

Use Process Mining to Automate Wisely, Not to Automate Everything

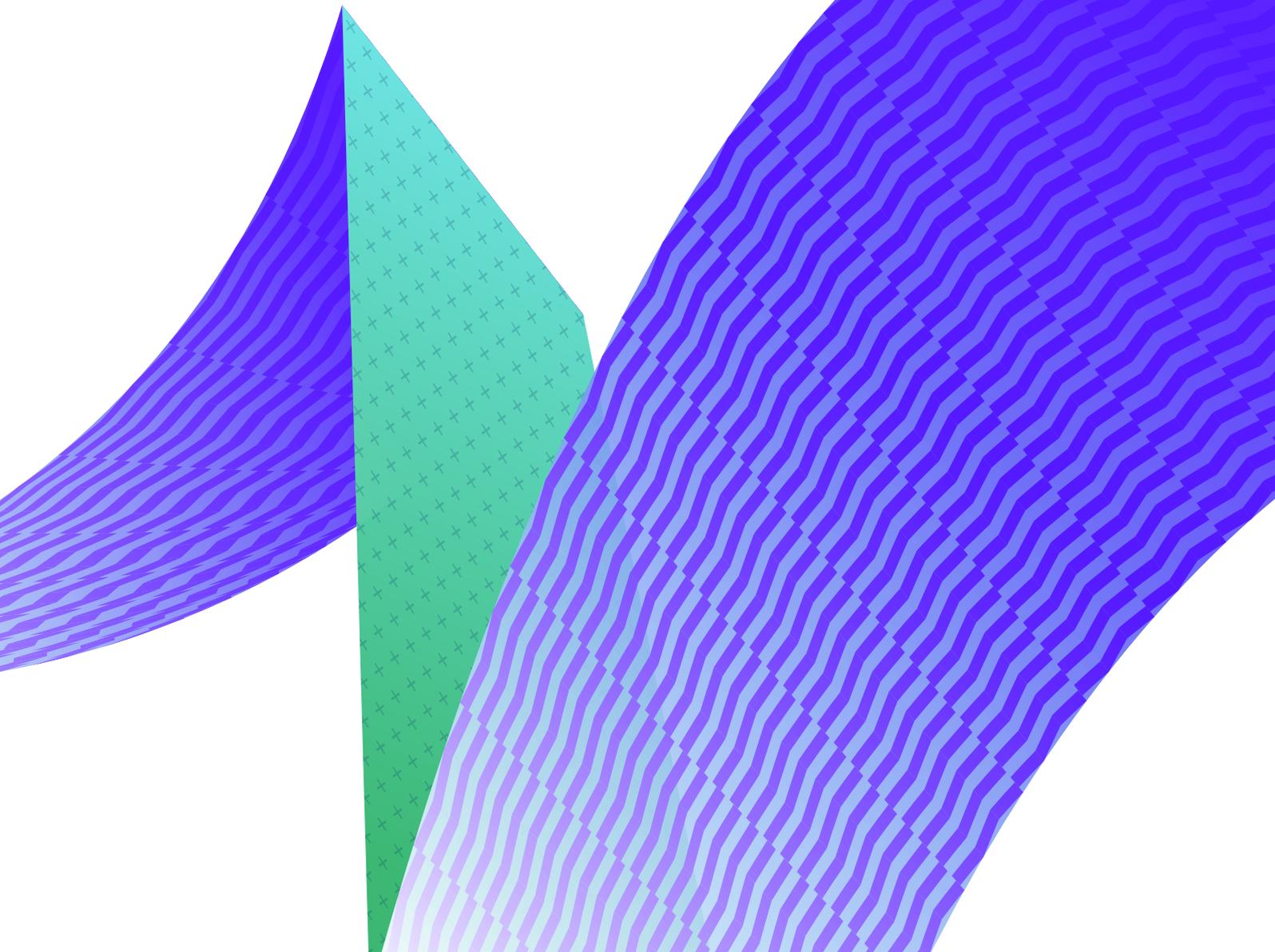


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Introduction

While process automation tools have been available for many years, automation has traditionally been a painstaking process. Why?

In large part, it was because of the time it takes to manually map out processes, rather than the automation tools themselves. This requires extensive engagement with process owners to determine how a process actually works—and, more importantly, how it should work. What's more, manual mapping results are often inaccurate since they are based on human perceptions and limited real-world data.

However, process mining and task mining are now changing this reality. These tools discover end-to-end process flows by tracing transactions from start to finish using logs and other machine data, and they also monitor the desktop to provide a fine-grain view of the work individual humans perform as part of the process. Because process mining and task mining are automated, they quickly create a comprehensive and reliable view of how the process works, providing a solid data foundation for automation.

The speed and accuracy of process and task mining often tempt organizations to use this newfound visibility to automate everything. To use an analogy, mining provides an almost unlimited supply of nails to hit with the process automation hammer. But is this the right approach? Or should you be more selective?

Here, we explain why it's important to carefully choose your automation targets and how you can do this most effectively.



Congratulations, you've been automated!

It's a deceptively alluring thought. Press one button to map a process, press a second button to automate it, and you're done. Of course, this is a gross exaggeration, but it highlights one of the key pitfalls of process and task mining. Mining accelerates automation initiatives, but it's not intended to be a zero-touch cure-all for process automation.

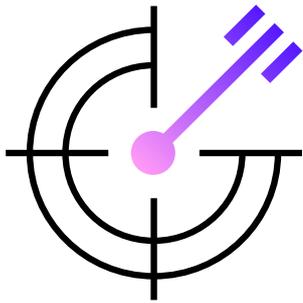
WHY?

First, while it gives you an accurate view of your "as is" processes, it doesn't ensure these processes are fit for purpose. And it doesn't optimize processes to take advantage of automation. In other words, it doesn't replace business analysts. Instead, it's a critical tool that analysts can use to investigate processes and have fact-based discussions with process owners.

Second, no business owner wants to be blindsided by an email saying, "Congratulations. You've been automated!" In fact, without the buy-in and engagement of process owners, automation just isn't possible. You need to align with the process owner's key priorities, demonstrate how automation can help them achieve their goals, and address key concerns such as risk. And, of course, you also need access to their people, systems, and data, which requires their active support.

Here's the bottom line. If you automate a bad process, it's still a bad process. Even with process and task mining, you have to apply wisdom. And that takes significant effort, which is why you need to be selective to maximize return on investment and time to value.

Choosing the right automation targets



Every automation initiative should have a quantified business outcome that supports the objectives of the process owner. Start by listening to and understanding their needs, and then show how automation supports these goals. Agree on clear success metrics upfront and focus your automation activities on achieving these results. This business context is critical—don't just assume that if you build it, they will come.

Let's look at a concrete example. You're running an automation team for an insurance company and are convinced that you can reduce claims processing time by 30%. You invest time and effort to produce a prototype.

Then you engage with the process owner and discover that claims processing time isn't their main issue. Instead, their biggest concern is the high level of processing errors and omissions, which is increasing the size of their risk pool and creating regulatory exposure. It's back to the drawing board. And because you didn't listen first, you've lost an opportunity to build a strong relationship with the process owner.

While many automation initiatives do focus on cost reduction, don't assume this is always the primary driver for business owners. We just highlighted how risk is often a key motivating factor, but there are others, such as:



REVENUES

For instance, are there a high number of billing disputes due to lack of documentation? Or, if you work for a healthcare system, are billings being missed because you can't fully trace a patient's journey through the system? Or is it because you don't understand how that journey affects patient outcomes in a pay-for-performance model?



CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

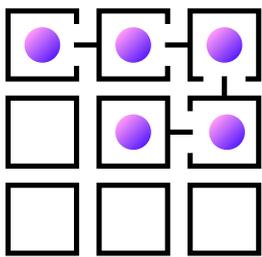
Poor customer satisfaction has a huge bottomline impact on business performance. Take contact centers. While cost is important, contact center owners worry equally about other key metrics such as call wait times that directly affect customer retention. And keep in mind that many processes—not just customer support—touch the customer experience.



THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

Employees spend an inordinate amount of time doing busy work rather than focusing on their core job function. For example, how much time does your sales team spend filling out expense reports rather than talking to customers? These types of activities can be easy automation targets with high returns for process owners. Not only does automation free up employee time for what matters, it also increases employee satisfaction and retention, which is critical in today's highly competitive labor market.

Determining the right automation strategy for a process



Once you have business alignment, it's time to determine how to automate the process and validate that automation will achieve the agreed-upon business outcomes. It is absolutely critical to continue to engage with the process owner and SMEs when you do this. This is an opportunity to confirm that the process is fit for purpose and make adjustments if it isn't. In fact, it's a good idea to embed SMEs directly into your automation team—or even adopt a citizen developer model.

Start with process mining to understand the overall process flow and identify key process bottlenecks and areas of process failure. Focus on these areas rather than trying to automate everything at once, particularly if you are dealing with a complex process. While this won't show you how to automate, it will point you toward what to automate. Once again, this is about carefully choosing your automation targets to accelerate time to value, rather than indiscriminately wielding your process automation hammer.

Also, make sure you understand the end-to-end impact of automating a process step. For example, while automating a bottleneck may improve its efficiency, this can also put pressure on downstream process steps—or other related processes.

Applying wisdom when automating tasks

Once you've identified the key process steps you want to automate, delve into the details with task mining. This will give you a complete view of what users are doing at the desktop, down to each individual click. Since different users perform tasks different ways, task mining will typically show you multiple paths. Don't just blindly pick the fastest, most direct path to automate. Instead, choose the path that delivers the best business outcomes aligned with the objectives you agreed upon with the process owner.

Process and task mining tools help you to make this choice by creating a record of every process transaction and allowing you to enrich these records to provide business context. For example, assume you want to automate a customer support process to increase first-contact resolution. One path is clearly faster, but when you slice the transaction data based on first-contact resolution, it becomes clear that a slower path provides higher first-contact resolution rates.

Also note that automation isn't always the best way to achieve business outcomes. For instance, task mining can highlight training opportunities that will deliver faster results. And it's also important to understand where humans still need to be part of a process. For instance, process automation can gather patient clinical information—and even suggest diagnoses when combined with AI—but a doctor still needs to make the final determination based on the presented information.

Finally, remember that task mining shows how humans accomplish a task. This may not be the optimal approach with process automation. For example, when humans need to interact with multiple systems, they typically access one system, then the next, and so on. However, machines can easily do things in parallel, and can also retrieve and retain large amounts of data, so they don't need to access systems multiple times. That's why it's important to optimize your processes for automation, rather than just pressing the button to automate "as is" processes.



Getting ready to implement process automation

Once you have defined what you want to automate, it's crucial to verify that this will deliver the business outcomes you expect. Process and task mining tools allow you to accurately estimate the improvements the automation will provide—whether that's cost reductions, increased process velocity, or other key metrics. You can use this analysis to help get final sign off from your process owners and to establish KPIs once you put the automation into production.

Also note that some process and task mining tools can feed process information directly into your process automation tool, accelerating automation development. Look for this capability when choosing a mining tool.

Post-implementation monitoring is critical

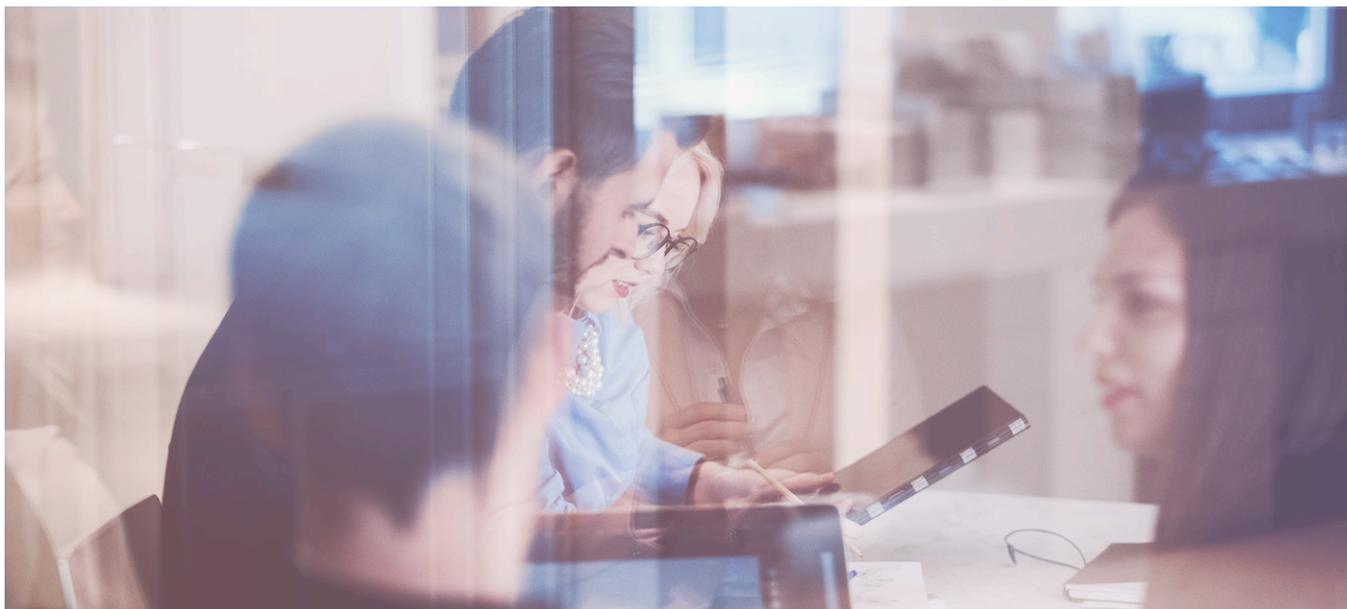


Once you've automated a process, you can't just walk away. In our experience, this is one of the main reasons why automations fail. You need to monitor process performance to ensure that the automation continues to perform smoothly and to take full advantage of automation capabilities.

Why? Here are two key reasons. First, while your automation tool may be working perfectly, the systems it talks to can still fail. By monitoring your automations, you can detect these issues quickly, identify which interface has failed, and take remedial action. Second, even if everything is working perfectly, you still need to ensure the automation is supporting the needs of your business.

For example, let's assume that finance relies on an automation to close its books two weeks after the end of each quarter. By monitoring the process, you can see whether it will hit the deadline, or whether you need to assign more digital workers to accelerate the process.

Once again, process and task mining can help you to do this. Because automation tools log every action they take, you can bring this data back into your mining tool to provide real-time visibility of process performance, forecast future performance, and identify process issues.



Let's recap

Process and task mining are powerful tools that allow you to dramatically accelerate automation by automatically discovering end-to-end business processes, eliminating the need for time-consuming and error-prone manual process mapping.

Because process and task mining are fast and reliable, it's tempting to adopt an "automate everything" strategy. However, based on our experience, this isn't the optimal approach. While these tools radically reduce effort, it's a mistake to just automate all of your "as is" processes. You need to carefully select your automation targets based on the goals of business and process owners and invest the time required to deliver the right business outcomes.

The good news is that process and task mining tools can help you to do this. Rather than just using these tools for process discovery, use them to investigate and analyze processes. This will allow you to develop the right automation strategies and have fact-based discussions with process owners. By applying wisdom rather than just swinging the hammer, you'll accelerate time to value and maximize the return on your process automation investment.

ABBYY Timeline

Discover the truth about your process performance and take the guesswork out of automation with process and task mining.



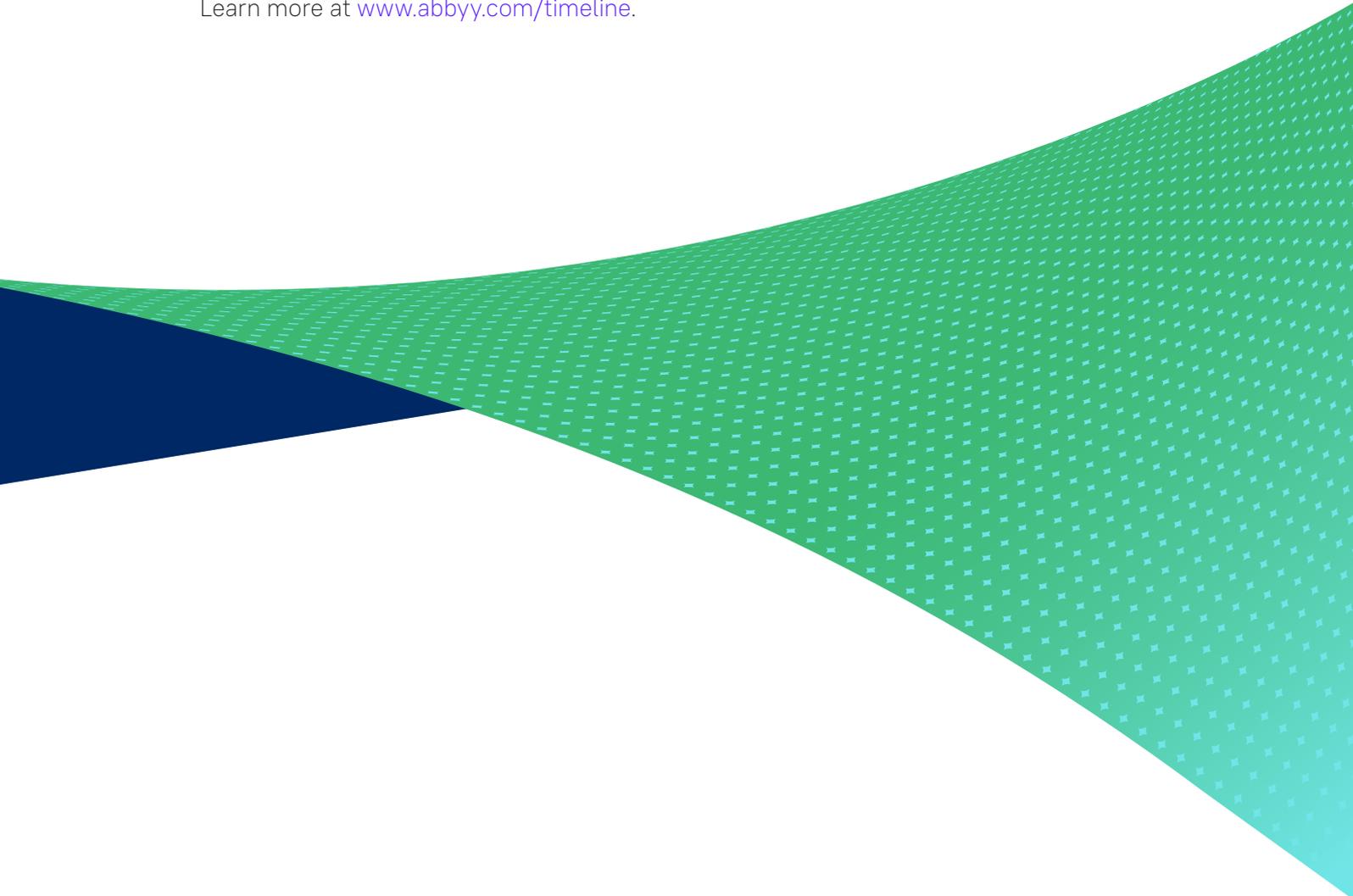
AI-driven process and task mining

ABBYY Timeline is a cloud-based Process Intelligence platform featuring advanced process discovery, analysis, monitoring, and task mining. It uses the latest artificial intelligence (AI) to enable enterprises to automatically build an interactive digital twin of business processes that reveals inefficiencies and process bottlenecks. With this insight, they can apply automation where it will have the greatest impact and predict future outcomes.

About ABBYY

ABBYY powers Intelligent Automation. We reimagine the way people work and how companies accelerate business by delivering the intelligence that fuels automation platforms. Our solutions transform enterprise data and empower you with the insights you need to work smarter and faster. We help more than 5,000 companies globally, including many of the Fortune 500, to drive significant impact where it matters most: customer experience, profitability, and competitive advantage.

Learn more at www.abby.com/timeline.



ABBYY

For more information, please visit www.abby.com

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