



# Service Philosophy: Five Things to Consider for Benefits Administration Technology Success



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There are many factors to consider when evaluating a prospective benefits administration platform. While the technology powering your solution is a critical component, it is not the sole indicator of future success. Given the complex and ever-evolving nature of employee benefits, even the most robust tools require knowledgeable service and support to realize optimal efficiency.

These five tips will help you gauge the supportive capacity of a benefits administration technology provider, to help you find the partner that will best serve your strategy and goals.

At-A-Glance Guide *from*  
Empyrean Benefit Solutions

## 5 THINGS TO CONSIDER:

1. A provider's technology and service are equally important.
2. Not all benefits administration technology providers follow the same service model.
3. The Shared-Service model is best for *one-size-fits-all solutions*.
4. The Service-Delivery model is best for managing *client-specific solutions*.
5. Leveraging technology, the Service-Delivery model can be taken even further.



## Tip 1: A provider's technology and service are equally important

Benefits administration technology can be a powerful tool for HR teams, but every platform's success is heavily dependent on provider and client working in-sync. A crucial part of this harmony is dictated by the provider's service philosophy, which can mean the difference between a simple technology vendor and a true business partner.

Typically, software-as-a-service (SaaS) vendors follow one of two service models: Shared-Services or Service-Delivery. We've defined each in more detail further on, but in a nutshell, Shared-Services is best for technology that can be implemented out-of-the-box with little customization, while Service-Delivery is best suited for customized or highly personalized product/service needs.

Your vendor's service model—and their ability to execute that model—will greatly impact the quality and longevity of your benefits administration solution.



## Tip 2: Not all benefits administration technology providers follow the same service model

The Shared-Services model and Service-Delivery model each have practical applications for technology solutions at the enterprise-wide level. However, a vendor's service model must fit the specific needs of its client segment in order to be of any real value.

When examining benefits administration technology providers, interested clients can find both models in practice – but the two models do not equally serve the unique demands of health and welfare benefits management.

Do-it-yourself options can be less costly up front, but the involvement they require can quickly strain internal resources and increase the chances that expensive mistakes will be made.

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## Tip 3: The Shared-Services model is best for *one-size-fits-all solutions*

Under a Shared-Services model, separate teams manage certain categorizations of issues or requests. Instead of receiving support from one client-dedicated or client-defined team, clients submit service requests based on the type of problem being experienced—which are then forwarded to the team assigned to handle similar requests for all clients on the platform. In a consumer-focused example, simply put, it's one reason why your cable or internet provider asks you to input "1" for billing or "2" for technical issues when calling for service.

A company-focused example is Slack, a popular communication and sharing software for teams or organizations involved in a variety of projects, such as engineers collaborating about space exploration, remote charity teams planning for efforts across the globe, and entry-level retail sales employees sharing customer best practices. Slack's tools offer capabilities that most organizations use with no customization required. Most teams implement Slack and begin using it right out-of-the-box, or in this case, as soon as they download it and login.

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## Tip 3: The Shared-Services model *Cont'd*

With minor or zero client customization needed, Slack successfully leverages the Shared-Services model: Slack's service teams do not need client-specific knowledge to provide high-quality service, and can funnel each request to the appropriate general service team (e.g. connectivity, functionality, etc.). Armed with product knowledge, any qualified service team member with relevant experience can help resolve a client's issue.

The Shared-Services model is an effective and cost-efficient approach to supporting one-size-fits-all SaaS solutions, and few client-specific resources are required. However, for highly-customized and company-centric solutions such as benefits administration, the Shared-Services model often results in clients unnecessarily compromising on vendor responsiveness, complete issue resolution, and operational precision.

Shared-Service experiences can quickly become frustrating and inefficient in highly-complex and client-specific solutions. Without a dedicated team, clients are forced to explain the details of their solution to each service representative that attempts to assist them.

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## Tip 3: The Shared-Services model *Cont'd*

Even when equipped with a solid customer tracking system, representatives may not fully understand the logic of a client's configuration, which could waste clients' valuable time or increase the risk of errors.

When applied to benefits administration platforms, providers practicing a Shared-Services approach begin with an Implementation Team that's focused solely on configuration and execution. Once the client's solution goes live, the Implementation Team hands all day-to-day responsibilities to separate, assigned teams that individually handle reporting, configuration management, web services customization, and so on. When service issues arise, these disjointed teams must coordinate amongst themselves to reach answers or resolutions.

Managing complexity and customization, and providing solutions that resolve unique (not general or easily classified) issues, is an integral part of effective benefits administration. Conversely, the Shared-Services model often frustrates benefits administration clients after go-live, when they are suddenly introduced to new teams that lack the depth, context, and organization needed to properly administer their unique solution.

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## Tip 4: The Service-Delivery model is best for managing *client-specific solutions*

In a Service-Delivery model, clients are served by a single dedicated team from the start of the engagement—and beyond go-live.

For example, cloud computing company Rackspace hosts a wide variety of websites and manages security, databases, and e-commerce shops for a diverse range of businesses. Each client's solution is highly customized and configured to meet their unique needs.

To ensure clients are properly supported, Rackspace follows the Service-Delivery model. Rackspace clients do not filter through various service tiers or explain their problems in triplicate before receiving the right support. Instead, clients reach out to their dedicated service team, whose members have a holistic understanding of their particular solution, context, and needs. The client-specific expertise of this team allows for faster service and more accurate results without the time, hassles, duplication, and confusion that the Shared-Services model typically requires under the same demands.

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## Tip 4: The Service-Delivery model *Cont'd*

**Similarly, the Service-Delivery model is best for managing the complexity and demand-for-responsiveness of health and welfare benefits administration.**

To remain successful, your technology solution must be tailored to your company's unique benefits strategy, workforce, and industry, and be capable of evolving as your needs change. With the help of a client-dedicated service team, HR leaders can confidently tackle their challenges while saving time and avoiding unnecessary compromises.

Empyrean naturally employs the Service-Delivery model for our clients. We call a client's dedicated team the Day-One Team: a multi-disciplined group that includes implementation experts, along with the Client Service Manager (CSM) and Business Systems Analysts (BSAs) who manage the solution after it goes live. Members of the Day-One Team are, in practice, an extension of the client's HR/benefits department, gaining a deep understanding of different employee groups and their dynamic needs, culture, plans, and expectations - critical experience that is applied when daily management begins.

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## Tip 5: Leveraging technology, the Service-Delivery model can be taken even further

With the right supporting tools in place, Empyrean's client-dedicated teams provide robust and timely solutions, while understanding processes and context. For example, Empyrean's day-to-day Service Teams utilize a configuration application that allows Empyrean BSAs to tailor and fine-tune their client's solution to stay ahead of evolving needs.

As a result, Empyrean's client-dedicated Service Teams run reports, manage web services, and make most configuration changes quickly and securely on their own, bypassing the need for complex, error-prone, and time-intensive manual computer programming, coding, testing, and staging. By making most changes directly, Empyrean teams remain well-versed in a client's processes, solution updates, and evolving business needs; clients receive quick and robust service.

This enhanced approach to Service-Delivery enables Empyrean clients to leverage the full benefits of this model, by replacing many narrowly-focused teams with a multi-disciplined yet singularly-focused team of client experts instead.

Our enhanced approach to Service-Delivery offers Empyrean clients the full benefits of this model, utilizing a multi-disciplined yet singularly-focused team of client experts.



## Tip 5: Service-Delivery model taken even further *Cont'd*

Many technologies offer efficiencies, but true *solutions* deliver capabilities that extend beyond their programming. Given your time, investment, and the critical needs of your employees, successful benefits administration requires a true client-vendor partnership — *the technology alone is not enough*.

In conjunction with the technology, there must be a strong, unified, and dedicated team of professionals committed to client success. Compromising on the *people* part of a platform can lead to new service issues, which accumulate without resolution and put your entire solution at risk over time.

When evaluating current or potential benefits administration partners, take a look at the service philosophy and team structure that power the technology. **Are they aligned to best serve your organization's needs *without compromise*?**

Once you begin to ask this question, look for answers that are focused on your needs, instead of the sole efficiencies of your current or potential provider. This will help you recognize a partner that will help you achieve long-term success in fulfilling your benefits administration strategies.

Join the conversation!  
We'd love to get your thoughts, or answer and address your questions and comments.

Start the dialogue now by contacting us at:  
[info@goempyrean.com](mailto:info@goempyrean.com).



## About Empyrean

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Empyrean Benefit Solutions is one of the fastest-growing providers of technology and services for managing employee health benefits programs. Empyrean provides enrollment, eligibility management, ACA reporting, and other plan administration services to employers, insurance brokers, and healthcare exchanges. Unlike other providers, Empyrean combines the industry's most client-adaptive and configurable benefits technology platform with expert, responsive service to deliver Hi-Touch benefits administration.

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