6 obstacles to scaling your automation program and how to avoid them

Expand initial processes company-wide for true digital agility

With competitive pressures and customer demand at an all-time high, it's vital that the speed and efficiency of your company's operations keep pace with the increasing speed of business.

For that reason, **more than half** of companies have piloted automaton programs to minimize manual tasks, streamline workflows, and empower their employees, with even more planning to do so through 2020 and beyond.

But one of the obstacles to achieving true digital agility with automation is a company's capacity to scale an initial automation pilot program beyond single processes and departments to the entire enterprise.

Because automation is intended to transform internal, company-wide operations and respond to long-term external competitive pressures—not to mention **unforeseen national or global events**—a company's pilot is only as successful as its flexibility to scale.

According to Catalytic's recent **data study**, only 9% of enterprise leaders reported their company's automation efforts as being at the "Pro" level, meaning that their automation solutions are optimally deployed and configured organization-wide.

Process automation is at a tipping point, where the awareness and interest in implementing a new technology far outweighs a company's ability to properly plan, execute, and scale. So what's holding companies back?

According to Catalytic's findings, here are a few common obstacles getting in the way.

An effective platform enables all business users to create automations—not just tech-minded employees—as each user will have the deepest understanding of their department's processes.

1. Lack of employee buy-in

As the war for talent rages on, companies of every size look to build a more communicative, inclusive culture to attract and maintain top employees. As a part of that initiative, companies should solicit employee feedback before making changes to their operations—but still, many don't.

More than 90% of employees report they are familiar with the concept of automation, and a majority believe it will make their jobs easier. This implies a better understanding of the concept and more ubiquitous adoption across industries. But Catalytic finds that employees who were hesitant with the concept or who were not interested in using it in their own roles knew very little about it due to a lack of top-down communication.

The truth is, an effective platform enables all business users to create automations—not just tech-minded employees—as each user will have the deepest understanding of their department's processes and can be easily upskilled to improve them.

To that end, your company's automation efforts should be a group decision, and not placed solely on the shoulders of the C-suite or IT.

The more you educate and communicate with your employees about the value of automation in your organization, the more likely they'll be willing to build automations in their own departments and help scale company-wide.

2. Reliance on legacy technology and inflexible tools

Countless companies operate with on-prem legacy systems that they've used for years —even decades—like their financing and accounting tools, HR software, project management solutions, etc.

But for many, what was once a meaningful technology investment has worn out its welcome. Some systems may be too outdated or require complete reworking to keep up with the necessary speed of operations. And often disparate platforms fail to communicate with each other, causing additional manual work, errors, missed handoffs, and wasted time.

The price and risk of ripping out and replacing these systems is often a deterrent to doing so, often encouraging the "because we've always done it this way" mentality. This files down a company's competitive edge and ability to drive internal efficiencies that pay off with customers and the bottom line.

And implementing certain traditional automation tools—like RPA, to name one—may make minor improvements resulting in one-off benefits, but essentially cements your operations into the very systems you need to move beyond.

According to Catalytic's recent study, survey respondents note a reliance on legacy systems is the second most common reason they've seen their automation effort fail to scale. Although many companies introduce costly automation technology, it's not always integrated in a meaningful way.

Any technology that lacks the flexibility and ability of a cloud-based solution may promise company-wide scaling, but will likely fail you in the long-run.

The price and risk of ripping out and replacing these systems is often a deterrent to doing so, often encouraging the "because we've always done it this way" mentality.

3. No clear automation journey or plan of attack

Whether a company is piloting a program for the first time, or has tested a variety of technologies with varying degrees of success, proper planning can be an obstacle to scalable growth.

Without a clear timeline of implementation, expansion, and forecasted ROI, companies may end up investing significant time, energy, and money with little return.

The pilot may apply automations to disparate processes, systems, or departments, in hopes of a positive result. But without a proper plan and clear KPIs that measure success and align with corporate goals, your company is not taking the necessary steps to scale.

Choosing a lightweight automation platform that doesn’t require costly consulting fees is a good start. And during the early sales conversations, ask potential providers how their solution delivery and customer success teams approach the customer journey, and how they plan to support your company months or even years down the line.

Without a clear timeline of implementation, expansion, and forecasted ROI, companies may end up investing significant time, energy, and money with little return.

4. Identifying ownership and stakeholders

A majority (78%) of organizations surveyed in Catalytic's data study said they take a centralized approach to automation, where the purchase decision and implementation is owned by a single team—usually the C-suite or IT. Only 22% distribute this responsibility across departments and teams, with multiple stakeholders across the organization.

However, those companies with a distributed approach saw a higher likelihood of employees believing their automations were more successful and scalable ahead of industry peers.

Though the distributed model is far less common, it often gives employees company-wide a personal stake and greater influence in the evolution of their company. Likewise, it prevents the planning, implementation and expansion of automation from being placed on a single department—namely overwhelmed IT teams with a backlog of work that creates bottlenecks and slows the process down.

Plus, employees further down the chain of hierarchy have a deeper understanding of department-specific processes, and therefore a greater stake in wanting to improve them, but most are not consulted.

Only 41% of managers said they're influential in decision-making, meaning there could be more room to involve frontline employees in the implementation process, as well as the various automation projects in the queue.

The more stakeholders you involve throughout your automation journey—from C-suite down to frontline managers—the more clearly you'll see the full picture of your automation needs.

The more stakeholders you involve throughout your automation journey—from C-suite down to frontline managers—the more clearly you'll see the full picture of your automation needs.

39% of employees in organizations with 250-1,000 people believe their automation tactics are superior, compared to 23% at companies with 50,000-plus people.

5. Failing to contour to organization size

One size does not always fit all, and that's particularly true of an automation strategy. Smaller organizations report ranking ahead of the curve with their automation strategy compared to their larger peers, and believe that gives them a competitive edge.

With fewer employees and therefore fewer stakeholders and decision-makers, there's more cross-company involvement in the buying, implementation and scaling processes —not to mention fewer processes to automate, less data and fewer tools to integrate.

In fact, 39% of employees in organizations with 250-1,000 people believe their automation tactics are superior, compared to 23% at companies with 50,000-plus people.

That doesn't mean all is lost for larger organizations, however. To keep with their smaller-sized peers, larger enterprises need to be more thoughtful with their planning strategy, in terms of involving more stakeholders, better communication, and ensuring you're choosing a technology provider that's flexible enough to accommodate your needs.

6. Failure to identify key performance metrics

Measuring the success of an automation program is one of the often overlooked steps in the journey. Once a technology is purchased, implemented, expanded, and ultimately scaled company-wide, there need to be measurements in place that allow you to track your progress, identify immediate and long-term benefits, and evaluate ROI.

It's important to benchmark these KPIs before implementing the technology, and track them on a month-to-month basis to see the data-driven evidence of your automation's effectiveness.

Employee productivity/output:

Track the monthly output of your employees when they work manually, and note how much more they're capable of doing with the help of automation.

Cost savings:

Whether it's a more effective HR department, an improved supply chain, or a more compliant finance & accounting team, track the budget surplus your teams realize with more optimized processes.

Employee satisfaction:

When your automation program is up and running, survey your employees to gauge their sentiment around efficiency, job satisfaction, and upskilling. This is an important criteria in the health of your company.

Customer satisfaction:

When your company's operations are more efficient and digitally agile, this will reflect in the perceived value your customers receive from your product or service. Keep track of the feedback they give you over time and note any increases around satisfaction, buying behavior, etc.

Once a technology is purchased, implemented, expanded, and scaled company-wide, there need to be measurements in place that allow you to track your progress.

Scaling is possible with Catalytic

Catalytic's next-generation Digital Process Automation platform and guided journey connects systems, data and people, creating a faster, leaner and fully digitized business that can execute higher volumes of work with less time, cost and risk—all while allowing employees to focus on more meaningful work.

Catalytic knows your organization is unique, and so are the systems and processes that compromise your operations. With our flexible, user-friendly automation technology, we partner with your organization to understand its specific needs. We'll help plan, implement, and scale your automations for true digital agility, regardless of size, industry, or corporate goals. Our customers, such as Bosch, Dentsu Aegis Network, Mayo Clinic and UL, are realizing up to 5x returns digitizing manual processes and building new digital strategies.

Get a free consultation from an automation expert and start building.

1-844-787-4268 • automate@catalytic.com • catalytic.com

Catalytic