Forrester Consulting Thought Leadership Paper
Commissioned By Cisco

May 2021

Automation Is Not Without Challenges, But They Can Be Overcome

In this series, we have already covered the ways in which operations professionals can help their organizations navigate the changing business needs of their digital transformation initiatives. As organizations embrace increasingly complex architectures and multicloud strategies, a mature operations approach that aims for adaptability, resiliency, and agility is critical to success, especially during times of crisis and sudden change.

But no organization, regardless of maturity level, is completely free from potential setbacks. There will always be challenges, but all challenges are not created equal. Issues of tool integration, data silos, and outdated technology are technical issues for many operations teams (see Figure 1). These are common areas of complexity for many IT professionals, and they are merely the symptoms of a complex technology landscape that's been built over the years. This diverse and distributed ecosystem is inevitable as technology evolves, organizations grow, and workforces become more dispersed. Exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, issues which were always present have become more dire. The difference lies in the preparedness of leaders' — that is, high-maturity organizations — to deal with these challenges. Their willingness to invest in the neccesary resources, to automate both back-end and customer-facing processes, and to thoughtfully craft strategy and governance rules puts them in a better position to address and move beyond these issues, rather than getting bogged down by them. As business ecosystems become increasingly complex, less mature organizations will struggle to overcome these issues, increasing the gap between beginners and leaders.

Our survey shows that both leaders and beginners experience a unique set of challenges that can help us better understand these two groups (see Figure 1). The data shows:

› **Leaders' issues reflect their more advanced posture.** Having already automated a slew of business and technical processes, leaders are more likely to cite difficulty in codifying processes, testing, and troubleshooting broken automations. In other words, these leaders have already created the necessary foundation for success and are now focused on perfecting their automations. Beginners don't suffer from these issues nearly as often because they have automated far fewer processes. Leaders also struggle more often than beginners with issues of complexity — both in tools and processes. Again, this is a function of the fact that leaders have moved past automating the low hanging fruit of customer-facing applications, focusing now on the more complicated back-end processes that power their front-end customer engagement.

FORRESTER®

› **Beginners lack the people and organizational will to change.** In stark contrast to leaders, beginners are more likely to suffer challenges that can derail them before they even get started. These less mature organizations lack the appropriate in-house skills needed to use new technologies. They are also more likely to report a psychological resistance to automation within their organization. Without these two critical components — the desire to automate and the necessary skills to do so — beginners will struggle to make any significant progress.
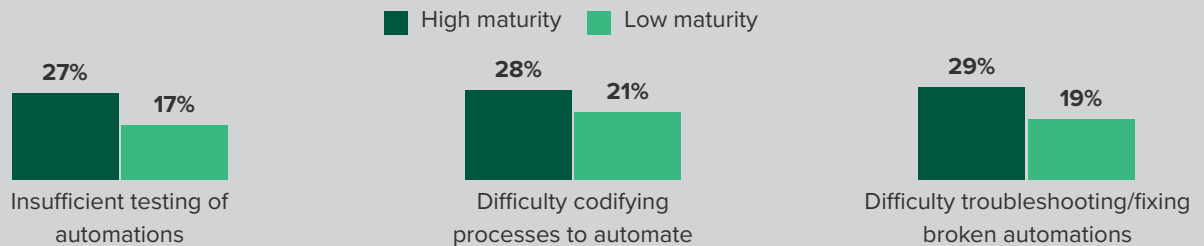
Regardless of your organization's maturity level, there's no need to get discouraged by the occasional challenge in the quest toward more automated processes. The next and final installment in this series will provide a set of recommendations to help your organization on its journey toward operational maturity, while also examining the benefits businesses can expect to receive by combining the power of automation with an advanced operations approach.

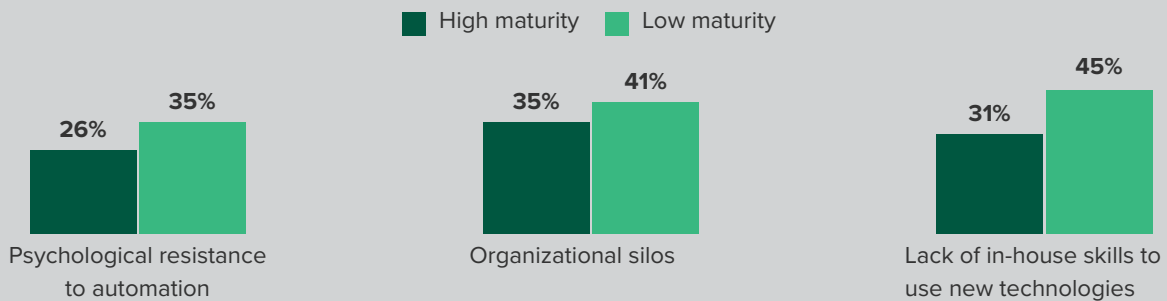**Figure 1: Automation Challenges Vary By Operations Maturity Level**

Everyone struggles with tool integration, data silos, and outdated tech.

■ High maturity   ■ Low maturity
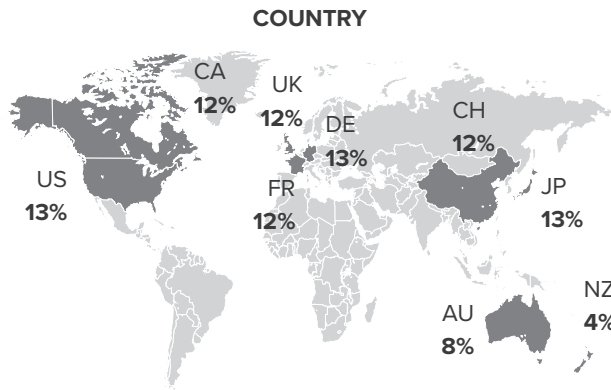
36% 38%
Outdated infrastructure technologies

37% 42%
Data silos

41% 45%
Tool integration
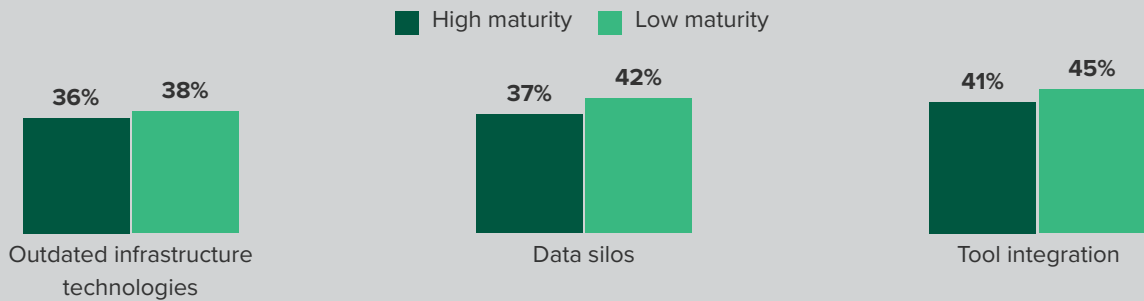
Leaders are perfecting automations.

■ High maturity   ■ Low maturity

27% 17%
Insufficient testing of automations

28% 21%
Difficulty codifying processes to automate

29% 19%
Difficulty troubleshooting/fixing broken automations

Beginners also lack the people and culture to gain any traction.

■ High maturity   ■ Low maturity

26% 35%
Psychological resistance to automation

35% 41%
Organizational silos

31% 45%
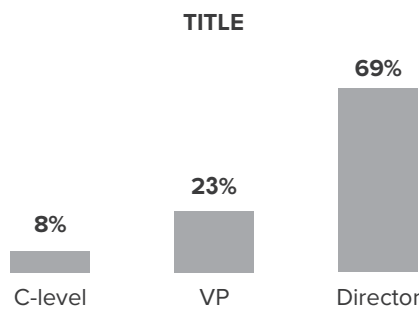Lack of in-house skills to use new technologies

Base: 201 high-maturity global decision-makers of automation strategy and purchasing decisions and 255 low-maturity global decision-makers of automation strategy and purchasing decisions
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Cisco, December 2020
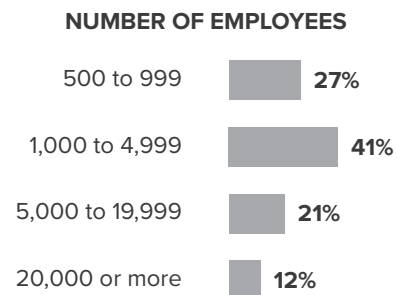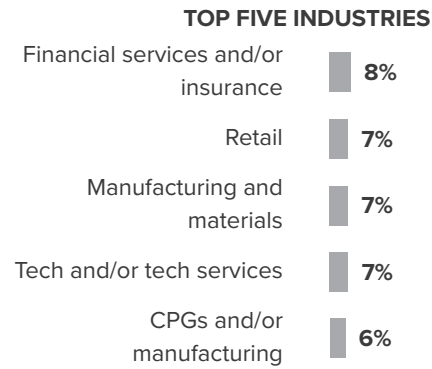
FORRESTER®

Appendix A: Demographics

COUNTRY

CA **12%**
UK **12%**
DE **13%**
CH **12%**
US **13%**
FR **12%**
JP **13%**
NZ **4%**
AU **8%**

NA: **25%**   EU: **37%**   APAC: **38%**

TITLE

- C-level **8%**
- VP **23%**
- Director **69%**

DEPARTMENT

50% IT
50% Operations

TOP FIVE INDUSTRIES

- Financial services and/or insurance **8%**
- Retail **7%**
- Manufacturing and materials **7%**
- Tech and/or tech services **7%**
- CPGs and/or manufacturing **6%**

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

- 500 to 999 **27%**
- 1,000 to 4,999 **41%**
- 5,000 to 19,999 **21%**
- 20,000 or more **12%**

PRIMARY ACTIVITY

66% Tech infrastructure and/or ops
34% App development and/or support

Base: 1,212 global decision-makers of automation strategy and purchasing decisions
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Cisco, December 2020

Project Director:
Rachel Linthwaite,
Senior Market Impact Consultant

Contributing Research:
Forrester's Infrastructure &
Operations research group

ABOUT FORRESTER CONSULTING

Forrester Consulting provides independent and objective research-based consulting to help leaders succeed in their organizations. Ranging in scope from a short strategy session to custom projects, Forrester's Consulting services connect you directly with research analysts who apply expert insight to your specific business challenges. For more information, visit forrester.com/consulting.

FORRESTER®