



EAB

Development of a Shared Services System

Structure and Implementation

Business Affairs Forum

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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Include units with high ease of standardization and high customer impact in new shared services structures. Contacts at all profiled institutions chose to transition units to shared services structures that would have the greatest impact on their primary customers and that would be the easiest to standardize. For example, administrators at **Institution A** pursued a shared services structure to better support students. Thus, administrators transitioned key student-related units such as admissions, financial aid, and student billing to the shared services unit, leading to improved efficiency and service to students.

Use holistic evaluation methods to maximize benefits of shared services systems. Across all profiled institutions, administrators track the effectiveness of their shared services systems using at least one of three key measures: cost savings, employee productivity, and customer satisfaction. Contacts at **Institution B** also highlight the value of assessing performance on these metrics before and after organizational changes. Specifically, these administrators explain that by evaluating employee efficiency before and after the transition to shared services, they have demonstrated large annual savings to other key stakeholders.

Standardized practices have allowed shared services units to easily adapt to remote work environments. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced administrators to adjust to remote operations, yet contacts at all profiled institutions note that due to the efficiency and centralized nature of shared services systems, they have been able to create a relatively seamless transition for their employees and customers. According to contacts at **Institution D** and **Institution E**, shared services structures' standardization and centralization make it easier for administrators to efficiently adapt institution-wide processes to align with the needs of changing work environments.

Provide transitioning staff members with peer mentors to ease the shift to shared services structures. Contacts at **Institution C**, **Institution D**, and **Institution E** note that to best prepare staff members for the transition to shared services teams, they assigned staff members peer mentors who already worked within teams more similar to the new centralized teams. At **Institution D**, contacts report that assigning new team members to peer mentors within the shared services unit serves two purposes – new members can ask mentors work-related questions and mentors can help embed new team members within the existing team culture.

Develop proactive and comprehensive communication plans to minimize staff pushback about shifts to shared services structures. Contacts at all profiled institutions highlight the benefits of prioritizing detailed and proactive communication in relation to the shift to shared services to address staff concerns as early as possible. For example, administrators at **Institution E** sent preliminary updates to leaders of impacted units almost a year in advance of the scheduled transition to the shared services structure. According to these contacts, giving these teams time to plan for the shift to shared services allowed staff members to process the change, ask questions prior to implementation, and understand the benefits of a shared services unit.

2) Structure

Overview

Implement a Shared Services System to Increase Efficiency and Consolidate Activities

Shared services systems consolidate administrative activities previously performed by decentralized staff members into a single centralized delivery point. By doing so, contacts at **Institution C** note that these units can increase service quality and reduce labor costs for customers. Shared services units use service-level agreements to ensure accountability to their customers in terms of the speed, quality, and scope of work. At peak maturity, shared services units continually improve service levels and efficiency, driving toward greater simplification, automation, and accuracy of workflows based on customer feedback and data-driven management.

Upfront expenditures (e.g., facilities renovations, new workflow technologies and automation solutions, consultant support, director and managerial salaries) may increase initial costs and lead shared services units to produce smaller short-term financial savings than anticipated. However, with this in mind, contacts at **Institution F** cite long-term cost savings and improvements to customer service as the key reasons they chose to pursue a shared services model.

To optimize the structure and implementation of shared services systems, contacts at profiled institutions included heavily transactional functions in the shared services structure (e.g., payroll, procurement), invested in holistic evaluation methods, used a “lift and shift” staffing method, and created detailed and proactive communication plans.

Services

Absorb Transactional Work in a Shared Services Structure to Support Academic Units’ Mission-Focused Efforts

Contacts at **Institution B**, **Institution C**, **Institution D**, **Institution E**, and **Institution F** note that their shared services units manage the institution’s transactional functions. These functional areas, such as procurement or HR, offer the best opportunities to introduce the shared services model to higher education since in many cases, the centralization and standardization of these processes is possible without harming service quality.

Contacts at **Institution C**, **Institution D**, **Institution E**, and **Institution F** cite that supporting academic and research missions at the institution is a main goal of transitioning to shared services. Specifically, by moving transactional actions into an integrated unit and out of individual academic units, academic leaders have greater ability to focus on mission-critical projects.

Additionally, when deciding which units to move to the shared services unit, contacts at profiled institutions note that they chose the functions that could most easily be standardized and those with high impact on overall customer satisfaction with institutional operations, and left all other functions decentralized. By choosing these functions, administrators avoided lengthy technological and procedural integration processes and could achieve the greatest financial benefits.

For instance, contacts at **Institution A** note that the main goals for creating the shared service unit were to improve efficiency and better serve students. As such, they clustered their student-focused teams in this unit, including admissions, financial aid, student records, student billing, veteran services, and institutional research.

Functions Included in Shared Services Systems at Profiled Institutions

Institution	Functions Included
Institution A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions • Financial Aid • Institutional Research • Student Billing • Student Records • Veteran Services
Institution B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Operations • Disbursements • Human Resources • Operations and Projects • Procurement
Institution C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accounts Payable • Financial Management • Human Resources • Payroll • Purchasing
Institution D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accounting • Human Resources • Post-Award Support
Institution E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiring and Onboarding • Information Technology Services • Finance
Institution F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Management • Human Resources • Sponsored-Project Financial Management

Organization

Organize Shared Services Units Either by Customer Type or by Functional Area

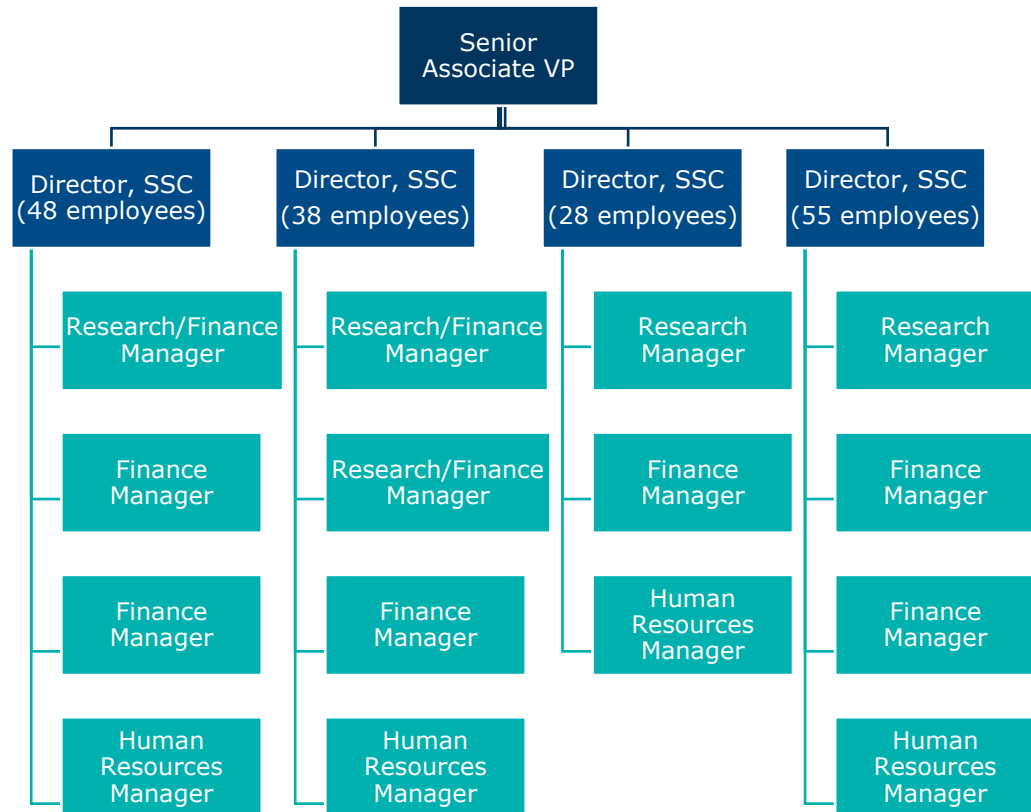
When considering the internal organization of their shared services units, administrators at **Institution A**, **Institution B**, **Institution D**, and **Institution F** separated unit responsibilities by customer type or by functional area.

For example, administrators organize the Shared Services Center at **Institution F** by functional area. The unit includes teams organized broadly around general financial management, sponsored-projects financial management, workforce administration, customer care (which handles frontline questions), and operational excellence (which deals with back-of-house products).

On the other hand, administrators at **Institution D** split their Shared Services Center (SSC) into four units, divided primarily by the schools and departments they support, rather than the functions they support. For example, the one SSC serves customers in liberal arts and humanities-focused departments, while the another SSC serves customers in science and technology-focused departments.

The shared services units at both institutions include a senior staff member overseeing the unit, managerial staff that align with their organizational structures, and staff to support the unit's foundational work.

Overview of the Organizational Structure of Shared Services Centers (SSCs) at *Institution D*



Provide Shared Services System Oversight via Senior-Level Administrators to Maintain Valuable High-Level Organizational Connections

Contacts at all profiled institutions note that shared services unit administrators report to senior-level administrators at the institution. By doing so, the units ensure they have the organizational connections and influence necessary to coordinate operations between several academic units, schools, and departments. Across profiled institutions, shared services units report to the senior-level administrators best aligned with the unit's specific work.

For example, since shared services systems at **Institution B**, **Institution D**, **Institution F**, and **Institution C** focus on finance-related responsibilities (e.g., accounting, payroll) work, these teams each report to their institution's Chief Financial Officer.

In contrast, the admin-focused shared services unit at **Institution E** reports to the Administration's Executive Director, while **Institution A**'s student services-focused shared services unit reports to the Associate Vice President of University Student Services and Systems.

Decentralized Units Collaborate Easily with Shared Services Units Due to Senior-Level Reporting

Contacts at **Institution E** note that organizing shared services teams and related decentralized teams under the purview of the same senior-level administrator eases coordination between centralized and decentralized teams.

For example, even though the IT team is not housed within the shared services unit at **Institution F**, its organizational proximity to the shared services unit helps IT staff coordinate with shared services staff to address joint challenges.

Measuring Effectiveness

Invest in Holistic Evaluation Methods to Capture and Track the Benefits of Your Shared Services Unit

When creating shared services units, EAB finds that institutions should establish a baseline for both the cost and quality of conducting business processes that may move to shared services to allow for a pre-shift and post-shift comparison¹. Across all profiled institutions, administrators track the effectiveness of their shared services systems using at least one of three key measures: cost savings, employee productivity, and customer satisfaction. Cost analyses can be relatively simple, considering expenses such as salary, fringe benefits, and facilities/maintenance costs. Case management systems can track request turnaround time and employee productivity, and surveys can provide insights into employer and customer satisfaction.

At **Institution B's** Shared Services Center (SSC), administrators measured the effectiveness of their shared services unit through cost savings, employee productivity, and customer satisfaction. Administrators evaluated the pre-shared services processes to better understand the investments needed to operate these functions. Through a comparison with post-change data, administrators were able to demonstrate savings of about \$425,000 annually, achieved through increased efficiencies.

Having this holistic information allows the SSC's leadership team to demonstrate broad value to several stakeholders, including high-level administrators and skeptical staff members. Contacts at **Institution B** note that the Shared Services Center administrators also routinely measure their transactional volume to help assess employee productivity and deploy an annual customer service survey to ensure their customers are satisfied with the services provided.

¹ Guadagnolo, Gary. "Shared Services Primer." EAB, 2019. <https://eab.com/research/business-affairs/resource/shared-services-primer/>

Metrics to Assess Shared Services Units' Effectiveness



Cost Savings

Create a simple cost analysis to calculate cost savings. Consider expenses such as salaries, fringe benefits, and facilities/maintenance costs.

Used by contacts at **Institution A** and **Institution B**.



Employee Productivity

Measure employee productivity by assessing transactional volume and/or request turnaround time. Case management systems like Salesforce or procurement platforms like Ariba can automatically track these metrics.

Used by contacts at **Institution B**, **Institution C**, **Institution E**, and **Institution F**.



Customer Satisfaction

Gauge customer satisfaction through routine surveys. Regularly distribute the survey to track progress over time and generate insights on areas for improvement.

Used by contacts at **Institution B** and **Institution D**.

Without several methods to track and reinvest savings from shared services shifts, systems risk not fully capturing the benefits of this shift. For example, a lack of information and data on which processes have improved in efficiency can cause administrators to spend limited funds on already-successful functional areas.

Administrators at **Institution C** used a wide array of metrics to track the impact of shared services more accurately. At **Institution C**, administrators note that by expanding the list of evaluative metrics used, they were able to identify benefits of shared services implementation that they had not anticipated. Specifically, these administrators explain that by tracking employee productivity more holistically, they not only achieved the desired cost savings that they had hoped for upfront, but also pinpointed opportunities to increase employee satisfaction further.

Standardized Processes Enable Units to Seamlessly Transition to Remote Work Environments

Contacts at **Institution A**, **Institution C**, **Institution D**, **Institution E**, and **Institution F** note that when the COVID-19 pandemic emerged and administrators had to adjust to remote operations, the efficiency of shared services systems helped create a smooth transition for employees and customers. Specifically, the standardization and centralization of shared services structures made it easier for administrators to efficiently adapt institution-wide processes to align with the needs of changing work environments.

3) Implementation

Staffing

Contacts at **Institution A**, **Institution B**, and **Institution D** note that their shared services implementation processes took just over three years on average.

Contacts at the **Institution D** report that over 100 employees opted into the VSIP during the earliest stages of shared services implementation.

Offer A Retirement Incentive to Minimize Involuntary Job Loss

Contacts at **Institution A**, **Institution C**, and **Institution F** note that their shared services initiative evoked fears of layoffs among staff members. However, because the implementation process took place over the course of several years, contacts at these institutions found that they could reduce overall headcount as needed largely through natural attrition. As staff members retired or left for other roles, administrators at **Institution A**, **Institution B**, **Institution C**, and **Institution E** kept the positions unfilled in anticipation of moving toward a shared service structure, reducing staff headcount while minimizing layoffs.

To further reduce the number of layoffs required by the shift to shared services, administrators at **Institution D** and **Institution F** also offered a voluntary separation incentive plan (VSIP) to staff members. By offering a VSIP, administrators encouraged faculty members to retire early, reducing total headcount in affected units without significant layoffs. To limit institutional costs, **Institution F**'s VSIP program outlined strict participation requirements and clearly defined monetary benefits for participants.

Adapted from Institution F's VSIP

Overview

In an effort to minimize operating costs and to increase funding for the institutions most top-of-mind projects, Institution F is offering a Voluntary Separation Incentive Plan (VSIP). Through the plan, the University will offer a one-time incentive payment to faculty and staff who agree to separate from employment with the institution either by resignation or retirement.

The VSIP allows the institution's academic and business units to adjust their labor force. By doing so, the institution will be able to offer improved programming to faculty and students, in addition to providing a monetary incentive to employees who may consider retiring or pursuing a new career.

Details

All faculty and staff across the Institution's System who meet the following criteria are able to apply for the VSIP:

- The employee is currently in a **benefits-eligible position** at the University; and
- The employee has served **20 or more years in a benefits-eligible position** at the University

Employees who accept the VSIP will be given two potential separation dates:

- **End of calendar year:** employees will receive a one-time incentive payment equal to 100% of their annual base salary.
- **End of fiscal year or June 30, 2020, whichever comes first:** employees will receive a one-time incentive payment equal to 50% of their annual base salary.

Reduce the Number of Layoffs by Leveraging a “Lift and Shift” Staffing Method

Aside from offering VSIPs, administrators at **Institution B**, **Institution D**, and **Institution F** used a “lift and shift” staffing method for their shared services units to avoid additional layoffs. This method “lifts” staff from relevant decentralized units and “shifts” them to the shared services unit.

Contacts at **Institution D** indicate that this staffing method reduces staff turnover by reassigning staff members to new and similar roles rather than laying them off and hiring all new staff members for the new shared services-specific roles. While no contacts had access to exact turnover rates during the implementation of shared services structures, they indicated that teams experienced relatively low turnover during the transition process, due in large part to the use of the “lift and shift” method.

Administrators at **Institution D** even went so far as to promise that there would be zero layoffs due to the transition to shared services. Administrators at **Institution F** made no such promises but reported only letting go of a single employee throughout the entire process.

In both cases, while the duties in new roles did not align with previous roles perfectly, the “shifted” staff adapted general knowledge and skills from their previous decentralized role to tackle their new work in the shared services unit. Thus, this staffing method also minimized retraining costs for shared services unit staff.



Highlight Opportunities for Professional Growth if Marketing New Shared Services-Related Roles to Potential Candidates

Administrators at **Institution C** did not choose to use the “lift and shift” method to staff their shared services unit. Instead, administrators posted new roles to both internal and external candidates, who could choose to apply on their own. Contacts note that this method increased existing employees’ agency over professional shifts.

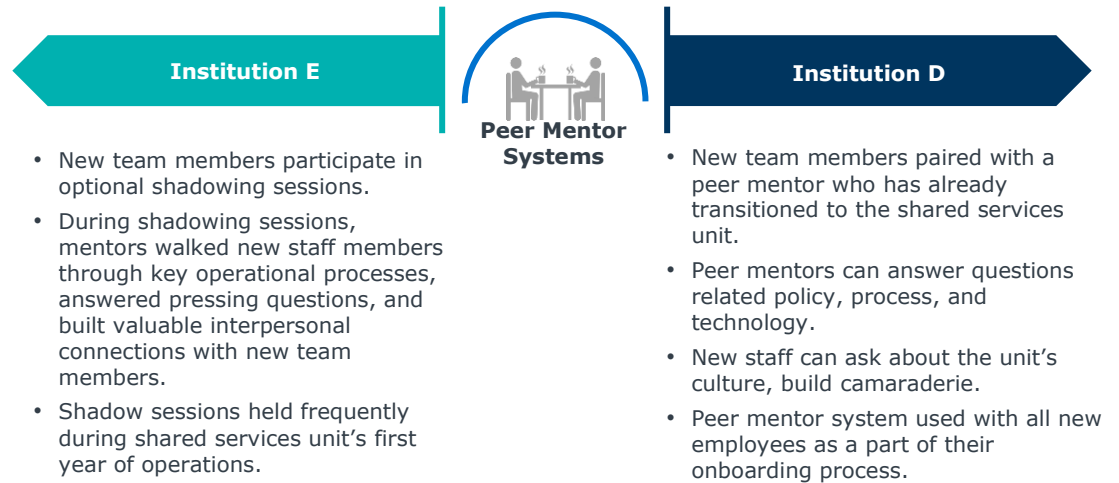
To maximize the appeal of these new roles, the CFO worked with the HR team to create new roles at various job levels within the shared services unit. Thus, these new roles presented strong opportunities for future professional mobility and growth, helping to market the roles to especially strong candidates.

Administrators at profiled institutions did not change their HR or finance systems at the same time as their transition to shared services, thus decreasing the retraining necessary for impacted employees.

Introduce a Peer Mentor System to Prepare Staff Members for Transitions to Shared Services Units

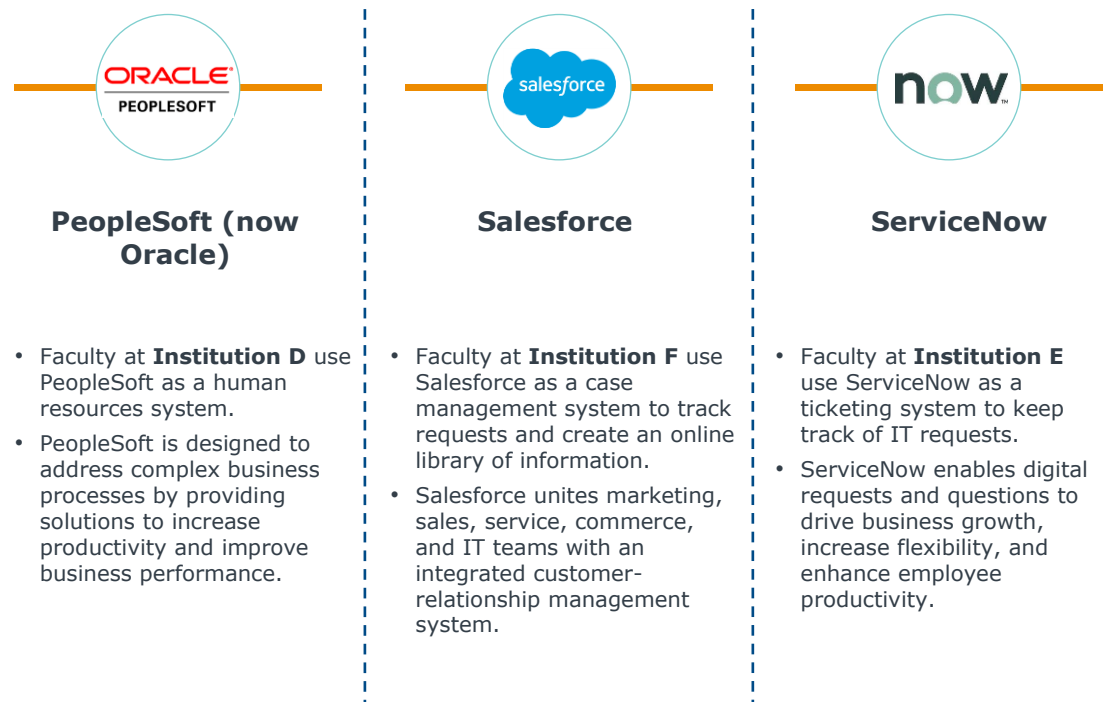
Contacts at **Institution D**, **Institution E**, and **Institution C** recommend introducing a peer mentor system during the implementation process to help prepare impacted staff members for the transition to shared services. Administrators at these institutions encouraged more experienced team members or team members who transitioned earlier in the process to volunteer as mentors for the newest team members. Peer mentors assisted new team members as they integrated technological tools across new teams during shared services implementation.

Peer Mentor Programs at *Institution E* and *Institution D*



Importantly, peer mentors help new team members learn how to operate key unit-specific technological platforms. While profiled institutions tended to use the same technological platforms across teams even before shared services-related organizational changes, peer mentors helped introduce unfamiliar staff members to key tools, such as Salesforce and ServiceNow, which often streamline coordination and communication between centralized shared services unit staff and decentralized customers.

External Technology Used by SSC Staff Members at Profiled Institutions²



² Oracle. "PeopleSoft," n.d. <https://www.oracle.com/applications/PeopleSoft/>; Salesforce. "What is Salesforce?" n.d.; <https://www.salesforce.com/products/what-is-salesforce/>; ServiceNow. "ServiceNow," n.d. <https://www.servicenow.com/>

Create Proactive and Thorough Communication Plans to Reduce Staff Pushback

With shared services system implementation, staff members at **Institution B**, **Institution C**, and **Institution E** feared that university leaders planned to cut jobs and reduce service quality.

To assuage these concerns and minimize related pushback to shared services systems, contacts at every profiled institution recommend that administrators prioritize descriptive, proactive, and comprehensive communication strategies in shared services-related change management processes. According to these contacts, communications should clearly outline procedures, plans, and timelines about the shared services initiative to increase buy-in for the new structure.

For example, almost a year in advance of shifting to a shared services model, administrators at **Institution E** sent initial updates and held town hall meetings with leaders of impacted units explaining details of the change. According to these contacts, giving impacted staff members advance notice of impending changes gave these teams time to fully process the change and ask pressing questions prior to official implementation. This proactive and thorough communication also granted administrators time to highlight the benefits of the shared services system and address pushback before fully implementing the new system.

Contacts at **Institution B** caution against communicating change too proactively, though, as administrators may struggle to manage staff members' concerns if they have not yet finalized key details of the impending organizational change. In their own change management process, administrators at **Institution B** wanted to emphasize transparency in their communications, but the lack of finalized details led to the spread of counterproductive rumors among staff members. With this in mind, these administrators recommend solidifying all main details about the change and preparing answers to predictable questions prior to communicating about the change to impacted staff members.

Use a Combination of Communication Channels to Increase Accessibility

Contacts at all profiled institutions note that to maximize accessibility of key information, shared services leadership teams should use multiple communication channels to convey important updates to staff members. Administrators at profiled institutions communicated these updates through various channels, such as informational emails, website updates, informal conversations, and formal meetings.

Methods Used by Administrators at Profiled Institutions to Communicate Shifts to Shared Services Systems



Informational Emails

Administrators at **Institution D** shared relevant information directly to staff members through emails.



Website Updates

Administrators at **Institution A** created a comprehensive website that includes important information, such as key timelines and progress updates.



Informal Meetings

Administrators at **Institution E** offered an open-door policy to enable staff members to come to leadership with questions at any time.



Formal Meetings

Administrators at **Institution F** hosted quarterly town hall sessions open to anyone within the campus community. These ensured that the units leadership team could meet with impacted individuals to share updates and receive feedback.

Personalize Your Messaging and Outreach to Affected Units to Instill Trust with Staff Members

Staff members and leadership teams from different units have unique goals and concerns. Administrators at **Institution B**, **Institution C**, **Institution D**, **Institution E**, and **Institution F** used personalized messaging to ensure that the stakeholders understood how the process would impact their specific unit.

While tailoring messages and informational sessions to specific audiences can be a resource-intensive process, contacts at **Institution E** note that individualized communication maximizes staff member support for planned organizational changes.

For example, during the implementation of the new shared services structure, administrators at **Institution D** met individually with the deans and leadership teams for each impacted unit to build trust by providing information, answering questions, and hearing feedback. This transparency, along with a personalized implementation timeline for each transitioning unit, helped the SSC leadership team build support for the system and earn the trust of its staff members.

At **Institution C**, administrators relied on external contractors to deliver the news of the impending shift to shared services to affected staff members. However, contacts report that this approach lacked clarity and that staff members were left with several questions and concerns, only made worse by an impersonal delivery of potentially bad news. Given this experience, contacts at **Institution C** advise that other institutions rely on internal stakeholders to deliver personalized communication to impacted staff members.

4) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at the partner institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- Which units did administrators at contact institutions choose to include within their shared services structure and which did they choose to leave decentralized?
- What factors influenced these organizational decisions?
- What is the internal organizational structure of shared services units at contact institutions?
- To whom do these units report?
- How do shared services units at contact institutions coordinate operations with other decentralized units across campus?
- What technological tools do administrators at contact institutions use to guide shared services operations?
- How do administrators at contact institutions measure the effectiveness of shared services structures?
- What process did administrators at contact institutions use to implement new shared services structures effectively?
- What was the impetus for administrators at contact institutions pursuing a shared services structure?
- How long of an implementation timeline did administrators at contact institutions use?
- What process did administrators at contact institutions use to integrate technological tools across teams involved in shared services implementation?
- Did administrators at contact institutions move to shared services at the same time as they changed any of their finance and/or HR systems?
- How did administrators at contact institutions involve relevant stakeholders in decision-making processes related to shared services implementation?
- How did administrators at contact institutions communicate shared services-related organizational changes to relevant staff members?
- How did administrators at contact institutions maximize staff member support for shared services-related organizational changes?
- If tracked, what changes in staff turnover rates did administrators at contact institutions observe over the course of shared services implementation?
- How did administrators at contact institutions staff new shared services teams?
- How did administrators at contact institutions prepare staff members for changes in their roles caused by shared services implementation?

Project Sources

Guadagnolo, Gary. "Shared Services Primer." EAB, 2019.

<https://eab.com/research/business-affairs/resource/shared-services-primer/>

Oracle. "PeopleSoft," n.d. <https://www.oracle.com/applications/PeopleSoft/>

Salesforce. "What is Salesforce?" n.d. <https://www.salesforce.com/products/what-is-salesforce/>

ServiceNow. "ServiceNow," n.d. <https://www.servicenow.com/>

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed administrators involved in shared services system development or implementation at research universities in the United States.

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Region	Approximate Enrollment
Institution A	Midwest	110,500
Institution B	Mountain West	13,500
Institution C	South	59,500
Institution D	Midwest	31,000
Institution E	Pacific West	55,500
Institution F	Mid-Atlantic	32,000