



AVANTRA

Automate or fail:

Why Automation is key to the survival of IT in a digital world.

Introduction

Businesses run on people, and people rely on mission-critical IT applications for the smooth running of everything from finance and payroll systems, through to supply chains and factory floors.

During 2020, the resilience of IT operations was truly put to the test. While many organisations had business continuity plans in place, most assumed scenarios such as a regional outage due to a terrorist attack and therefore focused on the transfer of services to different or backup locations. Not many anticipated the global scale or wide-reaching impact of what we have experienced, which for some industries also

resulted in a simultaneous growth in demand for products and services.

As a result, the COVID-19 effect has accelerated innovation and new ways of working, as businesses look towards technology to facilitate effective and efficient operations during times of uncertainty and upheaval. In fact, according to Gartner, 69% of boards of directors accelerated their digital business initiatives following COVID-19 disruption. For many, this meant moving mission-critical applications to the cloud and putting more emphasis on IT operations, in a bid to keep up with the pace of change and ensure system scalability and flexibility.

“ We’ve seen two years’ worth of digital transformation in two months. From remote teamwork and learning, to sales and customer service, to critical cloud infrastructure and security – we are working alongside customers every day to help them adapt and stay open for business in a world of remote everything ”

Satya Nadella,
Microsoft CEO

Innovation is the name of the game, with a recent ASUG survey commissioned by Avantra, finding that automation is the top way organisations innovate their IT operations: over three-quarters (78%) of organisations see adding new technologies, systems or tools as the top focus area for innovation. However, despite the huge value that ITOM tools and public cloud services can bring to enterprises, the number one challenge highlighted by the

research was a lack of skills in team. A sudden shift in strategy can mean additional complexity for IT management and monitoring, unless a third key element is brought into the mix – automation.

Without automation, businesses won’t be able to keep up with today’s pace of change. Access to enough staff with the right skills is now a major constraint.

For some organisations, the impact of staff working from home, key personnel being unavailable due to illness, quarantine or family commitments has heightened the need for automation as part of their response. The pandemic has also affected the ability for some IT service providers to meet the needs of clients, as many offshore delivery centres had limited home working capabilities, and travel restrictions impacted the redeployment of key staff.

With 92% of the Forbes Global 2000 companies relying on SAP Enterprise Application software as the backbone of their operations, it has become business-critical to ensure that these systems, which enable the wheels of industry to keep turning, can continue to deliver value to businesses and improve IT operations management. Adopting automation is key to providing that vital layer.



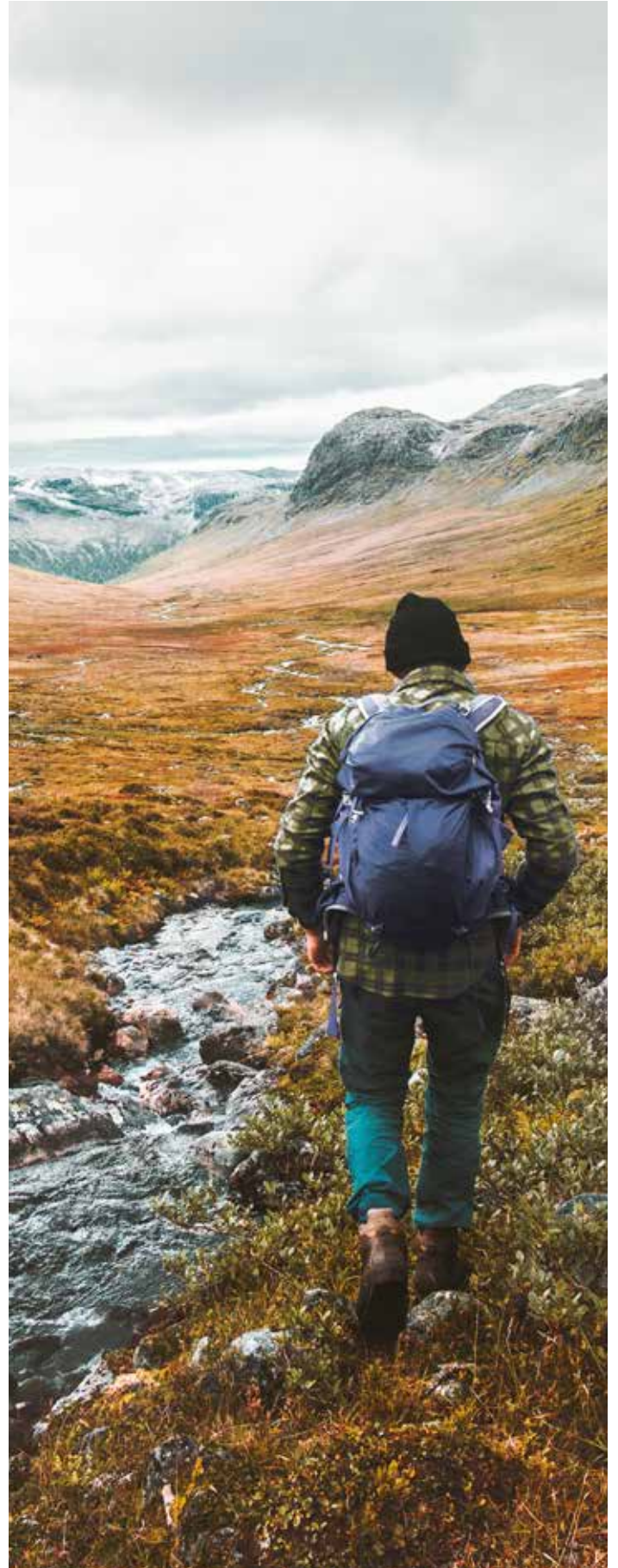
ITOM pressure points: Keeping pace with change

IT operations management has never been easy – but the challenge of managing sprawling and hybrid IT environments got a whole lot harder in 2020, as operational norms changed almost overnight and expectations on what IT can deliver grew exponentially.

The COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly highlighted the importance of a robust and resilient IT environment and the value of innovative cloud-based applications. But an acceleration in digital transformation adoption has also made IT operations management more complex and challenging. Resources have become stretched, putting pressure on change to happen quickly via swift 'lift and shift' strategies.

Optimising costs

Maximising the value of existing and future IT investments has never been more relevant, as businesses look to make the most effective use of resources. This includes being able to free up capacity through technology, rather than reducing headcount. Doing more with less is at the top of the agenda, which is pointing businesses to optimise IT environments through investment in better tooling and software solutions to reduce repetitive and inefficient ways of working.



Navigating complexity

However, the resulting shift to running applications in the public cloud – such as SAP workloads – is adding to the complexity of managing these hybrid cloud environments. Indeed, a recent ASUG survey commissioned by Avantra found that a cloud and hybrid IT landscape resulted in increased complexities for over three-quarters of (77%) of organisations. With homeworking and disparate teams set to become the norm for the immediate future, being able to effectively manage and maintain a hybrid IT environment is a key priority for business leaders. Having clear visibility of the dependency of different systems, as well as the business impact of issues as they arise is critical to ensuring resiliency of IT operations in this new complex world.



Reducing risk and exposure

With cloud-based applications and hybrid environments becoming central to the success of business operations, security and reliability take centre stage once again. The issue of security has never been far from the concerns of business leaders when moving mission critical applications and data to the cloud. But as adoption speeds up and becomes a necessity rather than a nice to have, continuity of service and reducing exposure to risk become key pressure points for businesses as they continue to innovate. At the same time, integration of enterprise applications into broader IT operations is also a challenge, along with who has access to what data on what systems.

While the value of ITOM tooling and public cloud is not in question, key pressure points still remain largely due to the speed of change, the need to see quick results and the limitation of staff and skills to effect this change. Bringing in automation alongside the adoption of crucial applications could help business leaders to really reap the benefits. Automation is the only way to effectively manage and optimise the changing environment. So why is it often missed out of the strategy? The mismatch could be down to a mindset – automation pre-COVID was seen as a productivity benefit, but now it is a necessity and the only way to manage the rate of change and associated IT risks.

Elevating automation

Automation is no longer driven by a need to optimise services and productivity, but by a move to the cloud, increased IT complexity and the need to effectively integrate enterprise applications. Once considered a ‘nice to have’ initiative, as part of continuous development that had to be self-funding, it is now seen as a business-critical priority, even if it requires upfront investment. For many businesses fighting to survive, the only true differentiator is the speed of innovation or how quickly they can respond and address the changing market. Automation can provide this competitive advantage.

Redeploy repetition

Automation is not about replacing people but freeing them up to focus on more crucial tasks that need dedicated human resource. For example, time spent on daily system checks and root cause analysis could be automated, leaving ITOps able to devote time to other projects within the organisation that could yield more value in the long term. The use of automation in this way also removes any manual or human error that could creep in when teams are overstretched and under resourced. Automation for ITOps supports faster innovation and allows companies to deploy more staff to project and innovation work instead of ‘mundane’ operations and simply ‘keeping the lights on’.

While this might sound simple enough, many companies fear that they do not have enough data to go down this route. However, unlike

deploying AI applications, where you need a certain amount of data for it to work effectively, automation can be up and running at any stage, collecting data along the way and providing immediate value.

Whilst automation can replicate and simplify a number of repetitive tasks, it should be about much more than automating existing operations. As businesses’ digital transformation journeys accelerate, it is important to have a ‘wish’ list of processes and tasks to automate, which can evolve as needs change and new applications are adopted.



Be clear on where 'quick wins' reside

'Lift and shift' is a commonly used cloud migration technique and way of moving applications between environments. Whilst it has merits and is positioned as a quick and easy way to speed up application migration, it is not on its own going to help clients maximise the value from the public cloud and can create new challenges for IT operations.

For ITOps teams, removing the manually performed daily system checks and reporting, and implementing intelligent notification can deliver immediate benefits. Automation of many frequently conducted activities and avoiding 'alert fatigue' can be simple and provide valuable time back for important activities.

Removing risk

The issue of security and risk is always a barrier and key concern when taking on any new system. Every application and access point can add a new vulnerability into the IT network, putting company data and integrity at increased risk. Automation platforms can remove this element, for example by negating the need to send customer information and data to email inboxes, but instead giving customers access to a centralised system with automation. When IT landscapes are more dynamic, this becomes even more valuable to



avoid mistakes being made. This is a great win for security teams but only if those tasked with IT security are involved early on in the project.

If security teams can have an operations platform that is consistently monitoring and ensuring the company's security policy is applied across all SAP systems, and one that is completely auditable and can produce a report at the click of a button, that is a commendable benefit and will save much time and manual effort.

Cutting costs

As well as improving the efficiency of tasks and reducing risk, automating processes can also save costs. The ASUG survey shows how automation is driving cost savings and that those enterprises who have an automation strategy in place are less likely to experience ITOps challenges. For those organisations with an automation strategy, high costs were only a challenge for a third (34%), compared with two-thirds (67%) of organisations without one.

Steps to success

The process of automating operations can provide quick wins, but it should be considered a long-term strategy. Having short-, medium- and long-term goals for automation will make it easier for the business to plan, get buy-in from those affected and ensure that it is being deployed in the right places for maximum return.

By taking a four-step process to automation, businesses can make a success of ITOM and public cloud environments, and continue to manage evolving IT landscapes and pressure points.

Step 1: Prepare

Every project needs to start somewhere and with an automation initiative you can start small and build up. An iterative approach will allow you to realise benefits immediately but still keep the bigger picture in sight. Create a wish list of these items and keep adding to it – remembering that automating fundamentally bad processes can just make errors happen more quickly.

The decision to automate is not static but a constantly evolving need, so it is important to review requirements throughout the journey. Like every technology solution, there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach, so evaluate different automation platforms against your wish list or set of requirements to select the best fit for your business.

Step 2: Execute

Do not underestimate the importance of involving your security team early on. If the team is involved from the beginning, they are able to assess different scenarios and help get the right operations platform in place for maximum value.



In addition to getting the security team on board, make sure you involve every stakeholder and user in the process. This could include security teams, network engineers and business users. Everyone affected should be aware of what is happening, how it will impact them, and the potential benefits. Getting buy-in at the start is vital for the smooth running of every automation project and for everyone to understand the additional value it will bring to operations. It will also provide a chance for those impacted to ask questions and feel part of the process, which will speed adoption and ROI.



Step 3: Run

Pushing the button on automation is just the start of the journey and one which will have many twists and turns. If buy-in to this new way of working has been done effectively, then company culture will start to change in such a way that an 'automation-first' approach is always front of mind.

Bringing IT teams and users on the automation journey is crucial to the success of the strategy and to ensure that the speed of innovation and technology adoption is matched with user acceptance and wider business value. By prioritising automation, the benefits will become bigger and better.

Step 4: Repeat

Measuring success is a key part of the process and one that will help set future automation goals. Only by understanding the benefits can you build a business case and have the necessary proof points about how much the business has benefitted from investing in automation.

This can be at high level or in granular detail, meaning you can assess and report back on how much time engineers have been able to save through automating processes and dedicating time to projects that really matter to the organisation.

Making the change: Key business takeaways

The way businesses operate today has changed significantly in a very short period of time. The pace of innovation has accelerated due to necessity, as the role of technology becomes even more critical for business success and longevity. Deriving value and a tangible return from any investment is even more important for sustaining growth and maintaining competitive advantage.

It is clear that those businesses who embrace ITOM, cloud and automation will have a strong foundation from which to overcome the challenges and urgency associated with digital transformation adoption. Without automation, organisations could buckle under the pressure of getting the most out of their business-critical systems and fail to deploy them in the right way for maximum benefit.

However, as with every new application or innovation, deploying automation needs to have a clear objective and strategy behind it in order for organisations to reap any value. The pace of technology change might be quick - and coupled with a need to make swift operational changes - but missing out crucial steps in a bid to automate faster could in fact lead to failure in the long-term. By following the four steps to automation success outlined in the previous section - prepare, execute, run and repeat - businesses will get automation right from the outset and start seeing a return almost immediately.





Taking a measured and practical approach towards automation will ensure that any digital transformation project will add value and become instrumental in the survival and success of businesses in the new world and beyond – no matter how the nature of operations evolves in the future.

Having the right foundations in place to automate now, will ensure businesses can continue their journey on the right route.

Avantra can help companies to achieve value through automation. As the industry-leading AIOps platform for SAP automation operations, we help companies transform into self-healing enterprises. We work with SAP customers to improve business experience, performance, and compliance, focus valuable resources on digital transformation, and reduce operational costs.



Our team can support businesses as they navigate their digital transformation journeys by delivering a unified operations platform – whether on-premises, in the cloud, SaaS, or hybrid – for both build and run operations.

Founded in Switzerland in 2000 with a global presence, enterprises as well as Managed Service Providers trust Avantra to provide them with unmatched intelligence and insight into their landscape health.

Learn more at [avantra.com](https://www.avantra.com)



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