



Process automation and the public sector





Organisations across all sectors have a multitude of manual, human-driven processes. Many of these processes can be automated.

These processes are typically both time and resource intensive. They take people away from the work that only humans can do, those that require real interaction, judgment and ingenuity. The public sector is no different: across Whitehall and beyond there are many manual processes that could be automated.

These processes regularly involve interaction between the customer, whether citizens or businesses, and the public sector. Examples of these processes include benefit claims, passport applications, vehicle tax renewals or National Insurance number requests. McKinsey have estimated that across functions, around 30% of the tasks of any given role can be automated.

Human-driven processes can create challenges and lead to bad outcomes.

Human-driven processes are prone to high error rates with potentially high costs. They are limited by resource capacity unnecessarily, reducing efficiency and lowering the quality of outcomes.

The human error rate in manual processes, such as data entry, is estimated to be as high as 4%. This leads to suboptimal outcomes for citizens, from having to restart the process through to not receiving a necessary payment.

Automation can solve these challenges.

Automation, sometimes called Robotic Process Automation (RPA), is perfect for rules-based, activity-driven processes: those that are undertaken by people but for which no new human judgment or interaction is required.

People are best deployed to tasks that require human skills, from conversation to empathy, and from judgment through to persuasion.

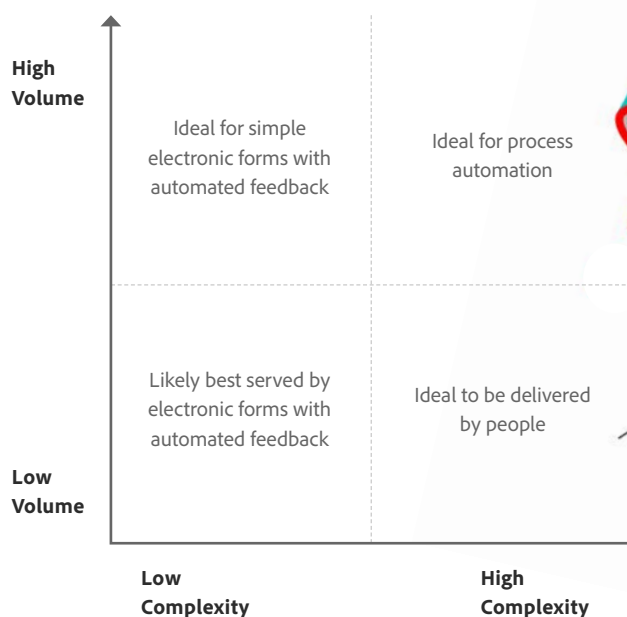
The repetitive, binary work can and should be done by computers. A piece of software will not accidentally enter a piece of information in the wrong field, or need to stop for a break. It can consistently and unerringly complete entire processes.

Process automation benefits the organisation, the employee and the citizen.

For the organisation, staff are deployed efficiently and customers are well served.

For the employee, they are able to work on non-repetitive tasks that they know will make a difference.

For the citizen and customer, they receive the best possible service in a way that suits them.





The challenges of manual processes that automation can solve



Resource and time savings.

Manual processes completed by humans are resource intensive. Employees must spend time keying and rekeying, checking, editing, approving and more. Frequently used processes, such as passport applications or benefit claims, have an enormous throughput and so require an enormous amount of resource to staff.

This takes public servants away from work that only humans can do, such as interacting directly with those most in need. It also places public servants on work that software can, and should, do. Process automation can free up existing human resources to deliver more for the customer and the citizen.

Human error.

Human error is a fact of life across the public sector, in the same way as it is in the private sector and across all industries. Any process that requires humans to enter, re-enter and validate data and inputs will see a significant error rate. This can be as high as four errors every 100 process completions.

This can lead to seriously damaging outcomes, for both the citizen and the organisation. For the citizen, human error can mean that they do not get what they need. This might be a delayed payment, or a missing permission, all of which can cause real and serious harm.

For the organisation, human error can mean overpayment and loss, non-compliance with regard to data regulations, reputational damage and much more beyond. Process automation eliminates the potential for human error, and ensures the best outcomes for both citizen and organisation.

Security and compliance.

The data protection regulation landscape places significant obligations on all organisations, and the public sector is no different. Between 2019 and 2020, central government reported thousands of data breaches, many of which included personally identifiable information.

Non-compliance is hugely costly, from fines through to the loss of the public's trust. Automated processes can have compliance hardwired in, reducing enormously the risk of breaches and reducing the associated costs to the public sector.

Institutional knowledge and memory.

The delivery of efficient and effective public services relies on all the documentation and records for a particular process, employee or citizen being readily and safely accessible when necessary. Knowing where to find what is needed when a tax challenge is lodged, or when a new claim is made, is vital.

Too often this is done manually, with completed forms and assessments being filed manually in a variety of folders and drives, some digital and some physical. The recovery of the records relies on individual and institutional knowledge and memory.

Process automation can save all relevant information and documents to a single, standardised location. It removes the potential for documents stored across multiple systems and formats to be misplaced, and makes it significantly easier for employees to find what they need, when they need it.

Fraud reduction.

Fraudsters are increasingly sophisticated, targeting both individuals and systems to exploit and extort. This often relies on forcing human error. Indeed, IBM has estimated that 95% of cyber security breaches are a result of human error rather than technical breaches.

Human-driven processes leave significant room for fraudsters to take advantage of inevitable human error. This can lead to real losses for the public purse, as well as public confidence. Process automation can increase the security of systems and reduce the occurrence of fraud by reducing human interaction with critical, but repeatable, processes.





Getting started with process automation



Process automation does not need to be a daunting task. And it does not need to be on a roadmap for consideration in a year's time.

There are simple, practical steps that you can take now to assess the potential for process automation in your organisation. From here, implementation is only another step away.

In our experience, we've seen large processes move from fully manual to fully automated in the space of time.

Identify.

Bring together a team of service and product owners in your organisation to identify candidates for process automation. You don't need to deep-dive at this stage, instead focus on checking the processes against some simple criteria such as:

- Whether the process is currently manual
- The amount of times the process is completed daily
- The amount of time the process takes to complete each time
- The number of people and the amount of their time required to complete the process
- Whether people are required to use judgment in the completion of the process

You will have found some strong candidates for process automation by looking for processes that are manual, completed often and by many people, but where human judgment is not required.

Map.

Once you have your candidates for process automation, you can now spend some time on mapping the detail of the process from start to finish. You should pay particular attention to:

- The order in which the process needs to be completed
- The moments at which the customer may be needed to move the process along
- The moments at which internal approvals or checks are required

From this, you will be able to see what an automated process will need to be able to do. You now have your specification.

Assess solutions.

It is now time to assess what solutions and providers can support in the automation of your identified processes. We would suggest considering the following:

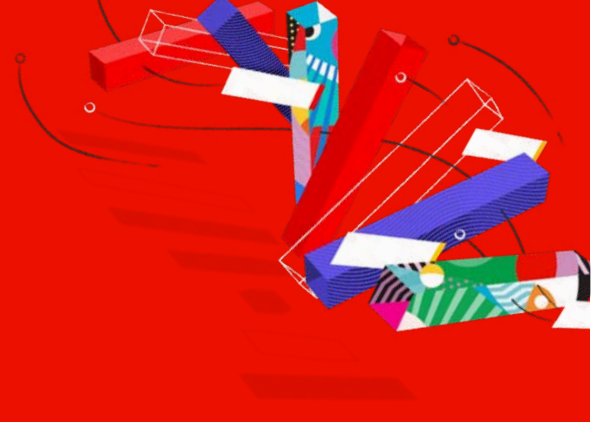
- Can the solution be built in-house or not?
- If it can be built in-house, is this the most effective and efficient approach?
- If an external solution is required, what providers should be considered?

If you decide that an external solution is or may be the right answer, you will need to begin talking to suppliers and exploring their products. Working with trade bodies such as techUK can be an effective way to engage with multiple potential suppliers at once.





The long term benefits of process automation



Investing in process automation improves both service quality and service efficiency.

These effects compound over time, supporting continuous improvement and significant ongoing cost savings.

Process automation implemented across customer interactions



Customer compliance improves as the service is easier to access.



Staff are freed up to deliver services that require people rather than computers.



Unnecessary call centre and face to face interactions reduced.



Costs of service delivery are reduced.



Occurrence of fraud is reduced.



The challenges of implementing process automation



Despite the benefits of process automation, implementing it can prove challenging in any organisation

These are the challenges that we see most frequently, and how we at Adobe support our customers to overcome them.

Working with legacy systems.

Legacy systems across the public sector can often make it feel difficult, if not impossible, to improve the digital service provided both to employees, citizens and customers. The fear of enormous and expensive IT transformation projects can be legitimate.

Adobe's process automation solutions are typically lightweight and can be layered effectively and at reasonable cost on top of existing systems. The software can read and write across multiple legacy systems, and can interface with new digital frontends. This can remove the need for a person to act as the intermediary between the old and the new.

Relying on IT support.

Process automation should be empowering for teams in the public sector, allowing them to design and deliver excellent services, efficiently. Too often, though, we see these benefits reduced as control of the process is placed with IT, rather than the service delivery team.

Adobe's solution consultants and account executives are experts in the delivery of process automation, and work with customers to ensure that the right teams can use the right tools at the right time. Adobe Experience Manager supports collaboration and the breaking down of siloed working.

Focusing on the wrong problems.

Process automation is perfect for high volume, high complexity processes. It can be a heavyweight approach for high volume, low complexity processes, where it is often better to employ simple electronic forms. For low volume, high complexity processes, it will typically be the case that these are best suited to people, rather than computers.

Adobe works with customers to understand the processes their organisation delivers to citizens and other customers that are most suited to our powerful process automation solutions.





About Adobe

Adobe Experience Manager is designed to facilitate process automation between customers and process owners. It enables next-generation digital government in countries across the world, reducing costs and improving services.

Adobe Experience Manager can support the UK public sector to continue to deliver exceptional services to citizens and customers. With products such as powerful digital forms, electronic signatures and more, process automation is made easy with Adobe.

We look forward to talking to you about how Adobe can support process automation in your organisation.

To request a call, please visit business.adobe.com/uk/request-consultation/experience-cloud.html

To find more information, visit our Public Sector page at business.adobe.com/uk/solutions/industries/government.html

Sources

McKinsey & Company, "[How governments can harness the power of automation at scale](#)", February 1, 2019.

IBM, "[IBM X-Force Threat Intelligence Index](#)", 2021.