OneStream Managed Services

A Complete Guide

WHITE
PAPER

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Introduction – Your Own CPM Center of Excellence

Many large organizations with global operations create a Center of Excellence to support their CPM operations. They act as a team of in-house consultants and support for their operations worldwide. Because of the variety of skills required to deploy a suite of CPM products – and the high cost of administrators – many companies find that these capabilities are out of their reach.

The mission-critical nature of CPM applications doesn't reduce your company's need for high-level results. It just makes the ROI hard to justify the cost of building out a sizable team and staffing for global support.

MindStream's award-winning AppCare changes all that, it allows your company to have your own 24/7 Center of Excellence – often at a fraction of the cost of a single CPM administrator.
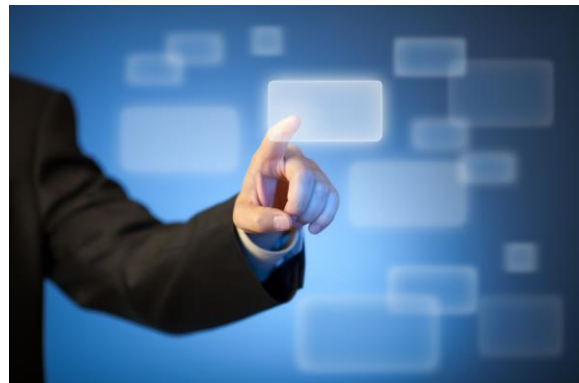
Very often we hear that cloud-based applications reduce the need for managed services completely. This is only partially true. While the need for technical infrastructure is reduced when using the cloud, the need for application maintenance, enhancement, and support does not go away. Very often those resources are very expensive and subject to high turnover.

The following white paper is designed to inform you of the basics of using managed services to create your own 24/7 CPM Center of Excellence. You'll find that having these capabilities is easier and less costly than you think.

Why Managed Services Instead of Hiring an In-house Admin?

Managed Services for the Corporate Performance Management (CPM) space is very different from the many other types of managed services. For starters, the relationship between Finance and IT is a unique one and often can be contentious. Both IT and Finance see their purpose as mission-critical… and they are.

Finance requires the utmost flexibility within most organizations because of their backward- and forward-looking views. This necessary flexibility is something that often creates friction because it requires systems to handle processes that are unique to finance. Thus, the CPM administrator is often stuck between trying to meet the requirements of IT and the flexibilities of finance.

Software solutions are often built on different underly technologies, even if they are presented as part of a "suite" of products. Very often the administration of your reporting solution and your planning and budgeting solution can involve very different technical expertise that sometimes requires more than one person to perform your monthly requirements.

This forms a unique demand within an organization, and it's unique for many reasons. First and foremost, it creates the need for a service provider that is adept at dealing with both groups and is reporting to both. This is important when determining what type of partner to choose, which we will detail later. As many companies have found, someone with that combination of skills is often difficult to find, expensive to hire, and the position is often subject to high turnover. However, the other important reasons to choose a managed services firm instead of hiring one or more system administrators are; cost, knowledge, and coverage. Managed Services gives you a team of dedicated support people that allows you to have a built-in Center of Excellence that can respond to your needs on a 24/7/365 basis.

Many IT managers are surprised to find that partnering with a managed services provider can reduce both cost and risk while increasing overall infrastructure and application reliability. Companies wrestling with supporting complex IT infrastructures, especially those running sophisticated performance management platforms, often assume that outsourcing support services to a managed services provider is simply too expensive, too risky, or too inefficient to be seriously considered.

That is a common misconception!

How Do I Justify the Use of Managed Services Providers?

Let's start with cost savings. Many companies assume that paying IT administrative salaries, as a relatively fixed operating expense, is going to be more cost-efficient than the perceived open-ended expense of a third-party service contract with a flexible statement of work (SOW) that may allow the managed services provider to increase hourly fees without much recourse.

In reality, managed services are typically less expensive and more flexibly priced. Skilled and experienced finance application administrators are in high demand. Therefore, many companies find that a big expense and headache is high administrator turnover. As a result, unexpected loss of productivity during the time no administrator is on the job — coupled with the added expense of hiring, training, and equipping a new admin — can quickly rack up costs compared to partnering with a qualified and reliable application managed services provider.

Depending on the size of your organization the cost of turnover may not be the only cost consideration. The use of a full-time position in either finance or IT to manage a system that is primarily used for half a month can be overly costly for an organization. If the deployment is large enough to warrant one administrator, it may not be enough for two full-time positions.

This can mean that a managed services provider can be useful for those who need a part-time resource to manage an application or to augment an existing provider. While a consultant can do this, there is a high hourly fee and most consultants strive to be utilized full time. Thus, managed services can be a good intermediate solution to provide an administrator or augment an existing one.

The cost of managed services can be contained and budgeted for when a proper contract is created with the provider. There are three types of contracts that most providers are willing to work with that can all be used to further manage costs.

How Do I Justify the Use of Managed Services Providers? (Cont.)

- The first is an **hourly contract**, where there is a small monthly fee to access the platform and then services are charged per hour. Often the fee includes a small number of hours and the advantage of this type of contract is that hours can be controlled by not using the service. While being able to control the hours can be viewed as a positive it can also create challenges in the future and lead to a less optimal system and process around your CPM instance.

- Another type of managed services contract is a **fixed-fee contract**. The advantage that most people see in this type of contract is control because it is fixed and it is easy to budget. The hidden advantage of this type of contract is the opportunity to truly partner with your provider. For instance, in this type of contract, the proper way to work with the provider is to involve them in weekly, or more frequent, meetings about the performance management system, landscape, and processes. In this type of arrangement, the value is to include the provider in everything you do and treat them as an extension of your internal team. The benefits are that the provider can proactively optimize your system to best support your processes as they evolve. What has been found is that ongoing optimization of these systems prevents downtime of the systems and optimizes performance. Typically, the number of severe incidents is seen with customers using an hourly model to try and control the costs. While they may spend less for a certain number of months, they generally experience more severe outages and performance problems because the system is not being cared for in an on-going fashion.

- The final type of contract that is the middle of the road between the straight hourly and fixed fee is called an **ARC/RRC contract** (ARC = Additional Resource Charge / RRC = Reduced Resource Credit.) Essentially, this is an agreed-to fixed fee for a certain amount of volume, where the volume can be measured in incidents (calls) or hours. The provider and the customer agree to a fixed amount of cost, volume, and measurement time. Then, during the measurement time, if the volume is a percentage greater or percentage lower of the agreed amount the customer receives a rebate or pays an additional fee.

Just as important, outsourcing application administration to an experienced managed services provider introduces a level of stability and reliability often unavailable with in-house employees in a high-turnover position.

How Do I Evaluate Managed Services Providers?

As you're shopping around for a managed services provider, it's important to consider several factors before jumping into something just because you find one quality acceptable, such as price. The earlier discussion about the relationship between finance and IT is the most important thing to remember when shopping for a managed services provider.

Many large corporations think that having a single managed services provider for all their applications will prevent inefficiencies and finger-pointing. The truth is many large managed services providers are excellent at offering ERP managed services where the process is more stringent and fixed. However, when we take into consideration that an ERP is focused primarily on what is happening now and, in the past, we realize what the major problem is for ERP managed services providers who try to offer managed services for performance management. Many policies and processes that make ERP managed services providers so good hinder them when offering performance management services.

Furthermore, when managed services for performance management is combined with ERP and other systems managed services, the vendor becomes beholden to IT and that lessens the ability of the provider to truly partner with IT and finance. The advent of the cloud has enabled organizations to utilize best of breed applications for every function. The same should be employed for managed services providers.

An experienced application managed services provider will have the following qualities you need for a successful managed services partnership.

How Do I Evaluate Managed Services Providers? (Cont.)

Comprehensive Product Knowledge
Performance Management suites are vast and cover virtually every facet of business operation. Many solutions require skill sets that can only be acquired through certified training and on-the-job experience. A good managed services provider will have a knowledge of and support capabilities for the entire suite.

Thorough Onboarding Process
Be sure to ask managed services providers about their onboarding process. Conducting a comprehensive, detailed analysis of your environment infrastructure and applications is a critical first step to success. This will determine if your system network, hardware, and operating systems are optimized to run at maximum efficiency and will ensure all applications are fully implemented and up to date.

✓ Regular, Periodic System Health Check-ups
   Regular checkups and fine-tuning are essential practices from a managed services provider. They help prevent any issues that could cause unplanned downtime and lost productivity. Find out how often managed services providers perform system health checks for clients and what they entail.

✓ 24/7 Remote Monitoring, 365 days a year
   Your application managed services provider should be available around the clock to diagnose and repair system problems as well as assist planned procedures like check-ups.

✓ Flexible Service Level Acknowledgments (SLAs)
   The best-managed services providers spell everything out in detail so the scope of work and service level are clearly understood by both parties to avoid any confusion or billing disagreements. Vague terms are a major red flag.

How Does a Good Managed Services Provider Identify Issues?

From the start, a thorough onboarding process will provide an in-depth review of both infrastructure and application functionality to identify any quirks or potential problems in the system that should be prioritized for service. An experienced application managed services provider will utilize a thorough checklist to ensure nothing is missed in the process.

On an ongoing basis, regular system health checks will help uncover potential issues, including those that might be lurking beneath the surface, unnoticed during daily activities. An experienced application expert will pick them out by carefully reviewing logs performed during the period covered by the check-up.

Finally, it's imperative for an application managed services provider to have a reliable change management procedure. As with any large-scale platform, starting and stopping a complex environment provides opportunities for things to go wrong, especially during patches, upgrades, and even routine maintenance. Adhering to a tested change management procedure ensures proper integration of all system components with minimal effort and risk.

Having an in-depth knowledge of the application is crucial for knowing where to look for issues and potential trouble. An experienced application expert will tell you that most issues reveal themselves in the logs.

Many administrators can be overwhelmed by the number and variety of logs generated by finance platforms but it's important to find and document all logs for all products being used. If issues are, in fact, uncovered through a periodic health check-up and log analysis, a qualified application managed services provider will have a database established where they'll keep track of all issues and their resolutions to help prevent recurrences in the future.

What Level of Application Support Do I Need?

Any good application managed services provider will have multiple offerings to meet the needs of your environment and applications. To help you decide which offer to employ, consider whether a reactive or proactive approach will best meet your support needs.

Reactive Approach

With a reactive approach, you will open tickets in a managed services portal as issues arise. Need a new user set up within your planning and budgeting application? Mapping updates required for data management? Translation issues in your financial close application? These are examples of unforeseen needs that require an experienced application managed services team to assist with and resolve.

You can't predict the future, so how are you supposed to predict how many issues will come up monthly? These are some factors to keep in mind when scoping out your managed services need:

- The number of users for each of your applications
- The number of environments you need to be supported (e.g. Production, Testing, Development, Disaster Recovery)
- Any future enhancements to your applications such as building new Financial Reports or overhauling your hierarchy
- Considering these factors, your application managed services provider can help you determine your support needs and the approximate length of time required to resolve any issues that might come up. Your managed services team is an insurance policy providing peace of mind that no matter how complex your issues, they will jump in and get you back on track.

Proactive Approach

Maintenance and updates are recurring activities that Performance Management applications require on a scheduled basis. This might be daily, weekly, or monthly. Your application managed services team can work with you to schedule the frequency of regular maintenance and updates and complete them for you. For example, you might need a substitution variable updated each month. Taking a proactive approach, these and other tasks can be scheduled and entered the managed services ticketing system. When each task is due, your service delivery manager will receive a notification. To help you sleep better, you can always be on top of what's happening with a Help-Desk ticketing solution to keep you up to date.

Whether your needs are reactive, proactive, or both, a thorough scoping session with your managed services partner will help you determine your mix of support needs.

What Factors will Affect My Cost?

The cost will always be a factor in your decision making — and the cost to support and administer a finance environment is expensive. However, managed services can remove the burden of investing in an administrator and provide you with an alternative solution that fits within your budget. There are several factors to keep in mind when gauging how much you can save with managed services.

✓ Level of Support

Whatever your reason for choosing managed services — a recently departed admin, a newly implemented application, or a general need for backup — you must decide what your managed services team can handle and how much you can take on inhouse. Identify recurring tasks and how often you have break/fix issues, so your managed services team can get an idea of when they need to take a proactive or reactive approach.

✓ Mix of Technologies

A good managed services provider will support all CPM and Business Intelligence technologies. The number of applications and complexity of each will affect the cost of support for your environment because of the variety of technical skill sets required from the support team.

✓ Application vs. Infrastructure Needs

Determining if your support will revolve more around the finance user community, traditional IT support for your environment, or both will be a cost-driving factor in your managed services support. Application support typically involves assisting with any issues that arise in day-to-day functional operations, like assistance with a data load or modifying and creating a planning and budgeting business rule. Examples of infrastructure support include applying patches and annual health checks for outdated technology no longer supported by the vendor. More than likely, your support needs will be a mix of application and infrastructure, but keep in mind that cost is proportional to the technical difficulty.

✓ Location

Typically, managed services support is provided by a remote team who may or may not be local to your area. There might be instances where you need or want a managed services resource to travel to your location to work on-site with your team. To avoid additional travel expenses, consider the much more affordable screen-sharing options with online conferencing.

How Do I Make the Onboarding Process Successful?

Once you have selected a managed services provider, there are steps you can take to ensure your expectations are set and met throughout the term of your contract. If you've answered all the questions above, chances are you've found a good managed services provider with a thorough onboarding methodology. Every onboarding process should include the following guidelines, whether you've contracted just a few hours per month or an end-to-end implementation and administration.

Pick the Right Points of Contact (POCs)

Identifying the right resources who will represent your company as points of contact to your managed services provider is critical. These are individuals who should be familiar with your environment and will be able to articulate your needs and expectations. POCs should be heavily involved in onboarding by providing information surrounding your environment, user community, applications, and infrastructure needs.

Establish a Timeline

From the very beginning, set up recurring meetings, prioritize activities, and assign deliverables — this will help streamline the onboarding process for your organization and your service provider. Regularly scheduled meetings will ensure your timetable is on track; prioritizing activities is a critical path, as there will likely be dependencies; and assigning deliverable tasks and dates to POCs on both teams will maintain accountability.

Share Your Documentation to Identify Gaps

In a perfect world, all documentation supporting your environment would be up to date, easy to read, and readily available. The reality is that many companies have very few documents to rely on other than handwritten notes left by the previous administrator. Share everything you do have with your managed services provider so that they can assist with what needs to be updated, added, or created.

Determine Level of System Access

Before your managed services provider gets started, make sure you've identified with your IT department the best way of providing remote access. Commonly used methods included VPN and Remote Desktop (RDP). Once you have decided what route to take, accounts and passwords will need to be created not only for remote access but for your finance applications. Have a conversation with your managed services provider to see how many accounts will need to be set up and determine the level of access needed.

How Do I Make the Onboarding Process Successful? (Cont.)

Test the Service Desk
When issues come up, you'll need to open a ticket with your provider's help desk or service desk. It's important to identify those who will be opening tickets for your company and provide that information to your managed services team. Typically, companies have one or two people set up as primary contacts to open tickets, along with a backup for each. During onboarding, you should test the ticketing system to make sure your ticket is received. You don't want to be in the first week of your contract waiting on a reply to a message that was never received by the other party.

Establish Your List of Frequently Asked Questions
Often there are common problems with easy solutions - password resets, point of view navigation, error messages – that can frustrate users and reduce product satisfaction. We'll work with you to get those solutions in front of your user base so they can be effective and successful. Self-empowerment is a big key to getting the most of your managed service experience.

Rollout Procedures to Your Staff
Team interaction is also essential to managed services success. Understanding when to open a ticket, assign a severity to the problem, and communicating expectations and timelines all lead to better results. Coordinate your schedules and deadlines with your Managed Service Provider so they can staff critical times appropriately.

MindStream's Award-Winning AppCare Managed Services

AppCare is our managed services offering that acts as an extension of your team. We'll use our experience in overseeing OneStream applications, supporting users, driving end-user adoption, and administering application extensions to provide you with key insights and recommendations that are unique to your needs and goals.

For four years in a row, MindStream Analytics has ranked in the top MSP 501 by Channel Futures - a report identifying the world's top managed service providers (MSPs). We are the ONLY Managed Services Provider dedicated to Analytics and Performance Management on the list.

AppCare can maximize the value of your IT organization by letting your staff focus on high-value activities while MindStream experts maintain your OneStream platform. To learn more, visit our website at www.mindstreamanalytics.com or call us at 1-800-497-0151.