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RETHINKING THE CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR THE MODERN ENTERPRISE



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Introduction

Shared Services and Centers of Excellence – Expediting Transformation Together

According to SSON Research & Analytics' **GBS & Shared Services State of Industry Survey 2022**, roughly 40% of shared services practitioners confirm that leveraging automation platforms and digitizing data are top priorities this year. 81% of shared service practitioners voted End-to-End process integration as a top priority for their organization, citing intelligent automation as the way to get there.

Yet, when respondents were asked, "How do you perceive your overall GBS/SSO automation levels?" only 13% felt they had high automation levels, while 39% described their automation levels as low. Further, when asked what the biggest barriers were to scaling IA at their organization, 59% of survey respondents said IT constraints, 56% said process reengineering, and 44% said siloed operations.

These realities present both challenges and opportunities. The key to unlocking full potential might involve closer collaboration between SSOs and COEs.

So, where can we start?

Too often, COEs are stretched thin and forced to choose between maintaining existing automations and collaborating with the business to scale initiatives. This can result in siloed projections and perception of a COE as a tactical support function, rather than its true value as a strategic business partner responsible for digitizing operations and creating an integrated toolkit of advanced intelligent automation (IA) technologies to drive strategic business outcomes.

This report will highlight how COE teams are uniquely positioned to balance business needs and IT requirements with a holistic approach to driving results. In addition to the cost avoidance, savings and FTE reallocation COE teams are known for – they are also assembling the right tools and talent to provide insight into customer needs, facilitate smoother transitions through focused change management, all while keeping an eye on new technologies that will keep their companies at the forefront of innovation.



Why Now?

What factors make the COE such a critical resource now? For one, COEs have the power to maintain the momentum of the gains made by shared services in the last three years.

There is no doubt that the workplace has changed since 2020. The pandemic forced rapid digitization out of necessity as workers were made to complete their duties remotely. This is evident in the investment priorities since the pandemic. SSON Research and Analytics **reports** that 57% of shared services have invested in some form of automation in the last three years. Moreover, when SSON members were **surveyed** on their digital toolkits; 57% of respondents had invested in cloud enablement, 56% on data and content management and 55% on analytics.

It's clear to see that what was once the remit of the IT function has increasingly become a part of the shared service offering. However, SSON Research and Analytics **reports** that 81% of shared services listed end-to-end process integration as a top priority for the year. Overall, while these insights demonstrate the rapid digitization of the enterprise, it's also indicative of a widespread challenge: in the wake of the pandemic, quickly adopted automation has led to a new challenge of integrating these

tools into end-to-end workflows and efficiently maintaining deployed RPA and IA programs.

Together SSOs and COEs are powerful sources of strategic, highly skilled employees that are weaving together a new and improved technological fabric to drive the future of work forward.

SSOs sit at the precipice of an important opportunity: by providing the organization with so many of the crucial services—like analytics and digital enablement—that make up the modern enterprise, they are so much more than just a support function to the broader business.

To accomplish this, SSOs must tackle some important hurdles. The following sections of the report will cover how working in close collaboration with COEs will not just help shared services do more with less, they'll also empower a company's most valuable asset; it's people.



Optimizing a Digitally Savvy Workforce



When employees were first required to work from home, many businesses were concerned productivity would decline, and that employees would struggle to understand the technologies that were thrust upon them in a new work model. However, many businesses have been pleasantly surprised to see that **productivity has remained high**, and their workforce has proven more capable of adopting new technologies than anticipated.

In the past, business functions expressed security concerns, or feasibility issues for relying upon cloud-based solutions and digital platforms. However, the years following the

pandemic have shown that technology can be an ally when it comes to reducing risk and creating compliance.

Similarly, trust in technology has also grown at the employee level. Before the pandemic, there was some trepidation that automation would make more jobs expendable, but those concerns are steadily being alleviated as evidence mounts to the contrary. Employees are now turning over mundane, administrative tasks to those technologies, lifting a burden off their shoulders, and allowing them to focus on work that is more personally fulfilling and adds value to their teams.

Engaging and Empowering Employees

Every year Shared Services is expected to deliver more value with fewer resources. Investment in automation continues to grow to help meet this expectation. In the [2022 IA Benchmarking Survey](#), cost efficiency was the top strategic target in Shared Services for 75% of survey respondents. [SSON Research and Analytics](#) reports that automation is having a significant impact on improving productivity, and business leaders are taking notice.

However, when respondents were asked what the most significant hurdles were in scaling IA, 57% said resourcing skilled staff. Because the COE team members possess the coveted combination of technical expertise and the business acumen that allows for “big picture” strategic thinking, it’s easy to understand why they are in such high demand.

According to SSON’s [“Global Market Review: Intelligent Automation in Shared Services”](#) report from 2021, 61% of

respondents currently see an IA skills shortage within their organization. With so many organizations in need of skilled employees, there is fierce competition to attract the right skillsets to the organization. In fact, [the GBS and Shared Services State of Industry Survey 2022](#) reports that the top skill prioritized is automation. Additionally, [one of the key reasons](#) shared services and GBS reported outsourcing was due to the access to talent and skills.

To properly engage and empower these teams, COEs must leverage the right tools and platforms to allow ample time to focus on the impactful work that multiplies benefits for employees, teams and the broader business.

The following pages highlight real examples of how tech-enabled COEs optimize business outcomes with the help of an IA management platform that enables greater visibility, strategic orchestration and automated maintenance.



Case Study

Scaling a Digital Workforce without Sacrificing Stability or Increasing Costs

A large health risk management service provider leverages automation to help provide higher quality care to millions of customers.



The Challenge

To meet growing demand, the CoE was directed to build a digital workforce that could scale five-fold within the next five years – without sacrificing stability or increasing costs.



The Solution

The COE team was responsible for assessing services and solutions that would provide quick and sustainable results. They determined that the C TWO was the single, integrated platform that would solve their most pressing challenges.



The Results

One of the first processes to work with C TWO was automating renal claims for 28 digital workers. This included a total of 47 automated processes and delivered value in several major ways. The quickest impact was enabling the COE team to pinpoint exactly where robotic resources were being wasted or underutilized.

Besides quickly pinpointing shortfalls of robotic resources, C TWO brought new opportunities for digital transformation across the organization. For example, the platform's real-time monitoring and automated operations allow IT departments to be alerted when something goes wrong. Whether transaction times are slowing down, poor data performance, or the network's gone down with no human intervention possible, C TWO resolves most routine failures before they cause bottlenecks or alerts the appropriate team if intervention is required – no more wasted time watching robots work.

By implementing C TWO, the team were better able to orchestrate process automation. Consequently, they could use fewer humans for constant monitoring while safeguarding operations.

Another noticeable impact of C TWO was increased automation throughput. They saw instant FTE gains; they went from 700 claims to 2,000 being processed right after implementation.



Outcome

At their current level of operational stability, they expect to scale the digital workforce further. "Over the next 5 years, we plan to scale up the number of automated processes to 3-5 times as much, and our digital workforce to 150 robots."

"If one of our machines loses connectivity, the handling process is cumbersome. First, you must log the instance, then hope that someone in IT responds quickly, and finally someone needs to fix or reboot the machine as soon as possible. But in that time, we're losing valuable production. In contrast, C TWO knows exactly what the error is, what task it's related to and whom to send an alert."

RPA Manager

Business Insights and Analytics

Shared Services is expected to demonstrate the cost-saving abilities of technology due to the focus on cost-efficiency, but with the help of the COE they can further amplify and expand upon this reporting with access to insights that demonstrate more strategic value. From showing business leaders how the business can create new revenue streams to improving customer satisfaction, business analytics can be the key differentiator between a Shared Service center being a cost-cutter, to being perceived as a value-creator.

Integrated dashboards that provide complete visibility of all work processed by a COE can influence behavior from day-to-day users all the way to the C-suite level. Such powerful reporting tools break silos, build trust and provide actionable insight for better planning, forecasting and overall decision making.

C TWO client, Head of Automation at a Global Telecom leader supports this with his own experience, "Now, they can see how the digital workers are performing on a day-to-day basis which leads to more discrete changes of behavior within the business. We help maintain the technical aspects, but the evolution of the digital workers sits within the business."

The following section will detail how Digital COEs can become strategic business partners in the modern enterprise utilizing business intelligence.





Realizing the Full Potential of a COE

In conversation with Erik Lien, CEO & Co-Founder of C TWO –
the first Intelligent Automation Management Platform

What is the one thing you think COE teams most underestimate when it comes to running a successful automation program?

Over the years, I've worked with dozens and dozens of COE teams and there is understandably great emphasis on selecting the right processes and tools when building the business case to launch, or expand a program. I don't think the same importance is necessarily placed upon what it really takes to support and maintain deployed automations. There are lots of hidden costs in the maintenance of a program that can eat into profitability if not accounted for—but it doesn't have to be that way.

It's commonly assumed that COE teams will spend 80-90% of their time on delivery and 10-20% on support – but all too often the opposite turns out to be true! This is both frustrating and costly. That's the primary problem we set out to solve when we developed the C TWO platform. We were unwilling to accept that highly qualified people should spend so much of their time watching and fixing robots that routinely require basic, yet time intensive remediation. This is a waste of their time and talent—and ultimately holds back the scalability of an intelligent automation program.

So, how does the C TWO platform help streamline and empower COE teams to unleash potential?

Together with a growing number of innovative CoE teams, we are helping them rethink how they prioritize, orchestrate, and manage robotic work with better visibility and streamlined integration—all while reducing overhead and operational costs to efficiently deliver business results.

It starts with optimizing and improving visibility into their entire IA estate so they can reduce cost to automate more. But the real value is aligning efficiency gains with business

outcomes. Once the operational issues are solved, COE and SSO teams can focus more on collaborating across the business to create value that can be measured beyond the typical hours back to business, cost avoidance and FTE savings. Of course, those are powerful KPIs that will always be relevant – but with advanced reporting and insightful business intelligence available in real-time, a new level of trust is established that opens the door to strategic partnerships and program growth.

You've mentioned transparency quite a lot – why is it so important to digital initiatives?

There are so many reasons visibility and transparency are important. Firstly, transparency builds credibility. A client of ours once said that the platform's dashboards changed the dynamic between his COE team and the business when he could present "facts not feelings." There are still some skeptics and old perceptions around RPA and Intelligent Automation – but leading with insight and transparency assuages fears and builds trust with both the employees that will be impacted by automation, as well as the leaders across the business.

Similarly – it's often said that 'you can't manage what you can't measure', and we completely agree. Only once a business truly understands the current state of its RPA or IA landscape, can the path towards hyperautomation begin. When a business attempts to scale an RPA program, or layer intelligent technologies without that adequate visibility, it can be counterproductive and quite risky. As complexity increases, visibility is absolutely critical.

Case Study

Reducing Maintenance Pressures to Enable Scale at a Global Food Distributor



The Challenge

In 2018, a small COE began its intelligent automation journey with a home-grown approach. But when the Covid pandemic began in 2020, it provided the biggest challenge to date for their automation efforts. To meet the sharp rise in demand, they needed a flexible solution that would deliver immediate results to expand their automation program without additional budget or headcount.



The Solution

After seeking advice from peers and conducting research, the COE team quickly decided that the C TWO platform would increase robotic license capacity and reduce the pressures of constant support and maintenance.

Since this was a first-of-its-kind platform, they opted to implement into only one business environment to compare it with another environment that was not utilizing the C TWO solution.



The Result

Since bringing in C TWO, the central COE team has grown to 60 members—with only 4 people dedicated to maintenance and support. The rest of the team collaborates closely with the business—supporting more than 30 functional areas—to identify automation opportunities, build business cases and deliver value.

Their team has successfully scaled their operations from 80 end-to-end automations—up from 28 the year previously—which totals 350 processes, while drastically reducing the number of machines needed. The program has been so successful that the company has since made the decision to bring all environments into their central COE and are being onboarded on the C TWO platform.

The COE team embraced their role as change agents and communicated openly and often with those directly impacted by their efforts. As a result, they have seen a groundswell in support and trust across the organization. Teams spanning various business functions are not only reporting increased efficiency, but also sharing stories of how RPA has directly impacted customer and employee experiences, as well as the company's bottom line.

"This has been an amazing journey. There was a time when I knew we were up against big challenges that seemed impossible. The automations—hands down, made our goals no sweat!"

Team Lead, Supplier AR

"During our Supplier AR initiative leveraging RPA across a wide range of transactional processing enabled historically unsurpassed working capital contributions and enhanced supplier service while simultaneously significantly reducing time effort."

Director, Supply Chain Transformation

"Being able to leverage RPA has enabled our new 'digital teammates' to work around the clock. Now associates can focus on Quality Assurances, Data Cleansing, Margin Improvement and more strategic partnerships with our supplier partners."

Sr. Director, Commercial Services

"We wouldn't have been able to scale as quickly as we have without C TWO, it's been a total life saver for us!"

Director of Intelligent Automation



Conclusion

The workplace has shifted dramatically in recent years, and will no doubt continue to transform as we discover new ways that technology can improve the employee and customer experience. The COE is undoubtedly at the center of this evolution. Not only are these teams well positioned to seek and test the latest technologies—but they are increasingly being viewed as the rusted intersection between technology and business teams for share services.

A holistic, customer-centric approach to aligning technological requirements and strategic business initiatives will accelerate digital transformation in the most sustainable way, truly unlocking the potential of digital transformation.

By bringing together a team of employees who are skilled in automation technologies, a COE can give businesses the necessary enablers to drive digital transformation to scale.

This is even more essential when considering the current challenges SSOs face; from struggling with a scarcity of digitization skills, to a renewed focus on communication between business functions, leaders and stakeholders, to increased efforts to engage customers with more seamless customer experience. Despite these challenges, there's an opportunity for COEs to become influential powerhouses—managing a business's digitization and automation strategy.

To accomplish this, COEs must be set up and governed as more than just maintenance administrators to strategic orchestrators of digital initiatives. By elevating this key group of subject matter experts from administrators of maintenance to strategic project directors, shared services will be better able to use automation and digitization to drive results and gain the competitive advantage.

C TWO

www.ctwo.com

C TWO, formerly C TWO, protects your IA investment by making automation more flexible, reliable and scalable. We are trusted by leading global organizations to eliminate operational burdens—like manual scheduling, monitoring, and maintenance—so their teams can deliver greater business value and accelerate scale across the business. C TWO is recognized in the industry as an HFS Research Hot Vendor for our commitment to helping enterprises scale automation through a ‘single pane of glass’ and referred to as the Hyperautomation Orchestrator by Gartner.



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The **Shared Services & Outsourcing Network** (SSON) is the largest and most established community of shared services and outsourcing professionals in the world, with over 170,000 members. Established in 1999, SSON recognized the revolution in support services as it was happening and realized that a forum was needed through which practitioners could connect with each other on a regional and global basis. SSON is a one-stop shop for shared services professionals, offering industry-leading events, training, reports, surveys, interviews, white papers, videos, editorial, infographics, podcasts and more.



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