



RPA IS POISED TO POWER

A GOVERNMENT WORKFORCE
TRANSFORMATION

Imagine what a single worker might be able to accomplish if she was freed from tedious, repetitive tasks. Now, imagine what an entire agency might be able to accomplish if all of these menial tasks were outsourced to technology. This is the dream of robotic process automation: A software solution that can be tapped to take over certain monotonous responsibilities from the workforce, freeing up employees to focus on more innovative projects.

“RPA is basically taking the drudgery, the repetitive routine manual processes — grabbing data from one system and moving it into another, reorganizing data, sending emails, all of those kind of redundant tasks — and replacing them with a software program that can do those things automatically,” says Keith Nelson, senior director for the public sector at RPA developer Automation Anywhere.

Nelson has previously served at the Transportation Department, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and in several other roles in the public sector, and sees not just the promise of RPA, but it’s tangible impact on the workforce at large.

“When RPA is implemented, two things result: Errors go way down and speed goes way up,” says Nelson.

AUTOMATION GETS FEDERAL ATTENTION

Despite its potential, however, RPA doesn’t register on the radar of many in the federal workforce. The recent poll from GBC and JTEK reveals that 62% of respondents are “not at all familiar with the term RPA.” Automation at large, however, of which RPA is a subset, is on the minds of tech

leaders everywhere as organizations seek to improve efficiency and accuracy in the face of workforce and talent constraints.

[A recent poll from the Government Business Council and JTEK Data Solutions](#), which surveyed federal employees about automation in the federal government, has found that 63 percent of respondents noted that their organization currently has an automation strategy, while a third of respondents reported their organization is in the initial stages of implementing an automation strategy.

Moreover, the federal workforce is optimistic about automation’s potential to bolster their focus on higher value tasks: 57 percent of respondents believe that “automating repetitive tasks would free them up to spend more time on the mission,” the poll found.

With [the federal workforce turning toward automation in coming years](#), RPA can prove to be low-hanging fruit for tech leaders looking to dip their toe in the water.

Indeed, the private sector has already seen major benefits from implementing RPA and its interest in the technology is growing, with [Forrester Research predicting](#) earlier this year that 40 percent of enterprises will have automation frameworks in place by the end of 2019, and the RPA market will grow to \$1 billion by the end of this year.

This interest hasn’t gone unnoticed by the federal government. The White House has [pinpointed RPA as a valuable tool](#) that can help to “reduce error, improve compliance and focus the Federal workforce on higher-value work.” Already, several successful implementations have emerged.

The Food and Drug Administration tapped RPA to automate 34 processes that improved data quality over 100,000 records and equated to 13,500 manual labor hours per year.

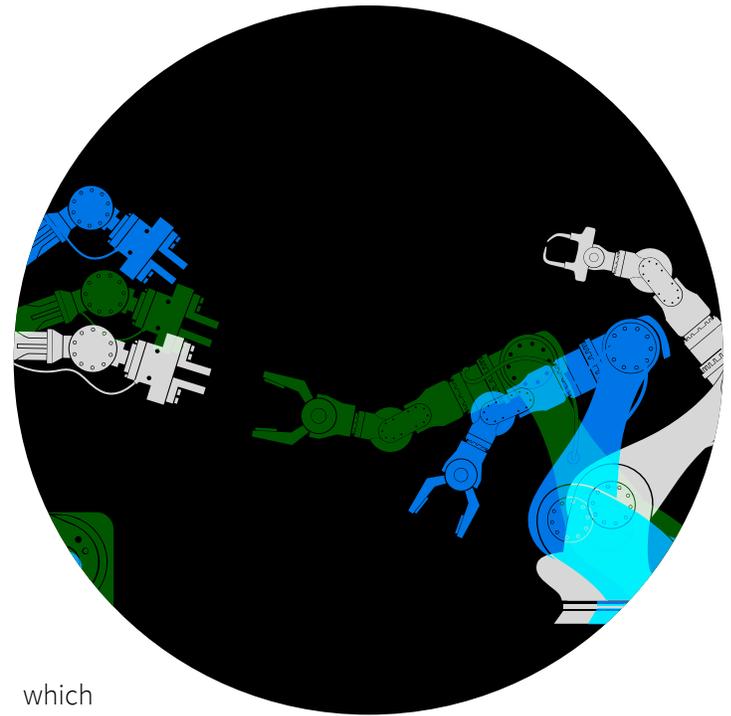
Ultimately, this freed up employees to focus on strategic tasks as opposed to tedious ones.

Moreover, in the private sector, a global bank is automating onboarding forms in various languages for its 10,000 international employees, reducing processing times by 70% with zero errors, offering its new employees a very positive first impression.

HOW FEDERAL TECH LEADERS JUMPSTART RPA ADOPTION

For IT leaders looking to begin piloting and exploring robotic process automation, Nelson suggests starting small by pinpointing areas where the technology can be easily implemented with a high return on investment.

“Standard operations that tend to take time and involve several manual steps in order to accomplish are great candidates for RPA,



which can step in to streamline efforts and reduce errors,” says Nelson.

He points specifically to back office operations, including accounting, HR processes and IT procurement as a few examples where government leaders can begin to explore the technology’s use in order to cut back man-hours spent on time-consuming tasks.

He urges IT leaders to look to RPA as a way help to reduce persistent errors, such as with issues around improper payments in the government sector.

“Government has spent \$1.3 trillion in improper payments since 2004,” says Nelson, pointing to a [recent report](#) from the Congressional Research Service, which found that incorrect government payments, those made for the wrong amounts or to the wrong recipients, have added up in recent years. “RPA is great candidate to help clean up improper payments. The tech can reduce errors and make sure the payments go to the people that deserve them at the right amount, at the right time.”

Moreover, as older members of the workforce retire, often taking institutional knowledge with them, Nelson urges IT leaders to look for places where RPA can fill the gaps left behind around legacy systems.

“Many federal agencies are still dealing with older technology, and attempting to get those legacy systems to communicate with newer ones requires a lot of manual steps and relies on employees with detailed knowledge about how older systems can interface with newer ones,” says Nelson. “RPA can help to solve that because it can be set up to interact with any system at all.”

But it's not just the work itself that gets a boost from RPA, a rise in morale is also in the cards for agencies that implement the technology. And while there is oftentimes cultural pushback around automation from the workforce, Nelson wants to be clear that the technology doesn't replace employees with bots, it simply improves their overall workload.

“Nobody got a degree in doing cut-and-paste work,” says Nelson. “Government employees generally joined the public sector based on policy knowledge or a particular mission orientation. The person that used to do those menial tasks is now freed up to use their brain.”

For more information on how you can partner with JTEK Data Solutions and Automation Anywhere to introduce RPA into your agency, visit <http://jtekds.com/>