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The Robots Are Coming

Process automation is set to transform the Public Sector.
How will it affect the way you work?

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Table of Contents

Introduction

From self-driving cars to robot care workers, stories about machine learning and artificial intelligence seem to dominate every magazine and news website.

But the fact is, despite the 'Tomorrow's World' speculation in some parts of the media, the impact of robotics owes a lot less to science fiction than it does to years of incremental development by business software engineers and IT system providers.

Nevertheless, misconceptions about robotics in the workplace persist. Among them, worries about wholesale job losses and the cost and practicality of implementing autonomous intelligent systems. In this article, we'll look at the reality behind these and other issues surrounding robotic technology, and how the Public Sector can adapt and take advantage of the many benefits it offers.

Defining robotic systems

When automation meets intelligence…

The word 'Robot' was coined by Czech playwright Karel Capek in 1920 to describe an artificial slave or forced labour. In the modern sense, robotic process automation (RPA) fulfils much the same role; the execution of repetitive tasks within a workflow process at a speed and consistency far greater than that of a human operator.

It does that by drawing data from one or more sources within the IT ecosystem and processing it to a tightly defined set of workflow rules. Bringing hugely increased accuracy and efficiency to common, administrative tasks such as form filling, data entry, information retrieval, ID validation and help desk tasks, robotic process automation is poised to strengthen public services and meet major business objectives.

RPA, most significantly, supports the **Government Transformation Strategy,** describes its ambitious programme to change the way government operates and serves its citizens. With the focus on harnessing new digital tools and techniques, Government's drive is to simplify and streamline complex business processes whilst offering great payback for investment.

RPA is helping build momentum for digital transformation across government, and, with the deadline to be 'digital by default' looming closer, the public sector is in a position to embrace automation in powerful and compelling ways.

Not only can RPA help strengthen public services, it can also change the relationship between citizens and the state, a goal at the very heart of government.

As the new wave of automation sweeps across the public sector, high-volume services must be rebuilt, making them digital by default. RPA can be the catalyst needed to achieve the delivery of world-class digital services from back to front office.

Government's focus is to accelerate the use of RPA

in order to deliver real savings and service improvements.

Robots & AI. What's the difference?

The terms 'robotic' and 'Artificial Intelligence' are often used interchangeably. But in fact, they have distinct and almost opposite meanings.

- **Robots** - in a computing sense, are applications that carry out repetitive, pre-determined tasks based on a specific set of instructions
- **Artificial Intelligence** - programmes that can learn, reason, solve problems, apply logic and even understand language, such as those used in internet search engines.

A Spotlight on The Digital Mailroom

There is a strong case for adopting automated systems throughout the public sector. With the potential to significantly reduce processing costs and time, automation can also eliminate over-dependence on costly labour and increase service levels.

The mailroom – a simple conduit for receiving and distributing physical post - stands at the centre of a complex set of work processes for sorting, classifying, extracting and disseminating data.

Government organisations is recognising that they cannot scale operations to process the amount of information flowing through it, and with restricted budgets, and a limited staff resources, it's important to think differently about how operations are organised.

One key area in which automation is delivering multiple benefits of increased efficiency and higher levels of customer satisfaction is the Digital Mailroom.

Many organisations are yet to benefit from the digital mailroom but are faced with relentless challenges such slow, costly and error-heavy mail handling, inconsistent mail formats, and increased customer expectations for digital mail delivery.

Creating a digital mailroon

solution achieves automated data

capture and workflow technology,

driving greater efficiencies.

Business Benefits of the Digital Mailroom Solution

As the public sector move towards becoming a paper-lite/paperless entity, the digital mailroom plays a central role to achieving digital transformation by:

- **Channel Communications** - With messages coming in from a number of different places, the digital mailroom can channel all emails, post and other messages into one place, helping prevent anything being missed or forgotten.
- **Reduced Paper** - satisfying government drive for paperless working. The digital mailroom reduces the amount of paper used, minimising the requirement for storage space and shredding.
- **Improved Efficiencies in Mail Handling** - The digital mailroom can sort and deliver mail in a much faster time than a human processor, meaning that issues and enquiries are dealt with immediately.
- **Reduced Mail Handling Costs** - cost efficiencies are made on staff time, postage and other overheads such as copying and storage. This allows the money to be used on other areas of the council requiring investment.

Defining robotic systems

Mail automation in use

When one local authority – Stoke on Trent City Council (SoTCC) - was moving to its new headquarters, the decision was taken to set up a digital mail room as part of a 'paper lite' policy for all council offices. With the implementation of 'hot desking', all documents also had to be accessible as digital files from anywhere in the building, and for remote and home workers.

Due to the volume of incoming post and the need for processes that could identify and classify inbound mail as 'regular', 'sensitive' and 'for managers', two high speed scanners were installed at a centralized location, feeding data to a powerful Kofax classification platform. Using complex algorithms, the Kofax system matches each document against a given sample set and, on positive identification, pushes it to the relevant Line of Business Team.

In the rare event that a document can't be identified, it is referred to a human operator for validation.

As result of automating its inbound mail and other communication channels, SoTCC has significantly improved handling and response times for issues and enquiries, while fulfilling its paper lite strategy and reducing mail handling costs

"Pre-project, the delivery process used to take three people all day to deliver our post. Now two people do it in just half a day. Staff across the council will no longer have to manually open, date stamp and scan in their post as this is now being undertaken by a central facility. This allows employees to add greater value to the work undertaken supporting our residents. Once the project is complete, we will be scanning in approximately 10,000 items of post per week."

Helen Dos Santos, Corporate Business Administration Manager, Stoke on Trent City Council

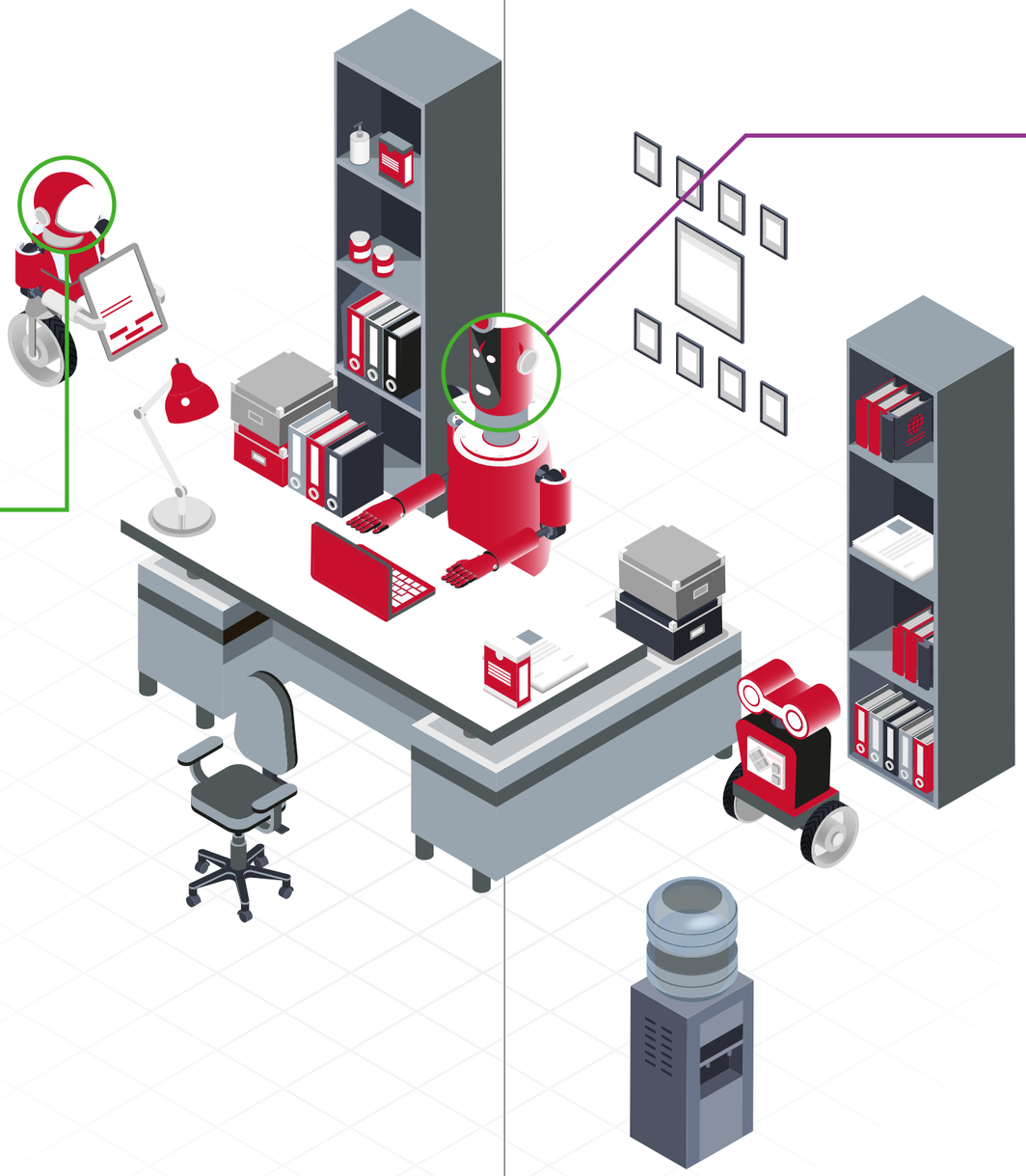
So could a robot take my job?

Since the very early days of mechanization, fears that technology will render human workers obsolete have lingered. The sheer speed of technological advancement in workplace robotics has done little to allay such worries – particularly when a single 'bot' can often do the job of dozens of human operators much more quickly, much more cost effectively and with 100% accuracy.

Two hundred years of seismic innovation since the dawn of the industrial age has not seen a rising trend for unemployment.

Reports like the one published by Deloitte in 2015, in which it was predicted that 861,000 UK Public Sector jobs would be displaced by automation with a saving of £15bn in wages to the public purse, paint a worrying picture for those who consider themselves at risk, but the reality is probably more nuanced than the figures might suggest.

"Since the dawn of the industrial age, a recurrent fear has been that technological change will spawn mass unemployment. By and large, neoclassical economists' prediction that people would find other jobs ....has been proven correct..."[1]



[1]www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/technology-unemployment-jobs-internet-by-kenneth-rogoff?barrier=accesspaylog

History tells us that new technology rarely brings about the wholesale job losses that are often predicted. Instead, it tends to result in a reshaped workforce, with new roles created as the result of the adoption of new working methods.

"most companies use RPA to automate only the most tedious aspects of back-office jobs, retaining the staff to work alongside the bots doing more interesting things."[2]

For an already overstretched Public Sector, the abolition of repetitive administrative tasks represents an opportunity to move employees into more critical, citizen-facing roles – a move that would directly improve levels of public service delivery and maintain a human face in the midst of increased automation.

By using technologies such as RPA, the public sector can continue to make sure that civil servants are working effectively and in more rewarding roles.

That robotics and AI are primed to revolutionise the way the public sector works is beyond doubt. In some areas, RPA and other, 'higher' forms of automation have already proved their value by creating more efficient, more economical processes while helping deliver levels of service that, under the non-robotic era of austerity just a few short years ago, would have been almost unimaginable.

[2]Paraphrased from www.ft.com/content/4580f43a-2191-11e8-9efc-0cd3483b8b80

RPA – How to Get Started

Need to increase operational efficiency? Free up staff, redirecting resources away from repetitive tasks to focus elsewhere in the business? Want tangible results in the short and long term?

Using RPA and automation solutions within your organisation does not require a major overhaul of existing legacy systems. Today's automation platforms are cost effective and flexible, causing relatively little disruption.

If your objective is to achieve digital change as outlined in the Government Transformation Strategy, now is the time to take hold of automated intelligence solutions, supporting government's digital transformation in powerfully efficient ways.

Let robotic process automation play a role in reshaping your government organisation. Let us use these solutions to achieve our goals; to put citizens first and meet their needs in more efficient ways. Let us change at pace and scale and enjoy the transformative potential of RPA technology.

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About

Restore Digital is a leading independent provider of document scanning, content input, capture, and business process automation solutions.

We're an innovative, digitally oriented division of Restore plc, and our reach is rapidly expanding. Our mission is to equip our customers with compliant document management solutions and contribute to a world shaped by digital transformation. Founded in 2000, our consultancy led approach to the implementation and delivery of integrated digital solutions has enabled thousands of customers to accelerate business processes, reduce costs and improve operational efficiencies.

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