

Shared Service Architects

THE ENTITLEMENT TO TRAINING

THE ENTITLEMENT TO “GET IT RIGHT FIRST TIME”

No matter how much money is available and no matter how skilled a shared service delivery team are, if there is a lack of trust and shared vision between the partnering organisations, a shared service will fail.

A shared service architect is someone who is specially trained and skilled in taking partnering organisations through the **Shared Vision Stage** of a shared service project. They will work to ensure that strong trust and absolute clarity of vision exist before passing the baton of the business case to a different project manager or team. And, they will do it repeatedly across a wide number of shared service projects. The Economist Intelligence Unit describe these professionals as “trusted individuals” ...

Furthermore, few companies have built high trust levels even within their own organisations, or invested in creating trusted individuals—who can, as the research shows, be powerful agents of collaboration.

In short, despite the widespread desire to be “collaborative”, and the concomitant use of such buzzwords as “collaboration”, many companies are probably recreating the wheel on every collaborative project they undertake. This ad hoc approach not only wastes resources: It makes it difficult for organisations to sell themselves as collaborative partners, thereby limiting their ability to exploit the potential of collaboration to generate unique and discrete innovations...!

These “trusted individuals” are a new and emerging role within public sector organisations and we have named them as shared service architects, to distinguish them from the individuals who will “build and operate²” the project from business case onwards.

It is important that these skilled people are given a distinctive name, otherwise the assumption is that anyone can fulfil this role easily and without entitlement to appropriate training and development so that they “get it right first time”.

The details of the knowledge that shared service architects will need and the skills they require are set out in the diagnostic tool over the page³.

The issue is that as the public sector paradigm shifts from yesterday’s agenda of “compete to spend”, to today’s agenda of “collaborate to save” we will need to rapidly increase the number of “trusted individuals” skilled at managing, and accelerating, the shared vision stage of the shared services.

Selecting the right people with the right skills

76% of shared service project managers in our 2008 research⁴ confirmed the key skills that are required in the early days of a shared

² If you wanted to extend the metaphor, you could say that those who calculate the cost of a new service are the “shared service quantity surveyors”, those who construct the service are the builders, etc.

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⁴ Macdonald-Wallace, D. (2008) Accelerating the successful delivery of shared services: What skills and knowledge do Members and Officers need to learn?

¹ Economist Intelligence Unit (2008) p4.

service are the skills of building trust and clarity of shared vision between the partners. Getting those two elements wrong, they tell us, results in false starts or partnerships crumbling during the project journey.

The local government economy is worth £144bn each year and the current reality is that senior managers are being thrust into the role of leading on multi-million pound shared services without formal skill or knowledge development. As a result the outcome for their organisations have been two fold:

(a) the inexperienced managers lose influence in the early days of discussions to more experienced representatives from other partners and find it very difficult to redress the imbalance during the project

(b) by not preparing senior managers or political representatives for shared service activity, organisations are gambling with the success or failure of their involvement in multi-million pound projects.

What is the background to the diagnostic?

The diagnostic is based on the top 20 key skills and pieces of knowledge that our 18 months of research revealed¹. The research was carried out in three strands:

1. A study of 30 shared service projects was undertaken to find out what three main things they would do differently if they were to repeat the exercise.
2. There was a review of government and shared service academic studies from the UK, USA, Australia and New Zealand and a review of inter-organisational studies in the private sector².
3. A workshop was held with senior managers in the public sector to gain

¹ The research was carried out at Canterbury Christ Church University Business School.

² Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) are probably the earliest academics to begin to look at this area in their work on cross boundary public sector collaboration, although they did not attempt to refine it down to skills and knowledge.

their views on the skills and knowledge they felt would be required to successfully undertake shared services.

We then compared and contrasted the three sets of data, it boiled down to 26 skills and pieces of necessary knowledge³.

As a final measure to verify our research, we asked over 20 experienced shared service architects working across the UK, to comment on the 26 skills and pieces of knowledge and score the items in order of importance to them.

Once in order of importance we reduced the number of skills and pieces of knowledge from 26 to the 'top-20' to create a more manageable scale.

The 20 are set out in their order of importance provided by the experienced shared service architects. Notice that it is "people skills"⁴ and governance that are considered the most important elements by the experts and "process tools"⁵ only coming into place from statement 13 onwards.

Do you need to refresh your skills and knowledge?

Now its time for you to take the diagnostic and decide where you may need to refresh your learning in order to be a top performer as a shared service architect.

³ The "boiling down" was done using Miles and Huberman's matrix system of reductionism (1994) which involves clustering, contrast and comparison and making conceptual/theoretical coherence - "moving from data to constructs through analysis and categorisation".

⁴ The traits show up in literature under different research areas such as "emotional intelligence" or "trust builders".

⁵ There is no implied criticism here of process tools such as PRINCE2 or MSP, they should be learned and understood by shared service architects to support the stages from business case development onwards.

Self-Diagnostic Tool	Tick how confident do you feel about your ability in each of the 20 areas		
What skills and knowledge will you require when undertaking this shared service project?	Highly confident	Fairly confident	Not confident
1. The skill of building and sustaining strong trust across leader relationships in multi-partner collaborations.			
2. The skill of creating a positive shared vision for a project team that may be drawn together from across a range of partners of un-equal size or authority.			
3. A knowledge of the key methodologies for supporting decision makers in creating policy for selecting which services to share.			
4. Skills in developing shared vision between this set of partners on the purpose of the new service.			
5. Skills in developing consensus between this set of partners on the procedures and structure required to deliver the new service .			
6. Skills in developing consensus between this set of partners on the accountabilities and powers in the new service.			
7. Skills in building strong trust between key stakeholders during the design stage of this project.			
8. Knowledge of the relevant statutes that will constrain the design of this service(s).			
9. Knowledge of the governance model(s) and partnership vehicles that could be considered for this project.			
10. Knowledge of the EU procurement rules that may apply to this project.			
11. Knowledge of the range of relevant tools you can draw on from support agencies (e.g. IDeA, 4ps, RIEPs, etc).			
12. Knowledge of a number of similar projects that have already been completed.			
13. Knowledge of the project methodologies required by the project board (e.g. MSP, PRINCE2, BPR, Critical Path Analysis, etc).			
14. Knowledge of the Business Process Improvement methodologies you are likely to use in this project.			
15. Skills in drafting clear communication pieces to communicate with a range of mixed stakeholders in the project.			
16. Knowledge of the possibilities and limitations of the range of ICT systems currently used by the partners to deliver the service.			
17. Skills in estimating return on investment scenarios for the service involved in this project.			
18. A knowledge of sources of financial/performance benchmarking that can be drawn on to inform measurable progress.			
19. Skills in designing “invest to save” programmes to enable up-front investment by partners.			
20. The knowledge that you will be released for enough time to be the shared service architect on this project.			

