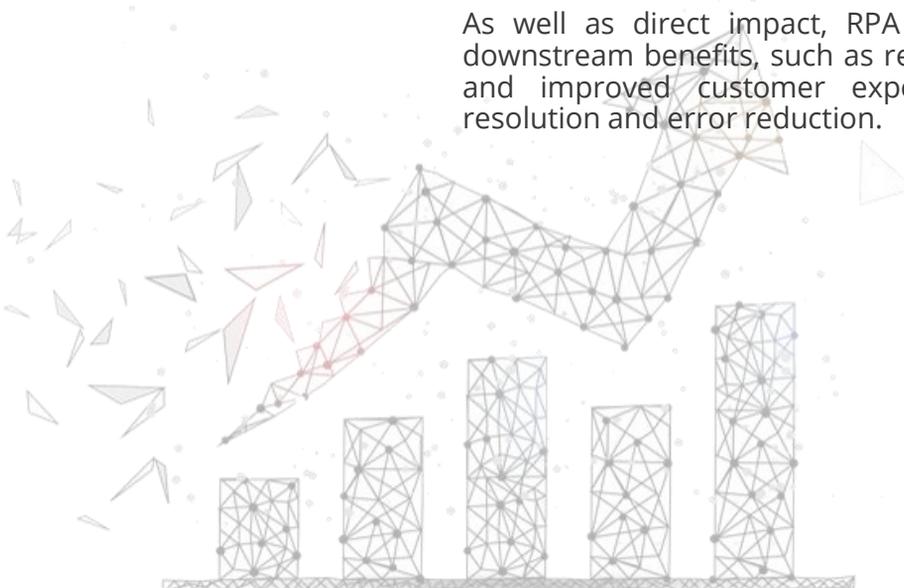
Laying Strong Foundations

COVID-19 is forcing us to work faster and better than ever before to match the dramatic shifts in customer expectations, and RPA has the ability to drive operational efficiencies at scale.

> "They are liable to encounter a number of common bottlenecks as they accelerate their digitization programs."

As a result, RPA is already on the radar for many organizations.

In our experience, most business fit into one of two categories: at the start of their automation journey and considering an RPA program, or 12-24 months in.

However, whether businesses are looking to accelerate new or ongoing initiatives, they are liable to encounter a number of common bottlenecks as they accelerate their digitization programs.

Starting their journey

"We are struggling with time and resources, or knowing where to begin."

Organizations at the start of their journey are looking for automation potential and a path to grow.

One of the hardest initial tasks when building a program is to identify use cases that are ripe for automation and outlining a clear roadmap.

Other common roadblocks include:

- *"We don't know where to start or what to automate"*
- *"We can't get management buy-in for our automation journey"*
- *"We are too busy or have too many competing priorities"*

> "RPA is only the first step on their long-term journey towards advanced automation"

12-24 months in

"We find it hard to scale our automation programs."

For those organizations further into their journey, the biggest hurdle is connecting and scaling their existing clusters of automation into a high-powered network.
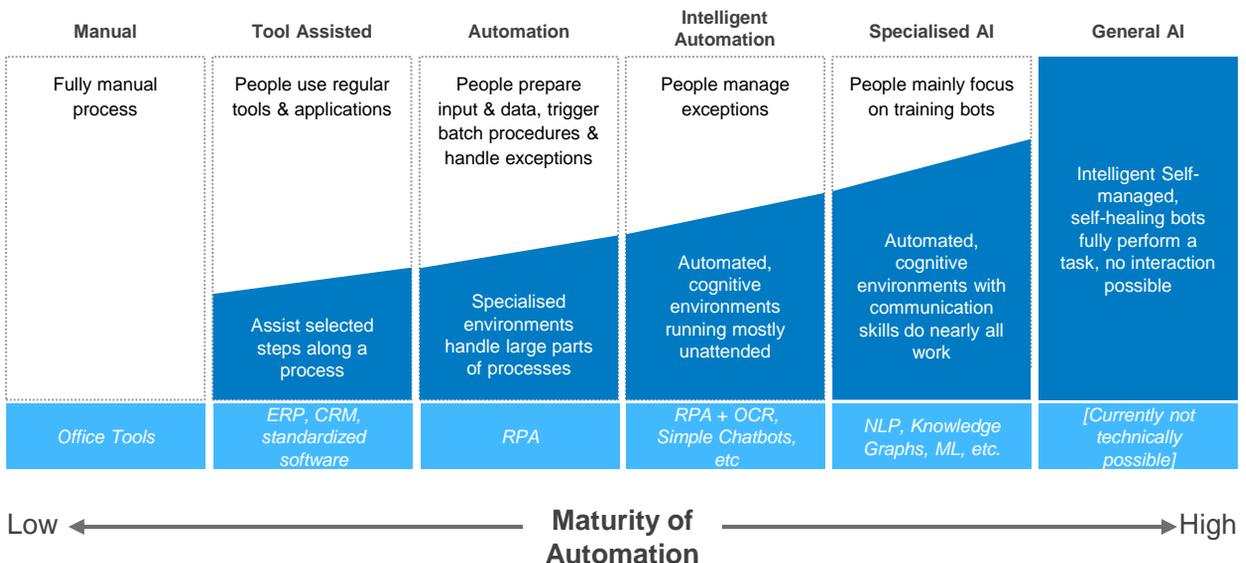
We also hear the following roadblocks from many clients:

- *"We struggle to find a partner that delivers both on business value and technology"*

- *"Our automation clusters are successful but remain in silos"*

- *"We have several bots in production on a tactical level, but want to scale to a more holistic, strategic view to bridge gaps and bottlenecks"*

For both of types of organizations, RPA is only the first step on their long-term journey towards advanced automation.

As such, it is critical that that they build a Center of Excellence (CoE) to overcome these roadblocks and build a solid foundation with RPA, before progressing further through the maturity journey (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Manual	Tool Assisted	Automation	Intelligent Automation	Specialised AI	General AI
Fully manual process	People use regular tools & applications	People prepare input & data, trigger batch procedures & handle exceptions	People manage exceptions	People mainly focus on training bots	Intelligent Self-managed, self-healing bots fully perform a task, no interaction possible
	Assist selected steps along a process	Specialised environments handle large parts of processes	Automated, cognitive environments running mostly unattended	Automated, cognitive environments with communication skills do nearly all work	
Office Tools	*ERP, CRM, standardized software*	*RPA*	*RPA + OCR, Simple Chatbots, etc*	*NLP, Knowledge Graphs, ML, etc.*	*[Currently not technically possible]*

Low ◄──────────────── **Maturity of Automation** ────────────────► High

Charting your Course for Growth

An Automation CoE includes the people, processes, and technology necessary to maximize the benefits of automation through RPA.

> "There are three critical success factors to consider when creating a CoE"

This is essential when finding new RPA opportunities, scaling automation within the organization, and carrying out a long-term vision; the success hinges not on whether a business automates, but how they do it. There are three critical success factors to consider when creating a CoE.

1. Establish your 'why'

Understanding how to capture impact from the beginning provides insights on where to focus effort. Our work with companies that have introduced RPA shows there can be significant potential almost anywhere they look, from automating simple tasks in back offices to highly technical functions such as engineering or maintenance and reliability.

By choosing to look at business value first, organizations can ensure that any RPA program is added to defined metrics and aligned with the company strategy (e.g. focusing on business continuity during COVID-19). Establishing a use case pipeline also helps to secure the fragile starting phase, and outlines clear expectations of when and what value will be delivered.

2. Establish your 'how'

One of the hardest initial tasks of a CoE is to align use cases and value with the technical delivery itself. This includes making sure the program is delivered to the highest quality, ensuring that it meets organizational requirements around data privacy, information security and secure operations, as well as support and change management.

3. Think global

Successful companies approach automation from the outset with a decisive and global transformation program—one that's a top-three priority for the CEO and is driven by management across the organization. Operationally, we suggest running pilot use cases within individual business units and then scaling them. However, we encourage clients to think globally from the start, with a clear value perspective of what RPA will bring to all facets of the organization.

A Roadmap for Success

Building a CoE, based on business priorities, best practice and a global mindset is the only way to create and scale a long-term AI and automation program.

But what are the steps organizations need to take in order to establish their CoE and realize the benefits of RPA?

Three steps to success

Based on our experience, these elemental steps help to kickstart an automation journey and set the path for growth at an early stage (Figure 3):
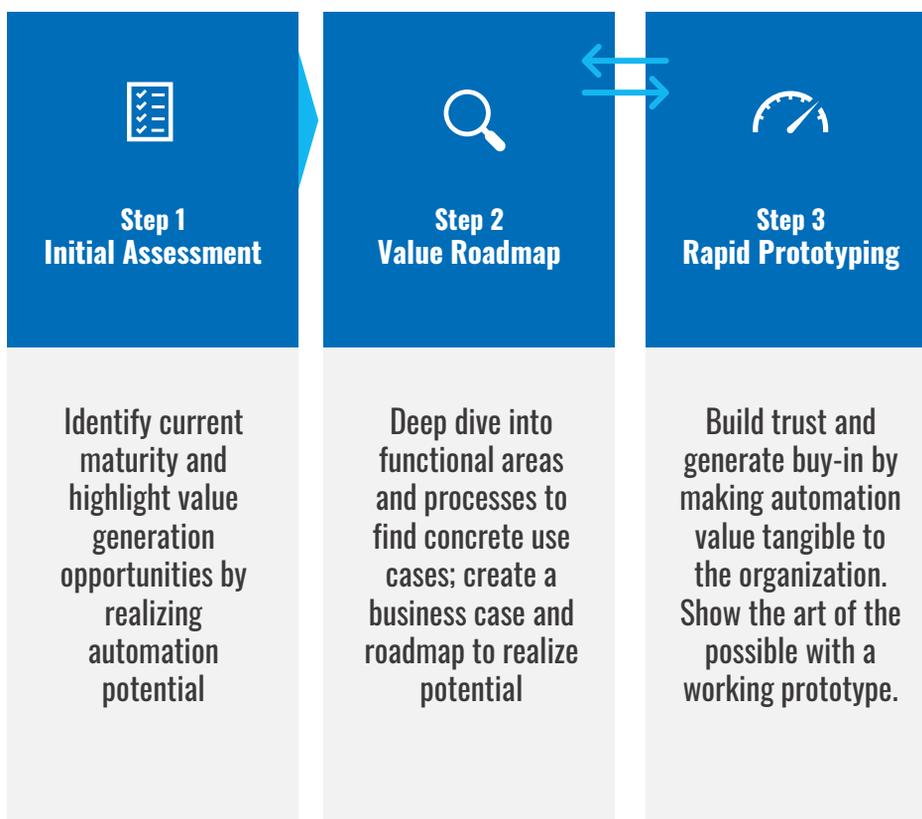
Step 1 Initial Assessment	Step 2 Value Roadmap	Step 3 Rapid Prototyping
Identify current maturity and highlight value generation opportunities by realizing automation potential	Deep dive into functional areas and processes to find concrete use cases; create a business case and roadmap to realize potential	Build trust and generate buy-in by making automation value tangible to the organization. Show the art of the possible with a working prototype.

Figure 3

Let's look at each step in more detail and consider some of the key points from the roadmap.

"By following these steps, organizations will realize value from the outset"

1. Initial Assessment

- Analyze the current standing of your organization on the automation journey

- Identify areas of high automation potential based on regional and functional factors

- Generate a business-driven understanding of RPA to analyze and design processes

- Identify main value drivers within your organization and how automation can impact them

2. Value Roadmap

- Analyze your processes based on complexity and ease of implementation

- Assess cost and benefit drivers on both use case and program levels

- Prioritize use cases and define the roadmap for value realization

- Connect the value roadmap to a CoE Framework for an updated strategic approach
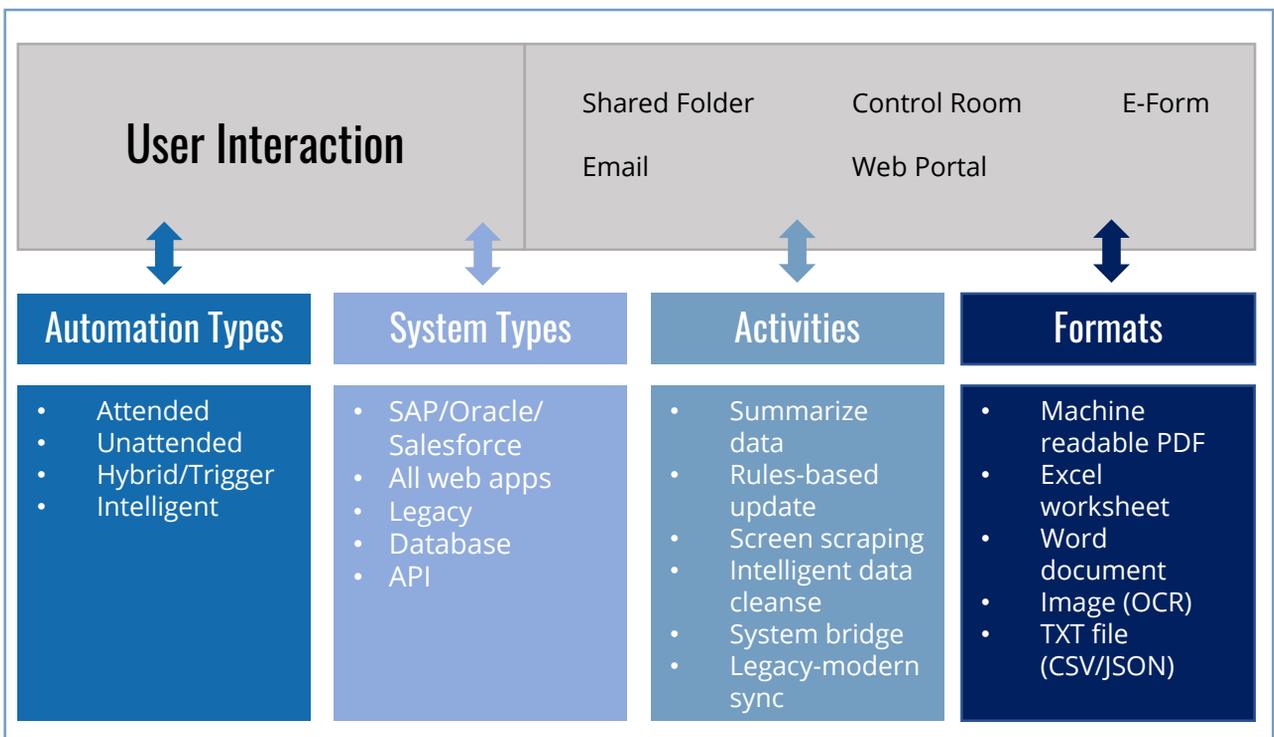
3. Rapid Prototyping

- Build trust in automation technology within your organization by building working prototypes in a matter of weeks

- Assess the current IT infrastructure & define best practice methodology for integrating a high-powered automation infrastructure and building an end-to-end delivery model including quality gates

- Analyze your audit and risk requirements for integrating automation solutions, outline steps for a successful go-live, and align with the value realization roadmap

Since RPA offers the opportunity to quickly improve processes and generate immediate savings, by following these steps, organizations will realize value from the outset.

Infosys Consulting RPA Framework

To help organizations assess their automation potential, Infosys Consulting has developed an RPA building block framework to de-mystify RPA, allow a non-technical access to the understanding and how to analyze, break down and re-design processes for optimal automation: Figure 4 shows this in more detail.

Figure 4

User Interaction	Shared Folder	Control Room	E-Form
	Email	Web Portal	

Automation Types	System Types	Activities	Formats

• Attended
• Unattended
• Hybrid/Trigger
• Intelligent
	• SAP/Oracle/
	  Salesforce
	• All web apps
	• Legacy
	• Database
	• API
		• Summarize
		  data
		• Rules-based
		  update
		• Screen scraping
		• Intelligent data
		  cleanse
		• System bridge
		• Legacy-modern
		  sync
			• Machine
			  readable PDF
			• Excel
			  worksheet
			• Word
			  document
			• Image (OCR)
			• TXT file
			  (CSV/JSON)

Three Key Takeaways

1. RPA offers organizations the rapid response they need to meet the challenges posed by COVID-19 and to build cost savings and resiliency into their business models.

2. Building a CoE that is aligned with an organization's overall strategy helps clients overcome hurdles in scaling automation programs

3. There are a number of steps that businesses can take to implement RPA within their organization. Once these are achieved, they provide the strong foundation needed to progress to further levels of automation maturity.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

AI and Automation spend is pivoting to shorter time horizon opportunities in response to COVID-19.

For businesses that were further behind on their transformation journey, the pandemic is likely to have exposed shortcomings in their programs. It seems clear that their cautious approach to digitization will have to be compressed, as smart and emerging technology will enhance our workforces; digital laggards that once mapped digital strategy in years through a use case by use case approach will need to start rapidly scaling their automation in a number of weeks and months.

RPA offers organizations the opportunity to gain immediate and downstream benefits offered by automation, as well as laying the groundwork for more advanced, intelligent forms of automation such as machine learning or artificial intelligence. Once RPA has been introduced as a rapid response post-COVID-19, organizations can look to the next stage of their maturity journey. At Infosys Consulting, we can help businesses jump start their automation program as well as scaling initiatives across the organization. Don't wait for the digitization gap to close – use RPA to ensure business continuity both now and in the future.

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