THE IMPORTANCE OF DIGITAL PROCESS AUTOMATION (DPA)

Any layperson privy to a conversation between two DevOps team members will quickly learn that "automate everything" is a key principle driving the work they are doing. From code generation to production, DevOps teams are actively seeking out manual tasks that can be handled with minimal human interaction to the delight of their organizational leaders. The primary reason automation has been embraced so widely is its ability to ensure higher output and increased productivity, helping both employees and businesses.

Digital Process Automation (DPA) is a method of automation specific to automating workflows by using software to optimize processes and automatically complete tasks. DPA focuses on automating or partially automating business workflows when a task typically needs some form of human interaction such as in sales, marketing, management, IT, and production.

Some key elements of DPA:

- Mobile-first interfaces
- Process transparency for users
- Offloading customer tasks to automation
- Triggered reminders and notifications
- Easy collaboration
- Rapid user response and adaptation

DPA vs BPA

Some may confuse digital process automation (DPA) with business process automation (BPA) or use the abbreviations interchangeably. This is an easy mistake since digital process automation (DPA) evolved originally from business process management (BPM) and the differences between the two methods are subtle but important.

Both have similar goals in workflow automation, however, BPA is a technology-enabled automation of activities that accomplish a specific function or workflow. BPA is also used in many segments of organizational activities including sales, management, operations, supply chain, HR, and IT with the ultimate goal of simplifying and improving business workflows through automation technology. Simply stated, BPA builds, operates, and automates manual business processes into automated digital workflows. DPA assumes that business processes have already been digitalized and focuses on optimizing the existing workflows to enhance the customer or end-user experience as opposed to containing costs. DPA caters to the human elements of the interaction by keeping processes up to date and making the information available to anyone who needs it.

DPA, on the other hand, is a crucial evolution of BPM and because they are so closely related, organizations that have experience with BPM should be able to easily implement DPA.

Benefits of Digital Process Automation

As with any type of automation, increased productivity is normally the major reason for many companies desiring a competitive advantage by using automation. Most automation offers low operational variability that is directly related to quality and productivity associated with the high cost of human labor. Some businesses automate processes in order to reduce production time, increase manufacturing flexibility, reduce costs, eliminate human error, or make up for a labor shortage. Decisions associated with automation are usually concerned with some or all of these economic and social considerations.

Some potential benefits of DPA:

- **Experience Improvements** - Engineering teams will have more time to focus on the end-user experience as more workflow elements become optimized and automated.
- **Time Savings** - Employees are freed from manual and repetitive tasks any time a task can be automated. By automating as many tasks as possible, employees can focus on other business aspects.
- **Reduced Costs** - Automated tasks do not require expensive human labor.
- **Adaptability** - Organizing and digitizing processes allows an organization to quickly shift goals if needed.
- **Improved documentation and communication** - DPA can reduce the likelihood of lost documents and can update employees on workflow changes.

Examples of DPA

A simple way to think of DPA in action would be if customers often complain that a specific item they want is frequently out of stock on your website. This results in frequent contact with employees by email or phone and could potentially make that employee spend additional time monitoring for

the arrival of new shipments of the product so they can follow up with the customer. DPA does not concern itself with solving your inventory management system problem but instead focuses on allowing the free flow of information (how much of an item is in stock, when new stock will arrive) and automation of small tasks (follow up alerts) to let your customers and employees know when items are back in stock.

Key to digital process automation is the idea that any improvement you make needs to be done with your customers in mind. If it doesn't improve the end-user experience, it's not part of digital process automation. To that end, the first step to putting a digital process automation plan into action is to know what your customers want and what they (and the teams serving them) need to know to get it to them. In the example above, this could include anything such as:

- Stock numbers
- Delivery dates
- Support ticket response times
- Customer reviews
- FAQs (and their answers)
- The speed (and experience) of the customer journey

If something could affect your customers' overall experience with you, it's something you should be able to document and consider when thinking about processes to automate. This helps to show what you need to focus on when working on your processes and also what processes you need to focus on first. While most types of automation focus on saving time, money, and effort, this customer-centric approach can at times make digital process automation at odds with that and will not necessarily cost less than your current system.

DPA is also used in customer onboarding, purchase orders, and credit approvals to keep workflow documentation updated. In complicated workflow processes such as these, DPA simplifies and smooths transitions between steps in the process. For example, with employee onboarding, the influx of paperwork could lower the productivity levels of other tasks. Automating the filling out of forms and setting up training, while keeping the relevant employees updated, can simplify this process and minimize mistakes.

DPA Tools and Digital Transformation

A successful digital transformation strategy combines DPA and BPA to support comprehensive, end-to-end process automation that can be dynamically and continuously improved at run-time to enhance the customer experience. DPA tools may include features such as automation capabilities, notifications, or low-code/no-code workflows for application development. DPA software should allow IT staff to look at the big picture and automate tasks via workflows that span multiple applications, systems, or infrastructure with fewer resources and higher-quality, predictable outcomes.

It is also important to understand that DPA has the capability to act as a cornerstone of digital transformation. As an enterprise technology, it powers the optimization of any type of process, regardless of whether this process can be fully automated or whether it requires human intervention to handle escalations, approvals, and other high-value tasks. This high level of agility and scalability makes DPA truly unique.