

PROCESS DESIGN IN AN INFORMATION-INTENSIVE SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this thesis is to explore the design of operational processes in information-intensive service delivery systems. Empirical data is presented which builds upon existing literature within the Business Process Management (BPM) and Service Operations Management (SOM) disciplines. Adopting a theory building mode, the thesis concludes with the formulation of several research propositions which specify the design characteristics of the processes that provide the service concept to the customer.

The research addresses a number of gaps in the literature. First, there is little empirical evidence concerning the relationship between the service concept, customer inputs, and process design. Second, service classification schemes promote homogeneous thinking in the design of service systems delivering diverse service concepts. Third, the BPM literature provides generic process design principles which offer limited theoretical insights into the design requirements of operational processes. Finally, there is a need for process design research in information-intensive service organisations.

A research framework that integrates theoretical models addressing service process design is investigated using a single case study approach. Fieldwork was carried out over a sixteen-month period in a large electricity supplier in the UK. In contrast to the macro-orientation found within the literature, this study employs a more granular level of analysis to address the unique requirements of ‘service concept – processes’ pairs. This approach results in a number of important findings which, in several instances, are in contradiction to current thinking. First, the results empirically validate the theoretical relationship between service concept, customer inputs, and process design. Different service concepts lead to different process designs, and the more customised the service concept, the more the process is uniquely designed. Significant differences in the design of the individual processes that collectively provide the service concept to the customer are highlighted.

The results also provide some new insights into the design of front office – back office activities as well as into the design characteristics of processes characterised by low customer contact. In addition, the study refutes the view that generic process design principles are universally applicable irrespective of the context in which the processes operate. Finally, the research findings show that a process-based view of service systems allows for heterogeneity; that is differences in the design of service delivery processes within the same organisation.

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