Providers go big for automation

2023 Healthcare Provider Automation Survey

Hospitals and health systems see plenty of opportunity to drive productivity gains through automation. But lack of strategy and automation silos could shortchange returns from these efforts.

Executive summary

What can tackle labor shortages, reduce burnout, improve patient care and take out costs along the way? Automation, according to our inaugural survey of hospitals and healthcare systems. More than **80%** of the executive, IT and business respondents in a new survey sponsored by Cognizant said automation and its benefits are important to the success and continued health of their organizations.

The survey defined automation in healthcare as "the use of innovation, systems and technologies to make processes and procedures more streamlined and efficient." By those measures, respondents reported their automation projects and priorities range from revenue cycle management and contact centers to streamlining care management.

While there's clearly a big appetite for automation and agreement about the importance of automation, healthcare providers aren't following a strategic, enterprise approach. This conclusion is reflected in the contradictory responses to questions about who's driving automation. C-suite executives claim that credit, but IT and business leaders say they're the primary forces behind automation. In addition, IT's automation efforts are largely unrecognized by other departments, while IT seems unaware of automation in some lines of business. Finally, all report using generative AI regularly, even though more than half of the institutions reported they have little to no automation underway.

These are just some of the key findings from our inaugural survey of 300 C-suite, IT and operational leaders at hospitals and health systems. We commissioned the survey to understand what's driving automation among healthcare providers, where it's taking hold and what obstacles are in its way. The survey revealed the following:

- **Healthcare providers have a wide array of automation projects underway—suggesting their hunger for automation may be outpacing strategy and governance**. Most (76%) respondents said automation is critical for their organizations. Yet C-suite, IT and business leaders often have different perspectives on automation priorities, benefits and challenges. Respondents view their departments as most likely to benefit from automation and see themselves as the leading advocates of automation in their organization.

This signals a lack of governance across automation efforts, which could spell higher costs and lower ROI from duplicated efforts and failure to align with technology roadmaps.

- **Improving productivity is the most powerful driver behind automation efforts; in complementary findings, respondents indicated they expect automation will take some burden off employees and clinicians and thereby reduce burnout**. Providers have already implemented automation throughout their revenue cycle operations, in IT and in care management. They also point to these areas as continued priorities for automation. It's probably not coincidental that these are areas in which talent is difficult to find and retain.

- **Fear about how patients, clinicians and employees will react to automation is an obstacle in automation's path, yet those fears are likely overblown as satisfaction with completed automation projects is high**. Respondents say concerns about whether staff and patients will support and use automation are barriers to implementing it. Yet most hospitals and health systems that have completed automation projects report that these projects met or exceeded their goals. Further, respondents say generative AI is helping them to be more productive and are adopting the technology at a surprising pace.

We discuss these and related findings in more detail in the following report. We also offer recommendations about how hospitals and health systems can develop enterprise-level automation strategies. With appropriate governance and clear objectives, hospitals and health systems can deploy automation projects that solve major pain points, improve workflow productivity across departments, and reduce costs while delivering the intelligent, frictionless experiences patients, clinicians and employees are demanding.
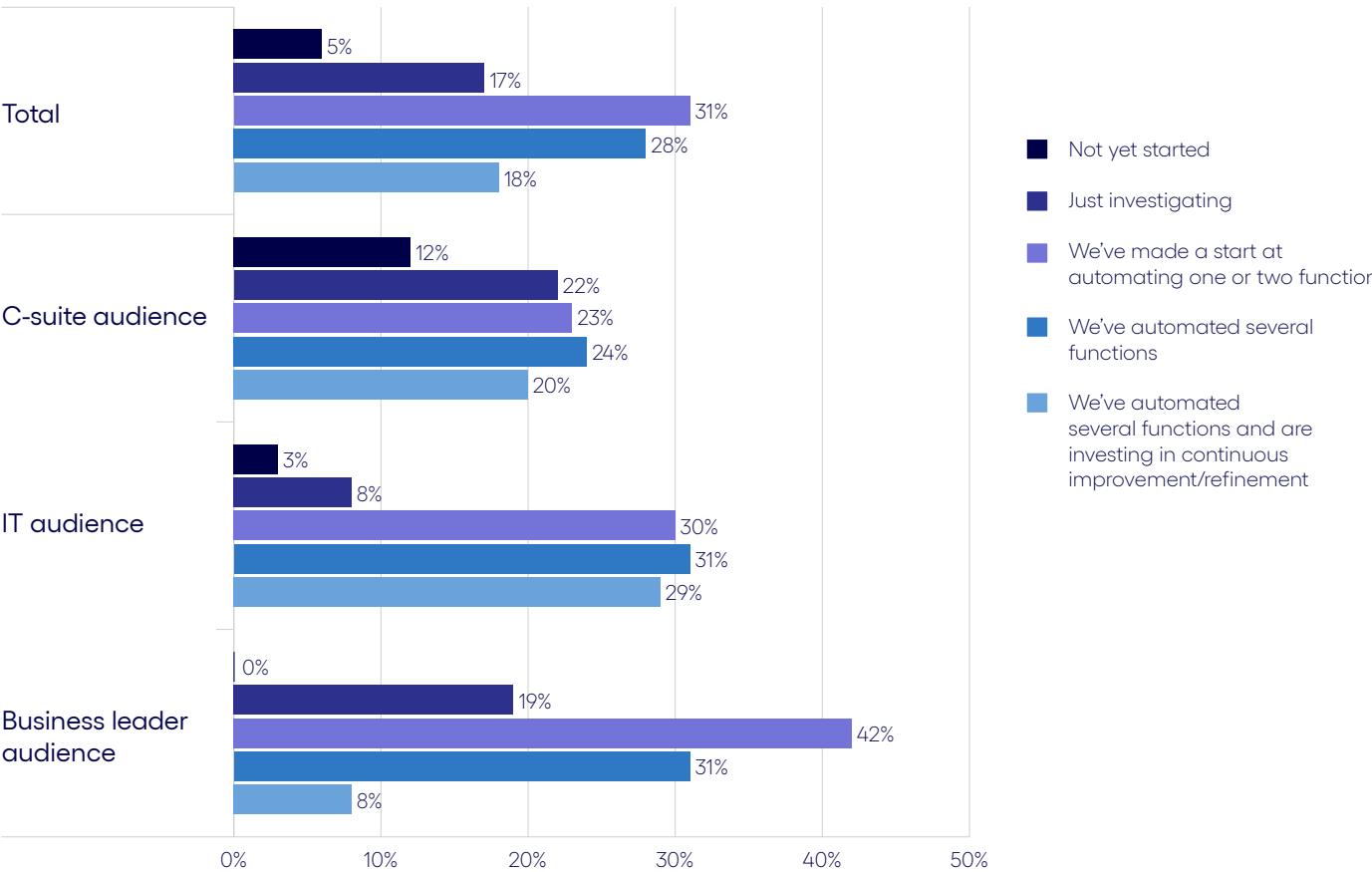
Key finding #1

Seventy-six percent of respondents said automation is important to the future of their organizations; another 6% said their organizations won't survive without it. Yet 53% of the hospitals and health systems surveyed have not implemented much automation.

Just **18%** of respondents have comprehensive automation programs that they are now refining. That said, **75%** of respondents reported increasing automation budgets.

Q: **How important do you believe automation is to the future of your organization?**

	Total	Audience		
		C-suite audience	IT audience	Business leader audience
Doesn't really have an impact	6%	7%	8%	5%
Can help a little	13%	16%	8%	13%
Important	61%	58%	63%	62%
Urgent	15%	14%	16%	14%
We won't survive without automation	6%	5%	6%	6%

Q: **Where is your organization on the journey to automation?**

- Not yet started
- Just investigating
- We've made a start at automating one or two functions
- We've automated several functions
- We've automated several functions and are investing in continuous improvement/refinement

Total
- 5%
- 17%
- 31%
- 28%
- 18%

C-suite audience
- 12%
- 22%
- 23%
- 24%
- 20%

IT audience
- 3%
- 8%
- 30%
- 31%
- 29%

Business leader audience
- 0%
- 19%
- 42%
- 31%
- 8%

Our insights:

Take advantage of healthcare consumers' increased digital adoption rates

Research shows healthcare consumers adopted technology from their healthcare service providers at much higher rates during the pandemic. Providers that launched automation during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as self-service kiosks and mobile check-in apps, can build on those efforts. Hospitals and systems that have not introduced patient-facing automation are playing catch-up.

Set automation goals that focus on improving stakeholder experiences

During the pandemic, hospitals and healthcare systems accelerated new technology adoption because of a sharp focus on how to deliver care safely. An equally clear goal today should be delivering frictionless, intelligent experiences to patients and clinicians.

Prioritize automation projects that will contribute to enterprise objectives

Automation technology ranges from robotic process automation (RPA) that replicates human keystrokes to advanced applications involving machine learning algorithms and AI. Automation applications exist for virtually every area of a health system. The C-suite, IT and business leaders must collaborate to set priorities and coordinate automation initiatives to prevent automation anarchy.

Of software bots and smart algorithms

RPA and AI are complementary yet very different forms of automation. RPA is process-driven and can only follow rules defined by users. RPA software bots, for example, can record a human's keystrokes, then execute them automatically, without human intervention–around the clock if necessary. By contrast, a machine learning algorithm, a form of AI, can learn from data, generate insights and make if/then decisions.

RPA applications lay a solid foundation for more intelligent and comprehensive AI solutions, improving data quality and scalability by delivering more accurate, consistent and secure processes.
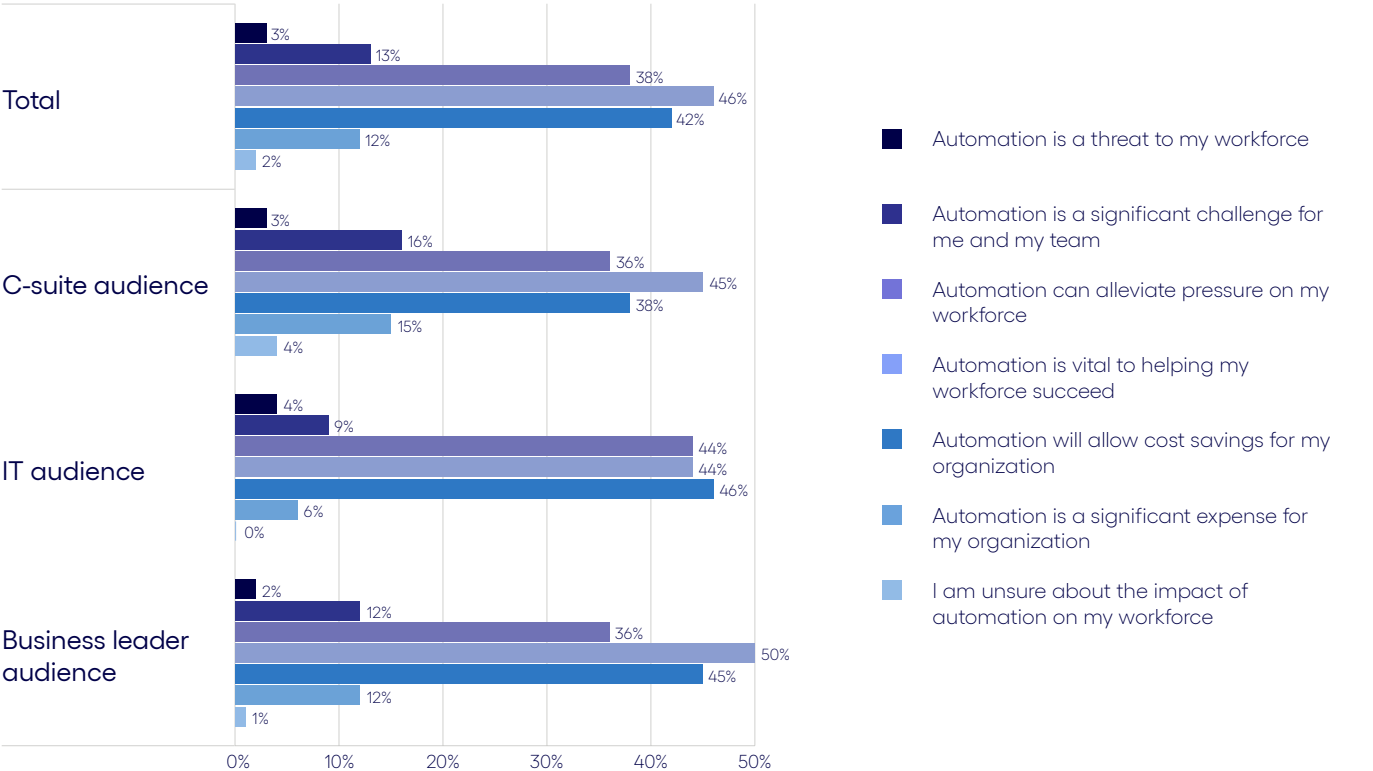
Key finding #2

Increased productivity is the top expected return from automation investments.

Almost **60%** of respondents said they would calculate productivity improvements as the leading measure of automation's success. Other important ROI metrics complement productivity improvements, including reduced recruitment costs (**24%**) and improved patient satisfaction scoring (**35%**). Providers also expect automation will help their workforce succeed (**46%**) while alleviating pressure on employees (**38%**). Interestingly, few respondents in any cohort view automation as a threat to their staff.

Q: **Which of these factors (if any) would contribute to your internal calculations of ROI for automation initiatives?**

	Total	Audience		
		C-suite audience	IT audience	Business leader audience
Increased productivity	58%	49%	70%	58%
Infrastructure cost reductions	38%	37%	43%	36%
Effect on patient satisfaction scoring	35%	34%	34%	37%
Impact on revenue acquisition	34%	35%	36%	32%
Sustainability targets	34%	38%	34%	28%
Impact on network leakage	27%	27%	25%	29%
Calculated value of avoided penalties	26%	29%	26%	22%
Reduction in staffing/recruitment costs	24%	25%	23%	23%

Q: **What is your general perception toward automation within your organization?**

Legend:
- Automation is a threat to my workforce
- Automation is a significant challenge for me and my team
- Automation can alleviate pressure on my workforce
- Automation is vital to helping my workforce succeed
- Automation will allow cost savings for my organization
- Automation is a significant expense for my organization
- I am unsure about the impact of automation on my workforce

Total: 3%, 13%, 38%, 46%, 42%, 12%, 2%
C-suite audience: 3%, 16%, 36%, 45%, 38%, 15%, 4%
IT audience: 4%, 9%, 44%, 44%, 46%, 6%, 0%
Business leader audience: 2%, 12%, 36%, 50%, 45%, 12%, 1%

Q: What is the most important reason for automation within your organization?

Rank 1 - Summary Table

	Total	Audience		
		C-suite audience	IT audience	Business leader audience
Relieving staffing pressure	19%	21%	16%	18%
Improving patient care/patient experience	14%	19%	8%	12%
Improving clinical workflow	14%	8%	11%	23%
Improving employee experience and reducing clinician burnout	14%	16%	15%	11%
Taking cost out of the system	10%	9%	14%	7%
Gaining a competitive advantage over others in my market	10%	6%	11%	13%
Measures to reduce bad debt	8%	10%	8%	6%
Hardening operations against labor disruptions like COVID-19	6%	4%	10%	4%

Our insights:

Automation can help improve job satisfaction and employee retention

Industry talent shortages range from RCM professionals to nurses and clinicians and are only forecast to get worse. Automation can take on much of the administrative burden—rote, rules-based and repetitive work—that contributes to job dissatisfaction and burnout. Automation solutions can work 24/7 to improve productivity while freeing clinicians and employees to work at the top of their abilities.

Address cost pressures

Shifting payer mixes as boomers age into Medicare are hurting hospital revenues, making cost containment a survival strategy. Automation enables healthcare systems to avoid and reduce expenditures. For instance, greater job satisfaction can lead to less turnover and reduced recruiting costs. Automating routine revenue activities can create time for revenue professionals to manage more complex appeals. Care managers can spend more time with patients to improve adherence and reduce readmissions when records and assessments are automated.

Improve stakeholder experiences

Automation can eliminate redundant data entry, improve clinical information flows, streamline patient referrals and discharges, and more. Creating a seamless experience from healthcare's many parts and pieces requires oversight and governance, however. Automating without cleaning up bad processes is likely to worsen workflow issues, not solve them.

Key finding #3

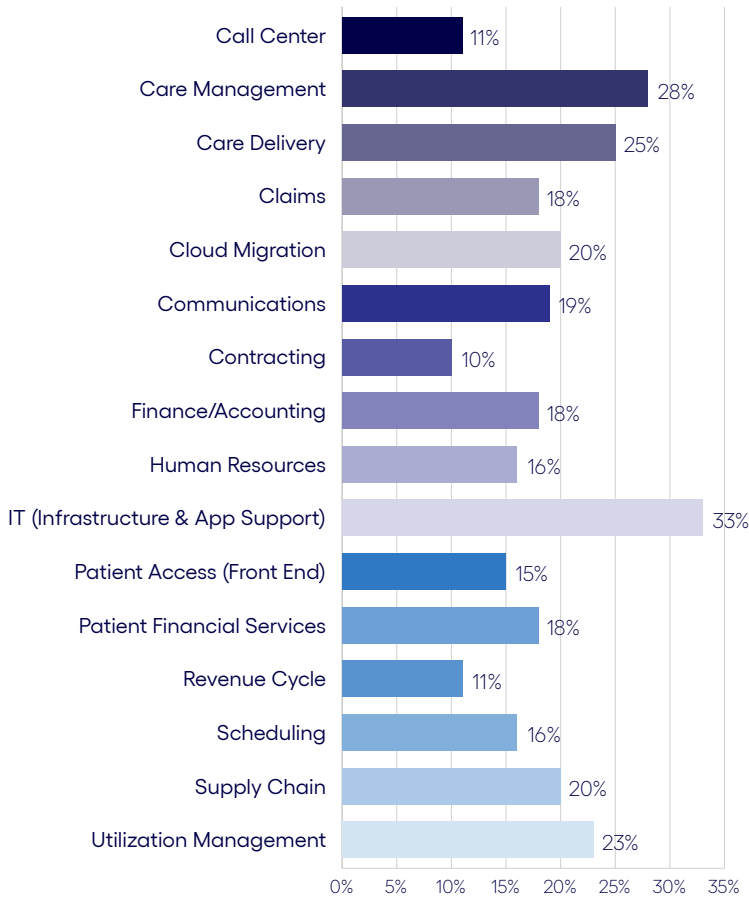## Providers say care management and care delivery are automation priorities.

Almost **25%** of respondents said they have some automation within care management; **15%** say the same for care delivery. IT leads in automation, with **31%** reporting automation in use for IT infrastructure and support and **18%** for automating cloud migration delivery.

Providers also rank care management and care delivery among the top three areas for future automation. Twenty-two percent of respondents have already automated care management—the highest automation percentage except for IT. Among operational business unit respondents, the number is **30%**.

Q: **For which functions have you already applied automation (if any)?**

	Total	Audience		
		C-suite audience	IT audience	Business leader audience
IT (Infrastructure & App Support)	31%	28%	59%	14%
Care Management	22%	18%	20%	30%
Finance/Accounting	21%	18%	24%	21%
Human Resources	20%	21%	19%	19%
Scheduling	19%	11%	25%	24%
Cloud Migration	18%	13%	30%	15%
Utilization Management	18%	15%	33%	11%
Communications	17%	16%	18%	18%
Patient Access (Front End)	17%	16%	14%	22%
Patient Financial Services	17%	17%	13%	22%
Supply Chain	16%	18%	18%	12%
Care Delivery	15%	18%	11%	15%
Call Center	14%	13%	15%	14%
Claims	13%	11%	13%	17%
Revenue Cycle	11%	11%	9%	14%
Contracting	6%	4%	8%	8%
None	22%	32%	10%	19%

Q: Rank the top three functions that present the greatest opportunities for automation.

Function	%
Call Center	11%
Care Management	28%
Care Delivery	25%
Claims	18%
Cloud Migration	20%
Communications	19%
Contracting	10%
Finance/Accounting	18%
Human Resources	16%
IT (Infrastructure & App Support)	33%
Patient Access (Front End)	15%
Patient Financial Services	18%
Revenue Cycle	11%
Scheduling	16%
Supply Chain	20%
Utilization Management	23%

Our insights:

Automating care management functions can help offset nursing shortages that could hurt "payvider" operations

Healthcare systems operating health insurance businesses can enable existing care management nurses to accomplish more in less time. Automation can queue the appropriate assessment documents for complex cases so a care manager can immediately engage the patient instead of searching for the assessment tool. Then automated solutions can generate the appropriate care plan based on the patient's responses. The care manager then can ensure the patient understands the plan, thereby improving adherence.

Care delivery

Automation solutions that directly involve patient care must enhance patient and clinician engagement. Creating these solutions will require significant collaboration and change management activities to ensure clinical buy-in and continued use.

An expansive view of the revenue cycle

Survey respondents' current use of automation and their priorities for future automation are well distributed across a wide range of activities. Yet when considering revenue cycle in combination with its various component functions—patient access, patient financial services, scheduling and claims—an interesting insight emerges. Combining and deduplicating these functions reveals that 48% of respondents have already engaged in overall revenue cycle automation projects, while 50% would like to complete further automation projects. In fact, 59% of respondents rank one of these revenue cycle functions in their top three automation priorities.

Providers are facing a shortage of revenue professionals to help them comply with price transparency and other regulations. Further, activities at the front of the revenue cycle, including offering patients convenient automated registration and payment options and streamlining prior authorizations, greatly influence how efficiently a hospital will collect the revenue owed to it.

Finally, today's healthcare consumers—aka patients—expect seamless, intelligent payment processes, from understanding their costs upfront to paying for them later. Automating the revenue cycle from start to finish—and providers indicate its components are high on their list for more automation—should result in a better experience for patients while improving revenue realization for providers.

Key finding #4

IT has implemented automation in critical areas such as cloud migration and IT infrastructure and support, but this work is going unrecognized by executive management and business leaders.

Among IT leaders, **59%** report automating aspects of infrastructure and IT support. Yet only **28%** of C-suite executives and just **14%** of other business leaders say IT support and infrastructure have been automated.

Similarly, **30%** of IT leaders say they have automated cloud migration activities; just **13%** of C-suite and **15%** of business leaders recognize this activity.

On the flip side, IT leaders may not be aware of automation underway in business functions. Among business leaders, **30%** report having some care management automation, compared to **20%** of IT leaders reporting the same. IT leaders' recognition of efforts to automate the revenue cycle, patient access and patient financial services also lag the reports of business leaders in those areas.

Q: **For which functions have you already applied automation (if any)?**

- C-suite audience
- IT audience
- Business leader audience
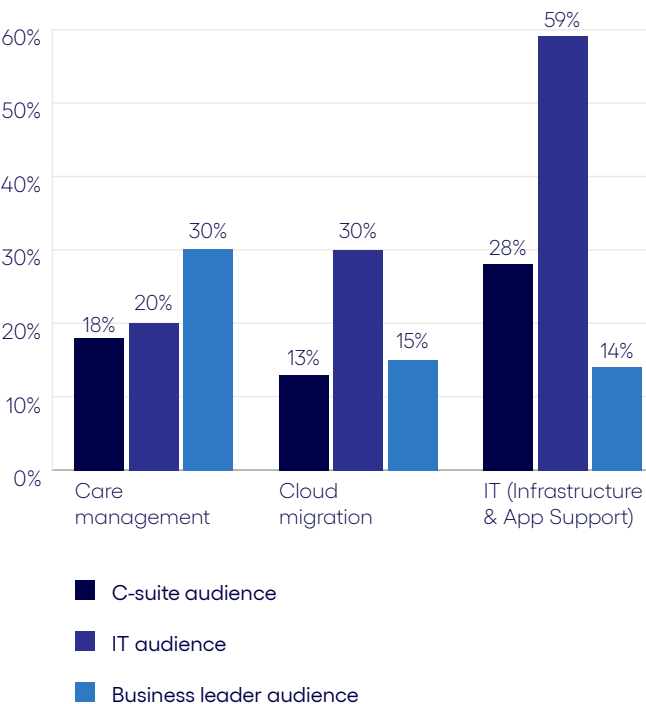
Our insights:

Don't overlook routine automation and its benefits

It's considered best practice for IT organizations to automate password resets, data back-ups, minor application updates, help desk services and other IT services and support. IT leaders may need to remind C-suite and business leaders of the value of these efforts. IT leaders also should be prepared to show the business value of other seemingly IT-centric automation projects, such as automatic scaling of cloud-based applications.

Collaboration is required for optimal results from automation

Business and IT leaders must work together to ensure apps and features meet business objectives and organizational priorities. That IT and business leaders apparently are unaware of each other's automation work suggests this collaboration is lacking.

Break down silos to build cultural acceptance of automation

Automation done in silos limits enterprise familiarity with automation's benefits and stifles ideas about complementary applications and best automation uses. C-suite leaders have the responsibility here to champion the enterprise automation vision and encourage and reward projects that align with it.

Duplicated costs

That IT apparently is unaware of automation underway in business units suggests a growing shadow IT organization. When lines of business invest in technology independent of IT, that raises the likelihood of redundant efforts, lax data governance and compliance, and duplicated expenses. It also brings up long-term concerns about how well applications in silos will align with the technology roadmaps of major systems, such as electronic health records. A short-term gain may cause real headaches and greater expense in the longer term.

Key finding #5

Hospital and health system leaders have different and sometimes conflicting perspectives on automation efforts within their organization.

Respondents generally see their function or line of business as most likely to benefit from automation. C-suite, IT leaders and business leaders all tend to see themselves as the leading advocates of automation in their organization. Encouragingly, this tendency to view oneself as an automation champion aligns with the vital role respondents say automation plays in their continued survival. Respondents are racing to be the leader.

Q: **Who within your organization is driving initiatives to invest in automation?**

	Audience		
	C-suite audience	**IT audience**	**Business leader audience**
C-suite	51%	50%	37%
IT team	37%	74%	43%
Administrative functions (RCM, HR, F&A)	25%	26%	39%
Clinical Team	28%	21%	37%
Research Team	30%	24%	31%
Operational business units	33%	35%	32%
None of the above	6%	3%	6%

Our insights:

Educate leaders about cross-department benefits to automation

While it's understandable that every department prioritizes its own automation needs, holistic views of a process and its pain points can help leaders pinpoint what to automate "upstream" to improve downstream results. Capturing data about a patient's prior authorization status and sharing this via a software bot with revenue and care management systems can improve health outcomes, the patient's experience, clinician satisfaction and revenue realization.

Know vendors' technology roadmaps

Understanding when a key vendor will roll out an automated feature is important to deciding whether to invest in a software bot or other solution. The greater the number of homegrown or third-party automation applications bolted onto an older, closed core system, the more difficult that system will be to maintain, upgrade or even replace. Providers then may find themselves with multiple mini-automations but unable to take advantage of next-gen features in modern core platforms.

A temporary bot sometimes makes sense

RPA's software bots are relatively easy to implement and can be the right solution for acute situations and bottlenecks hurting financial performance and/or patient outcomes. The ideal situation is for the bot to fill the functional gap until the feature is available in a core system.

Data management requires an enterprise-wide strategy

When different lines of business all see themselves in the automation lead, who's minding the data stores? Data management isn't just an IT concern. Accurate, unbiased data is the foundation for continuing automation, including all AI- and machine learning-based efforts. Data privacy and security compliance requirements also must be met. Yet just 24% of C-suite executives expressed concern about data handling compared to 38% of IT leaders and 36% of business leaders.
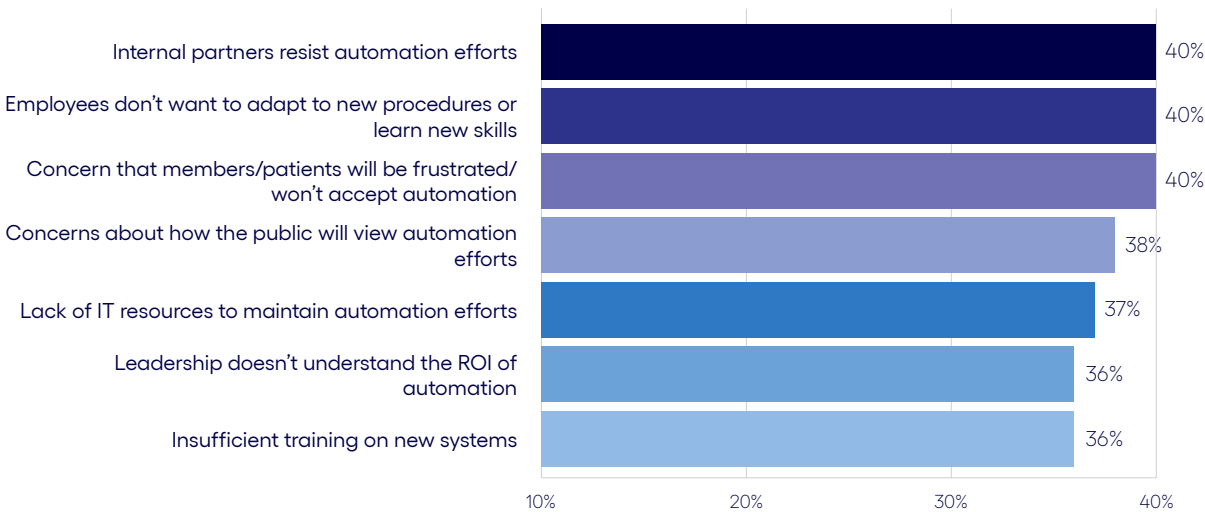
Key finding #6

Concern about whether the public, clinicians and patients will support automation is a major obstacle to securing funding for automation initiatives.

Providers report resistance to automation from internal partners (**40%**), employee unwillingness to adapt to new procedures or learn new skills (**40%**), and concern about how patients will react to automation (**40%**) are major obstacles to securing funding for automation projects. Right behind those barriers are worries about how the public will perceive automation (**38%**).

As projects get under way, challenges become more practical, focusing instead on logistical considerations. Out-of-date technology infrastructure, cost of deployment, change management concerns and data handling concerns dominate at this stage.

Q: **Rank the top three difficulties preventing you from securing funding for automation efforts (if any)?**

Difficulty	Percentage
Internal partners resist automation efforts	40%
Employees don't want to adapt to new procedures or learn new skills	40%
Concern that members/patients will be frustrated/won't accept automation	40%
Concerns about how the public will view automation efforts	38%
Lack of IT resources to maintain automation efforts	37%
Leadership doesn't understand the ROI of automation	36%
Insufficient training on new systems	36%

Q: What are the top three greatest barriers to automation within your organization (if any)?

Rank 1/2/3 - Summary Table

	Total	Audience		
		C-suite audience	IT audience	Business leader audience
Cost of deployment (budgetary constraints)	34%	33%	30%	38%
Lack of IT talent to undertake major automation projects	34%	32%	41%	30%
Change management challenges	32%	25%	41%	33%
Concerns regarding data handling	32%	24%	38%	36%
Difficulty aligning new systems with existing infrastructure	29%	34%	21%	28%
Technology infrastructure isn't current enough	25%	29%	21%	23%
Clinical or patient risk is too high	24%	23%	26%	24%
Contracts don't incentivize automation	20%	20%	24%	18%
Physicians/clinicians won't support automation	18%	23%	16%	14%
Patients won't support automation	18%	21%	18%	15%

Q: What is the greatest difficulty you have faced in implementing automation?

Rank 1 - Summary Table

	Total	Audience		
		C-suite audience	IT audience	Business leader audience
Cost is greater than anticipated	10%	8%	13%	9%
Resistance to automation from administrative staff	10%	7%	8%	15%
Automation solutions promised functionality the solution doesn't deliver	8%	8%	10%	8%
Insufficient training for staff	8%	11%	10%	4%
Difficulty handling large amounts of data	7%	8%	10%	5%
Resistance to automation from clinical staff	6%	7%	3%	7%
Vendor support is less than promised	5%	3%	5%	6%
Performance improvement is less than anticipated	5%	5%	9%	3%
Analytics are insufficient to report on performance	5%	3%	8%	6%
Resistance to automation from patients	5%	3%	5%	7%
Complications in implementation limit functionality	4%	4%	8%	1%

Our insights:

Emphasize automation that supports more and warmer engagement

Many of the concerns about whether patients and staff will accept automation may stem from experiences with rolling out electronic medical records. Many patients felt unhappy that keyboards had captured their physicians' attention. But automation that retrieves data, generates reports and reduces data entry can create time for clinicians to engage more meaningfully with patients. That should increase satisfaction for everyone.

Aim for frictionless experiences

Patients increasingly are "trained" to expect intelligent, frictionless experiences by the many other service providers with whom they interact. Automation that clearly benefits them, such as not having to repeat demographic data or fill out similar forms at each touchpoint, should meet with their approval.

Address concerns of care teams

Caregivers have legitimate concerns about the consequences of faulty data and conclusions in automated systems. Clinicians should be key participants in collaborating on solutions to these issues to ultimately secure their support for, and confidence in, automated procedures and processes.

Expect shifting challenges as projects get underway

Once funding is secured and projects are underway, new challenges will emerge. Plan ahead by reviewing technology infrastructure and data handling implications to identify potential policy adjustments or technology upgrades that may become necessary well in advance of their need. Careful budgeting and change management planning can proactively address these challenges before they become significant. Proper preparation can mitigate future challenges.
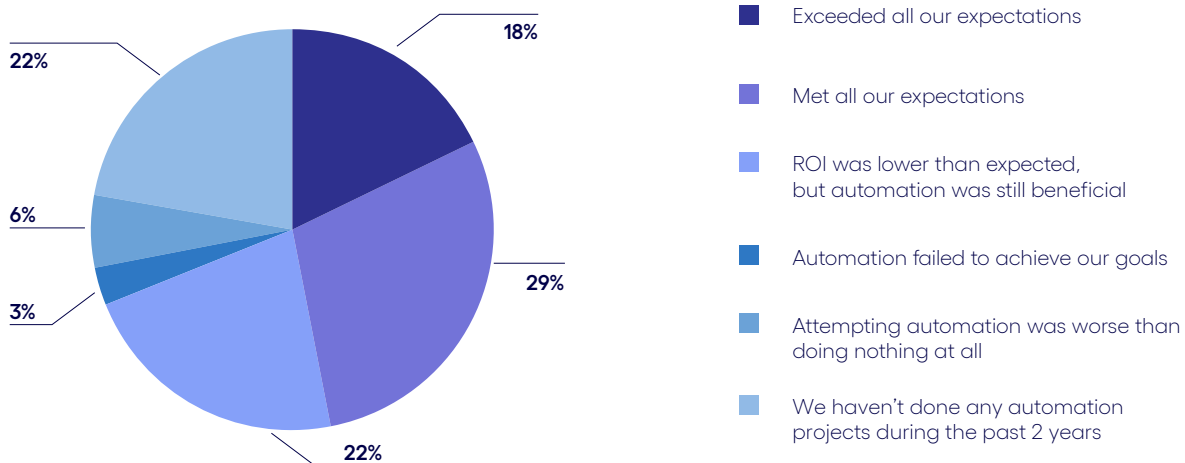
Key finding #7

Hospitals and health systems that have completed automation projects generally are pleased with their returns.

Projects met or exceeded the expectations of **47%** of respondents, while **22%** said the automation was beneficial even if returns were lower than expected.

Q: **How happy are you with any automation projects you've implemented in the past two years?**

Pie chart percentages: 18%, 29%, 22%, 3%, 6%, 22%

Legend:
- Exceeded all our expectations
- Met all our expectations
- ROI was lower than expected, but automation was still beneficial
- Automation failed to achieve our goals
- Attempting automation was worse than doing nothing at all
- We haven't done any automation projects during the past 2 years

Our insights:

Concerns about lack of automation support hurting returns appears to be largely unfounded

Despite the challenges with fostering acceptance of automation and other concerns, providers who have completed automation projects show automation is worth the effort.

Results change perceptions and drive demand

About 75% of all respondents, regardless of title, say automation is important. These responses appear to have been validated by real-world experience with automation projects. Project successes help whet the appetite for still more automation and help reduce resistance.
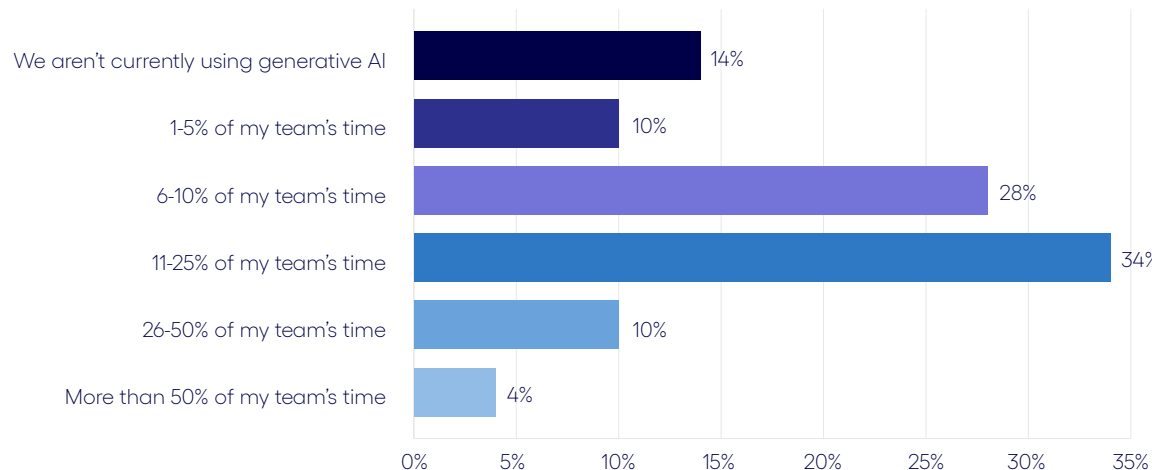
Key finding #8

Hospitals and health systems are experimenting with generative AI, with 96% of respondents using it for research and to simplify repetitive tasks.

Providers see promise for generative AI across the enterprise. Despite the relatively recent public availability of generative AI, hospital and health system leaders are using it and have a high demand for more applications. All respondents rank care management as a key area for the technology. A third of C-suite executives also want to see generative AI in their finance and accounting organizations.

Q: **How are you currently using generative AI (such as ChatGPT) in your role?**

	Total	Audience		
		C-suite audience	IT audience	Business leader audience
I use generative AI for research purposes	40%	47%	45%	29%
I use generative AI to craft internal and/or external communications	24%	23%	31%	19%
I use generative AI to simplify some individual, repetitive tasks	29%	31%	25%	30%
Generative AI validates my team's work	22%	23%	19%	23%
Generative AI has allowed my team to shift to addressing only exceptions	18%	18%	15%	20%
Generative AI has allowed my team to eliminate certain tasks	22%	24%	18%	23%
I'm not using generative AI	1%	-	-	4%
I'm not currently using generative AI but plan to in the next year	3%	1%	3%	5%
I'm not sure if we're using generative AI	<1%	-	-	1%

Q: **If you are using generative AI models (such as ChatGPT), how much time does it save your team each week?**

Category	Value
We aren't currently using generative AI	14%
1-5% of my team's time	10%
6-10% of my team's time	28%
11-25% of my team's time	34%
26-50% of my team's time	10%
More than 50% of my team's time	4%

Q: **What business areas do you feel could benefit from generative AI (such as ChatGPT) at your organization?**

	Total	Audience		
		C-suite audience	IT audience	Business leader audience
Care Management	27%	23%	23%	35%
IT (Infrastructure and App Support)	26%	23%	46%	15%
Communications	25%	26%	21%	27%
Care Delivery	22%	19%	19%	27%
Finance/Accounting	22%	33%	14%	16%
Scheduling	19%	18%	13%	24%
Call Center	18%	16%	21%	17%
Claims	18%	18%	15%	22%
Patient Financial Services	16%	19%	15%	12%
Supply Chain	16%	13%	21%	14%
Utilization Management	15%	13%	16%	17%
Patient Access (Front End)	14%	13%	14%	17%
Cloud Migration	13%	14%	15%	11%
Human Resources	13%	13%	15%	12%
Contracting	12%	11%	15%	11%
Revenue Cycle	12%	13%	8%	16%

Our insights:

Respondents see the extensive value of generative AI

All cohorts of respondents are leveraging generative AI in their day-to-day work lives, particularly as it relates to functions like care management, care delivery and finance/accounting. Organizations should lean into these opportunities to alleviate some of their talent, cost and resource pressures.

Generative AI requires strong governance

Swift adoption of generative AI across the hospital is evidence of the technology's promise. C-suite executives should make certain the organization has adopted and is following ethical AI policies and that there is clear visibility into exactly who is using generative AI and for what purposes.

Seek out healthcare-specific generative AI to avoid safety and ethical issues

Many open generative AI models such as ChatGPT have been trained on internet content, the clinical accuracy of which can be questionable. Generative AI models built exclusively for healthcare, however, are designed to account for the privacy and safety concerns hospitals and health systems face and can improve the technology's accuracy and safety.

Include generative AI as part of an automation strategy

Generative AI is a powerful tool with unique use cases that can transform how many functions operate. Strategically employed with existing automation— such as machine learning, robotic process automation, and natural language processing, which still have powerful uses for healthcare—it can amplify and expand the value and efficiency of a hospital or health system's operations.

Best practices for amplifying the value of automation

With most hospital and health systems having limited experience with automation, they have a window of opportunity to develop a holistic strategy that ultimately will save time, take out costs, and deliver better operational and patient health outcomes. Here are some foundational no-regrets actions and investments that will benefit providers no matter their level of automation:

1. Create an automation center of excellence (CoE)

The CoE becomes the central clearinghouse for automation efforts. It includes stakeholders from throughout the organization so it can provide a bird's eye view of enterprise automation projects. The CoE's job is to provide governance, find complementary projects, avoid wasteful redundancy, and ensure reusable bots, code and applications.

The automation CoE also helps accomplish the following:

- Identifying the most important functional solutions that the hospital/health system needs
- Defining clear goals, objectives and KPIs that the leadership team and stakeholders can own
- Measuring the project, timelines, costs, goals and the KPIs to their conclusion
- Championing change management programs
- Managing talent management and securing resources with appropriate skillsets and capabilities

2. Implement comprehensive automation governance

The CoE also can be the clearinghouse for data management and ethical AI policies as well as prioritize automation investments that align with the enterprise vision. It should track automation applications in the hospital system's landscape to help catalog its dependencies. That vital information enables smooth system upgrades or their unwinding and replacement.

3. Identify low-hanging fruit for quick wins from initial automation efforts

Rote, repetitive and rules-based operations are typically good candidates for RPA, but providers should also think about how much change the new process would require from staff. Layering in machine learning can extend the functionality of a simple solution. It's important to assess whether the desired functions already are on vendor roadmaps or are going unused in existing software and tools already implemented.

4. Budget for change management

Formal change management programs will help project leaders understand and prepare for the impact of automation on stakeholders. When processes and procedures change, employees and clinicians worry about changes to their roles, how they will carry out their responsibilities and the impact on their job security. These can add up to resistance. Addressing and mitigating these issues requires a disciplined, holistic strategy featuring extensive communication and feedback opportunities.

5. Develop a comprehensive omnichannel communications plan

Healthcare providers should anticipate and address patient and public concerns long before an automation initiative goes live. Educating patients and the public about procedural changes and their benefits and encouraging their feedback should help improve their acceptance and support.

6. Find trusted partners

No individual health system will have all the technical expertise necessary to implement automation in every function or line of business. The range of automation technologies—RPA, machine learning, NLP, generative AI—can make defining an effective strategy difficult. Find partners who have experience with the full range of automation tools, along with deep healthcare expertise, to streamline strategic development and implementation and help deliver expected returns.

Conclusion

Automation options for hospitals and health systems run the gamut from sweeping solutions that cover multiple operations to applications that address a single pain point. Whether a provider attempts a major initiative or chooses bots that emulate human keystrokes, their choices should be guided by a clear enterprise automation vision and strategy with defined objectives. With these in place, plus no-regrets investments, providers will be in a strong position to gain the productivity benefits they expect automation to deliver.

Want to learn how Cognizant can help with your automation efforts? Contact us

Methodology

The inaugural Cognizant 2023 Healthcare Provider Automation Survey asked 300 hospital and health system executives questions designed to help us understand their attitudes about, investment in and use of various forms of automation, including generative AI. The survey was conducted in early 2023.

The 300 executives included the following:

120 C-Suite
CEO, COO, CFO

80 IT
CIO, VP IT, VP Automation

100 Business Leaders
CNO, CMO, VP of:

Revenue Cycle	Financial Services	Contracting
Clinical Operations	Supply Chain	Finance
Collections	Claims	Accounting
Patient Access	Care Management	Human Resources
Patient Financial Services	Care Delivery	

Organization size
by employee count

8%
12%
9%
18%
34%
19%

- ■ Less than 100
- ■ 100-149
- ■ 150-199
- ■ 200-499
- ■ 500-1000
- ■ 1000+
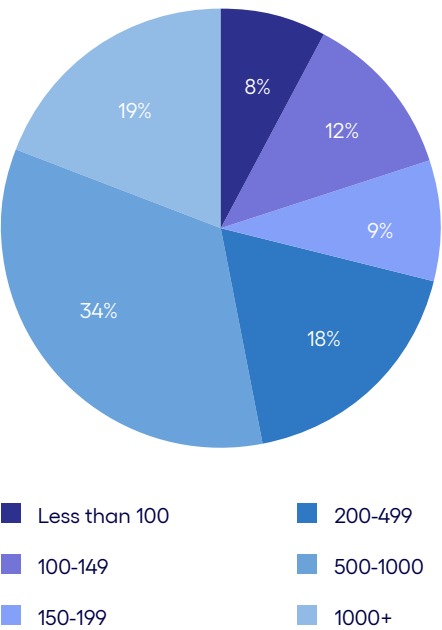
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