

## **How Process Practitioners Can Improve Digital Transformation Success**

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While the return on investments in digital transformation can be pretty high, the [success rate is regrettably low](#). There are many pitfalls to avoid. Some companies focus too narrowly on cost reduction and miss opportunities for revenue enhancement. Other firms persist in applying digital tools within individual department boundaries to solve small problems and miss the big picture. Other organizations choose to select tools one at a time and deploy them independently, and fail to leverage the power of integration. Process professionals have the potential to play a key role in helping companies succeed with digital and avoid these and other pitfalls. They can do this by advocating for a customer centered, process based view in deploying digital tools to optimize both the customer experience and process performance. This is in stark contrast to [operating in silos](#).

Some readers may recall one of my recent articles on the [evolving role of process practitioners](#). I wrote about building skills in areas such as customer experience, design thinking, change management and operating models. The current article focuses on the role of process practitioners in optimizing the utilization of digital tools and the importance of concentrating on customer experience. .

Digital technology is advancing rapidly. Robotics and AI provide increased enterprise capacity and capability at scale, and other powerful tools are maturing. Integration of digital tools can unlock new capabilities and insights, and provide improved outcomes. Robotic process automation (RPA) focuses on the use of software bots to automate high volume, repetitive, routine tasks. RPA does not redesign processes – it simply automates certain repetitive steps that humans do. [Combining robotic process automation \(RPA\) with artificial intelligence \(AI\)](#) makes it possible to go one step further as machines mimic human tasks, using pattern recognition, visual perception, and speech recognition. Given that nearly 70% of companies claim to be [engaged in digital transformation](#), it's no surprise that there are a number of success stories in deploying bots including the Bank of America, Bank of Montreal, Cigna and [Nielsen](#) – just to name a few. Nielsen is noteworthy as it has combined RPA with optical character recognition (OCR) to extract information from documents, and with the use of natural language generation (NLG) create automated summaries of business presentations. Further, some of Nielsen's robots are integrated with chatbots, and can make outgoing phone calls.

Process professionals can be instrumental in increasing the probability of success with digital transformation. First, they can emphasize that the integrated digital program will only achieve its full potential in the ability to scale when the firm's large; enterprise processes are understood and actively discussed at executive and middle management levels. This practice is needed to assure that the digital program addresses major issues and that it can scale. This means that the practice of modeling small processes inside of departmental boundaries needs to cease as does the practice of referring to small procedures as processes.

Second, process practitioners can be front and center in advocating that [digital transformation should start with the customer](#). This can drive the organization to develop a set of accurate and compelling customer journey maps. These maps need to reveal the voice of the customer. Some companies believe that just getting technology and business teams together to map the customer journey is adequate. It is not. When the voice of business teams is taken as a proxy for the voice of the customer this can produce maps that are misleading. The best opportunities for deploying enabling technology to create customer value are realized when the organization examines its business from the customer's point of view. This view is needed to drive the focus on end-to-end processes that create value for customers at key point on their journey, and is needed for cross functional [collaboration](#). This is something that process practitioners understand. Viewing business from this perspective can productively challenge the definition of enterprise processes. For example, it illustrates that customers care less about "order to cash" – and much more about "order to delivery." Similarly, when viewing employee experience in a process context, it becomes useful to challenge the concept of "hire to retire."

Third, adopting a customer focused, process based view of business will help organizations avoid the pitfall of seeing the deployment of technology too narrowly – for example; as being solely in the domain of the IT department. Similarly, such a narrow view can bias an organization toward s deploying bots simply for cost savings and ignore opportunities for revenue generation. Process professionals know that an enduring focus on both customer experience and employee experience is needed to engage the entire organization.

Finally, process professional have learned through experience the high degree of effort that is needed to institutionalize a new process. They can apply this knowledge to persuade leaders that the total cost of deploying technology is many times greater than the simple programing of bots or the development of algorithms. By emphasizing this point of view they can act to place sufficient attention to change management.

Process professionals can be also instrumental in increasing the probability of success with digital transformation just by leveraging their experience with process and customer focus as a management discipline. They can play a role in identifying service providers which pay attention to the customer and take a process centric approach. [Telus International](#) is one such service provider. It builds and services technology through a focus on both customer experience (CX) and employee experience. One example it promotes was achieved at a telecommunications company where it deployed 50 RPA bots to automate invoicing, order shipment processing as well as some other tasks thereby capturing [savings of \\$6 million and 500,000 person hours](#).

When process professionals encourage a focus on end-to-end processes, customer experience, integration of digital tools, and engaging the entire organization – they can make a significant contribution to improving the success rate of digital transformations.

## **Author**

Andrew Spanyol's work in Process Improvement and Management is recognized internationally. He is the author of three books: ***More for Less: The Power of Process Management***, ***Business Process Management is a Team Sport: Play It to Win!*** and ***Operational Leadership***.

He has over two decades of management training and consulting experience. He is the founder and President of Spanyol International Inc. Since 1992, he has worked on over 100 major process improvement projects and led the development of several sales and management training programs. He has delivered keynote speeches at conferences in Canada, the USA, Europe, Australia and Africa.

He was affiliated with The Babson College Process Management Research Center and has taught courses at Babson College at both the MBA level and as part of the Babson executive education program. He is a member of the Board of Advisors at ABPMP. He has published articles with a broad cross-section of magazines such as Strategic Finance, Industrial Engineer, Lean Management Journal and the CEO Refresher.

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