How do you make sure your bright idea is a big idea?

How ENGIE developed a Centre of Excellence for Robotic Process Automation

For a term that is bandied about so frequently, innovation is not always done very well. First, the innovative idea has to be relevant to the business. It also has to provide a, usually quick, return on investment. Toughest of all, when it's a winner, it has to be rolled out across the whole enterprise, so that the benefits of this new notion or invention can be maximised. That's often where the real difficulties lie – scaling up innovation.

In this article, Martin Ruane, Programme Director at ENGIE, sets out how to make a big success of innovation. When ENGIE initially embarked on its (now national award-winning) Robotic Process Automation (RPA) programme back in 2014, it was determined that it would have the systems and structures in place to be able to roll out the technology at scale. It would make sure it could identify RPA opportunities across the enterprise; educate key stakeholders to gain acceptance for RPA; and evidence early returns on investment (from financial, to human) to secure further support.

How was this achieved?

It would be simple to say that ENGIE set up a Centre of Excellence (COE) to develop the necessary skills, knowledge, technology and best practice in RPA. But that was the easy bit. To ensure it could be rolled out consistently and deployed as standard practice in multiple areas of the business, the COE had to live up to its name.

The COE team had much to do, across, and up and down the enterprise. It sought top-level buy-in from senior executives, which was crucial to providing the momentum and backing to drive RPA adoption throughout the organisation.

A structured approach to implementation across business requirements, design, build and testing was essential at the outset – agility and flexibility were key components of this methodology.

A clear deployment strategy was developed, so that RPA was aligned with the business's core goals and the objectives of the individual departments. A proactive approach to identifying further opportunities for automation was built in from the start to assist enterprise-wide planning; as was a learning culture, which ensured that the experiences of one department were used to reduce the design, development and implementation lead times for deployment in another area.

The COE also had to make sure the organisation possessed the right skills and knowledge from the word go, so building staff capability in RPA, and in a short timeframe, was imperative. Training by vendor specialists, who themselves had been appraised by ENGIE of its goals, priorities and way of working, along with accredited

software created a high standard of expertise. After which, ENGIE staff were able to undertake further implementation using their in-house RPA capabilities.

Helping to further the scale up, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were agreed and put in place for all RPA activities, which assisted the quicker transfer of knowledge among staff and allowed the roll-out to be more easily audited. The SOPs were not set in stone though.

The COE constantly evaluated the automation, breaking down the deployment into discrete activities, and conducted research to gauge best practice. The best practice was then incorporated into the SOPs to improve future deployments. This was more proof, if needed, of how the COE's proactive, lessons-learned approach helped to drive a high-performing strategy for change.

Speaking of which, change management, including robust governance and effective communication, was another vital aspect of the COE's workload. ENGIE used existing two-way communication channels but it all depends on what lines of communication already exist within the organisation; bespoke channels could be created if desired.

How was success managed?

The COE played a pivotal role in creating the right measures to enable the assessments and outcomes of RPA to be fed back into the organisation. Any enterprise-wide innovation should provide good management information that can be used effectively to hone and shape its development. Time and capacity were handy indicators of success for RPA but whatever the measures used, the metrics needs to be consistent and accepted by the organisation as a valid currency for assessing the innovation.

When success is achieved, what next?

Once the walk has been walked, the talk needs to be talked. Spreading the word about the success of RPA helped to disseminate its value across the organisation. Marketing media, such as case studies and award submissions demonstrated capability, reinforced sponsorship and attracted wider interest, creating positive perceptions for this disruptive technology.

Once the deployment went live, aftercare was an important consideration to get right. Throughout the RPA programme, the COE had established a strong partnership with the ICT team under a documented and transparent support agreement, which detailed support arrangements and delineated responsibilities, giving clarity and confidence to staff. This was critical to maintaining continued collaboration and cooperation with the COE as the RPA programme moved ahead.

There you have it, how ENGIE's Centre of Excellence helped a bright idea become a big, bright idea.

Martin Ruane – Programme Director (Cities & Communities) - ENGIE

Martin has 20 years' experience of leading business transformation across a range of sectors; including local government, central government, FM and health. Martin

joined ENGIE in 2014 as Programme Director and leads an award winning programme of change, including RPA technology. The RPA programme has now been live at North Tyneside Council for over 18 months and is set to expand across ENGIE in the UK

ENGIE

ENGIE is a leading energy and services Group employing 20,000 people in the UK. ENGIE is using its energy and services capabilities to lead the UK's transition towards a more secure and sustainable future, through a strategy based on investment in critical energy infrastructure, integration of its energy expertise with its broad services offer, and innovation in customer-led solutions and technologies. The business has well-established and diverse operations that span the exploration and production of gas and oil; on-shore gas storage; generating power as one of the UK's largest independent power producers; providing power and gas to thousands of UK businesses; and delivering services to more than 14,000 customer sites across the public and private sector.

Globally, ENGIE's businesses are developed around a model based on responsible growth to take on the major challenges of energy's transition to a low-carbon economy largely based on its expertise in four key sectors: renewable energy, energy efficiency, liquefied natural gas and digital technology. The Group employs 154,950 people worldwide and achieved revenues of €69.9 billion in 2015.

www.engie.co.uk