

Leveraging intelligent automation during COVID-19



Introduction

COVID-19 has, in its relatively short tenure, already introduced unprecedented change (and business pressure) on organisations, and is expected to continue doing so for at least the next few months. A few topical challenge areas currently being faced (uniquely or more predominantly) within COVID-19 times, include for example:

Employee related matters



Increased **workload with limited options to increase capacity** (for example due to hiring freezes instituted) and the **need to virtualise activities** traditionally done in person. Employee morale and motivation also becomes a bigger challenge (given limited in-person contact and the consideration of "bigger concerns"). Further, **productivity** may be adversely affected (as a result of the morale impact, or more tangible elements such as IT and connectivity issues).

Business focus shift



As clients' focus shift to personal well-being and primary needs, the ask for more luxury-nature goods and services is severely impacted. This means that business are increasingly pressurised to **diversify their offerings**, especially in scenarios where restrictions and caps are placed from a regulatory perspective. This also further impacts projects which usually would have been prioritised – such as large-scale business revitalisation / ERP implementations – which are put on hold in the interest of cost saving (or even survival).

Operational matters



Given the above (and a multitude of further) challenges, organisations will increasingly place **focus on cashflow measures** (e.g. deferred payment, adjusted forecasting to account for seasonality introduced by COVID-19 measures) and on the **reduction of costs** (such as cost cutting, refinancing or restructuring debt, electing to use relief measures such as payment holidays and tax relief measures).

Risk & fraud



With new ways of working (largely being remote), additional opportunities are created for **abuse of reduced physical oversight, redirected focus or previously effective (traditional) controls/measures** – such as phishing (using COVID-19 "hooks"/ fears), increased cyber attacks, physical or virtual theft, accessing data or systems not required for execution of duties and the falsification of approval.

Regulatory pressures



Most countries have introduced COVID-related measures – including phasing in or out of lock-down (across allowances to operate, products and services restrictions, travel measures, etc). **Uncertainty is introduced into businesses** given the unpredictability of timeframes, as well as the possibility of compounding challenges (e.g. return of load-shedding in South Africa as economic activity increases).

Introducing the concept of intelligent automation

Intelligent automation spans across basic process automation, enhanced automation (e.g. machine learning, natural language processing) and cognitive automation (e.g. artificial intelligence).

Resilience, recovery and a new reality Focused on intelligent automation

Translating themes identified into illustrative, practical intelligent automation solutions:

The challenges noted on the previous page can be bucketed into a number of themes which create the opportunity to use intelligent automation (to alleviate / reduce the impact of such challenges). Illustrative examples of these are highlighted below:











Enabling and releasing capacity & productivity of existing staff complement

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Enhanced and easy-to-access information (for decision-making and reporting)

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Digitising / virtualising of activities to support remote working

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Clarity needed for employees around policies & procedures Enhanced preventative and monitoring controls and mechanisms

- Automating manual, repetitive / timeconsuming tasks to release staff capacity (using robotic process automation) – including core activities, and doing so in offpeak times to spread stress on systems
- Automated data gathering, collation and initial analysis (so staff can focus on interpretation)
- Intelligent forecasting (using internal and external data, including COVID-specific parameters)
- Automation
 maturity
 assessment
 & roadmap
 for the future –
 with the aim to
 effectively embed
 / enhance level of
 automation
- Supplement contact centre staff activities / volumes (using virtual assistants)
- Automated scanning of contracts for appropriate clauses (e.g. force majeure)
- Policy-bots (chat-bots to answer FAQs on 24/7 basis)
- Automated HR self-reporting (bot) on COVID-19 requirements
- Automated control checks (e.g. data rights / accessed information, segregation of duties, login attempts)
- Automated regulatory scans (to flag new / amended regulation)

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