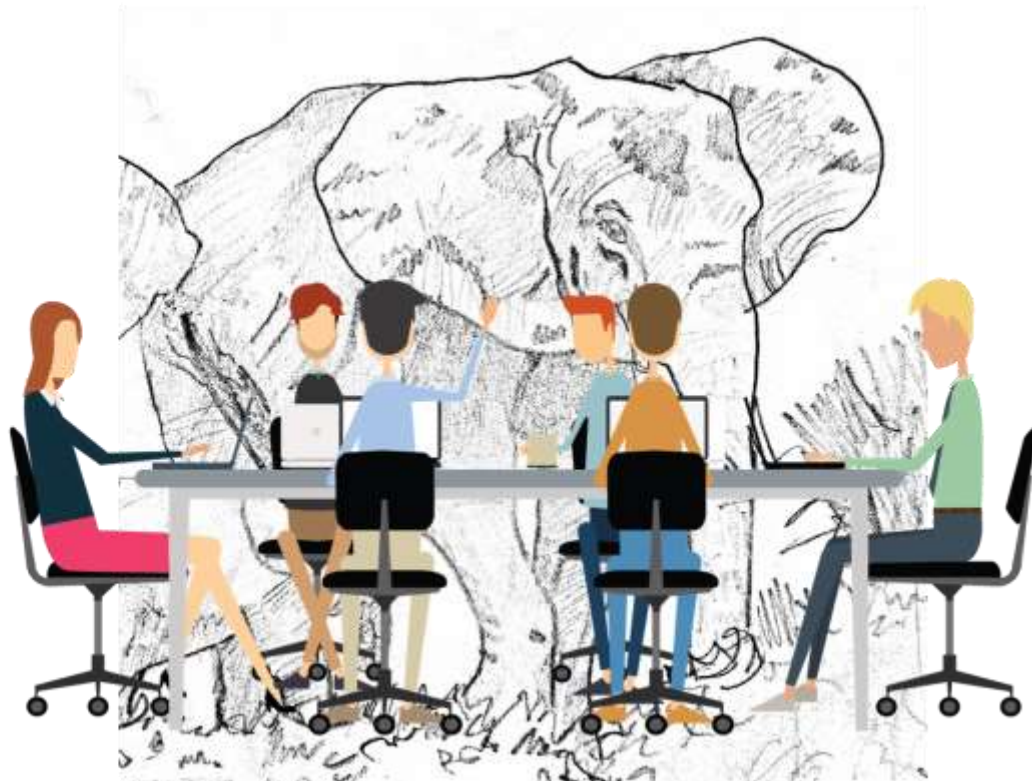


ALL THINGS DIGITAL

AUGUST 6, 2019
VOLUME 8, ISSUE 3

RPA'S ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM



Technology continues to be woven evermore tightly into the business. Whether incorporating advanced technologies into human capital management, finance, sales and marketing or other areas, the successes that advanced technologies have enabled are amazing.

These advances have become part of everyday conversations that include cloud, the Internet of things, data and analytics, artificial intelligence, machine learning, natural language processing, robotic process automation (RPA) and more.

The benefits that these technologies can provide are great. In addition, organizations can independently initiate projects to include these advanced technologies. Often there is less of a requirement placed on information technology organizations, which can relieve the load on burdened IT organizations. Quicker solutions are commonly achieved with benefits such as

improved efficiency, lower costs and improved sales. A case in point is RPA. RPA solutions have delivered stunning outcomes. It's no surprise how popular RPA has become.

Not all of this is without challenges and especially so for RPA. Over the past few years I've witnessed quite a few problems customers have faced with RPA.

- A major bank embarked on its RPA journey and after a dozen automations stopped the program as they were not achieving the benefits of automation. Upon further analysis, the root cause of their problem was an unanticipated 30% to 40% maintenance cost for the automations they developed.
- For another firm, they launched their program, identified five automations and selected three to proceed with. Over a year later the automations still are not in production.
- In one particularly painful case, an organization had over two dozen automations in production and a majority of the automations began to fail. It took over a week to determine the cause of the failure and to fix the problem. In this case a system configuration problem caused the failure.

There are plenty of examples in the industry of firms who have been unable to realize the potential of RPA. Perhaps the large numbers of firms who haven't embraced RPA are taking heed of these failures.

The Elephant in the Room . . .

The elephant in the room is information technology, not the organization, but the function and the harmonization of information technology across an enterprise.

For information technology the function, there are many lessons learned over the past decades in information technology that are not being applied to RPA. Programming principles such as simplicity, reuse, clean code and easy to understand automations are often not followed. They're not followed not because of intent but rather ignorance. New RPA users haven't been given the benefit of these principles and are learning on the job. It's a real pity for the firm that has to struggle to maintain a complex automation with thousands of lines of code.

Another recurring challenge is the coordination between a line of business implementing robotic process automation and the information technology organization. The table below depicts the common approaches:

Line of Business

- **We Don't Need Any Help.** Does it all themselves with no involvement of IT.
- **We'll Tell You Only What We Need.** Engages with IT but only for very specific infrastructure requests such as servers and applications.
- **Let's Work Together.** Coordinates closely with IT to optimize outcomes.

Information Technology Organization

- **Not Invented Here or Doesn't Fit Into Our Enterprise Architecture.** Dismisses RPA as a flawed strategy and offers limited support, if any.
- **We'll Do What We Have To.** Provides limited support for RPA but does not become knowledgeable of RPA especially with implementation and scaling issues.
- **Let's Work Together.** Embraces RPA as one of many strategies to improve the efficiency of the business.

It's no wonder that approaches from the top portion of each of the lists result in poor RPA implementations and failure. In fairness, the RPA systems are a bit kludgy and adding another layer increases complexity. Even so, the outcomes from RPA are stunning.

What Can You Do?

Whether you are considering RPA or you have implemented RPA and would like to improve, you must face the elephant in the room. Institute training, not only on the tool, but training for the methodologies and practices that have been developed over the past decades for the maintainability, reliability and scalability of solutions. Establish cross-organizational relationships to achieve a win-win for all involved. Most of all, determine how you can successfully leverage advanced technologies – if you don't, you can be sure your competitors will.

Please let me know if you'd like to learn more about RPA's elephant in the room.



Dennis Conley is a multi-published, innovative and transformational leader with comprehensive experience delivering market differentiating digital strategies and solutions across diverse industry verticals. With his In-depth executive and consulting expertise, he helps corporations plan and implement digital solutions, business improvement, and post-merger integration programs. A strategic thinker and futurist, he is regularly sought after for corporate strategy development.