Start off the Power Platform journey...

How to initiate your organizations journey in implementing Power platform

Introduction

Consider a scenario, to improve business processes, communication and overall organizational integrity a company just bought Office 365 licenses for its employees. The IT team understand the same comes with Power platform licenses and it wants to encourage various groups to take advantage of it and start creating low-code no-code apps by themselves. Few months down the line IT starts getting support tickets regarding various apps create by users which have now being used by multiple departments are not functioning as intended. Also, IT is getting multiple requests for upgrading the Power platform plan so that they can use various premium features of the platform. IT is overwhelmed and due to restricted budget constraints is not able to satisfy all the end users thus creating malcontent.

This is a typical scenario for a company who jumps head-first into a technology platform which has a great pull for end user but without through due-diligence and long-term plan. **Power platform (PP)** provides many features which when leveraged correctly can be an absolute boon for the company. But some ground-rules needs to be put in place for this endeavour to be successful.

The following whitepaper is intended to provide a starting point for implementing a successful **power platform (PP)** practice into an organization. This paper only concentrates on few correct steps you can take in the journey; rest of the journey can be planned according to the success of these first few steps.

So! What is power platform

Power platform is a set of technologies and tools all specifically developed to provide a non-IT business users tools to detach themselves from depending on the IT teams for all their basic development requirements. It proves a very smooth transition from working on O365 tools like Word & Excel to develop applications which can help automate tasks which previously required loads of manual interventions or needed IT teams to create IT solutions using custom development or implement COTs packages. The most intriguing part of the platform is the user don't need to be an IT expert to integrate these solutions with other established platforms like Facebook, MuleSoft, SharePoint, etc. as a power platform provides a methodology called as connectors to work with these varied services.
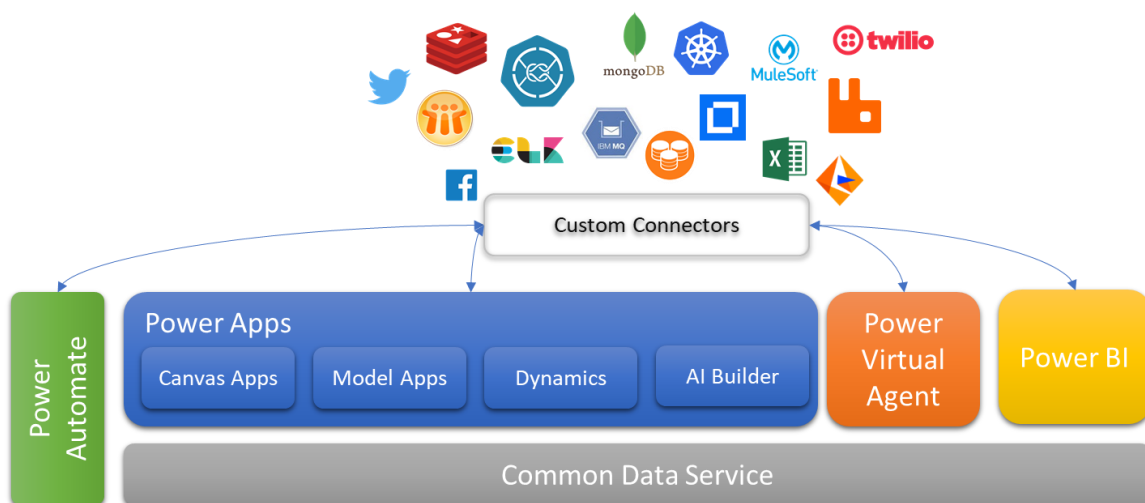

Figure 1: Power platform BIG picture

Is power platform relevant for you!

Microsoft is trying extremely hard to ensure the word about power platform reaches far and wide and is bending its back to ensure easy entry point for this service. Hence it provided free trials as well as bundling various license with its other platforms as benefits. But if you are getting a service for free doesn't mean you need it!

Consider a scenario in which you are a small-time manufacturer and you got power platform licenses when you purchased a new PC. You work with only few local vendors and supply to just one organization. Your orders and billing volumes are not too high and most of your staff are not tech savvy. In this case it does not make sense to create an inventory management system or a learning management system. Both these systems can be easily created on power apps but if your inventory can be managed by just a simple excel sheet and training material is available in shared folder. Hence, it's imperative to consider the scope & requirements to automate various processes.

In some cases, power platform can really help reduce your IT development budget as well as other miscellaneous IT cost like licenses by as much as 60%. Consider an organization which had created may Access 2007 application. These applications are the driving force of the application, but you are not able to move them to modern Access platform (0365) as they are unsupported. Previously the only way out of this conundrum was create custom apps and move the existing data to the new database. This needed high upfront investments in both development & upkeep. But now, due to Power platform, the applications can easily be created by non-developer staff in canvas app and data can be moved for free either to SharePoint, excel or the CDS. These modern applications can be developed in less than 60% of time and within fraction of development cost. Provided you will need to pay monthly cost of Power apps licenses, but if you are already sitting on large amounts of licenses this cost is completely negated.

Hence, power platform is not the answer to all your needs. It might be extremely useful tool in your IT arsenal, or it can be an absolute dead weight with no functions. It's imperative that management & IT team consider this analysis before diving head-on in this journey.

Kick off

Ok, so your organizations decide Power platform is something to invest in. Then the general question arises… **How do we start the Journey!**

The power platform journey is quite different to what you might have implemented in other IT endeavours. This difference stems from the fact that power platform is not only intended to be used by IT professionals & technical teams but also by non-IT flock of your company. These non-IT resources who will be developing apps in the organization are called 'Citizen Developers' and special care needs to be taken to ensure that these individuals receive proper constructive training and support.

App in a Day

One of the methodologies recommended by Microsoft is to arrange for a training called App-in-a-day.

This training can be provided by Microsoft in conjugation with training partners or your own IT team. The training tries to encompass 4 major dimensions of the power apps:
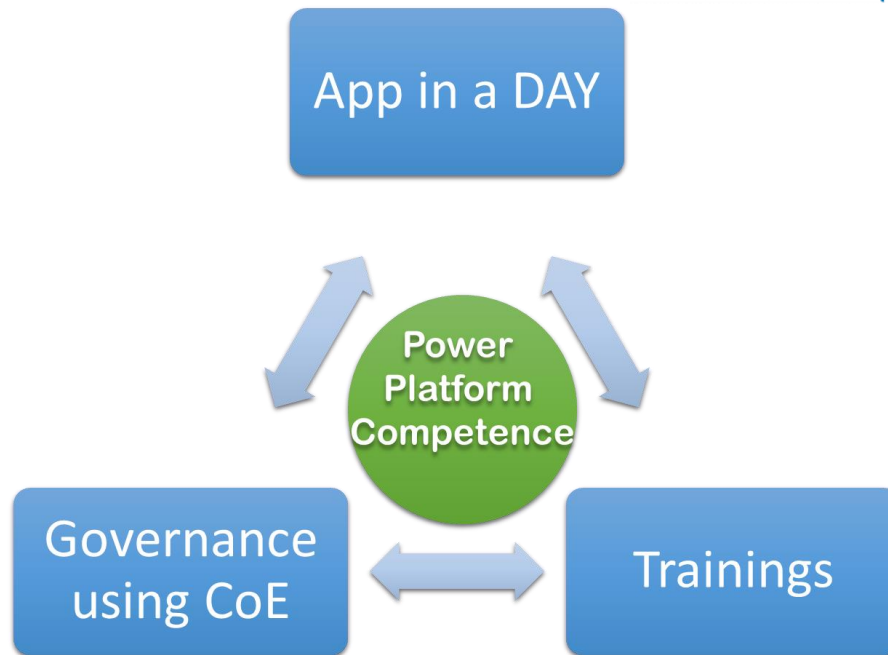
Figure 2: Three facets of kick-off

- Learning about PowerApps with hands-on labs and content
- Build canvas and model-driven applications with end users
- Use Common Data services (CDS) to store business data
- Integrate Microsoft Flow to automate approvals and send emails

These trainings can be attended by the **Core group** of your organization along with any citizen developers who you might have already isolated. This core group should consist of your entire IT team along with key personnel from your various departments. Choosing these key personnel is extremely important as they will be the agents through which you will be spreading the power platform adoption in your organization. So-to-speak they will be you marketing team for the endeavour.

The idea here is not to make EXPERTS but to introduce the resources to full spectrum of what is possible & available in power platform. The app chosen to be developed for this training is also important. It's imperative that a domain which is close to your organizations competencies is selected so that most of the citizen developers can concentrate on the technology rather than understanding the functional aspect of the app. It also helps to make the sessions interactive as the non-developers can also contribute using their functional knowledge.

Trainings

One of the fastest way to ensure adoption of any platform is by introducing small & regular trainings. Its preferable that these trainings are provided by external parties to begin with & then can be made in-house. But one must always keep in mind the most important mantra of power apps training

Empower your IT teams & Train your Citizen Developers

Training a citizen developer in any IT platform is far different than doing the same for an IT individual. IT resources are expected to get themselves trained in new technology after certain period and its basically one of the founding tasks of an IT resource.

Citizen developers don't share the same mentality and it can be difficult to inculcate the idea of upgrading themselves in a platform which is other than their core competencies. Hence non-standard trainings like 'App in a Day' are far more effective than asking resources to get themselves trained using more conventional means like online training.

It is imperative that the trainings conducted consider the background of the participants and training materials reflect items which they are comfortable with. A simple example of this will be to have a 'App in a Day' session for HR personnel where they develop an application like 'Appraisal Processing' rather than an app like 'Inventory Management'

Some tips which can be effective for this facet are:
1. Conduct department wise trainings so training can be more targeted, and examples provided can be more easily understood
2. Splitting the training in multiple smaller sessions of 2 hrs each focusing on one specific area, rather than 2 long sessions stretching 4-5 hours.
3. Utilizing external & professional trainers at least during the start of the PP journey rather than depending on train-the-trainer approach
4. Pre-create training environments and distribute logins beforehand rather than asking trainees to create their own. Environment creation is a confusing activity and can sometimes discourage employees from even trying PP.

Setup basic governance using CoE

Once adoption of power platform starts it can EXPLODE too fast and completely unpredictably. Hence it's imperative that some aspects of governance have to be put in place. This will ensure the adoption & penetration of power platform can be managed and monitored to ensure problematic or negative scenarios can be negated from the start itself.

One way of getting off the mark is by implementing set of tools custom developed for this purpose. All these tools & documents have been neatly bundled by Microsoft in an open source package called '**Microsoft Power Platform Center of Excellence (CoE) Starter Kit**'
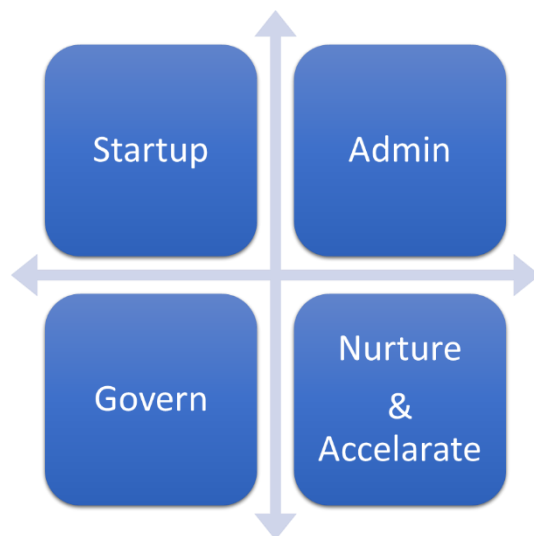
As Microsoft puts it:

A Center of Excellence (CoE) in an organization drives innovation and improvement and brings together like-minded people with similar business goals to share knowledge and success, while at the same time providing standards, consistency, and governance to the organization.

The CoE toolkit provides tools & apps targeting one of the 4 facets of the power platform adoption. These facets Define

Figure 3: Four facets of CoE

goals and expected outcomes of your CoE. They also help you gain insights into your Microsoft Power Platform adoption as well as establish audit and compliance processes. Finally, it provides flow to accelerate adoption by ensuring enriching & thriving community of makers.

The first facet introduces the toolkit and provides scripts & instructions which are needed to setup the environment as well as update the various power automate flows so that data can be ingested and available to admins to view and take action on

Second facet of the Center of Excellence (CoE) Core Components solution provides components that admins will need to review the setup apps like the DLP Editor and Set New App Owner help with daily admin tasks.

The third facet concentrates on overall governance of the implementation. This facet dives deep in to features like setting up sample audit process, features for Archive unused apps, and most importantly features to take action based on certain connector usage.

A successful implementation of CoE can give a head start to any power platform implementation.

What Next

Completing the Kick-off part mentioned above is just the first step in a journey to successfully implement the power platform in your organization. Depending on the feedback you received you might consider consolidating the training efforts and build a bigger base of devs. On the other hand, if you receive a overwhelming response then you might consider employing an power platform implementation expert to plan your next move keeping in mind the size and scope.

One of the most important next steps will also be to expand your core group and create an Organization-wide Steering Committee which can take decision on the way forward.

In whichever path your organization chooses to tread once thing is for certain always consider power platform to be a MASS driven endeavour then a technology driven one. Hence special considerations need to be taken while planning and it should certainly not be considered as just another IT tool.

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