



SERIES 2

Artificial Intelligence & Robotics

Chapter 2: Robotic Process Automation (RPA)

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WHAT IS ROBOTICS?

Robotics is the foundation of workplace digitalisation, and refers to the conceptualising, design, manufacture and operation of robots. It includes electronics, computer science, mechatronics, nanotechnology, and sometimes – though not always – Artificial Intelligence, or AI, which is how robots perform more advanced tasks. (We looked at AI in Part 1 of this series). The application of robotics to repetitive, rules-based tasks is a major win for businesses. Bots can do mindless, repetitive work faster, and more accurately than we can, freeing humans up to do the work that only humans can – work that requires judgement, experience, relationships and empathy.



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AI & ROBOTICS: RPA



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ROBOTICS DESKTOP AUTOMATION (RDA) AND ROBOTICS PROCESS AUTOMATION (RPA)

The first, RDA, is a widget installed on your PC which you trigger and manage. It does mechanical tasks that you define, and blocks your computer while it's busy. It's a tool you use.

RPA, on the other hand, is on the server (not on your computer), and doesn't block your computer while it's busy. It doesn't need you to trigger or manage it personally – it can be triggered on demand (e.g. an email response) or on a schedule.

Think of the first as a desktop assistant, and the second as a virtual assistant.



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WHY ARE WE HEARING SO MUCH ABOUT RPA?

It is a genuinely breakthrough technology:

- It operates 24/7 with no human intervention, thus can deal with volumes in a way humans cannot.
- It's non-invasive. Risk is low.
- It's accurate and creates a trail for audit purposes.
- It's consistent, reliable, industry-agnostic, versatile, and can scale up and down according to need.
- It frees people up for more complex work.

Naturally, robotics is sometimes perceived as a job-killer. And it's true that it takes over some jobs: **the bean counters in the business love robots** because they don't soak up time in performance reviews, go on leave, need pay increases, or resign to join a competitor company just when they're starting to really add value. **But anybody who likes their job to be more than mechanical loves them too:** many more jobs may be created through this tech, all of them more engaging and interesting.



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WHERE CAN WE SEE RPA IN ACTION?

It's Siri; it's Alexis, it's that customer-service bot which pops up in the corner of your screen when you've gone onto a webpage, asking: "How can I help you?" (When it's good, it's good. When it's not – well, the data needs some work).

RPA is very widely used in invoice processing, sales orders, payroll, price comparison, etc



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ROBOTICS AND THE FINANCIAL SERVICES SECTOR

FS is a compliance-driven sector; meaning there is lots of repetitive, rules-based administration – exactly what robots are best at.

Robots are also excellent at managing high volumes of transactions efficiently; and there are multiple applications for robotics in the surveillance of activities required for top-notch risk management. While none of this obviates the need for human involvement whenever red flags are raised, the groundwork can be done robotically, freeing up people skills for more subtle, complex work.



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WANT TO EXPLORE FURTHER?

Accenture offers a good overview of the field [here](#).
This video from EY demonstrates [AI in action in an insurance claim](#).

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NEXT WEEK: MACHINE LEARNING