

Chapter III

A Taxonomy of Service Standards and a Modification for E-Business

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ABSTRACT

Against the background of theoretical typologies of service standards, a survey among European service companies addressed the question, in which service-related categories formal and informal standards are implemented. Relying on the assessment of the importance of the various service-related standardisation aspects, it was possible to identify a taxonomy of service standards containing five clusters of service standards “Service Management”, “Service Employee”, “Service Delivery”, “Customer Interaction”, and “Data Flows and Security”, which correspond very closely to the ex ante applied typology derived from the literature. The analysis of the subsample of companies active in e-commerce reveals significant differences, which reflect their special needs caused by the distance to their customers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since we are only at the beginning of service standardisation, a conceptual typology or an empirically founded taxonomy will be helpful to survey the upcoming standardisation activities regarding services, including e-business, to reduce the complexity of the different types of

service standards, to identify similarities and differences, for comparative analyses and to shape future empirical investigations. A simple application or transfer of existing typologies of standards developed on the basis of the features of the manufacturing sector and material products is not adequate to tackle this challenge.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objective of the chapter is first to provide a review of existing typologies of service standards. In a second step, we compare the theoretical insights with the results of a survey among European service companies. This allows us to produce an empirically based taxonomy of service standards. Furthermore, one fifth of the sample is active in e-business activities, which allows us to compare the answers of this group with the rest of the sample. Based on these insights, we are able to determine the challenges of e-business for future standardisation activities.

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the objectives, the chapter is divided as follows. First, the state-of-the-art in service standards research will be apprehended by screening the relevant literature, including the very few existing empirical studies. Here, we focus especially on the few typologies of service standards. Based on this background, service companies were approached via a questionnaire in order to elucidate the importance and the current implementation of standards. The survey covered all Member States and the sample was distributed according to size and service sectors. The addressees were approached via e-mail and a link to an Internet-based questionnaire. More than 350 completed questionnaires are available to perform a test of the conceptual typology of standards in order to come to an empirically proved taxonomy of service standards. In addition, we are able to separate the answers of the one fifth of companies active in e-business. We focus on the estimation of the importance of various types of service standards and develop an empirically based taxonomy, applying a factor analysis approach.

4. RESULTS

In general, there is no broad literature on service standards and typologies. The most recent and differentiated approach to set up a typology of service standards was developed by De Vries (1999, 2001; see Table 1). According to his general definition, standards concern entities or relations between entities. Therefore, for a systematic approach to standards in the service sector, it is first necessary to define entities. Typical of services is the interaction between supplier and customer as the main entities. On the supply side, the organisation or the service company and service employees can be regarded as entities. Furthermore, both the service process and the service results can be considered as further entities, although often service process and result occur simultaneously. Finally, a distinction between delivery and final result has to be made. Based on these theoretical considerations, the following classification can be derived.

De Vries applied this classification successfully both to hair care service and to road transport service. These examples deliver indications about the appropriateness and the feasibility of this classification for use across all service sectors, which allows cross-sectional comparisons in the proposed empirical study and may help to identify also the need of cross-sectional service standards.

The major objective of this chapter is to test empirically this typology of service standards presented and to develop an empirically proved taxonomy. The qualitative and quantitative overview of service standardisation activities on the national, European and international level is not sufficient to detect clusters of closely linked types of standards, although they may be classified according to the ICS classification, which is still strongly influenced by technologies and the manufacturing sector. However, we follow another

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