Robotic process automation – blue prism

Implementation of robotic process automation (RPA), to automate repetitive, rule-based tasks, giving police officers more time to focus on complex and strategic activities.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Evaluated locally
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Digital, data and analytics Productivity
Organisation	Thames Valley Police
HMICFRS report	**PEEL 2023–25 Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy: An inspection of Thames Valley Police**
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Region	South East
Partners	Police Community safety partnership Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Education Government department Local authority

Key details

Stage of Implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2021
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Children and young people Communities Families General public LGBT+ Offenders Race/ethnicity Victims Women Workforce

Aim

- Embed RPA as an internal capability within the force to deliver quick solutions supporting the increasing demand and complexity of work across a large range of business areas. Automating the high volume, logic driven, repetitive parts of a process and providing productivity gains back to the force.
- Increase efficiency and productivity by automating repetitive, time-consuming tasks allows officers and staff to focus on higher-value activities.
- Reduce errors and improve accuracy. RPA eliminates human errors associated with manual data entry and processing, leading to more reliable and accurate information. This information can also be input much quicker, enabling up to date data existing in systems.
- Enhance data analysis and decision-making. By automating data collection and analysis, RPA provides valuable insights.

- Improve public service. Streamlining processes results in faster response times, better communication, and improved overall service delivery to the public.

Intended outcome

The implementation of RPA can address a range of issues. It can easily be adapted to suit the requirements of the business area to ensure the outcomes are met. RPA is now introduced early once a gold group is set up to see if a digital worker can support the area. Examples of outcomes seen in utilising RPA include:

- protecting the vulnerable
- quality of data
- capacity release
- victim satisfaction
- cashable savings
- workforce satisfaction
- compliance
- process assurance

Description

The initiative started in 2020 using an external partner to deliver the first automation proof of concept with the firearms licensing management team. After this was delivered, the force procured the technology, and an internal RPA team was established, initially with a single developer and business analyst.

The capability of the team grew across the force through building confidence with stakeholders to implement automation within their area. This led to wider adoption across the force. Automations are now delivered to over 22 business areas:

- 1x team lead
- 2x business analysts
- 1x senior developer
- 3x developers
- 2x junior developers

Growth consisted of staffing, application licenses and IT infrastructure costs with a total budget of over £500K per year. Automations provided 96 full time employee (FTE) worth of productivity savings back to the force, the equivalent of £3.6M in the 2023-2024 financial year.

The force tracked the benefits of the RPA initiative in several ways, primarily using a Power BI dashboard to monitor the overall impact.

The force analysed the average time taken to complete the task manually when considering a new automation. This allowed for accurate measures of time saved by automating the process and demonstrating the increase in capacity for the team.

RPA is used to tackle tasks that were previously unmanageable due to resource constraints. While the time savings are captured from these automations, it's crucial to recognise that they represent newly achieved efficiencies, not just a replacement of manual effort.

Overall impact

The force's KPI is the full time employee (FTE) equivalent saved across the board. This metric helps the force to understand the overall impact of RPA in terms of workforce efficiency.

- Hampshire crime incident management filing – annual work items processed – 224,000 case files and annual capacity automated - 50 FTE and annual FTE cash equivalent – £1.9m revenue
- Thames Valley police and Hampshire contact management system – annual work items processed – 131,000 contacts and annual capacity automated – 3 FTE and annual FTE cash equivalent – £117,000 revenue
- Thames Valley police and Hampshire domestic abuse and triage – annual work items processed – 161,000 tasks and annual capacity automated – 2.4 FTE and Annual FTE cash equivalent – £88,000 revenue

Beyond FTE savings, other benefits were assessed at a process level. These include:

- improved accuracy. reducing errors and improving data quality
- reduced risk: minimizing compliance issues and potential for human error
- enhanced decision-making: providing better data and insights for informed choices
- timely communications: providing quicker response times for the public
- employee satisfaction: automating processes, which are pain points for team members

Impact in relation to the intended outcomes

- protecting the vulnerable. The implementation of the domestic abuse triage automation meant a 150% increase in the identification of vulnerable children linked to a domestic incident, as the digital worker was able to sift through more data and find relevant markers.
- data quality. Improve the data quality within core local systems, reducing duplicates and ensuring the data quality standards are met for filing of occurrences.
- capacity release. Automating a manual process, like the input of road traffic incidents into core systems, meant the time provided back to the criminal justice team could be better spent reviewing the information, enhancing decision making in investigations.
- victim satisfaction. Victim updates automation, means victims can receive an update on the crime without phoning 101 in a much more timely manner.
- cashable savings. Implementing a digital worker within the action fraud unit to add crimes to the record management system, meant a retired post was unfilled as the workload was completed by the digital worker.
- workforce satisfaction. Implementation of the annual leave request process meant that officers and staff could get a response to their annual leave typically within 2 hours, rather than weeks before the digital worker was in place.
- compliance. The crime filing digital worker, ensured that occurrences were filed to the required standards.
- process assurance. A bail notification digital worker, notified officers of upcoming bail, enabling them to have time to update the occurrence with relevant information as early as possible.

Learning

Involving the right team and choosing suitable processes from the outset is very important. Having enthusiastic stakeholders is instrumental to the success of the initiative, fostering confidence in the implementations and providing essential support from the business when investigations were necessary.

While some forces have utilised external RPA partners, their high day rates can be a significant cost. Prioritising the establishment of an internal team at the start is recommended. This approach fosters a deeper understanding of policing challenges and enables flexible adaptation of process or legislative changes without relying on third parties.

The competitive market for experienced developers can make hiring difficult, particularly when compared to private sector salaries. Developers were recruited out of the force area, which enabled the Force to acquire the necessary skills but resulted in a fully remote team.

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