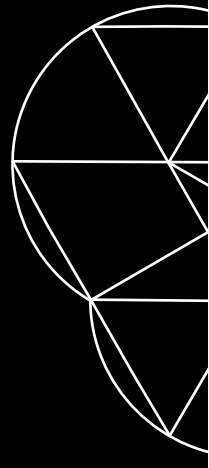




Behind the shared services curtain

Leaders center in on value creation for the business – and how you can do the same



Back in the 1980s, General Motors created a centralized support function that is now considered one of the first examples of a Shared Services Center. Over the last four decades, countless other businesses have followed suit – clustering teams around the world to serve specific organizational areas in the search for productivity and efficiency.

The model has not only proven its worth, it has evolved remarkably. In 2023 70% of shared services provide multi-functional services, reported **SSON**, and a majority are also taking a role in meeting new business priorities, such as supporting ESG initiatives.

In this book, we've brought together interviews with leaders in the shared services industry, Ramki Raman, CTO, Intelligent Finance Operations and Industry Operations, Accenture; Bogna Pismari, Global Process Owner, P2P, Fresenius Kabi; and Swathi Devireddy, Advanced Process Analytics Community Leader, ABB.

As they explain, Shared Services Centers are taking the expansion in their stride, but pushing it forward. "We don't just see ourselves as executing on process improvements, we're an advisor that helps clients transform their Shared Services Centers", says Raman.

When businesses embrace that advisory role, they can make real progress. Pismari scored a 140% increase in cash discounts for a global healthcare company and now pushes for shared services to be taken more seriously: "My dream would be that Shared Services Centers are not copy, paste people but partners in investment, strategy, and corporate development."

As these interviews bring to life, Shared Services Centers want to work with the business – not just for it. Devireddy gives her advice for making that ambition real. She says it comes down to continuous learning to ensure continuous improvement, without forgetting to add a little passion: "The business may not have asked for it but if you can get ahead and show the advanced capabilities of the technologies through your passion projects, you'll impress them."

What follows is these three shared services experts giving their advice on everything from hitting KPIs, working transparently, retaining top talent, and strengthening the model for incoming challenges. Got questions about performance, processes, or partnering with the business? Get the answers here.

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**FOCUS ON STRATEGIC WORK SO YOU DELIVER
VALUE NO MATTER THE WIDER CONTEXT**

—
**Ramki Raman, CTO, Intelligent Finance Operations and
Industry Operations, Accenture**

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**GIVE THE BUSINESS THE DATA AND RESULTS
IT NEEDS**

—
**Bogna Pismari, Global Process Owner,
P2P, Fresenius Kabi**

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**BUILD A MOVEMENT THAT UNDERSTANDS AND
APPRECIATES WHAT YOU DO**

—
**Swathi Devireddy, Advanced Process Analytics
Community Leader, ABB**

Ramki Raman works in one of the world's biggest Shared Services Centers. The Accenture CTO not only standardizes and centralizes processes for the global professional services company, he also delivers on the frontline for its clients. After 12 years in Shared Services, he shares advice on enforcing the policies behind the processes, keeping up with 'compressed transformation', and how Shared Services Centers can create value regardless of what the world throws at them.

Ramki Raman

Title & business CTO, Intelligent Finance Operations and Industry Operations, Accenture

(4)

Fast facts:

- Over 25 years of experience, spent 20 years with Accenture, 12 years in Shared Services, used to work in consulting and strategy.
- Based in Bangalore.
- More than 1000 shared services clients.
- Locations: Accenture's SSCs are spread across more than 50 delivery centers worldwide.
- They work in 45 languages, cover various industries and sectors, and have 800+ operational delivery patents.
- How they measure success: 'Value 360 framework' that includes financial, experience, sustainability, talent, inclusion & diversity, customer industry specific value impact.
- What clients appreciate most: Transparency, speed, business outcomes.

How does Accenture structure its Shared Services Centers?

We have three offerings. The first is **functional growth**, processes related to Marketing Operations, Sales & Service Operations, and Next Generation Customer Operations. These services focus on enhancing and optimizing customer-facing functions to drive business growth.

Second is **functional enterprise**, processes that cover intelligent finance operations, sourcing & procurement, supply chain management, and more. Generally, these are services that streamline and improve efficiency in core business operations.

Third is **industry-specific processes** tailored to specific sectors, like capital markets, banking, insurance, health and life sciences.

We have three kinds of centers: scale, experience, and customer proximity. You'll find centers of scale in India and the Philippines, centers of experience in North America, the UK and Italy, and near-shore centers in Poland, Czech Republic, Argentina, and Brazil.

How has working in a Shared Services Center changed since Covid?

Post-Covid a lot of business models have been challenged and we've seen new ones emerge. **A few years ago, people had set expectations of what a Shared Services Center could do, and couldn't do. But now people tend to be a lot more open.** Financial planning forecasts, for example, was a CFO-specialized service pre-Covid. Today people are asking how they could use generative AI, data, and process mining to do it with the support of their Shared Services Center.

Everyone's talking about GenAI, are you finding ways to apply it?

GenAI takes AI from analytics to advisory – we are experimenting with it across finance, HR, customer service, and sales. One example is using GenAI to connect different data streams and process mining. Imagine an email communication that needs to be read, classified, and receive the right prompts. **By connecting that email to a knowledge model that can execute the process, we can remove a huge amount of manual intervention.**

Do you think SSCs are becoming more strategic, rather than transactional, partners?

Absolutely. SSCs continue to upskill themselves by moving toward more strategic work. Automation has played a big role for us: anything we can measure, predict, repeat, we try and automate. We do that so our teams can learn new skills, take on more processes, and do higher value-add work like financial scenario planning, forecasting, budgeting.

Celonis helps a lot with working more strategically by giving us full understanding of the process, where the 'fat' is, and fixing the bottleneck.

How would you describe your use of process mining?

We use process mining more like a discipline than simply a technology. We use it to get a heuristic study of the process – using the process data of our client and being able to see where the metrics stand in terms of good, bad, ugly. ***Once we know the issues, we use our shared services experience, practices, and benchmarks to transform the process for the better.***

We don't just see ourselves as executing on process improvements, we're an advisor that helps clients transform their Shared Services Centers.

How do you balance working within Accenture as a department as well as a shared services provider?

We drink our own champagne – ensuring we use what we learn from Accenture to help our other clients, and vice versa. Right now we're undergoing enterprise transformation internally, so whatever learnings and best practices we get, we'll share them with our clients.

What's the most common best practice you share with clients?

To connect people, processes, technology. ***A common issue we find is people not adhering to the policies behind the processes, and no one's monitoring how big the variations are and how often they occur.*** If you can't detect and measure non-conformance then you're stuck.

Think of maverick purchases for example. A company might have a 'no PO, no pay policy', but they still see maverick purchases. The policy's getting breached but no one's taking notice. A Shared Services Center can't do its job if people refuse to change.

What's the reaction of clients when they see problems like that?

Most people are intrigued by the insights – they know something's not working but often don't realize it's so high. ***Their reaction turns into action when we tell them the dollar impact. Once you treat non-conformance like leakage, you grab people's attention.*** Now the business says, 'let's fix it.'

What do your clients appreciate about what you and the SSC team do?

First, I think they appreciate how transparently we work. ***A Shared Services Center can't be a black box where clients aren't sure how the work gets done. It's better to be open:*** the clearer you can show a client how the SSC is performing, the trust quotient is better.

Second is matching SSCs to business outcomes, not just SLAs. You want to be able to create value, of course, but you should connect that to wider goals. Taking out \$1M from P&L is great but it's even better when you can prove you've reduced DSO from four days to three days, for example.

Third is speed. Our clients expect 'compressed transformation' – so what we would have delivered over 1–2 years, they now want results within months.

Do SSCs have a reputation for not working transparently?

If that happens, it's usually down to not having the right level of sponsorship and change management rigor.

We help solve that by pushing for C×O sponsorship. Day-to-day we work with the heads of Shared Services Centers but the C×Os are the change management agents. Get them on side, and you will achieve a lot more.

Are you optimistic about Shared Services Centers for the near future?

This is a very good time for Shared Services Centers because of the macro-economic challenges plus organizational constraints. Whether it's newer business models for SSCs to work with or taking on more automation, ***if SSCs focus on strategic work then the setup will deliver value regardless of the wider conditions.***

SSC is a combination of human and machine. Match the right team with smart technology, and Shared Services Centers can be the booster packs to accelerate change, value, and transformation.

There's not much you can tell Bogna Pismari about shared services. With two decades of experience under her belt, the global process owner is an expert at improving working capital, getting business buy-in, and expanding the shared services remit. She's also passionate about giving her team members the chance to do more. Here she tells us about helping people bloom, why honesty is the best client policy, and that 3.3 manual touches on an invoice is 0.3 touches too many.

Bogna Pismari

(8)

Title & business Global Process Owner, P2P, Fresenius Kabi

Fast facts:

- Worked in Shared Services Centers since 2004.
- Moved back to Poland from Ireland to start working with Fresenius Kabi.
- Locations: Fresenius Kabi has Shared Services Centers in the Philippines, Poland, China, and the Dominican Republic.
- Poland is the largest – with around a 200-strong team.
- The SSCs cover: P2P, O2C, R2R, Tax (core areas).
- What clients appreciate most: Quality data that is always up-to-date and available.

How do you get people to buy into the shared services model?

I invite people to come and see the Shared Services Center in person. It's so much easier to understand how we work by seeing us on site than over a video call. We talk about the processes we cover and our success, for example explaining how we moved O2C into the Shared Services Center to make it much more efficient.

I remember inviting colleagues from HR and after looking into how they work, it was obvious straight away they were duplicating work and taking different approaches. We talked about the benefits of taking a centralized approach and about solutions like Celonis for reporting. With Celonis we don't just get the reports, but we get told where the issues are, and how to get quick wins. The business responds to that.

Who do you approach on the team to get started?

The first step is approaching the global heads, so the global head of HR, for example. Then we go down to the service level, the heads of recruitment or payroll, and others.

What do you class as 'strategic' rather than 'transactional' work?

Transactional is posting the invoices as part of the Accounts Payable process. Whereas analyzing working capital is more strategic. Getting the data, finding the areas to improve working capital. That's the work we want to do – and we get to do it with Celonis.

How has the ambition of people working in shared services changed?

Days Payable Outstanding is a good example of how the Shared Services Center stepped in to help the Fresenius Kabi team in a strategic way. Before working with us, the business would just pay invoices whenever they had the money. That meant a lot of early payments. We showed them that if you just shift the payment by 'X' number of days, that can massively improve working capital and the investment team will love to see it.

It's an example of how Shared Services Centers can keep their clients and their own team happy. ***This is a world where lots of people get hired for basic tasks and at some stage they want to go further. If there's nothing interesting for them, they'll go elsewhere.*** People grow in their role so I want to keep them, their knowledge, their view of the market.

In the past someone might work in a department on the same straightforward tasks for years. Today people tend to want to do more, to work on more advanced projects. That can be a challenge for someone in my position because not every process is massively complex. It's why working with technologies like Celonis is useful – you can say 'go play with this and find new ways to bring value to the process.' People come up with fresh ideas, move beyond copy-paste, and look at processes from different perspectives.

How has your day-to-day work changed in the past 12 months?

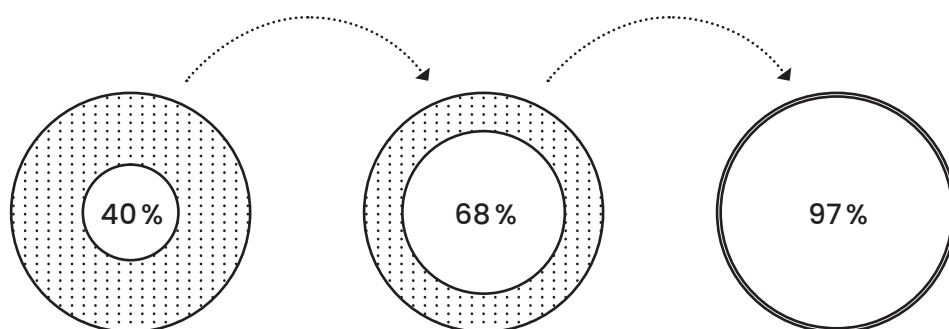
There's been a big interest in making processes more touchless. We have the IT to do that, but we didn't always know the best way to do it. We thought we were doing a good job at posting invoices, but after running Celonis, we saw 20% of them needed manual touches. We also found the bug – data not mapping to a field correctly. It was an easy fix. In Italy we saw all invoices coming in HTML format, so we made the system able to work with that.

There's definitely also more interest from the business in getting the most out of advanced technologies the business has, or to purchase new ones to improve accuracy and speed up work. Clients don't want to wait a week for the invoice to be posted. They want to see the invoice immediately.

Do you have a top memory of SSC success?

A real game changer was dynamic discounts. When I first joined Fresenius Kabi it took an hour to prepare the list of invoices needing to be posted to get the discount.

Working with Celonis, we got the data immediately and ***moved in a year from capturing 40% of discounts to 68%***. Then, investigating the process further, we noticed people signing contracts that guaranteed a discount if we paid within seven days. That can be challenging – so with the information gathered about us as a reliable payer, we negotiated up to ten days. ***Today we're capturing 96-97% of discounts available.***



A second was touchless invoices. We constantly had a backlog, like most companies. Teams told us it was because of necessary, manual touches. We were ***touching invoices 6-7 times on average.*** With process mining we could see by vendor the fields we were touching and could interrogate why. For non-PO invoices you want three touches: receive the invoice, post it, approve it. ***Now we're at 3.3 touches on average.*** We're still aiming for three.

What does the business appreciate about you?

Three or four years ago, shared services was a cost-efficiency game. Now our clients are looking for quality data that is always up-to-date and available. In the past it was ok to review P&L data at the end of the month, now they want it 'always on'. And they want access to one source of truth, not having to work across different tools. Our ability to do that is definitely something the business appreciates. ***Tasks formerly done locally are now moving to us when they see what we can do.***

You're CEO for a day, what would you get SSCs to do?

I've worked in SSCs that are involved in budgeting and planning, which gives people the sense they're truly part of the strategic direction of the company. ***My dream would be that SSCs are not copy, paste people but partners in investment, strategy, and corporate development.*** If I were CEO I would get SSCs working across markets, not just in one, and having the whole business following the same standards, benchmarks, and best practices.

What's your advice for getting the most out of a Shared Services Center?

Put yourself in the client's shoes. Be honest with them about what SSCs can do. People don't want to spend time on things that don't create value, so find a process early on that you can transform. Win them over. Within the SSC, make sure you have the people that can deliver it. The worst thing you can do is make promises to a client you can't keep. Avoid that by giving new clients the time and attention of your best people so they feel taken care of and they don't have to explain the basics.

After a decade spent on SAP implementations, Swathi Devireddy was ready for a change. Spotting a vacancy to set up a practice specializing in ERP for a large consulting company, she jumped at the chance to add analytics to her skillset. She's since joined global engineering leader ABB where she oversees a centralized/hybrid working model for shared services. Here she shares her advice for building communities at work, the enduring importance of training, and why the target KPI is far from the finish line.

Swathi Devireddy

(12)

Title & business Advanced Process Analytics Community Leader, ABB

Fast facts:

- Based in the UK.
- Career began in SAP implementations.
- Started at ABB in 2021, in current role since 2022.
- ABB Shared Services Centers are called Centers of Excellence – there is one centralized CoE and four hybrid ones.
- ABB classifies processes as 'core', 'common', and 'distinct'.
- What clients appreciate most: Clear governance model that clarifies roles and responsibilities.

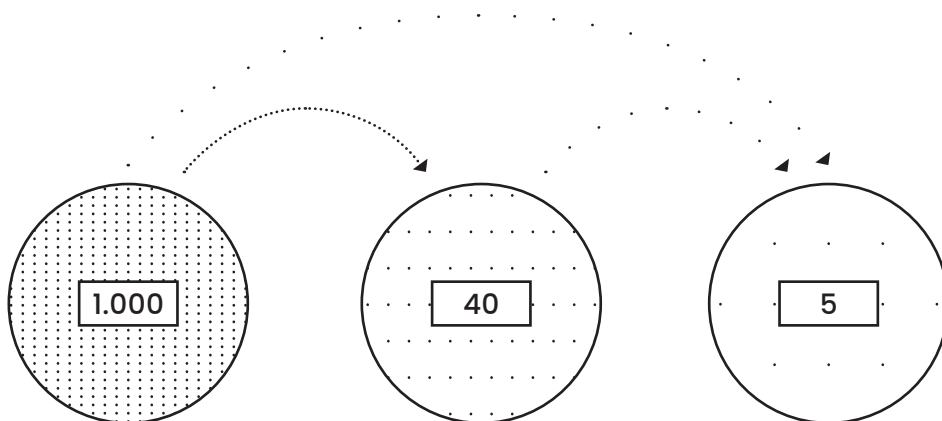
How did you get your start in Shared Services?

I was a tech consultant for SAP implementations for around 13 years, working with production, procurement, Order to Cash, etc. but I got a little bored. I then moved to a large professional services company that wanted to build its analytics practice, where I specialized in ERP.

They said I could pick any tool to learn and with Celonis being relatively new back then and having a background in process mapping, that's what I went with. I'll always remember being able to look at the whole process for the first time – eye-opening.

ABB has grown quickly through mergers and acquisitions, what impact does that have on you?

Each one adds a layer of complexity because with every company you acquire, you acquire its IT system along with it. **At one time we were working with around 1000 SAP systems**, which made working with the data a massive exercise. We're now down to **40 systems and want to get it down even further to five or six.**



Why does ABB have a centralized Center of Excellence and hybrid ones?

Our centralized CoE started in Germany back in 2015 with about six people. We moved into the centralized/hybrid model for two main reasons.

First, the success of the centralized CoE in standardizing processes meant it grew massively and showed the whole business what a CoE could do. Second, ABB has become more decentralized, so more power now lies in the different business areas – electrification, motion, process automation, robotics – and their divisions.

When the business shifted to a decentralized model, our centralized CoE saw a massive increase in demand and couldn't handle it. You need local knowledge of what's happening in the business, and you can't do that from a Center of Excellence that's working daily with completely different business units, based in different countries, and continents. **Centers can be based miles away from their clients but they have to be focused on their needs.**

So we identified local champions within ABB and started upskilling them so they could open new Centers of Excellence, which are our hybrid ones.

How do you divide work between the centralized and hybrid CoEs?

We have 'core', 'common', and 'distinct' processes. Core is something that ABB as a whole deals with, like how we pay our customers and suppliers – the centralized CoE handles that. Common is when more than one business area is involved and the hybrid CoE handles that. Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable, and global transformation programs fall under this. The hybrid centers also cover distinct, when a process is very specific to one business area only, like production planning.

Data extraction remains centralized but frontend activity like building dashboards and automations is done at the hybrid level. Not every department has access to their own center, the smaller ones work directly with the centralized CoE.

What's the challenge with having this setup?

You have to pay a lot of attention to sharing knowledge. There's no sense in having two CoEs do the same job. We have a governance board that meets to discuss priorities and projects to make sure that overlap does not happen.

You take training very seriously, can you share a recent experience of why constant training matters?

I spent a lot of time with our team in India earlier this year, looking into their use of the KPI dashboards. We found that once the KPI was hit some of the teams would stop there. Hypothetically, **going from 50% to 80% can actually be relatively easy. It's improving every percent after that, which can be really tricky.** You might have to solve ten different issues to get a single percent increase. It can take personal interaction to make sure teams understand the KPI isn't the end point, it's just one step in the journey of continuous improvement.

Training programmes are also great for making more experienced users aware of new functionalities and for helping newer users understand how to get the most out of technology.

What do people often underestimate about your role?

The importance of change management: how to be patient, to upskill others, and to influence people to go in the right direction.

You have to make people comfortable, don't make it an exercise in pointing fingers or people will take it personally. Change management is about helping people, teams, and the business grow in the future – we're all in this together.

What's been your top success in recent memory?

I love that we've built a community of process mining fans at ABB. We have community calls, training programmes, and boot camps. We invite internal speakers to share their success stories to underline how much easier process mining can make their day-to-day.

What keeps you
excited?

It's a role where you get to learn about the future and unlearn what you did in the past. The pace of change with technology means you need an open mind or you'll get left behind. I get excited by making improvements to the business and to how teams work.

You could have this role and settle for the first dashboard you ever made and the first KPIs you ever set. But if you take it seriously, you'll find useful ways to challenge yourself. For example, even if you think you're analyzing data well enough today, take the time to consider even better ways to do it. I recently did that with reconfiguring our dashboards and we got to a much simpler experience for the end user.

Top advice for people
who want to succeed
in Shared Services?

I have a couple. Make people comfortable by being clear in your communication and showing your working. Data validation is really important and the more transparent you can be, the more you'll win others over. Second is to have passion projects – the business may not have asked for it, but if you can get ahead and show the advanced capabilities of the technologies through your passion projects, you'll impress them.

Discover opportunities. Attract value. Extract cost.

Celonis transforms your Shared Services Center into an always-on value magnet that creates immediate and long-term cash impact by delivering on the value opportunities hiding in and between your processes.

Want to know more about the transformation that process mining and Celonis unlock?

Watch our on-demand demo all about the value opportunities you can capture with your Shared Services Center.

[Watch the demo](#)

