

The background of the entire page is a photograph of rows of red theater seats, viewed from the back, receding into the distance. The seats are upholstered in a dark red, textured fabric. The lighting is dim, with a slight glow from the front, creating a sense of depth and perspective.

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# 20.02

# A SMART CONTENT LOVE STORY

By Mary Yurkovic, Director, Smart Content Council, MESA

Automation technologies are becoming woven throughout the fabric of virtually every company, especially now, and especially in the media and entertainment space. This raises the question of information technology's (IT) role in governing such capabilities. IT leaders can and should provide guardrails to make sure automation technologies run properly ... but only if the business (and end users) will let them.

That "if" is the sticking point: most business lines procure technologies for their teams with involvement from IT. Some IT leaders welcome such independence, while others view it as a slippery slope that courts risk. Regardless, the democratization of technology enabled by machine learning (ML), artificial intelligence (AI), robotic process automation (RPA) and low-code/no-code solutions is growing more ubiquitous across business lines. And it's here to stay.

Getting humans out of the way is one of the main goals of the automation revolution. Software "bots" automate routine business processes, such as populating forms with data that humans traditionally entered via pen and paper, then keyboards. Physical robots move anything from parts to merchandise, while their robotic coworkers place it in boxes. Chatbots retrieve low-level information for inquiring consumers throughout the customer service value chain. Then the other powerful various tasks are offloaded to high-caliber ML and AI algorithms.

With automation like this, who needs humans? Entrusting too many functions to automation without governance can be a bit like letting lunatics run the asylum; it's destined to end in disaster! You can acquire a LOT of bad data if there is complete reliance on automation without proper guidance.

## AUTOMATION PRESENTS A AMBIGUITY

IT can help recommend the proper tool, provide a framework for governance and

reuse, and help manage the tool's ability to scale. But what is more important is that the IT team can ensure that technologies comply with business processes and compliance rules and "don't leak" sensitive information outside the company.

But from where is governance born in an organization? Should business leaders ask IT to help provide it? Or should the IT leaders insert themselves into an implementation to control it?

Given the various risks, which include cybersecurity breaches or failures to protect data privacy, the IT leaders and board should insist on governing automation. There is an impetus and responsibility for leadership of an organization to balance empowerment with the effective use of resources. At the very least, business units should loop in the IT team leaders to provide cover for cyber and compliance risks.

Unfortunately, that is rarely the case, as most automation technologies are happening outside of the reach of IT. Ultimately, when the business has problems it tends to be because they haven't properly integrated it into IT systems. Therein lies the ambiguity, because IT, with its holistic view of data, architecture and business processes, is best positioned to govern the deployment of automation.

Many automation crusades have lost their initial momentum by failing to prioritize areas of opportunity that are aligned with strategic corporate objectives and the capabilities of individual tools. Some form of governance procedure involving senior business leaders is needed to target areas of maximum opportunity and prioritize proposed initiatives.

## AUTOMATION GOVERNANCE PLAYBOOK

Organizations that have demonstrated the most success with automation are lever-



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aging a “center of excellence” (COE) model, a collaboration between business and IT to identify business use cases where automation could help. Such a center fosters a continuous feedback loop in which models are updated quickly and governance is baked in from the beginning of each project.

A COE provides a fine central command for enterprises to attain the holy grail: automation at scale, in which a company derives benefits across the full range of its business lines. To automate at scale, enterprises should develop automation engineers, business process analysts and automation operations specialists. These staffers will helm competency centers and automation factories — COEs — that provide training, documentation and, ideally, guardrails.

## THE SMART CONCLUSION

Automation is becoming critical, as organizations lean increasingly on smart solutions that must be continuously updated to run their businesses. Smart technology solutions define how businesses work, how they compete and engage with customers or end users. There simply isn’t enough tech talent to operate the hyperscale systems most businesses rely on.

Technology in M&E organizations has the ability to automate infrastructure, and to manage the deployment of apps at scale, but the business often has the discretion to automate business processes. Nonetheless, governance is critically important for all global organizations consuming cloud services that could hop across several continents. Every leader must be involved in establishing and reinforcing the governance rules. Because that is just SMART! ■