Chapter 6
Evaluation of BPS and its Impact:
Qualitative Approach

ABSTRACT

The goal of this chapter is a qualitative analysis of the research models and the hypotheses developed in Chapter 4. Firstly, the case study research method, for both single and multiple case study research, is introduced. Then, the four case studies conducted are presented in detail, including the respective case background, the BPS initiative, as well as reflections on the respective BPS value creation. Finally, a cross-case analysis is presented in which the authors discuss the cases against the background of the research models developed in Chapter 4 and corroborate, respectively falsify the research hypotheses.

Case study research is remarkably hard, even though case studies have traditionally been considered to be 'soft' research. Paradoxically, the 'softer' a research strategy, the harder it is to do. (Yin, 1994, p. 16)

6.1 CASE STUDY RESEARCH METHOD

A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. (Yin, 2003, p. 13)

To investigate BPS initiatives the case study research method is well suited for a number of reasons. Firstly, BPS is an organizational change activity which interacts with its context and in addition depends on a number of external, organizational and managerial factors. Such contingencies can be very well investigated with case study research. Secondly, while the quantitative approach applied in the previous chapter (compare chapter 5) provides indications of the existence and intensity of the impact of BPS, the data collected within the case studies will allow shedding light on causal processes, temporal interrelations as well as the mentioned contingencies. Finally, given that case study research is often and rightly

used to investigate research areas which are still in the understanding, discovery and description stage, case study research seems to be a well suited approach to investigate BPS initiatives where – so far – neither a concise definition nor a well suited theoretical approach existed (compare sections 1.2.2 and 3.3).

According to Yin (2003), 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 (Babbie, 1983).

Defining the research questions represents one of the most important steps to be taken in any empirical study. […] Yin (1994) explains that case study research is most likely to be appropriate for "how" and "why" questions because these deal with operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies of incidence. (Dubé & Paré, 2003, p. 607)

In his critical review of case study research Dubé and Paré point out that

fewer than half (42 percent) of the case study articles specified clear research questions. This is rather disappointing since a clear research question expresses the essence of an inquiry, allows one to easily link a study to its practical and theoretical contributions, and is the backbone of a solid research design. (Dubé & Paré, 2003, p. 607)

Hence, for our purpose of investigating BPS initiatives we, first of all, adopt the research questions asked in section 1.3.2, but in addition put a special emphasis on the "how" and "why" aspect that the case study approach allows to understand, i.e. in addition to the "what" perspective that dominates the previously formulated research questions, now we want to explicitly understand:

Research Question (Case Study) 1: "How was impact of BPS in the different case studies created?"

Research Question (Case Study) 2: "Why does the created impact of BPS differ between the case study situations?"

We approached these research questions by conducting a multiple case study research in three phases (compare Figure 1). In the first phase, "define and design", we prepared the multiple case study research effort by selecting the cases and planning and designing the actual data collection. Then, in the second phase, "collect and analyze", we conducted four single case studies in parallel, i.e. for each case conducted the collecting and analyzing work and wrote an individual case study report per case. Finally, in the third phase, "analyze and conclude", we conducted a cross-case analysis leading us to cross-case conclusions that we documented in the final cross-case report.

6.1.1 Single Case Study and Multiple Case Study Research Methods

When you have the choice (and resources), multiple-case designs may be preferred over single-case designs. […] Single-case designs are vulnerable if only because you will have put "all eggs in one basket." More important, the analytic benefit from having two (or more) cases may be substantial. (Yin, 2003, p. 53)

Many of the research questions in the field of information systems of interest to researchers and practitioners alike deal with phenomena such as e.g. organizational change programs, information system introduction, business processes management/reengineering/standardization that have to be investigated in their real-life context and where the focus is rather on organizational than on techni-

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