Setting up and managing business process standardization: Insights from a case study with a multinational e-commerce firm

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Abstract

Business process standardization (BPS) is an important aspect of BPM that receives increasing academic and practitioner attention. But what makes BPS projects successful and how can a firm establish a sustainable BPS capability for continuous process improvements? This paper draws on a case study with a leading E-commerce company about key business and IT-actions that contribute to BPS success. Further – while so far most BPS projects were designed as "only-once" activities – the paper shows how companies can enhance their BPS activities towards a "BPS competency" allowing for continuous BPS process improvements.

1. Introduction

A recent executive survey impressively shows that enhancing the performance of a firm’s business processes is among the most important top-management challenges [14]. Recently, many companies have changed their business logic from a purely functional towards an increasingly process oriented model [3,8,13,24,27]. Hence, knowing how to efficiently manage business processes and how to change an organization from a functional towards a process oriented model seems more important than ever. As a management discipline, business process management (BPM) "focuses on making business processes more efficient, effective, and capable of adapting to the fast-changing environment" [14].

In business process management, one particularly important instrument for enabling and achieving efficiency potentials that is receiving increased academic and practitioner attention is the standardization of business processes (BPS). On the academic side Venkatesh, for example, identifies BPS as one of three "broad future research directions" [29] and an impressive number of recent scientific publications shows its relevance [2,10,18-22,25,26,30,32]. On the practitioner side companies increasingly conduct BPS activities mainly aiming at achieving cost savings [9], increasing agility and flexibility [17] and improving regulatory compliance [16].

When standardizing business processes, companies face highly complex and mostly international situations. The case of the steel company Arcelor Mittal, which gave up plans to standardize its worldwide business processes shows that not all BPS projects are necessarily successful [5] and that an intelligent and thoughtful management approach combining the right business and IT-actions can be decisive for project success.

Therefore in this paper we aim at elaborating what business and IT-actions contribute most to BPS project success. Hence, the paper's first research question is: What business and IT-actions make a BPS project successful?

Hitherto most BPS projects were designed as "once-only" activities, i.e. their goal was to standardize processes from a current state towards a target state, in which it then usually remained. Today, as a response to faster-changing organizational and market environments, BPS activities need to advance. In this paper we show how a company – within a BPM context – can enhance their BPS activities towards a "BPS capability" allowing for continuous BPS process improvements. Hence, our second research question is: How can "once-only" BPS activities be enhanced towards a "BPS competency" to allow for continuous BPS process improvements?

To answer these two research questions we use a case study of BPS activities within a leading E-commerce company. We derive a set of key business and IT-actions that contributed to BPS project success and to developing a "BPS competency".

The paper is structured as follows: After introducing key terms and concepts we present an exploratory case study of BPS and then derive a set of key business and IT-actions contributing to BPS project success to show what accounts for developing a "BPS competency". Finally, results are critically discussed and avenues for future research are suggested.
2. Definition of key terms
This section aims at providing the terminology necessary to approach the case study in sections 3 and 4.

2.1. Business process management
Over the last years complexity of business processes has increased significantly. While a decade or two ago most "business processes" took place in one selected division only and were mostly stable over time today most end-to-end business processes span multiple divisions and have to change quite often to respond to the faster-changing environment. Among factors that led to this increased complexity and need for faster changes are new customer requirements (e.g., access to order entry using different channels), creation of shared service centers (providing parts of processes from a central location for several business units), supplier integration (e.g., letting the supplier handle the inventory) and finally outsourcing and offshoring (e.g., transferring process steps to other companies and/or locations).

The management-discipline that aims at coping with the increased complexity caused by the aforementioned factors is business process management (BPM). Luftman and Kempaiah define that "BPM focuses on making business processes more efficient, effective, and capable of adapting to the fast-changing environment. BPM also provides executives with the ability to monitor, analyze, control, and improve the execution of processes in real time" [14]. Regarding BPM as a management-discipline means taking several aspects into consideration simultaneously: managing change to improve business processes, setting up a BPM governance structure and roles equipped with sufficient responsibilities and power to successfully manage process change, and an extensive use of technology to model processes, analyze the models, automate the processes and finally measure and optimize process performance.

An important aspect underlying the concepts of BPM is the "principle of continuous improvement" [6]. After a process has been modeled, deployed and is currently being managed, next it will be measured and subsequently optimized.

Figure 1 visualizes the key elements of BPM and the principle of continuity since after optimizing the BPM circle will be run through again.

2.2. Business process standardization
While there seems to be a consensus on the desirability of BPS as a management tool to enhance business process performance, the concept has not yet been fully developed. There is even less of a clear definition, let alone a systematic understanding of the how and why of its benefits. In 2006, Lyytinen and King [15] complained that "despite the importance of standardization, the IS field has not pursued research on it vigorously" and did not sufficiently focus on "why" and "how" standards emerge and what their impact and economics are. In almost the same manner and also in 2006 Ungan [28] pointed out that "despite its great attractiveness, academics’ and practitioners’ work on process standardization is conspicuously absent".

As a response to these appeals and promoted by Venkatesh who identified process standardization as one of three "broad future research directions" [29] several papers dealing with BPS have been published [2,10,18-22,25,26,30-32], some focusing on a definition and drivers of BPS [10,18,22], others analyzing consequences of BPS using quantitative empirical [19-21,25,30-32] or qualitative empirical methods [2,26].

Approaching a definition of BPS, the probably most common underlying definition is that of "standard" resp. "standardization" provided by ISO/IEC: "Standards are documents, established by consensus and approved by a recognized body that provides, for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines or characteristics for activities or their results, aimed at the achievement of the optimum degree of order in a given context" [12]. Shaw et al. [23] define BPS as a means to change business processes from where they are to a standard business process but completely leave open the question, how a standard business process should look like and how a given business process at hand can be transformed into a standard business process.

Muenstermann and Weitzel [22] address "business process standardization" by dividing the issue into two steps. First, an "archetype process" either has to be chosen from the existing process variants or a complete new "archetype process" may be designed. The authors declare a standard process to fulfil several self-defined
quality dimensions. Consequently, this standard process is considered to be the time-, cost- and quality-optimal way of achieving the business process’ goals by incorporating both internal and external best practice knowledge. Hence, in a second step the archetype process is enhanced towards a standard process by adapting these criterions and the beforehand gathered process variants are aligned against the newly created standard process. Sánchez-Rodríguez et al. define business process standards to "represent the best, easiest and safest way to do an activity". Wuellenweber et al. define "the objective of [process] standardization" as "to make process activities transparent and achieve uniformity of process activities across the value chain and across firm boundaries."

In summary, for this paper we define "business process standardization" to be the activity of aligning existing variants against a standard process.

3. Research methodology

In this section we provide details on the case study research methodology, the company in focus and the data collection and analysis steps conducted.

3.1. Case study research methodology

According to Yin [33], a case study is an effective strategy for exploring 'how' or 'why' questions. It allows direct observations of a phenomenon in its natural setting, thus promoting a profound, realistic understanding [1]. Following Eisenhardt [7] a case study is a legitimate tool to derive new insights in an exploratory approach. While other methods would have compiled broad conceptual overviews or isolated quantitative facts, field research produced rich explanations and illustrative examples that generated great insight [1].

3.2. Company profile

For reasons of anonymity we will call the company in focus in this case study "Online". Online is a globally operating E-Commerce enterprise with business areas including payments, marketplaces and communications and several billion Euros gross profits. It serves dozens of markets and millions of customers all over the world.

3.3. Data collection and data analysis

Following the guidelines of Eisenhardt [7] for the case study approach we defined in the planning phase our research design and its components.

In the first stage we prepared our data collection and created interview guidelines. The guidelines were checked and pretested to ensure consistency and reliability. To allow the participants' flexibility in their responses the interview guidelines included several open format questions. While face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were the main data collection method, when necessary, telephone interviews were conducted to supplement the information gathered during the personal interviews. Additional documents containing information as to process flows, organizational structures or governance issues were requested as well as public accessible annual reports to broaden our data base.

The data collection phase took place in 2009 in two different stages: First, in January and February we collected basic case study data with semi-structured interviews. Then, to clarify open aspects and to focus on key success factors we conducted further semi-structured interviews and telephone interviews in June, July 2009.

The interviews were tape recorded, transcribed in written form and screened by all participants of our research team. Finally the transcribed case study report was checked by our interview partners.

As described in the sections above, we based our data-collection both on various data-sources, e.g., conducting interviews or requesting relevant documents, as well as enlarging our time frame from January 2009 until July 2009. This provides a triangulation of our data, which results in objective and scientific intangible basis for this work.

4. The case: Standardizing the customer relationship management process

This section concentrates on explaining the BPS project at Online from a descriptive perspective, in contrast to section 5, which will elaborate on what made the BPS project successful.

4.1. Background information

Market challenge

Online is a company that has been significantly growing over the last years (indicated by growth rates of up to 30% a year). This vast expansion kept Online from adjusting its internal processes and structures in a lasting and organic way. As Online is divided into seven business units located in different countries on multiple continents, the rapid growth led to heterogeneous handling of upcoming demands and as a consequence to partly diverging processes along the business units.
During the last months growth has decreased and now allows Online to readjust its structures and to reengineer the process landscape aiming at both improving flexibility and efficiency for future business and reflecting the organically grown increased company size.

Business processes at Online

In the past, Online’s business was mostly functionally oriented. Although a lot of processes crossed division borders, all activities still were planned and organized within the respective functional departments without having an end-to-end process perspective. The employees only had a narrow and incomplete understanding of their day-to-day business limited to and by the boundaries of their particular divisions. This not only prevented a holistic view of end-to-end processes but also caused, for example, media disruptions and additional intermittent communication between the functional departments.

IT at Online

As Online is an E-Commerce company, information technology is used in almost every business process. The major commercial platform is provided by an integrated global core IT system. Information provided by the core system is consistently accessible from all business units.

Besides the core IT system Online operates several supporting IT systems that in most cases are not globally accessible and not integrated as the core system. For the case study – out of the set of supporting IT systems – the customer relationship management systems (CRM) will be of importance. Along the business units different CRM systems were in place: In Asia Online operated one CRM system while in both Europe and the United States Online had two additional different systems in place. Each CRM system implements its own specific data model. The usage of heterogeneous systems therefore additionally caused an inconsistent and fragmented view upon the customer’s data. As a consequence, an integrated view on a customer's activity within the core system along the different CRM systems resp. business units was not possible.

Business process in focus of standardization project

Millions of customers worldwide require an effective customer relationship management. The main objective of the CRM process – on which we focus – is to support customers using the online-platform. This may include solving technical difficulties with the platform itself or solving problems with regard to selecting, buying and receiving products. To get support the customer can chose among different channels such as email, online chat, online self help or telephone.

Comparing the order and activities per CRM process step along the business units before the standardization project both the order and the activities per process step were profoundly inhomogeneous. Regarding the IT support, as described in the previous subsection, the CRM process was supported by different CRM systems along the business units and was based on different customer data models.

The CRM process has been selected as research object due to the massive heterogeneity from both the business perspective (order of process steps and activities per step) and the IT perspective (supporting CRM system). As a consequence of this heterogeneity we expect to find a more significant difference in the degree of standardization before and after the BPS project what makes the CRM process interesting and particularly suitable for our research purpose.

4.2. The CRM process standardization project at Online

The aforementioned massive heterogeneity from both the business and the IT perspective lead to decreasing customer satisfaction and increasing CRM costs for Online. In this situation the vice-president of customer support initiated a standardization project of global scale.

The main project targets were a) increase customer satisfaction, b) decrease CRM process costs, c) enhance business continuity (Sarbanes Oxley Act) and d) enhance readiness to outsource (parts of) the CRM process.

A dedicated project team comprising about 10 team members was set up and put in charge of operating the project. In addition different employees of the seven business units were involved in the project on a temporary basis. The whole project was coordinated by one leading business unit.

Online’s standardization project could be divided into three distinct phases as illustrated by Figure 2 and explained in the following.

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3 The Sarbanes Oxley Act demands companies to secure its business core functions. As Online operates in E-Commerce, securing core functions mainly applies to the continuous operability of the IT systems and infrastructure.
Gathering existing process variants

As mentioned before, at the beginning of the BPS project the CRM process existed in different variants along Online's business units.

Figure 3 exemplifies an extract of Online’s process landscape. In this case, a vendor sold a product using Online’s platform and is demanded to deliver immediately. As soon as the delivery time exceeded, the consecutive process was handled differently along the business units. Whereas one unit granted a ten days extension for delivery another promptly raised dunning costs. Although the variants jointed again to a homogenous process the succeeding activity of providing payment methods to the clients as well differed along the business units.

As these process variants were not publicly (i.e., company-wide) accessible, the goal of this first project phase was to create transparency with regard to which business unit operated what kind of CRM process variant.

Luckily in the past, several approaches had been undertaken to document the CRM processes in the company. Hence, a broad base of CRM process documentation was available that, within a first step, was collected by the BPS project team from all business units. In addition – within each business unit – the IT department, that delivered the CRM systems, and the content department, which is responsible for e.g., the text modules that are used in the messages for the customer, were contacted and available process information was collected.

After gathering all existing documents and information, they had to be analyzed and checked for completeness. If no documentation was available, the BPS project team contacted the responsible employee and collected the required information by conducting individual interviews. As tool support for the notation of the process variants both MS Visio and MS Excel have been used.

The end product of this project phase was complete transparency with regard to the existing process variants in the company. Both the complete documentation of process variants including the supporting CRM system as well as where available additional information allowed comparing the existing CRM process variants in detail.

Defining a standard process

The goal of this project phase was to define a standard CRM process based on the process variants gathered in the preceding project phase.

Therefore, in a first internal step, all variants that had been documented in the first phase were analyzed on the level of process steps aiming at identifying a set of time-, cost- and quality-optimal process steps, originating from different business units that collectively cover the full CRM process. Having selected these time-, cost- and quality-optimal process steps Online synthesized the contained process knowledge into a new process, the future CRM standard process prototype by assembling all the best process steps identified in the variants. To allow for necessary country specific aspects (e.g., juristic requirements) respective requirements were collected and – where indispensable – integrated to the future CRM standard process prototype (effective for those business units only that requested the specific aspect).

Then, in a second external step, Online analyzed competitors’ CRM processes and CRM systems on the market. Where competitors’ CRM process or available CRM systems contained process steps that were better than those in the future CRM standard process prototype Online adopted them and thereby enhanced the future CRM standard process prototype to the future CRM standard process.

Implementation of the process

Within this phase of the BPS project the previously designed CRM standard process had to be rolled out companywide.

As a first step within the implementation phase Online selected a CRM standard system and customized it to best fit the previously designed CRM standard process. The CRM standard system allowed switch-off and replacing the existing legacy CRM systems. Then, on the business side, Online changed responsibilities for CRM activities. Instead of having several responsibilities along the functional departments, the role of a "CRM process owner" was created – one at Online's
headquarter and one at each business unit. To best support the roll out an online process repository has been installed that is accessible for employees in every business unit. The repository contains the process and its activities. Finally, the global roll out of the CRM standard process and the CRM standard system was supported by an external consultancy disposing of broad experience with regard to introducing new CRM processes and systems.

Since the project has only recently been finished to date mentioned results, e.g., increased customer satisfaction or decreased CRM process costs, are based on solid ex-ante business cases disposed in the forefront of the project. However, as the above explanations show, the project targets have successfully been realized:

The standardized CRM process now allows for transparency and consistency across all business units. As a consequence customer satisfaction already increased and is supposed to further increase over the next year. The usage of one global CRM standard system allowed decommissioning the legacy CRM systems and thereby significantly reduced IT costs. Since the CRM standard process consists of time- and cost-optimal process steps only the process costs have already decreased and are supposed to further decrease over the next year.

Operating only one companywide CRM standard system continuous operability of the IT systems is easier to assure because of the reduced amount of systems and the respective related risk factors.

As the CRM process is standardized now and the specific process steps are known it is easier for Online to figure out which parts of the process may be outsourced to external service providers.

An additional benefit the CRM process standardization provided is the possibility of measurement, i.e., company-wide analysis of process performance data across business units.

### 4.3. Case summary and outlook

The vast expansion of Online implied that restructuring the process landscape to fit to the increased company size had to be neglected. As soon as possible Online had to revise their processes in order to ensure efficiency for future business. Therefore, Online's CRM vice president initiated a CRM process standardization project. After gathering all existing CRM process variants, Online derived a CRM standard process and implemented it along all business units. As mentioned above, the initially constituted targets have been achieved.

In the near future, quantification of the cost savings as well as an analysis of the increased customer satisfaction will hopefully provide additional insights.

### 5. Successful BPS within a BPM context: What are the key business and IT actions leading to success?

As described in section 4, after a phase of impressive organic growth, which kept Online from adapting its business processes to the growing company size and complexity, Online entered a phase of reduced growth, allowing for catching up the necessary process redesign. Regarding the CRM process the vice-president of CRM decided to execute a global CRM standardization project paired with an effort to establish a BPS competency allowing for continuous process improvement (as will be described in subsection 5.2). From the standardization project and the efforts to establish the BPS competency a set of key success actions have been derived as described in the following:

After having finished the first round of interviews and having evaluated the information gained within the interviews and documents received, the authors independently derived a first set of actions. In a next step, the initial sets of actions were merged to a single set and revised through several enriching iterations.

The result of these iterations was a final set of actions that – from the authors' perspective – was able to completely exhaustively and mutually exclusively cover and interpret the case study. Subsequently, the case study then has been formulated along the derived set of actions. Hence, the study has been interpretation using a perspective/lens based on the derived set of actions.

To ensure that this perspective/lens – not only from the authors' but also from Online's perspective – has correctly been synthesized from the information gained during the interviews and documents received and correctly interprets the case study, the script of the paper (containing both the case study itself and the derived set of actions) has been sent to Online asking their managers for feedback which subsequently has been incorporated into the paper. This procedure allowed making sure that the authors' interpretation matches with Online's real world perspective.

In the following, on the one hand, this section derives specific key business and IT actions from the case study and illustrates how and why they had a positive effect on the BPS project's success (subsection 5.1); on the other hand, it puts Online's BPS activities in a BPM context and exemplifies how in addition to "once-only" BPS activities a "BPS competency" allowing for continuous BPS process improvements (subsection 5.2) can be established.

#### 5.1. Specific key business and IT actions to guarantee the BPS project's success

This section presents the set of "once-only" actions derived from the case study. These actions over all con-
stitute amendments necessary to establish both a successful course of the BPS project as well as building a foundation for subsequent continuous BPS process improvements:

**Action 1: Set up a BPS project team and configure it correctly**

Right at the beginning the CRM vice-president set up a dedicated BPS project team and ensured that its configuration was as multifunctional and versatile as possible. Besides several experts for the CRM process itself from both the leading business unit and the other decentral business units, the CRM vice-president staffed IT experts, a controller and some consultants from the external consultancy into the BPS project team. One principle that each member of the project team had to adhere to was that working in the BPS project team required at least 50% of monthly working time below that threshold friction losses would have been to big. **Impact:** The broader the competencies and backgrounds within a dedicated BPS team the higher the probability to design a standard process that simultaneously fulfills all organizational, environmental and technological requirements. Including representatives of the future users of the standard process to be rolled out increases buy-in and, as a consequence, the motivation to adopt the standard process after its roll out.

**Action 2: Involve employees and get top management support to establish both acceptance and authority**

A crucial point of a BPS project's success is the adoption and subsequent execution of the standardized process by employees. Online has taken several steps contributing towards a successful adoption of the CRM standard process e.g., organizing workshops in the decentral business units in which problems and challenges regarding the BPS project were discussed and solved. Employees there were able to actively participate in the BPS project. Since a BPS project entails issues regarding both financial investments and changes to responsibilities, significant top management support was inevitable. As the project was initiated by the vice-president of CRM Online guaranteed strong support by senior managers already early on and throughout the whole project. Typical challenges in process reengineering and adoption like management resistance or staff denial to share knowledge were not an issue as Online had outsourced several customer-support related processes in the past. Hence, the changes had to be implemented by the service providers. As already mentioned, the project has just recently been finished with the implementation of the standard process and consequently the new CRM system being operational. Hence, no further confirmations can be made at this point of time and future research will look at further developments. **Impact:** "A pure top-down approach would have led to huge chaos in the appropriate divisions", states an involved BPS project team member. The early integration of the employees prevented denial of the future standard process users. Furthermore, implementing a BPS project needs strong support by senior managers throughout the whole project. Visible management support led to show more commitment to the CRM process standardization project and repeatedly highlighted the importance of adopting the future CRM standard process.

**Action 3: Systematically identify existing best practices and derive a future standard process**

Within the CRM process standardization project Online systematically identified existing best practice process variants and – based on time-, cost- and quality-optimal parts of the variants – derived the future standard process. The partly already existing CRM process documentation significantly simplified the creation of the future standard process. In a first step, to decide which variant to choose for a CRM process step – performing a given activity at hand – Online conducted cost-benefit analyses. Based on the results of these analyses Online decided from which variant to take the process step as input for the future CRM standard process. In a second step, Online decided to enrich the future CRM standard process prototype by learning from a competitors CRM process and some publicly available CRM system implementations. That allowed to finally dispose of an industry-wide standard process that is optimal with regard to process time, cost and quality (since the external perspective has been incorporated) and that already is sufficiently company-specific (since the CRM standard process prototype has been derived based on internal best practices). **Impact:** Synthesizing knowledge and experience that already exists within the organization (either explicitly in written form such as process documentation or implicitly in the heads of process experts and executives) before conducting the standard process definition phase is essential to a BPS project's success. Enriching the synthesized external knowledge by external perspectives (e.g., competitors processes or large process supporting IT systems available on the market) can further enhance the performance of the future standard process.

**Action 4: Define and fill appropriate roles and create incentives to ensure BPS project success**

First, breaking with its hitherto existing functional organizational structures Online introduced a process centric organizational structure. Doing so the role of a
central CRM process owner being responsible for companywide planning, modeling, managing and optimizing the CRM process was created. Since this central process owner could not fully control and monitor the CRM activities across all business units he got assigned decentral CRM process responsibilities supporting him. After the CRM process standardization project Online managed to convince several BPS project team members to take over a CRM process owner or other CRM process related roles and thereby ensured continuity.

Second, Online not only created these new process owner roles but also designed and communicated incentives to engage in the CRM process standardization activities. One example measure with respect to the designed incentives is a "best practice competition" where employees could send in improvement ideas that were evaluated by the CRM process owner. The "winners" got a price and were mentioned in a company-wide newsletter.

**Impact:** BPS activities can only be successful if supported by a process reflecting organizational structure and an incentive system resp. company culture that allows making the program successful. If feasible a company should always try to convince BPS project team members to take over responsible roles with respect to the standardized process also after the end of the BPS project. Doing so allows to create continuity in terms of content and contact persons. To create the right culture the company should set role models that will promote positive behaviors with respect to the new standard process. It should design work processes that facilitate the sharing of best practices. Further, it should provide motivation, recognition, and incentives for employees who do share best practices, e.g., by revising the performance measurement system in such a way as to foster the transfer of best practices and engagement in BPS activities.

**Action 5: Rethink IT support of the future standard process and implement a standard solution whenever possible**

Within the CRM process standardization project Online detached the design of the future CRM standard process from designing the future IT support for the CRM standard process. This separation allowed Online to first come up with a future CRM standard process that completely fulfilled all organizational and environmental needs that Online had and of which the design has not at all been influenced by capabilities or constraints of any legacy CRM system within Online or any CRM system publicly available on the market. Only in a second step, after having successfully designed the future CRM standard process Online started to select a CRM system to support the CRM standard process. The fact that Online managed to fade out capabilities and constraints of existing CRM systems allowed Online to design the best CRM process possible from a business perspective and was key to the BPS project’s success. If Online had been influenced by capabilities and constraints of existing CRM systems the standard process probably would have been designed in a less time-, cost- and quality-optimal way – but would probably have led to a continued use of existing CRM systems preventing the introduction of a cost-saving, more flexible and more transparent standard CRM system.

**Impact:** The separation of designing the standard process and designing the standard process’ IT support allows to, first, come up with a time-, cost- and quality optimal standard process along all industry criteria and, second, enables the organization to freely think about whether decommissioning legacy systems or introducing a new standard IT system is the better option.

### 5.2. Specific key business and IT actions allowing for continuous BPS process improvements

The following section presents actions that extend the aforementioned "once-only" actions. Building on subsection 5.1.1 the following three actions focus on creating a BPS competency that allows for continuous process improvements and iteratively adopt processes to standard best practices.

**Action 6: Design and implement a corporate process governance allowing for continuous BPS process improvements**

One important step of the project was the implementation of a corporate process governance. Building on the roles established during the BPS project (compare action 4) Online continued to establish a more and more process centric organization. Three new process roles have been implemented: "Overall process owner (global level)", responsible for overseeing all strategic and operative process changes, "Process manager (global level)", responsible for setting global process targets and monitoring the operative process success as well as continuous improvement of implemented processes and "Process specialists (local level)", responsible for local operational support and monitoring/improvement of the process variants. With this three-staged corporate process governance Online established process centric responsibilities in addition to already existing business and IT responsibilities. The difference to the already existing accountabilities is that the new roles do have end-to-end process success view and responsibilities.

**Impact:** Designing a corporate process governance was most important for declaring a solid managerial authority. While local process specialists are able to identify particular needs and required changes a global
process manager must check these change-requests along global standards to ensure guideline consistency. Such an end-to-end process centric governance structure is a necessary precondition for continuous BPS process standardization.

**Action 7: Design an effective architecture to disseminate practices and select the right architecture to support it**

To ensure successful dissemination of the CRM standard process Online implemented an online process repository. This repository was accessible from each employee's working place and has been promoted within the BPS project in an eye-catching way. Hence, employees had the chance to be "up-to-date" regarding the BPS project progress whenever they wanted.

**Impact:** Prompt and easy accessibility of information regarding a process standardization project is key to an ongoing BPS success. To get a BPS program started, a company does not necessarily need to begin with a sophisticated database of process best practices; it can start with a simple technology and build its infrastructure over time. For example, a best-practice collection and dissemination program can be started through simple techniques designed to foster collaboration. These could include discussion groups and providing access to its stock of explicit knowledge through help desks company employees can reach by phone. After some time, when "process best practice sharing" is more widespread, a more holistic portal can be implemented so further improvement opportunities can show.

**Action 8: Set up a measurement system to track impact**

Having designed the CRM standard process and having companywide implemented the CRM standard system Online is now able to easily extract CRM process performance data such as process cost, time and quality on the one hand and customer satisfaction in terms of, e.g., number of calls/contact per business activity on the other hand from the system. Tracking impact and making success publicly available is key to a BPS controlling capability and rewards employees that have been engaged in the project and motivates them to further engage in this or further such activities. Since the CRM process standardization project only recently finished, as mentioned above, it is not possible to report any quantitative measurements of the project's impact, yet. Besides delivering process performance data to employees critical, real-time business data can be delivered to business leaders helping them to keep track of the running process and proactively intervene where necessary.

**Impact:** The final challenge of each BPS project is measuring the BPS project's impact. An organization that underwent a BPS project should set up a measurement system tracking the project's impact with regard to the initially formulated targets. Areas on which to focus are firm specific and might include process performance in terms of process time, cost and quality as well as process customer satisfaction.

### 6. Conclusions

The paper offers insights in how business process standardization can be used as an important tool for BPM. A case study with a globally operating E-Commerce firm was used to derive a set of key business and IT actions **Error! Reference source not found.** that contribute to BPS success. Based on insights from the case it was proposed organizations can enhance the regularly "once-only" BPS activities towards a "BPS competency" allowing for continuous BPS process improvements.

To set up such a "BPS competency" all the actions described in section 5.1 and 5.2 should be put into practice. If a company is solely aiming at conducting a BPS "once-only" project it only has to realize the actions described in section 5.1. Enhancing a "once-only" BPS project the actions described in section 5.2 have to be additionally implemented. In this case, for example, when setting up the BPS project team, the company should try to staff employees that later can take over roles in the process centric governance structure as described in action 6 (similarly the other actions described in section 5.1 can be enhanced to contribute to setting up a BPS competency).

Despite the insights, there are some limitations. As this paper partly draws on an exploratory case study approach the findings may not yet be directly generalized or transferred to different contexts. To say it with the words of Byrd and Turner [4] "a single study in any area is only one piece of a puzzle". Also, since the CRM process standardization project only recently finished a quantification of cost savings as well as increased customer satisfaction was not yet possible.

Hence, future research should first analyze more firm to evaluate the validity and completeness of the suggested BPS actions. Second, quantitative empirical research should be undertaken to corroborate the derived key actions. Third, combining the findings of further case studies and a quantitative empirical survey an actionable management-toolkit could be derived comprising all elements to effectively plan and conduct a BPS project. As mentioned above, an extensive measurement of the project's outcome and the quantified success of the actions performed will be conducted by the authors with first results available at the time of the conference which we will be glad to provide to interested readers.
7. References


