accenture

Compelling Benefits,
Common Misconceptions

PUTTING INTELLIGENT AUTOMATION TO WORK FOR FEDERAL

Even as federal agencies struggle with tightening budgets, rising citizen expectations, and a high percentage of the workforce nearing retirement eligibility, they need new ways of handling routine transactions and delivering personalized service to citizens. Addressing the problem with more staffing is not a sustainable solution. That's true not only because of cost constraints but also because manual processes won't deliver the speed, quality, and control that agencies increasingly require.

These challenges are widespread. In an Accenture survey of 200 federal program leaders with mission, business, and operational responsibilities, 58 percent reported that a clear majority of their business processes require significant or complete manual processing. With more than 80 percent of these business process interactions with external parties—citizens, regulated industries, business partners, and other government agencies—the implications are significant.

Intelligent automation is an ideal solution for highly process-driven government operations. Yes, the potential cost savings can be significant, but that's not all. Agencies can also deliver added convenience and control through expanded self-service while freeing their workforce to solve thornier challenges. Consider automation as a force multiplier—a foundation for a deeper journey into artificial intelligence.
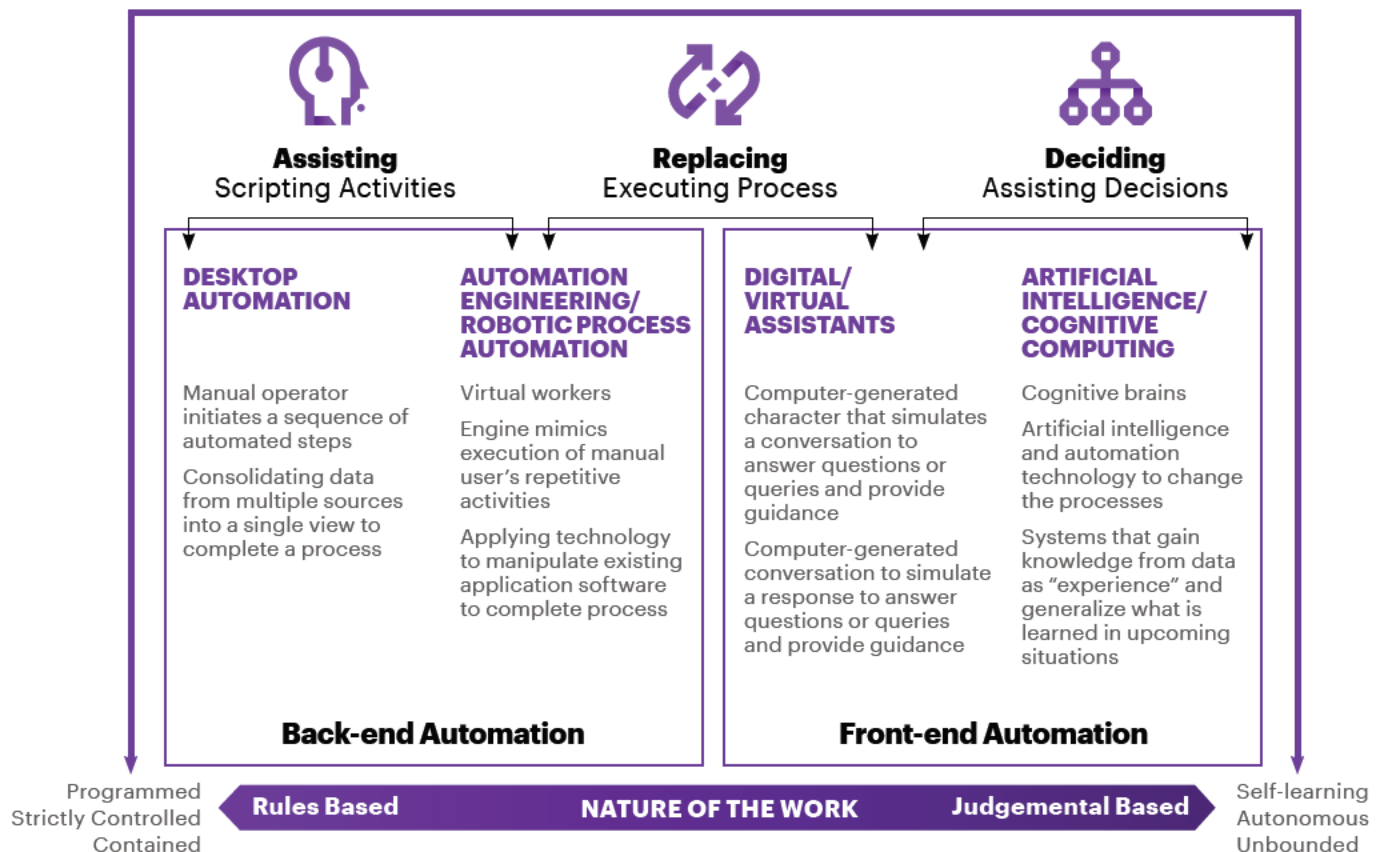
What, exactly, is intelligent automation (IA)—and what specific ways can agencies apply it? Who's "getting it right" when it comes to IA? And, what are some of the most common misconceptions that may limit the effectiveness and success of IA initiatives?

In Brief: Robotic Process Automation and Intelligent Automation

It's helpful to set the stage with clear definitions for both robotic process automation (RPA) and intelligent automation (IA).

RPA is technology that enables a task to be automated using computer software. By completing repetitive, structured, rules-based tasks (think: data collection, entry, and verification), the software makes it possible to automate business processes at scale. In many ways, RPA is the office equivalent of robots on a production line.

IA combines RPA technology with other AI technologies and surrounds them with an understanding of processes and challenges. IA empowers agencies to automate more complex business rules and decisions that require added judgment. By taking advantage of AI technologies, such as natural language processing and machine learning, IA brings greater scale and insight to enterprise operations.

| **Assisting** Scripting Activities | | **Replacing** Executing Process | | **Deciding** Assisting Decisions |

DESKTOP AUTOMATION	**AUTOMATION ENGINEERING/ ROBOTIC PROCESS AUTOMATION**	**DIGITAL/ VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS**	**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE/ COGNITIVE COMPUTING**
Manual operator initiates a sequence of automated steps Consolidating data from multiple sources into a single view to complete a process	Virtual workers Engine mimics execution of manual user's repetitive activities Applying technology to manipulate existing application software to complete process	Computer-generated character that simulates a conversation to answer questions or queries and provide guidance Computer-generated conversation to simulate a response to answer questions or queries and provide guidance	Cognitive brains Artificial intelligence and automation technology to change the processes Systems that gain knowledge from data as "experience" and generalize what is learned in upcoming situations
Back-end Automation		**Front-end Automation**	

Programmed
Strictly Controlled
Contained

Rules Based   **NATURE OF THE WORK**   **Judgemental Based**

Self-learning
Autonomous
Unbounded

Another key difference is scope. RPA can be quickly implemented as a desktop solution, operating independently of the underlying processes that it supports. IA solutions, on the other hand, often entail a broader footprint—requiring greater integration to make more cognitive or human-like decisions.

And while RPA can deliver significant value, IA can generate even more. To make the most of intelligent automation, tackle it from the top down—with a focus on achieving outcomes, delivering insights, and enabling systems to learn from experience.

To assess the current state of digital process automation within the federal government, Accenture surveyed 200 federal government executives across both deense and civilian agencies. These were program (non-IT) leaders with mission, business or operational responsibilities for business processes and service delivery within their agency.

RPA and intelligent automation can deliver many of the functional benefits federal process owners identified as top priorities for their digital transformation efforts:

Reducing the number of manual interventions and/or process steps — **47%**

Accelerating end-to-end processing — **37%**

Expanding the use of automated business rules management to reduce errors and improve consistency — **36%**

Simplifying how end-users interact with systems to share input and enter data — **36%**

Improving how systems and/or case workers generate output (e.g., reports, correspondence) for end-users — **30%**

8 Compelling Benefits

Intelligent automation is revolutionizing the way work gets done in enterprises across commercial industries and government agencies.

Benefit #1
ACCURACY

Intelligent automation helps reduce the risk of transactional errors—including incorrect data inputs, missed steps, incomplete processes, and mistakes in rule application—to improve overall data accuracy and data-driven decision-making.

A global technology company needed to blend RPA tools with several third-party tools to automate its financial reporting processes. A tool capability assessment and solution design allowed the company to develop a strong, stable system that was rolled out across multiple functions.

RESULTS

28% reduction in processing time
40% increase in productivity
Slashed errors in half
Upskilled financial analysts to more valuable tasks

The potential extends beyond the back office. For example, a federal agency is examining intelligent automation to perform mission functions. This agency is looking to recreate the human-intensive work of examining multiple images to detect changes and update systems accordingly. This approach involves computer vision and RPA technology to detect changes in images and then perform specific tasks based on what's detected. While still in the early stages, the initial results look promising.

SPEED

Intelligent automation dramatically reduces process cycle time—with handling times typically falling by half or more. That can significantly improve outcomes and customer satisfaction.

For federal agencies, reviewing and processing employment applications is a cumbersome, costly process. Beyond its impact on time to hire, delays can require reprocessing or resubmission when the approval window for submissions has expired. Using RPA, one agency was able to reduce the average review time from 24 minutes to 13 minutes, a significant savings when employed across thousands of applicants per year.

RESULTS

46% reduction in application review time
$1.5 million in annual cost savings

SERVICE CONTINUITY

Software robots work 24/7, providing predictability, dependability, and continuity of service—even during spikes in demand.

A government call center sought to automate routine inquiries to deliver faster customer service while reducing costs. It developed an integrated approach combining more contextual search for a public website, a digital assistant for webchat and phone interactions, and a newly created email handling agent. In taking these steps, the agency made personalized service available outside of standard operating hours.

RESULTS

11,000 monthly customer interactions (60 percent) handled without human interaction
30% improvement in service speed

GREATER PROCESSING EFFICIENCY

Intelligent automation reduces the cost of transaction processing by up to 80 percent.

Workflow and analytics automation are bringing significant improvements to finance processes at several organizations. One global technology company has successfully replaced cash allocation processes with an automation solution now being systematically scaled to multiple regions.

RESULTS

$500,000+ in annual cost savings
Process quality score increased to **98.8%**

EASE OF USE

Compared to other forms of automation and transformation, RPA is easier to implement, configure, and maintain—typically via a simple, intuitive user interface.

Deadlines are a relic of the past for a major European newspaper as it constantly publishes new information and insight 24/7/365 across multiple platforms and channels. The challenge it overcame along the way? Maintaining the paper's legendary quality standards while improving both productivity and speed-to-market.

Today, digital assistants are helping journalists keep pace with these new demands. Now, when a journalist starts a story, the assistant continuously checks the text for data consistency, potential links to other sources, as well as spelling and syntax. By offering prompts to other potentially relevant content, whether from previous stories or external resources, the assistant gives journalists a completely new way to check sources, develop background understanding, and—more important—add extra content they might have otherwise missed.

RESULTS

Within six months, the entire newsroom will use assistants to increase productivity, boost story quality and accuracy, and create rich and consistent digital content.
Additional premium content is creating new opportunities to grow revenues through print and digital subscriptions.

WORKFORCE AGILITY

Intelligent automation excels at adapting to demand fluctuations. It makes it possible to increase or decrease capacity—almost instantly—at a fraction of the cost of traditional models. This capability can be critical in ensuring peak demand doesn't negatively affect customer experience—or workforce satisfaction.

A global banking and financial services company recently reskilled its procurement teams to focus on more rewarding, higher-value work. This implementation used RPA to automate invoice processing, non-compliance validation, vendor master data, catalog creation/amendments, contract uploads, vendor onboarding, and global sourcing.

RESULTS

More motivated team now delivering new value and achieving more for the business
Productivity savings of approximately **20%** across the function

SCALABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

Intelligent automation effectively decouples resource costs from process volume. This capability greatly simplifies operational scaling, enabling organizations to focus resources on other key areas of expansion, organizational change, and capacity increases.

Using optical character recognition in concert with automation tools, a global energy company is delivering greater efficiency and accuracy in sales and reporting. More than 100 processes have been automated seamlessly—all without disrupting existing global processes.

RESULTS

67% reduction in the time needed for journal entry and invoice processing
Increased data accuracy
Total annual savings of **more than $3 million**

STRATEGIC FOCUS

Perhaps the biggest benefit of intelligent automation is making it possible to delineate between rules-based decisions and those requiring greater judgment or analysis. By doing so, highly trained staff can devote greater attention to cases and tasks that require more cognitive thinking or empathy.

As part of its annual audit, a large federal agency needed to demonstrate the integrity of tens of thousands of financial transactions. Traditionally, this was not only a costly exercise but also a significant distraction from day-to-day work for staff required to support the audit. By taking advantage of intelligent automation, the agency was able to automate many of the tests and verifications, giving staff time to review more complex cases.

RESULTS

70% shorter cycle time
$1.5 million in labor cost savings

6 Common Misconceptions

Too often, organizations fall prey to one or more of these misconceptions about RPA and IA. Increase an agency's likelihood of success by learning the truth about planning for, implementing, and maintaining automation in a federal enterprise.

Misconception #1

ROBOTS ARE THE WHOLE SOLUTION.

The reality is, few processes can be neatly and fully automated using only an RPA tool, and focusing solely on short-term cost reductions won't deliver the full benefits of automation.

Rather than thinking of RPA as substituting one "ingredient" for another, view it as part of a shift to a whole new "recipe." That recipe should be a strategy of incremental investment in automation, analytics, and artificial intelligence—all underpinning transformation, modernization, and innovation in operations for the next decade and beyond.

Intelligent automation requires important and complex work around solution design—that is, identifying high-value areas and determining which combination of capabilities to apply to processes to create optimal efficiency. Strong solution design should have a broad focus from the start, with a long-term plan and business case for ongoing improvements and innovations.

End-to-end process thinking often uncovers opportunities to use multiple tools and techniques, including "mini bots," natural language processing, data analytics, process reengineering, mashups, and more. Similarly, to save costs, some upfront investments (for example, in digitization) may be necessary to enable the right combination of tools.

Misconception #2

WE CAN DO THIS WITHOUT INVOLVING I.T.

It's true that RPA is driven by core operations functions (think: middle office, human resources, finance, or procurement. Even with the best of intentions, there is sometimes a lack of understanding around how RPA will impact the rest of the business.

It's also true that robotics tools are often non-invasive—that is, they require no integration to legacy applications, and they can be installed on any desktop. For these reasons, there's a tendency to assume RPA doesn't require significant involvement from enterprise IT.

Be forewarned: Not involving IT is a grave mistake.

Take it from a former head of Back Office Services at a major telecommunications firm. His RPA pilot proved so effective it almost got him fired. How? Because so many transactions were executed so quickly, it triggered an IT security alert. He was escorted to a private room by the head of Fraud and Security.

Avoiding this kind of internal wrangling is one reason to bring IT on board as soon as possible. A more fundamental reason: to ensure RPA systems are part of IT's worldview and strategy in terms of security, reliability, scalability, continuity, and fault tolerance. Doing that homework will enable an operations teams to quickly drive productivity outcomes and transformation benefits.

Misconception #3

IF WE CAN DO ONE ROBOT, WE CAN DO 1,000.

Getting started in RPA is relatively easy. In fact, a great feature of the technology is how easily organizations can "test and learn" in sandbox environments, gaining experience without risking negative impacts.

Those advantages lead many to run before they can walk. Yes, implementing one robot is relatively easy. Yet implementing hundreds across diverse processes—and infusing intelligent automation throughout the organization—is much harder.

While getting the initial capability is relatively easy, for organizations that are aspiring to do this at a large scale, here are some best practices that have proven useful in our experience:

- During initial piloting phase (one to three months), establish a process of wider business consultation. In this phase, different areas can come forward with ideas to be built into the program and what could be automated in their business areas. Doing so puts an automation program on the right track by increasing the internal knowledge and expertise needed to industrialize RPA.

- Scaling up from piloting requires a formal structure and operating model, centralized control, strong governance, approved business cases, and a long-term roadmap. It involves systematically rolling smaller projects in a wider program and delivering benefits in parallel.

- The "go live" phase often runs nine to 16 months, with implementations delivered in waves according to the roadmap.

This formal, robust, and holistic approach increases success in building a sustainable automation capability that reaps the considerable benefits of larger-scale intelligent automation.

Misconception #4
LET EVERYONE DO THEIR OWN.

The beauty of RPA tools is that they're highly flexible, easy to use, and applicable within numerous contexts spanning functions and departments. All of that sometimes leads larger organizations to let a thousand flowers bloom—reflecting a desire not to restrict new innovations and a perception that they're enabling a wide-scale efficiency drive.

That's risky. From the beginning, automation programs need centralized control and governance. Otherwise, an organization could end up with a collection of "weeds"—a tangled mess of isolated projects.

For example, robots can be targeted at the wrong tasks, solutions may overlap, and a random mix of tools and techniques could develop. Those realities can seriously hamper future scaling. Meanwhile, a scattershot approach often leads to key risk practices being applied inconsistently or missed entirely. Such practices include business continuity planning, formal maintenance schedules, system documentation, IT security protocols, robot inventories, and measures to preserve human process knowledge.

Instead of letting RPA grow unfettered throughout a federal agency, aim to create a common environment with shared common security, risk, and quality standards and centralized control and governance procedures.

ROBOTS ARE 'SET AND FORGET.'

On the contrary, like every other system in an organization, robots need to be managed operationally and maintained technically. Consider them true virtual workers.

New procedures need to be tested, and leaders need to be attuned to new complexities that could arise. At the same time, any changes to underlying systems and technology need to be monitored—with changes carried through to the "virtual team."

In fact, changes to procedures and rules require a change strategy to ensure robots are tuned, processes are current, and systems are aligned. And, of course, human workers need to be kept informed alongside the robots.

PEOPLE STRATEGY CAN COME LATER.

Intelligent automation is ultimately positive for people. Why? Because robots provide another way to tackle mundane, repetitive, high-volume chores—the "drudgery" of federal agency work. They fuel opportunities for people to do work that's more interesting—and more valuable—to an agency and the citizens it serves.

After all, human brains are more valuable in non-robotic tasks, including creative problem solving, innovation, personalization, discretionary decision-making, in-depth analysis, and human-to-human communication. Intelligent automation enables agencies to retrain teams to focus more of their time on these higher-value, higher-satisfaction tasks. As robot capability evolves over time, an agency can automate increasingly complex tasks. As part of that effort, new capabilities need to be mapped against revised roles, processes, and systems to identify and capture further benefits.

Of course, none of this happens on its own. Any intelligent automation plan needs the technology strategy and the people strategy on the same page. At best, failing to address people will cause delays in training, redeployments, and team development. At worst, it will lead to unrest among federal employees who feel uncertain about their future.

Set a course for success

Intelligent automation can be a game changer for federal agencies. But realizing the full potential requires much more than deploying RPA tools. Success hinges on setting the right pre-implementation strategy and expectations, implementing strong enterprise governance, and ensuring ongoing monitoring, maintenance, and improvements.

Consider the following recommendations to support those aims:

1 **Automation Center of Excellence.** Federal agencies need a team responsible for all things automation—including governance, idea generation, skill development, process assessment, and agency-wide support. Establishing a Center of Excellence helps ensure that best practices are implemented, projects aren't duplicated, and reusable tools and resources are developed and used across the organization.

2 **Right Tooling.** Given the diversity of automation tools on the market, federal agencies need to build a capability for automation-focused assessment and solution design. Maintaining updated analyses of various technologies is key to identifying the right tools for the right processes.

3 **Structuring the Infrastructure.** To support large-scale rollout, build strong infrastructure support—including a virtual environment, server hosting and management, product installation, and service capabilities.

4 **Robot Risk Control.** Ensure robots aren't risks through robust monitoring and security governance. These processes help keep RPA compliant with IT security policies, regulatory provisions, and risk policies—no matter where the robots reside or how they're used.

5 **Operating Governance.** Every agency needs a comprehensive governance framework to execute step-by-step RPA implementation, manage organizational change, update processes, manage service demand fluctuations, and communicate with stakeholders.

6 **Focus on Value.** Above all, stay focused on the "why" of Intelligent Automation: driving operational efficiency, productivity, quality, and/or customer satisfaction.

LET'S GET TO WORK TOGETHER.

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