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IT process automation: where business and technology meet

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Table of Research Findings

The automation imperative

Modern IT teams can't rely on approaches and tools that were designed for less complex times.

Today's IT environments are pervasively hybrid, increasingly complex, and in a constant state of change.

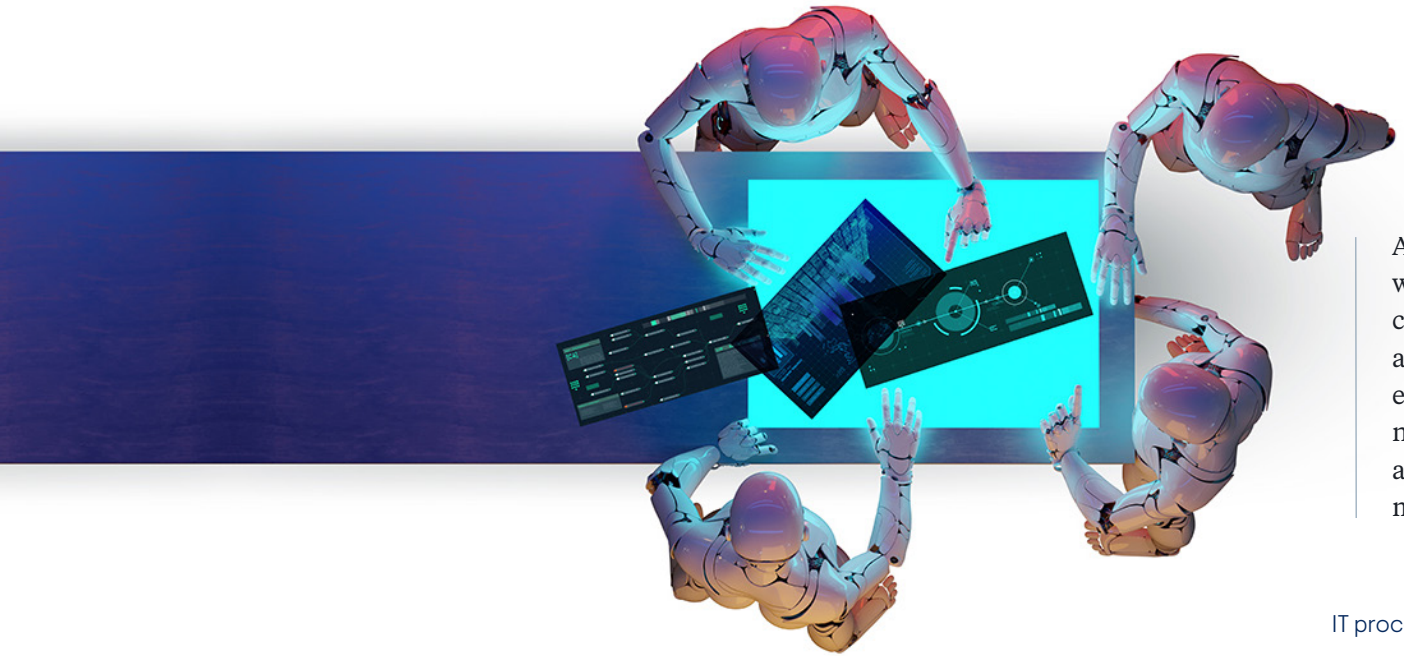
Digital transformation raises modern challenges and offers new possibilities for the management of IT in the data-driven, digital enterprise.

Advances in AIOps, ML, analytics, and automation reshape cross-functional workflows and boundaries in enterprise-wide initiatives, efficiencies, and innovations.

Work-from-anywhere demands excellence in IT service everywhere.

The very definition of IT technology is expanding across clouds, hybrid workplaces, IoT, edge, and new enterprise capabilities in addition to well-established technologies.

Automation is not optional.



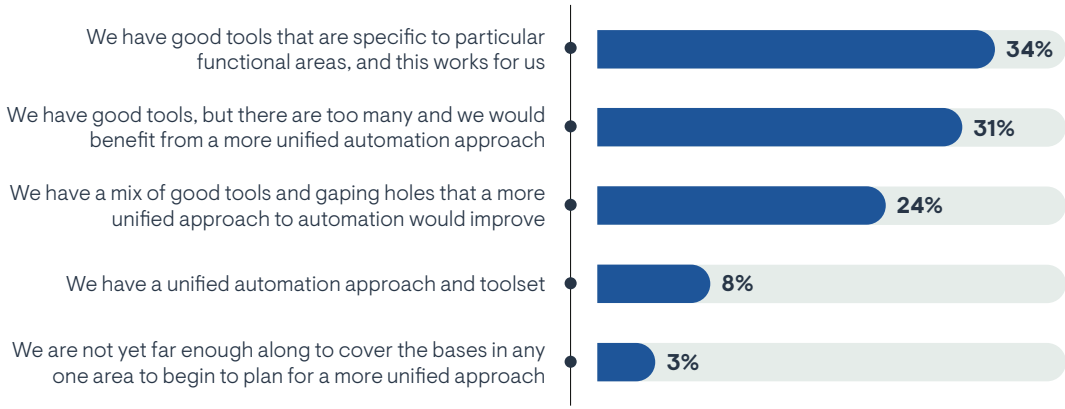
As new technologies take hold, IT responds with new tools. The resultant islands of specialized management and automation add another layer of complexity to the ever-expanding IT estate. IT operations teams need to automate cross-domain workflows and processes to avoid drowning in a sea of mundane tasks and increased costs.

IT automation today

Automation is on the rise, with room for improvement

EMA conducted in-depth research on the topic of IT automation with a global panel of 405 IT leaders to determine the state of adoption and near-term goals.[1] Not surprisingly, automation was a strategic, enterprise-wide initiative for most of the respondents, with 51% citing it as a high-level priority mandated by C-level executives.

Asked, **"How do you feel about the automation options in your IT organization?"** the respondents painted a picture that reflects a somewhat fractured state of automation. Yet, even in a less than ideal state, IT automation is almost universally a productive and positive investment.



[1] "Data-Driven IT Automation: A Vision for the Modern CIO" 2020 EMA

IT automation benefits and drivers

The top drivers of IT automation can be summarized in three general categories:

Cost | Efficiency | Quality

In a symmetry of objectives and achievements, benefits delivered directly map to the drivers of automation.

To date, what benefits have been achieved from your current automation investments?

Asked to name the top driver of automation, respondents resoundingly placed "IT personnel productivity" at the head of the list, beating out second place "better IT service/reduced downtime."

High-impact (low-hanging) IT process automation use cases

AIOps and analytics tend to dominate discussion of IT automation for good reason. Advances in these technologies have allowed IT organizations to proactively reduce the number of incidents and slash MTTR when trouble arises. Availability and performance may get all the attention, but bread and butter tasks steadily consume the time and talent of IT personnel every day.

Many use cases are ripe for automation but remain weighed down in a series of manual tasks and an unending progression of tickets.

These functions are necessary; having humans perform them is not.

IT organizations stand to gain a lot of efficiency and cost savings by automating workflows and processes in everyday functions across the enterprise.

People coming and going

Onboarding

Day 1 of employment is typically a wasteland of general orientation, piles of digital paperwork, and plenty of time waiting to be equipped with technology (hardware, software, and access). Although permissions and applications may differ, the process of onboarding new employees and contractors is pretty much the same for both the new VP and the new intern.

Many of the time-consuming steps can be automated as workflows that cross between HR and IT. Frequently, these steps include the service desk where tickets are opened, tracked, and closed in ITSM systems that may or may not communicate well with other departments.

Every step that requires getting approval or taking an action is a breeding ground for delay and error, not to mention the wasted time of talent spent on tasks that automation would do better.

Everyone benefits when processes are streamlined and automated from procurement, through delivery and secure activation of endpoints to predefined permission/access to applications and corporate resources.

The impact of process automation on this activity set was obvious in the responses to: **When it comes to onboarding/provisioning new employees and contractors with equipment/assets and access to enterprise resources, and offboarding them when they leave, what level of cooperation is there between IT, security, and HR?**

58% of respondents with mature process automation ranked cross-functional cooperation in onboarding/offboarding at the highest level possible—outstanding/optimized. In contrast, only **30%** of the less automated organizations ranked cooperation at this level.

Offboarding

The flip side of onboarding is the security-sensitive process of offboarding. The scope of offboarding employees and contractors alike is not only time-sensitive, but fraught with potential exposure to operation, financial, and data leakage risks. There are many logical steps involved from initial separation (whether voluntary or involuntary) through deprovisioning to eventual disposition of any associated assets:

- Multiple approvals and notifications
- Procedures in legal, HR, finance, IT, and other departments, such as sales and PR, depending on the person leaving and the nature of termination
- Swift deprovisioning of access to devices, SaaS applications, network, and cloud resources
- Preserving data and work product
- Reassignment of workspaces such as emails, events, assignments, data, and work products
- Reclaiming licenses and entitlements
- Reallocating or decommissioning/disposal of devices

This long and logical list is not exhaustive. With multiple levels of approvals and notifications required along the way, each step in this process can take the time of one or more people—time that automation could easily free up. Offboarding complexity can also result in financial loss when endpoints, software licenses, and cloud resources are not recovered. The savings in actual dollars (as well as time) is matched by gains in security when the window of risk can be automatically closed.

Automation where accuracy matters most

Audit and compliance

In this volatile environment of innovation and change, one thing remains unchanged: audit and compliance processes are complicated, boring, time-consuming, and wide open for errors. Automating as many of these processes as possible makes business and financial sense.

People hate doing work that machines can do, and machines do it better than humans. When it comes to audit and compliance, that difference can translate into savings of auditing delays, penalties, and costs not imposed on the organization, as well as the savings of valuable IT time and talent.

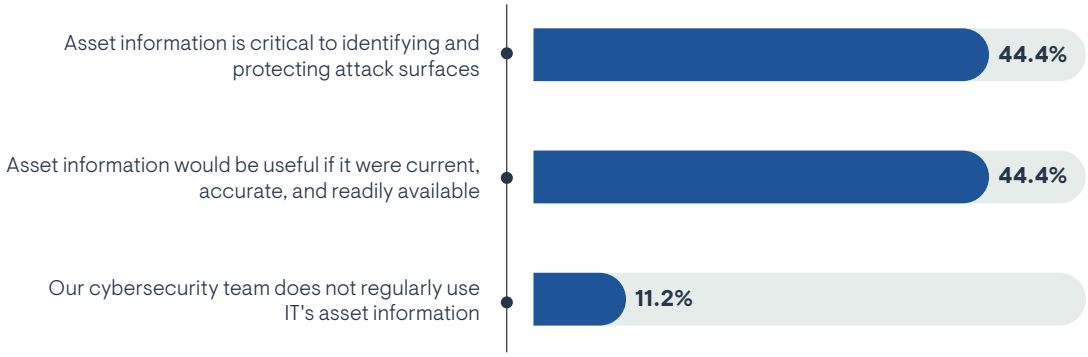
22% of global IT leaders report an increase in audit frequency and duration.

That represents a significant opportunity to use process automation for direct savings of time, talent, and money in audit preparation, evidence, and defense.

Security

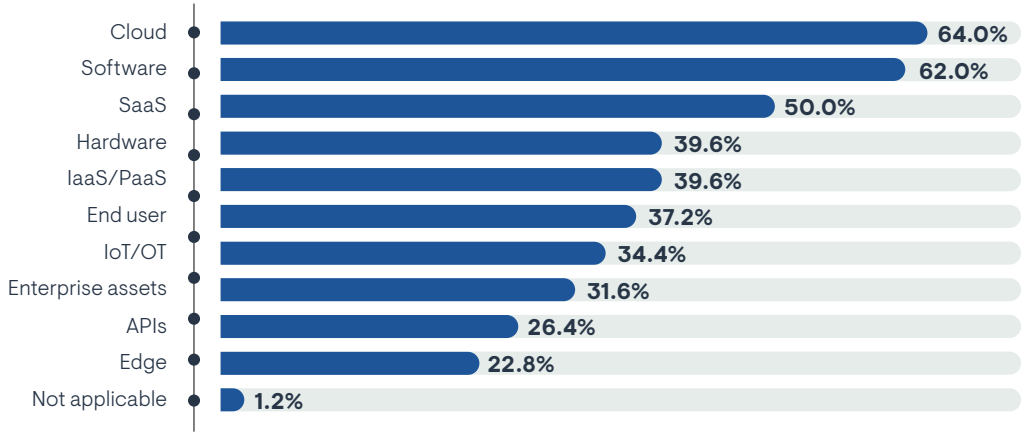
Automation and accuracy take center stage when it comes to cybersecurity. The first step in securing the IT estate is knowing what needs to be protected. What exists and where? Visibility of technology assets is the non-negotiable foundation of security and risk management frameworks. Logically, that information is the bedrock of cybersecurity efforts. However, more than half of the global panel stated that their organization did not have that base level of accuracy.

How does your organization's cybersecurity team view asset information?



Security teams that use technology asset information as a critical factor in identifying and protecting attack surfaces are in organizations that have high levels of lifecycle management maturity, automation, and data accuracy. Organizations with less mature functions fall short of their potential as a source for security efforts—and are prone to cyber-exposures.

Which areas of technology are of most interest to your cybersecurity teams?



The areas of technology that most interest security teams today are cloud, software, and SaaS.

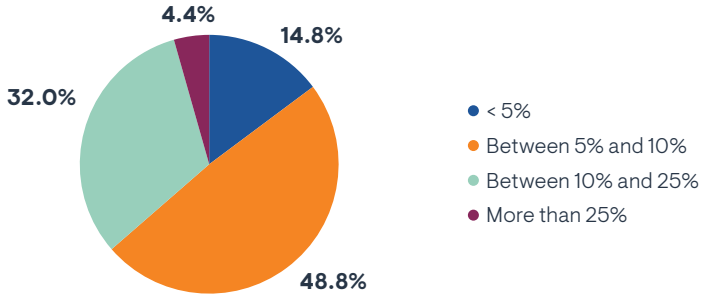
It won't stop there. The span of interest is growing as asset types and uses multiply.

Automation of lifecycle management processes

When it comes to IT operations, security, and compliance, process automation is not optional any longer. Once a competitive advantage for progressive organizations, automation is becoming table stakes for effectively managing complexity and change.

Automation is best started early in a full lifecycle management process and system because information that is current and accurate is the basis of all automation. Waste is the alternative.

How much total spend is wasted on software that is unused, underused, unmanaged, unaccounted for, or generally not needed across the enterprise (including licensed SaaS and on-premises applications)?



Together, 85% of respondents estimated software waste at between 5% and more than 25%, with only 15% of respondents citing waste at less than 5%.

There is a very strong correlation between effective lifecycle management and the quality of IT service delivered to users. More than half of the organizations that report outstanding quality of IT service also report having a unified approach to the purchase, deployment, maintenance, monitoring, use, and disposal of technology across all asset types. Furthermore, organizations that have highly effective unified lifecycle management also report high levels of IT process automation. Automation and excellence tend to travel together.

It's worth noting that **25%** of organizations with mature automation processes reported less than five percent software spend waste compared to only **4%** of those with less mature automation.

Recommendations

There are degrees of automation, and each degree has value. In fact, EMA research consistently demonstrates that most organizations prefer to retain a human touch in their automation.

What is the long-term goal for automation in your organization?

Automation is something of an acquired taste. Although it is top of mind in C-suites globally, organizations differ greatly in their cultural ability and willingness to trust, adopt, and consume automation. EMA research shows that an organization's appetite for automation will grow over time with experience and firsthand proof of the many advantages it brings to both teams and individuals.

Here are a few simple points to keep in mind to smooth the advance of automation:

1. **Be practical in selecting initial automation use cases and realistic about the scope and pace of automation initiatives.** Where is your organization in its willingness to rely on automation? Look for a system that fits the needs of your organization as it is today and as it is most likely to develop over time—not as it might be in some distant, idealized future. That means that your automation solution must be able to start small, think big, and scale with experience to handle complex processes as your organization's appetite for automation grows over time—and it will.
2. **Start small, with processes that are relatively straightforward to score some quick wins.** Define and streamline processes before you automate. It turns out that when close attention is paid to existing processes, business-as-usual is often bloated with extra steps and approvals that can easily be eliminated. Streamlining processes requires cross-functional cooperation. An intangible critical success factor is enlisting the input and support of all interested parties before and during any implementation.
3. **Expect success and build upon it.** EMA research shows that automation initiatives are generally not only successful, but profitable—at the very least, a breakeven proposition relative to cost. Socialize and publicize all successes up and down the corporate ladder. Give credit generously to stakeholders as you advance process automation across teams.
4. **When it comes to evaluating process automation platforms, perform your due diligence based on your organization's needs, not on the tech-press trend du jour.** However, do be forward-thinking. Whatever you choose needs to be easy to integrate with existing tools and systems, as well as new capabilities that may be on the horizon. The alternative is just another silo to hamper business innovation. IT automation of processes and workflows—essential to high-quality IT service—must be able to seamlessly cross organizational and tool boundaries. Prebuilt integrations, useful analytics, low-code workflow tailoring, and out-of-the-box capabilities make automation accessible and practical in ways that were unthinkable even a decade ago.

All things considered, automation of IT processes is actually a business initiative that is wrapped in a coating of technology management.

A word from the Oomnitza team

Oomnitza offers the industry's most versatile Enterprise Technology Management platform to deliver key business process automation for IT.

Our SaaS solution, featuring agentless integrations, best practices, and low-code workflows, enables enterprises to quickly achieve operational, security, and financial efficiency leveraging their existing endpoint, application, network infrastructure, and cloud infrastructure systems.

We help some of the most well-known and innovative companies to optimize resources, mitigate cyber risk, expedite audits, and fortify user experience.

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