Chapter 7
Discussion of Findings

ABSTRACT

The goal of this chapter is to discuss the findings of the research effort at hand. After a summary of the findings, both the quantitative and qualitative results are discussed. Then the implications of the findings for both theory and practice are presented. Finally, potential limitations to the research are identified and put into perspective.

What a business can effectively market is determined by what it can efficiently manage through standardization. (Haley, 1986, p. 461)

7.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This book attempted to provide a detailed understanding of Business Process Standardization (BPS), of selected dimensions impacted by BPS as well as of the actual impact BPS has on these dimensions. The results obtained provide insights from multiple perspectives. For example, an extensive literature review yielding a "state of the art BPS" literature overview, two quantitative surveys with the 1,000 biggest companies in Germany yielding insights into the existence and intensity of the impact of BPS, and finally, four qualitative case studies from different industries shedding light on the "how" and "why" BPS creates impact.

At the beginning of this book we formulated two research questions that guided our work

(compare section 1.3.2). The first one, "What is BPS?", dealt with the activity of standardizing business processes itself and aimed at providing a concise definition of BPS. The second research question, "What are relevant impact dimensions of BPS and what is the impact of BPS along these dimensions?", aimed at identifying dimensions impacted by BPS and at analyzing the actual impact of BPS along the identified dimensions. To answer these research questions we followed the three phased approach laid out in section 1.4.1 and proceeded along the following steps:

Phase 1: *Exploring.* Understand business process standardization.

Firstly, we conducted an *extensive literature review* on BPS in which we selected 119 research publications from multiple major journals, multiple disciplines and geographies for detailed analysis to provide a solid foundation for the next steps.

Secondly, we compiled a "state of the art of BPS" overview comprising a concise definition of BPS, a comprehensive overview of drivers/antecedents and consequences/value dimensions used in the 119 research publications.

Phase 2: *Model building.* Develop research models and hypotheses around business process standardization.

Thirdly, we developed a *multi-theoretical framework for BPS research* based on the Resource Based View (RBV) of the firm – extended by both the Dynamic Capabilities (DC) view and boundary spanning capabilities – to provide a solid basis for identifying the mechanisms of BPS value creation.

Fourthly, based on the multi-theoretical framework for BPS research we derived *three research models and respective hypotheses* to be evaluated in phase 3.

Phase 3: *Model evaluation.* Validate research models and hypotheses around business process standardization.

Fifthly, we combined *two quantitative surveys* with the 1,000 biggest companies in Germany with *four qualitative case studies* in four different industries (tourism, automotive, banking, energy) to evaluate the three research models and hypotheses.

Sixthly, we developed a *roaDMap for future BPS research*.

To lay the foundation for answering the two research questions, at the beginning, we provided a "state of the art BPS research" overview by analyzing 119 well selected research publications with respect to a) definitions of BPS used, b) drivers/antecedents of BPS mentioned and c) consequences/value dimensions analyzed. An interesting fact was that the majority of research on BPS was only published within the last approximately 10 years. Analyzing the 119 research publications, firstly, we found a scarcity of concise definitions of BPS given that definitions were often unprecise and even contradicting if compared across research publications. Secondly, we found rare and rather abstract and inhomogeneous theoretical approaches to explain the BPS value creation. Thirdly, we found a selective focus on specific sub-sets of drivers/antecedents as well as consequences/value dimensions in most of the research publications. Not even a single one provided a comprehensive overview of all relevant variables and analyses of causal relations and respective intensities between BPS and drivers/antecedents. Research on consequences/value dimensions was notably absent. Fourthly, we found a lack of empirical quantitative research on BPS given that only 19 of the 119 research publications analyzed used a quantitative approach[1].

On the *theoretical side* we proposed a multi-theoretical framework for BPS research by combining aspects of established theories such as the Resource Based View (RBV) of the firm, the dynamic capabilities view and boundary spanning capabilities. We proposed to consider BPS as a dynamic capability along the three classes of activities "sensing", "seizing" and "transforming". The sensing class of activities focuses on selecting an area for business process standardization in an organization, the seizing class of activities aims at defining an archetype process and planning the business process standardization activities, and the transforming class of activities focuses on implementing the business process standard in an organization.

To allow for more precision in defining BPS we introduced the terms "archetype process" and "to homogenize a set of process variants" against an archetype process. Applying this terminology and zooming in into the seizing class of activities of BPS – considered as a dynamic capability and leveraging the theoretical concept of boundary spanning capabilities – we proposed the decomposition of BPS into "Business Process Standardization – Homogenization (BPS-H)" and "Business Process Standardization – Combined Homogenization and Optimization (BPS-H+O)".

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