PG&E partners with Cognizant for innovative digital productivity solutions strategy

Engaging users to drive the right business outcomes

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Expertise helps ensure customer success

PG&E worked with Cognizant's Intelligent Process Automation team to assess the best approach to rationalizing the company's automation toolset and select a technology that enabled digital productivity.

A continued platform for growth

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Utility company empowers users to drive company-wide digital transformation

Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) is a San Francisco-based utility company that provides natural gas and electricity to more than 5.2 million households in Northern California. In 2021, the company embarked on an ambitious program to leverage automation and citizen development to alleviate cost pressures and eliminate redundant and manual processes from the daily work of its 32,000 team members. While PG&E had multiple automation software tools in place, their lack of flexibility and slow adoption by co-workers did not fit with the company's vision for a new Digital Productivity Center of Excellence (COE) that would provide agile and scalable solutions for both business and IT users.

To determine the right approach, PG&E engaged long-time partner Cognizant and its Intelligent Process Automation (IPA) team. PG&E and Cognizant partnered to assess the best approach to rationalizing the company's automation toolset and select a technology that enabled digital productivity. The answer was Microsoft Power Platform, which offers a single, comprehensive platform for automation, low-code app development, machine learning and artificial intelligence, and business insights in a way that is accessible to non-technical end users. Deploying Power Platform would help PG&E rationalize its automation tool footprint, consolidate on a single platform, and

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replace legacy applications and solutions. Most importantly, it would provide a much broader set of capabilities to drive digital transformation across the organization.

The close partnership and collaboration between the Cognizant IPA team and PG&E quickly made this vision a reality. In less than a year, PG&E launched its COE, scaled it across nine business units, and delivered 132 solutions, including a Power App for tracking equipment shipped to emergency event sites, an FAQ chatbot for internal technical service desk requests, and unattended bots to help reconcile billing data across different systems. The initiative has delivered strong ROI in terms of both cost avoidance and efficiency gains, saving more than 75,000 work hours to date, through low-code/no-code, automation, and chatbots. Additional projects that are underway are estimated to save another 645,000 hours.

"PG&E is trailblazing in the area of digital productivity," said Ann Delmedico, AVP, Advisory Principal Intelligent Process Automation at Cognizant. "They are using Power Platform in a comprehensive way that we have seen few companies have to date, driving desired business outcomes through apps, visualization, and automation. The results have been astounding in such a short time."

"Automation is a game changer for us on multiple levels," said Mark Seveska, VP, IT Products and Enterprise Solutions at PG&E. "It helps alleviate the human struggle of getting work done and allows us to refocus high-caliber talent on the most important work. We are extremely pleased at the progress we've made with the help of Cognizant and Power Platform and look forward to building on our early successes to drive even greater business impact."

Engaging users to drive the right business outcomes

The PG&E and Cognizant partnership took a courageous approach to innovation that provided space for experimentation combined with rigorous discipline around outcome management and governance. Both companies knew that driving organization-wide excitement about citizen development and empowering users with the skills and training they needed to be active participants were critical to the Digital Productivity program. "Even before PG&E implemented Power Platform there was a huge focus on making sure everyone in the enterprise knew about it and then demystifying it along the way," said Bryan Glass, Director of Automation Advisory at Cognizant.

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The program kicked off by gaining alignment on the company's vision and working with key stakeholders to determine standards and governance. With over 1,000 stakeholders joining the program launch, there was a robust effort to raise awareness. From there idea sourcing began in earnest with SME's and process owners.

In addition to training more than 1,200 co-workers, the company held a Shark Tank-like hackathon in October 2021 that empowered users to develop their own ideas. One hundred co-workers volunteered to participate and were divided into 19 teams that spent a month developing solutions alongside Cognizant mentors. Each team presented its solutions to Directors and VPs from across the enterprise, the "sharks," who were so impressed with the results that every app presented was green lit for production.

Today PG&E has more than 800 active citizen makers developing apps and flows on Power Platform and has formalized a Community of Practice to empower all team members, drive results at scale, and create a problem-solving culture. "The Digital Productivity COE and Power Platform let us replace sweat equity with tech equity," said Tom Bilbo, Principal Product Owner, Digital Productivity COE at PG&E. "Everyone can have access to tech, everyone can build a solution, and everyone can use it." Alla Gogerman, leader of the Digital Productivity COE at PG&E added, "This platform enables us to realize how low investment and high return it is."

Deep technical and business expertise helps ensure customer success

Recognized by Microsoft as a global leader in implementing Power Platform, Cognizant has strong technical knowledge built through its Power Platform technology COE and participation in Microsoft early-adopter programs that provide opportunities to evaluate and influence services and products before they are released. However,

as evidenced by its work in the development of the PG&E Community of Practice, it is its ability to work from the client's perspective that is a key differentiator in driving success with its growing customer base. "Most of our team members are previous practitioners who have either run automation centers of excellence themselves or been on a COE team," said Delmedico. "We know how important empowering people, setting up governance and security, and driving adoption are in achieving desired business outcomes."

To help ensure positive results, the Cognizant Advisory COE was formed to empower business teams to build applications that improve processes, enable rapid prototyping, and align business leaders with IT to provide a safe and controlled environment where citizen development can flourish.

"We see three common areas where automation programs run into trouble: lack of a healthy and sustainable pipeline, delivery issues that impact ROI and ineffective production support that undermines business confidence," said Delmedico. "Our Advisory COE helps educate and ensure customer teams use best practices that set customers on a foundation for success."

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Cognizant has been steadily expanding its IPA practice since 2015, seeing accelerated year-over-year growth. The company sees demand for Power Platform, automation, and low-code citizen development increasing over the next decade as companies seek to improve operational efficiency, create better co-worker experiences, and control costs. "The opportunity with Power Platform is very promising. We have invested in our own COEs so that we can better support our clients in leveraging this technology for the speed, productivity, and innovation they need to achieve the outcomes they want," concluded Delmedico.