Consumerization. 
Advanced robotics. 
Specialized talent.

Why shared services organizations need these core components of integrated business services models—and how they can build them.

By Sarah Daubenspeck
Integrated business services models, designed from the outside in, and with the customer experience at their heart, are emerging as critical enablers of the enhanced business value that shared services organizations are now expected to deliver.  

Because they prioritize the customer experience, integrated business services models can enable consumerization. The true customer-centricity, characterized by personalized services that are simple, swift and seamless to use, which customers increasingly demand.

What’s more, thanks to the connectivity they create, integrated business services models can maximize the benefits of advanced robotics—now rapidly transforming transaction processing in so many industries. Because they also lead in applying digital technologies to service delivery, they can support the specialized talent shared services organizations need to support new service innovation and optimize the front-line customer experience.

Moving forward, strength in three core components of integrated business services models—consumerization, advanced robotics and specialized talent—will be critical to competitiveness, growth, and even to survival: must-haves in increasingly challenging markets.

Here’s why.
Today’s customers expect the kinds of seamless, virtual interactions they get from commercial providers who service their personal lives. Yet, although research shows that 60 percent of existing shared services organizations believe customer relationship management (CRM) will be the area of business most impacted by digitization over the next two to three years, relatively few have digitized their customer interface. Let alone delivering an integrated, customer-centric experience.\(^2\)

The organizations that do have such a capability tend to be clustered in a few consumer-facing industries. Banking, for example, where smart phone apps now enable swift and seamless online banking, even when you’re on the move. Or healthcare, where jurisdictions with coordinated care networks can offer a single, digitized point of contact for all interactions.

Emerging virtual care models enable anyone seeking to contact a hospital—whether as an employee, a physician, a patient or a donor—to do so virtually, using any digital device. Because both patient and provider portals are on a single platform and enable a 360° view of the person calling, all their needs can be immediately understood, brought together and acted on.

Shared services organizations in other industries have much to learn from these innovations. Their external customers typically interact at multiple points of a buy cycle. And a fully digitized and integrated business services model that supports sales would be able to see every one of those interactions, reference them, and respond to queries and deliver results. Remotely, via the customer’s smart phone app—all at once. Consider, for example, how the Amazon app (and other online services like it) enables seamless search, purchase and delivery, with just one click.

Robotic process automation (RPA) promises to revolutionize the world of work. From “minibots” that can manipulate existing application software to complete a process, to cognitive computing systems that gain knowledge from data as an “experience” and then apply what’s learned to upcoming situations. RPA’s virtual workforce capabilities can eliminate the potential for human error, improve quality and compliance—and dramatically reduce cost to serve.

Accenture experience suggests, for example, that using robots to handle requisition-to-purchase orders could cut transaction-handling time in half. And robotic “digital assistants,” which combine artificial intelligence and continuous machine learning from social media, can reduce operating costs by as much as 80 percent.

In high-speed markets subject to the constantly shifting demands of informed, digitally-enabled customers, the attractions of RPA can only grow. But for shared services organizations, its appeal is especially urgent.

In the next five years, some familiar with the capability speculate that close to one-third of existing Tier Two BPO providers could go out of business because they have not invested in robotics. And if these players, whose survival depends on being lowest-cost providers, haven’t made the leap, captive shared services organizations look even more at risk.
Specialized talent—driving innovation

As the robotic processing of routine activities gathers pace, transaction-oriented jobs in shared services are disappearing fast. In fact, a headcount reduction of 30 to 50 percent over the next five to 10 years is anticipated, according to Accenture’s estimates. And that means an organization’s talent needs will change rather radically.

When customers call, they will be doing so because they need more information and help than their smartphone app can deliver. Already accustomed to seamless digital service in their personal lives, they won’t have the patience for triage and transfers. So instead of a large volume of call-center agents, working in functional silos, organizations will require a smaller number of resources who can handle everything at once. Resources skilled not only in technology, but also in advisory and consultative capabilities—and who can coordinate responses to the customer’s inquiry in full.

Imagine, for example, calling your telecoms provider with a bill inquiry and instead of being shunted over to sales when an opportunity to optimize your current service plan is identified, the same agent could handle both transactions—and more.

These skills may already be resident in-house. But shared services organizations need to invest more in them, and less in data entry clerks. That includes investment in software that enables end users to program or “teach” a robot. As well as investment in a small team of transaction process experts and a few project managers who can support implementation and value realization efforts, as needed.

Be a winner

Consumerization, robotics and more specialized talent will distinguish the winners from the also-rans in tomorrow’s markets. They are essential components of the integrated business services models that will be leveraged by the most successful shared services organizations.

But how should you begin to build them?

Start by asking yourself the following questions:

- Do I have the technologies that will enable customer interactions to meet the expectations of consumerization?

- Could I develop a robotics capability to reduce existing cost to serve?

- Can I re-orient hiring toward the skills needed to drive new digital capabilities?

If the answer to any of the above is “no,” then take steps now to invest in change. The expenditure will be well worthwhile. It will not only help ensure that your shared services organization remains relevant. It will also accelerate your journey toward implementing a fully integrated business services model—the key to sustained competitiveness and profitable growth in a complex and volatile global economy.
Sources:


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