

"Collaboration: Pivoting Out of the Pandemic"

Part 3: Talent - The Basis for Enterprise Digitization



SHARED SERVICES - POSITIONING "AHEAD OF THE CURVE."

The pandemic disrupted practically every area of business. According to SSON Analytics Global Market Review: Intelligent Automation in Shared Services 2021, 73% of SSO leaders indicated that COVID-19 is accelerating the adoption of automation technologies. This trend signals a "next normal" for shared services, namely upskilling - building talent in order to adapt to the increasingly digital future. Digital skills play a vital role in aiding post-pandemic economic recovery. As a result of COVID-19, smart technologies have redefined digitally-enabled shared services - but the basis for these capabilities is talent. By linking talent to enterprise digitization - in other words: expose people to AI, cloud, and robotics - organizations are fostering community development through collaborative innovation. Oklahoma City positions itself ahead of the curve among local economies through its [skills development initiatives](#), specifically also targeting frequently untapped and overlooked demographics through its diversity and inclusion program (see below).



CULTIVATING CODERS CAMP: TAPPING LOCAL "TALENT ACCESS" THROUGH EMBEDDED SSO RESILIENCE.

Oklahoma City has already witnessed the power of business resilience unleashed to encourage local talent. For example, the non-profit digital platform Cultivating Coders has provided underprivileged youths in Oklahoma City a chance to cultivate critical technical skills otherwise unavailable. Indeed, Cultivating Coders - with its democratizing

educational initiative - has transcended socioeconomic barriers to incentivize a local generation, transforming lives by seizing opportunities. With computer coding skills, these students are now realizing their potential, applying newly acquired, highly sought capabilities in careers that might have otherwise been inaccessible to them. Computer coding is critical to shared services given software development trends in enterprise digitization - the U.S. Department of Labor statistics projects a 21% increase into 2028. Consequently, community learning initiatives inspire "talent access" - linking people and technology.

OKLAHOMA CITY - TOP TECHNOLOGY HUB FOR SHARED SERVICES.

As previously witnessed, software development talent in shared services promotes holistic enterprise growth, which Oklahoma City is actively promoting across its businesses. For example, Rural Sourcing, an IT SSC, has partnered with Cultivating Coders to launch a Coder Camp for underprivileged youths in Oklahoma City. Additionally, Greater Oklahoma City Metro differentiates itself with its nationally reputed, top-ranked innovation technologies programs. [Home to 15 colleges and universities](#), OKC boasts [nine technology centers](#) - each one delivering high-quality, customized training for expanding companies. Furthermore, given its leadership in oil and gas, OKC reveals a cyclical yet robust industry impact on talent. The area notoriously attracts highly analytical and technically adept individuals whose diversified skillsets support resilience with versatile proficiencies readily transferable to other industries. Moreover, OKC outranks Nashville, Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Tampa in self-tagged SSC professionals, displaying some of the highest percentages. Therefore, with [more than 50 headquarter operations, shared services, and call centers](#), OKC is distinguished by the quality of its talent in business service delivery.

OKLAHOMA CITY: COLLABORATIVE RESERVOIRS FOR SSC TALENT.

Optimizing organizational performance depends on establishing strong shared services talent pools. Oklahoma City ideally suits SSC talent retention. Some of the attractive features include:

- **Low Cost-Living** - ranked 15% below national average; ideal for workforce recruitment
- **Growing Market** - Census data shows that OKC is within the fastest growing region of the U.S. and was 1 of only 14 U.S. cities that grew by 100,000+ people in the past decade
- **Supportive Demographics** - Diverse population that currently exceeds 1.5 million people, with 33% growth in the Hispanic population over the past decade
- **Resourceful Amenities** - Abundant technical facilities at lower cost compared to major metros
- **Data Center** - 1.6 million square foot campus currently housing several SSCs
- **Favorable Taxes** - 1st in unemployment insurance; 8th for corporate tax per 2020 state tax rankings

Finally, Oklahoma software and cybersecurity companies extend up to \$2,200 annually for 7 years in tax credits to qualified employees with credentials from accredited programs. Alongside various other quality of life options this suggests suitable SSC talent retention conditions compared to metro competitors (e.g., Nashville, Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Tampa).

Ultimately, Oklahoma City reflects a strong shared services talent pool deemed key in optimizing organizational performance because its copious collaborative reservoirs build local community talent.

We caught up with representatives from Rural Sourcing, Cultivating Coders and the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber to discuss the partnership and how the efforts are accelerating enterprise digitization.



Monty Hamilton, CEO, Rural Sourcing

Q: What made Oklahoma City a prime location for Rural Sourcing?

A: Rural Sourcing, the leading provider of US-based IT outsourcing services, started with one mission in mind: to create fulfilling tech careers for people who live outside of the traditional tech hubs. That mission has grown to encompass ten development centers, including a software development center in Oklahoma City. We chose Oklahoma City

because it has a rich and diverse talent pool, supportive city leadership, and a booming tech scene where we can become a catalyst for growth. Most importantly, Oklahoma City shares our desire to create pathways for underserved groups. Together, we are bringing never-before opportunity to diverse members of the Oklahoma City Community who can now access critical technology jobs and training.

Q: How is Rural Sourcing helping to positively impact diversity and inclusion?

A: We believe in breaking down barriers for underrepresented communities in tech, finding talent in overlooked metro areas, and providing opportunities for job placement and acceleration. It brings absolute fulfillment to provide educational opportunities and resources to those in need. At the same time, we are embedding digital literacy within the Oklahoma City Community, which, in return, is helping the residents and businesses they support flourish in today's digital economy. In partnership with the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber and Cultivating Coders, we're making it possible for people to obtain great technology jobs and career advancement opportunities in a city with an affordable cost of living and overall great place to live and work. As we expand our partnership with the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber, the future goal is to bring more diversity into our workforce with well-defined pathways to serve underrepresented populations.



Charles Ashley III, Founder & CEO of Cultivating Coders

Q: Cultivating Coders in partnership with Oklahoma City and Rural Sourcing has brought tremendous opportunity to underrepresented youth living in OKC. What made this a success?

A: Cultivating Coders is a nonprofit organization that works with minority and lower-income students to teach them computer coding. Through a partnership with the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber, students from Millwood High School and Metro Tech Academy's Springlake campus spent eight weeks learning computer coding, a highly-sought skill in today's digital economy. The program was offered to eligible students for free, including the training, equipment, and coaching.

Q: What factors enabled the program to achieve such high success?

A: It is crucial for a teaching workforce to be diverse. Our Cultivating Coders Training Faculty represents a diverse talent pool, similar to the students we teach. This has led to positive outcomes for all students. We also believe that high exposure to technology through education and its benefits is the foundation for sustained success. We can create this exposure through our partnerships, and we continue to build opportunities for students to use their newly earned credentials to gain paid internships and full-time employment. It is the ultimate gift to help improve the economic outcomes our city's young people who would otherwise not have been exposed to the possibility of a technology career.

Q: How are the participants giving back to the community?

A: During a virtual event with more than 60 people, the students presented their final projects and showed off the coding that was applied. The attendees were blown away by the new skills developed, the excitement amongst the participants, and the overall talent on show. These students will continue to practice their skills and leverage the knowledge gained to take on paid internships and full-time opportunities such as website, application, and software development. In addition to the youth program, Cultivating Coders has launched an adult's class. We hope that every program member will become an equity advocate, continuously encouraging support from the local community and prospective students.



Jeff Seymour, Executive Vice President, Economic Development, Greater Oklahoma City Chamber

Q: What characterizes Oklahoma City's business environment?

A: Oklahoma City has an interesting history and one that has always been very entrepreneurial. It emerged more or less overnight during the land run of the late 1800s, growing rapidly until the late 1980s / early 1990s when it became apparent we needed to focus on economic diversification and community reinvention. Oklahoma City's specific business focus over the past thirty years has been on building a community where people

and families would enjoy living, through strategic public and private investments in quality-of-life infrastructure—knowing new business growth would follow. This strategy of having the right people with the right ideas living in the Oklahoma City metro has led to the creation of a much more robust local economy.

Q: How is the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber helping to build a digital-ready workforce?

A: With demand rapidly outstripping supply when it comes to digital skills, we are taking a proactive approach to ensuring the best talent and creating new technology and ideas to maximize economic potential. Our partnership with Rural Sourcing and Cultivating Coders is a great example of this commitment. We are constantly collaborating with our education and skills partners to better align, recruit and retain digital talent, working with existing and new training providers, and ensuring that these digitally skilled individuals are connected to the right career opportunities.

Q: Shared Services Centers (SSCs) and The Greater Oklahoma City Chamber share a commitment to diversity & inclusion in the workplace. How will Oklahoma City continue to advance its D&I initiatives?

A: Having a diverse and inclusive workforce increases productivity and can improve a company's financial performance. Through our private and public partnerships, we are focused on assisting diverse groups with the tools, skills and resources needed to achieve a healthy professional career in technology. As SSCs become the engine for enterprise-wide digital transformation, the need for tech skills is growing. In Oklahoma City, organizations can tap into our robust and diverse talent pool to find relevant skillsets. Furthermore, SSCs can make a powerful difference in the community through the power of strategic partnerships focused on bringing more D&I into technology. As listed above, we have several programs that organizations can gain support and benefit from.