

# RESEARCH PAPER

## Overcoming obstacles to intelligent automation adoption

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Sponsored by



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# Introduction

This white paper examines the obstacles involved with planning and implementing automation technology, along with some common misconceptions about the technology's capabilities and outcomes. It will also explore the importance of a strategic approach to automation in overcoming these obstacles and provide some considerations for making your own program a success.

It's a tough fact of business life that some technology initiatives falter during their early implementation while others may hit difficulties once fully up and running. Even when the project runs smoothly, if it's not generating the expected results, stakeholders will be left wondering who or what is to blame.

Process automation programs have some unique obstacles and others which are common to many new technology implementations. For example, many IT and digital transformation initiatives suffer from 'mission creep', where they drift far beyond their original parameters and become overly complex and expensive. This is particularly true for large programmes where too many stakeholders jump onboard and demand too many deliverables. Some have the opposite problem: being rushed and planned superficially at the outset, leaving a mismatch between aims and deliverability.

To alleviate such issues, it's important to have a clear understanding at the start of what automation technology can actually do for your organisation, agree a set of goals and scope with decision makers and stakeholders for the implementation phase of the project and have a roadmap for continuous development and improvement for at least the first 12 months.

Pretty standard stuff. But add to this an understanding of the obstacles unique to automation that you are likely to face, and things become more difficult. The best way to achieve this is to learn from the experiences of others who have started their journey.

Bear in mind that while some of the immediate benefits of intelligent automation software are to make organisations smarter, more efficient and more productive, some buyers simply want a quick way to save money – inspired by hype in the market. This can lead to a confusion of aims, deliverables, and workflows, and is a barrier to real progress.

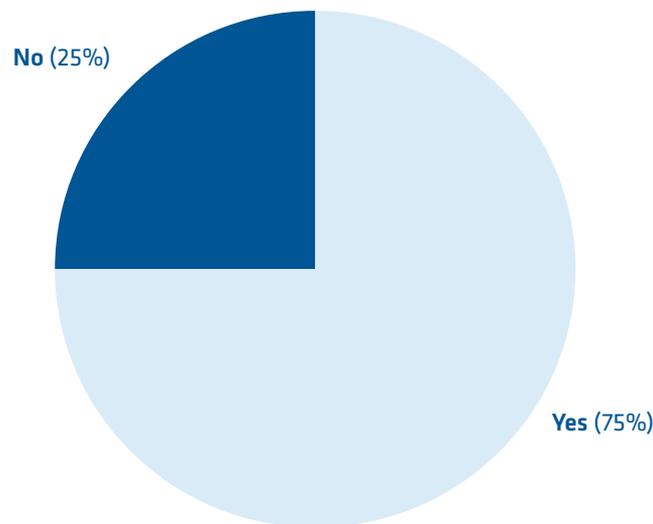
Throughout the course of this paper, we provide stats and insights from the experiences of other organisations, and a related checklist to help overcome the obstacles.

# Real automation insights

Intelligent Automation is fast becoming a valuable asset for organisations worldwide. The process of deploying and scaling it is now easier than ever before, but some avoidable obstacles and pitfalls remain – both real and perceived. *Computing* Research spoke to 150 senior IT leaders in medium to large organisations across nearly every sector of the economy, to find out how they have fared on their automation journey and which challenges they came across along the way.

One hundred percent of the survey base has been involved in Intelligent Automation implementation or decision-making in their organisations. Out of those, 75 percent have live automation processes of some kind running.

**Fig. 1 : Does your organisation currently have any live automated processes in operation?**



## Live automation outcomes

So what outcomes have the live proportion of programs generated to date?

In terms of financial benefit, nearly 12 percent of respondents who implemented automation have seen a “significant” financial return on investment (ROI), while just under one-quarter (24 percent) have received an “acceptable” financial return. However, nearly 13 percent report no ROI to date at all.

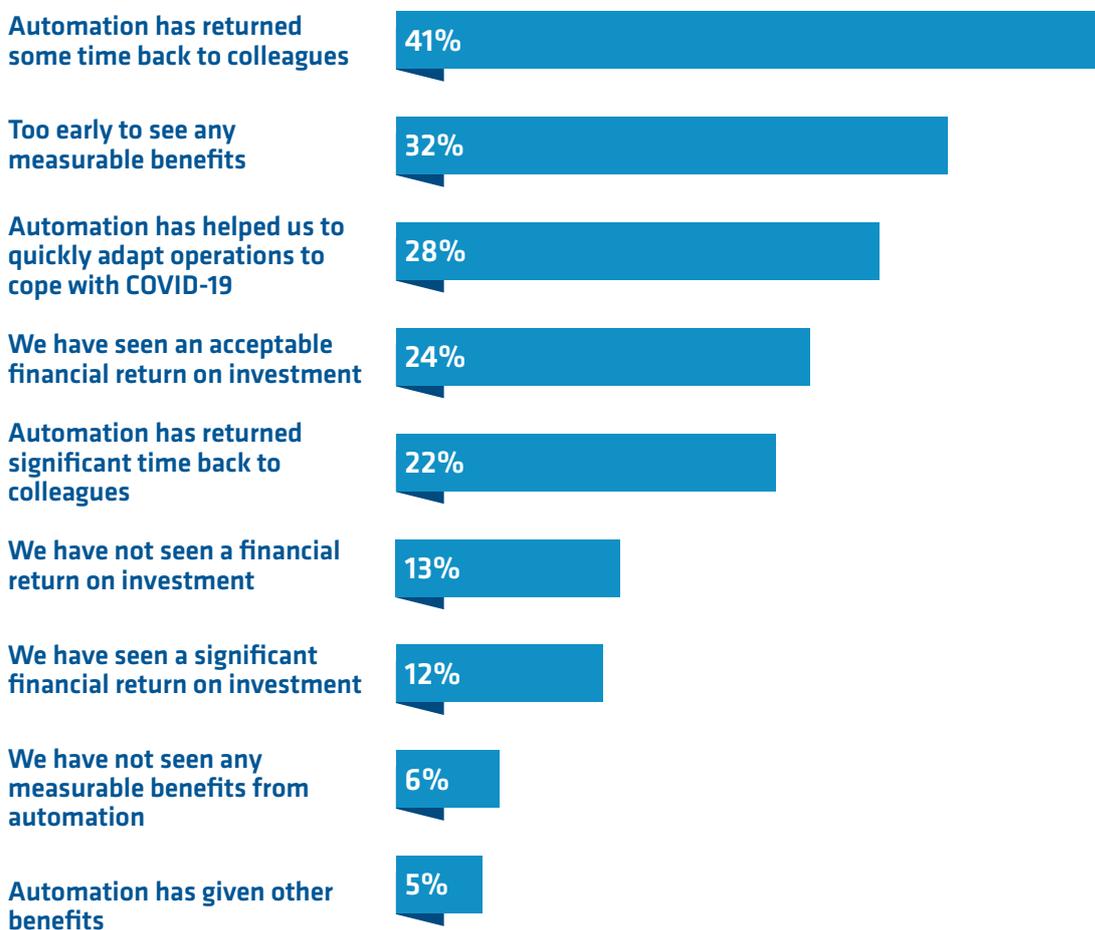
For the 13 percent that hasn’t seen a financial return, it may simply be that the program is too early in its implementation. Alternatively, a lack of financial ROI can point to the wrong process being chosen to kick-off the program – a common mistake which can unfortunately affect internal perceptions of automation early on.

## Overcoming obstacles to intelligent automation adoption

The great thing about intelligent automation is that reasons for a lack of ROI are easily identifiable and can be rectified. Automation is rarely a wasted investment, as there are a multitude of use cases across functions and industries with proven results.

That said, a project will often stall where the technology is implemented tactically as a point solution, rather than strategically in line with business objectives. Business leaders should ensure that the business case is clear and the strategy sound from the outset, long before the technology is put in place. They should also establish that the technology can actually deliver what is being asked of it.

**Fig. 2 : Which of the following outcomes have you experienced from implementing automation?**



Given the right strategy, other benefits and forms of ROI are clearly there to be had. Almost two-thirds of those surveyed have seen their colleagues freed up to do more meaningful work, while digital workers take on more repetitive tasks. Just 6 percent of those who have implemented automated processes haven't seen any measurable benefits.

### YOUR AUTOMATION CHECK LIST



- Be clear about what you want to achieve with automation.
- Discuss with your vendor what ROI will look like and manage expectations accordingly.
- Include process analysis in your planning to ensure you are automating the highest value tasks.
- Monitor live automations closely to ensure they are on course to generate value.
- Set a timeline for evaluation and improvement of each automated process.

## Navigating the planning stage

Avoiding the obstacles common to automation implementation requires careful planning, leadership, and management. Technology challenges must be considered alongside those involving employees and culture.

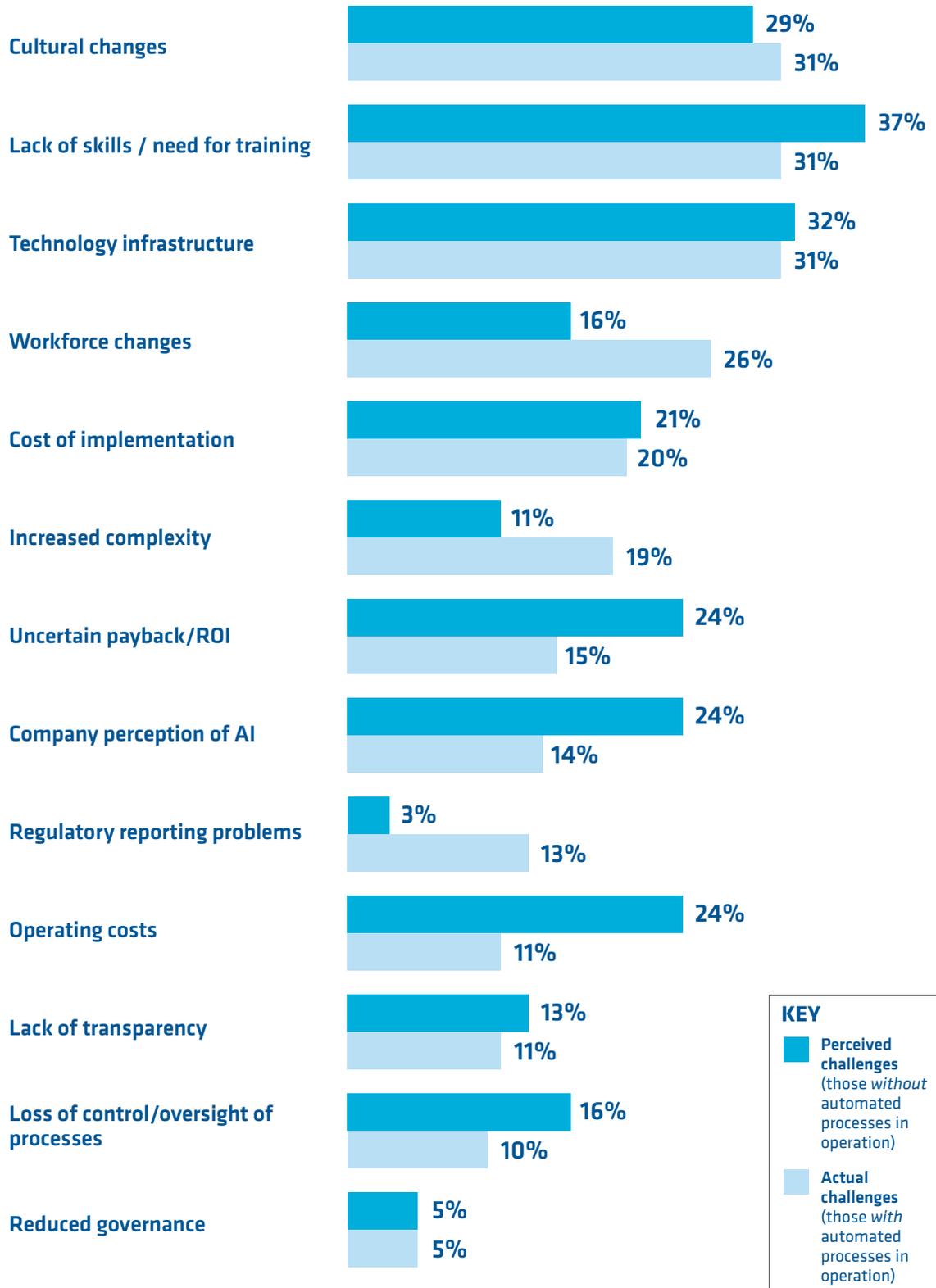
The survey found that some of the most impactful challenges are underestimated among those who haven't yet implemented an automation program. Two of the three actual challenges identified most commonly were cultural changes (31 percent), and workforce changes (26 percent). These aspects of automation can be mitigated during the strategy and planning phase if handled correctly.

The technology infrastructure needed for implementation was mentioned by over 31 percent of IT leaders, alongside increased complexity (19 percent). Again, if this is identified as a challenge early on, the choice of vendor selection will be crucial. For example, Cloud and SaaS based automation software helps simplify implementation and avoid infrastructure costs.

Financial and operational challenges emerged strongly in the survey too, as real obstacles to progress. Cost of implementation was cited by just under 20 percent, operating costs by 11 percent, and uncertain payback or ROI by over 15 percent.

## Overcoming obstacles to intelligent automation adoption

**Fig. 3 : Perceived vs actual planning challenges faced during automation projects [3 maximum]**



### YOUR AUTOMATION CHECKLIST



- Understand the capabilities of the technology before you begin.
- Understand your unique challenges in order to create a strong strategy.
- Structure your plan using guidance such as the Blue Prism Robotic Operating Model (ROM).
- Select the vendor that will best help you to achieve your goals.
- Spend time choosing the right processes to start your journey and create a roadmap to keep up momentum.

## Compare and contrast

As the chart shows, there is a contrast with the responses from those IT leaders who have already implemented automation and those who are in the earliest stages of planning an automation project or are still exploring their options. In this latter group, there is a more even spread of concerns across workforce, cost, ROI, and technology, though lack of skills remains in the top spot (cited by 37 percent of respondents as an obstacle).

This suggests that the financial aspects are more troubling for some IT leaders *before* the project kicks off. Those who are further along in their journeys may find that the emphasis shifts even more strongly towards the cultural and human impacts and that the financial outlay is balanced by the return on investment.

In this sense, it could be argued that the financial dimensions are more of a psychological barrier to progress, one that falls away somewhat once the project is up and running. Meanwhile, the workforce and cultural elements demand real engagement, management, and hard work to overcome. Partnership with everyone affected, from senior management to business stakeholders and the wider organisation, is key.

### AUTOMATION CHECK LIST



- What does ROI mean to your business? How quickly will the cost of the technology be offset by the value generated?
- Don't skimp on employee and stakeholder communications.
- Can you offset a lack of skills and IT resource with low-code, cloud-based software?
- Get the CFO and CEO on board with the project early on, and keep them involved.

### Mature solutions

As we have been seen, the core promise of Intelligent Automation and RPA isn't always the instant cost saving that some organisations might desire, although if used correctly, most users do save on operating costs over time. The most impactful benefits lie in staff augmentation and business transformation. Wherever there is a business function or product that relies on time-consuming manual processes, there is an opportunity for transformation. This in turn gives back time to people who can use their skills to more effectively and creatively support the business.

When it comes to these benefits, survey respondents report noticeably better results: 22 percent say that Intelligent Automation has given significant amounts of time back to colleagues, while 41 percent say that it has returned *some* time – a combined total of 63 percent who can now focus on adding real value to the business.

But nearly one-third of respondents (32 percent) say that it is too early to quantify the benefits of automation. Arguably, this is a mature approach and should not be seen as a barrier to progress. Leaders should recognise that, as long as the technology has been implemented strategically to support business goals, then instant payback is not the right target to aim at; it's to create a smarter, more agile, productive, and efficient business.

That said, nearly two-thirds of organisations already report time savings, while many *are* cutting their costs and seeing a return on investment.

#### AUTOMATION CHECK LIST



- Work with your people to decide how they will use the time returned to them.
- Where is your organisation falling down with productivity or customer experience?
- Examine automation use cases from your industry for ideas.
- \* Look beyond existing processes and structures to how you can innovate through automation.
- \* Choose intelligent automation over RPA to widen the scope of transformation.

### The integration question

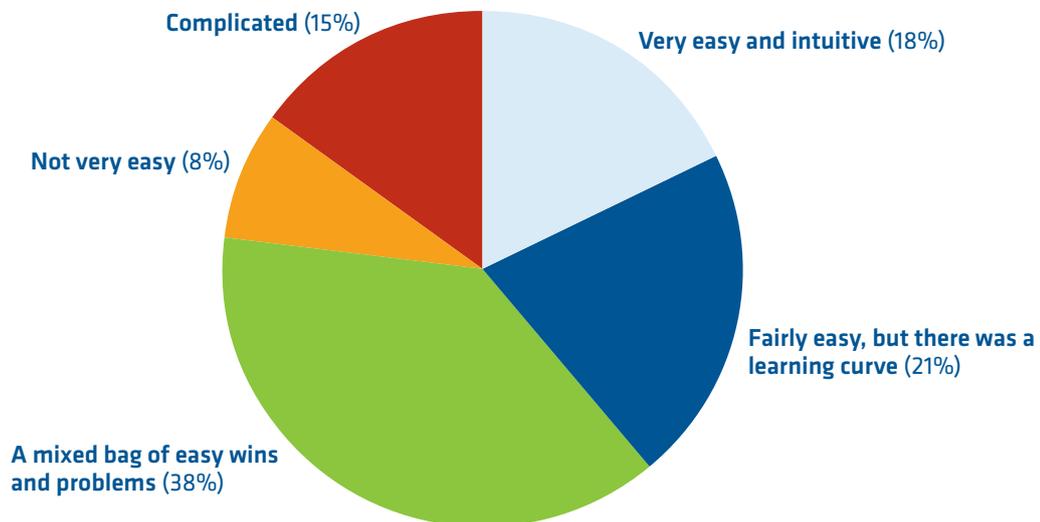
There are internal challenges for automation leaders to consider. Process automation demands a spectrum of decisions across business strategy, structure, technology, and (as previously explored) training. For example, any technology that transforms business processes and outcomes needs to be well integrated – in terms of existing systems, technologies, workflows and business culture.

So how easy did the UK's IT leaders find integrating Intelligent Automation with their existing systems and processes? And what barriers did they encounter?

Eighteen percent found integration very easy, 21 percent describe it as “fairly easy, but there was a learning curve”, while 38 percent say it was “a mixed bag of easy wins and problems”. At the other end of the spectrum, 15 percent say it was “complicated”, with a further eight percent saying integration was “not very easy”.

## Overcoming obstacles to intelligent automation adoption

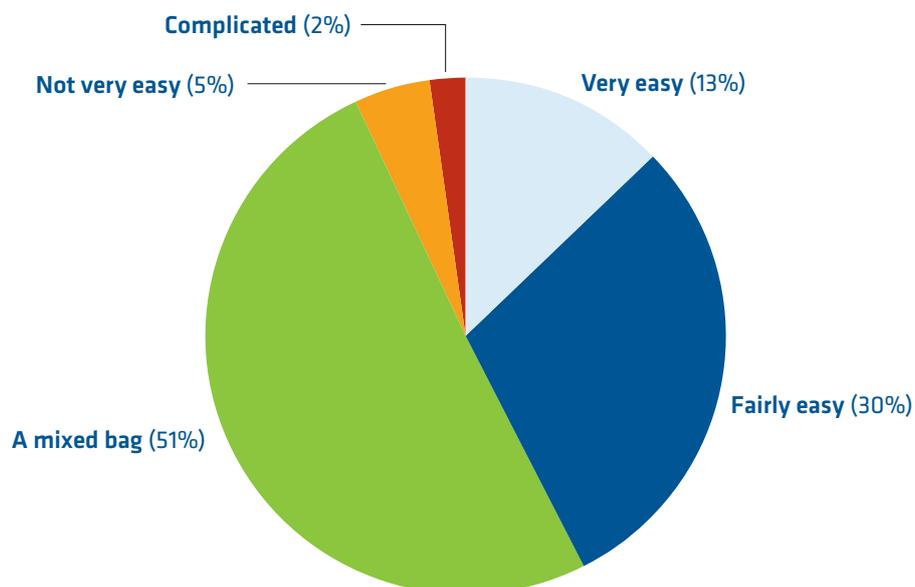
**Fig. 4 : How easy has it been to integrate RPA/digital employees with existing systems and business processes?**



## Implementing automation

However, *implementing* Intelligent Automation or RPA is easier than integrating it with internal systems and processes – at least, this was the conclusion from those leaders who have actually done it. Forty-three percent of IT leaders found implementation either “very” or “fairly” easy, while 51 percent describe a “mixed bag” of results. However, less than two percent found that implementation was complicated, and only five percent say it was “not very easy”.

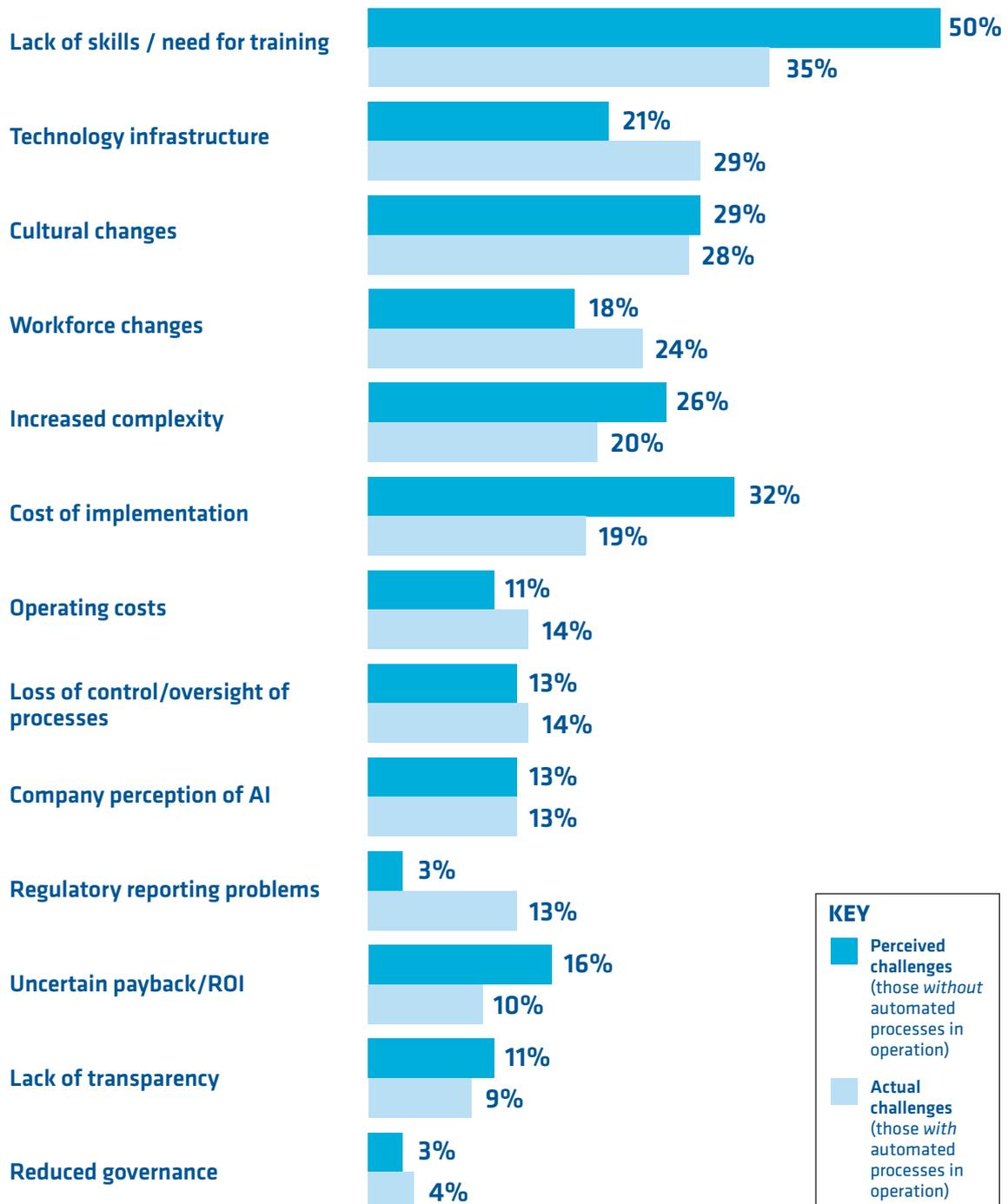
**Fig. 5 : How easy was it to manage the implementation of the overall program?**



## Overcoming obstacles to intelligent automation adoption

Over half of automation leaders encountered at least *some* problems during implementation. The most significant of these was human. Lack of skills and a need for retraining was cited by 35 percent of the survey base, as were cultural changes (28 percent), workforce challenges (24 percent), and the company's perception of artificial intelligence (13 percent).

**Fig. 6 : Perceived vs actual implementation challenges faced during automation projects [3 maximum]**



## Overcoming obstacles to intelligent automation adoption

The latter point is worth examining. Alarmist media reports about technologies such as AI, automation, and robotics may have an impact on staff morale, and it is important to be aware of this problem and explore the real issues, benefits, and challenges openly. Leadership, transparency, and workforce cooperation will be essential here.

A focus on cost reared its head in the survey too: cost of implementation was cited as a barrier by 19 percent of IT leaders who have actually done it, operating costs by 14 percent, and uncertain payback/ROI by 14 percent.

However, as we have mentioned, the key is to implement automation in line with strategic aims – to support the business and make it smarter and more efficient.

Among IT leaders who have yet to implement Intelligent Automation or RPA, lack of skills and the need for staff retraining emerged even more strongly as a worry or obstacle: it was cited by 50 percent of the survey base. Among these respondents, cost is the next largest barrier (32 percent), followed by cultural changes (29 percent), and increased complexity.

### AUTOMATION CHECK LIST



- Choose a vendor that will support planning, implementation and beyond.
- Work closely with staff across the organisation in the planning phase to alleviate fears.
- Humanise your digital workforce – find ways to make them part of the team.
- Consider cloud and SaaS software which makes implementation faster and simpler.
- Choose an automation solution that makes work simpler not more complex.

## Conclusions

Overall, the survey demonstrates that the main obstacles to progress in Intelligent Automation and RPA are a mix of financial worries, practical technology issues – in terms of integration and complexity management – and cultural and staffing challenges, where up-skilling is clearly essential.

Of all these, the human element is the one that cannot be overlooked under any circumstances, both in terms of leadership and discussion, and in terms of training and transparency.

While planning and implementing challenges will likely occur along the way, even the most commonly encountered hurdles were only met by around a third of organisations. As demonstrated by this research, the anticipated challenges are usually far worse than the reality. By approaching intelligent automation with sound business objectives in mind, and combining it with the right technology, the benefits we've shown are well within reach.

Seeking the right technology and strategy partners will play a key role in overcoming what obstacles remain – helping to fill-in any skills gaps, work through integration challenges, and sensitively tackle cultural changes. The end result can be an augmented workforce that no longer gets caught up in daily rote tasks and can instead direct its energy to driving and developing the core business.

## About the sponsor, Blue Prism

Blue Prism is the global leader in intelligent automation for the enterprise, transforming the way work is done. At Blue Prism, we have users in over 170 countries in more than 1,800 businesses, including Fortune 500 and public sector organisations, that are creating value with new ways of working, unlocking efficiencies, and returning millions of hours of work back into their businesses. Our intelligent digital workforce is smart, secure, scalable and accessible to all; freeing up humans to re-imagine work.

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