

## RPA and Intelligent Automation

### A smarter approach for Citizen Development



Previously I saw the concept of citizen developers as used for RPA and intelligent automation (i.e., letting people in the business create their own automated processes) as being a ‘double-edged sword’. I was therefore promoting the importance (or more aptly, the criticality) of a robust governance framework to ensure the negative aspects didn’t cause mayhem, disillusionment and unreliable or faulty solutions being deployed – or worse - risk setting back or jeopardising the future adoption of a digital workforce in your organisation.

However, while I still believe that robust governance is extremely important, I recently saw an approach that Spotify are taking, which is definitely worth sharing. This quite simple, but very smart approach seems – to my mind – to enjoy both the positive aspects of why an organisation should adopt a citizen developer initiative for intelligent automation (IA), while at the same time mitigating some of the risks surrounding this.

## Why a double-edged sword

On the positive side, the use of a citizen developer approach allows people within an organisation to trial, learn, and experience what intelligent automation is, and what it can do – which can help to stimulate innovative thinking on how business processes could be optimised, inspire rethinking of new processes entirely, or encourage the creation of improved customer experiences, or possibly even new service offerings or business models. To me, it just seems far more logical to use (and tap into the experience of) the people at the coalface of your organisation when it comes to thinking of new opportunities. These people are likely to outperform a few people in the strategy, business improvement or Innovation COE (Centre of Excellence) teams in this regard. We have seen evidence of this repeatedly, with organisations establishing an Innovation team or business unit – only to disband it a couple of years later when it failed to deliver against expectations. A great quote I saw recently said “Companies don’t innovate – People do”



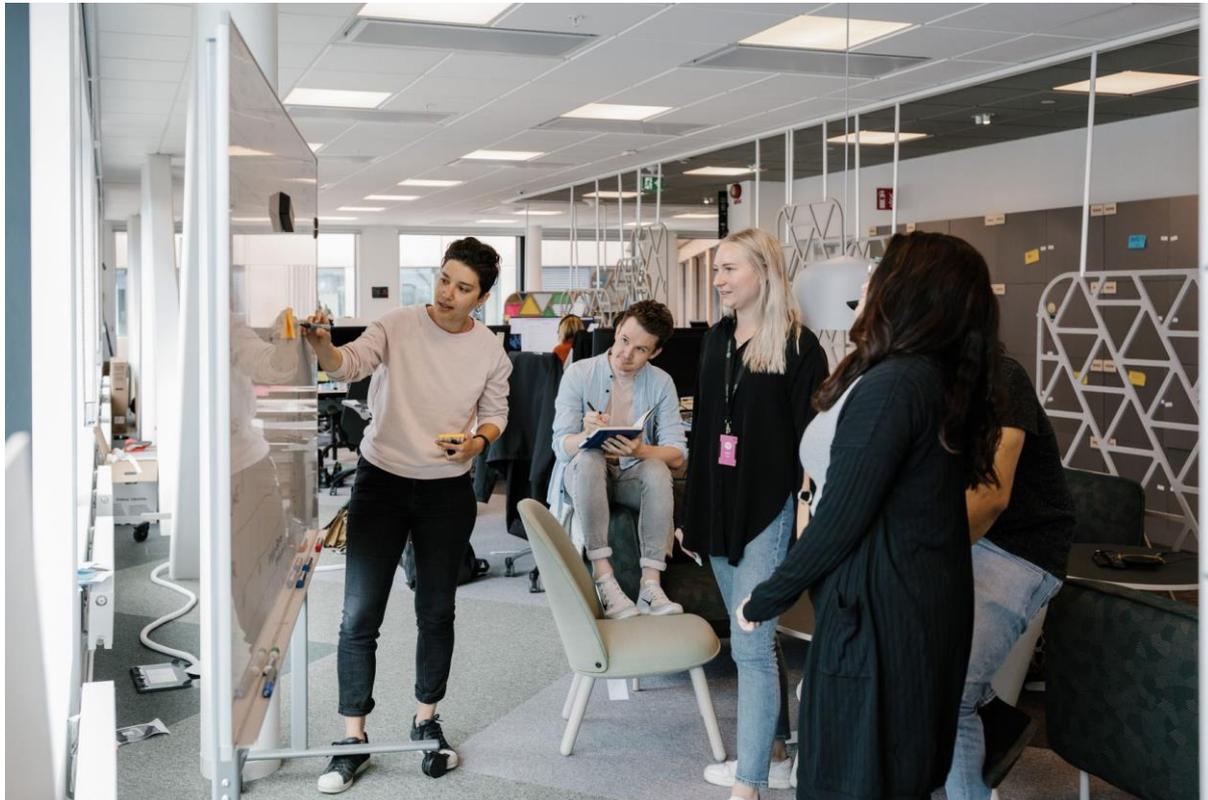
Taking this one step further, citizen developers could then (with the appropriate skills) either deliver some of the innovations via intelligent automation (IA) or, as a result of their increased understanding of the power of IA, help fuel the pipeline of candidate processes for the Automation COE, and help increase demand for IA from across the wider business.

On the flip side, the learnings achieved must be balanced with the risks in using the citizen developer approach. Chief among these is that some people in the business can waste a lot of time playing around with a technology that they may never understand, or be able to use. They may not have the required skills to optimise or reimagine how processes could be performed better, or to consider new, improved services that could be delivered to your customers. While this may sound very pessimistic of me, we do have to be honest with ourselves.

An even riskier situation is having people in the business start delivering (possibly substandard) solutions which create inaccurate results, jeopardise transaction or data integrity, or break existing and validated business processes. Besides the business and customer impact of possible data corruption, this can tarnish the otherwise success of intelligent automation, and negatively impact the continued adoption of a digital workforce and other transformation technologies in your organisation.

## Spotify's COE drive of citizen development

I recently heard about the model which I understand Spotify has adopted, whereby their Automation Centre of Excellence was tasked with owning and managing the citizen developer initiative within their organisation, rather than just letting this evolve, or seeing this as a hinderance or risk.



A key part of this includes the upfront education and training of people within the organisation - i.e., the potential citizen developers - thus reducing wasted time, and giving them a solid foundational understanding of intelligent automation and what it can do, and how this works to augment the workforce rather than replace it.

It's understandable that, after the education and training, some of the candidate citizen developers may not wish to take this further. At least the initial education has helped the business users see what is possible with IA, illustrated executive support for IA, and potentially help drive automation demand – however, most importantly, it helps provide more psychological safety and reduces anxiety relating to the adoption of IA – and that it's not going to take all their jobs away. I refer to this group of people as Citizen Explorers – while they won't be building new automated solutions, they will be helping identify new business opportunities for IA. In summary, this illustrates the huge amount of value in educating more business users – even if they don't end up building any your automated processes.

For the people in the business who do take this further, they get the benefits of ongoing mentoring and support – which is essential, as we know there is far more to IA than can be covered in a short training course or reading the manual. These new citizen developers are shown best practices, get access to reusable components, then included in the more formal and stringent design and solution reviews, delivery controls and release management alongside the Automation COE – thus ensuring more robust and maintainable solutions are delivered into production, and formally handed over to support, with the required monitoring and high availability implemented. That is, these citizen developers are supported and included throughout the delivery journey – rather than being policed and reviewed when they front up with what they think is a completed solution (all being quite disparaging for the individuals involved and inefficient from a COE and organisational perspective).

I love this COE managed citizen developer concept as it provides a plethora of other transformational benefits: employees being trained for - and included in the future of the organisation; there's more innovative and transformational thinking taking place; there's an increased pipeline of candidate processes; and organisation-wide communications and discussions are taking place around the opportunities for IA and the potential it has for businesses today. On the people front, it's also a great opportunity for the COE to identify key people in the organisation who may be more suited to working in the Automation COE – as we know there's a shortage of talent – and getting people who already understand your business must be valuable.

Lastly, there must be huge benefit for both the organisation and their staff, if the people working in the organisation can do more of things they love doing. Imagine an organisation where everyone loved what they did! - Or in a world where 80% of workers are not engaged or actively disengaged, imagine just raising the percentage of the engaged workers by a few points in your organisation.

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## About the author



**Maurice Dubey**

Executive Director of Q4 Associates,  
The RPA and Intelligent Automation specialists.

[www.Q4.co.nz](http://www.Q4.co.nz)



Maurice's research, tapping into global networks, and years of experience at the coalface of RPA and intelligent automation, has helped him drive ongoing conversations and increased effectiveness of digital workforce adoption, and the next evolution of work.

Maurice is also the co-author of: **Adopting a Digital Workforce**, (available on Amazon.com) This includes real-world examples, and practical frameworks and tools to assist both Executives and Program Leads on their RPA and intelligent automation journey.