

"From ad hoc to a planned way of working": Use of processes and process models in corporate communication

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Objectives of the Study

This study focuses on the use of communication processes in corporate communication and aims to show how international business communication as a discipline could benefit from process thinking. The main research question is: How can process thinking be utilized in corporate communication? Therefore, the study had two objectives. The first objective was to find out how corporate communication function can benefit from process thinking, and identification, and documentation of the core communication processes. The second objective was to identify the main communication processes in corporate communication.

Summary

Corporate communication is often seen as a hectic, ad hoc natured function, but the present study argues that by managing communication processes more effectively, a more systematic and planned way of working could be achieved. Previous research on the use of processes and process models in corporate communication was very limited. The literature review introduced Business Process Management (BPM), and discussed process models, their documentation and reported outcomes of processing. Finally, business communication was integrated to BPM by identifying the main corporate communication activities. The theoretical framework was constructed on the basis of Harrington's (1995) framework for BPM and Ungan's (2006a) framework for standardization. Empirical data was collected through two qualitative data collection methods: semi-structured interviews conducted in 14 Finnish companies and public organizations, and an online survey with open-ended questions with 82 respondents.

Findings and conclusions

The findings showed that processes do exist in corporate communication. Based on the data, the main communication processes in organizations could be identified. The main reason for documenting business communication processes seemed to be inconsistency in performing processes. Also, the reported benefits of process thinking in corporate communication were identified, as well as the possible risks involved. However, process improvement in corporate communication was not a widely spread practice. The main reason for this could be that processes had not been used for long in corporate communication, and thus they were not yet outdated. Business communication could benefit substantially from process thinking just as many other business disciplines have. Literature reviewed on business processes supported the use of processing in corporate communication. Effective communication is critical to organization's success, and process thinking would improve overall efficiency and quality of communication processes.

Keywords

International business communication, corporate communication, ad hoc, business process management (BPM), process, process documentation, process model, process improvement, communication process, standardization

“AD HOC TEKEMISESTÄ SUUNNITELLUMPAAN TYÖSKENTELYYN”: PROSESSIT JA PROSESSIKUVAUKSET YRITYSVIESTINNÄSSÄ

Pro gradu -tutkielman tavoite

Tämä pro gradu-tutkielma tarkastelee viestintäprosessien käyttöä yritysviestinnässä ja näyttämään, miten kansainvälinen yritysviestintä voi hyödyntää prosessiajattelua käyttämällä prosesseja ja niiden dokumentointia. Päättökysymys oli: Kuinka yritysviestinnässä voidaan hyödyntää prosessiajattelua? Tutkimuksella oli kaksi tavoitetta. Ensimmäisenä tavoitteena oli selvittää, miten yritysviestintä voi hyötyä keskeisten viestintäprosessiensä tunnistamisesta, kuvaamisesta ja kehittämisestä. Toisena tavoitteena oli tunnistaa ydinviestintäprosessit, joita käytetään kansainvälisten organisaatioiden viestintätoiminnossa.

Tiivistelmä

Yritysviestintää pidetään usein hektisenä toimintona, jossa on paljon ad hoc tekemistä. Tutkimuksen lähtökohtana oli ajatus, että viestintätoimintoon voidaan tuoda suunnitelmallisuutta ja järjestelmällisyyttä, jos viestintäprosesseja hallinnoidaan tehokkaammin. Prosesseja ja niiden dokumentointia yritysviestinnässä ei aiemmin oltu juuri tutkittu. Kirjallisuuskatsaus esitteli liiketoimintaprosessien hallinnan teoriaa (Business Process Management; BPM), ja prosessikuvauksia, niiden dokumentointia ja saavutettuja tuloksia. Lopuksi yritysviestintä sisällytettiin liiketoimintaprosessien hallintaan tunnistamalla keskeiset yritysviestinnän toiminnot. Teoreettinen viitekehys pohjautui Harringtonin (1995) BPM -malliin ja Unganin (2006a) standardisointiin viitekehukseen. Empiirinen aineisto kerättiin kahdella kvalitatiivisella menetelmällä: haastattelemalla 14 viestintäjohtajaa tai -päällikköä suomalaisissa yrityksissä ja julkisissa organisaatioissa sekä avoimia kysymyksiä sisältävällä Internet-kyselyllä, jossa oli 82 vastaajaa.

Tulokset ja yhteenveto

Tutkimukset tulokset osoittivat, että prosesseja käytetään yritysviestinnässä ja kerätyn aineiston perusteella pystyttiin myös tunnistamaan keskeisimmät viestintäprosessit organisaatioissa. Pääsyy viestintäprosessien määrittämiseen ja kuvaamiseen oli epäjohtonmukaisuus viestinnän tehtävien suorittamisessa. Myös prosessiajattelun hyödyt ja mahdolliset riskit yritysviestinnässä tunnistettiin. Vaikka tutkimuksessa selvisi, että viestintäprosesseja ei yleensä kehitetä tai paranneta viestintätoiminnossa, syy oli ymmärrettävä: viestintäprosessit oli otettu käyttöön vasta 2000-luvulla eikä niissä ollut vielä ilmennyt muutostarvetta. Aiemmat tutkimukset liiketoimintaprosesseista tukevat prosessien käyttöä myös yritysviestinnässä. Yritysviestintä voisi hyötyä paljon prosessiajattelusta, kuten muutkin liiketoiminta-alueet ovat jo osoittaneet. Tehokas viestiminen on tärkeää organisaation menestykselle, ja prosessiajattelulla voitaisiin tehostaa toimintaa ja parantaa viestintäprosessien laatua.

Avainsanat

Kansainvälinen yritysviestintä, prosessi, liiketoimintaprosessien hallinta (BPM), ad hoc, prosessikuvaus, standardisointi, viestintäprosessi, viestinnän prosessointi

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1 INTRODUCTION

The need for standardization and better governance of business communication is growing, especially in multinational corporations. As companies have stakeholders in diverse and global environments, consistency in communications needs to be ensured. As any organization wants to project a strong, coherent image to its stakeholders (Argenti, 2003) communication has to be coordinated accordingly regardless of who is communicating and in which part of the world. Ungan (2006a, p.136) argues that one possible way to achieve greater consistency is to standardize operations by defining and documenting the core communication processes of a corporation. Today, many multinational corporations are interested in process standardization. This can be seen in the growing interest of national and international organizations for standardization, such as ISO. Standardization is believed to improve operations and increase business opportunities. Furthermore, many researchers have shown that by managing business processes effectively companies can gain a competitive advantage (Ungan, 2006; Lee & Dale, 1998; Yu-Yuan Hung, 2006).

In this study, a process is defined as a systematic series of interrelated and predefined actions directed to the achievement of a specific goal (Talwar, 1993; Danesh & Kock, 2005). In other words, any activity that includes various steps and that produces a certain outcome can be called a process. It is important to notice that the process is always performed in the same way and therefore the outcome of the process should always be the same. An example of a process is hiring a new employee or preparing a hamburger at McDonald's. Especially in the latter example, the quality has to be consistent and thus there cannot be variations in the process. Since consistency and standardization are valued in today's fast paced and increasingly global world, business process models and documentation have grown in popularity. When a process is standardized, it should produce an identical output every time, which contributes to consistent quality and less variations in the process.

Several business disciplines have turned to Business Process Management (BPM) for decades (Danesh & Kock 2005; Urgan, 2006b; Yu-Yuan Hung, 2006), but business communication has not traditionally been a very process-oriented discipline. According to Lee and Dale (1998, p.219), Business Process Management is a set of tools and techniques for improving business processes. There are numerous studies made on processes, process models and Business Process Management (BPM), but communication processes and their documentation has not been researched. Cornelissen (2008, p.138), however, briefly mentions process documentation in corporate communication and argues that communication practitioners are not accustomed to using processing because of its analytical and disciplined approach.

It is important to note that this study uses the terms of business communication and corporate communication interchangeably. The definitions for business and corporate communication are overlapping, and it is not simple to always identify the difference between the disciplines. Louhiala-Salminen (2009) argues that there are four sub-disciplines that focus on communication in organizations: management communication, organizational communication, corporate communication and business communication. Louhiala-Salminen (2009, p312) suggests that business communication actually acts as an umbrella that has the other three sub-disciplines under it. Furthermore, many scholars use the term business communication and corporate communication interchangeably. Since the terms business communication and corporate communication are both used often also in this study, these both will be defined now.

Louhiala-Salminen (2009, p.311) defines business communication as an umbrella concept that covers all formal and informal communication in a business context. Business communication is a broader concept than corporate communication, since it uses all possible media, involves all stakeholder groups and operates at individual and organizational level. According to Louhiala-Salminen (2009, p.308), corporate communication, on the other hand, evolved from public relations and is now a business function that acts as the corporation's voice and shapes its image by responding to the challenges of constantly changing environment. Corporate communication includes

both the external and the internal communication of the corporation.

This study argues that since communication is an integral part of business, it too should be examined from the processing point of view. Even though communication is not always seen to be at the core of the business, the practitioners should not abandon tools of improvement from other business disciplines. Corporate communication is in the key role in defining the way of communication and guiding communication practitioners to communicate in the desired manner (Cornelissen 2008, p.138). Therefore, shared ways of working and consistent approach to corporate communication are needed. However, in spite of expanding use of processes in business communication, there has been very limited research on their use in corporate communication.

One reason why research on processes in business communication is limited, is the ambiguous use of process related terms (Ungan, 2006; Nickols, 1998) and the lack of interest of communication practitioners to integrate controlled process thinking to the creative, ad hoc field of business communication. Furthermore, the general attitude is that a process is not a process unless it is officially named a process. In business disciplines that are traditionally process oriented it is easier to identify the processes, but as communication processes have not been paid attention to, they might not have been identified as communication processes.

Therefore, this study aims to identify the core communication processes and investigate their use in corporate communication. The current study will focus on researching the use of processes in corporate communication and aims to show how especially international business communication as a discipline could also benefit from process thinking and utilize processes and their documentation in ensuring consistent quality and greater efficiency.

This study has two objectives. The first objective is to find out how corporate communication as a function can benefit from process thinking by structuring and documenting of the core business communication processes. The second objective is to identify the main communication processes in companies operating internationally and

having employees all over the world. As Berry (2006, p.347) suggests, it is more difficult to reach consensus in a geographically diverse team. If the corporate communication function of an international organization identified and standardized the core communication processes, guiding and auditing communication in other geographical areas would be facilitated.

1.1 Research questions

The main research question is: How can process thinking be utilized in corporate communication? To find an answer to the main question, the following four sub-questions are posed:

1. What are the main communication processes?
2. How have the processes been documented?
3. What are the benefits of defining processes and documenting them?
4. How are communication processes developed and improved?

1.2 Definitions

In the present thesis the following definitions of the key concepts are used:

Process

Talwar (1993, as cited in Lee & Dale, 1998, p.216) defines a process as a “sequence of pre-defined activities executed to achieve a pre-specified type or range of outcomes”. Danesh and Kock (2005, p. 727) add to this that these activities are not only related but also interrelated. Also, even though the outcome of the process is tangible, the process itself cannot be seen. What all of these definitions have in common is that process is seen as a sequence of activities directed to a predefined goal. To rephrase, a process is a systematic series of interrelated, predefined actions directed to the achievement of a specific goal. In this study the term process refers to an operational task within a function, not the function as a whole.

Business process management (BPM)

Business Process Management is a set of tools and techniques for improving business processes (Lee & Dale, 1998, p.219). Lee and Dale (1998, p.216) define BPM as a systematic, continuous and organized approach to analyze, improve, control, and manage processes. The aim of BPM is to improve the quality of products and services. Yu-Yuan Hung (2006, p.24) sums up, that BPM is a management philosophy that also emphasizes customer satisfaction and employee involvement.

Process document

Cernauskas and Tarantino (2009, p.6) define a process document plainly as an instantiation of a workflow that is necessary to turn inputs into outputs. According to Ungan (2006b, p.401), a process document is a graphical representation of a process. The flowchart or map shows how a product or service is created, and thus shows the relations between activities, personnel, information, responsibilities and the objectives in a given process. Laamanen and Tinnilä (2009, p. 123) complement this view by adding that process documents present only the activities that are important in order to understand the process. To synthesize, a process document or model is a graphical or textual representation of a process that describes the relations between the activities and stakeholders that are crucial in the process.

1.3 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the background and motivation for the thesis, as well as the research questions. Chapter 2 forms the literature review of the thesis and is divided into five sections. The first section introduces Business Process Management (BPM) and discusses how business processes can be managed in practice. The second section introduces process models, their documentation, and the level of detail for documentation. The third section goes through the reported outcomes of process thinking. The fourth section integrates business communication to business process management by identifying and discussing the main corporate communication activities. Finally, after presenting these, the last section will introduce the theoretical framework for the study. After reviewing previous literature on the subject of the thesis, Chapter 3 will present the research data and methods of the thesis. Also the trustworthiness of the study is discussed. In Chapter 4 the findings of the study are reported. The chapter is divided into four sections as each of them answers one research question of the thesis. Chapter 5 discusses the main findings of the thesis in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by discussing practical implications, limitations and suggestions for further research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will review previous literature and studies on business processes and their documentation as well as the use of business processes in business communication. The ultimate aim of this chapter is to present the theoretical background, which justifies the objective of the whole study: to investigate how business communication processes are used in corporate communication. The literature review is divided into five main sections. The first one focuses on business processes in general while also introducing Business Process Management (BPM). The management of business processes in practice is also discussed. The second section introduces process models, their and the level of detail for documentation. The third section shows the reported outcomes of process thinking. The fourth section integrates business communication to business process management and identifies the main corporate communication activities. Finally, the last section will introduce the theoretical framework for the study.

There are many factors that contribute to the difficulty of recognizing and defining core business processes. In fact, Nickols (1998, p.16) argues that there are only about a dozen basic business functions in any organization, and even fewer business processes. He points out that business processes are fragmented, and sometimes scattered across organizational silos. It is not easy to focus on the core processes partly because their definitions are so misleading. Consequently, most organizations do not recognize or define their core processes. Furthermore, if the organization has not recognized its processes, it has not named them either. This makes the identification of processes even more difficult. Since the name of the process comes last a process that is not defined cannot be named. Also, examples of processes can be confusing. For example, some say that product development is a process, but others see it only as a basic function that does not deserve to be called a process.

There are several different definitions for the noun 'process' (Nickols, 1998; Ugan, 2006; Melão & Pidd, 2000). Especially in management literature the word “process” refers to a set of related activities. Most of the definitions of process could just as easily

apply to activities called “function”, “task”, or “operation”. Indeed if a process is a set of related activities, then regardless of their scope or scale, all functions, tasks and operations constitute processes. Furthermore, Nickols (1998, p.19) argues that some definitions for processes alone are inadequate because they fail to differentiate processes from other related terms such as functions, tasks and operations. It is important to notice that Nickols (1998) discusses processes as whole functions, not just as operational tasks people perform inside that function. Communication as a whole would then be a process from Nickols’s point of view. However, in the present study the term “process” is used to refer to an operational task within a function, not the function as a whole.

2.1 Business Process Management (BPM)

This section provides a brief introduction to business processes in general and introduces the concept of Business Process Management (BPM) in particular. The section contains five sub-sections; each of them discusses one aspect of Business Process Management.

The term “process” is used in many disciplines such as systems thinking, cybernetics and systems dynamics. According to Kock, Verville, Danesh-Pajou, and DeLuca (2009, p.562), “business process” is a set of interrelated activities that is carried out routinely in organizations. Examples of processes are preparing a cheeseburger at a fast-food restaurant, organizing a conference call or indeed, any action that is conducted through pre-defined steps. Nickols (1998, p.18) points out that processes are not actually separate sets of related activities. Instead, processes are selected parts of larger streams of activity and therefore process boundaries must be established. Only after this selection can the process be treated as a set of related activities.

There are a number of definitions for the term “business process”. For example, Cernauskas and Tarantino (2009, p.5) define business process as “a series of transformation steps used to create information from data. The business process uses

resources such as computer systems and labor to turn inputs into outputs.” According to Danesh and Kock (2005, p. 726), process is “a mental abstraction of an abstract entity.” A process itself produces an outcome, can consist of various roles and activities, and can have numerous internal or external entities involved. Even though the outcome of the process can be tangible, the process is not. Laamanen and Tinnilä (2009, p. 121) define a process as “a set of logically related activities and resources needed to transform inputs to outputs.” They say that any activity in a company can be a process, but business processes are the ones that are critical to the success of a company.

Companies face the difficult challenge of identifying their business processes in an attempt to improve them. Nickols (1998, p.14) points out that identifying and mapping business processes can be difficult because processing is still a rather new practice. To add to the confusion: definitions, titles and examples concerning processes are not often necessarily accurate and many of them are overlapping. Zairi and Sinclair (as cited in Ungan 2006b, p.401) conducted a survey in 1995 that showed that about 92 percent of the organizations do define and document or at least plan to define and document their core processes. In addition, about 82 percent of the organizations define and document or plan to define and document also their sub-processes. Yu-Yuan Hung (2006, p.24) clarify that those processes that are strategically important to the organizations’ success can be called core processes.

There are multiple ways processes are and should be performed. Melão and Pidd (2000, p.116) argue that business processes are dynamic due to the interaction of their internal components and the interaction of the process with its environment. Varey and White (2000, p.5) add that organizations arrange work and structure around business processes. Melão and Pidd (2000, p.120) suggest that one way to see business processes is as social constructs that are performed by people with different values, expectations, experiences and agendas. Lee and Dale (1998, p.220) use the term “process discipline” to refer to a situation where business processes are applied in a correct and constant manner across the whole organization and their performance is being monitored. Hämäläinen and Maula (2004, p.95) point out that often the official, documented

strategy process differs a lot from the way the process is carried out in practice. This is due to the unofficial methods and practices that the employees have developed while performing their tasks. These practices can be used to create or improve the strategy or its implementation.

As mentioned earlier, there are many terms used when referring to processes. For example, Lee and Dale (1998, p.214) discuss process orientation and note that there have been many terms used for the approach to the study of processes, including process simplification, process improvement, process re-engineering and process redesign. They also discuss Business Process management (BPM) which is a re-emerging discipline that is “intended to align the business processes with strategic objectives and customers’ needs but requires a change in a company’s emphasis from functional to process orientation.

BPM is an approach to organizational improvement. Yu-Yuan Hung (2006, p.23) sees that BPM is still in its infancy even though it has raised a lot of interest over recent years. According to Lee and Dale (1998, p.219), BPM is a set of tools and techniques for improving business processes. Furthermore, BPM is an approach to the systematic management, measurement and improvement of all business processes achieved through cross-functional teamwork and employee empowerment. Yu-Yuan Hung (2006, p.24), on the other hand, defines BPM as “an integrated management philosophy and a set of practices that includes incremental change and radical change in business process, and emphasizes continuous improvement, customer satisfaction, and employee involvement.”

When conducted properly, BPM can help organizations to structure their operations in a more effective manner. According to Lee and Dale (1998, p.215), there are many reasons for the popularity of BPM. These reasons are increased globalization, constantly evolving technology, increased regulation, actions of stakeholders and the eroding of business boundaries. In addition, Laamanen and Tinnilä (2009, p. 53) argue that when talking about process management, efficiency and effectiveness are often

referred to. Also, if a process is stable, it costs less than a process that is constantly changing.

Improvement of processes is central in BPM. As Lee and Dale (1998, p.225) argue, BPM is a tool of process improvement that is most effective if the processes that will undergo BPM are chosen based on company goals and objectives. Yu-Yuan Hung (2006, p.22) argues that BPM aims to improve business processes by ensuring that the company's core activities are executed in an efficient and effective manner. This is achieved through process improvement and learning from best practices. As a result, business processes are fundamentally redesigned to improve performance. Lee and Dale (1998, p.225) also point out that BPM integrates the use of improvement tools such as re-engineering, continuous improvement and benchmarking to business. But in order for BPM to be effective, management should be process oriented and cross-functional.

Furthermore, Yu-Yuan Hung (2006, p.23) argues that BPM requires that the main activities are mapped and documented, and also horizontal activities should be linked to focus on end-users. Thus BPM relies on systems and documented procedures that in turn are based on best practices. Furthermore, BPM should be seen as a continuous approach and its performance should be assessed by measuring. Lee and Dale (1998, p.217) agree with Yu-Yan Hung and stress that in BPM main activities have to be properly mapped and documented because BPM relies on systems and documented processes to ensure discipline, consistency and repeatability of quality performance. The performance of each individual process is measured and it relies on best practices.

BPM affects the whole organization where it is implemented, not just the processes that are improved. Yu-Yuan Hung (2006, p.24) points out that BPM has an organization wide impact since it affects its organizational structure by organizing the structure around the cross-functional processes, which in turn leads to a flattened hierarchy. BPM also affects the organization's management, and personnel that has to be cooperative and involved in order for PBM to work. Furthermore, Yu-Yuan Hung (2006, p.27) argues that an organization can ensure competitive advantage when it is appropriately

aligned, and organizational structure, strategic planning and IT correspond to organizational core processes and objectives. Involving employees and executives in the organization's processes is a critical factor in organizational success. Especially support from top management helps the organization succeed in Business Process Management.

In order for BPM to be effective, business processes have to be managed systematically. There are two similar methods to manage business processes in the literature reviewed. First, according to Lee and Dale (1998, p.219), a standard method for Business Process Management includes six phases: preparation, selection, description, quantification, process improvement selection and implementation. The first phase is preparation. After preparation the process that will undergo BPM will be selected. In the third phase the selected process is described. The fourth phase is then quantification of the process. The fifth phase in BPM is process improvement selection, where the parts of the process that need to be improved are selected. Finally, the sixth phase is the implementation of the improved process.

Second suggested way to manage business processes is Harrington's (1995) framework for BPM. The present study will review this framework in more detail, as it is more thorough and also focuses on process improvement. According to Harrington (1995, p340), there are five main aspects of managing business processes effectively that together form a framework for process improvement (see Figure 1). These aspects in a chronological order are:

- Organizing for quality
- Understanding the process
- Streamlining the process
- Implementation, measurement and control
- Continuous improvement

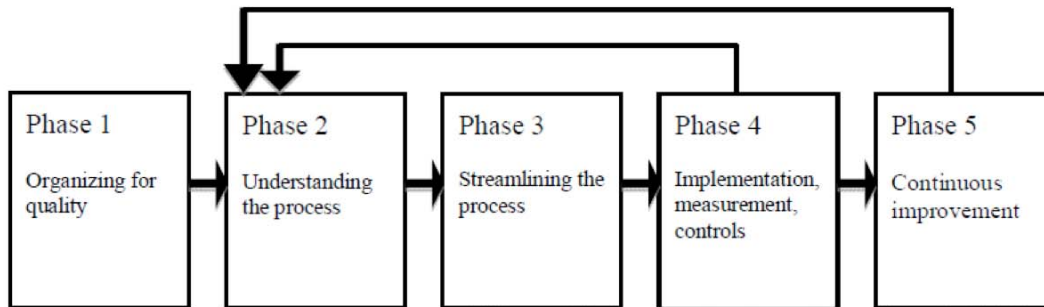


Figure 1. Aspects of managing business processes (Harrington, 1995)

As can be seen from Figure 1, the five steps of managing business processes follow each other and some of them are even linked to each other. For example, phase five that is continuous improvement has an arrow leading to phase two, since continuous improvement is an ongoing process and thus always restarts from phase two, as phase one has been completed in the first round of business process management. Each of these five phases of business process management and improvement will next be discussed in more detail.

2.1.1 Organizing for quality

In the first phase, the process that will undergo process improvement is organized for quality, which includes defining the critical processes, selecting the process owners, setting the boundaries and measurements, and forming process improvement teams (Harrington, 1995, p.340). Ruuska (2007, p. 235) sees that quality control is an important part of the implementation- and guidance process of any project. Ungan (2006b, p.406) argues that the process and its aims need to be defined clearly before starting any improvement effort. The inputs, outputs, boundaries, customers and suppliers of the process are thus first determined. Furthermore, Ungan (2006b, p.403) points out that the objectives of process mapping should be clearly stated. There might be various objectives that include improving, standardizing, reengineering, or just defining a process.

There are a numerous of ongoing business processes in organizations. Therefore, management has to select the processes that are most critical. Harrington (1995, p. 340) explains that the first step in organizing the process is that the management selects and defines the core processes. Lee and Dale (1998, p.219) point out that since all processes are not equal, process identification usually begins with an inventory of processes. Ungan (2006b, p.403) agrees that the processes selected for documentation should be the processes that are strategically important or problematic. Also, the processes that need to be standardized and described must be considered for mapping in order to see alternatives for improvement. Hämäläinen and Maula (2004 p. 95) give strategy process as an example of this kind of process. It is presented in a very similar way regardless of the organization.

Harrington (1995, p. 340) argues that the second step in organizing the process for quality is to assign a project owner to each process. The assigned process owners then assign process improvement teams that then define boundaries, measurements, and objectives, and in addition create a plan for the process improvement. In accordance, Lee and Dale (1998, p.219) see that once the core processes are identified and benchmarked, they can be signed to an owner. This core process owner is responsible for managing the process and improving the process across functional units. Lee and Dale (1998, p.219) argue that the process owner can assign a team to map, document and analyze the process and its sub-processes. The team will also be responsible for identifying problems in the process and making changes to the process accordingly. After phase one of BPM is completed, the process is fully organized and can then be scrutinized further in phase two of Business Process Management, i.e. in understanding the process.

2.1.2 Understanding the process

In order to manage processes well, they first need to be understood. However, Flanagin and Waldeck (2004, p.138) argue that understanding organizational processes has become more difficult since organizations are more dispersed, decentralized and

increasingly more virtual than ever before. Danesh and Kock (2005, p. 726) add that since people often have different ideas of how a process works they can consequently understand it differently.

Ruuska (2007, p.238) argues that the first phase in developing processes is defining the methods and usage of the processes being documented. But Urgan (2006a, p.139) stresses that before a process can be standardized by creating process documents the process itself should be understood. In order to map the existing processes the outputs, inputs and steps involved have to be defined first (Nickols, 1998, p.16). Furthermore, Harrington (1995, p.343) argues that in phase two, the process is described “as-is”. In this phase, data from the process that will undergo BPM is collected. The data includes: cycle-time, cost, processing time, and error rates. Based on this data and the presentation of the process “as-is” is then used as a basis for improving the process.

Flow diagrams can be used as a tool to better understand a process. For example, Harrington (1995, p. 343) points out that drawing some kind of flowchart of the “as-is” process helps to understand the process. In this way knowledge of the process is acquired. Urgan (2006b, p.402), on the other hand, argues that a process has to be thoroughly understood before it can even be codified. As Urgan (2006a, p.141) points out, the process master knows how the process is best performed and can be the only one with profound knowledge of the process. Therefore, the knowledge acquired from the process masters can be used in streamlining the process. Once the process and all of its components have been understood, the next phase is to streamline it.

2.1.3 Streamlining the process

Streamlining of processes is important for the processes to evolve. Urgan (2006b, p.402) argues that most often the processes creating problems are too complicated or unclear, have repetition of steps, unnecessary record keeping and data collection. Once the problems have been identified and taken care of, the whole process has to be redesigned. Harrington (1995, p. 345) suggests that there are three different

streamlining options: process redesign, new process design and benchmarking. Harrington (1995, p.347) points out that wherein process redesign aims at redesigning the existing process to make it more efficient, new process design ignores the existing process and aims to design the whole process from scratch. New process design is thus a more expensive and time consuming way to streamline a process, but it can also lead to better results. Harrington (1995, p.349) argues that the most popular streamlining tool is benchmarking the current process to best similar processes.

By streamlining the business process the consistency of the output and the quality of the whole process can be ensured. Ruuska (2007 p. 235) argues that especially in a project it needs to be ensured that “the right things are done in the right manner.” Laamanen and Tinnilä (2009, p. 54) point out that process thinking focuses directly on action, and thus people are not asked to do more, just to do the same things differently. According to Ungan (2006a, p.139), standardization makes it possible for employees at disperse geographical locations to carry out a certain process in exactly the same way. Consequently, organizations have started to standardize and certify their practices. Ungan (2006a, p.136) points out that when a process is standardized it becomes routine with well-defined subtasks. Once this is achieved, the process can be prepared for implementation. According to Harrington (1995, p.350), the last phase in streamlining a process is to prepare a preliminary implementation plan.

2.1.4 Implementation, measurement and control

In the fourth phase of BPM, the process is implemented, and measurement and control systems are defined. Harrington (1995, p.352) argues that there are five steps involved. The first step is to finalize the implementation plan. The second step is to actually implement the new process. During this, close control is maintained over each change to ensure they are implemented correctly. The third step is developing in-process measurement systems, which means that measurements and controls are developed for each activity in the process. The fourth step is then to build feedback systems to collect feedback from people who are performing the process. Finally, the fifth step is cutting

the poor-quality costs that occur when resources are wasted in the process.

In reality it can be difficult to control the work of experts, but processes still have to be controlled. Laamanen and Tinnilä (2009, p. 65) believe that when discussing processes performed by experts, the process describes only the key factors and tasks in the process, and the process is customized every time it is performed. Still, Cernauskas and Tarantino (2009, p.6) argue that processes need to be governed by creating structures, roles and responsibilities and metrics. Lee and Dale (1998, p.218) use Hewlett-Packard as an example of a company that utilizes Business Process Management effectively. Hewlett-Packard is known to manage their processes by empowering their employees and give them the responsibility to identify and document their key processes, measure the effectiveness of the processes, and improve the processes. According to Cernauskas and Tarantino (2009, p.3), process control is a discipline that monitors, adjusts, and controls the output of a process by using different methods and procedures.

In the implementation stage of BPM there can be some complications. Harrington (1995, p.340) suggests that if implementation does not succeed, the process of process improvement should be restarted from phase two, understanding the process. At this stage the process is already organized for quality and can thus skip this phase one. However, if the process is implemented successfully and measures for it have been put in place, then the final phase is continuous improvement.

2.1.5 Continuous improvement

Continuous improvement of business processes is possible if they are managed well. Lee and Dale (1998, p.219) argue that once the core process is in use, the owner and the team will supervise the process and constantly seek for possible improvements. Furthermore, Urgan (2006b, p.406) points out that process documentation is an iterative process and thus the model needs to be revised from time to time. Harrington (1995, p.353) agrees that once a process is implemented, its improvement has to be continued.

According to Laamanen and Tinnilä (2009, p. 79), if a process is carried out in a new way that produces better results, it can improve performance.

However, implementing BPM is not without problems. Lee and Dale (1998, p.224) argue that the problem with process improvement is that often employees do not have the time to simplify and improve processes and as a result improving is not coordinated. Cernauskas and Tarantino (2009, p.9) propose at least two solutions to the problem of poor process improvement. The first solution would be statistical process control that aims to improve the process over the long run. The second solution would be engineering process control that, in contrast, focuses on minimizing the process variation in the short term.

If a business process is chosen to undergo BPM, it does not mean that the process is somehow faulty. As Ungan (2006) points out, a process can be improved whether it has problems or not. Laamanen and Tinnilä (2009, p. 14) suggest that process improvement requires that something will be changed in the process. Improving an activity can be done without processes, but it is not efficient. According to Harrisson (1995, p.340), continuous improvement is an ongoing process. Therefore, BPM always restarts from phase two, which was “understanding the process”, as phase one has been already completed during the first round of business process management.

To conclude Section 2.1, Business Process Management is an approach to organizational improvement, and thus improvement of processes is central in BPM. Yu-Yuan Hung (2006, p.22) argues that BPM aims to improve business processes by ensuring that the company’s core activities are executed in an effective manner. Lee and Dale (1998, p.217) stress that in BPM main activities have to be properly mapped and documented because BPM relies on systems and documented processes to ensure discipline, consistency and repeatability of quality performance. In other words, in order for BPM to be effective, business processes have to be managed systematically. Therefore, Harrington (1995) proposed a five-phase framework for managing business processes effectively.

In sum, BPM is relevant for the present study because in order to understand communication processes, one has to have knowledge of the principles of BPM. This way BPM and its best practices in other business disciplines can be benchmarked. For example, Harrington's (1995) framework for BPM could be used to manage processes in corporate communication. As principles of BPM could be also used for the processes performed in corporate communication, reviewing previous research conducted on business processes is helpful when researching communication processes.

2.2 Process models and documentation

Now, after reviewing literature on Business Process Management, this section on business process models and documentation is divided into three sub-sections. Sub-section 2.2.1 focuses on defining and exploring documented business process models. Sub-section 2.2.2 will then describe how business processes are documented into process models. As standardization of the process is needed to document a process Ungan's (2006) framework for process standardization will also be introduced in this sub-section. Finally, in sub-section 2.2.3 the level of detail used in process models is discussed further.

As discussed in sub-section 2.1.2, in order to manage processes well, they first need to be understood. And in order to understand processes well, they need to be documented. Therefore, when discussing Business Process Management, the documentation of business processes should not be overlooked. In what follows, the terms process models and process documents are used interchangeably since "model" calls for a graphical form, be it verbal or visual, and thus a document.

2.2.1 Process models

Process documentations are often presented in the form of process models. Cernauskas and Tarantino (2009, p.6) define process document as an instantiation of a workflow that is necessary to turn inputs into outputs. According to Laamanen and Tinnilä (2009,

p. 123), process models present the activities that are important in order to understand the process. The model usually includes description of resources, personnel, desired output, tools, and interfaces with other processes. Furthermore, Ungan (2006b, p.401) completes these definitions by arguing that a process document represents a process in question in a graphical form. Therefore, the process map or flowchart illustrates how a product or a service is created through the operation. In order to do this, the process map should show the links between the activities, personnel, information, and the objectives of a certain process. Also, the responsibilities for each activity have to be defined.

Process thinking can be utilized in many different sectors and types of organizations. Ungan (2006a, p.139) points out that even though manufacturing companies were the first to utilize process documentation, lately all types of organizations are using process documents. Actually, Ungan (2006b, p.400) argues that process documents are the most widely used tools for analyzing and developing business processes. Process documents are useful tools for understanding, analyzing and improving work processes. In addition, process documents can be used for process standardization. Process documents are important and widely used process analysis tools that acquire a lot of resources. Managing processes effectively will help companies to succeed in increasing global competition and thus helps to grow profit margins.

By using process models, processes can be conceptualized which in turn helps to understand the processes within an organization. Danesh and Kock (2005, p. 726) agree that process models help to conceptualize the numerous steps and relationships within a certain process. Furthermore, Laamanen and Tinnilä (2009, p. 69) argue that processes convert information from inputs to outputs. Process model is therefore one type of knowledge, and without it the modeled knowledge cannot be effectively transferred and shared. Kock et al. (2009, p.563) feel that process models serve as cognitive frameworks and present different levels of abstraction with emphasis on elements of the processes they represent. Therefore, business process models represent the interrelated activities that the process consists off.

Even though there are guidelines for documenting processes, there is no standard form in which a process document should be presented. Ungan (2006b, p.401) argues that different needs require different approaches and thus there is no one size fits all solution in process documentation. However, Danesh and Kock (2005, p. 725) points out that it is crucial to choose the right way to represent a process and therefore standardized modeling approaches are often used. Ungan (2006b, p.400) divides process models into two categories: process flowchart/diagrams and process maps. Both of the models are used in the same manner. However, recently process maps have been more widely used than process flow charts. The difference between the two types of process models is that process maps are easier to produce than process flowcharts, since they do not have the same level of detail.

Although every process model is different, there are shared criteria based on which the process models are evaluated. According to Kock et al. (2009, p.563), the following factors define the quality of a business process model: ease of generation, ease of understanding, completeness, and accuracy. Ease of generation means that the process is easy to conceptualize by using the model, and that the model is easily created. Ease of understanding refers to whether the graphical representations of processes are clear and easy to understand. Completeness refers to how complete and detailed the process model is and if it models the process as a whole. And finally, accuracy refers to how accurate a description the model provides of the process under modeling.

Documenting processes into process models is not simple, however. As a result, Harrington (1995, p. 343) argues that most organizations have not documented their processes, and when they have, the process documents are not necessarily followed. In addition, Gilsdorf (1998, p.197) reminds that a written guideline can also be dysfunctional if it is not flexible, but rather too bureaucratic, or if it is unfair to some of the employees. In the next sub-section the different approaches to actually documenting business processes into process models will be in focus.

2.2.2 Process documentation

The actual documentation of business processes into process models can be done in numerous ways. For example, Danesh and Kock (2005, p. 726) suggest that since some processes can seem rather abstract, a proper presentation of a process facilitates problem solving. Furthermore, presenting processes graphically helps to understand them. Laamanen and Tinnilä (2009, p. 121) argue that processes are often presented in the form of process models. Cornelissen (2008, p.66) points out that process models can also be presented in the form of flow charts, process maps or simple checklists. Juholin (2006, p.122) feels that the best way to create a process model is to make a detailed description of the process and then to identify the phases where guidance is needed. After this activity a person who is not familiar with the process should test the guidelines to see if they work.

However, since business systems are so complex, capturing an organizational process can be difficult. Ungan (2006a, p.137) argues that the more details the process document includes, the more difficult documentation is. The people involved in a process have their own, even subconscious way of doing things and they might not be able to communicate it. This tacit knowledge should also be written down in order to include it in the process document. Ungan (2006b, p.406) continues that the knowledge of the process participants has to be acquired and documented. Information is then collected on how the process works in practice, not how it is supposed to work. This can be done by interviewing the process participants and tracking the whole process with them. If tacit knowledge cannot be converted into explicit knowledge, a lot is lost on the process.

In order to convert tacit knowledge into explicit, Ungan (2006a, p.140) proposes a framework (see Figure 2) that shows a step-by-step procedure for creating process documents for purposes of standardization. The framework includes seven steps. Ungan (2006a, p.136) defines standardization as “the degree to which work rules, policies, and operating procedures are formalized and followed.” Ungan (2006a, p.137) argues that

process standardization helps to minimize uncertainty and variations in service levels. Consequently, process standardization correlates positively to the perceived quality. If processes are not standardized, the same tasks can lead to different outcomes depending on who is performing the task. A finished process model is the outcome of Urgan's (2006a) framework for process standardization and is a relevant part of business process improvement.

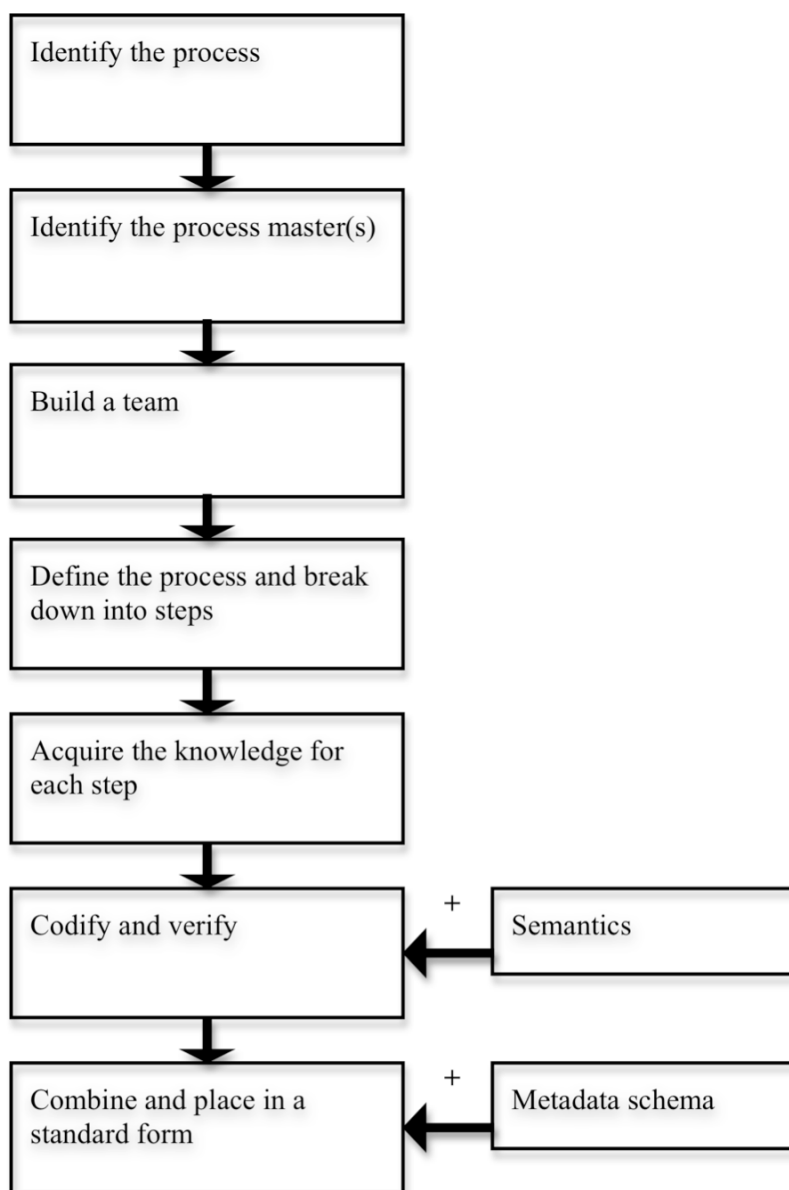


Figure 2. Framework for standardization (Urgan, 2006a, p.140)

As can be seen from Figure 2, the first step in standardization is to identify the process that will be documented in a standard form. After this, Ungan (2006a, p.139) argues that in the second step the process master is identified. The process master's knowledge needs to be articulated and codified because no one else has more knowledge of the process and knows the best way to carry out the process. There can be one or more process masters in an organization.

In the third phase, a team is built for process mapping if necessary. Ungan (2006b, p.405) points out that the objective of process documentation determines the level of detail and whether a team or an interviewer will be used for mapping. Ungan (2006a, p.140) argues that there are two basic techniques for collecting data: using an interviewer or using a team. Interviewing is preferred if the process is uncomplicated and involves only a few participants. In contrast, if the process is complicated, a team is needed. Also, by using a team it will be easier to make the process master articulate his/her tacit knowledge, as the group will create a synergy. The team should include people who have previous knowledge of the process and people that are not familiar with the process.

In the fourth phase of process standardization, the boundaries, goals and objectives of the process are defined. Ungan (2006a, p.142) suggests that the process is then broken down into steps and the inputs, outputs, tasks and users for each step are also defined.

The fifth step in documenting a process is acquiring the knowledge of each step defined in the previous step. Ungan (2006a, p.142) argues that knowledge of the process to be documented needs to be collected, mostly from the process owners or masters. The knowledge can either be tacit or explicit. According to Ungan (2006a, p.138), tacit knowledge that can be articulated includes know-how, process, practice, practical know-how and business knowledge. Thus processes with the same inputs, outputs, and procedures can be standardized. Ungan (2006a, p.142) continues that if there is no knowledge in the written form, then the process master tells everything he can about the process and this is written down. To best acquire the process master's knowledge, his or

her job must be surveyed. This way questions can be asked in each step of the process and the process master can conceptualize his or her actions. Ungan (2006a, p.146) points out that standardization is never easy because employees have so many different techniques to produce the same output. But if the process master's knowledge can be documented in detail and this is strictly adhered to, the variations in the output can be minimized.

In the sixth step, the process knowledge acquired is codified and verified. Ungan (2006a, p.145) suggests that when the main components of the process model are agreed on, they are written down to form separate documents. The aim is that the process master and people creating the process model see the process in the same way. Only after this, are the documents combined into one process chart that is then checked for inconsistencies. Semantics apply to this step, as standardization requires that the process chart is clear to any employee since many employees at different locations will use it. "Reusability of the process depends on if it can be well understood by the users" (Ungan, 2006a, p.144). Therefore, the main issue in codifying standard activities is to minimize interpretation differences that arise, for example, if terms are used in the wrong context or are understood differently in different locations.

The seventh and final step leads to actual documentation of the process. The knowledge acquired is combined and put in a standard form. Ungan (2006a, p.144) argues that once the knowledge is acquired, it has to be written down in the form of process maps or models. The model needs to be revised step-by-step to create the desired process chart. In this final step, Ungan (2006a, p.145) feels that metadata schema can be utilized (see Figure 2). Metadata is data about the data that describes the attributes and characteristics of the process. This helps to organize process knowledge in a standard form and thus will reduce the ambiguity when performing the process. There are various international standard metadata schemas that can be used, or a new metadata schema can be created for standardization purposes. Metadata schemas enable organization, storage, and reuse of the process knowledge.

However, not all processes are suitable for standardization, and their suitability depends on the nature of the process. As Urgan (2006a, p.140) points out that all processes cannot be standardized. Whereas a large clothing retail chain can standardize its process for making clothes, a tailor at a boutique cannot do so. Before standardization, the process needs to be reviewed and process masters need to be identified so that their knowledge can be codified.

2.2.2 Level of detail in process models

Since all process models are different, also the level of detail in their documentation varies. Urgan (2006a, p.140) argues that before a process can be mapped, the appropriate level of detail must be determined. However, there is no universally accepted level of detail, instead the objectives of the mapping determine the detail level. Furthermore, Urgan (2006b, p.404) points out that process documents should not be very complicated, because such models are difficult to comprehend but still they must be documented in sufficient detail. The sufficient level of detail in documentation depends on the purpose of documentation. For example for the purposes of standardization the process documents should be very detailed. Sufficient level of detail is needed to identify the causes of problems in the process. If the process under documentation needs to be improved the level of detail is high, especially for the part of the process that is not functioning well enough. But if a specific part of a process works well, it does not have to be documented in full detail.

The level of detail depends on how many components are included in the process model. Danesh and Kock (2005, p. 727) argue that process models can show the order of execution, the time it takes for the activity to be completed, and the cycle time. Cycle time is the time between when an activity ends and the next activity starts. According to Urgan (2006a, p.140), the knowledge that is usually presented in most process maps are the sequence of the steps in a process, precise descriptions of job performed in each step, the inputs and outputs, and decisions made in the execution of each step. For example, Hämäläinen and Maula (2004 p.47) argue that strategy planning and

implementing is typically described as a process chart that presents operations that are conducted frequently and always in the same manner. It is often tied to other organizational operations like budgeting through the time aspect. The documented strategy process often entails situational evaluation of the organization and its environment, setting the direction for the organization, operational planning, strategy implementation and assessment of the realization of the strategy.

The level of completeness varies in process models. Kock et al. (2009, p.572) use the term completeness to refer to having as many details as possible of the process. Completeness is one factor that affects the quality of business process model. Surprisingly, completeness does not seem to have an influence on the model's usefulness. This suggests that it is not worthwhile to develop a very detailed representation of a business process. Having too complete a model can lead to information overload where only a certain level of detail can be absorbed. Laamanen and Tinnilä (2009, p. 53) agree that one challenge in managing processes is to model them without being too detailed. But, on the other hand, Ungan (2006a, p.140) argues that if a process is not mapped in detail, employees will develop their own ways of doing things because of interpretation differences. This in turn leads to variation in the output.

To conclude Section 2.2, process models can be used to conceptualize processes that in turn help to understand the processes within an organization. Process documentations are often presented in the form of process models that illustrate how a product or a service is created through the operation. Ungan (2006b, p.401) argues that the process map should show the links between the activities, personnel, information, and the objectives of a certain process. Also, the responsibilities for each activity have to be defined. However, documenting processes into process models is not simple, because capturing an organizational process can be difficult since business systems are complex. Even though there are guidelines for documenting processes, there is no standard form in which a process document should be presented. Neither is there a universally accepted level of detail the process model should be documented in. Still, Ungan

(2006a, p.140) proposes a framework for standardization for purposes of creating process documents. A finished process model is the outcome of Ungan's (2006a) framework and is thus a relevant part of BPM.

In sum, business process models and their documentation is relevant for the study because business models are an integral part of Business Process Management, and thus BPM cannot be discussed without discussing process models as well. When researching communication processes in corporate communication, Ungan's (2006a) framework for standardization of process models can be used to discuss how communication processes are documented in corporate communication in practice.

2.3 Reported outcomes of process thinking

After reviewing literature on BPM, business process models, their documentation and their level of detail, this section will focus on the reported outcomes of process thinking. Besides the improvement of processes through process documentation, there are other reasons why companies document and manage their business processes. This section will therefore go over the reported outcomes of process thinking. Furthermore, the section will provide some knowledge on what to expect from the outcomes of processing business communication processes, and it is therefore necessary to review previous research made on the reported outcomes of process thinking in other business disciplines.

Process thinking benefits the whole organization, not just a singular process. Yu-Yuan Hung (2006, p.21) believes that Business Process Management can help companies sustain competitive advantage and face increasing global competition. Ungan (2006b, p.399) agrees that a process-oriented approach contributes to the overall success of a business. Moreover, Cernauskas and Tarantino (2009, p.8) argue that BPM makes it easier for organizations to gain insight, reduce risk, and optimize processes. Process documentation is needed to international quality certifications. Ungan (2006b, p.401) points out that the revised ISO 9001:2000 standard requires that all business processes

that are important to product realization have to be flowcharted.

Other benefits of documenting processes include improvement, standardization, reengineering, and description of processes. Actually, according to Ungan (2006b, p.402), one main benefit of process documentation is the standardization of processes. Process documents that are defined in detail are also used to develop standard operating procedures that in turn lead to greater consistency in operations. Laamanen and Tinnilä (2009, p. 70) argue that a well-documented process facilitates collaboration by creating shared mental models. Once a process is documented and understood, it can also be improved.

Consistency is argued to be the main outcome of process thinking. According to Ungan (2006a, p.136), most of the benefits of process standardization come from improved consistency of operations. Consistency makes process control easier and increases the efficiency of operations. Consistency can be achieved through process standardization. Consistency in operations is crucial for an organization's growth and performance. Ungan (2006a, p.135) argues that inconsistency in performing tasks can be solved by documenting the way the best performer performs a certain task. This process document can then be used as the basis for the standardization of operating procedures. As other employees adapt the documented way of performing a task, variations will be minimized and quality will be consistent.

However, accomplishing consistency in operations is not without problems. For example, Ungan (2006a, p.135) argues that consistency can be difficult to achieve because people perform the same tasks in different ways due to their educational background, experience and skill set. Inconsistency in performing tasks within an organization leads to inconsistency in process output. Some claim that standardization does not leave room for innovation. However, Ruuska (2007, p. 236) stresses that even though standards are needed, they cannot become an obsession leading to bureaucracy. But since every situation is unique, all the methods are not one size fits all.

There are various reasons for the use of business process models. For example, Ungan (2006b, p.402) argues that the popularity of process documents can partly be explained by their usefulness in designing new processes and re-designing the existing ones. One reported reason to use process documents is to reengineer, to improve or to simplify processes. Harrington (1995, p.346) continues that when a process is redesigned, it is simplified, automated, and thus becomes more efficient. Also, cycle times are shorter and costs are reduced. Cernauskas and Tarantino (2009, p.16) agree that once processes are optimized, they produce more timely and accurate information to support decision-making. In addition, documentation of processes improves transparency and this in turn leads to better risk management. In addition, compliance costs are lower as auditing operations improve. Therefore, the chance of errors is also reduced.

Process documenting can also bring administrative benefits. Ungan (2006b, p.402) argues that these include reducing conflict among current employees and new employees in training on regarding how a particular task should be performed. Furthermore, Flanagan and Waldeck (2004, p.137) point out that people who are new to the organization, newcomers, have high uncertainty regarding what is expected from them. Therefore, effective socialization is needed. Process models are effective tools for socialization, as they serve as guidelines how to perform an activity. To conclude, Ungan (2006b, p.403) argues that process documents are used to describe a process for the purpose of training employees or sharing the process with other organizations. Process documents help to clarify the process and help analyzers see problems and alternatives. This way value adding and non-value adding activities can be identified.

To conclude Section 2.3, there are various outcomes of process thinking. Process thinking benefits the whole organization, not just the process that undergoes BPM. Ungan (2006b, p.399) believes that a process-oriented approach contributes to the overall success of a business. BPM is reported to lead, for example, to: greater competitive advantage, increased insight, reduced risk, greater consistency in operations, improved efficiency, shorter cycle times, and reduced costs (Yu-Yuan Hung, 2006; Cernauskas & Tarantino, 2009; Ungan, 2006; Harrington, 1995).

According to Ungan (2006b, p.402), one main benefit of process documentation is the standardization of processes, which in turn leads to greater consistency in operations. In fact, consistency is argued to be the main outcome of process thinking.

As the section discussed the reported outcomes of process thinking in other business disciplines, it could be applied to processes in corporate communication as well. Recognizing the reported outcomes of process thinking is relevant for the present study because they provide some knowledge to what to expect from the outcomes of process thinking in corporate communication.

2.4 Processes in corporate communication

Now, after reviewing literature on Business Process Management, process models, their documentation and level of detail, and reported outcomes of process thinking in other business disciplines, this section will focus on the processes in corporate communication. The section is divided into two sub-sections. Sub-section 2.4.1 aims to gather some theoretical background to support the use and documentation of processes in corporate communication even though processes have not been researched widely from the business communication perspective. Sub-section 2.4.2 will introduce the main communication activities performed in corporate communication as to recognize the activities that are central in corporate communication. The fact that organizations define and document the critical and complex processes that are recurring suggests that the most central communication activities should be the ones that would also be regarded as core communication processes.

2.4.1 Communication processes

Effective communication is critical to organization's success and business communication processes could help make communication more effective. Previous research on business processes supports the use of process thinking in business communication. For example, Berry (2006, p.345) argues that as communication

technology evolves constantly, organizations have to find processes that enable effective communication. Furthermore, Gilsdorf (1998, p.178) suggests that strong corporate culture, effective communication, and cost savings are all linked together. When employees know what is expected of them, time is saved in decision-making. If employees do not know what they are supposed to do, time is wasted when they consider their options. Berry (2006, p.344) agrees that effective communication is critical to most organizational processes. Cornelissen (2008, p.66) argues that process models will create shared understanding within the communication function, will reduce cycle times and the dependency of certain individuals.

Even though the need to communicate more effectively does exist, there are not always enough resources to do so. Especially lack of time is recognized as one factor that hinders communication efficiency. Berry (2006, p.344) argues that in today's fast paced and global business environment time pressures have a negative affect on team processes and communication effectiveness, which leads to less effective communication processes. Christensen (2002, p.163) points out that some organizations are obliged by the law to disclose certain information and as a result the media and analysts increasingly scrutinize their business practices. But according to Berry (2006, p.351), the lack of time reduces the time spent on analyzing communication strategy and diminishes overall communication quality.

Although previous research does not explicitly mention business communication processes, the terms guidelines and instructions are discussed. For example, Juholin (2006, p.121) argues that to ensure the flow of everyday communication in the workplace, many organizations have created guidelines and instructions on how to perform certain tasks. Common procedures ensure consistent quality and the same outcome regardless of the person performing the task. Gilsdorf (1998, p.176) points out that these guidelines and procedures are often called policies. For example, corporate communication might have a policy for crisis communication.

Juholin (2006, p.121) points out that guidelines can be created for any activity that always needs to be done in a consistent manner and that is not common knowledge for all. For example, such activities include guidelines for the use of graphic presentations, sponsoring, crisis communication, writing of a press release or personnel performance appraisal. Varey and White (2000, p.5) agree that internal communication processes aim to establish structure and stability in the organization. Furthermore, Juholin (2006, p.119) argues that agreed procedures create the feeling of continuity and safety. According to Christensen (2002, p.164), BPM aims at greater transparency by creating organizational efficiency. It is, in fact, the main goal of corporate communication to define in detail all communicative dimensions that contribute to the overall image of the organization. However, as Juholin (2006, p.121) warns, guidelines or process models cannot become an absolute value; instead they should be seen as tools for guidance.

As mentioned in Section 2.2 on process models and documentation, there is no universally accepted form in which documented processes should be presented. Juholin (2006, p.119) argues that the rules and procedures of communication within organizations should define at least how often the process is done and who is responsible for it.

For example, Juholin (2006, p.121) suggests that the guidelines for writing a press release can include the answers to the following questions:

- Who is responsible for the process?
- What is the schedule?
- Who will authorize the release?
- Who are identified informants?
- Where can the template be found?
- Length and style of the press release
- How is the release distributed?
- Distribution lists

(Juholin, 2006, p.121)

Whereas Juholin's (2006) suggestion for the guidelines for a press release was purely theoretical, Figure 3 presents an authentic press release process model. It is presented here to illustrate how such a document may look like in reality. The process model in Figure 3 is an actual process model used in an international listed technology corporation, which is referred to as XX in Figure 3. Any changes have not been made to the press release process model.

As can be seen from Figure 3, the process model concerns three types of processes: local press release, trade press release, and corporate press release or stock exchange release. It is written on the process document that each business area's communication function is responsible for local and trade press release. Corporate communication is in charge of corporate press and stock exchange releases. Therefore, the process for corporate press and stock exchange releases is the only one where the finished release does not have to be sent to Corporate Communication function (see Figure 3).

All of the three processes presented in Figure 3 are similar to each other, with small variations. The process model includes guidelines for drafting, commenting, approving, and agreeing on the publication schedules of the releases. The process also includes partners and everyone that might be involved in the process. In a way, the process model is detailed, but yet it does not include the timeframe for the processes. The process model is written by the corporate communication function to guide communication practitioners working in the same organization.

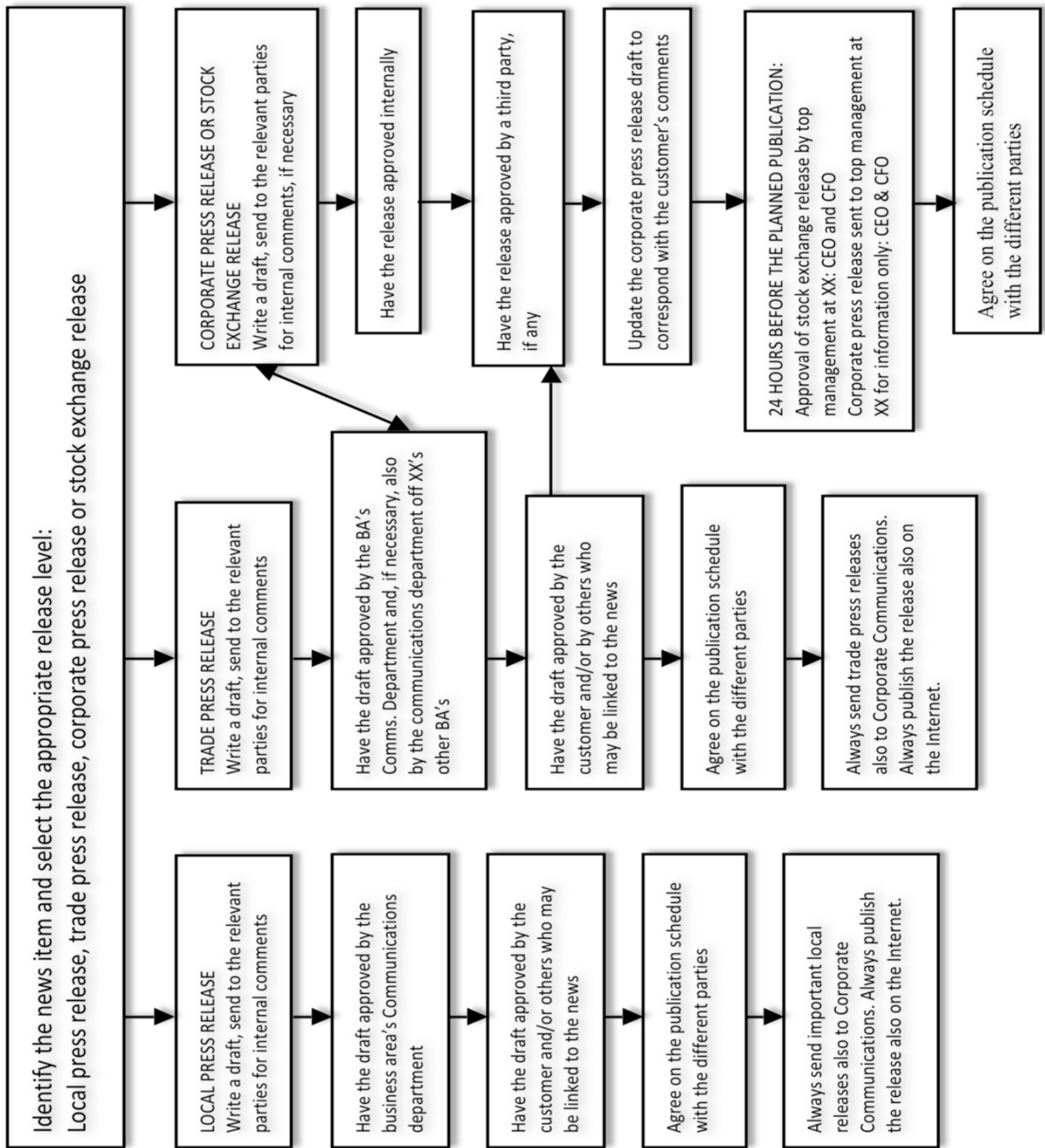


Figure 3. Example of a press release process model

2.4.2 Activities in corporate communication

Most communication activities in companies are performed in the corporate communication function. Argenti (1996, p.73) argues that most large organizations have departments called corporate communication. According to Louhiala-Salminen (2009, p.308), corporate communication is a business function that acts as the corporation's voice and shapes its image by responding to the challenges of constantly changing environment. Shelby (1993) defines corporate communication as an umbrella for a variety of communication forms and formats that exist inside and outside organizations. Cornelissen (2008, p.5) regards corporate communication as a management function that coordinates all internal and external communication to maintain relationships with organizations' stakeholders. Furthermore, Varey and White (2000, p.5) divide corporate communication into two inter-related systems. The first one is the internal system that organizes activities that aim to gather and interpret data on expectations from the organization's environment. The second one is the external system that in turn presents information about the internal processes to the external environment. All of the definitions for corporate communication presented here acknowledge that corporate communication has both internal and external audiences.

Corporate communication has many responsibilities in an organization. Varey and White (2000, p.10) suggest that corporate communication is responsible for all forms of managed communication with all the stakeholders of the organization for corporate purposes. Furthermore, Christensen (2002, p.162) argues that the purpose of corporate communication is to manage an organization's communication as one coherent entity. Instead of letting different units manage their communication locally, the aim of corporate communication is to form a coherent and unified image of the company through communication.

Activities performed in corporate communication vary from organization to organization but can include, for example, PR, communication policy and strategy development, and communication with employees, customers and stockholders. Argenti

(1996, p.77) argues that corporate communication takes care of the activities related to the following areas of communication: image and identity, corporate advertising, media relations, financial communication, employee communication, community relations, and crisis communication. Cornelissen (2008, p.31) completes Argenti's list of corporate communication activities by adding public affairs, issues management, direct marketing, sales promotions and sponsorships (see Figure 4).

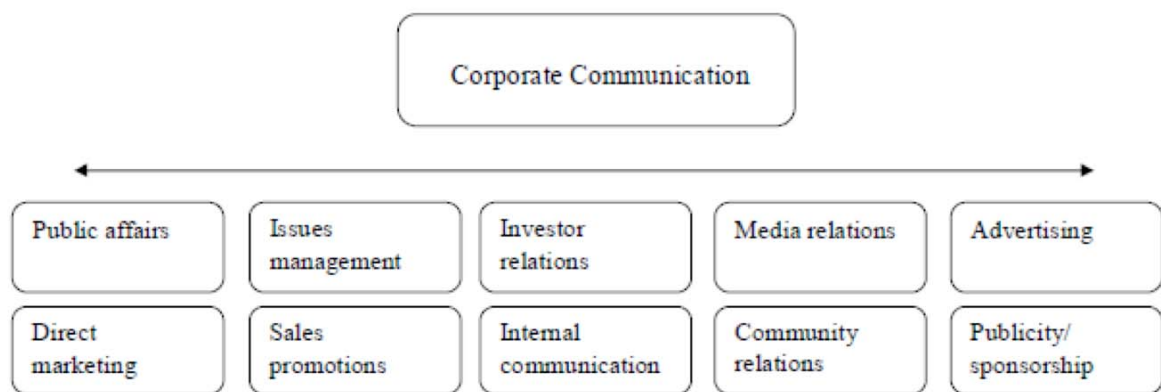


Figure 4. Corporate communication as an integrated framework for managing communication (Cornelissen, 2008, p. 31)

I have combined Argenti's (1996) and Cornelissen's (2008) listings of corporate communication areas into eight corporate communication activities, that are: image and identity, crisis communication, financial communication, media communication, corporate advertising, public affairs and PR, internal communication and issues management. In what follows, these main corporate communication areas are each discussed in more detail.

Image and Identity

Even though there is a difference between image and identity, they are closely linked to each other, and are thus both addressed here. According to Argenti (1996, p.78), corporate communication can manage image by conducting image research among stakeholders. Identity, on the other hand, refers to corporate logo, visuals, brochures and

advertising. Cornelissen (2008, p.66) argues that the term identity management was originally used to refer to visual communication but now covers also corporate advertising and sponsorship. The tools used are for example logos and corporate advertising campaigns. Moreover, Argenti (2003, p.64) points out that an organization should project consistent image to its stakeholders, and therefore all its identity elements (logos, mottos and employee behavior) should be consistent.

Communication plan, for example, is one process that is closely linked to maintaining organization's image in the long term. According to Ruuska (2007, pp. 216-218), communication plan is one of the processes that are usually documented in a very detailed way. The goals of project communication for each stakeholder and the measures taken to achieve these goals are defined in the communication plan.

Issues and crisis management

Cornelissen (2008, p.214) argues that issue management and crisis communication are overlapping terms, and thus they will be discussed under the same topic here. However, there is a clear difference between a crisis and an issue. Cornelissen (2008, p.215) defines an issue as a concern about the organization's operations that might raise a conflict, and gives a product recall as an example of issue management. Massey (2001, p. 157) defines a crisis as a major event that threatens to harm the organization and its stakeholders and that has not been predicted but could be expected. Cornelissen (2008, p.216) agrees and adds that a crisis requires immediate action from the organization. As time passes, an issue might develop into a crisis if it is not addressed properly.

As it is not desired that an issue evolves into a crisis, corporate communication has to be prepared for dealing with issues. Argenti (1996, p.81) stresses that corporate communication has to plan and coordinate responding to a potential crisis beforehand. Typically, a crisis communication plan includes risk assessment, setting communication objectives, and assigning a team for each crisis. Once a crisis occurs, corporate communication is also responsible for gathering and communicating information. Sapriel (2003, p.350) sees that even though all crises cannot be prevented, it helps to

have effective risk and issues management processes in place. This will help to forecast, plan possible scenarios, be more proactive and make decisions. Furthermore, Sapriel (2003, p.354) argues that when an organization has a plan for crisis communication, it protects from unnecessary staff movement and ensures that training takes places systematically.

Crisis communication especially is an area of communication where there is no room for errors or miscommunication. Therefore, Massey (2001, p. 158) stresses the importance of consistency of communication in a crisis situation. It means that all stakeholders are addressed in the same way and the same information is disclosed. Sapriel (2003, p.351), on the other hand, argues that supervision and evaluation are critical to the success of managing crisis process. Thus organizations need to have the processes, facilities, resources, competencies and tools in place to prevent a crisis if possible and to manage one effectively. Furthermore, as Massey (2001, p. 159) points out a consistent message is more believable than an inconsistent one, and thus it is crucial to maintain consistency in crisis communication.

To conclude, Argenti (2003, pp. 202-215) argues that communication practitioners working with crisis communication are responsible for preparing a crisis communication plan including the choice of channels, informing all stakeholders of the potential or an occurred crisis, and a product recall, gathering and sharing information, and handling media coverage related to the crisis at hand.

Financial communication

Financial communication is an integral part of business, as it targets investors and other important stakeholders. Belasen (2008, p.73) points out that even though in some organizations IR is separated from corporate communication; it is closely connected and even overlapping with other corporate communication functions. Argenti (1996, p.79) argues that financial communication can also be called investor relations (IR) and includes being in contact with investors of the company. According to Courtis (1987, p.20), financial communication helps to reduce uncertainty of the investors by releasing

timely, relevant, and credible information.

The activities of financial communication include producing financial statements such as annual reports. Courtis (1987, p.19) argues that most public corporations are required by law to provide certain financial information to their stockholders. The usual way to do this is the annual report. Annual report is a long, complex document that includes all the financial information of the company relevant to the investors and other decision makers. In addition, Argenti (2003, p. 150) points out that financial communication is also in charge of the following activities: targeting financial media, generating financial information on company web site, financial reporting, and marketing company's shares to the investors.

Media communication

Effective communication with the media has become more important than ever due to the increased ways in which people use media, 24/7. Therefore, also organizations aim to communicate effectively with the media to reach their stakeholders. In fact, Argenti (2003, p. 101) argues that media communication is one of the most critical functions of corporate communication since media can affect all of the organization's stakeholders. Belasen (2008, p.44) supports this notion by pointing out that good media relations must be maintained and nurtured carefully in order to be able to use media to "paint a certain picture" of the organization and events occurring in its environment.

There are many activities related to media communication in corporate communication. Cornelissen (2008, p. 177) points out that media communication includes managing communication and relationships with the media. Corporate communication can use various tools in maintaining media relations. For example, Argenti (1996, p.79) argues that corporate communication handles media relations by being in contact with the media, training managers to deal with the media, and acting as a spokesperson for the company. According to Cornelissen (2008, pp. 185-187), the tools that are used for media communication are press releases, press conferences, interviews, and media monitoring and research. Argenti (2003, p. 106) agrees with Cornelissen's list and

completes it by adding media calls and interviews. In other words, the tools that Cornelissen (2008) and Argenti (2003) listed are communication activities related to media communication.

Corporate advertising

Corporate communication is typically responsible for developing the strategy for corporate advertising. Corporate advertising has a lot in common with advertising of products or services, but it is the responsibility of communication function, not marketing. Argenti (2003, pp. 81-92) defines corporate advertising as use of paid media that instead of promoting organizations products or services, promotes the organization itself. The aim is to brand the company, to enhance company's reputation and image, and to increase sales. Advertising, that aims to influence opinions, is called issue or advocacy advertising. Corporate advertising uses various different channels, for example, paid advertisements on television, magazines, radio, or Internet.

Public affairs and PR

Dissimilar to Cornelissen's view of corporate communication functions (see Figure 3), publicity and sponsorship are part of public relations (Argenti, 2003), and are thus presented here under the same heading. Belasen (2008, p.61) defines public relations (PR) as a function that aims to establish two-way communication between the organization and its stakeholders. However, the main function of PR is to enhance the organization's reputation. One of the main functions of PR is to communicate with the media. When interacting with the media PR professionals act as the face of the organization and act as advocates. Furthermore, Fortunato (2009, p.330) stresses that sponsorship is part of PR and an extension of traditional advertising. A sponsorship helps an organization to get more media coverage and thus enhance its image, especially if the sponsorship is CSR related. Therefore, sponsorship can help an organization achieve the objectives of public relations. Belasen (2008, p.126) argues that the tools that PR practitioners use are advocacy advertising, corporate newsletters, public opinion surveys and media outlets.

Internal communication

Internal communication is also called employee relations, and involves all sorts of communication with employees of the organization. Argenti (2003, p. 127) stresses that communication with employees should be a two-way process. Argenti (1996, p.80) points out that corporate communication communicates to employees about decisions that affect them and changes in the marketplace or in the organization. Cornelissen (2008, p.201) agrees and adds that change communication is also an important area of employee communication. Argenti (2003, pp. 131-138) argues that the tools to communicate with employees are: employee publications (i.e. newsletters, magazines, releases), Intranet, internal branding campaigns and employee-supervisor discussions, company grapevine.

To conclude Section 2.4, the main communication activities performed within corporate communication function relate to following areas of communication: image and identity, crisis communication, financial communication, media communication, corporate advertising, public affairs and PR, internal communication and issues management. As stated already, the activities performed within these areas of corporate communication are considered as the communication processes in corporate communication. Therefore, it is relevant to the present study to identify the core communication activities, because they serve as an indication of what to expect from the findings. Effective communication is critical to organization's success and business communication processes could help make communication more effective.

2.5 Theoretical framework

Now, after reviewing the relevant literature for the purposes of this study, this section presents the theoretical framework for the study. The section aims to highlight the reasons for investigating business communication processes and their use in corporate communication. The theoretical framework is built combining the information from literature review in general and from Harrington's (1995) model of managing business processes and Ugan's (2006a) framework for standardization of business processes in particular. Corporate communication and the activities it performs according to Section 2.4 are then integrated to these two models to form a theoretical framework for the present study.

Figure 5 presents the theoretical framework for the study, and consists of three components. First, Ugan's (2006a) framework that shows a step-by-step procedure for creating process documents for purposes of standardization is used for constructing the theoretical framework (Figure 5). Process standardization is argued to minimize uncertainty and variations in service levels and if processes are not standardized, the same tasks can lead to different outcomes regarding who is performing the task, standardization of communication processes is needed. Therefore, this study suggests that the various activities that corporate communication function performs could be standardized according to Ugan's (2006a) framework.

Second, Harrington's (1995) framework for managing business processes is used as such for the construction of theoretical framework of this study to present Business Process Management. As discussed in Section 2.1, on BPM, Harrington (1995) proposes five phases for managing business processes effectively. The phases are in a chronological order: organizing for quality, understanding the process, streamlining the process, implementation, measurement and control, and continuous improvement. These phases could also be applied to managing communication processes in corporate communication, and are therefore used in the theoretical framework of the present study (see Figure 5).

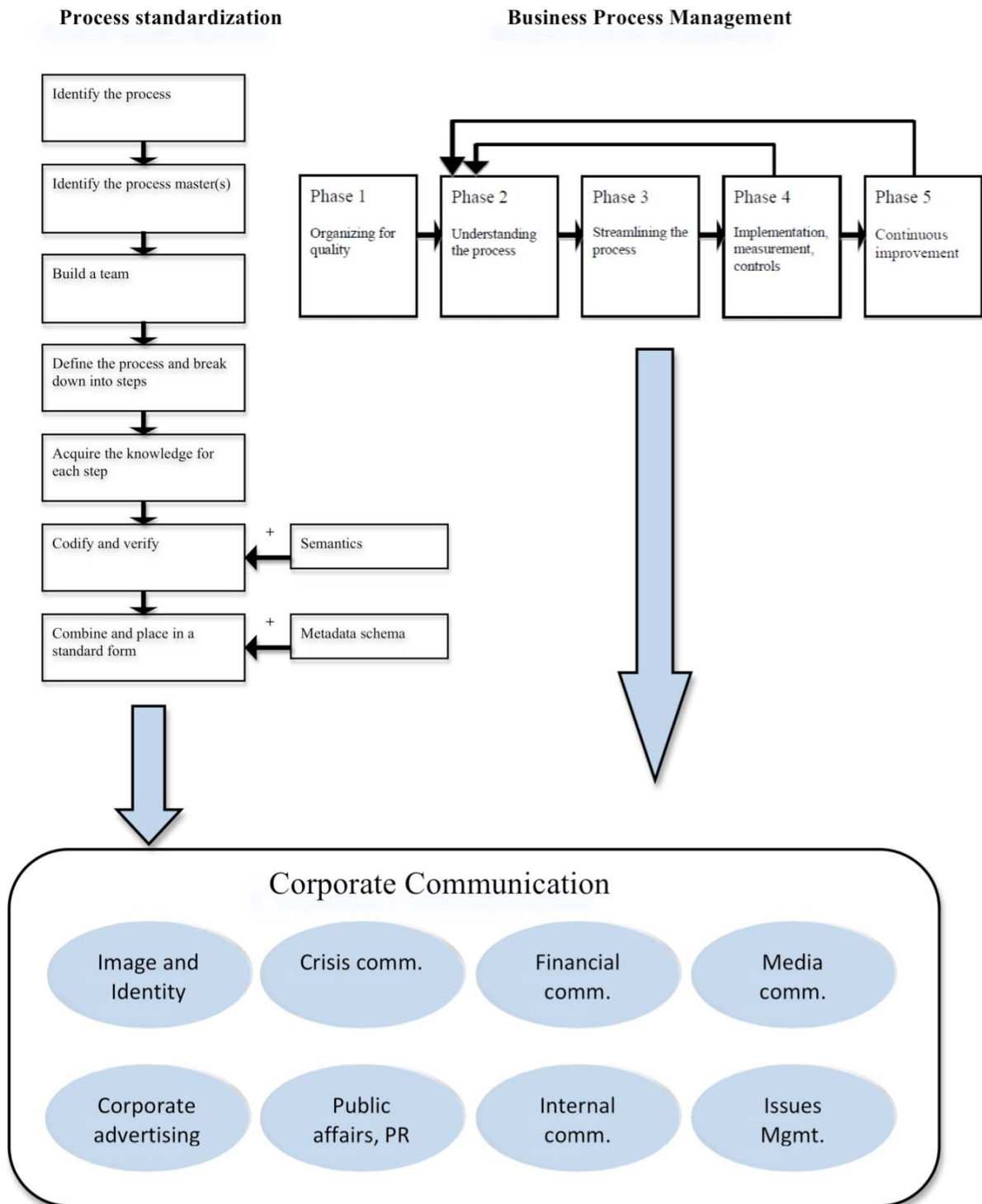


Figure 5. Theoretical framework. Process standardization and BPM integrated to corporate communication (Based on Harrington (1995), Ungan (2006a), Cornelissen (2008) and Argenti (1996))

Third component of the theoretical framework presented in Figure 5, is formed by the main communication activities performed in corporate communication. Based on Section 2.4 on business communication processes the main communication activities performed within corporate communication function relate to the following areas of communication: image and identity, crisis communication, financial communication, media communication, corporate advertising, public affairs and PR, internal communication and issues management. These areas of communication are thus presented in the theoretical framework as the ones that are performed within corporate communication (see Figure 5).

As discussed in Chapter 2, standardization and better management of corporate communication processes leads to greater consistency of communication and helps corporate communication improve. With the help of the theoretical framework (see Figure 5), this study aims to find out what are the benefits of defining and documenting core communication processes in corporate communication, and thus answers to the research questions posed in Section 1.1. There are many reported outcomes of process thinking according to the literature review of this study. Since the main benefit seems to be consistency in operations, the point of interest is if process thinking will lead to consistency in communication. Effective communication is critical to the organization's success and standardization of processes increases efficiency. Therefore, this study assumes that standardization of business communication processes leads to more effective communication.

To conclude Section 2.5, according to the theoretical framework of this study presented in Figure 5 the principles of process standardization and Business Process Management (BPM) should be integrated to corporate communication. This way business communication could benefit from process thinking as a number of other business disciplines have been doing for decades.

3 RESEARCH DATA AND METHODS

This chapter describes the data used in the research and methods used for collecting that data and also how the present study was conducted. The study is qualitative and inductive in nature, which means that theory is generated on the basis of data. The research problem is approached on the basis of a theoretical framework constructed drawing on selected existing academic literature and journal articles. Empirical data is collected through semi-structured interviews and an online survey. The selected previous literature on the research subject forms the theoretical framework for this study through which the research questions can be answered.

Qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to describe the phenomenon of communication processes and their documentation. This study analyzed people's words in order to understand the research subject as it is constructed by the interviewees and respondents (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). By using the qualitative approach and open-ended questions the interviewees' own views were better understood and valuable insights were gained. This study uses two qualitative data collection methods: semi-structured interviews and an online survey with open-ended questions. The main data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in 14 Finnish companies and public organizations. In total, 14 communication directors and managers were interviewed. The interviews were conducted between 8th May and 8th June 2009.

An online survey conducted in April 2009 for a communication consultancy about the communication function's resourcing and business communication processes will be used as background data. The survey was targeted at communication managers. A link to the survey was sent to 300 people in charge of communications in Finnish companies and communities, and 82 of them responded. Both of these data collection methods will next be discussed in more detail.

3.1 Research interviews

In this study semi-structured interview was used. The framework for the interview can be found in Appendix 1. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2001, p.47) point out that in semi-structured interviews some aspects of the interview situation are preset, but there are variables that change according to the situation and the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. The theme of the interview is set beforehand and discussion flows freely within certain set themes. In the present study the questions were the same for all interviewees but their order varied.

The primary data for the present study was collected from semi-structured interviews with 14 communication directors and managers working for Finnish companies and public organizations. All of the investigated organizations had a separate communication organization, and the director of that organization was the interviewee. The interview data can be seen in Table 1. In the initial phase, 17 communication managers were approached. Two of them declined because they said they did not understand the subject, and one had scheduling problems. As Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2001,p.36) suggest, people are easier to reach through personal interviews than surveys and thus the answering rate was higher when using interview rather than survey as the main data collection method.

The interviewees were carefully selected based on their possibility of expanding the variability of the sample (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 45). Therefore, organizations from the private and public sector were chosen for the study. The 14 organizations that were selected were all from different fields of business. The sample included organizations from the steel industry, retail, forestry, and the medical industry. The purpose of having a variety of different industries in the sample was to reduce the risk that process thinking in communication would somehow be industry related, as traditionally more technical and industrial organizations have been utilizing business process management.

Table 1 shows the organization type, industry, and the number of employees of the 14 investigated organizations.

Table 1. Interview data (Organization, industry, number of personnel)

	Organization type	Industry	Personnel
1	Publicly listed company	Retail	25,000
2	Publicly listed company	Industrial machinery	28,000
3	Publicly listed company	Paper, pulp and timber	24,000
4	Publicly listed company	Basic resources, technology	2,500
5	Publicly listed company	Construction	9,800
6	State-owned company	Beverages	1,100
7	City	Public sector	14,000
8	Publicly listed company	Basic resources	13,300
9	Cooperative joint stock company	Fresh foods processing	4,200
10	Public healthcare	Specialized medical care	21,000
11	Government, public administration	Communications	500
12	City	Public sector	40,000
13	Cooperative enterprise	Retail	38,500
14	Government, public administration	Healthcare	170

As can be seen from Table 1, nine of the investigated organizations were from the private sector and five of the organizations were from the public sector. The investigated organizations varied in size and represented many different industries. As the largest of the organizations measured by the number of employees employed 40,000

employees, the smallest one employed only 170 employees. In other words, the sample consisted of organizations from different industries, sizes and sectors.

Table 2 shows the position, educational background, gender and the years of service of the 14 interviewees involved in this study, as well as the date and duration of the interviews.

Table 2. Background of the interviewees and the interviews

	Position of the interviewee	Educational background	Gender	Years of service	Date of interview (Year 2009)	Duration of interview
1	Comms. Director	Vocational Qualification in Business and Administration	M	35	8/5	26m18s
2	Comms. Director	MA	F	5	May 13	43m07s
3	Comms. Director	MA	F	7	May 13	32m36s
4	Comms. Director	M. Sc.	F	6	May 15	26m46s
5	Comms. Director	M. Sc.	F	2.5	May 20	32m49s
6	Comms. Director	B. Soc. Sc	F	8	May 26	37m12s
6	Comms. Manager	MA	F	6		
7	Comms. Director	M. Soc. Sc	F	3.5	May 28	30m59s
8	Comms. Director	M. Soc. Sc	F	1	May 29	29m35s
9	Comms. Director	M. Soc. Sc	F	7	May 29	26m15s
10	Comms. Manager	B. Soc. Sc	F	7	June 2	33m41s
11	Comms. Manager	B. Soc. Sc	M	0.5	June 3	23m50s
12	Comms. Director	M. Soc. Sc	M	8	June 4	34m58s
13	Comms. Manager	M. Sc.	M	5.5	June 8	28m53s
14	Comms. Director	MA	F	0.5	June 9	43m53s

As can be seen from Table 2, out of the 14 interviewees 10 were communication directors and four were communication managers. They were in charge of corporate communication in their organization. Most of the people in charge of corporate communication in the investigated organizations were women, (N=10). The interviewees came from three different educational backgrounds; business, arts and social sciences. Four of the interviewees had an MA degree, four had a M.Sc. degree, three had M.Sc. (Econ.) degree, two had B.Sc. degree and one of the interviewees had a lower level business degree. There was a lot of variance in the years of service in the organization, ranging from half a year to 35 years.

Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2001,p.60) argue that once the interviews do not give any new information to the interviewer, the number of interviewees is sufficient. During the interviews it was noted that the answers were beginning to repeat the same pattern not offering more valuable insights. Therefore, conducting 14 interviews was considered sufficient for the purposes of the study.

Interview data was recorded and transcribed as soon as possible after the interview (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2001,p.135). The transcription was done within two days from the interview. Since Maykut and Morehouse (1994, p.101) argue that words are the data of qualitative research, the interviews were transcribed word for word. The next step was to read through the interview transcripts and look for patterns and emerging themes. After this phase the answers of all the interviewees were divided into specific themes, and then compared with each other. Data analysis was carried out until no new or relevant information could be discovered and the data had reached redundancy (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 144).

3.2 Online survey

The link to the online survey was sent to 310 communication managers on 10th May 2009. A reminder was sent on May 17th, 2009, which led to a few more responses. As 82 managers responded to the survey out of 310 invited, the total response rate was 26

percent. However, many invitees were out of office during the time frame of the two weeks the survey took place. Also, as most of the questions were open-ended, it was maybe considered to take too much time to answer the survey. Although the response rate is fairly low, it was considered sufficient to provide background data for this study.

The respondents were chosen based on company web sites and their position in the company. The language of the survey was Finnish since communication managers are required to be fluent in the native language of the country they operate in. Some of the questions were open-ended, but there were also a couple of multiple-choice questions (see Appendix 2). The online survey can be considered a qualitative rather than a quantitative method as the section used for this study included only open-ended questions.

The online survey was originally conducted for a communication consultancy called *Communica Oy*, where the researcher of the present study was employed. The survey was originally a needs assessment among potential clients and focused on resourcing of communication function and processing of communication activities. The survey (Appendix 2) included six questions concerning communication processes and their documentation in the corporate communication function. Therefore, only the section concerning business processes is used as background information for this study. Other parts of the survey dealt with challenges and strengths experienced in communication, resourcing of the communication function, buying communication services and future prospects.

As the data from the online survey was analyzed for the purposes of this study, differences and similarities of the findings from the semi-structured interviews were sought. The main findings from the online survey were then divided into the same groups with the findings from the interviews, based on the research questions of the study.

3.3 Trustworthiness of the study

As the research approach is qualitative consisting of 1) semi-structured interviews, and 2) an online survey with open-ended questions, they can be used to complement each other. The trustworthiness of the research is then higher as the survey data can be used as background data to supplement the interview data. There are two main advantages of using multiple methods of data collection and the phenomenon is examined from different points of view. First, the convergence of the collected data is high, meaning that the 14 interviews and the online survey give similar results and the same patterns emerged (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 146). Second, inappropriate certainty can be reduced (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2001, p.39). Therefore, the two methods i.e. semi-structured interviews and the online survey increase the trustworthiness of the study.

The study can be considered valid, as data is collected from a broad sample. According to Collis and Hussey (2003, p.58), validity means the overall quality of the study and how the findings present the actual situation. The research should then demonstrate exactly what the researcher claims it does. To ensure that there would be no research errors in this study, the sample is broad. When counting the 82 respondents of the online survey and 14 interviewees, there were altogether 96 communication practitioners involved in the study.

Furthermore, Collis and Hussey (2003, p.58) argue that high reliability of a study means that if the same study is repeated, it will lead to the same findings. Since the present study is qualitative, different observers at a different occasion should come up with the same observations and interpretations in order for the study to be reliable. This study can be considered trustworthy in this sense as careful investigation of the data was carried out to avoid misrepresentation and as much data as considered useful was provided for evidence. As Maykut and Morehouse (1994) argue, the goal of qualitative study is to discover emerging patterns, not generalizations. The findings of the present study are therefore contextual, and are based on close observation, careful documentation and profound analysis of the research topic.

4 FINDINGS

In this section the main findings of the research are presented by combining the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and online survey. As stated in Chapter 1, the main research question is: how can process thinking be utilized in corporate communication? In order to answer the main question, the four sub-questions have to be answered first. Therefore, the findings are categorized so that each section of this chapter relates to one of the four research sub-questions of the study:

1. What are the main communication processes?
2. How have the processes been documented?
3. What are the benefits of defining processes and documenting them?
4. How are communication processes developed and improved?

Accordingly, section 4.1 reports on the main business communication processes in organizations and divides them into those that are documented and those that are not. Section 4.2 focuses on the ways of documentation of the processes. In section 4.3 the benefits that process thinking has brought to an organization will be discussed. And finally, section 4.4 reports on how business communication processes are developed and improved in organizations.

4.1 Main business communication processes in organizations

The section reports on the use of business communication processes in the 14 investigated organizations and answers the first research question of the study. Sub-section 4.1.1 lists the main business communication processes that have been documented in the investigated organizations and sub-section 4.1.2 focuses on the processes that are in use but have not been documented.

4.1.1 Documented business communication processes

All of the 96 (14 + 82) surveyed organizations had defined and documented some of their communication processes. Organizations had defined and documented business communication processes in the following areas of communication:

- Crisis communication
- Media communication
- Financial communication
- Internal communication
- CSR communication
- Web communication
- Customer communication
- Event communication

Table 3 shows the business communication processes that have been documented in interviewees' and respondents' organizations. The activities performed in corporate communication function are here called "processes", as the interviewees also called them that. As the online survey is used as background information, only the communication processes that were mentioned also in the interviews, are listed in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Documented business communication processes

Business communication process for	No. of interviewees (interviews)	No. of respondents (survey)
Releases (press, and internal releases)	10	25
Web communication (Internet and Intranet)	9	9
Publications (stakeholder magazines and brochures)	9	15
Financial communication (Annual reports, interim reports)	8	13
Crisis communication	7	13
Media communication (media tracking, training, press conferences)	8	10
Event and exhibitions	4	4
Communication plan	3	7
CSR reporting	3	1
Use of pictures and visual communication	2	0
Summaries of speeches	2	0
Monthly decision-making releases of council	2	0

As can be seen from Table 3, processes for writing of releases, updating and providing web content, generating publications, financial communication, crisis communication and media communication were the communication processes that were documented in most of the investigated organizations. Also, processes for organizing events and exhibitions, generating communication plan, CSR reporting and visual communication were documented in some of the organizations selected for the study.

In addition to the communication activities listed in Table 3, the following processes were documented in at least one of the organizations: staff reporting, recruiting process,

buying of communication services, sponsoring policy, non-disclosure policy, stakeholder info session and a process for how to deal with feedback received from different stakeholders.

The data suggests that organizations had documented processes for the recurring communication activities that were always performed in the same way. In other words, the processes that were documented were those that were recurring, were performed the same way every time, and involved many participants. One interviewee said that they first started to document their “best seller” processes that occurred most often. In addition, organizations seem to be prepared for a crisis situation by defining a process for crisis communication. Also, financial communication processes are used widely, as there is no room for errors or variations. The quotations¹ below describe the type of corporate communication activities that are documented:

“The processes that recur every month or week, require some kind of documentation, it seems they are done over and over again.”

“We have aimed to developed processes for activities that are repetitious, that have many internal and external people involved, that are complex or require that they have to be done right.”

”The processes we have documented are the core communication processes that are carried out regularly. Thus it is really important that these processes are always performed in a consistent manner, regardless of who is performing them.”

Surprisingly, almost half of the interviewees’ organizations had documented a process for crisis communication. Although crises do not happen often, corporate communication still needs to be prepared for them, just in case. Since a crisis has to be

¹ All the quotations here were originally in Finnish and were translated into English by the researcher. Consequently, the researcher is responsible for any inaccuracies or mistakes in the translations.

communicated well, corporate communication had often documented a process for crisis communication as the following quotation shows:

“One cannot handle crisis communication without any process documents.”

The interviewees had different perceptions of what a business communication process was. They all had processes in use, but they understood them in two different levels. In some organizations, communication as a whole was seen as one big process. In other words, the corporate communication unit formed one process and thus there was only one communication process defined in the organization. Inside that process there were sub processes that were the operational communication activities performed in corporate communication, for example, an annual report and press release. In other surveyed organizations only the operational communication activities were documented, and the framework within which they were performed was not defined in any way. However, all the interviewees still agreed that processes do exist in business communication as can be seen from the following quotations:

“For us processes are singular activities or tools that are documented into process models, but the whole communication function could be thought of as one big process. Sort of what activities communication includes, how it has to be resourced, stakeholders etc. The whole communication process could be beneficial to describe if designing a new communication organization.”

“Processes exist in all systems, since one cannot do anything without an underlining process. If there is a system, it is obvious that there is also a process behind it. But if you do not have a system, then people find it harder to follow a process. In communication, there are not many systems or tools for processes.”

According to the interviews, it seems that not everyone in charge of corporate communication understood what communication processes were. For example, in the beginning of one interview, the interviewee argued that they had not utilized processing

at all in their communication function. As the interview progressed, it became clear that they indeed had many processes but had not realized it. Sometimes processes were seen as something abstract that had nothing to do with day-to-day communication activities. Furthermore, another interviewee saw communication as an organizational support function. The interviewee's company had many processes, but the interviewee did not see them as such because she saw communication as one big process that included all the communication activities as sub processes.

It seems that there are two extremes in processing business communication activities. According to the interviews, some organizations had process documents and models for all the communication processes they performed, and some had not documented any of their processes. Two of the interviewees argued that they did not think they had any communication processes that had not been documented. And there were also two interviewees who had not utilized process thinking at all in the organization's communication. The general opinion was that processes were needed in corporate communication, but there had to be a healthy balance since not every process document has a purpose. Also, if a process had not been documented in a written form, it did not mean it had not been thought through and defined. The attitudes towards processing in the investigated organizations are shown in the following excerpts:

“A balance has to be maintained between having no processes at all and following process documents without using one's own head.”

“If a process is not documented in any way, some might think it does not exist, but I am sure that the processes that are recurring have still been defined in detail.”

“We do not have any processes that have not been documented. If there were, it would be an exceptional situation and I would be alarmed and get involved. We aim to have as few ad hocs as possible.”

Considering the organizations chosen for the present study, one point of interest was if the organizations in the public sector differed from those in the private sector in terms of processing business communication. Indeed, the organizations from the public sector mentioned two processes that they had documented that none of the private sector organizations brought up. The first one was a process document for decision-making and another was a process document for summaries of speeches. The interviewees explained that in public organizations there are many speeches held by key people that have to be summarized and published. Decision-making, on the other hand, involves many stakeholders and often the law requires that decision-making is communicated before and after the decision is made. Therefore, public organizations had identified the need for documenting processes for these two activities that the organizations in the private sector had not.

In the next sub-section the business communication processes that had not been documented will be discussed in more detail.

4.1.2 Processes that have not been documented

A majority of the respondents of the online survey had communication processes in their organizations that had not been documented. Still according to the interviews and the online survey, there were more processes that were documented than those that were not. Even though organizations had defined their core communication processes, the processes might not have been documented in any way. Table 4 lists the business communication processes that had not been documented in the investigated organizations, based on the interviews and the online survey.

Table 4. Non-documented business communication processes

Business communication process for	No. of interviewees (interviews)	No. of respondents (survey)
Releases (press, and internal releases)	1	20
Websites (Internet and Intranet)	4	1
Publications (stakeholder magazines and brochures)	1	4
Financial communication (annual reports, interim reports)	4	10
Media communication (media tracking, training, press conferences)	1	5
CSR reporting	1	1
Use of pictures and visual communication	1	-

As can be seen from Table 4, according to the interviews, the processes that were most often left undocumented were: websites and financial communication. Also, releases, publications, media communication, CSR reporting and use of pictures were mentioned. Based on the data from the online survey, processes for releases, publications, financial communication and media communication were most often left undocumented. Interestingly, these were the same processes that were documented in most of the investigated organizations. This could be due to the fact that they were the main communication activities performed by corporate communication. It is possible that the interviewees only mentioned such communication activities that were most often performed within corporate communication.

In addition to the communication activities listed in Table 4, there were also differences between the interviewees and respondents. A number of the respondents of the online survey mentioned newsletters and project communication as aspects of communication that had not been documented. Interviewees, on the other hand, mentioned sponsoring,

criteria for choosing partners and newsletters as activities that had not been documented.

The criteria for documenting communication processes seemed to be their frequency, centrality, and the importance of the activity. But, still, there were recurring processes that had not been documented due to various reasons. For example, one of the interviewees argued, *“Professional communication people do not need processes”* which was one of the reasons why the company had not utilized processing. In the interviewee’s organization communication issues just emerged and they were taken care of ad hoc. Other reasons for not documenting processes were that the processes had worked fine without any process documents, some processes were performed differently each time, and there had not arisen any problems in the process, as the quotations below illustrate:

“The ones that haven’t been documented are those that haven’t caused any problems. But it does not mean that everyone knows the process by heart.”

“We do not have a process document for organizing campaigns, because for each campaign there is a tailored communication plan. We usually use an external communication agency to help us with these. Because in campaigns communication is more free and creative, we feel we cannot have process documents for organizing them.”

“In corporate communication we have evaluated that half of the time goes to routine activities that you perform without process models. Other half of the time goes to different communication projects where we need a plan and processes.”

Many interviewees mentioned the lack of time and other resources as one reason for not documenting their processes. Often operational tasks required so much time that there was none left for thinking in terms of processes. The following quotations demonstrate this well:

“The reason these processes have not been documented is that there simply is no time. We have so much to do and have had big corporate projects, we have just been doing and not thinking.”

“Due to the lack of resources, operational tasks always seem more important than planning ahead. Therefore, we have not had time for processing, which is a shame. In our company, corporate communication puts out fires and cannot always follow plans or schedules. The day rarely goes the way you planned it in the morning.”

A number of the respondents pointed out that it was not sensible to document all the communication processes that were performed. If the process was a simple, routine task that was performed often, there was no need to document it. The same idea arose during the interviews:

“We decided not to document processes that are not performed often, or are self-explanatory. We will just document the ones that are significant and can benefit us.”

One interesting finding from the online survey was that the writing of press releases and internal releases is both the most documented communication process and the least documented communication process at the same time. The explanation for this is, according to the interviewees, that writing press releases is considered such a routine task that everyone in communication knows how to do it without any process models. But, on the other hand, the recurring processes were most often documented. As the press release process fulfills both of these conditions, some organizations had taken the effort to document it while others had regarded it as a routine process that was too simple for documentation, as the following quotation shows:

“Since the recurring activities such as press releases happen so often, they are a routine and thus do not need to be documented in anyway.”

To conclude the findings of Section 4.1, organizations had defined and documented business communication processes in the following aspects of communication: crisis communication, media communication, financial communication, web communication, CSR communication, internal communication, customer communication, and event communication. More specifically, the business communication activities that were documented in most of the investigated organizations were processes for writing press and other releases, generating publications, updating and providing web content, financial communication, media communication and crisis communication. Also, processes for organizing events and exhibitions, visual communication, CSR reporting and generating a communication plan were documented in some of the investigated organizations.

Majority of the respondents of the online survey recognized that they had defined communication processes that had not been documented. Even though organizations had defined their core communication processes, these processes might not have been documented in any way. According to the interviews, the processes that were most often left undocumented were content providing for the web, the annual report, and the interim report. Also, press releases, CSR reporting, publications, media communication, and use of pictures were mentioned.

There were two extremes in processing business communication activities as some organizations had process documents and models for all the communication processes they perform, and some had not documented any of their processes. The general opinion was that processes were needed in corporate communication, but there had to be a healthy balance since not every process document had a purpose. The data suggests that organizations have documented processes for the recurring communication activities that are always performed in the same way. Still, having a process document for crisis communication was frequent. This may be due to the fact that a crisis has to be communicated well, and therefore corporate communication has often documented a process for crisis communication even though crises rarely happen. Also, financial communication processes were used widely as there is no room for errors or variations.

Furthermore, the interviewees had different perceptions of what a business communication process was. There seemed to be three approaches to documenting communication processes in organizations. First, in some organizations the whole communication process was documented in detail, including all the activities that were then seen as sub processes of the communication process. Second, in other organizations the communication process as a whole was documented, but the communication activities inside this big process were not. Third, in most of the surveyed organizations only the operational communication activities were documented, and the framework within which they were performed was not defined. However, all the interviewees still agreed that processes did exist in business communication.

Interestingly, the same processes that were documented in most of the investigated organizations were also those that were most often left undocumented. This can be due to the fact that these were the main communication activities performed by corporate communication. It is possible that the interviewees did not mention other communication activities than the ones that were most often performed within corporate communication. Reasons for not documenting defined communication processes were that processes had worked fine without the process documents, some processes were performed differently each time, there was a lack of time and resources, and there was no need to document every process. In the interviews and online survey the same processes were mentioned as those that had been documented, and those that had not been documented. Combining these two “sets” of processes it can be concluded that the main communication processes in organizations were press and other releases, publications, CSR reporting, annual report, interim report, content providing for Internet and Intranet, press conferences, crisis communication, events and exhibitions, brochures, use of pictures, communication plan, summaries of speeches, project communication, news letters and campaigns.

4.2 Documentation of business communication processes

This section reports on the ways that business communication processes are documented in the investigated organizations and thus contributes to answering the second research question. It is divided into three sub-sections. Sub-section 4.2.1 explains how communication processes are documented in the investigated organizations. Sub-section 4.2.2 goes over the reasons for documenting communication processes. Finally, sub-section 4.2.3 reports on the level of detail used in business communication process documents.

The online survey is not used in answering research question two, as there were no questions asked concerning the actual documentation of communication processes.

4.2.1 Documentation of communication processes

In all of the investigated organizations, at least one business communication process was documented. According to the interviews, organizations had many different ways to document their communication processes. Some interviewees approached process documentation through conceptualization, some aimed to process the whole circle of communication, and some defined the core processes that were to undergo documentation with purpose and determination. An interviewee reminisced that when she started in the organization it was really unclear which task belonged to whom, and in which division or country a task was performed. Therefore, she realized that process documents were needed. Here are some quotations from the interviews that enlighten the process documentation efforts in the investigated organizations:

“When we create process models, we first take an activity and conceptualize it. Then we take the concept and turn it into a process.”

“Corporate communication wrote process documents as a development tool”

“Even though we aim to document the whole core process of business we have yet managed to define only some parts of the process. The aim is to define the whole process of communication from the beginning to end.”

“As a part of EFQM we have defined core communication processes. And then we have also defined sub processes for these core processes that have been documented.”

Some organizations hired consultants from outside the organization to document the core communication processes, while other organizations relied on their own employees to document the communication processes. In general, most of the organizations assigned a team from inside the organization to document the core communication processes. How the documentation was done in practice can be seen from the following quotations:

“For each process, a small team was assigned to go through the process and document it. After this the proposition was polished up and approved by the board of directors.”

“In the beginning these process documents were really complicated and boring graphs that people in fact could not understand. Expensive consultants made them and afterwards they were put in folders and forgotten.”

“During the processing we operated normally, we did not hire any extra resources to do the processing. Our team decided together what are the processes that need to be documented, how a certain process is to be carried out and who is responsible for a process. The responsible person for each process made the first draft and it was completed together.”

“Certain people perform certain processes, and they are the ones who have been developing them in the first place.”

“The communication unit as a team described and documented the processes. Some of the process documents were born when we just wrote down step-by-step how a certain process is carried out and were then fine-tuned a bit. But some processes were created from scratch, to create new, consistent and faster ways of working.”

The process documentation for business communication processes had started only recently in the investigated organizations. Only one organization claimed they had had process documents for communication processes since 1995, other 13 organizations had documented their communication processes in the 21st century. In most of the organizations process documents had been in use for three to five years. Of course, it is impossible to know when processing really started, as opposed to when it was first referred to as processing. Here are some perceptions of the point in time that processes were first utilized from the interviewees:

“The first processes were developed around 1995, but communication planning started already in the 1980s, we didn’t call them processes back then. In the middle of the 1990s when we started process documentation the board would sit for days just to document one process.”

“Processing was started in communications in 2006, but due to ISO standards the organization has standardized its processes from the 90s.”

“Marketing Communication processes have been in use for 7-8 years, and communication processes for 3 years.”

In all of the organizations surveyed, the process documents were available to all of the communication employees. Most of the interviewees’ organizations had stored process documents into their Intranet, and only four of the interviewees had stored the communication processes onto a shared hard drive.

To conclude, all of the investigated organizations had at least one documented business communication process and the process documents were available to all of the communication employees. Process thinking was a fairly new concept in organizations, as majority of organizations had started to document their communication processes in the 21st century. Of course, it is impossible to know when processing started in reality, as opposed to when it was first referred to as processing.

4.2.2 The reasons for documenting processes

Most of the interviewees began to process their communication activities to answer practical needs and processing was seen as a tool to overcome existing problems in the process. Often the problem was that a process was carried out differently every time it was performed, the process was not well organized, or there was a need for facilitating the work of new and existing employees. Especially, the need for guiding employees in different countries was often mentioned as a reason why business communication processes were documented in the first place. The following quotations describe the situation well:

“Before we processed the interim report it was a really messy process. Every time it was done, we improvised and some employees sat at work until midnight. Then we thought that if we just wrote down the steps and their order beforehand and divide them between employees, it would make the process easier. Now employees know that the interim report is done in three days and they know what is expected from them. And now no one has to sit at work past normal working hours.”

“Once a problem was identified through quality variance, the corporate way of working was invented and communicated.”

“The reason we started to process our activities is that as a result of acquisitions, and expansion to China, we felt that we need to create certain shared working

styles for the new people, whether they are from a different geographical area or working in the companies we acquired.”

“We defined what are the recurring and most common processes that are performed globally, all over the organization. We wanted to make the employees’ work easier and felt they needed guidance.”

The need to create shared ways of working through process documentation was evident in the investigated organizations. In fact, all of the interviewees that had documented their business communicating processes mentioned inconsistency in performing processes as one reason for documenting them. The aim seemed to be to create consistency in communication and project a coherent picture of the corporate communication unit to outside the corporate communication function. Therefore, there was a need for ensuring greater consistency in the ways of working as the following excerpts show:

“The aim was to create consistency and get communication employees to work in a more standardized way. And we have succeeded in this. Employees seem to think that process documents have already made their job easier and clearer.”

“The reason we have the process documents is that we had some problems with inconsistency. People performed the same task differently than others, and even in a different way than they did earlier. We wanted to make our job more systematic.”

“The reason we started documenting our processes is that we have so many different divisions and units that all have different ways of working. We wanted to create a unified model that everyone would now know how things work in here and how things get done the best. Before this our problem was that it was too confusing and we never knew where we were.”

A number of interviewees believed that process documents would increase discipline and make communication better manageable. The aim was also to create some structure into communication and also prevent problems in the process beforehand. For example, one interviewee mentioned that the need for processing arose from the need of better manageability, improved management and guidance. Another interviewee explained that the people in corporate communication know very little about what their fellow communication practitioners in other units do. The need for greater discipline and guidance can be seen from the following quotations:

“The point of process models is to insert discipline and introduce shared working models throughout the organization.”

“There was a huge need for clarity, especially in operational communication tasks. Attempts to reduce manual labor and excessive bureaucracy had also been made.”

“The need for new processes arises through practice, we never seem to have the time to think about processes beforehand. Forces of practice dictate us to do something in order to get things done in a more sensible way.”

“The reason why documenting was started was to get structure to everyday work. There had been changes in the personnel. Many of us had been to EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) training and it gave the idea that we could use processes to help us create more structure to the communication function. And since we are a public organization, many other units use processes as well. It’s a way of working in here, and there are even templates for detailed process models.”

Even in organizations that had not documented their core communication processes, it was understood that process documents could create structure. One interviewee explained that the situation was that there were as many ways of working as there were

employees. The most important goal was that they would communicate a unified picture of the organization. The need for reducing ad hoc doing in corporate communication is captured in the quote below:

“The aim is to get from ad hoc doing to a more planned way of working.”

In general, public organizations had the same reasons to document business communication processes as organizations from the private sector. In addition, legislation and the publicity requirements affected the decisions about which processes to document:

“As a public organization we have rules and legislation, especially concerning the line between public information and information that follows non-disclosure policy. Therefore it is crucial to have detailed process documents.”

To conclude, process documents were seen as guidance tools that facilitated the work of both new and existing practitioners working in corporate communication. Process documents were needed to remember what steps were involved in the process and which issues were crucial in order for the process to be performed successfully.

4.2.3 Level of detail of process documents

The level of detail chosen for process documentation varied a great deal in the investigated organizations. All of the investigated organizations had defined at least the action points and people involved in the process in the process document. In the organizations that had defined their processes in more detail, the process document included the following aspects: action points, responsibilities and roles, dead lines, stakeholders, scheduling, and approvals.

For example, one of the interviewees described the organization’s communication strategy process in detail. The process had nine main phases. The first phase defined the

person initiating the strategy planning, and his/her roles and responsibilities. The second phase defined what services corporate communication provides to other business units. The third phase was to look at the trends from outside the organization and take them into consideration. The fourth phase was goal setting and prioritizing. The fifth phase was to involve internal partners into the process and discussion. The sixth phase was to export the goals of the process into action plans for the next three years. The seventh phase was to insert the goals to business units locally. The eighth phase was personal goal setting for the people involved in the process. And finally, the ninth step was the follow-up of the process. The interviewee argued that this process was not defined in great detail, but one can, for example, see the specific points where approvals were needed.

In some organizations, process documents were so detailed that a person who had no experience in that specific process could carry it out by following the process document as can be seen from the following excerpts:

“Some of the process documents are very detailed, for example,” annual report” is impressive. The purpose is that a person who has never performed a task could do so by following the process model. Of course this is not always the case, not with annual report at least.”

“The process document for crisis communication, for example, starts from how the work group is formed and what are the action points in the forming phase, and continues to define the principles, scheduling, core communication and evaluation of the process. I would say that a person who has never done crisis communication before could handle the situation pretty well just by following the process model.”

The level of detail of a process document depended on various factors. The bigger or more important the process, the more detailed the process document was. Also, if a

process was especially complex or included various action points, the documentation was also done in detail, as the quotations below illustrate:

“Process documents are rather detailed, they have to be. The bigger the process, the more detailed the process document has to be.”

“The complexity of the subject determines the level of detail of the process document.”

Process documents were presented as graphics, flow charts, or just written documents. In some organizations process documents were very generic descriptions of a process and all the process models were made based on that same structure. There were also differences in how organizations themselves perceived the level of detail. Some organizations were of the opinion that their process documents were very detailed but in contrast to the process documents in other investigated organizations their process documents were not so thorough after all. Below are some quotations from the interviewees that had not documented their processes in much detail:

“Our process documents are in the form of graphs, they do not have very much text in them. There are pictures and links to other documents, and we feel that textual descriptions are not relevant in process models.”

“The process models are not very detailed; they are presented as rather generic flowcharts. They define in which order the subtasks are performed, who are internal stakeholders, who has the approval right. However, they do not define schedules or when a certain subtask should be finished before moving on to the next one. Still, the idea is that a person who has never performed the task could do so by following the flowchart. Still, there has to be room left for own thinking and judgment”.

“The operative processes are documented in detail as sized A4 process models. The documents describe the tasks that are involved in the process, roles and responsibilities, scheduling, and interfaces to other processes.”

“Scheduling and responsibilities have been written down, and what needs to be communicated and when, who is in charge of that and who will approve this.”

Even though processes were documented in detail, they were not necessarily followed in detail. One interviewee pointed out that process documents were not always followed since in communication a lot was done ad hoc and thus surprising situations emerged. In that sense, process documents described the ideal situation. Also, it was not always easy to get communication practitioners to follow the process documents. Below, a couple of examples demonstrate this discrepancy:

“Process documents describe roles and responsibilities and scheduling. Even though the schedules are defined, we usually cannot follow the timetables. Once something comes to the public knowledge that is the time when we have to communicate it regardless of the scheduling in the process document. It is our principle that once a decision is made it will be communicated.”

“It is of course a challenge to make everyone understand that things are done according to the process model. There are always exceptions and new situations that do not fit the process model, so we cannot force anyone to work in a certain way.”

“Even though we have processes, we still need to be ready to react quickly and logically, even if it sometimes means overruling the process. For example when competition changes we might have to reschedule the whole press release.”

To sum up, the level of detail chosen for process documentation varied a great deal in the investigated organizations. In the organizations that had defined their processes in detail, the process document included the following aspects: action points, responsibilities and roles, dead lines, stakeholders, scheduling, and approvals. In some organizations, process documents were so detailed that a person who had no experience in that specific process could carry it out by following the process document. But even though processes were documented in detail, they were not necessarily followed in detail due to the ad hoc nature of communication. Also, it was not always easy to get communication practitioners to follow the process documents. Therefore process documents described an ideal situation.

To conclude the findings of Section 4.2 contributing to answering research question two about the documentation of business communication processes, all of the investigated organizations had documented business communication processes. No difference between the private and public sector interviewees were identified as to the ways that processes were documented. The organizations had many different methods to document their communication processes. Some organizations hired consultants from outside the organization to document the core communication processes, while other organizations relied on their own employees to document the processes. In general, most of the organizations assigned a team from inside the organization to document core communication processes.

The process documentation for business communication processes started only recently in the investigated organizations. Only one organization claimed they had had process documents for communication processes since 1995, while the other 13 organizations had documented their communication processes in the 21st century. In most of the organizations process documents had been in use from three to five years. The process documents were available to all of the communication employees. Most of the interviewees' organizations had stored process documents in their Intranet, and some of the interviewees had stored the communication processes on a shared hard drive.

Most of the interviewees began to process their communication activities to answer practical needs and to overcome existing problems in the process. Process documents were seen as guidance tools that facilitated the work of both new and existing employees in corporate communication, especially in different geographic regions. In addition the need to create structure into communication and prevent problems in the process beforehand was considered important. In fact, all of the interviewees that had documented their business communication processes mentioned inconsistency in performing processes as one of the main reasons for documenting them. The aim seemed to be to create consistency in communication and project a coherent picture of the corporate communication unit to the stakeholders. This was understood even in the organizations that had not documented their core communication processes.

Process documents were presented as graphics, flow charts, or just written documents. When it comes to the level of detail of the documented communication processes, in some organizations process documents were so detailed that a person who had no experience of that process could carry it out by just following the process document. And in some organizations process documents were very generic descriptions of a process and all the process models were made based on that same structure. The bigger or more important the process, the more detailed the process document was. Also, if a process was especially complex or included various action points, the documentation was done in detail.

4.3 Benefits of process thinking in communication

This section provides an answer to the third research question by listing the benefits that the organizations involved in process thinking have gained. The aim is to see how corporate communication can benefit from defining and documenting the organization's core communication processes. The online survey is not used in answering research question three, as there were no questions asked concerning the benefits of processes in corporate communication. Table 5 below lists all the benefits that the interviewees had experienced as a result of processing and documenting their communication activities.

Table 5. Benefits of process thinking in corporate communication according to the 14 interviewees

	Benefit of process thinking	No. of interviewees
1	Facilitates working and division of work	10
2	Facilitates training of new employees	9
3	Increases efficiency	7
4	Improves quality	5
5	Improves risk management	4
6	Increases consistency	4
7	Saves time	4
8	Improves cost efficiency	4
9	Facilitates knowledge transfer	4
10	Improves routine management	3
11	Provides long-term vision	3
12	Facilitates auditing and measuring of communication	3
13	Clarifies interfaces to other functions	2
14	Increases transparency	1
15	Helps to engage management	1

As can be seen from Table 5, all of the interviewees had noticed some benefits from utilizing process thinking in corporate communication. The benefits mentioned during the interviews are now reported on in more detail. In what follows, the benefits of process thinking in corporate communication according to the 14 interviewees are addressed. To clarify the findings, I have combined some of the benefits listed in Table 5 under the bolded headings and given the equivalent number(s) of the benefit(s) in parenthesis after each bolded heading below.

Employee satisfaction (1, 2)

The benefit of process thinking in communication that was most often mentioned by the 14 interviewees was that process thinking facilitates training of the new employees and also guides the existing employees in their everyday work. This was seen to increase overall job satisfaction. As there are documented processes, employees know what is expected from them and what is their role in the process. In other words, processing clarifies the roles and responsibilities and helps all the parties of the process to see the “big picture” as the quotations below demonstrate:

“Even though it takes a lot of work to document a process, it has its benefits. Once these operational processes are documented, it clarifies the process to everyone involved. Also, as there are changes in the staff, the process model can be used to guide new employees.”

“Training of new employees is facilitated and they learn our way of doing ”

“To ensure that the people who do communication besides their own work can manage and get the tasks done faster. It seems like reinventing the wheel if every time a press release is written, it has to be started from a scratch.”

“This way we can act as substitutes for each other if needed and this brings transparency into our work. And for a new employee, process documents teach the way of doing things in this organization. They help new comers to see the big picture and understand how different tasks are related to each other.”

Process documents serve as guidelines and guide employees through their work. This is especially important when the organization has employees in other geographic areas that might be working in a culture very different to the one in the organization’s home country, and therefore need defined, shared practices. To quote:

”Process models serve as a tool of guidance for employees all over the world. When processes are defined and the necessary steps are documented, the same task is done in a consistent manner in every part of the world. ”

”Process documents serve as guidelines or instructions, even though one cannot become a communication guru just by reading them.”

Increased efficiency (3)

By overall efficiency, the interviewees meant faster, more effective and productive ways of working. Even though most of the reported benefits of process thinking can be considered to contribute to increased operational efficiency, many interviewees listed increased efficiency separately as one of the benefits of process thinking. This can be seen from following quotations:

”I guess that documenting processes aims to save time, improve quality of communication and ensure continuity of operations. Processing can also facilitate training of the new employees, but new recruits do not happen often in our organization.”

”These process documents and other management tools are only beneficial when they help you to perform more efficiently, fast and productively.”

Consistency and quality (4, 6)

Many interviewees reported that as a result of thinking in terms of processes, the overall quality of communication has increased. Consistency in communication was seen as improved quality of final outcomes. Processing ensures that tasks are performed in the same way every time, and consequently the quality improves. Consistency in operations was seen as a crucial factor of quality, as the interviewees’ perceptions suggest:

”I believe that when you have to think beforehand, the quality of the output is better and work is faster than if you would act first.”

“Process documents are tools to consistent quality, to ensure that we all perform the same task in the same manner.”

”Processing teaches the organization to react in the same way to the same situation every time.”

Risk management (5)

When processes are documented it reduces uncertainty and thus facilitates risk management. It does not even matter if the processes are not documented in great detail; it is enough that the action points and responsibilities are listed to ensure that nothing is forgotten in the process. One interviewee mentioned that if someone is on a sick leave, someone else could act as a substitute by following process models. This ensured operational efficiency even in an exceptional situation. In addition, risk and failure reduction is achieved through better understanding of possible risks as processes are planned so well beforehand. This way communication process documents serve as a back-up system and people in charge of the process can rest assured that risks are minimized as long as the process document is followed in practice:

”As long as the process documents entail description of schedule and who is involved in the process. Then I don’t have to wake up in the middle of the night worrying if I have forgotten something. In a way process documents serve as check lists.”

”If put in one word, processes act as a back-up system and ensure that processes are not dependent of one person.”

Cost efficiency and time saving (7, 8)

Increased cost efficiency was one of the benefits of process thinking in the investigated organizations. The cost reduction comes from the increased efficiency that is gained by listing action points and getting rid of unnecessary steps in the process. When process is documented in detail, it facilitates resourcing and thus the process does not involve too

many people. Once futile steps and resources can be eliminated, cycle times are shorter, which saves time. Thus defining and documenting processes saves time, and as the process is less time consuming it is also more cost efficient. Also scheduling is clearer as projected schedules and timeframes are clearly marked in the process document, as can be seen from these quotations:

”One of the benefits is reduction in costs, since processing aims at shorter cycle times and eliminating the futile steps in the process.”

”Process documents save time. As much as it sounds a cliché, the 80/20 rule applies here. In order to react to the 20 percent of acute situations, you need to have the 80 per cent defined, otherwise communication will be in chaos.”

Knowledge transfer (9)

One benefit that is very closely linked to training of the new employees was improved knowledge transfer. When processes are defined and written as process documents, the tacit knowledge of employees is captured and can be shared with others. In some organizations knowledge is transferred only verbally, which increases the risk of inconsistency. Process documents were seen as insurance for the company against high employee turnover and loss of tacit knowledge. The danger of not having process documents was recognized as a threat to knowledge management. Also, the risk of conflicts that can arise if shared ways of working are not documented were mentioned, for example, as follows:

”In a unit that has high employee turnover, there is a lot of tacit knowledge and many issues are dealt with by speaking with no documented knowledge. When people have very established job descriptions and they know exactly how an activity is performed, things go along smoothly until one person leaves the team. The new employees might bring some new ways of working and this creates internal conflicts and decreases efficiency. But if the company had defined and documented their processes it would be a lot easier to integrate new employees to

the existing team. Of course the new employee still has to learn the organizational culture, but the risk for conflicts decreases.”

”If there are changes in personnel and their know-how is not documented, its is really dangerous for the organization.”

Managing routines (10)

Managing routines and daily operational tasks was facilitated as a result of documenting business communication processes. In a way, process documents serve as checklists where one can make sure that everything is in order and the process goes on as planned. When the routine communication activities are defined and documented, it facilitates managing routines as everyone knows what is expected from them and when. This, in turn, leaves more time for other tasks than the operational ones, for example strategic planning and improvement of the communication unit. To quote:

”Managing everyday operational activities is also very valuable. Processing facilitates routine management.”

”When there are over 200 different role combinations, over ten companies and we operate in six different industries, the system does not work if the routines and roles are not defined.”

Long term vision (11)

Communication processes were reported to improve long-term vision. One interviewee pointed out that when a process is documented, it forces you to really think the process through in order to find out alternative ways to make the process more efficient. This way the process is envisioned fully, from the beginning to the end, and it becomes clear what resources the process requires in the long run. Furthermore, one interviewee pointed out that if everything were always done ad hoc, it would mean a major mess. Therefore, careful planning and long-term vision is needed in documenting processes as can be seen from the excerpts below:

”Processing gives us air to breathe and makes us realize the foci and relativity of things. It helps us keep things in perspective. There are some really small things, but it is good to know if they will evolve into something bigger.”

”The fact that processes have been gone through together and documented at some level is valuable itself. Process documents are not just daily operational working tools, they are tools for strategic thinking and hopefully management tools at some point.”

”I think that processing is allowed to take time; one of the values comes from the extensive discussion of each process. It does not matter if the process document was unfinished for years, because then you would have to return to it regularly and improve the process. It is all about constant improvement. “

Communication auditing and measuring (12)

It was also reported that the use of processing in communication could facilitate auditing and measuring communication. Having communication activities written down in a form of a process model presents communication as a planned, strategic operation that does not just put out fires but also prevents them. For example, one interviewee sees processes as one tool of communication and also as a tool for auditing communication. Measuring is facilitated when a communication process is streamlined and broken down into smaller, more measurable pieces. The following quotations demonstrate the situation very well:

”If you do not connect processing to auditing or measuring, and just do it mechanically, then you might not realize the full potent of process thinking.”

”Processes can be used as a base for Balanced Scorecard, they facilitate measuring and auditing.”

”I believe that processing can give communication more credibility and can portrait it as a more serious business function. Traditionally communication is seen as creative, ad hoc – natured function, but processing can change this. Measuring communication results could also be facilitated through processing. This is turn facilitates goal setting which has been difficult in communication unit due to its reactive nature.”

Other benefits (13-15)

In addition to the benefits listed above, communication processes and process documents were reported to help to identify interfaces with other functions, increase transparency and help to engage management to communication. When the interfaces to other processes or functions are written down, it also facilitates working with internal and external stakeholders. Also, mapping communication activities into processes increases transparency and shows communication as a strategic action directed to a predefined aim. Once the core processes have been defined and documented into concrete terms, engaging managers to communication will also be easier.

Even the organizations that had documented only one or two communication processes recognized the benefits of process thinking. For example, in one interviewee’s organization there were only two people working in corporate communication and they understood that in order to minimize risks and ensure continuity of their functions, it would be crucial to document communication processes as soon as possible. To quote:

“If a car should hit me and the communication manager at the same time, the company would loose all communication know-how and knowledge since our processes are not documented. Right now the communication organization is really vulnerable. Since we do not have the need to share knowledge with a wider circle, there is a danger that tacit knowledge is not shared; instead it just stays inside our heads.”

Even though the present study was not interested in risks involved in the use of processes and their documentation in corporate communication, I want to address some of the risks that the interviewees brought up when discussing benefits of process thinking. It was understood that processes and process documents were not omnipotent, and thus cannot answer all the problems. Furthermore, as people typically working in corporate communication are experts, the interviewees thought that they needed to have the chance to use their own expertise and critical thinking and thus processes could not be blindly followed. As most of the communication activities were traditionally done ad hoc due to the hectic nature of communication activities, it was pointed out that especially the timeframes in process documents do not always hold. Therefore, process documents in the interviewees' opinion, describes ideal situations that might never come true in reality. The interviewee's cautious attitudes towards overreliance on process documents can be seen in the following quotations:

"Processing alone does not ensure consistent quality. Processes teach certain kind of thinking, more systematic approach to communication and involving stakeholders. These things are obvious for an experienced communication person, but for a new comer process models show the big picture and the effect of one process on other processes."

" Processes can enslave people, and make communication people follow process models sheepishly without using their own judgment. Of course the other extreme is that everything is done ad hoc, which can also be nerve wrecking when no one knows how the process should really be performed."

"We operate in an expert organization, where individuals want to do things as they see best. So even though a process is documented, there is always the challenge of getting people to follow it."

“Communication especially is an area where you need to understand situations and culture, and therefore you need to have extra space in communication processes.”

“We have a timeframe for each process, but these timelines do not hold in reality since new ad hoc situations always arise. In a way process models represent the ideal way in which a process should be performed.”

To conclude the findings of Section 4.3 contributing to answering research question three on benefits of process thinking, there are a number of benefits of defining and documenting processes in corporate communication. The most important ones are increased employee satisfaction, increased efficiency, improved quality, better risk and routine management, improved cost- and time-efficiency, and facilitated knowledge transfer. In addition, process thinking is reported to facilitate auditing and measuring of communication, which in turn increases the transparency of communication and helps to engage management. Furthermore, process thinking has forced organizations to engage in long term planning, which helped to integrate strategy to everyday operational communication.

In addition to the reported benefits of process thinking, there are also risks involved in the use of processes and their documentation in corporate communication. The interviewees brought up the balance between having processes for every communication activity and having none. Also, as communication is seen as a creative function, room needs to be left for considering the situation at hand and thus process models cannot be followed blindly. For this reason it can be concluded that in the investigated organizations process documents described an ideal situation that might never come true in reality.

4.4 Improving business communication processes

This section answers the fourth research question by reporting on how business communication processes have been developed in the investigated organizations. The aim is to find out how actively processes have been improved in corporate communication, and why they have not been developed once they have been documented.

Even though most of the investigated organizations had defined and documented their core communication processes, they were not improved much after the processing of the activity was finished. Typically, the process models were not changed because they needed improvement but because they contained outdated data. Therefore, some mandatory changes were made to the process as a result of changes, for example, in the business environment, technology, or key personnel. Consequently, when there were some changes in the process, the process document was changed accordingly. The following quotations show that interviewees understood that processes evolve in practice and thus process documents need to be adjusted as well:

"We do not have a yearly plan for the processes, but they are developed regularly. For the very least, we have to check if some of the data is outdated, if some links are old or if there is a newer version of the process."

"The processes are developed as a need arises, not in a proactive way by going through the processes once a year. The person who is responsible for the process has to update the model if there are changes in the process."

"We are committed to our processes and we develop them together. Once some function is changed, also the process document is changed."

Some interviewees were of opinion that it was not enough that the processes were documented if they were not followed up regularly. Processes and the goals set for them

should then be assessed also after process documentation had been done. Once an organization had identified and documented their core communication processes, they also had to develop them in the future. The aim would then be to keep the process of processing alive, not to stop it once the process was standardized and documented, as can be seen from the excerpts below:

“In my opinion, the development of processes is forgotten in those organizations that have not understood the meaning of process documents. And also how processing is used as a tool for developing the function, because once you document the process the whole function already evolves.”

“Last year we went through all of our business processes to figure out if something can be done more efficiently. Once processes have been documented they cannot be left alone.”

“Once a process is documented it requires constant updating and maintenance since the environment and strategy is constantly changing. I would estimate that one year after being documented, the process is no longer the same. Up until now we have only made slight, micro level adjustments to our processes since they have not yet been documented very extensively.”

In some organizations processes were developed and improved basically every time they were carried out. Processes were then not developed systematically but through practice. For example, one interviewee said that recurring processes evolved constantly through practice and gave the annual report as an example of a process that was fine-tuned every year based on the critique it received on previous year. Here are some quotations that well reflect the interviewees' perceptions:

“Processes are not developed systematically on a regular basis, and I bet that the situation is the same in 90 per cent of Finnish organizations.”

“Some small changes have been made to processes. We have many complex pieces in processes, and I would like to clarify and simplify them.”

There were a few organizations that went through their processes systematically at a predefined point in time to see if there was room for improvement. In these organizations the importance of continuous improvement was understood and put into practice. The following quotations illustrate the situation in these organizations:

“During documentation some processes changed a lot because we saw the opportunity to make some real improvements. People who had been performing the processes shared their experiences on the difficulties and challenges they had faced and we aimed to overcome them by reorganizing the process.”

“At least I feel that every process that has been documented at least to some extent should be regularly taken in for closer examination to see if it makes sense and if every relevant aspect is taken into account.”

“Once a process is documented it still requires constant fine-tuning as it is taken into use. So change is constant through practice and evaluation.”

“We have evaluated some processes on a regular basis to see if something should be changed or if there are unnecessary steps.”

Although some organizations have taken a more active part in process improvement, among the investigated organizations there were more of those that chose to stay passive. Some interviewees believed that the documentation of processes was an end itself and not a tool for improving processes. Consequently, when a process was defined, documented and put into practice, they considered their work done. Furthermore, one interviewee stated that they had not developed their core communication processes in any way after they had been documented. To quote:

“We used to have a person in charge of communications development and she also took care of processes. After she left in 2006, no new processes have been defined and old processes have not been updated.”

“Processes have not been improved after they were documented. We have never looked back at them.”

Also, sometimes a process itself was changed but the process document was not updated. For example, one interviewee explained that processes were improved but process documents were not. The interviewee aimed to update the process document in case of changes in the process, but as the processes were not documented in detail, it was difficult. Sometimes process documents were not updated once the process changed simply because no one remembered to do so. In organizations where process models were not in active use, it could be difficult to remember how the process was actually defined in them, as the following quotations suggest:

“It is typical that once we have documented a process we realize that there has to be a way to do this more efficiently. And when we start performing the process in the more efficient way, we forget to update the process document.”

“Processes have not changed after they were documented. When there are changes in the technology, we change the way we work but the process document is not updated. There have been some minor changes, but the main principles stay the same.”

There seemed to be six main reasons for the lack of process improvement. First, once a process was documented, it was seen as a finished product, not as something that is constantly evolving. Second, lack of time and resources contributed to the lack of process improvement. Third, once a process is documented, it would always stay the same because the documentation reflects how the process is carried out in reality. Therefore, the way the process is carried out should stay the same without much

variation, and it need not be improved. Fourth, the current economic situation created challenges. The fifth reason was that it was believed that the processes were sufficient as they were. Some of the reasons for not improving communication processes can be seen in the following quotations:

”It is a challenge to develop processes especially in the current economic situation. We have to think things through even more carefully than usually. It also helps us to resource more effectively. As ways of working evolve, the processes change as well.”

”If a process has not been touched for years, there are two options for that: either it has been done so well the first time that it doesn’t have to be changed, or then it is a useless function that needed no meddling in the first place.”

”The processes are updated but not regularly. The ones that were documented in 2004 were updated in 2006. The processes we have are sufficient and there is no need to improve them now. The processes are not improved due to the lack of time and there have been many more acute matters to discuss on the board.”

And finally, the sixth reason for the lack of process improvement was that since processes are a rather new concept to communication function and they have not been in use for long, developing them further was not yet considered necessary. The novelty of process thinking in corporate communication seems to be the main reason for the lack of interest in process improvement. The following quotations reflect the situation:

”Because the processes have been in use only for a year now we have not developed or improved them. At this point the process documents work well, so there is no need to improve them before next year. But of course if there are changes in job descriptions or responsibilities, the processes will be changed accordingly.”

“Processes do evolve in use, but not very much. Processes are not developed regularly, they are rather slow, but then again one year is a short time in our business.”

“Developing processes and using them as development tools is probably not so common in Finland, within communication, with the exception of a few top corporations.”

To conclude the findings of Section 4.4 contributing to answering research question four about improving processes, process improvement in corporate communication is not a widely spread practice. There seemed to be many reasons for the lack of process improvement. For example, one reason was that once a process was documented, it was seen as a finished product, not as something that would be constantly evolving. Other reasons that were reported to affect process improvement efforts were lack of time and resources. Also, once a process is documented, it was believed to always stay the same because the documentation reflects how the process is carried out in reality. However, the main reason for not improving processes seems to be that processes and process documents have not been in use for long, and thus they are not yet outdated and there really is no room for improvement yet. Nevertheless, most of the interviewees recognized the need to develop and assess processes in the future.

As there were some organizations that aimed to develop their core communication processes also after the documentation phase, some organizations took no effort to improve their processes. The most used tactic to deal with processes improvement was to be passive and only change processes as something in the process itself or in its environment changed. Often, the process models were changed, not because they needed improvement, but because they contained outdated data. Also, sometimes a process itself was changed but the process document was not updated accordingly.

5 DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the main findings of the study. While Chapter 4 presented the findings of the study and thus answered the four sub research questions of the study, this chapter focuses on answering the main research question: How can process thinking be utilized in corporate communication? The main research question can only be answered by going through the findings by using the theoretical framework presented in Section 2.5. Considering that research on business communication processes was very limited, it was challenging to find literature on processes in corporate communication. In what follows, the findings of the study will be discussed in relation to the reviewed literature presented in Chapter 2.

It is worthwhile to notice that all of the interviewees of this study understood the term process and knew what it meant in corporate communication already when they agreed to do the interview. This suggests that even though business communication processes have not been researched widely, they do exist in organizations. The findings of the present study showed that all of the investigated organizations had defined and documented some of their communication processes. The processes that were recurring, frequent and always performed in the same manner were the ones that were documented. This shows that corporate communication function has many recurring activities, and thus BPM and process standardization could be used to make communication in organizations more effective.

Even though organizations had defined their core communication processes, these processes might not have been documented in any way. Interestingly, the same processes that were documented in most of the investigated organizations were also those that were most often left undocumented in other organizations. This can also be due to the fact that these were the main communication activities performed by corporate communication. It is possible that the interviewees did not mention other communication activities than the ones that were most often performed within corporate communication. It can be difficult to name processes that one does not have. Therefore,

the processes identified in this study as the ones that have not been documented in corporate communication do not present the absolute truth and cannot be generalized.

It seems that there are two extremes in processing business communication activities. According to the interviews, some organizations had process documents and models for all the communication processes they performed, and some had not documented any of their processes. Two of the interviewees argued that they did not think they had any communication processes that had not been documented. And there were also two interviewees who had not utilized process thinking at all in the organization's communication. In addition, there were two organizations that did not agree to be interviewed because they do not have any documented business communication processes. Could be that if they had agreed to the interview, they might have realized that they do have processes, but have not just named them accordingly. As business communication processes are a rather new concept, there is a lot of confusion on process related terms and what processes are in reality.

Recognizing communication processes is not easy, as it seemed that not everyone in charge of corporate communication understood what communication processes were. One interviewee, for example, argued in the beginning of the interview, that they had not utilized processing at all in their communication function. But as the interview progressed, it became clear that they indeed had many processes but had not realized it. Just as the previous literature on process identification suggests, sometimes processes were seen as some abstract thing that has nothing to do with day-to-day communication activities. Previous literature written on BPM pointed out that there are three main factors that contribute to the difficulty of recognizing and defining core business processes that many of the interviewee also mentioned. First, there are several different definitions for the noun 'process' (Nickols, 1998; Ungan, 2006; Melão & Pidd, 2000). Second, as Nickols (1998, p.16) argues most organizations do not recognize or define their core processes. Third, Nickols (1998, p.14) argues that since processing is still a rather new practice identifying and mapping business processes can be difficult.

Furthermore, the interviewees had different perceptions of what a business communication process is. There seemed to be three approaches to documenting communication processes in organizations. First, in some organizations the whole communication process was documented in detail, including all the activities that were then seen as sub processes of the communication process. Second, in other organizations the communication process as a whole was documented, but the communication activities inside this big process were not. Third, in most of the surveyed organizations only the operational communication activities were documented, and the framework within which they were performed was not defined. This phenomenon also emerged in the literature review. Nickols (1998) discusses processes as entire functions, not just as operational tasks people perform inside that function. Danesh and Kock (2005, p. 726) argue that since people often have different ideas of how a process works they can understand it differently.

Implementing Business Process Management is not without problems. The findings of this study show that there are many reasons why process thinking is not used effectively in corporate communication. Reasons for not documenting defined communication processes were that processes had worked fine without the process documents, some processes were performed differently each time, and there was no need to document every process. There was an underlying attitude that communication practitioners do not need processes because they can do their work fine without them. Many interviewees also mentioned the lack of time and other resources as one reason for not documenting their processes. Often operational tasks required so much time that there was none left for thinking in terms of processes. What was not understood is that if a process would be well planned or even standardized, it would require less time and resources to perform. So, when corporate communication does not engage in BPM, they are not saving time, at least in the long run. As Lee and Dale (1998, p.224) argue, the problem with process improvement is that often employees do not have the time to simplify and improve processes.

Process improvement is not a widely spread practice in corporate communication. There seemed to be many reasons for the lack of process improvement. For example, one reason was that once a process was documented, it was seen as a finished product, not as something that would be constantly evolving. Other reasons that were reported to affect process improvement efforts were lack of time and resources. The main reason for not improving processes seems to be that processes and process documents have not been in use for long, and thus they are not yet outdated and there really is no room for improvement yet. Still, corporate communication would benefit more from BPM if it were seen as a continuous effort. Researchers argue that once the process is in use, the model needs to be revised from time to time (Lee & Dale, 1998; Ungan, 2006; Harrington, 1995). Furthermore, Yu-Yuan Hung (2006, p.23) suggests that Business Process Management (BPM) should be seen as a continuous approach and its performance should be assessed by measuring. However, this was not often the case in the investigated organizations in corporate communication where process improvement was not understood as an ongoing process.

In reality it can be difficult to control the work of experts, and this is important to notice when interpreting the findings of the present study. In fact, the interviewees believed that it is impossible to force communication practitioners to work in a certain way. Communication is regarded as a business function where there needs to be room for creativity and situational communication know-how. Findings also show that as communication is seen as a creative function, the interviewees were cautious towards overreliance of process documents. Furthermore, as people working in corporate communication are experts, the interviewees thought that they needed to have the chance to use their expertise and critical thinking and thus processes could not be followed blindly. This is in conjunction with earlier studies made on processes. For example, Laamanen and Tinnilä (2009, p. 65) believe that when discussing processes performed by experts, the process describes only the key factors and tasks in the process, and the process is customized every time it is performed.

The findings of the study show that even though a communication activity would be processed and documented, the process model is not necessarily followed as such. As most of the communication activities are traditionally done ad hoc due to the hectic nature of communication, it was considered that communication processes cannot be strictly followed, and especially the timeframes do not always hold. It was pointed out that process documents could not always be followed since in communication a lot was done ad hoc and thus surprising situations emerged. Therefore, process documents in the interviewees' opinion, describe ideal situations that might never come true in reality. As Harrington (1995, p. 343) argued most organizations have not documented their processes, and when they have, these process documents are not followed. This was also the case in the investigated organizations.

Process thinking can be utilized in corporate communication. The findings to research question three were in accordance with the outcomes of process thinking in other business disciplines discussed in the literature review. One objective of the study was to find out what are the benefits of defining and documenting core communication processes in corporate communication. There were many reported outcomes of process thinking according to the literature review of this study. Benefits of documenting processes include, for example, improvement, reengineering, facilitated collaboration, increased efficiency, greater consistency of operations, shorter cycle-times, and improved cost efficiency (Ungan, 2006b; Laamanen & Tinnilä, 2009; Harrinton, 1995). According to Ungan (2006a, p.136), most of the benefits of process standardization come from improved consistency of operations. Consistency makes process control easier and increases the efficiency of operations. Since the main benefit seems to be consistency in operations, the point of interest was if process thinking would lead to consistency in communication.

The findings of the study show that there are a number of benefits of defining and documenting processes in corporate communication, and most of these benefits are the same as had been identified in other business disciplines. The most important benefits of process thinking in corporate communication are increased employee satisfaction,

increased efficiency, improved quality, better risk and routine management, improved cost- and time-efficiency, and facilitated knowledge transfer. In addition, process thinking is reported to facilitate auditing and measuring of communication, which in turn increases the transparency of communication and helps to engage management. Furthermore, process thinking has forced organizations to engage in long term planning, which helped to integrate strategy to everyday operational communication. Cornelissen (2008, p.66) is the only researcher who mentions processes in business communication in the reviewed literature. He argues that process models will create shared understanding within communication function, reduce cycle times and the dependency of certain individuals. The interviewees also mentioned the benefits that Cornelissen (2008) mentioned, but also listed many others.

However, many of the interviewees were concerned that process thinking does not suit communication practitioners because creativity is needed in communication. However, having processes for communication activities does not mean that creativity is not needed. The process models can never be so detailed that one's own critical thinking is not needed. Cornelissen (2008, p.66) argues that in many companies it is feared that process documentation will diminish creativity needed in corporate communication. This notion is in conjunction with the findings of this study. . In the organizations that had defined their processes in more detail, the process document included the following aspects: action points, responsibilities and roles, dead lines, stakeholders, scheduling, and approvals. As none of the interviewees that had process models had included detailed descriptions of content, creativity seemed not to be at risk.

As there were organizations both from the private and public sector, one point of interest was if there were differences in the way these organizations act in regards to communication processes. In general, there were no differences between private and public sector organizations in terms of process thinking. The only difference that were found were that the organizations from the public sector mentioned two processes that they had documented that none of the private sector organizations brought up. The first one was a process document for decision-making and the other one was a process

document for summaries of speeches. Decision-making involves many stakeholders and often the law requires that decision-making is communicated before and after the decision is made. The interviewees explained that in public organizations there are many speeches held by key people that have to be summarized and published. Therefore, public organizations had identified the need for documenting processes for these two activities that organizations in the private sector had not.

To conclude, business communication could benefit substantially from process thinking just as other business disciplines have. Previous research on business processes supports the use of process thinking in business communication. Effective communication is critical to organizations' success, and process thinking improves overall efficiency and quality of communication processes. Berry (2006, p.351) argues the lack of time reduces the time spent on analyzing communication strategy and diminishes overall communication quality. Therefore, this study argues that it is crucial for the overall efficiency of corporate communication function to create communication processes that facilitate understanding of the value and perspectives of other stakeholders.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter concludes the thesis and sums up the research aims, methods and findings. The chapter is divided into four sections. Section 6.1 summarizes the purpose, methods and theory of the research. Section 6.2 summarizes the findings of the study. Section 6.3 presents the practical implications of the study. Section 6.4 presents the limitations of the study. Finally, section 6.5 suggests approaches for further research.

6.1 Research summary

The purpose of this thesis was to identify the core communication processes and investigate their use in corporate communication. This study claimed that since communication is an integral part of business, it too should be examined from the processing point of view. However, in spite of the seemingly expanding use of processes in business communication, there has been very limited research on their use in corporate communication. Since business communication has not traditionally been a very process-oriented discipline, also the research into business communication processes is still in its infancy. It is important to note that although this study uses the term business communication, it actually refers to corporate communication. The definitions for business and corporate communication are overlapping, and it is not always simple to identify the difference between the two disciplines. Louhiala-Salminen (2009, p.312) suggests that business communication actually acts as an umbrella that has the other three sub-disciplines of management communication, organizational communication and corporate communication under it, and this was the view followed in this thesis.

The study focused on researching how international business communication as a discipline could benefit from process thinking and utilize processes and their documentation in ensuring consistent quality and greater efficiency. The main research question was: How can process thinking be utilized in corporate communication? There were also four sub-questions:

1. What are the main communication processes?
2. How have the processes been documented?
3. What are the benefits of defining processes and documenting them?
4. How are communication processes developed and improved?

As previous research into the use of processes and process models in corporate communication was limited, a lot of the previous research reviewed in Chapter 2 was gathered from other business disciplines than business communication. The aim of the literature review was to justify the objective of the whole study: to investigate how business communication processes are used in corporate communication. The first section introduced Business Process Management (BPM) and discussed how business processes can be managed in practice. Harrington's (1995) model for BPM was presented in this section. The second section introduced process models and documentation along with how to choose the right processes and the level of detail for documentation. Ungan's (2006) framework for process standardization was introduced in this sub-section as a means of documenting business processes. The third section then outlined the reported outcomes of process thinking. The fourth section integrated business communication to business process management by identifying the main corporate communication activities and presenting an authentic example of a process model used in corporate communication of an investigated internally operating corporation. The activities performed within corporate communication were considered as the communication processes in corporate communication.

To recap the theoretical framework of the study presented in Section 2.5: the framework was built combining Harrington's (1995) model of managing business processes and Ungan's (2006a) framework for standardization of business processes. Corporate communication and the activities it performs according to Section 2.4 were then integrated to these models. As stated before in Section 2.4, the activities performed within corporate communication are considered as the communication processes in corporate communication. Therefore, the main communication activities performed within the corporate communication function relate to the following areas of

communication: image and identity, crisis communication, financial communication, media communication, corporate advertising, public affairs and PR, internal communication and issues management (see Argenti, 1996; Cornelissen, 2008). The aim was to collect data and see which are the activities within these areas of corporate communication that are defined and documented.

The reason why these two models from Harrington (1995) and Urgan (2006a) were chosen as the basis for theoretical framework in this study is discussed now. Process standardization is argued to minimize uncertainty and variations in service levels. Standardization of communication processes is needed because if processes are not standardized, the same tasks can lead to different outcomes regarding who is performing the task. Therefore, this study suggests that the various activities that corporate communication function performs should be standardized according to Urgan's (2006a) framework. Also, the five steps that Harrington (1995) proposes for managing business processes effectively could also be applied to managing business communication processes in corporate communication. This study assumed in that standardization of business communication processes would lead to more effective communication and business communication could benefit from process thinking as a number of other business disciplines have done for decades.

The study was qualitative. Empirical data was attained through two qualitative data collection methods: semi-structured interviews and an online survey with open-ended questions only. The main data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in 14 Finnish companies and public organizations. Each investigated organization had a separate communication function, and the person in charge of it was the interviewee. An online survey conducted previously for a communication consultancy about communication function's resourcing and business communication processes was used as background data. A link to the survey was sent to 300 people in charge of communications in Finnish companies and public organizations, and 82 of them responded.

6.2 Main Findings

As a result of the 14 interviews and the online survey, the main findings are presented briefly here, and in more detail in Chapter 4. To answer the first research question, the main business communication processes in organizations were divided into those that are documented and those that are not. All of the interviewees agreed that processes did exist in corporate communication. Interestingly, in the interviews and online survey the same processes were mentioned as those that had been documented in some organizations, and in others as those that had not been documented. Therefore, the main communication processes in organizations were: press and other releases, publications, CSR reporting, annual report, interim report, content providing for Internet and Intranet, press conferences, crisis communication, events and exhibitions, brochures, use of pictures, communication plan, summaries of speeches, project communication, news letters and campaigns.

To answer the second research question on the ways processes were documented, all of the investigated organizations had documented business communication processes, but had many different ways to document them. Some organizations hired consultants from outside the organization to document the core communication processes, while others relied on their own employees to document them. In general, most of the organizations assigned a team from inside the organization to document core communication processes. Process models were presented in the form of graphics, flow charts, or written documents. When it comes to the level of detail of the documented communication processes, the bigger or more important the process, the more detailed the process document was. Also, if a process was especially complex or included various action points, the documentation was done in detail.

Process thinking in corporate communication is a rather new practice, as the process documentation for business communication processes started in the 21st century in the majority of the investigated organizations. The reason communication activities were processed in the first place was to respond to practical needs and to overcome existing problems in the process. Process documents were seen as guidance tools that facilitated

the work of both new and existing employees working in corporate communication, especially in different geographic regions. In addition the need to create structure into communication and prevent problems in the process beforehand was mentioned. The main reason for documenting business communication processes was inconsistency in performing communication activities. The aim seemed to be to create consistency in communication and project a coherent image of the corporate communication unit to stakeholders of the communication organization. This was understood even in the organizations that had not documented their core communication processes.

The third research question was answered by discussing the benefits that process thinking had brought to investigated organizations. The main benefits of process thinking were increased employee satisfaction, increased efficiency, improved quality, better risk and routine management, improved cost and time-efficiency, and facilitated knowledge transfer. In addition, process thinking was reported to facilitate auditing and measuring of communication, which in turn increased the transparency of communication and helped to engage management. Furthermore, process thinking had forced organizations to engage in long term planning, which helped to integrate strategy to everyday operational communication. But there were also risks involved in the use of processes and their documentation in corporate communication. The interviewees brought up the balance between having processes for every communication activity and having none. Also, as communication is seen as a creative function, room needs to be left for considering the situation at hand and thus process models cannot be blindly followed. For this reason it can be concluded that in the investigated organizations process documents described an ideal situation that might never come true in reality.

And finally, the fourth research question was addressed by reporting on how business communication processes were developed and improved in investigated organizations. Process improvement in corporate communication was not a widely spread practice. As there were some organizations that aimed to develop their core communication processes also after the documentation phase, some organizations took no effort to improve their processes. The most used tactic to deal with process improvement was to

be passive and only change processes as something in the environment changed. Often, the process models were changed, not because they needed improvement, but because they contained outdated data. There were many reasons for the lack of process improvement. For example, one reason was that once a process was documented, it was seen as a finished product, not as something that would be constantly evolving. Other reasons that were reported to affect process improvement efforts were lack of time or resources. The main reason for not improving processes seemed to be that processes and process documents had not been in use for long, and thus they are not yet outdated and there really was no room for improvement yet. However, most of the interviewees recognized the need to develop and assess processes in the future.

To conclude the study, the discussion that took place in Chapter 5 concluded that previous research conducted on business processers supports the use of process thinking in business communication. Business communication could benefit substantially from process thinking just as other business disciplines have. Effective communication is critical to the organization's success, and process thinking improves overall efficiency and quality of communication processes. Therefore, this study supports the creation of communication processes that are vital for an organization's success.

6.3 Practical implications

The findings of this study showed that even though the research on business communication processes is limited, business communication processes do exist in organizations and they are used widely. This section presents the four practical implications of this study aimed at communication practitioners especially.

First, introducing process thinking to corporate communication could benefit the whole organization, not just an individual process. In today's fast paced world, especially corporate communication is hectic and therefore needs structure and guidelines to ensure ability to react fast and in a consistent manner. As communication practitioners would go from ad hoc doing to a more planned way of working, risks and uncertainty

could be reduced significantly. As the findings of this study conclude, business communication processes performed in corporate communication could be improved according to the principles of BPM. Therefore, at least the need for introducing process thinking to corporate communication seems to be necessary to assess.

Second, it was also suggested in the interviews, that process thinking gives communication more credibility and portrays it as a more serious business function. Processed communication activities are performed in a planned and consistent manner, which would reduce ad hoc doing. As activities performed in corporate communication are put in more concrete terms, transparency would increase and it would be easier to engage management.

Third, the findings of the study suggest that after processes have been defined and documented they need to be improved constantly. Otherwise the effort to document the processes would be wasted from process improvement view. One value of documenting processes is that the process would improve, as it has to be thoroughly analyzed in the documentation phase. Therefore, if a process is not reviewed after it has been documented, a valuable improvement tool would be lost. As the business environment, technology and stakeholders of a process change, the process seems to need re-evaluation or at least the process model would need to be updated accordingly.

Fourth practical implication of the study is that people working in corporate communication could see that process models can facilitate their operational working. Thus it is worthwhile taking some time to document the core business communication processes, as it would save time and resources in the future. Even though defining and documenting core communication processes takes some time, process thinking actually saves time in the long run. Both previous literature and the findings of this study argue that one benefit of process thinking is shorter cycle times. If people in corporate communication take the time to standardize their operations, the activities could be performed much faster once they are documented. There is no need to reinvent the wheel.

6.4 Limitations of the study

This section reviews some of the limitations of this thesis by taking a critical look at the research process. The limitations listed here should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings of this study although they do not diminish the trustworthiness of this study.

The topic of the present study was challenging, as the research into business communication processes was very limited. It was therefore difficult to find models or theories from the business communication point of view, and all the models used in this study come from other business disciplines. Many of the references were collected from management, information systems and IT service management literature. But as discussed in Chapter 5, previous research into business processes in other business disciplines can be also applied to business communication processes.

In this study, the empirical data was collected from communication directors and managers. This means that the insights of people actually performing the communication processes i.e. communication practitioners were left out. The findings of the study could have been different if the data had been collected from employees performing such operational tasks. It is possible that the communication directors do not have an accurate picture of how the operational activities are performed in practice.

Also, it is possible that the respondents and interviewees did not mention all the communication processes they perform or even all the processes that have been documented. Especially in the online survey, it was impossible to specify the answers of the respondents and as a result many of the respondents gave rather ambiguous responses that were difficult to interpret. Furthermore, it may have been difficult for the interviewees to recognize the communication processes they had not documented. Not all corporate communication units perform the same activities, and thus the scale of documented corporate communication activities was rather narrow.

6.5 Suggestions for further research

This section suggests five possible directions for further research on business communication processes. As there has been only limited research on the topic of the use of processes in corporate communication, there are various ways to expand or to continue the research at hand. However, I only focus on five.

First, a natural way to expand the present study is to examine business communication processes that are performed outside the corporate communication function. Especially in large multinational corporations there are employees all over the world and thus also people outside the corporate communication function perform communication activities. As employees in corporate communication function typically have rather strictly defined job descriptions and roles, the activities performed outside the corporate communication function might differ substantially from those performed in corporate communication function.

Second, as this study only focused on the perceptions of communication directors, it would also be interesting to investigate how employees in corporate communication perceive processes and their documentation. It could very well be that employees have totally different opinions on the usefulness of business communication processes. Managers use process documents as a tool of guidance and ensuring that tasks are performed in a consistent manner, but for their employees, business communication processes might be something totally different.

Third, the present study could be extended to investigate if it is somehow ensured that the defined and documented process models are in use. The findings of the present study show that the process models are not always followed as such, and thus it would be interesting to examine how the use of communication process models is enforced in corporate communication function.

Fourth, based on the findings of the present study one benefit of process thinking was facilitated measuring and auditing of communication. It is has traditionally been very

difficult to measure communication efficiency, and there are not many tools of measurement. Therefore it would be interesting to examine if utilizing BPM in business communication could actually facilitate measuring and auditing of communication.

Fifth, even though the present study was not interested in risks involved in use of processes and their documentation in corporate communication, the interviewees brought them up when discussing benefits of process thinking. Findings of the present study show that some communication practitioners have the prejudice that process thinking does not suit ad hoc natured communication. Future research could investigate the possible downsides of process thinking in corporate communication, and maybe focus on the assertion that processing would somehow hinder creativity and critical thinking required from communication practitioners.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Interview framework

Processes

1. Have you documented processes relating to communication? Why?
2. What kind of processes has been documented?
3. For how long?
4. Are the process documents explicit?
5. What steps are involved in processing itself?

Documentation

6. How processes are documented and where?
7. Are the documents easy to find? Available to all?
8. Are process documents used in internal and external communication?

Why processing?

9. What have you gained from documenting your processes?
10. Three main benefits in order?

Roles and responsibility

11. Who initiates and develops processes that will be documented?
12. Who is responsible for communicating about the processes?

Development and improvement

13. How do you ensure that developed processes are used in practice?
14. Do the processes evolve?
15. Are the processes being developed regularly?
16. Are the recurrent activities that have not been processed? Why not?

Appendix 2 - Online survey

Background Information

Respondents position in the organization:

Organization:

Do you have a separate communication organization:

Staff in communications:

Do you do business outside Finland?

Field of business:

Staff:

Processing communicational activities

1. Have you documented your processes within communication function?
Yes/no
2. What kind of communication processes have you documented into processes?
Open
3. Do you have recurring processes that are not documented?
Yes/no
4. If your answer to the previous question was yes, please give an example.
Open
5. How do you ensure that the processes developed are used in practice?
Open
6. Are you planning to process communicational activities into processes?
Yes/No