

Do You Need a Center of Excellence and Innovation?

An approach to achieving ServiceNow excellence.

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A woman with long brown hair, wearing a bright pink dress and a wide-brimmed tan hat with a dark patterned band, is seen from the back. She is looking out over a vast valley filled with numerous hot air balloons of various colors (red, yellow, blue, orange) floating in the sky. The landscape below is rugged with rocky hills and some small buildings. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting dawn or dusk. The overall mood is serene and aspirational.

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Do you need a Centre of Excellence & Innovation?

Are you considering establishing a Centre of Excellence and Innovation (CoEI) for your ServiceNow platform? While the need for a CoEI might be pressing, it's worth taking a step back and defining the journey you want to embark on - and here's why.

In today's dynamic landscape, excellence isn't just a lofty aspiration; it's the baseline expectation. Many organisations now talk about the pursuit of continual excellence, recognising that in a world that's constantly accelerating, staying ahead requires relentless effort.

At Synechron, we understand the urgency of ServiceNow Excellence. It's not just a service; it's a commitment to helping our clients achieve and sustain continual excellence, unlocking the full potential and value of their ServiceNow investment.

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What is a Centre of Excellence & Innovation?

Let's delve into the essence of a CoEI, as it forms the foundation of our discussion. It's crucial to understand that no two Centres of Excellence and Innovation (CoEIs) are identical. The reason behind this diversity lies in their tailored design for specific purposes.

ServiceNow provides the following definition:

“A ServiceNow Centre of Excellence and Innovation brings together teams for strategy, business engagement and delivery, platform architecture and support, and innovation.”

For comparison, AWS defines it as:

“It is a cross-organisational leadership function that supports successful cloud adoption across the enterprise through alignment, enablement, and automation.”

Although these definitions differ, they both share common characteristics. They are cross-functional entities driven by a shared aspiration—to enable and accelerate the utilisation of their respective platforms. Any CoEI you establish must have a clear purpose and charter aligned with the needs of your platform and business. Defining this upfront is crucial before embarking on your journey. While the charter may evolve over time, it serves as a compass guiding your efforts in the right direction.

Does my Organisation need a Centre of Excellence & Innovation?

Does my organisation need CoEI? Or perhaps a better question is, does my organisation require another CoEI? Chances are, several already exist, so conducting research to understand their functions and operations is invaluable. To ascertain the necessity of a CoEI for ServiceNow, you must first identify the challenges you currently face and where you envision your organisation in the next two years.

This necessitates a deep understanding of your existing operating model, its performance metrics, and how it delivers value to the business.

In most cases, the challenges you encounter will prompt a series of improvements focused on story development, demand management, long-term platform strategy, innovation initiatives, and potentially onboarding new business units. These are common scenarios in the ServiceNow ecosystem and can often be addressed by a proficient ServiceNow Platform team. Sometimes, enhancing your current capabilities and processes over time proves more beneficial. This iterative approach lays a solid foundation for future endeavours.

Continuously improving until you reach a point where managing demands becomes overwhelming signifies the ideal juncture to consider establishing a CoEI. At this stage, the CoEI plays a pivotal role in outwardly engaging with the business to maximise value delivery. However, it's crucial to ensure that your organisation is prepared for the increased demand that comes from establishing a CoEI, hence the importance of laying strong foundations beforehand.

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You may ask yourself, if my platform team already handles these tasks, should I simply rename them? While it may be tempting to rebrand the existing platform team as a CoEI, it's not advisable. The difference lies in their primary focus: the platform team predominantly looks inward, whereas a CoEI is oriented towards outward engagement.

So, while the capabilities of a CoEI often overlap with those of a platform team, they serve distinct purposes. Therefore, it's essential to delineate their roles clearly to reap the intended benefits without causing confusion within the organisation.

What functions should a Centre of Excellence and Innovation provide?

Each Centre of Excellence and Innovation (CoEI) should be meticulously crafted to align with the strategic objectives of the organisation. While the specific design may vary based on organisational needs, there are several common capabilities that warrant consideration. Drawing from our extensive experience collaborating with diverse clients, we've compiled a list of key components:

1. **Business Engagement**
2. **Demand Intake**
3. **Design Authority**
4. **Technical Governance**
5. **Data Governance**
6. **Operations Lead**
7. **Standards & Blueprints**
8. **Enablement and Communications**
9. **Innovation**
10. **FinOps**
11. **User Experience**

Where should you begin? Start by identifying the smallest, most logical steps from your current model that will address the issue at hand. While it may be tempting to concentrate solely on the technical architecture and governance of the stories being developed, which often proves to be a challenge for the

platform teams as they strive to increase velocity while ensuring adherence to best practices, I strongly recommend you look further upstream. Focus on reviewing the work during the demand intake stage to prioritise the right tasks as early as possible. This approach ensures that you are overseeing valuable work from the outset. Each item on the functions list is intended to yield specific outcomes and benefits for your operating model. I detail each of them in more detail below.

1. Business Engagement

If the catalyst for focusing on a CoEI is the transition towards outward engagement with customers, then this aspect of a CoEI is undeniably crucial. It enables you to interact with both your existing and potential customers (beyond IT), gaining insights into their objectives, use cases, and what they require to achieve success. The better you understand their objectives, the more effectively you can align the current and future capabilities of the platform to support them.



Business Engagement also facilitates collaboration with other areas of the CoEI, such as Innovation, to help shape the future. A significant outcome of this capability is that your customers should have a clear understanding of what the platform offers and how it will benefit them. Consequently, the demands they submit will be better scoped and more likely to be fulfilled, thereby enhancing the platform's perception.

2. Demand Intake

Every customer we engage with presents a backlog or demand list longer than Chuck Tomasi's fan base. Ensuring this list contains higher quality, well-defined items that align with the business strategy is paramount. This ensures that the downstream process of refining and delivering these items becomes more efficient.

Each item on the list should possess both value and size, facilitating smooth progression to the next stage of refinement. You may be familiar with the concept of "garbage in, garbage out", but the hidden cost of disposing of this "garbage" introduces additional manual work or toil into the rest of the operating model. Preventing this at the source is the most effective way to propel your operations forward.

3. Design Authority

The role of the design authority is to facilitate the implementation of new demand within the platform. Its primary focus lies in the architectural design of demand and determining which platform components should be utilised. This should involve discussions regarding the platform's suitability in comparison to other enterprise offerings and its integration with other systems. It should also be aligned with and supported by the overall enterprise architecture of your organisation.

4. Technical Governance

Technical Governance is a familiar concept for many, often encountered through their engagement with ServiceNow and the health checks that assess adherence to best practice. However, this function goes beyond mere adherence and defines what the vendor recommends and what your business needs to meet its specific requirements.



The focus here is not simply on right or wrong but on maintaining consistency to ensure a supportable codebase in the long term, with any technical debt understood and justified. Technical Governance must adapt to changes in the platform and should be responsible for driving improvement initiatives aimed at eliminating debt that arises from organisational entropy or platform changes. If you remain stagnant, technical debt accumulates, much like dust on the back of your monitor. It's not a matter of anyone doing something wrong, but it does need to be addressed eventually.

5. Data Governance

Data model governance on the Now platform is often overlooked, yet it is frequently the gateway through which customisation infiltrates the system. Understanding and controlling how your technical teams manipulate and



utilise data is crucial for long-term success. The data model is susceptible to the same entropy as technical governance, underlining the importance of staying current.

The data governance function must also collaborate with the design authority and the wider enterprise data team to educate the business on the value of a mature ServiceNow data model. In our experience, most organisations are actually consuming and processing data that fits within the ServiceNow data model—they just refer to it by different names or, even more confusingly, as something else, that exists for a completely different purpose. The end goal is to establish a shared understanding of the data's purpose, how it is populated, and who owns it.

6. Operations Lead

Ensuring a stable and high-performing platform is essential. The role of the operations lead within the CoEI is to monitor the trending operational platform Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and to advise the design and technical teams on how their standards and templates should evolve to protect the platform.

The scope of this role should be comprehensive, encompassing performance, capacity, security, as well as the implications of upgrades and patches. Their responsibility is to offer a different perspective on every aspect of value delivery on the platform, a perspective that must be understood and considered for long-term success.

While the Operations lead should refrain from dedicating excessive effort to current operational issues in order to maintain the strategic focus of the CoEI, it would be appropriate to discuss reprioritisation to address chronic platform issues, if necessary.

7. Standards & Blueprints

Although an output of the Design, Technical, and Data Governance capabilities, standards deserve specific mention to ensure clarity on their purpose and usage. In the enterprise world, standards are often lengthy and complex documents

that outline the practical implementation of policies. However, in the ServiceNow environment, these standards should define the recommended approach to platform delivery. They should be easily understandable and open to feedback from all stakeholders.

It's crucial that these standards remain current. Unlike corporate standards, which may have a lifespan of several years, or even decades, the recommended approach to platform delivery involves greater frequency, with quarterly releases via the store. The ultimate goal is to provide users with these blueprints in the form of practical templates that they can utilise rather than simply read. For instance, templates in Catalog Builder and Studio exemplify this approach: "Write less and build more."

8. Enablement and Communications

The main objective of this capability is to determine whether your customers understand the value and capabilities delivered by the platform. In our



conversations with customers, we often find a gap in their outward communication around the platform. Raising awareness of the platform and its capabilities is essential to increase its appeal. It's crucial to highlight its successes and involve the entire enterprise in the journey.

Another aspect of enablement is ensuring that your team is equipped with the necessary skills and experience to drive the operating model forward. Finding individuals with the required skills can be challenging, as demand often exceeds supply. However, investing in the education of your existing team members is an excellent alternative. By providing them with training and sharing your knowledge and experience, you empower them to thrive. At Synechron, we are committed to ongoing education through our Academy service, where we help organisations upskill their teams with practical hands-on training.

9. Innovation

This is perhaps the simplest aspect familiar to platform owners. It enables you to experiment with new features of the platform and determine the best way to apply them to your organisation. However, I encourage you to broaden your scope to include assisting the enterprise with its challenges, not just focusing on what the platform does.

Consider, for instance, the AI revolution that has compelled most companies and software vendors to scramble to deploy and govern AI. How many are exploring how to utilise ServiceNow to govern and control the broader use of AI? This is just one example of how you should think bigger and aim for broader horizons.

10. FinOps

The cost of running the platform is determined by license fees from the vendor, services from partners, and your employee cost base. Typically, customers cover these costs from a cost centre in Technology and then charge the costs back to the business using a model, algorithm, or spreadsheet. While the approach is often simple in theory, it can be complex to execute.

As the platform expands beyond the realm of technology, this chargeback model will need to evolve to align with how the business consumes other services and how they pay for the ones they manage internally. The CoEI is well positioned to define and shape this model, encouraging the use of the platform to drive benefits rather than just accruing costs.

11. User Experience

A superior user experience is what motivates people to change. Very few individuals are natural risk-takers; the majority are simply seeking a simpler, better way to meet their needs. Therefore, having a ‘voice of the user’ within the CoEI will add another dimension to the standards and templates you produce and crucially improve effectiveness. An excellent user experience is very difficult to add in later; it should always be integrated into the initial design.



Who should work in your Centre of Excellence and Innovation?

Once you've determined the areas you want to prioritise and the necessary roles to drive these initiatives, the next question arises: who within the organisation will take on these responsibilities? The good news is that these roles often start as part-time commitments and can be fulfilled by a community of individuals across existing teams. However, it's essential to have a plan in place to gradually expand and dedicate some roles over time. This not only ensures continuity but also provides opportunities for professional growth within your team.

A common concern I encounter is whether a CoEI can effectively deliver when roles are shared among team members. Will the work be deemed important but never urgent, leading to stagnation? The CoEI should serve as an efficiency enabler. By creating blueprints and guidelines for building items, you empower your teams to deliver projects correctly the first time, eliminating the need for costly rework. Think of it as the role of Problem Management in ITSM—it's not always urgent, but it contributes to long-term success. Therefore, while the value delivered by a CoEI may not be directly measurable, its impact is felt through the improved output of other teams.

Once you've established a dedicated team, I recommend providing them with access to a delivery team to drive proof of concepts (POCs) and explore new capabilities. While having a dedicated team is advantageous, it's also beneficial to rotate team members periodically, giving everyone a chance to contribute to various initiatives and share their learnings and experiences with their respective teams. Some organisations opt for a small, dedicated team to handle POCs and act as specialists to support critical deliverables, ensuring smooth workflow and minimising disruptions. If a critical project faces delays, this team can step in to provide support, preventing further setbacks. This proactive approach positions the CoEI as a valuable asset, rather than merely an oversight function. Leveraging partners or talent programs to fill roles during rotations is a common strategy employed by organisations.

Let's Recap

Hopefully you now have a clearer view on whether you need a Centre of Excellence and Innovation to deliver your vision for your ServiceNow platform now, or at some point in the future. Perhaps after starting with a focus on the foundational elements of delivering efficiently for a single business area.

Once you have completed the baseline measures of the current operating model you will have data to describe the issues you need to solve with the CoEI. These challenges should be addressed by a subset of the capabilities I discussed that could form part of a CoEI. You almost certainly don't need all of them initially, but a number of them support each other so it's important to consider the sequence in which you deliver them.

Resourcing each function is a unique challenge for everyone. It's important to have the means (financial and sponsorship) to bring the right people together at the right time. One of the objectives of a CoEI is to break down organisational barriers so your resourcing will need to be sourced from a broad pool to make this happen. And remember that your partners are here to help free people up if needed.

If you want to discuss your needs reach out to me and the team at Synechron. We are focussed on enabling your CoEI through our ServiceNow Excellence services so you can capture your future faster. We have created a unique team that blends enterprise ServiceNow Knowledge with the insights learnt from helping people drive DevOps transformation.

“A CoEI is oriented towards outward engagement.”

Synechron

Capture your future faster.

Synechron is an elite ServiceNow partner, experienced in delivering major transformations at scale for clients operating in complex and highly regulated environments - all delivered by our world-class team.

- Transform at scale
- Engineer expertly
- Build in resilience
- Accelerate with AI



James Brommhead

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James's expertise is central to helping solve enterprise customers' challenges, with innovative solutions that drive tangible long term business value. His extensive knowledge of the ServiceNow platform combined with a passion for improving enterprise technology allows him to challenge the status quo and help accelerate the platform mindset.



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