



Unboxing Future of Work

Episode 1: Unboxing Intelligent Automation in an Enterprise

[Audio Transcript]

Vijay 0:31

Good morning, all of you. I have today with me Shail Khiyara who is an executive and thought leader who has spent the last half decade in building the Intelligent Automation market. As somewhat I would call him a unicorn in the interior innovation and digital transformation industry. He has served as a CMO and chief customer officer at three leading automation firms helping shape the industry. Currently, he's an Executive in Residence at a leading venture firm in Silicon Valley. He continues to invest, write about disruptive automation technologies, while helping organizations in their automation journey. Shail, welcome to my inaugural podcast episode of Unboxing Future of Work. Very excited to have you today.

Shail Khiyara 1:11

Vijay, thank you for this opportunity to kick off the first in what will be an exciting series of Unboxing Future of Work. Thank you for having me here today.

Vijay 1:21

It's a pleasure. Shail, before we get started and unbox one of the most talked-about technology today AI & automation. Can you give a bit of background about yourself where you're from, your schooling, career?

Shail Khiyara 1:32

Yeah, happy to do that. I'm a global citizen. I've lived in four countries worked in 10, with some of the world's leading brands and enterprise software, market sectors, including storage, security, HR, SaaS, automation.

I was born in Bombay, India, now called Mumbai, and have lived in various parts of the world before moving to the US many years ago and did my education in engineering and an MBA on the East Coast and have transformed from designing buildings and bridges which is what I used to do, to storytelling and marketing and becoming a GM and chief executive. I think you've described my last half decade well, here, which has been followed by a long career of building tech companies.

Vijay 2:22

That's amazing. Being from Mumbai, being a global citizen, and on such a varied background and experience and now, I think you have one of the only worlds statuses being a unicorn working with Automation Anywhere, Blue Prism, UiPath, the top three leading firms. I don't think I could recollect anybody who has done that, in a C-level position, shaping the industry. Very, very excited to have you and I'm sure the audience is going to get a lot from you in the next 10 minutes. We've put some really interesting questions, discussions for, you to take your inputs and share your experiences in this industry. So, let me start off with very first question.

Vijay 2:59

In the future of work, when you look at it from 10 years ago, where we stood and where we stand, in 2020 and 2021, especially after pandemic. Technologies like AI automation, blockchain, all these are becoming mainstream along with cloud. What do you think, where is the future? After pandemic? Where is it going? What do you see in the next three years happening? And how are these technologies shaping up the world in general, and especially enterprises and the way they will work going forward?

Shail Khiyara 3:28

Yeah, that's an interesting question, VJ. It certainly requires a crystal ball of thinking of where we see work going over the next half-decade or so, you know if we compared to 10 years ago, 10 years ago would be 2011. And that's when HR SaaS was crossing the chasm and becoming mainstream. I remember well, I was the chief marketing officer at TALEO. And we were talking about talent, intelligence, the ability to have a platform, to know your people, and grow your business, which was a tagline before we got acquired by Oracle in 2012. The iPhone was just four years old, 10 years ago. Compute storage network, we're converging, and a company called Nutanix was born. Hadoop was showing incredible promise, cloud era had adopted, it was about, three to four years old then 10 years ago. Amidst this, we're a company called Texas solutions, renamed itself to Automation Anywhere 10 years ago. Blue Prism was about a decade old 10 years ago and RPA was not mainstream, just coined at that time. So how different is work from 10 years ago? Well, I think with the pace of tech evolution that we've seen, it has increased massively but I don't see a massive difference in how work was being done 10 years ago. In the last year alone, that has completely changed with a pendant. But the concept of work as we define it is still the same. The automation era, where our hiring approaches, still the same roles are more or less still the same. Innovation over the last 10 years and has been exemplary. But in my humble opinion, has been focused on disruption to cause accidents versus disruption to innovate. And what I mean by that is, you see an emergence of solutions, disruptive solutions that tend to overlap each other, you certainly see it in the automation space, where feature functionality differentiation is a challenge. Or you look at the marketing automation stack of 8500 companies that exist, in that stack today.

Shail Khiyara 5:56

As I was saying, this last one year has certainly changed the way we work. And I see more of a need to bring things together rather than best of breed, multiple best of breed solutions out there. We go through these cycles of innovation every decade or so and I see the emergence of platforms that brings the best of breed solutions together where you have one dashboard as an employee to do my work versus dozens of tools.

Shail Khiyara 6:24

I also see roles emerging like Chief Digital Officer, which is more mainstream now than it was 10 years ago, Chief Customer Officer roles which is mainstream or Chief Growth Officer roles that are coming up. I feel that the bravado that is exhibited in markets at times exhibited as boldness, will disappear. And we'll start to see true bold moves like Apple or Nike or Duff have done in the recent past to revive their brains. And these bold moves are about stating a purpose of the company. So, a renewed focus on purpose, empathy, convergence of solutions are trends that I see over the next half decade.

Vijay 7:08

Amazing. And coming from TALEO, which is one of the leading talent management solutions to now in the automation space, it looks like a full circle where you are coming to empathy, purpose, which is very human-centric in nature. And I think automation, taking a personified human-centric approach, and, taking next three-five years is all about bringing those core factors into the mainstream, not just looking at the technology and tools.

Vijay 7:39

So, today's focus is about unboxing Intelligent Automation or sometimes also called as digital workforce. So, can you little bit talk about being a veteran who has seen this industry from its infancy to going through its own hype cycle, adoption cycle. If you're talking to a CXO, who was the CFO or a CIO or who are head of a shared services or contact center, if they have to start and scale their Intelligent Automation journey, who have actually started their robotic automation journey, five years or maybe 10 years down the line. Now, with the advent of AI becoming mainstream and internal automation becoming the focus area, how do you really CXO would unbox Intelligent Automation in their enterprise? What are some of the key aspects of CXO would think about starting and scaling into the automation journey in their organization?

Shail Khiyara 8:34

I think the fundamental promise of automation was to connect legacy and modern systems that don't talk to each other. I think that promise is getting diluted. In the enterprise automation market, as it has evolved to become a collection of multiple different technologies that are not integrated in sort of make up the concept of and I call it a concept, as opposed to a technology, the concept of hyper automation.

Shail Khiyara 8:34

So many of these technologies are much like the monster in the movie, we now have a Franken-stack of tech that CXOs wrestle with, where the risk of integration and automation as a whole, falls on the customer themselves. And as a CXO in an organization, you know, you want to focus on how automation is going to drive value, and how automation is going to be accepted in your organization, that sort of see-saw of value and expectations inside an organization are so critically important that you can't avoid focusing on them together. Change Management is a critical aspect of driving automation success in your organization.

Shail Khiyara 8:38

So, there are multiple measures of success. And we moved from FTP, reduction in automation to derivative metrics. I think there are several sets of technologies that come together low-code, no-code, IBTM capabilities, your microservices, integrating process mining, chatbots, AI/ML, IDP - intelligent document processing, all in one platform, to provide a UI based automation or API integration through one single solution is certainly the path that I'm seeing many customers aspire towards. And this approach can significantly reduce the total cost of ownership, and in fact, allows organizations to build flexible hyper apps that are allowing them to accelerate their innovation.

Shail Khiyara 10:48

I see that CXOs have a very interesting opportunity ahead of them. And considering these multiple tools that are available, as opposed to just making RPA the center of the universe.

Vijay 11:03

Exactly. I think that brings us to our next point about where do you see Robotic Process Automation evolving in the fast growing Intelligent Automation space, right, when you talk about CXOs, first taking a leap, and you're talking about, a cohesive set of technologies, you can call it the cognitive full stack if I can say that, bringing a combination of ability to engage, ability to extract and look at documents and extract data, ability to and also do the work actions, automate the actions. If you can bring all that into a cohesive, cognitive full stack, where do you see RPA fitting in and you already mentioned about RPA is definitely not the center of it, but , it seems to be so for most of the CX folks today because that's where they start the journey. So, what's your view about where RPA is going to come in, in this whole space and how CXOs should look at Intelligent Automation from a different lens, not just from an RPA point of view?

Shail Khiyara 12:01

See, I think there is a broad awareness of RPA in the market. It is valuable technology, there is no doubt about it. And I think many CXOs are familiar with it, and or using it inside of their organization. But, if you look at the adoption, and you look at the fast pace of innovation around other technologies that I mentioned earlier, the unit economics of RPA indicated a move down the commodity path.

Shail Khiyara 12:31

You look at the price disruption caused by Microsoft, you know, the bundling of RPA with SAP products, the outcome-based pricing efforts by various system integrators. You look at the experimentation and usage-based pricing, the average deal size in the market, which is still fairly low compared to enterprise software deals. You look at the adoption of RPA within an

organization, which is far from a bot for every person. 85% of the customers still have less than five bots. And many of these customers have more than five employees.

Shail Khiyara 13:05

So, when you look at all of that it makes you wonder about the move of RPA Donna commodity pad and a higher order solution that is required by the customer in order to, to make their automation successful. And native automation built with various technologies on a single platform, adding more value to the organization versus RPA as a standalone. So, I see a future where RPA is, is one component of a much larger step.

Vijay 13:34

Absolutely. And it comes with its own benefits about time and cost, but at the same time, it has its own limitations. When you don't get from the... Exactly. And when you look at the overall Intelligent Automation value framework, I'm sure it's one of the key components, but there's so much around AI and, micro services, APIs and low code that actually is going to become much more, doing all this together. Right. Great, great.

Shail Khiyara 13:35

Absolutely.

Vijay 14:02

So, that brings us to the topic that why or what not to do when you're actually starting and scaling your Intelligent Automation journey. What could be the top three things that you don't heed to the myths or hypes of the automation that people talk about, you know, about, FTEs, about number of bots, there are so many, highly talked about myths and hypes?

Vijay 14:25

But what I would like to take a little bit different perspective out of you. What are the top three things CXOs should not be doing when you're actually starting your and scaling your Intelligent Automation journey. And if you have a view about it I'm sure you're talking to a lot of CXOs. And they must be sharing so many experiences, learnings, and if you can bring some of those in terms of what are the top 3 things you should not be doing?

Shail Khiyara 14:46

Well, I would say, you know, start, when you're embarking on your automation journey, or any new disruptive technology journey, start with the people. A common myth about RPA is fuelled by a fear of losing audience that RPA will replace jobs. There's a lot of press around automation reducing jobs. But RPA is not meant to replace the human workforce. But it's meant to complement it. Essentially what it does, it gives you the arms and the legs, it does not give you the thinking, which is where AI comes in, but it certainly gives you the arms and legs.

Shail Khiyara 15:18

So, from a CXO perspective, you asked about what should they be thinking about, what should they not be doing. I would say that, you know, don't underestimate the cultural transformation that is required in your organization. Don't let the exciting nature, the early exciting nature of doing automation be considered as a ticket to have adoption inside your organization.

Shail Khiyara 15:43

You need to drive concentrated cultural change inside of your organization to help people understand what the bots can do and what they cannot do. Because there's clearly a distinction of many things that cannot be done through RPA. And it's important to drive that cultural change in the organization, to give the comfort and drive, what I call the automation

emotion, inside the organization to be positive. If the automation emotion in the organization is not positive, it's very likely that your automation program could fail. And it all starts with people and cultural transformation.

Shail Khiyara 16:16

So that's one thing, I would say the other is that, there is a common myth that, you know, RPA can do for business what cloud did for IT, as a systematic push to make RPA the center of the universe and everything around it labelled as hyper automation. It's very comical because these are collection of technologies that are not integrated with each other.

Shail Khiyara 16:42

So as a CXO understand the risk profile of connecting RPA with process mining chatbots, machine learning, AI, intelligent document processing, and where does that risk lie? In most instances in the market, the risk lies with the customer. The risk of making the automation, successful deriving the metrics from the automation, as well as integrating this set of automation technologies. So, it's important for CXOs to understand that risk, and understand where it lies and figure out if there's a shared risk dynamic with yourself and the vendor.

Shail Khiyara 17:19

I think that the other prevailing myth is that RPA is easy. You know, if you're considering doing automation in the right manner that it scales, it requires a CoE, which is Center of Excellence, which requires, you know, hiring talent, training them requires a change management program that I mentioned, a clear path to defining and increasing your automation value, and having the ability to orchestrate RPA with other needed automation technologies. It is not just about building a bot and releasing it inside your organization, maybe so if you're, you know, just doing task automation.

Shail Khiyara 17:58

So really understanding the convergence of these automation technologies is critically important. And in my humble opinion, an RPA centric architecture and complete reliance on an RPA centric architecture may not get you there. So that's another aspect of really understanding what does it take to make automation successful? The prevailing myth that it's just easy build a bot release it needs to be examined.

Vijay 18:26

Absolutely, if I can summarize. So, the first one is about don't ignore people, right? Always think people first when you're embarking on the journey.

Vijay 18:36

Second, there is an inherent risk involved in bringing a set of technologies together in an intelligent automation journey. And, factoring that risk, share that risk, and have right partners and approach, right, and don't ignore the risk.

Vijay 18:50

Then the third one is about, if you're trying to bring all these technologies together, it's not going to be easy. So, don't think it's easy. It's going to be a serious enterprise technology. You've got to have a serious approach to it, where you can find a center of excellence team, we can form a core team in business and IT and bring them together. Don't think it's just one more small tool for a small team. It's an enterprise grade technology. And, you got to take it that way and plan for it and build the business and technology infrastructure around it. If I can summarize into these three, I think that they should not be doing.

Shail Khiyara 18:51

I think you summarized it very well.

Vijay 19:30

Great. So now, the fun part Shail!

Shail Khiyara 19:33

Oh, there's a fun part. Okay.

Vijay 19:35

We don't want to keep it really serious. This is, this is fun for CXOs. But you know, you bring so much...

Shail Khiyara 19:41

I can talk about Intelligent Automation all day and night. But...

Vijay 19:48

Yeah, you bring so much diverse experience. And being from Mumbai, I can really relate to where you were from and where you've gone. And the way the kind of industry you've been pioneering, it's amazing to see you. So actually, if you can talk about one leader/boss, you were really inspired with and you learned a lot from him or her. Who would that be?

Shail Khiyara 20:11

If you look at my background Vijay, as I was describing earlier, as you know, I work in multiple industries that I've transitioned from what I was trained to do many years ago and building bridges and structures to marketing and running tech companies. I am a big believer that learning can come from anywhere. It can come from your boss, it can come from a colleague,

it can come from someone in the boiler room, someone in the field, it can come from your customer, your partner, your investor

, and I have had the blessing of learning from various people. And what is exciting for me is really collating all those learnings and experiences and asking the right questions and solving problems. So, I don't have one individual that I can share with you that I've learned a lot at work. It has really been a collection of learnings from various books. And if you keep an open mind, and learning mindset, every moment is a learning experience.

Vijay 21:09

So, you're saying everybody that you work with or learn something good or bad.

Shail Khiyara 21:12

I am saying that. Yes.

Vijay 21:16

Okay. So, this is our inaugural podcast episode, and who would you suggest or who do you follow? Or who do you see as a peer being a thought leader in this industry should I invite here for my next step?

Shail Khiyara 21:30

That is a tough one. There are several out there. There are influencers with funny insights like Ralph. There are influencers with no nonsense insights like Phil. There are leading thinkers like Francis, Ian, Pascal... There are several. And that's what makes it exciting.

Vijay 21:50

Yeah, I think they are. They all have different perspectives and trying to share this industry in their own ways. I'm sure, you know, you're doing it in your own way. So now, let's get to the rapid fire. Are you ready for the rapid fire?

Shail Khiyara 22:03

I think so. I don't know what you're gonna ask me. But I'm ready.

Vijay 22:06

I'll keep it simple for you. So, your favorite book.

Shail Khiyara 22:10

Favorite book. There are two actually, that I'm in the process of going through at the moment.

Shail Khiyara 22:18

The one that I'm reading is called 'Thinking in Bets'. This is by Annie Duke. It's all about making smart decisions when you don't have all the facts. It's based on this notion that - Life is poker, not chess.

Shail Khiyara 22:33

And the other interesting book, which I'm re-reading is narrative economics by Robert Shiller. Robert Shiller was one of my professors years ago, and he was the one who predicted the of the housing crisis in the US. And this book Narrative Economics is about how stories drive economic events and the power of viral stories. RPA is one example of it that we just talked about.

Vijay 22:59

Amazing. You just shared with me two book goals now.

Shail Khiyara 23:03

There we go.

Vijay 23:05

So, what's your personal app that you like, or you spend the most of time on your mobile?

Shail Khiyara 23:11

Evernote. I find it very easy to track things, search for things, keep it keep everything in one place. And then of course the app that we're on, Zoom.

Vijay 23:23

Yeah, everybody's favorite, nowadays.

Shail Khiyara 23:25

Everybody's favorite.

Vijay 23:27

I do keep Google Keep and I think Microsoft Teams is catching up too, so we'll see that it's a tough competition in the conferencing space.

Shail Khiyara 23:37

What was the first one Google Keep?

Vijay 23:40

Yeah, Google Keep, it's Google's Notes. But it works across the devices. And pretty much an Evernote kind of experience.

Shail Khiyara 23:49

Okay.

Vijay 23:49

The next one, what is the work App? I think you mentioned about it. If it's not Zoom, what is the professional app that you use a lot? It could be any service in the finance space, bank...

Shail Khiyara 24:02

You know the app that I use the most. You can call it a professional app, the personal app is Audible. And I think most of the audience probably will. And I use Audible, a significant amount. In fact, it allows me to read two, three books or listen to two three books at the same time, which is exciting.

Vijay 24:22

Yeah, absolutely. And the interesting part about Audible is you keep saying you read the books while you're hearing the books. That's what confuses me. And people haven't started saying, yes, I'm hearing books. I'm not reading.

Shail Khiyara 24:35

That is very much true. Yes.

Vijay 24:39

Well, so that's great. Shail thanks very much. I think, there are great insights for different audience here, people and the CXOs, who are starting unboxing, their Intelligent Automation journey, and the business leaders how to start and scale their journeys, what to do, what not to do.

Vijay 24:58

So one last final advice for the millennials or the Gen Z who are actually now peaking in their careers or, you know, joining the next generation workforce. What would be your advice and how the future of work for them would be and when. One or two key skills that they should be focusing on if you can, you know, coming from Intelligent Automation industry, being a thought leader, what would be your advice to these next generation youngsters who are joining the workforce?

Shail Khiyara 25:29

I would say you know, always be learning. Life is Poker, not chess. So, innovation and life take non-linear paths often. Have fun at what you're doing. These are the three that I would highlight in the top ones.

Vijay 25:43

So here it comes from Shail Khiyara - Life is Poker, guys. Thank you very much Shail. Thanks for being my inaugural host. It was fun. Great to have you today.

Shail Khiyara 25:52

Vijay, thank you for having me here. And all the best, it's going to be incredible series that you're embarking on.

Vijay 25:58

Absolutely. Thank you very much.