How to Get the Most Out of Your Guidewire Platform With Shared Services

APRIL 2018
The benefits of using a shared services model on your Guidewire platform

The benefits of this model are evident:

Reduced costs
Shared services uses resources more productively (with less downtime), enabling specialization that maximizes efficiency. Because the core functions remain consistent across all Guidewire products, it is more effective for the support team to share resources.

Improved quality
With deployment specialization, you can drive quality improvement across multiple projects (product lifecycle versus project lifecycle) within the enterprise. Deployment automation can be achieved through various processes, such as robotic process automation, and we can employ continuous process improvement to increase the quality of the delivery and consistently measure the effectiveness.

Reduced risk
With specialization, standardization and automation, the impact of attrition is significantly reduced. This ultimately results in more time spent on activities that deliver real return on investment and less time spent on operation and maintenance activities.

So, you’ve implemented Guidewire core products for your policy administration, claims handling and billing systems. Now you need a well-thought-out plan for ongoing enhancements, technology upgrades and production support after the initial deployment. The good news is that you have many options when it comes to managing costs and implementing the right service model. One of those options, shared services, enables you to easily manage overhead while streamlining processes. Based on our experience, we think it’s your best bet for comprehensive platform support as it surpasses the benefits of outsourcing and offshoring.

Shared services is a significant improvement over the standard IT services delivery models that are still largely based on resources or head count. With shared services, you can focus on throughput or a defined service catalog, or even on project activity versus platform activity.

In this paper, you’ll learn more about the Guidewire platform and how to get the most out of your implementation using a shared services model that aligns people, process and technology for success.
Guidewire: Built on a foundation of shared technology and support

Guidewire has a common shared platform beneath all its products, as well as common technical and functional features. These functions include document and notes management, workflows and activities, contract management and administration. Support is also shared across all the products in the platform, including integrations, batch process patterns, data models, data extraction and monitoring. Another major benefit: You can enable an omnichannel customer experience for all core products across contact centers and customer portals, as well as interactive voice recognition (IVR), email, fax and social media support.

Most of the billing center, claim center and policy center stabilization practices are also shared across the organization, and Guidewire products have similar online and batch components. Billing is batch intensive, and batch processes need to be continuously monitored and tuned for optimal performance. Based on performance needs, existing capacity needs to be tuned or additional capacity and servers need to be added to support both online and batch process needs.

By integrating a shared services model into this foundation of shared technology and support, you can improve overall operational efficiency.

Upgrades to Guidewire products are similar across all products, and upgrade best practices and experiences are shared across the organization. Guidewire product investments can improve the agent/customer experience, providing them with consistent and accurate data. Using a shared platform for data analytics leverages big data for unstructured data analysis, billing and claim notes analysis, and predictive analytics. Again, all technology is shared across the organization.

By integrating a shared services model into this foundation of shared technology and support, you can improve overall operational efficiency. This includes fewer agent and customer incidents; lower IVR call volumes; and better development of customer service representative aids, data summarizations, quick views and so on. It can also help you improve balancing and reconciliation processes, and enable claims submission online, which eliminates duplicate data entry.

NTT DATA recommends platform management

We know a lot of different models are available to provide shared services such as application maintenance and capacity management. All the models, however, seem to fall into three different shared approaches: resource pool, support and maintenance, and platform management. Based on our experience delivering shared services to organizations across the globe, we recommend following a platform management approach. It can help you achieve benefits, such as improving overall efficiency and minimizing attrition risk and capability gaps, as well as implement cross-governance to prioritize demands in other technology platforms.

In this approach, all the core Guidewire products — including ClaimCenter, BillingCenter and PolicyCenter — share a support team that also works on application maintenance and other projects. The shared services provider is part of the governance team, too, and works collaboratively with the three core maintenance teams. Governance includes, but is not limited to, project oversight, project prioritization, service-level agreement management and architecture management.
Including both support and project work in shared services provides a number of benefits: maximum use of top-skilled resources, less unplanned work and lower attrition risk, among others.

The governance team, which includes shared services representation, prioritizes any additional individual work requirements as well as estimates the effort required.

Core team size is based on the known scope of activities and the technical skill requirements for all three groups. Based on the projected effort, additional team size is estimated and maintained as a flex team. If there is any downtime, the flex team provides continuous training, process improvements, data templates and integrations patterns, among other things.

Including both support and project work in shared services provides a number of benefits: maximum use of top-skilled resources, less unplanned work and lower attrition risk, among others. In addition, the scope of activities ensures broader opportunities for hands-on learning. Shared services also drives operational enhancements, because the team can balance effort and benefit internally to improve overall efficiency. However, challenges do exist.
Meeting the challenges of a shared services model

Capacity planning remains as critical in shared services as it is for any project or support team. Although there is more flexibility to spread demand over time, if work focuses on deliverables and opportunities to drive value-added activity, more moving pieces will mean more management. Stakeholders need to be active in the entire process, ensuring strong governance to manage capacity.

To enable the most efficient capacity management, it’s important to not only actively manage priorities but also set standards for priority. You need to be able to manage the engagement end to end, particularly when changes may impact other areas (for example, configuration changes, process changes, best practices implementations and integrations). Active governance is critical, too, to ensure transparency, value and fairness, as well as quality and value.

Although specialization provides significant benefits in a platform-centered shared service, it can sometimes create tunnel-vision with a focus on the technology itself. As such, it’s important to maintain breadth of focus to understand Guidewire’s position within your enterprise as well as all upstream and downstream technologies and business processes.

Although a shared services model doesn’t work for every IT environment, Guidewire offers a unique platform that’s suitable for end-to-end shared support — aligning people, process and technology.

Critical success factors

Based on our experience implementing shared services, there are certain critical success factors that can help maximize the benefits in a Guidewire engagement.

Processes supporting prioritization and planning are critical, but so is accounting. You’re basically buying into a shared service and need to be able to show that you’re getting the correct share of that service.

From a people perspective, it’s all about maintaining the right level of capability. You need to be sure that the service provider keeps you informed at every step of the process — while also being part of an active feedback loop. To do that, you must maintain an overarching understanding of the platform and its environment, as well as an understanding of the platform’s features and capabilities. At the same time, the service provider needs to drive continuous training around both the platform and the specific implementation of the platform to ensure continuity of high-quality service.

Unplanned work is even more disruptive to platform management. It always happens, but the focus must be on reducing the occurrence of such work, not just managing each incident.

From a technology perspective, the platform must continue to develop to stay relevant and provide the most value. Where a software package is at the core of the service, it’s critical to stay current — not just in terms of version but in terms of actively evaluating and supporting product developments that introduce greater value. You need a service provider that understands standardization. Standardizing environments helps enable the easy shifting of resources across users and activities, and it’s foundational to driving operational efficiencies. Change management, defect detection, root cause analysis and deployment processes all benefit from standardized environments.

Most importantly, every implementation has some degree of technical debt. A decision or set of decisions made during implementation that needs to be fixed/corrected/enhanced after the go-live date often requires some manual processes or workaround to accommodate that decision. Attacking this debt is critical to stabilizing the platform and delivering the full, originally expected value. Unplanned work is even more disruptive to platform management. It always happens, but the focus must be on reducing the occurrence of such work, not just managing each incident. Although more of a general application support concept, total platform health needs to be at the center of your shared services engagement and not just as a problem ticket or project throughput.
Let’s get started

As one of the leading providers of application services across the globe, we can help your organization analyze its existing Guidewire platform and recommend the steps necessary to optimize it. No matter the current status of your organization’s application maturity, NTT DATA Application Services can help plug any gaps and recommend steps for achieving the maximum return on investment for your business.

Our services include:

• Strategic consulting: Identify the gaps within your application stack to align IT and business for your enterprise roadmap.

• Technical consulting: Mediate these gaps by leveraging your existing investments or suggesting new investments that align with your business priorities.

• Application management: Take a consultative approach to application management and work toward your business goals. We structure our solutions around your environment while maximizing efficiencies and value to your business.

NTT DATA Application Management Outsourcing (AMO), our award-winning solution, uses real business metrics to help you identify short- and long-term innovation opportunities across applications, support services and technologies. Through continuous measurement and analysis of the entire application and technology portfolio, AMO enables you to align support activities to current business goals, reduce total cost of ownership and focus resources on meeting the ever-changing needs of your business.