

ServiceNow Service Portal vs. Employee Center: A Casual Comparison

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If you're diving into ServiceNow's front-end options, you've likely heard of the **Service Portal** and **Employee Center**. Both are designed to provide an engaging user experience, but they each have their own flavors, features, and fit depending on what you're looking for. Let's break down how these two stack up in terms of **TCO (Total Cost of Ownership)**, **features**, **scalability**, **maintainability**, and **user experience**. By the end of this, you'll know exactly which one is the right fit for your organization. Spoiler: It's not always one-size-fits-all!

Key Differences Between ServiceNow Service Portal and Employee Center

1. TCO (Total Cost of Ownership)

Service Portal:

- **Low cost to start:** It's a more affordable option if you just need basic functionality for requests, incidents, and knowledge management. You can get up and running quickly with minimal setup.
- **Custom development needed:** If you want to significantly customize the portal (for branding, workflows, etc.), expect higher ongoing development and maintenance costs. For example, custom widgets and themes can require substantial development effort.
- **Maintenance:** Service Portal requires updates and bug fixes but does not benefit from the automatic updates and out-of-the-box features like Employee Center. This means more manual effort to keep the portal current and functional.

Employee Center:

- **Higher initial cost:** Employee Center comes with more advanced out-of-the-box features, so it might have a higher initial cost (especially if you're aiming for a comprehensive experience from day one).
- **Reduced customization needs:** Thanks to its rich set of pre-built features, there's less need for custom development. For example, the Employee Center includes pre-configured HR and IT service delivery capabilities.
- **Lower long-term costs:** With automatic updates and built-in integrations, Employee Center can reduce the ongoing cost of maintaining custom configurations and keeping up with new releases. This can result in significant cost savings over time.

Recommendation: If you're on a budget and just need a functional, user-friendly interface without too much customization, **Service Portal** is a great choice. But if you want a more modern, out-of-the-box experience with fewer long-term headaches, go for **Employee Center**.

2. Features and Functions

Here's where things get interesting—both portals allow users to access services, requests, knowledge, and more, but the feature sets are a bit different.

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Feature	Service Portal	Employee Center
Out-of-the-box experience	Basic and requires customization	Rich, modern UI with pre-built templates
User-friendly self-service	Highly customizable but basic by default	Built-in, highly interactive self-service
Employee experience	Custom workflows and content needed	Tailored experience for employees (e.g., HR, IT, facilities)
Integration capabilities	Depends on what you customize	Strong integrations with HR, ITSM, and other workflows
Branding	Can be fully branded with customization	Limited branding but has a modern, consistent look

Service Portal is super flexible and lets you design your own experience, so it's great if you need a completely custom portal. However, you'll need more effort to make it visually appealing and feature-rich. For example, creating a custom branded portal with unique workflows will require significant development and design work.

Employee Center, on the other hand, provides a modern, out-of-the-box experience with fewer customizations required. It's more targeted toward employee self-service and comes pre-configured with features like **HR Service Delivery**, **ITSM**, and a consistent UI across devices. Think of it as the "premium" package with less work for you to do. For instance, an Employee Center can quickly provide employees with access to HR services without extensive setup.

Recommendation: If you need a polished, ready-to-go experience with minimal customization, **Employee Center** wins. But if you're looking to create a completely custom experience and are willing to put in some work, go for **Service Portal**.

3. Scalability

Service Portal:

- **Scalable, but manual:** The scalability of the Service Portal largely depends on the customizations you make. If you're adding lots of custom widgets, integrations, or features, it can become harder to scale efficiently. For example, a highly customized portal may require additional infrastructure and resources as it grows.
- **More flexibility for growth:** Since you can tailor the portal as needed, it's flexible in supporting more complex use cases as your needs grow. You can add new features and integrations as your organization evolves.

Employee Center:

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- **Built for scale:** Employee Center is designed with scalability in mind. It's ready to grow as your organization expands, especially with new ServiceNow features automatically included in updates. This means you can easily add new capabilities without significant effort.
- **Standardized approach:** You may lose some customization flexibility, but the tradeoff is that scaling is much easier and can be done faster with minimal effort. The standardized design and features ensure consistency as you grow.

Recommendation: For pure scalability, **Employee Center** is the way to go if you want less manual effort as you grow. If you prefer a tailored solution, **Service Portal** can scale but might require more attention to customization.

4. Maintainability

Service Portal:

- **Ongoing upkeep:** Due to its customization-heavy nature, maintaining the Service Portal requires constant attention. Every update to ServiceNow may require tweaks to your custom configurations. This can be time-consuming and requires careful planning.
- **Requires a skilled team:** Since Service Portal often involves coding and design, you'll need a team that's skilled in both ServiceNow and web development to handle maintenance and updates. For example, custom widgets and themes will need regular updates to stay functional.

Employee Center:

- **Less effort to maintain:** Since Employee Center comes with built-in updates and upgrades, it reduces the maintenance overhead significantly. As new features are added to the platform, they are seamlessly integrated into your portal. This means you can focus on other priorities rather than maintaining custom code.
- **Simplified maintenance:** You don't need to worry about coding and design changes, making it much easier to keep running smoothly. The built-in features and integrations ensure that your portal remains up-to-date with minimal effort.

Recommendation: If you want a low-maintenance solution, **Employee Center** is your best bet. If you're okay with spending more time maintaining a highly customized portal, then **Service Portal** is fine too, as long as you have the right resources.

5. User Experience

Service Portal:

- **Custom user experience:** You have total control over the design and layout. This can be fantastic if you want to match the portal to your brand or provide a very specific user experience. For example, you can create custom dashboards, forms, and workflows to meet your unique needs.

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- **User adoption may vary:** Since the experience is customizable, it might take more effort to make it intuitive for users, especially if you create too complex of a design. User training and support may be needed to ensure adoption.

Employee Center:

- **Streamlined user experience:** Built for simplicity, Employee Center offers a clean, modern design that is intuitive out-of-the-box. It's geared towards improving employee self-service and engagement right away. Features like a unified service catalog and knowledge base make it easy for employees to find what they need.
- **Employee-centric:** The Employee Center is specifically designed with employee needs in mind, so things like HR requests, IT services, and other employee-related functions are well organized and easy to navigate. This enhances the overall user experience and satisfaction.

Recommendation: If you need a tailored experience for your users, **Service Portal** is perfect. But if you're after a modern, seamless experience for employees with less effort on your part, **Employee Center** is the way to go.

Ideal Use Cases for Each Solution

Service Portal:

- **Ideal for organizations that need custom workflows and have complex, specific use cases.** If your organization has very particular requirements and you have the resources to manage it, **Service Portal** is a great option. For example, a company with unique business processes and branding requirements can benefit from the flexibility of Service Portal.
- **Best for organizations that want full control over design and customization,** whether it's for creating specialized interfaces, adding unique integrations, or matching corporate branding. This level of control allows you to create a portal that truly reflects your organization's identity.

Employee Center:

- **Ideal for organizations looking for a user-friendly, modern self-service portal that requires minimal configuration and maintenance.** If you want to quickly deploy a solution that employees can start using right away, **Employee Center** is the way to go. For example, a company looking to improve employee engagement and streamline HR and IT services can benefit from the out-of-the-box features of **Employee Center**.
 - **Best for organizations that want a fast, out-of-the-box solution for employee requests and services (HR, IT, facilities),** and don't want to get bogged down in extensive customizations. This approach ensures that your portal is always up-to-date and requires minimal effort to maintain.
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Summary

Both the **Service Portal** and **Employee Center** have their pros and cons. If you're looking for full customization and don't mind a bit of extra work, **Service Portal** might be the right choice. However, if you want a modern, user-friendly experience with minimal maintenance, go with **Employee Center**—it's built for the modern workforce, with less effort on your part.

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Service Portal vs. Employee Center: What's Going On Under the Hood?

Let's take a look at what makes each of these tick and what you'll need to know about their tech and dependencies.

Service Portal: Flexibility with Power (and a Little Complexity)

Service Portal is the go-to for companies that want to create something totally unique. It's all about customization, but that means it relies on several technologies that can require a bit more effort to manage. Let's dig into what powers Service Portal and what you need to know about how it works.

What's Going On Behind the Scenes?

1. **AngularJS**

Service Portal is built on **AngularJS**, a powerful JavaScript framework that allows you to create interactive, client-side applications. It's super flexible but also a bit of a beast to manage. While AngularJS is still widely used, keep in mind that ServiceNow plans to move to **Angular 2+** in the future, so it's worth staying on top of that change.

2. **Widgets**

The heart of Service Portal is its **widgets**. These custom-built UI components let you create pages and features that are totally tailored to your needs. Need a custom form or dynamic page? You build it with widgets, using **AngularJS**, **HTML**, and **CSS**. It's pretty customizable, but also something you'll need to manage closely.

3. **REST APIs**

REST APIs help Service Portal talk to other parts of ServiceNow (and beyond). These APIs let you pull data from various tables like **Incident**, **Service Catalog**, or even third-party apps, and display it in the portal. So if you need a form that pulls live data, the API is how it happens.

4. **Jelly Scripting**

If you dig deeper, you might find **Jelly scripting** at play in some parts of Service Portal. It's a tag-based scripting language used for server-side scripting. It's how data is pulled dynamically from the ServiceNow database to show on the portal. It's not used everywhere, but it's a handy tool when you need it.

5. **Branding with CSS**

With Service Portal, you can fully brand the look and feel of your portal. This is where **CSS** (Cascading Style Sheets) comes into play. If you want to match your company's colors, fonts, and overall aesthetic, you'll need to dive into CSS to make that happen.

Key Dependencies:

- **ServiceNow Platform:** The portal needs the ServiceNow platform to function, so you'll want to make sure your instance is set up properly and configured well.

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- **Customization Efforts:** Creating custom widgets, workflows, or branding will need **skilled developers**. You're looking at a team familiar with AngularJS, JavaScript, REST APIs, and ServiceNow development frameworks.
- **Access Control:** You'll use **Role-Based Access Control (RBAC)** to manage who sees what, so make sure roles and permissions are correctly set.

Employee Center: Ready-Made, User-Friendly, and Less Messing Around

On the flip side, **Employee Center** comes pre-built with a ton of features. It's the go-to if you want a more out-of-the-box solution without the hassle of deep customization. Here's what you'll find under the hood.

What Powers Employee Center?

1. **ServiceNow Platform (ITSM, HRSD, etc.)**
Just like Service Portal, **Employee Center** runs on the ServiceNow platform, but it's much more tightly integrated with pre-configured modules like **ITSM** and **HRSD** (Human Resources Service Delivery). This means it's ready to roll for HR requests, IT services, and other employee-related needs, all with minimal setup.
2. **Mobile-first Design**
One of the coolest things about Employee Center is that it's built to be **mobile-first**. This means it's fully optimized for smartphones and tablets, which is perfect for today's workforce who's on the go. You don't need to worry about making sure things look good on every device—it's all taken care of for you.
3. **Pre-built UI Components**
Instead of building everything from scratch, Employee Center uses **pre-built UI components**. These are ready-to-use features for service requests, knowledge articles, and more. If you're looking to launch something fast with a modern design, these components are a life-saver. No heavy coding required.
4. **Widgets, but Simpler**
Employee Center also uses **widgets**, but the difference is that there are fewer customizations needed. It's still widget-based, but the system is much more streamlined with built-in integrations for things like HR services and ITSM requests. Less development means less headache.
5. **Automated Integrations**
Since Employee Center is built with ServiceNow's core modules in mind, you don't need to manually configure integrations with HR, IT, or Facilities. It's mostly plug-and-play, which means you get to focus on more important tasks than setting up integrations.
6. **UI Builder**
If you want to tweak things a bit, **UI Builder** lets you customize your portal with a drag-and-drop interface. It's a great way to make small changes without needing a coding background. Want a custom page layout? UI Builder lets you do that without writing a single line of code.

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Key Dependencies:

- **ServiceNow Modules:** Employee Center depends on **ITSM**, **HRSD**, and other ServiceNow modules. The more of these you have, the better the Employee Center experience will be.
- **Minimal Customization:** Employee Center is pretty much ready to go, but if you need deep customization, you might hit a few limitations. The key is balancing customization with convenience.
- **Access Control:** Just like Service Portal, Employee Center uses **RBAC** to ensure employees can only access what they're supposed to. So don't forget to set up those roles!

Side-by-Side Tech Comparison

Feature	Service Portal	Employee Center
Customization	High (custom widgets, themes, workflows)	Low (pre-configured templates, minimal customization)
UI Framework	AngularJS, custom widgets, CSS	Pre-configured UI components, UI Builder
API Usage	Extensive (REST APIs, SOAP APIs)	Primarily REST APIs for integrations
Integration	Custom integrations, manual setup	Automated, out-of-the-box integrations with ITSM, HRSD, etc.
Mobile Optimization	Not mobile-first, but mobile-friendly	Mobile-first, fully responsive
Security	Role-based access control (RBAC)	Role-based access control (RBAC)
Development Effort	High (requires skilled developers)	Low (pre-built, easier for non-developers)
Maintenance	High (constant updates needed for custom widgets)	Low (automated updates)

Conclusion: Which One Fits Your Needs?

When it comes to choosing between **Service Portal** and **Employee Center**, it all comes down to how much you want to customize and how quickly you need something up and running.

- If you're after **full customization** and have the resources to support it, **Service Portal** is perfect. You can build the portal of your dreams, but it will require some extra work and expertise.

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- If you prefer something **ready-to-go** with minimal effort and maintenance, **Employee Center** is the way to go. It's modern, mobile-optimized, and comes with a lot of pre-built features—just plug it in and go.

At the end of the day, it all depends on what you need. Either way, ServiceNow has you covered with both options!

Migrating from ServiceNow Service Portal to Employee Center: What You Need to Know

If you've been using **ServiceNow's Service Portal**, but now you're thinking about making the jump to **Employee Center**. Or maybe you're just exploring the possibilities and wondering if this migration is worth the time and effort. Whether you're planning to upgrade or just curious about the process, we've got you covered.

Here's a straightforward guide to help you understand your options, the steps involved, and what you need to keep in mind when migrating from the **Service Portal** to the **Employee Center**.

Why Migrate?

Before we dive into the nitty-gritty of migration, let's take a minute to talk about **why** you might want to make the switch in the first place.

- **Employee Center** comes packed with modern, out-of-the-box features designed to improve the employee experience—think HR Service Delivery, IT services, and more, all under one roof.
- It's also highly intuitive, with a user-friendly interface that doesn't require a lot of customization to look and feel great.
- With **Employee Center**, you get automatic updates, integration with various ServiceNow apps, and less work to keep things running smoothly.

If you're ready to get more out of your ServiceNow platform with fewer custom development needs and a richer user experience, this might be the perfect time for the migration.

Key Considerations Before Migrating

Migrating from Service Portal to Employee Center isn't something you can just flip a switch for. It's important to think through these areas before diving in:

1. Current Customizations

The more customized your **Service Portal** is, the trickier the migration might be. You'll need to assess:

- **Custom Widgets:** Do you have widgets built into your Service Portal? If so, they may need to be recreated or modified for Employee Center.

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- **Branding:** Are there heavy custom branding elements (e.g., logos, color schemes)? Employee Center comes with a set branding style, but if you need something unique, plan for adjustments.
- **Custom Workflows:** If you've built custom workflows or processes, you'll need to map those out and decide how they'll fit into Employee Center's more structured flow.

2. Out-of-the-Box vs. Custom Needs

Employee Center comes with a lot of **out-of-the-box** features, but if your business has specific, non-standard needs, you'll need to balance those with what Employee Center can provide. It's great for common scenarios like HR requests and IT services, but anything outside of that will need careful planning.

3. Integrations

Employee Center supports a lot of pre-configured integrations (like with HR, ITSM, and other workflows), but if your Service Portal relies on niche third-party integrations, you'll need to assess how they will transition over. You might need to tweak or rebuild integrations as part of the migration process.

The Migration Process: What to Expect

So, now that you've done the prep work, let's talk about the actual process of moving from Service Portal to Employee Center. Here's a general flow of what you can expect:

1. Discovery & Planning

Start by conducting a thorough discovery of your **Service Portal**:

- Identify all the custom widgets, integrations, and workflows you're currently using.
- Map out your **Service Catalog** and determine how it will transition to Employee Center.
- Decide which features you want to carry over and which ones might need to be updated or scrapped.

2. Choosing Your Migration Method

Now, there are a few ways you can migrate, depending on your needs and level of customization:

- **Lift and Shift:** This is the "quick and dirty" method where you take your existing configurations and simply port them over to Employee Center. It's a fast route but can lead to some compromises in functionality, especially if your Service Portal is highly customized.
- **Rebuild from Scratch:** If you're looking to fully embrace the Employee Center experience and ensure everything is up-to-date, you might want to rebuild your functionality. This is ideal if your Service Portal was built with a lot of custom code that doesn't translate well to Employee Center's more standardized features.
- **Hybrid Approach:** This is probably the most common method. It involves rebuilding the core aspects of your portal in Employee Center (like the service catalog and HR services) while reusing

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some elements from your Service Portal (custom widgets, integrations, etc.) to ease the transition. It's a balance between leveraging what you've built and taking advantage of Employee Center's out-of-the-box features.

3. Design & Customization

Employee Center is designed with an eye toward simplicity, but that doesn't mean you can't still make it your own. You'll need to:

- **Customize the look and feel** to reflect your organization's brand (but keep it within the confines of Employee Center's UI constraints).
- **Set up or adjust workflows** to ensure a smooth user experience.
- **Add custom functionality** where necessary, especially if you're using the hybrid approach.

4. Testing

Once you've got the migration plan in place and have started rebuilding your features, it's time to test everything. Testing is key to making sure the migration goes smoothly and users won't run into issues. You'll want to test:

- **Core functionality** (Service Catalog, HR services, ITSM integrations)
- **Mobile experience** (Employee Center is optimized for mobile, but you want to make sure it fits your needs)
- **Integrations** to ensure any third-party or ServiceNow integrations are still working as expected.
- **User acceptance testing (UAT)** to get feedback from real users on the new experience.

5. Go Live & Post-Migration

Once everything is tested and approved, it's time to flip the switch and go live. Be sure to have a rollback plan in place just in case, but the transition should be fairly smooth. After go-live, keep an eye on the system for any post-migration issues:

- Monitor user feedback and address any friction points quickly.
- Track performance and make any tweaks to workflows or design as needed.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Migration sounds simple, but it can come with some challenges. Here are some common mistakes to watch out for:

1. **Underestimating Customization Effort:** If your Service Portal is heavily customized, don't expect a one-to-one copy-paste experience. The more customized your Service Portal, the more work you'll need to put into adapting that to Employee Center.

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2. **Ignoring User Training:** While Employee Center is user-friendly, some of your users may need a little guidance during the transition. Make sure you provide training and support to get everyone on the same page.
3. **Forgetting About Integrations:** If your Service Portal has any unique integrations, make sure you have a plan to reconfigure them for Employee Center. Sometimes these integrations need a bit of tweaking to work smoothly.
4. **Skipping UAT:** It's easy to assume everything will work perfectly, but user acceptance testing is crucial. Get real users involved early and often to ensure the new platform is meeting their needs.

Summary

Migrating from ServiceNow's **Service Portal** to **Employee Center** can be a game-changer if you're looking for a modern, out-of-the-box solution with fewer maintenance headaches. While the migration process can involve some work—especially if you have a heavily customized portal—the benefits of **Employee Center**'s scalability, reduced maintenance, and better user experience are worth it in the long run.

So, take your time with the planning and testing stages, keep the users in the loop, and don't be afraid to ask for help if needed. The transition might be a bit of a ride, but once you're through, you'll be glad you made the move.

About Mana'o Pili ↴

Mana'o Pili is a Hawai'i based technology consulting firm specializing in business automation through ServiceNow. Mana'o Pili provides its customers with individualized solutions. We reject the notion of one-size-fits-all solutions. Instead, we partner with you to craft a tailored plan that aligns with your unique needs, budget, and objectives. Our approach focuses on optimizing your existing platform while minimizing customization and reducing technical debt.

Here at Mana'o Pili, we treat our customers as 'ohana (family), listen closely to your challenges and deliver tailored attention with exceptional service.