



IT & DATA MANAGEMENT RESEARCH,
INDUSTRY ANALYSIS & CONSULTING

The business view of cross-functional workflow and IT automation

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By Valerie O'Connell, Research Director

Digital Service Execution

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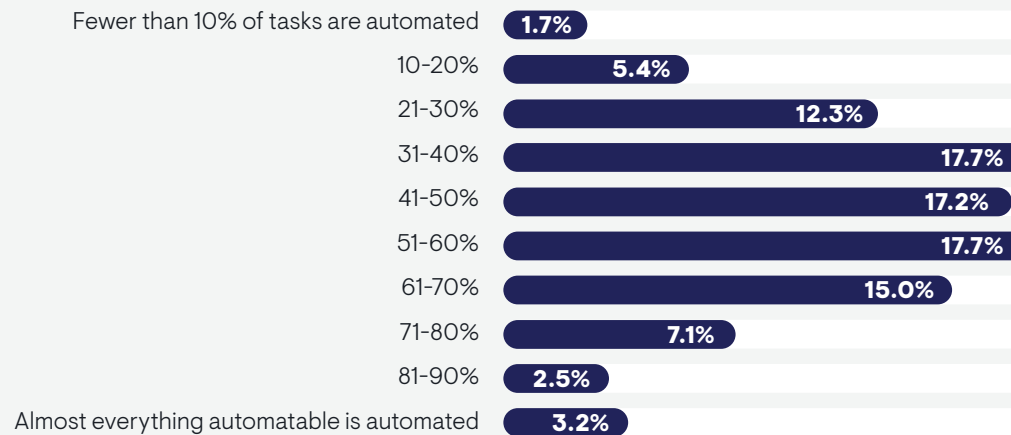
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The competitive perspective

IT automation is either a competitive advantage or a competitive gap.

The difference is in adoption and execution. After all, if one company can operate faster and more efficiently than another, they have an advantage in execution and margin over their less automated peers. That gap is clearly visible in the response of 400+ global IT leaders EMA asked to estimate the percentage of IT tasks that use automation.

If IT automation is “software that can replace repeatable processes, address complex processes, and take critical actions,” what percentage of IT tasks do you estimate use automation in your IT organization?



Responses ran the gamut of a normal curve, with 53% of respondents reporting automation at work between 31% and 60% of IT tasks. Another way to look at the same result is to consider the competitive implications of being on either side of the average.

Note that the question asks about IT tasks that use automation rather than the number of IT tasks that are automated. The wording is intentional. Automation is not an either/or proposition (either you automate or you stay manual). It is very frequently a hybrid of machine execution and human insight, intelligence, and action—most prominently in workflows that cross functional and organizational boundaries.

The disparity between highly automated IT organizations and laggards is a de facto competitive gap.

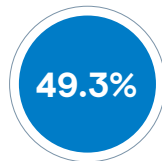
The human/machine connection

There is a wide spectrum of automation along which most organizations operate effectively. Organizations differ in their willingness and ability to adopt automation—even groups within the same organization can vary widely in their trust and adoption levels.

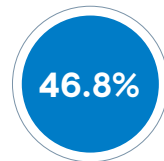
Automation can be an acquired taste. EMA research and experience find an initial reluctance to allow autonomous actions that holds true across industries, company size, and geographies. Against all reason, humans trust humans more than they trust machines.

Asked about the degree of automated actions allowed, a global pool of research participants was no exception to that trust preference. When asked about long-term automation goals, the distribution didn't greatly change.

To what degree does your organization enable automated actions?



Automated actions are taken with as little human touch as possible



Automated actions are enabled only with human oversight/approval



We don't allow automated actions except for proven routines, such as batch processing

These findings have implications for anyone evaluating automation platforms and solutions. The proposed solutions must have the ability to match automated actions to the organization's cultural ability and willingness to consume automation. Furthermore, the degree of automation must be capable of increasing to keep pace with an organization's appetite for automation. That appetite will predictably grow because success breeds success and most automation initiatives are successful.

Automation breeds automation.
Plan for growth.



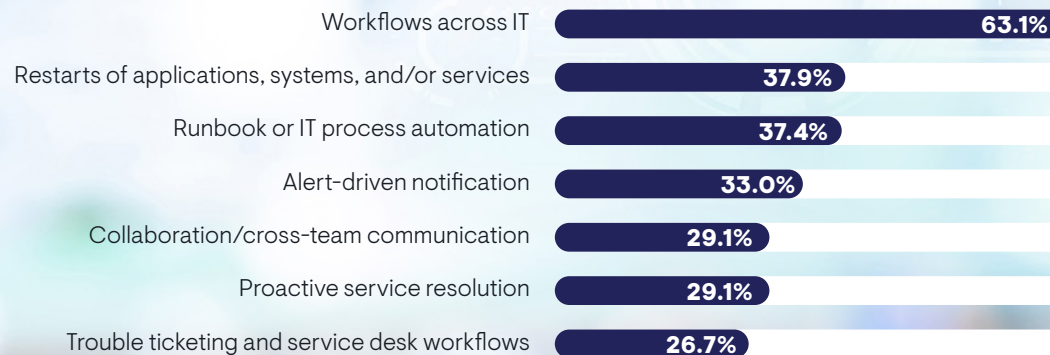
Workflow tops the list of IT automations

Theoretically, any process or activity that takes time and human attention and happens repeatedly is a candidate for automation. In reality, organizations gravitate toward automations that provide significant benefits in efficiencies and cost savings. Workflow tops that list.

Not only is workflow across IT the top automation globally, but it is also in first place by a large margin over other valuable automation initiatives. By their nature, cross-functional workflows can be cumbersome and padded with manual labor, inefficiencies, and time delays. Each departmental or organizational boundary that a workflow must cross is also a potential source of error, as well as delay.

Workflow automation has a high return on investment. Those benefits are amplified when workflows cross functional domains as they routinely do in enterprise service management (ESM) implementations that serve diverse functions, such as human resources, finance, and facilities. In addition to speed and efficiency, well-documented workflows that are well-executed deliver predictable and reliable results. They close the natural gaps between teams and eliminate finger-pointing, freeing up valuable time for IT personnel.

Which automations are supported currently or planned?

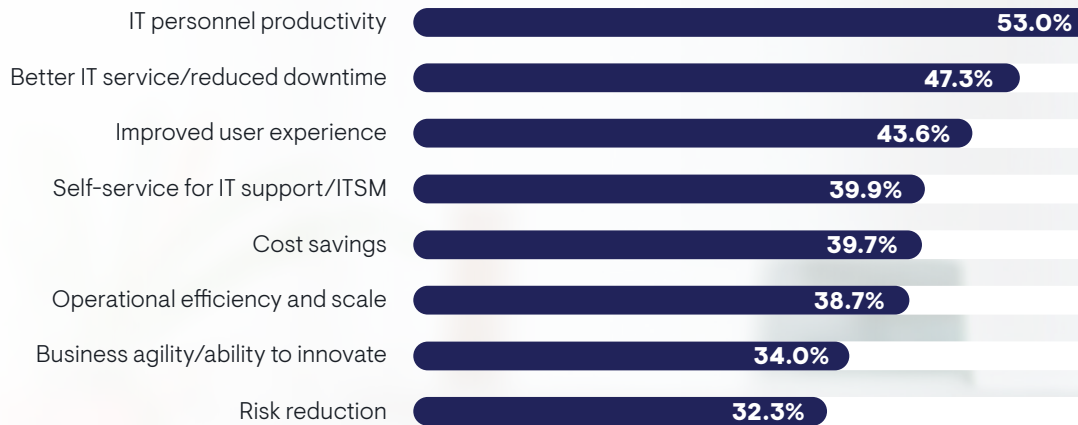


Automation is all about people

Asked to identify the driving objectives behind IT automation, IT leaders land on the side of people.

IT personnel productivity is number one not only because of the current global shortage of talent, but because automation is so good at lifting routine and mundane tasks off talented professionals. Automation frees that talent for creative endeavors. As a result, business value and job satisfaction both soar.

What are the top drivers of IT automation?



Cost, of course, makes the list of drivers, but it rarely tops it. In fact, for organizations that are the most advanced in their digital transformation and automation adoption, cost doesn't even break into the top ten. However, regardless of where cost appears as a driver, cost savings is always a result.

Cost savings is universally a consistent benefit and predictable outcome of IT automation.

IT personnel productivity tops the list of reasons to invest in IT automation.



Technical challenges and platform gains

Automation of cross-functional workflows is an easy business decision. Its many business benefits make it a compelling priority for C-suite executives and stakeholders alike. However, there's nothing automatic about automation. There are technical hurdles that must be bridged before cross-domain workflows and automations can function enterprise-wide.

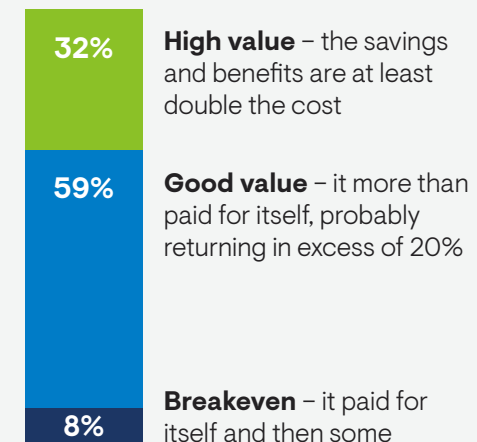
What's preventing you from adopting automation more broadly?



Increasingly, organizations are turning to platform solutions to resolve impediments to cross-functional initiatives. It is not uncommon for organizations to have more than one platform type, including those for IT service management (ITSM), enterprise service management (ESM), IT asset management (ITAM), finance, security, and AIOps.

When it comes to ITSM and ESM capabilities, however, more than 50% of EMA's global panel of practitioners are actively consolidating to one platform. Those organizations that have successfully standardized on one platform consistently outperform their peers in terms of quality of IT service delivered, degree of task automation, budget increase, user experience/satisfaction, and alignment with the business. Enterprise-wide workflows and automations, made possible by platform capabilities, drive those gains.

Asked to rate value relative to cost, 91% of respondents stated that their platform investments return more—often much more—than the cost:



High value – the savings and benefits are at least double the cost

Good value – it more than paid for itself, probably returning in excess of 20%

Breakeven – it paid for itself and then some

The ITSM/ESM connection

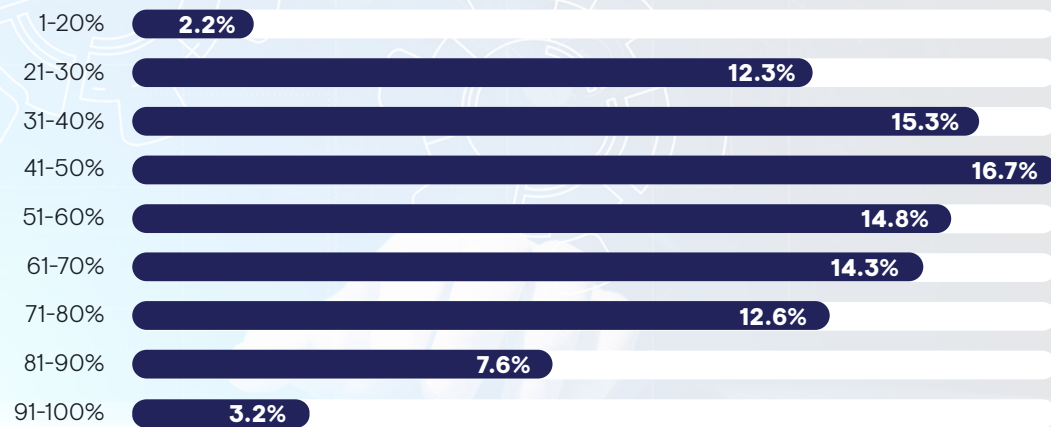
EMA research consistently finds that ITSM will grow in both importance and automation, especially as it serves wider enterprise functions with ESM capabilities. In a recent study, 86% of respondents anticipated growth. Asked, **“How do you view the future of ITSM in your organization over the next three years?”** they replied, **“I see ITSM as...”**

- 42% substantially growing in importance
- 44% somewhat growing in importance
- 12% staying at the same level of importance

The remaining 2% was split between those who see ITSM potentially going away as a separate organization and those who see it evolving to a mostly automated function. Declining in importance is just not a realistic option, especially in the far-flung world of a work-from-anywhere workforce.

Automation features heavily in the near future of ITSM, in large part because business-as-usual can't keep up with the demands of a digital business environment. Research participants were aggressively optimistic in assessing the level of help desk automation in the next two years.

What percentage of help desk requests and problem resolution do you envision being auto-resolved or transitioned to end-user self-service remediation within two years?



The exact percentages are not important. What does matter are the wide range of estimations and the general bullishness about the role of automation in ITSM/ESM. An organization's ability to cost-effectively execute workflows and automated processes will increasingly be a decisive factor in service management's growth, financial health, and status within the larger organization.

EMA perspective

When evaluating workflow automation solutions, EMA highly recommends that organizations be realistic, practical, and self-aware. Due diligence should be based on an organization's needs and resources, not on the tech-press favorite trend of the day.

However, do be forward thinking. Whatever you choose today needs to be easy to integrate with existing tools and systems, as well as any new capabilities that are yet to come. The alternative is just another silo to hamper business innovation.

Choose a solution that can take advantage of existing automations that are working well in addition to accommodating manual processes. This requirement is especially critical in ESM implementations that cross the boundaries of organizations that have their own, well-established ways of working. Involve major stakeholders early in the process to ensure workflow effectiveness and cross-functional cooperation.

IT automation of processes and workflows—essential to high-quality IT service—has to be able to seamlessly cross organizational and tool boundaries. It also has to be relatively easy to implement, tailor, and expand over time. Prebuilt integrations and low-code capabilities make a big difference in time to value and return on investment.

This decision is as much a business issue as it is a technology consideration.



A word from the 4me team

Purpose-built to be a complete service management platform, 4me's service-centric architecture ideally suits it for cross-functional workflow automation. 4me combines ITSM with ESM and SIAM capabilities, enabling all internal departments, such as IT, HR, and facilities, as well as external managed service providers, to collaborate securely and seamlessly on one platform, providing visibility and control of service quality, cost, and automations enterprise-wide.

4me supports ESM cross-functionality out of the box, making it easy to define and run cross-domain workflows. There is no need to build integrations or replicate data. Workflows are defined, registered, coordinated, monitored, and reported in 4me.

4me also orchestrates the execution of multiple tools, solutions, and automations—both existing and future technology yet to be implemented. Easy integration with automation tools and solutions leverages existing investments while it allows for future expansion to enterprise-wide initiatives and capabilities.

The combination of prebuilt templates with drag-and-drop customization makes workflow automation accessible to a wide range of skill levels—an important consideration in times of talent scarcity. Each step of a workflow is registered as a task in 4me and can include any combination of automated and manual tasks or approvals. 4me orchestrates and documents the execution and results of both automated and manual actions, providing a detailed audit trail of all activities.

4me's workflow automation capabilities are a no-brainer for existing customers and should be a powerful differentiator for prospective clients who are considering joining the 4me community.



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