

Best Practices for Creating a Shared-Services Infrastructure for BPM & SOA

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The main benefits of shared-services are cost savings and rapid deployment of new applications by leveraging access to centralized expertise and infrastructure.

Despite these benefits, many companies have been slow to move toward a shared-services infrastructure because they are confused about how to do so.

This article examines what a shared-services infrastructure is, who should consider evolving to one, and best practices for launching such an initiative.

Introduction: What is a shared-services infrastructure and who needs one?

Shared-services is a form of “internal outsourcing” that allows enterprises to achieve considerable cost benefits by utilizing a single group within the organization to create and manage specific IT services. The main benefits of shared-services are cost savings and rapid deployment of new applications by leveraging access to centralized expertise and infrastructure. Despite these benefits, many companies have been slow to move toward a shared-services infrastructure because they are confused about how to do so. This article examines what a shared-services infrastructure is, who should consider evolving to one, and best practices for launching such an initiative.

Increasingly, large enterprises with multiple lines of business are under pressure to consolidate infrastructure, reduce costs, and ensure governance across the enterprise. In such companies, however, most business units have their own IT groups and run their own core processes, resulting in duplicated effort and hence additional costs to develop and maintain applications. A shared-services group works to centralize business processes and IT infrastructure in order to reduce this duplication.

Business processes that benefit several lines of business (e.g., human resources, training, finance, accounts payable, and accounts receivable) are perfect candidates for being moved to a shared-services group. Furthermore, as the number of applications hosted by the group grows, common themes and patterns emerge, enabling the group to identify still more processes that can be encapsulated as “services” and reused within other applications. For instance, an “employee background check process” might be a widely used service that the shared-services group hosts and maintains. By leveraging the “reusable service,” the shared-services group can develop and deploy new applications faster and at less cost.

Moving to a shared-services infrastructure requires an investment of time and money. To maximize the opportunity for a successful initiative, adopt and adhere to the following best practices.

The Best Practices

1. Find a Champion. Find a high-level executive with credibility and enthusiasm to help fund a Center of Excellence (COE) and back an initial project. Choose a project that will deliver the greatest value in the shortest time. Look for lower investment, lower risk of failure, less business disruption, faster time to deployment, and faster time to proving benefits. Success with the first application is paramount to being able to deploy more applications.

2. Establish Goals. Do not bite off more than you can chew. While it’s important to choose a development tool that addresses every phase of the process lifecycle, it should be flexible enough to let you choose the phases you want to focus on initially. For instance, you should have the option to establish your initial goals around capturing and refining the business process model; or you might want to expand your initial goals to include the automation of this captured process while leaving the analysis and process optimization for a later date.

3. Select the Right BPM Offering. Some of the key criteria to consider while evaluating a BPM offering include the company’s financial strength and stability,

its adherence to standards so you do not get locked into a single platform, the breadth of functionality that the product offers, and pricing. “BPM” means different things to different people, so determine what it means to you. Do you need a solution that lets people participate in the process and determine the course of the process flow based on the decisions they make? Does the solution easily let you intervene to escalate or reroute tasks when there is an exception to your established process? Or do you need a solution that can manage millions of transactions with very little human involvement? Every vendor has a sweet spot. Choose wisely. Test-drive what you see in a demonstration; make sure that what you see is really what you get. And choose a BPM vendor that is committed to being your long-term partner.

4. Set up a BPM Center of Excellence. A Center of Excellence needs to bring together the right blend of business and IT expertise from across the enterprise to ensure alignment of ideas, define what can be shared, and prioritize projects. Trained professionals on business process modeling as well as technical integration are required. Always start off a new initiative with a use case. This helps you define the business process model, an excellent starting point to estimate the integration effort and associated costs to deploy the application. A typical BPM Center of Excellence should be equipped to cover all the phases of developing, running, and maintaining the application, as well as providing business stakeholders with regular product updates and periodic updates on new capabilities within the Center of Excellence.

5. Design with SOA in Mind. Crafting the architecture so it can support multiple applications is key to a shared-services environment. Identify reusable components for subsequent applications. If you take this approach, you are well on your way to setting the stage for an SOA. Refrain from using proprietary technology. It will cost more in the long run.

6. Develop a Charge-Back Model. A pragmatic charge-back system to the business units is crucial for the long-term survival of the shared-services group. There are different ways of doing this – for instance, one approach would be to monitor CPU utilization for a particular application to estimate the charge back to the business unit. Remember to factor in the cost of the Centre of Excellence’s expertise as well as the associated infrastructure for the BPM application when establishing your charge-back model.

7. Engage the Lines of Business. One of the biggest challenges to establishing and sustaining a shared-services group within an organization is getting business



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units to cede IT power to a centralized function. The lines of business often fear they are now at the mercy of the shared-services group for new development and product upgrades. Alleviate these fears by engaging with business units on a regular basis to update them on the enhancements to the shared-services infrastructure and the Center of Excellence.

8. Show the Benefits and Sell, Sell, Sell. Develop Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with your business partners to measure success. The more shared-services infrastructure is used, the lower the costs involved in operating it and the greater the benefits to the enterprise. So spread the word. Get executive buy-in for wide-spread deployment. Find opportunities internal and external to your organization to gain more visibility for your shared-services group and the benefits it provides.

The benefits of BPM through a shared-services infrastructure are clear. With the right people, the right BPM partner, the right solution architecture, and the right charge-back model, as well as executive backing and the will to sell, sell, sell the concept throughout your enterprise, your BPM shared-services group will be ready for take-off.

For more information on the Fujitsu Interstage offerings for BPM and SOA, visit us at www.fujitsu.com/interstage, or contact us through Interstage@us.fujitsu.com.

The Best Practices

Find a Champion

- Find a high-level executive with credibility and enthusiasm to help fund a Center of Excellence (COE) and back the initial project.

Establish Goals

- Be realistic and stay flexible.

Select the Right BPM Offering

- Consider your company's financial strength, stability, and its adherence to standards so you do not get locked into a single platform.

Set up a BPM Center of Excellence

- A Center of Excellence needs to bring together the right blend of business and IT expertise to ensure alignment of ideas, define what can be shared, and prioritize projects.

Design with SOA in Mind

- Craft the architecture so it can support multiple applications. Identify reusable components for subsequent applications.

Develop a Charge-Back Model

- A pragmatic charge-back system to the business units is crucial for the long-term survival of the shared-services group.

Engage the Lines of Business

- Engage with business units on a regular basis to update them on the enhancements to the shared-services infrastructure and the Center of Excellence.

Show the Benefits and Sell, Sell, Sell

- Develop Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with your business partners to measure success.



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