

Podcast transcript

Robotic process automation and global mobility.

Podcast with Robert Smith, Senior Manager of Global Mobility Services, KPMG in the US.

Musical intro

Announcer:

Hello, and welcome to the 'Future of mobility', a KPMG podcast series for global mobility leaders. In this series we offer short insightful episodes you can listen to on your way to work or wherever you enjoy your podcasts. This series will look at some of the most pressing issues and opportunities facing global mobility departments in the modern business world through interviews with leaders in global mobility, human resources, tax and other areas of business from KPMG and beyond.

In today's episode, I talk to Robert Smith, Senior Manager of Global Mobility Services from KPMG in the US. Robert has been worked in global mobility for 8 years, including 3 years in tax compliance. He is also part of the Global Mobility Technology group, helping businesses understand technology's place within global mobility, and implementing KPMG LINK Work Force, a set of proprietary KPMG global mobility management tools.

Robert, thanks for taking the time to join us today.

Robert:

Hi, thanks for having me.

Announcer:

Perhaps we could start by you helping me understanding exactly what you mean by 'Robotic process Automation'.

Robert:

You know we're really living in a time unlike any before, technology-based devices are essentially now a part of everyday life and they change how we interact with each other, how we work, and how we interact with the world. More and more businesses are adopting technology-driven solutions to manage rising employee and assignment costs and that includes Robotic Process Automation, or RPA for short. And Robotic Process Automation refers to software that can be programmed to do basic tasks across multiple applications. Just like the majority of employees do today.

Announcer:

So how do you see Robotics Process Automation changing mobility business models and how do you think businesses are benefiting from them?

Robert:

We're truly at the beginning of a shift within mobility. In fact, I see RPA as the way to solve many of the issues faced by programs today. For example, we all know that we are in a global talent race and RPA alleviates some of these pressures by automating repetitive time-consuming tasks. While it can decrease headcount in some instances, RPA is really seen by most as a way of making personnel more strategic in their positions. It also benefits employees who rely on global mobility by enhancing the care and attention they receive. It frees up time to create a high-touch, high-impact environment for those employees. And lastly, RPA is also becoming a way to restructure outsourcing departments. As global labor becomes more expensive, RPA is a solution that can assist in managing offshore cost and enhance efficiency since it can work around the clock.

Announcer:

So Robert, based on your experience, has Robotic Process Automation become adopted by many global mobility departments yet?

Robert:

Many global mobility departments are realizing that Robotic Process Automation can really provide a blend of efficiency, performance and consistent quality while reducing human error and cost. But this level of automation is still relatively new in mobility. We conduct an annual benchmarking survey called the Global Assignment Policy and Practices survey and based on our most recent edition, the majority, 66 percent, of global mobility teams do not have a strategic vision for automation and robotics and are not using automation to streamline portions of their global mobility process.

Announcer:

So Robert, if I were heading up a global mobility department, how do I get started with Robotic Process Automation, what do I need to be thinking about?

Robert:

It's important to consider the correct technology, or process and technology mix for the organization and/or the project. You're essentially building a job description for an RPA. And many times, the organization has a broader technology vision, or even a department that can assist in streamlining the review of technologies and may also help determine the return on investment for using that type of technology.

As the organization builds the business case and hiring criteria, there are a number of considerations. Process; does the process or job activity lend itself to leverage an RPA? Alternatives; how might you accomplish the project without the use of an RPA? Complexity; what is the time and cost needed to create an RPA and is this cheaper or more efficient than the current process? Teaming; since you can leverage multiple systems, are you able to easily and effectively work with other groups to solve issues? System integration; are all systems capable of leveraging RPA technology? And lastly, maintenance; who will maintain the RPA and what's the cost associated with that maintenance? Keep in mind that anytime there is a system change, whether large or small, portions of the RPA will have to change as well.

Announcer:

Of course, as an organization automates, through the use of Robotics Process Automation, there's bound to be an impact on employees.

Robert:

Absolutely. The people aspect, and I mean the "real people" aspect, is an important consideration. This requires a strong change management strategy throughout the entire process, during planning, implementation and adoption. There are still many processes and tasks that RPA's cannot do so it's important to let people know how expectations and their day-to-day jobs are going to change with the use of the technology.

Announcer:

I suppose the question then becomes Robert; how does the organization engage their employees to support and accept the implementation of Robotic Process Automation?

Robert:

Employee engagement is one of the main components of RPA adoption and I think that it really falls into four main categories. The first is communication transparency; make sure that the employees know what's coming and it's communicated how that change is going to affect them. The second is training and transition planning; it's really important that people begin to plan for changes to their job and to processes that they're familiar with. Doing this is part of your communication roll-out, make sure

that once the RPA is released people are ready to hit the ground running and you don't then have the training aspect and time associated with it following the RPA roll-out itself. The third is really the value proposition around the RPA; talk about how it will positively impact individuals' positions. Either that is a decrease in time to or something that allows them to be more strategic in their role. And the last one is involvement in the RPA process; get people involved. This creates excitement and it also teaches them about how the RPA is built and how it will function.

Announcer:

Over the past two decades, there has been a real push to centralize back-office functions, and much of global mobility into shared service centers.

Do you think the adoption of Robotic Process Automation has had an impact on this?

Robert:

It has. This is a strategy that was designed to lower costs, and it has worked for many years, but it's becoming increasingly obsolete as we are seeing; increased globalization and shrinking gaps in labor costs across all markets, decreased efficiency as many companies prioritized cost savings over efficiency of offshore teams and are now seeing more frequent turnover, and political changes that are threatening cross-border employment opportunities.

Announcer:

So Robert, what advice would you give listeners who are about to start this journey?

Robert:

A key to the success of RPA is knowing which technology products you will continue to leverage and support in the future along with the interconnectivity between the products, the roadmaps of the products, and the stakeholders that utilize each system. It's also important to understand the organization's broader stance on automation as it can assist in driving discussions and helping to garner internal support for the project.

Announcer:

Thank you Robert. I guess there's just one final question.

How soon before we start to see a robot at the next desk?

Robert:

Actually now. Companies are already starting to use RPA to create efficiencies around several mobility processes including cost estimation, assignment letter generation, and compensation management. While these are currently few and far between, I suspect the next couple of years will see a growth in this adoption.

Announcer:

Thanks again Robert, you've given us a lot to think about and we really appreciate you taking the time to go through it with us. And thanks to our listeners for joining us today. Please let us know what you think of this episode, or if you have any ideas for future episodes, please email us at tax@kpmg.com and remember you can find our latest publications, articles and other material that address the issues discussed in this ongoing podcast series at kpmg.com/futureofmobility.

Musical exit

