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NOMOS - Multidisciplinary Scientific Journal
Knowledge. ISSN: 2675-9128. São Paulo-SP.

Year VII, v.2 2026 | Submission: 06/01/2026 | Accepted: 09/01/2026 | Publication: 12/01/2026

Financial shared services and the transformation of Procure to Pay: leadership, indicators, and operational design for scale.

Financial Shared Services and Procure-to-Pay Transformation: Leadership, Performance Indicators and Operating Design for Scale

Shared Financial Services and Payment Transformation: Leadership, Performance Indicators and Operating Design at Scale

Viviane Navarro Dias

Technologist in Financial Management from Paulista University (UNIP), 2010

Summary

The consolidation of financial activities into shared services structures has altered how organizations manage transactional operations, controls, and relationships with internal areas. In Procure to Pay (PTP), centralization and technology can increase scale, but they do not guarantee efficiency when processes, responsibilities, and knowledge remain fragmented.

This article analyzes operational leadership, service levels, indicators, knowledge management, technological integration, and continuous improvement in shared financial environments. The research utilizes a structured narrative review of books, articles, and verifiable institutional sources. The results indicate that mature operations combine standardization with disciplined exception handling, balanced metrics, team development, and transformation governance.

Keywords: shared services; Procure to Pay; financial leadership; indicators; process transformation; accounts payable.

Abstract

The consolidation of financial activities into shared-service structures has changed how organizations manage transactional operations, controls, and relationships with internal stakeholders. In Procure-to-Pay (PTP), centralization and technology can increase scale but do not ensure efficiency when processes, responsibilities, and knowledge remain fragmented. This article examines operational leadership, service levels, performance indicators, knowledge management, technology integration, and continuous improvement in financial shared-service environments. The study adopts a structured narrative review of verifiable books, articles, and institutional sources. Findings indicate that mature operations combine standardization with disciplined exception management, balanced metrics, team development, and transformation governance.

Keywords: shared services; Search to Pay; financial leadership; performance indicators; process transformation; accounts payable.

Introduction

Shared services emerged as an alternative to the repetition of administrative activities in different units of an organization. Bergeron (2003) describes the model as a strategy of Consolidation of functions to provide internal services with greater focus, standardization, and scale. In Finance, PTP has become one of the areas most frequently associated with this architecture.

Centralization, however, does not eliminate complexity. Ulbrich (2006) argues that Shared services implementations can learn from the business process movement. reengineering, especially regarding the need to understand processes before redesigning

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structures. In the PTP, regulatory differences, systems, suppliers, and internal behaviors
They continue to exist even after operational consolidation.
This article discusses how leadership, SLAs, KPIs, knowledge, technology, and continuous improvement...
They can support the transformation of PTP into shared services. The analytical hypothesis is that
Operational scale only translates into value when accompanied by governance capable of connecting
People, processes, and information.

2. Methodology

The study adopts a structured narrative review, bringing together literature on shared services.
Process management, internal controls, and payments. Books, a scientific article, and other resources were used.
Institutional documents with identifiable authorship and origin.
Bergeron (2003) and Ulbrich (2006) form the specific basis for shared services.
Davenport (1993) and Hammer and Champy (1993) support the discussion on design and transformation.
of processes.
The governance and control components were compared with COSO (2013) and PCAOB (AS
2201). For the contemporary payments environment, AFP (2025) and the report were used.
Annual Federal Reserve report for 2024.
The analysis was divided into six areas: operational model, leadership, metrics, knowledge,
Technology and continuous improvement. Each axis was examined for its contribution to scale.
Quality, control, and adaptability.
No benchmarks were used as universal goals. Organizational structure, volume, sector,
Technological maturity and regulatory requirements alter the expected performance of an operation.
This is why external numbers were only treated within their original context.
The synthesis seeks to offer an interpretation applicable to complex organizations without attributing
results for a specific company. Professional experiences can inspire management questions.
However, the academic claims in the article remain supported by the literature and sources.
selected institutions.

3.1 Shared services and operational design

Bergeron (2003) associates shared services with resource consolidation and structured provision.
of internal services. The logic seeks to avoid duplication and create specialization, but it depends on a

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A design that clearly shows who the client is, who provides the service, and how the service will be performed.
accompanied.
In PTP, centralization doesn't begin with the invoice. Requisition, purchase order, receipt, and registration.
determine the quality of the input. Davenport (1993) shows that processes should be analyzed to
to start from the flow of information and the result, not just from the unit that performs each task.
When inputs are not standardized, the shared center can become an area of correction.
The operation receives discrepancies originating before its stage and consumes capacity to reconstruct them.
This reduces the expected gains from economies of scale.
Ulbrich (2006) notes that shared services projects need to incorporate lessons from reengineering.
of processes. One of them is to avoid organizational change being confused with transformation.
of the process. Transferring the same activity to another location does not eliminate its inefficiency.
A more mature design separates standard transactions from exceptions. The standard flow can be highly
automated; exceptions require analysis and defined responsibility. This differentiation allows
To utilize people where judgment adds value.
Therefore, shared services work best when centralization is a consequence of a
A redesigned process, not a replacement. Scale, in this context, derives from consistency and clarity.

3.2 Operational leadership and team development

The leadership of a shared operation manages more than just productivity. It coordinates.
priorities, risks, people, systems and expectations of areas that may be geographically dispersed
distant. Bergeron (2003) highlights that the model requires service orientation and clear mechanisms of
governance.
As repetitive tasks become automated, the importance of judgment increases.
Humans are the exceptions. The team needs to understand why a rule exists and what risks it protects against.
and when a situation needs to be escalated.
Professional development also reduces reliance on tacit knowledge. Critical processes
They often accumulate details that don't appear in formal procedures. Training
Cross-referencing and documentation make the operation more resilient to vacations, shutdowns, and changes in...
structure.
Leadership also influences the culture of control. Pressure to meet deadlines can encourage shortcuts.
especially in urgent payments. COSO (2013) places the control environment as
A fundamental component because managerial behavior shapes how policies are implemented.
effectively applied.

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Succession planning must be connected to the process map. It's not enough to simply identify replacements.
by position; it is necessary to understand critical skills, access, schedules, and decisions that do not
They can depend on a single person.
Thus, leading PTP means developing collective capacity. A mature operation is not one that is in
that one specialist solves everything, but the one in which knowledge, criteria, and responsibilities are
distributed in a controlled manner.

3.3 SLAs, KPIs and performance readings

Service level agreements formalize expectations between the shared operation and its clients.
internal. Bergeron (2003) treats SLAs as relevant instruments for defining service, performance
and responsibility in shared structures.
In PTP, metrics can include processing time, backlog, on-time payments, and invoices.
Blocked orders, old orders, calls, and exception rate. The value of these indicators is in
ability to reveal where the flow loses quality or speed.
However, a single metric can induce inappropriate behavior. Hammer and Champy (1993)
They criticize local optimizations that don't improve the final result. A team can reduce its time.
internally while increasing rework at another stage.
Therefore, speed must be combined with precision, compliance, and first-time success. Time
It also needs to be broken down into periods under the operation's control and waiting periods.
external approval or information.
Indicators of exceptional behavior deserve specific treatment. Repeated invoices without requests, discrepancies...
Calls sent to the wrong category reveal design or knowledge problems. The number
It stops being just a backlog and starts functioning as a diagnostic tool.
KPIs become a management system when each relevant deviation leads to investigation, accountability, and...
action. The dashboard is just the surface; improvement happens in the management conversation that connects
trend and cause.

3.4 Knowledge management, onboarding and simplification

Standardization depends on accessible knowledge. Extensive procedures can fulfill a function.
Documentary tools, but they don't always help the user at the time of decision. Guides, flows, and trees of
Choices can complement formal policies.

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Bergeron (2003) associates shared services with the need for consistency. For it to exist,
The organization needs to reduce differing interpretations regarding categories, documents, channels, and...
responsibilities.
Onboarding is a critical point because it introduces not only the tools, but also the logic of the process.
When new members understand the reason for a control, they become more capable of...
Recognize exceptions and avoid mechanical execution.
Internal users also need guidance. Incorrect call assignments, incomplete documentation.
Requests sent through the wrong channel consume capacity. Simple materials can reduce this.
Avoidable demand and improved experience.
In technological changes, local champions and references help translate the global design to
the routine. Ulbrich (2006) highlights the organizational dimension of transformations in services.
Shared; adoption doesn't happen simply because a platform has been made available.
Knowledge management, therefore, is part of the PTP infrastructure. Documentation, training and
Updates need to keep pace with process and system changes, preventing operations from becoming dependent on them.
of individual memory.

3.5 Technology, integration and payment environment

Contemporary PTP combines ERP, document capture, workflows, portals, and tools for...
expenses, cards, and service platforms. The challenge is not just having these solutions, but
Integrate them in a way that data and controls follow the flow.
The technological transformation in shared services is already appearing in a measurable way in
international research. In the Global Shared Services and Outsourcing Survey, Deloitte (2023), with
Approximately 500 responses, distributed across six industries and 12 sectors, recorded implementation.
Automation in 59% of GBS organizations, single-instance ERP in 47%, and tools of
Case management or workflow accounts for 45%. The results reinforce that digitization, standardization, and
Integration has been treated as a component of the operational model, and not as an initiative.
isolated.
The Federal Reserve's annual report (2025) describes an infrastructure that includes checks, ACH,
Fund transfers and instant payments. This diversity shows that operations
Financial institutions need to work with different instruments, deadlines, and controls.
The AFP research (2025) adds the risk dimension: 79% of participating organizations reported
Attempts or occurrences of fraud in 2024, and BEC was cited by 63% as the main channel.

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Payment technology, therefore, needs to be accompanied by authentication, validation, and monitoring.

System integrations also require change governance. Interface changes, Parameterization or access profiles can affect execution and control. The PCAOB, in AS 2201, It emphasizes the need to evaluate the design and effectiveness of relevant controls.

Technology adds more value when it reduces duplicate input, makes exceptions visible, and... Preserves audit trail. Integration does not mean eliminating supervision, but positioning it where the Risk justifies intervention.

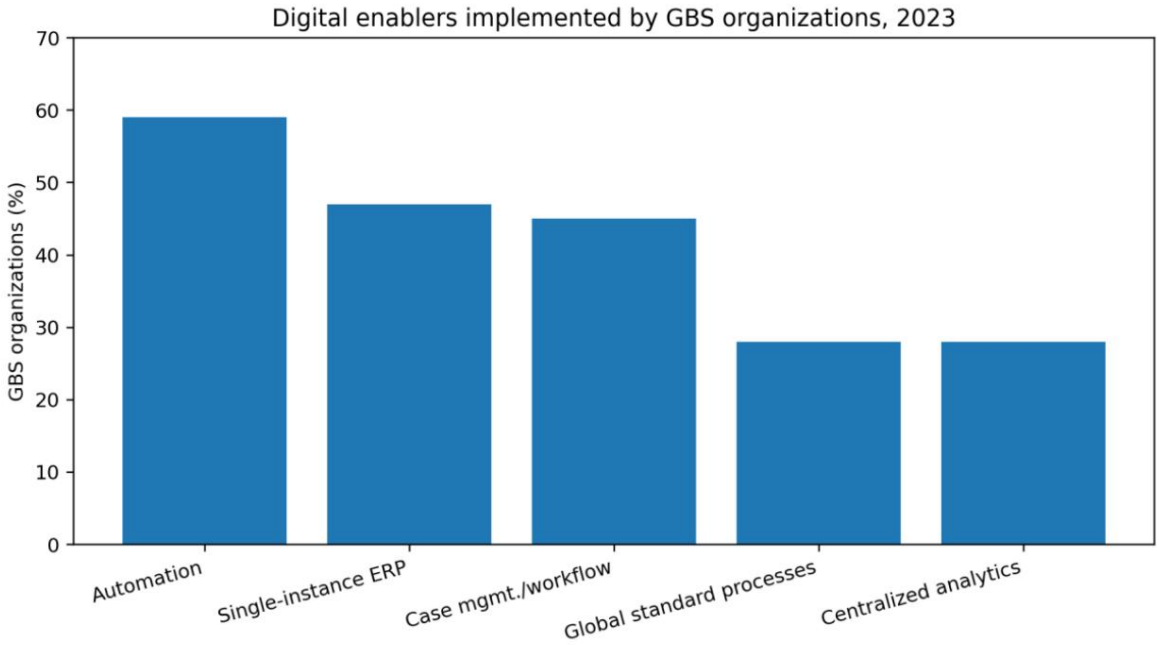

Figure 1. Adoption of digital enablers in Global Business Services (GBS) organizations in 2023. Source: own elaboration based on Deloitte (2023).

3.6 Continuous improvement and organizational transformation

Continuous improvement begins with the ability to transform recurring problems into information. Backlogs, fines, interest, incorrect calls, and discrepancies can be classified by cause. frequency and impact.

Hammer and Champy (1993) propose rethinking processes based on the outcome, while Davenport (1993) emphasizes the combination of process and information. In PTP, these approaches suggest that The correction should occur as close as possible to the source of the problem.

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Small simplifications can produce significant effects in high-volume environments. One rule
A clearer explanation, a better-structured form, or a user guide can prevent repeated interactions.
without requiring a large technological project.
Major transformations, such as migrating operations or integrating entities, require
Planning and stabilization. Supplier data, orders, liabilities, and access need to be...
reconciled so that organizational change does not disrupt the flow of finances.
The post-implementation phase must be measured. Temporary indicators, analysis of pending issues and...
Decision forums help identify problems that do not appear in tests. Ulbrich (2006) reinforces this.
that implementing shared services is an organizational process and not simply a transfer of
tasks.

Finally, continuous improvement becomes a competency when the organization incorporates process review.
to routine. The goal is not to live in permanent transformation, but to build the capacity for
Identify, prioritize, and correct problems with discipline.

Conclusion

Shared services can increase scale and consistency, but centralization should not be the norm.
often confused with automatic improvement. The process needs to be understood before it can be transferred.
or automated.

The literature by Bergeron and Ulbrich shows that governance and organizational design are...
These are key determinants for the model's functioning. In the PTP, this requires clarity regarding responsibilities.
and interfaces.

Leadership plays a crucial role because it connects performance, risk, and people development.
Well-prepared teams handle exceptions better and reduce reliance on isolated specialists.
SLAs and KPIs are useful when they represent the actual workflow. Measuring only speed can hide the truth.
Rework and problem transfers between departments.
Knowledge management supports standardization. Procedures, onboarding, and support materials.
They need to keep up with changes in process and technology.
Technological integration should reduce fragmentation and preserve controls. The payments environment
as described by the Federal Reserve and the risks recorded by AFP show that speed and safety
They need to evolve together.
Continuous improvement gains momentum when exceptions are analyzed as signals from the process. Correct.
Addressing recurring causes is more sustainable than indefinitely expanding treatment capacity.

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It can be concluded that the transformation of PTP into shared services is, above all, a task of Design and management. Technology expands possibilities, but it's leadership, knowledge, metrics, and... Governance that translates scale into sustainable performance.

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