

fgi perspectives

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Fischer Group International



The Hidden Killers
of Shared Services
Organizations

The Hidden Killers of Shared Services Organizations

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Executive Summary

For a quarter century, organizations have been under increased pressure to seek additional operational synergies and savings. One of the most frequently employed means to this end has been to create greater efficiency through shared services. Over time, the tools and technology for operating shared services have improved. Yet, many shared services operations fail to live up to their primary objectives.

All too often, the cost savings and other strategic benefits do not materialize. In fgi's experience, the way to lessen the risk of such disappointing results is to give more attention to the softer, less visible determinants of organizational performance.

In this paper we identify eight of these "Hidden Killers" of high-performing shared services organizations. More than being a warning of what not to do, this paper provides a checklist for anyone involved in designing, implementing or managing a shared services organization. It is never too late to address the issues that are hindering the performance of shared services organizations.

Schon lange sind Unternehmen gefragt, Synergien und Kosteneinsparungen zu realisieren. Häufig wurden in diesem Zusammenhang Shared Services als bewährtes Beispiel zur Effizienzsteigerung eingestuft. Im Laufe der Jahre wurden die Werkzeuge und Technologien für die Einführung und den Betrieb von Shared Services wesentlich verbessert.

Nichtsdestotrotz verfehlen immer noch viele Shared Services Organizations (SSO) ihre eigentlichen Zielsetzungen, nämlich Kosten einzusparen und andere strategische Vorteile für das Unternehmen zu erzielen. fgi's Erfahrung ist, dass durch die Beachtung der „weichen“, weniger sichtbaren Faktoren, die die Leistung einer Organisation bestimmen, dieses Risiko gemindert werden kann.

Dieses Dokument stellt acht versteckte Fallen, sogenannte Hidden Killers, vor die den Erfolg von SSO gefährden können. Statt Tipps zu geben, was zu vermeiden ist, stellen wir eine Checkliste für alle SSO-Verantwortlichen und für Personen zur Verfügung, die SSO entwickeln, implementieren oder auch vorhandene SSO optimieren – denn es ist nie zu spät, die Themen anzusprechen, die die Leistung von SSO behindern.

An fgi Perspective on Creating High-Performing Shared Services Organizations

There is always both a “hard” side and a “soft” side to creating and maintaining a high-performing shared services organization (SSO). The “hard” side includes organizational design and governance, process design, IT infrastructure, charge back arrangements and financial measures of performance. The “soft” side includes aspects of all these plus additional consideration for culture, individual capabilities, management practices and leadership. In fgi’s experience, it is these soft-side elements that tend to get overlooked. The “Hidden Killers” of shared services arise due to an almost exclusive focus on the “hard” factors at the expense of the “soft” factors. Soft factors have typically not received much attention in recommendations and best practices for establishing SSOs. This paper addresses this oversight.

The eight overlooked Hidden Killers are:

1. Unclear or unrealistic business plan, vision and mission for the shared services organization
2. Lack of customer focus and inappropriate practices to align SSO with customer expectations
3. Ambiguity over the distinction between centralized and shared services
4. Chronic cultural issues arising from initial transition to shared services and/or subsequent difficulties
5. Lack of leadership for shared services in both the services and customer organizations
6. Inadequate process and performance management tools
7. Lack of committed, competent service employees
8. Inadequate risk management

These issues are best dealt with when first establishing a shared services organization. However, if they were not addressed then it is imperative to do so as soon as possible to ensure the long-term success of the organization.

fgi has been able to identify these soft and hidden factors through its whole system perspective on organizational performance, which we apply to all our work. A whole system

view is a very robust way to plan and manage organizational performance and enables both hard and soft variables to be taken into account.

*The **whole system view** is based on the assumption that the structure and the culture of organizations are too complex to be managed by linear cause and effect reasoning. Organizations are seen rather as a network of direct and indirect, intended and unintended actions and impacts across multiple aspects of the system’s performance. Thus the whole system view on organizations means understanding how decisions and management of strategy, processes, people, culture and structure impact each other.*

Applying this whole system perspective in fgi’s research and client work has enabled us to identify various overlooked, “soft” determinants of high performing SSOs.

The chart on the next page is an illustration of fgi’s whole system view of shared services. The location of each Hidden Killer described in this paper is indicated by a number in the starbursts scattered around the graphic. The remainder of this paper reviews the nature and possible responses to each of the eight Hidden Killers.

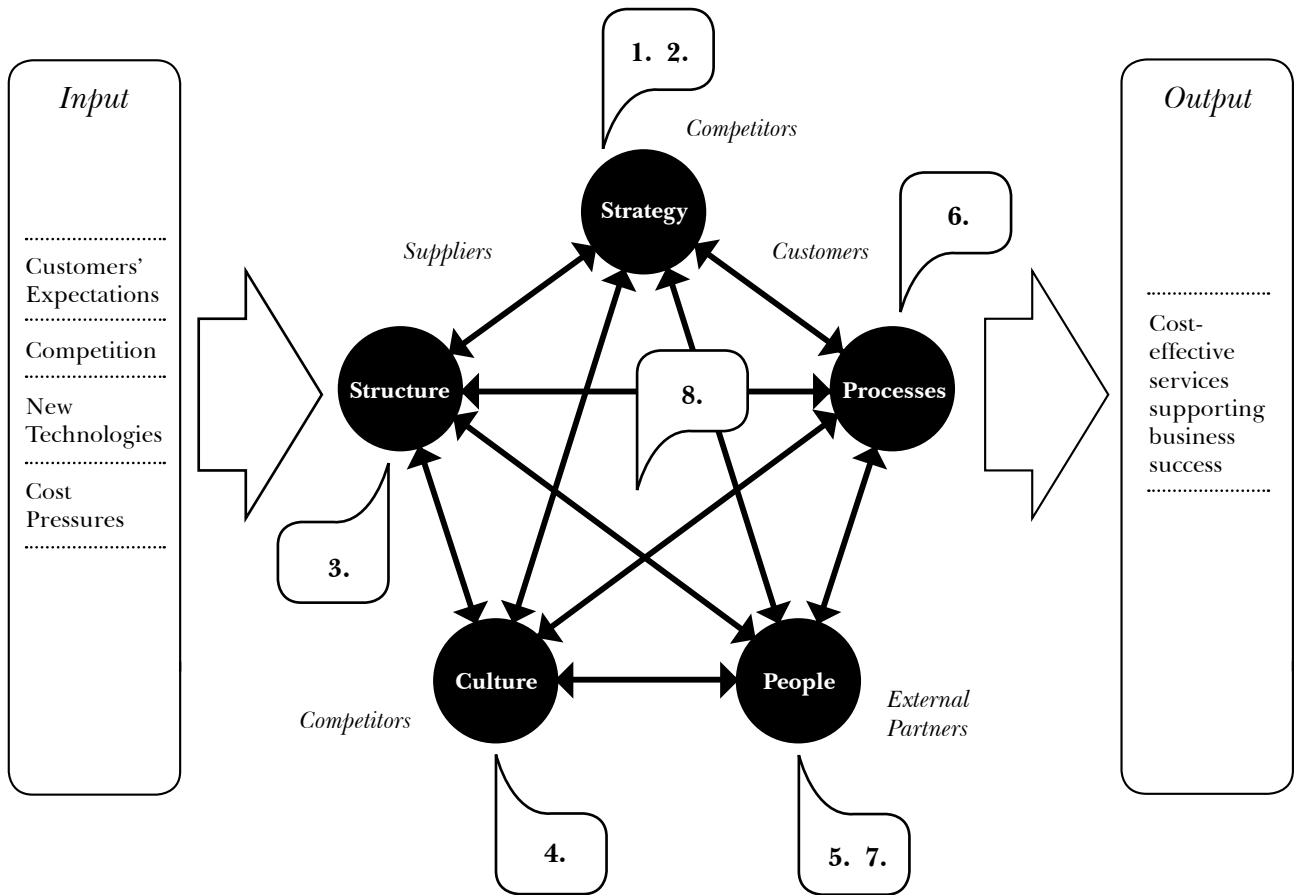
1. Unclear or unrealistic business plan, vision and mission for the shared services organization

The decision to change to shared services is usually based on potential cost savings with, perhaps, some argument for the benefits of greater control and standardization.

The SSO’s business plan emphasizes these savings and becomes a key tool in advocating the change to SSO. But an overly narrow focus on cost savings can lead to unrealistic estimates of the payback period to recover the cost of implementation along with overly optimistic estimates of the timing and scale of financial returns. In addition, the attention to building the solid, “hard” cost-return argument for the change leaves little or no attention for preparing the softer but equally important statements of the SSO’s vision and mission. We consider each of these elements in turn.

Realistic business plan. The quantitative analysis (head count, process performance and cost data) of the shared services opportunity typically makes the argument for moving to shared services. The qualitative analysis of performance determinants such as the risks to service quality or the impact on employee morale do not get the same attention.

The cost argument and related hard data may lead to optimistic estimates of the ease, speed or magnitude of the payback from the change if not balanced by analysis of the impact of qualitative variables. Any subsequently weak initial



fgi's Hidden Killers in High-Performing Shared Services Organizations

fgi Fischer Group International, in accordance with: Katzenbach „Peak Performance“, Collins „Good to Great“, Foster/Kaplan „Creative Destruction“, Light „The Four Pillars of High Performance“

SSO performance can lead to a reaction to back away from the newly created SSO, further hurting any possibility of achieving the business plan. Therefore, a realistic business plan needs to include both the quantitative and qualitative determinants of performance. Such a plan includes:

- direct and indirect costs of establishing the SSO
- expected payback period under different assumptions
- impact (positive and negative) on the quality of customer service
- changes to core processes and IT infrastructure with associated risks
- personnel changes and associated morale and legal issues
- availability/development of management and customer service skills, and
- other issues associated with the change management effort required

Clear mission and vision statements. Mission and vision provide direction to members of an organization in line with

the business plan. They are important for defining the boundaries of the SSO business and for aligning staff and internal customer expectations during the difficult transition to the new service structure.

.....
 A **mission statement** addresses the question:
 “Why do we exist?”

SSOs exist for operational efficiency, but they also exist for quality, service, governance and other reasons. This is particularly the case with internal SSOs. A clearly defined mission statement sets the boundaries for the SSO, communicating its role and responsibilities within the organization. It sets expectations for centralized as compared to shared service, and for organizational, functional or geographic reach, as well as similar determinants of service scope.

.....
 A **vision statement** answers the question:
 “Where are we going?”

The vision statement provides direction to management and staff as they make decisions about their priorities in providing services day by day. An effective vision statement should fit the business planning discussion and support important leadership and change management requirements.

To be most effective, fgi recommends that mission and vision statements be developed with the input of various stakeholders in the SSO, particularly internal customers. The mission statement is most closely linked to business plan development and reflects key strategic decisions. It should be developed first. A subsequent meeting or meetings to develop the vision with a diverse range of stakeholders can provide a powerful opportunity to align expectations and build broad commitment to necessary changes.

Across different shared service implementations, fgi has defined various reliable methods for efficiently and effectively communicating and engaging the whole organization in this change. All effective approaches rely on broad input and engagement of those affected by the change and not just one-way communications or marketing events. Implementing the SSO with a realistic business plan, in line with the mission and ultimately the vision, requires a concrete road map for change. Such a road map should clearly describe how the organization will move from the current situation towards the vision. Gaining everyone's commitment to this road map is critical to the success of shared services.

2. Lack of customer focus and inappropriate practices to align SSO with customer expectations

A shared services organization differs in a number of ways from the traditional corporate functions of IT, HR, finance, and so on. Among other differences, shared services use new measures of productivity and quality. In addition to being technically proficient, a high-performing shared services operation must put more emphasis on "customer focus".

Customer focus: Defining quality of service on the basis of what "quality" means to the customer.

Developing and maintaining customer focus is a necessary but often underrecognized part of the establishment of an effective SSO. This focus may not have been as important when the functional area was part of the business unit it served, and hence was physically and organizationally closer to the customer. Furthermore, the establishment of the SSO has likely emphasized unit cost and process improvements, personnel changes, organizational changes and other determinants of service efficiency while not emphasizing service quality. The one tool for customer focus that is adopted by most SSOs is the Service Level Agreement (SLA), but this tool is frequently

misused and focused more on the level and cost of service, not quality. The risk here is that if the SSO fails to focus on serving customers well, those customers will find other ways to get their needs met and the proposed benefits of the SSO will not be achieved. To develop and maintain customer focus and the quality expected, fgi recommends a number of practices across three areas as illustrated on the next page:

- Customer Value Strategy: First there must be ongoing quantitative and qualitative assessment of service quality as the customer sees it. One good practice is to have clearly defined customer demand managers play a role in the prioritization of SSO activities.
- Customer Feedback System: Second, there must be regular performance reviews between SSO managers and their customers to monitor service quality.
- Customer Value Action Areas: Third, specific attention should be given to developing or recruiting staff with appropriate capabilities as customer service providers in addition to their technical competence. These staff members should be supported by well-designed and maintained processes as well as constantly updated information to ensure both service efficiency and accuracy.
- Finally, there are various practices to align SSO and customer performance expectations. Brand or Service Promise is one such practice. Another powerful tool can be the Service Level Agreement when well-planned and implemented.

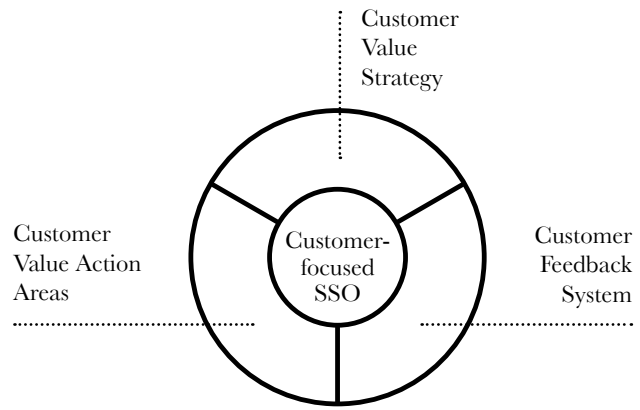
These last two practices deserve further explanation, beginning with the Brand/Service Promise.

Brand/Service Promise: A commitment to customers that characterizes the distinctive nature and benefit of the shared services in terms that are important to customers. It provides a context for aligning service level agreements and various policy decisions. It communicates expectations about how day-to-day service decisions should be made.

In fgi's experience, a well-planned and implemented Brand/Service Promise will leverage the appropriate customer focus over time by aligning the quality of service delivery with customer expectations. For example, the following brand/service promise was created to align internal customer service with the overall brand promise to external customers in a major financial institution.

Consistently meeting or exceeding customer expectations

- *at a price the customer is prepared to pay*
- *at a cost that produces an acceptable return*



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While the Brand/Service Promise provides guiding principles for the quality of customer service to be provided, the Service Level Agreement documents the mechanics and contractual realities of the understanding between service provider and internal customer. In fgi’s experience, however, poorly defined SLAs can present risks to building high-performance shared services. In fact, they can become a Hidden Killer. Part of the problem is that SLAs are seen as a contract for performance and some leaders may assume that well-designed SLAs will resolve any uncertainties between expectations and delivery.

Traditionally, Service Level Agreements have often been developed as part of contractual relationships between suppliers and external companies as part of outsourcing arrangements. Much of this outsourcing involved information technology and computer services of one form or another. It was natural to develop SLAs as part of the overall business contract between two corporations.

Shared services organizations serving internal clients have a different context for their business relationship. While there must be clear and measurable definitions of the level of service required and promised, these should not be framed in defensive terms, with an emphasis on remedies for nonperformance, safely achieved performance levels, and a legal tone. Instead, they should be framed by the overall corporate strategic objectives that make shared services the right choice for all parts of the organization. The metrics should include measures of service quality as well as quantitative indicators of responsiveness or efficiency. SLAs should be subject to frequent review and revision in discussions between service providers and customers. They should be revised whenever it is in the best interest of the business and the parties involved.

fgi recommends that SLAs be developed from a whole system view with all the stakeholders involved. Selected aspects should be tested by various parties, including front line staff, for clarity and utility (and alignment with the Brand Promise). Finally, they should be treated as working standards for performance: standards to be maintained until they can be improved.

3. Ambiguity over the distinction between centralized and shared services

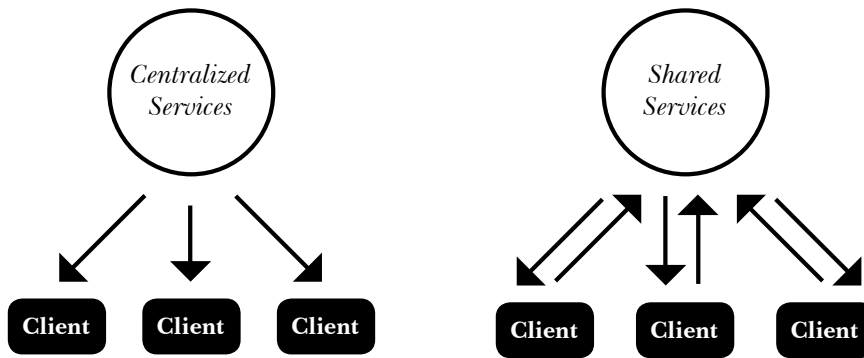
Various organizational design decisions have to be made when setting up an SSO. One of these is the extent to which the new service organization will operate as a centralized or a shared service. In fgi’s experience, there can be considerable ambiguity around this distinction with resulting “hidden” difficulties for effective service performance.

Centralized services: *Provide a universal set of services at an appropriate overall cost and service level to meet the corporation’s needs. Operate on a cost-plus basis with cost allocations on a standard basis by transaction or by business unit. Support compliance with various policies and standards.*

Shared services: *Provide internal customers with services and service levels based on what they want to pay for those services. Services are provided at a fully loaded cost. Separate policy and compliance function from service function.*

A services organization is likely to have a combination of these roles with some services operating on a centralized model for compliance reasons while other services operate as shared services. The difficulty comes when there is ambiguity about which model is in overall use. Furthermore, services may be called “shared” for political reasons when in fact they are intended to operate as centralized. Over time this ambiguity can generate considerable dissatisfaction with internal customers.

Several steps should be taken to avoid this ambiguity in setting up and operating the SSO. fgi recommends a careful analysis by service area and customer requirements to clearly define what services should be shared or centralized. Those services with strong policy and governance responsibilities may be set up to operate on a centralized basis, while those services which are either advisory or transactional may be better operated as shared services.



Which model for services is actually in use: centralized or shared?
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Once these overall decisions are made, the necessary structures, governance policies, authority and responsibilities must be defined for the SSO to function as intended. This is particularly important when a mixed model of centralized and shared services is being created. In such situations, fgi recommends that staff have clearly defined roles so that they don't have to wear two "hats", as centralized and shared services can require different behaviors to be well-implemented.

4. Chronic cultural issues arising from initial transition to shared services and/or subsequent difficulties

Completing a successful transition to a shared services organization usually requires the development of a true culture of service. Often this change is overlooked as the new shared service organization's members had previously provided many of the same services to local clients within their business area. Presumably, they were already doing an acceptable job; now they just have to increase capacity to serve more clients. Increasing service capacity may be seen as just a technical problem to be resolved through additional staff and the right technology. However, an organization's culture is made of assumptions, beliefs, norms and certain tangible signs of how work is performed. Different cultures influence the performance of organization members. In making the shift to an SSO, service staff now operate in a more virtual service environment that is no longer characterized by local, personal relationships between the former "internal" service provider and the partners being served. Communication needs, responsiveness requirements, motivation and feedback possibilities have all shifted.

Failure to attend to cultural changes means that staff may try to continue performing their jobs as before and fail to meet the expectations of their new and growing numbers of new customers. Over time this leads to deteriorating trust between customers and the SSO. Subsequent negative feedback creates a defensive internal climate within the service organization. In time, customers may begin to find ways to avoid relying on the SSO. While culture can be hard to define, it effects performance and must therefore fit the particular circumstances

of the shared services organization. Research results point out that high-performing SSOs have cultures characterized by some of the following:

- The SSO's work is centered around clearly defined values, e.g.: customer value, focus on results, inspiring work environment, continuous improvement.
- Service offerings and means of delivery are agreed upon through discussion and negotiation with internal customers. These interactions are characterized by trust, respect and listening.
- Customers and providers agree on indicators and measures of success, means of gathering data, feedback and complaint processes.
- The shared services provider makes significant investments in becoming customer-focused in ways that are also obvious to the customer:
 - staff recruited for service and customer-focused values
 - staff trained in listening and problem solving
 - staff trained to build an "understanding of the customer's business"
 - customer service is central to performance assessment
 - leadership has customer-oriented priorities

An effective culture for shared services can be developed with the right leadership and targeted follow-up activities. It helps to build the culture from the beginning of the change to shared services. If the culture has been ignored in the initial rush to set up the SSO, it still must be addressed to achieve the intended benefits of shared services, but it may take more time and effort to turn the culture around.

No matter where you begin this change, fgi recommends that specific steps be taken to support the organization in changing behaviors to align with the desired service culture. It is usually more effective to help people act their way into new ways of thinking, rather than to think themselves into new ways of acting.

5. Lack of leadership for shared services in both the services and customer organizations

It might be expected that the leaders of the new SSO can be chosen from those in similar positions in the original, decentralized functions. While this is a good place to look for potential SSO leaders, it can be short-sighted and results in another Hidden Killer as these traditional leaders may not be prepared to assume the different leadership responsibilities of an SSO.

Effective leadership of a shared services organization requires a distinctive set of skills in comparison to traditional functional leadership. Being a leader of a high-performing SSO requires the commitment, skills and orientation of both cost- and profit-center leaders. It also requires more than technical competence in the service offering. The SSO is a service business balancing the requirements of internal customers with the overall policies and strategies of the whole organization. Specifically, shared service leaders need to be proficient in balancing both sides of the following demands:

Not just:	But also:
<i>excellent service</i>	<i>executing policies</i>
<i>local needs</i>	<i>corporate standards</i>
<i>service quality</i>	<i>operational efficiency</i>
<i>strategic perspective</i>	<i>short-term results</i>
<i>responsiveness to customer</i>	<i>responsibility to the organization</i>

Such leadership must demonstrate specific competencies in the areas of customer focus, organizational agility (ability to get things done through formal and informal channels, including matrix management), process management (including continuous improvement of core processes) and negotiation.

In fgi’s experience, such leadership skills are not common across leaders and managers whose career history has been defined by conventional, functional organizations. These leaders need time and coaching to develop their new responsibilities. A key challenge in developing SSO leadership is shifting the focus from a technical and managerial focus appropriate to managing a specialized function to the leadership focus of a shared services business. Not all functional leaders are able to make this transition to broader service leadership responsibilities.

6. Inadequate process and performance management tools

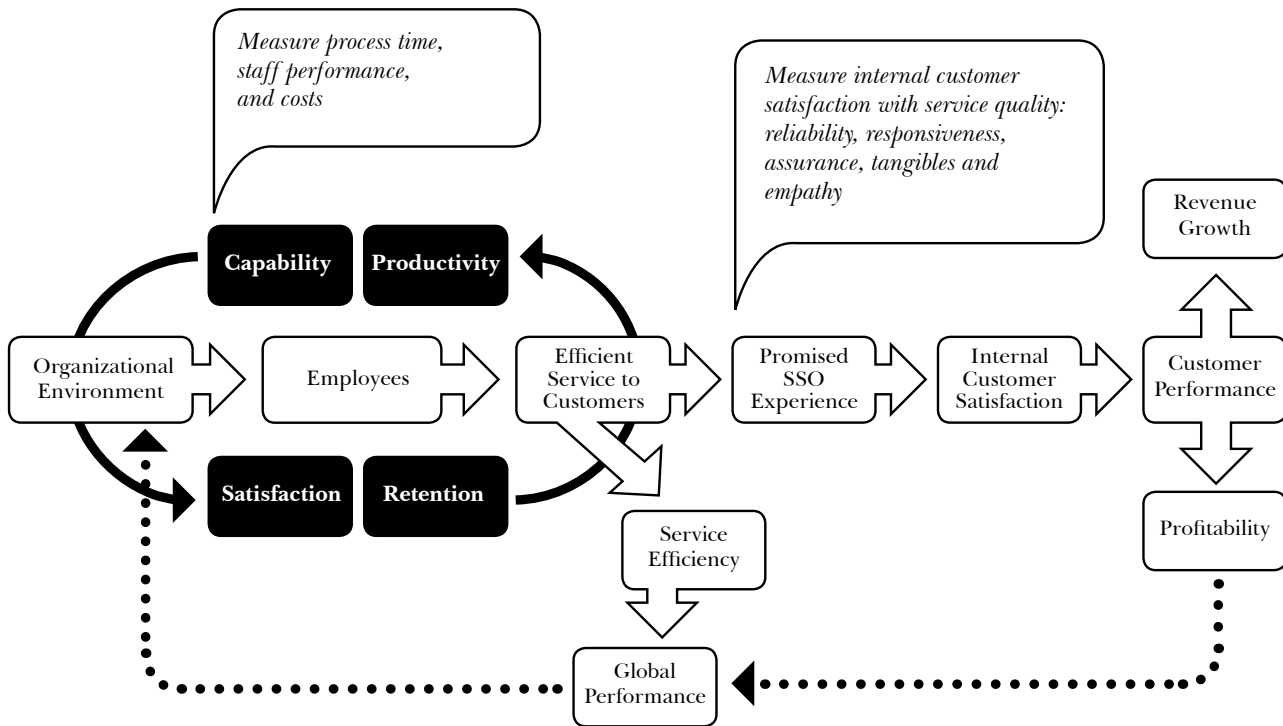
The establishment of SSOs is typically accompanied by process redesign efforts to improve efficiencies and support various new performance measures. These redesign efforts

are necessary and appropriate. However, these new processes are often incompletely implemented or maintained, and there-in lies another Hidden Killer. Specifically, the SSO leaders and staff lack the commitment to or tools for managing and measuring ongoing process performance.

The Hidden Killer of SSO performance here is three-fold. First, the redesigned processes may not be adequately adopted by staff and management. There may be superficial compliance, but no real commitment to work in new ways. A well-designed and implemented change management effort can help with this adoption effort. But a second hidden problem may also be present: a lack of process management and improvement capabilities. SSO managers and staff must understand and take responsibility for process performance so that it can be maintained and further improved as various operational challenges arise. Otherwise, even the best designed processes will soon degrade. Finally, there may not be an adequate, balanced set of measures by which to monitor and manage performance of the processes and the overall SSO. Too often, the measures chosen emphasize process efficiency and cost. If measures of cost-efficiency are the only metrics used, the SSO will be unlikely to achieve its long-term cost savings, and may not even survive for long.

To address these Hidden Killers, fgi recommends that process management concepts, tools and responsibilities be widely understood and applied by all working in the process on a daily basis. Such process capabilities may not have been required to provide the service in the original organization, but a high-performing SSO requires broad literacy in process management if the organization is going to deliver on quality, cost and volume expectations of its customers in the long run. As for measures of SSO performance, fgi recommends a balanced set of Key Performance Indicators of shared services performance. Some of the measures focus on costs, others focus on process performance along with measures of staff performance, attitude and retention. Meanwhile, additional measures should assess SSO performance from the customer’s perspective on the quality of services delivered. What’s important here is a simple but comprehensive set of measures with which to steer performance.

Various possible measurement points are summarized in the graphic below. The SSO organization and its possible measures of operations and capabilities are on the left, while the internal customer organization and its potential measures of service received are on the right. The results measures are on the far right as the total outcome of SSO operations and customer satisfaction leads to company revenue growth and profitability. fgi recommends that careful attention be given to developing an effective balanced scorecard with which to manage the shared services business. Key Performance Indicators should be developed carefully, with the customers and other stakeholders involved.



Balanced Measurement of Shared Services

fgi Fischer Group International, adapted from Heskett, et al and their research which indicates a high correlation between employee job satisfaction and the quality of service delivered to customers.

7. Lack of committed, competent service employees

Shared services require different or additional capabilities and attitudes than the traditional technically-focused functions. Different kinds of shared services also require different capabilities. The following table suggests some typical differences in the capabilities of those who work in basic or transactional shared services and those who work in more advisory capacities.

Transactional services staff	Advisory services staff
<i>Focused and motivated when dealing with routine or repetitive requests.</i>	<i>Skilled at providing new and tailored responses to specific requests.</i>
<i>Applies product service knowledge to provide reliable and efficient answers to requests.</i>	<i>Skilled at gaining insight into customer's real need and at anticipating additional needs</i>
<i>Provides clear helpful explanations.</i>	<i>Effective communicator, building strong customer relationships.</i>
<i>Utilizes feedback to improve efficiency.</i>	<i>Utilizes feedback to improve quality and cost-effectiveness.</i>

The Hidden Killer here is underestimating the necessary extent of new capabilities to be acquired through recruitment and/or training to develop competent staff. Note that none of the skills in the table above are focused on the technical proficiency of the service professional, but only on the additional capabilities essential to the delivery of customer-focused shared services. Technical competence is essential, but not sufficient for operating a high-performance shared services organization.

Some service skills can be easier to hire than to train, and this choice should be considered when selecting staff for the new SSO. There is also likely to be a significant need for knowledge transfer from the original, fragmented service functions to the new, shared service function.

fgi recommends that carefully designed staffing and training plans be created very early in planning the transition to SSO. This work should be based on appropriate position descriptions, competency models and training needs analysis. Recruiting and reskilling staff takes time and attention. Avoiding this step can be a fatal error, if the SSO is going to get off to a successful start with its customers.

8. Inadequate risk management

Establishing a shared service organization is a major undertaking for any business. There are significant potential

risks to be identified and managed during both initial implementation and subsequent operation. Outside of disaster recovery and business continuity planning, however, most organizations devote little attention to identifying and planning how to mitigate various risks.

In fgi's experience, there are two main areas for SSO risk management: risks associated with initial implementation, and risks involved in managing operations. This latter area of operational risks has both primary risks (financial, relationship and reputational) and secondary risks (unanticipated adjustments and responses from individuals and functions).

Implementation risks. In planning for SSO implementation, it is essential to anticipate the key threats to the plan. This involves testing, ahead of time, all the risks which could affect the success of the implementation effort – and what to do in case any of these risks appear. Such risks include external events (e.g., accidents and monetary fluctuations), project planning and execution (e.g., overly optimistic time estimates, availability of scarce resources, SSO staff capabilities and qualified management), and technical challenges (e.g., new technologies, complex legal and other interdependencies) and so on. The SSO project team should identify likely risks and ways to counter or mitigate them.

Operational risks. When the SSO begins operation, there are additional risks to be anticipated. These include the primary risks affecting interruption in business services or threats to reputation. In addition, there are significant “hidden” risks to overall SSO success. These are the secondary risks associated with the unanticipated adjustments and reactions of individuals and functions being served by the SSO. Such secondary risks may involve financial, service quality, operational standards and even cultural threats to the benefits of the SSO. For example, an unrecognized belief in a customer organization that a particular shared service is now some “other” organization's responsibility can lead to a variety of undesirable implications. Furthermore, the natural tendency of any large, non-competitive organization is not cost control or innovative service, but simply maintenance of the status quo. To plan for these less visible threats, fgi recommends a scenario planning exercise with a cross-section of internal customers to identify “rational” but unpredictable responses by individuals and groups to various challenges in the shared services environment.

To identify and manage all of these risks, fgi recommends that the change management effort be planned, conducted and communicated with the help of a clear, detailed road map of all main implementation and operation activities. Such a road map can also be an important tool for involving and updating key stakeholders in the necessary activities going on in

different parts of the system, and keeping everyone aligned in creating an SSO that meets the organization's needs.

Conclusion: Overcoming the Hidden Killers of a High-Performing SSO

This paper has offered fgi's perspective on threats to high-performing shared services organizations and has stressed the importance of attending to various “soft”-side change issues. While the eight killers of SSO performance have been described separately, they are closely interrelated to each other within the overall view of an SSO as a system. We do not suggest that any of the issues be addressed in isolation.

What if the SSO implementation is already well underway before its leaders recognize the importance of addressing some of the softer factors in the change? This will certainly make things difficult, but not impossible. As someone once said, “the only way out is through,” which here means going through a carefully designed change management effort.

SSOs can be very cost-effective and efficient organizational innovations. In fgi's experience, they often fail to meet their initial promises, but this failure is largely avoidable through a whole system view to managing the transition and the resulting organization.

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