Unboxing Future of Work feat. Ricardo Henriques

Episode 2: Unboxing the Power of Digital Enablement

[Audio Transcript]

Vijay 0:33

Welcome to Unboxing Future of Work podcast series. Thanks for joining the series today. Great having you! Just wanted to start off with a little bit about yourself. Can you talk about where you're from, where's home? What do you do? What's your personal professional habits, passion?

Ricardo 0:49

Okay, so thank you very much first of all for this invite and for having me here today. So, I'm based in Portugal. I am the father of three boys that are driving my life. sometimes in a more challenging way.

Ricardo 1:09

From a professional point of view, I have more than 20 years of Information System industry experience. Now I'm leading a business enablement and transformation team in the business side of energy company, where we cover mainly five different areas. So, the first one is around business process management, where we manage all the quality system and the certification of ISO 9001 of our process model. Other one is the knowledge management platform, where we have the digital platform with all the contents regarding procedures, offer, documentation to support our front office and back-office operations. The other one is, my team is leading for six years ago the RPA and Intelligent Automation initiative with a federated model. We also have another area that is process mining for four years ago. And the final one is digital acceleration, where we are pivoting all digital projects regarding

another kind of solutions like augmented reality, digital platforms, and another kind of solutions.

Awesome.

Vijay 2:44

You keep sharing on LinkedIn a lot of insights. I think you were one of the earlier pioneers I would say who actually started 5-6 years back a Robotic Process Automation journey. And you also drive not just automation you also drive knowledge side of initiatives in your organization. And then you keep sharing all this knowledge insight. What's the thought process behind sharing your experiences, views in becoming a thought leader in this space and what drives you? What is that you want to contribute and build a community around?

Ricardo 3:17

Okay, great question. So, the driver behind it is because I'm completely passionate about business reformation through digital and all the challenge that we must change the way of think digital needs this kind of interaction and collaborative intelligence. So, I feel that we need to not only share but also to get a lot of new learning. I consider that I'm not a guru but I'm a super learner so, everyday I'm trying to...

Vijay 4:01

Yeah, super sharers are super learners actually, right? Sharing is learning nowadays and when you share something people respond and you will learn from that and you adjust your learning and knowledge.

Ricardo 4:11

Yeah, and here we have a new challenge because digital makes us think in a different way, operate in a different way and also measures the real impact of digital transformation. Because I also feel that many companies are talking about digital transformation. They have a lot of beliefs around digital transformation. And in our case, we are trying to really capture value from each use case. And not only in the Intelligent Automation space where it's more easy to do that.

Vijay 4:56

I've spoken to a lot of digital transformation leaders who are actually more focused on automation side of the journey. What's unique about you is you're also driving the knowledge side of the human enablement and empowerment in your organization. So how do you bring it all together? You're talking about front-office and back-office as well. So, you're not just focused on some back-office operations like most of the RPA companies focus on going and selling to back-office leaders especially in the shared service organizations, and trying to provide some FD savings. So, how are you driving some of the valuable lessons and success metrics that you drove, both on the knowledge side and the automation side.

Ricardo 5:41

Yeah, so, first of all, our purpose regarding RPA or Intelligent Automation in this business automation space is to try to have some operational elasticity.

Ricardo 5:59

As you know, our market in our specific industry is completely changing every day. So, this requirement around having operational elasticity is completely crucial when you have a business model that is changing with a high frequency, and also because we need to develop our business in a different way. It is a little bit different compared with some static industries. This is our main and our first purpose is having business automation like the service provider of operational elasticity.

Ricardo 6:51

But yes, this was a six-year experience a long time ago. And we also took a decision regarding the governance model about this problem. So, we have a federated model where our team develop a growing community of business users that are creating and maintaining their robots. We have non-tech or geeks from IT people working with RPA. We have different academic backgrounds - from economy, from management, from psychology, that

are our main champions regarding automation. And we are doing this only because the technology now has this ergonomy of providing business users the capacity with some training to deliver this kind of new deliverables from business. I think automation is a part of something that is bigger, not only in the technology space, but also in the continuous improvement or the operational excellence.

Vijay 8:15

Yeah, absolutely.

Ricardo 8:16

The other one is, I think that we need to think for the long term and try to manage the initial automation anxiety that many companies have in the very beginning with some quick wins from the first results. And in our case, in the very beginning, we were a little bit slow, because when you have a federated model, it is a little bit different compared to the centralized models where you could subcontract a lot of RPA developers bringing new live automations with hype base. But the interesting part is, after these years, we are contributing a lot for the beta. And also, this community of people is also growing every year. So, thinking for the long term, I think that is also important. And also, another lesson is to increase the value captured from each use case, and RPA is not enough. So, we need also to combine RPA with, for example, chatbots or AI or Process Mining.

Vijay 9:49

Right, right. Are you able to bring all these technologies together and solve some interesting use cases? And if you can share some high-level use cases normally requiring this kind of an ecosystem of technologies.? Any success stories there? How you were able to bring Intelligent Automation or a whole stack together.

Ricardo 10:08

Yeah. So, for example, the combination between chatbot with RPA has had a lot of success supporting the front office operations for contact centers, our branch offices. Our agents, they love this new experience that is completely different to interact with the complex operational system or a CRM system and things like that, because they are in a different way

of interacting with the technology, and that technology has a lot of power because behind the chatbot we have the RPA doing the interesting part.

Ricardo 10:52

For example, getting insights for the conversation, or even to do some repetitive work. The other one is when we connect process mining with RPA and here many companies talk only about okay, let's use process mining to identify new opportunities to automate some part of the process or the entire process. We are using process mining to identify some process exceptions. And with that operational alarms, we connect and we are bringing and delivering work to robots. So, we have robots that are handling in an automatic way the process exceptions, or for example use process mining to understand if the robots are doing the right job.

Vijay 11:49

Yeah, yeah. So, you're using process mining in an interesting way. It's actually not just for identifying opportunities but also to manage exceptions and govern robots. Automation has a linear value means you might automate 20% - 30% of the work, or 40% of the work, or 60% of the work, if you are too legacy in some of these processes. But after a certain point in time, it's all about people. How you are enabling people to really deliver more value and productivity. What are you doing on the knowledge side? And is there something that we're seeing happening between knowledge, AI, and automation coming together?

Ricardo 12:29

Yes, yes. Regarding that combination we are using for example we have some automation where the input is more complex to manage, because it could be not so structured, or more complex to analyze. I think that AI services could help a lot, for example, computer vision and doc understanding and things like that.

Ricardo 13:01

In our case, trying to understand if a specific photo confirms that the field service operator is using or not some kind of equipment. This kind of tasks today are typically by humans. But yes, I agree with you. This combination, even though I think that in that space, we have to be careful around the business case, because sometimes the business case could not be so

interesting. But we also need to be careful not only to create the solution, but the other part of maintaining or to train the algorithms and the quality is also a challenge.

Vijay 13:59

Absolutely. AI is not everybody's game and you need to have patience. You should be able to embrace experimental thinking with data, right? And sometimes you will find value sometimes you might not, it's like digging oil.   But I think it's a cultural difference in terms of how IT used to operate in a project driven mode. There was not much space for experimentation. But there are leaders, champions who are pioneering innovation and execution together. So, both of them have their own places too.

You mentioned about some of these technologies already - RPA, BPM, you mentioned process mining, chatbot, conversational AI. So, what do you think are the key pillar technologies next three to five years you'll see fundamentally changing or fundamentally driving the future of work?

Ricardo 14:48

RPA is a good base to running business from a starting point and chatbots combined with RPA, I think that could impact a lot...

Vijay 15:00

Value is much higher.

Ricardo 15:03

Yeah, much higher. In our case, we have less chatbot combined with RPA solutions but each solution captures a lot of value. AI combined with RPA has a capability to work more in some complex use cases. As I told you, we need to be careful about the business case and the long-term maintenance. And finally, process mining, I think it is giving us not only the vision about how we are running our business, how can we improve it and what is the real impact of digital transformation. Even though this technology is also evolving also to having some predictive capacity to understand not what is happening with our process, but what

will happen in our process, or even to simulate some specific scenarios. For example, if I want to automate some part of the process, which will be the impact of the end-to-end process, not only in a time-frame calculation but also regarding the all the resources that are required to execute that process.

Vijay 16:38

Awesome, awesome! No one technology is playing a center play right? So, this is a very important question that I ask all my super gurus:

Vijay 16:45

You've seen this for almost six years, right, you have seen the whole story evolving. Every year, the business case must be changing. All your automation has a shelf life. Some of the automation you must have even retired them, or they're not anymore relevant because IT systems must have changed, processes must have changed. Now, unlike an ERP system, or unlike a core application, automation has lesser shelf life. What is your opinion about it? And do you see a combination of AI and automation becoming an assistant for everyone? Do you see in your own organization? You envision in next three to five years that everybody will have an AI powered assistant helping them with the knowledge that they don't have and automating the work that they don't want to do?

Ricardo 17:30

Yeah, I think that the technology plays this role. So, we'll be augmented, the human capacity and that is a reality, not for the future, but even today. Basically, the non-routine workers will have the opportunity to execute more complex work in less time. So, technology will also create new jobs. And like we are seeing, so we have new roles, like machine learning storytellers, like new rules around automation.

Vijay 18:08

Data scientists, all these are the roles that we never heard of right, five years back. Now they are almost a de facto role in every organization. Digital Marketer, nobody was there before 10 years ago. I didn't mean to interrupt, but how do you see the assistant for everyone approach? Is this happening in your own organization?

Ricardo 18:27

Yeah. So yes, I believe that will happen. And not only having the personal virtual assistants, but also technology that will automatically recommend the bot to automate specific tasks. So, I think that we are not so far from having our operating system recommending as that Ricardo, in a specific day of your week, you are executing a task that is completely boring. So, here is the bot that you could play. And we will automate that task. So not only the individual assistance, because that is also a reality, but also some ways of automate tasks in an automatic way. Autonomous workforce.

Ricardo 19:34

But even though I think, and I don't know, if you want to touch in this point, because we also have a huge gap regarding the skills gap. Yeah,

Vijay 19:48

A huge skills gap, I actually wanted to touch on that is the reason that just not about automation and a lot of people don't have new age skills. So, AI has to play a role in assisting them with the knowledge, you know, plugging them the knowledge gap that they have, while also helping them automate the work, doing the work, right.

Ricardo 20:95

Yeah. And regarding the skills gap, I think the first gap is the digital literacy that we need to have in the top management executives. Because if they don't understand the role and the impact of digital, or this kind of new technology on business, that will narrow the decision making and compromise the future of the performance of the companies or organizations. But on the other hand, we also have a lot to do regarding the Re or Upskilling digital in our internal communities of expertise. And we need to have some programs to rescue people around digital because we know that we don't have enough students to answer the digital demands of organizations. So, we need to work a lot. And in our case, we also have a program that we are now piloting that is 'RPA Grow' where we have this pathway of developing digital skills in the robotics and automation area. And each person that is nominated to work with us, we will make this pathway and grow in the digital skills of robotics, for example.

Vijay 21:46

That's one of the key skills, everybody should be able to automate their work. Like everybody is going to handle the email. Everybody is managing their own meetings. And eventually, everybody should be able to manage their work and automate what they need to be, of course, those maybe it will take five years down the line, maybe everybody should have their own assistant where they can show and tell what they want to do it and it will do it for them, or it will suggest some of them it will do it by yourself.

Ricardo 22:11

Like, Excel.

Vijay 22:15

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely like that. And I always believe in a world, that's no-code tool. You know, no code app. So, I think automation should become something similar. Talking to it, it will learn and do it for you.

Ricardo 22:29

Yeah.

Vijay 22:30

Great. That brings you to a fun round, rapid fire round. I'll ask you three simple questions, and you got to quickly answer them.

Ricardo 22:40

Okay.

Vijay 22:40

Okay, so favorite app

Ricardo 22:44

Oh, app? Favorite app...Revolut

Vijay 22:47

What is that?

Ricardo 22:51

Yeah, it's a finance one.

So, another one and one that is a little bit different. I don't know if you know, that is Patreon.

Vijay 23:03

Patreon, I heard about it.

Ricardo 23:05

Yeah, Patreon is a way of sharing knowledge in a community is also interesting.

Vijay 23:13

Interesting. Interesting. I'll definitely check it out. The next one - who is the favorite thought leader that you follow?

Ricardo 23:23

Simon Sinek

Vijay 23:25

Easy one! I should have asked apart from Simon Sinek. So, you did well there. Then favorite book?

Ricardo 23:36

I am trying to not share one from Simon Sinek. Because, like, yeah, this is very interesting. The Infinite Game is very interesting.

Vijay 23:52

It's a very nice book, actually. Yeah, it's worth being read. So, you did well, actually, it didn't take long time. So, I asked every guru an important question towards the end. It's the same question. And it's important in the sense of that...

Ricardo 24:07

Sorry, sorry but you could try to replace another interesting, good book could be one book that I was a co-author that is a 'Process Mining in Action' from Dr. Lars Reinkemeyer if you want to go to more technical approach.

Vijay 24:28

Yeah. And I think it's biased.

Ricardo 24:32

Yeah.

Vijay 24:35

 I will put this on the record. Thanks, Ricardo.

Vijay 24:42

One advice that you can give to people or kids, who are entering the workforce today. It's not going to be the same that when we entered. It was one single career path that you choose and can grow in that - you take IT, you choose finance, capital markets, choose any area and then you go into that. So, what is one advice that you will give for the kids who are entering the workforce in 2021, to be future ready?

Ricardo 25:09

Yeah. First of all, I think that we need to share with this young generation that guys you are so lucky because you could make all the difference. You could also impact more and more in less time compared with my generation. So, now you have different tools and different power in your hands. But regarding the advice, I think that you will need to breathe digital because that will be the new survival mode. So do not underestimate technology or think that technology is only for IT people or for a geek people. And even better if you have digital skills, you'll be a better professional in every industry. So that is my advice.

Vijay 26:14

Fantastic. Think digital, have a domain experience, think digital, whichever domain you are in, will be a key code still going forward. It is now a differentiator. But very soon it's going to

be expected core skills for every industry, every domain, or courses. That's a great advice. Thanks, Ricardo.

Vijay 26:52

It was fun and it's great having you here. You're one of the, I would say, veterans in implementing RPA and some of these technologies. Great having you, sharing your insights in our Unboxing Future of Work series. Thank you very much.

Ricardo 26:52

Thank you also for this opportunity.

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