**How automation improves policing operations to better serve the community**

With 2.8 million customers, West Midlands Police is the second-largest police force in the United Kingdom. To stop crime, safeguard communities, and assist those in need, every officer, employee, and software robot has a role to play. West Midlands Police, which responds to more than 2,000 emergency calls daily, is a vital part of its neighbourhood. Software robots assist with a variety of back-office tasks, freeing up police officers to spend more time defending the public and less time in the office.

Law enforcement and paperwork must be carefully balanced. To address this issue, West Midlands Police has implemented software robots across the organization to free up time for staff to concentrate on the work that truly matters—protecting the community.

Robots have been implemented throughout shared services, IT and digital, and operational policing for the past three years to grease the wheels of the force, boosting efficiency and experience for both citizens and personnel alike.

**Introducing automation to the workforce**

The West Midlands Police team, which is establishing the Centre for Applied Automation, was eager to assuage employee reservations right away. A top choice for early automation was the management of shift pattern adjustments in response to demands for flexible working. The team used a bot to automate the process, relieving three teams of labour and cutting processing time from 10 business days to 90 minutes.

More recently, as part of the Chief Constable's roadshow, the team organised a "race the robots" competition to inform the larger workforce and find new automation candidates. With each bot given a name, being in the HR system, and being searchable in the corporate directory, a lot of effort was also taken to humanize automation. Employees are thus urged to think of the bots as an extension of their current teams and ultimately as colleagues who can enhance their experience.

Top-down support was essential given the stringent budgeting and governance in the public sector. "The Chief Constable realized the value of automation from the start and that it was preferable to purchase this capability rather than outsource it if we were going to continue keeping bots. This has helped our team to rapidly grow our project while also ensuring that any current automations continue to function as intended, says Gregory.

The Centre for Applied Automation has plans to deploy enthusiastic RPA users as ambassadors for the technology among their peers in the future. By taking on some of the initial triage work and process documentation that would otherwise consume a lot of team resources, these business users may offer their in-depth understanding of processes.

**Emphasizing on policing rather than bureaucracy**

To provide officers more time in the day and enhance capacity in underserved regions, West Midlands Police started expanding automation into operational policing operations in 2019. This was done after securing employee and executive buy-in. Without automation, officers would have had to manually input witness statements into the appropriate system by returning to base, which might take up to an hour each trip. An officer only needs to fill out a digital statement in an app now, and a robot will download the document locally, look up the case in the database, and attach any files that are required. 23,000 statements have been processed since June 2020, saving 3,000 hours of officer processing time in addition to the countless hours and gasoline that have been saved by avoiding the need to return to base.

Additionally, the procedure is much less susceptible to mistakes made by humans. The robot adheres to the same strict procedures every time, ensuring that only the proper information is transmitted with the Crown Prosecution Service rather than taking the chance of unintentionally uploading the incorrect portion of the document to the system. The proportion of paperwork and policing is beginning to change because of bots currently employed in operational policing as well as back-office shared service duties.

**Countering human bias**

The use of software robots in recruitment-related activities will also aid in the fight against unconscious bias. Robots can be employed in vetting, for instance, to not only speed up the process but also to level the playing field and guarantee that every candidate has the same experience.  The screening procedure is susceptible to some unintentional prejudice.

Due to the numerous spelling variations entered into the system, candidates with names from underrepresented ethnic origins may unintentionally be subjected to repeated searches. We need to make amends for this wrong, says Gregory.  These initial screening procedures are carried out automatically by a robot, protecting candidates from unintentional prejudice.

**The value of thoughtful consideration**

Even if each automation journey will call for a unique strategy, West Midlands Police has so far been successful thanks to thoughtful choices and a well-thought-out plan.Gregory believes that while placing a centre of excellence, the same care should be taken (CoE). "We placed our Centre for Applied Automation within IT and Digital with great thought and consideration. This enables us to avoid any conflicts with IT, easily set up our infrastructure, take responsibility for improvements and upkeep, and examine all of the choices for a process instead of automating it right away when it might not be the greatest fit, according to him.

**Conclusion**

West Midlands Police was able to overcome resistance and start revolutionizing operational efficiency because of these considerations and assessments, which also had a huge number of side effects. The force will continue introducing bots into more departments, enlisting more personnel in the process, and experimenting with ancillary technologies in the hopes that they would eventually grant the bots more autonomy. The same objective—improving operations to better serve the community West Midlands Police must protect—remains with all ongoing and upcoming projects.