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FROM BLUEPRINT TO PRACTICE: APPLYING PROCESS MAP METHODOLOGIES IN ROAD FREIGHT TRANSPORT ORGANIZATIONS—A CASE STUDY APPROACH

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Abstract: *Process mapping, a technique mostly used in manufacturing facilities, has become quite widespread as not only a tool for gaining visibility in how processes work together to achieve a common objective, but also for identifying inefficiencies and areas for improvement. Considering the dynamic context of today's world and the need to apply competitive strategies to survive in this specific industry, process mapping proves to be a viable approach. Taken into account that this technique is not designed for the service industry, a proper methodology on how to apply it in a road freight transport organization is needed. Step by step, this piece of work guides and showcases the elaboration of a process map in a road freight transport organization.*

Keywords: *competitive strategy, process analysis, process-based approach, process map, road freight transport.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Process mapping is a complex and comprehensive approach that presents all the processes within an organization and the workflows. This technique consists of a visual representation of the organization and the way it carries out its activity. A process map centralizes information about the agent who partially or fully performs the process at a given time and the internal communication flow through which the process is carried out [1]. Thus, this complex tool allows for the analysis of the organization and facilitates the identification of potential problems and aspects that can be improved.

To develop a process map, it is necessary to fully understand how the organization operates. The process map is prepared by identifying and analyzing the sequence of processes that have been carried out to successfully complete the activity, and not the theoretical way in which they should be carried out [2]. The activities are to be described properly and ordered accordingly. The moment in which tasks are performed is also to be taken into consideration.

The links between these activities must also be graphically highlighted.

Developing a process map can have numerous organizational benefits. First, this technique provides clarity on the concrete way in which processes are carried out and facilitates the identification of inefficiencies. In the spirit of a process-based approach, most of the problems existing within an organization are within the processes [2].

Thus, a process map can be considered an organizational “x-ray”, by visually highlighting the processes that are carried out and how they are interlinked. In addition, the process map helps to identify activities that can be improved, through observing their efficiency and their importance in the organization. It has also been observed that by integrating this tool within the quality improvement strategy, the benefits of this approach are much greater [3].

Road freight transport organizations carry out an activity that, although seems simple, involves a series of “hidden” processes that make it possible to fulfil their purpose. From this point of view, the development of a process map is a suitable approach to visually illustrate the

complexity of the operations and how they interlink. Thus, the organizational structure in terms of processes and the role that each department has in carrying out the road freight transport is graphically highlighted. Both the workflow that integrates many operations and the network that unites the relevant activities, individuals, information systems and operational resources are highlighted [4].

Through providing a clear picture of the organizational processes and workflow, it also creates a framework for standardizing processes and creating organizational procedures that facilitate efficiency, as well as continuous improvement, simplifying the workflow [5]. Furthermore, this tool also facilitates better resource allocation, by identifying the main areas for investment so as to increase efficiency. Another important aspect of using the process map as a tool for organizational improvement is the increase in customer satisfaction, by eliminating inefficiencies and, implicitly, increasing the quality of the services provided.

To develop a process map, a thorough analysis of the processes is necessary, which highlights how they influence each other and facilitates the identification of the sub-processes that take place within a process, as well as the people who participate in the processes and the environment from which they come [6]. Thus, it is necessary to follow a clear methodology in this regard.

2. CONTEXT

A process map is a graphical approach that highlights step by step how one or more processes operate to deliver a service [7]. This tool is of great value to all those involved in these processes, as it facilitates communication both within the organization and with the external environment, identifies areas in need of improvement and steps that do not add value to the process, thus supporting the elimination of non-conformities.

A process is a series of activities that receive one or more inputs, transforms them through appropriate processing, or subprocesses, and generates one or more outputs [8]. Thus, in the case of a road freight transport organization, the process is the road transport of goods, and the

subprocesses can be receiving the transport order, allocating a vehicle, loading the goods, transporting the goods, and unloading the goods.

Since the process map should emphasize on the object of activity, namely the road transport of goods, it does not include operations related to human resource management, accounting or marketing. Although these activities are necessary from the point of view of the functioning of the organization, they are not the subject of this research and do not directly affect the freight transport process. The process map will illustrate the road freight transport process, graphically representing all the processes that occur to make the studied process possible.

It is noted that this tool is of particular importance within a road freight transport organization. Providing road freight transport services is an inherently complicated activity, as it requires the management of multiple information flows between the multitude of interested agents [9]. Developing a process map facilitates the understanding of how information “flows”, both within the organization, as well as to and from it. In addition, this tool can identify flows that can be easily automated, so that the entire process is more efficient and activities that, although not time-consuming, may interrupt other processes can be eliminated.

For instance, in a situation where the customer requests information regarding the location of the transport, the dispatcher must interrupt other activities to verify and follow up on the request. Although this communication flow is essential, it can be easily automated by using platforms that allow customers to check the status of the transport in real time.

Developing a process map facilitates a better and easier understanding of complex interconnected systems and the identification of areas that need to be streamlined [10]. Thus, process improvement is done contextually, depending on how actions are interconnected, also considering how a change may affect other sub-processes or the workflow.

The process map is a tool that can be used to visualize and manage the processes that take place within an organization, generally recognized for increasing the transparency or visibility of how the activity is carried out within it [11]. Thus, the process map represents an “x-

ray” of the organization from a process point of view, presenting clearly all the sub-processes that make it possible to provide the service.

It is necessary to understand that the process of road freight transport can be carried out differently depending on the people involved. A group carrying out a road freight transport process may have a different way of working than another group. The group is understood as all the people both within the organization and outside it, who actively or passively participate in the road freight transport process. By developing a process map, the similarities and differences between the various ways of working can be observed. This approach facilitates the identification of more efficient practices, by comparing the existing ones, choosing the optimal parts of each method and using this information in creating a standard procedure. Thus, the use of the process map has a critical role in standardizing processes and forming universal procedures to be followed within the studied organization [12].

Moreover, this tool has an important role in training new employees who can consult previously created procedures and how a process had been carried out in the past [13]. Also, this tool can be used in periodic training sessions of people within the organization, so that they are familiar with standardized processes and imposed procedures. From this point of view, the process map has an important role in making training sessions more efficient.

Also, developing a process map can facilitate a better allocation of resources. It is well-known that the development of processes requires the allocation of several types of resources: human, temporal, financial and technological. By using this tool, it is possible to quantify the resources required to carry out a process, the way in which they work together and their impact on the processes [14]. Following an analysis of process efficiency, areas that require improvement can be identified and a better allocation of resources in alignment with specific needs is facilitated.

Furthermore, communication flows can be improved, facilitating a knowledge-based management approach. Process mapping has been found to positively influence intra-

organizational communication and facilitate the process of knowledge sharing [12].

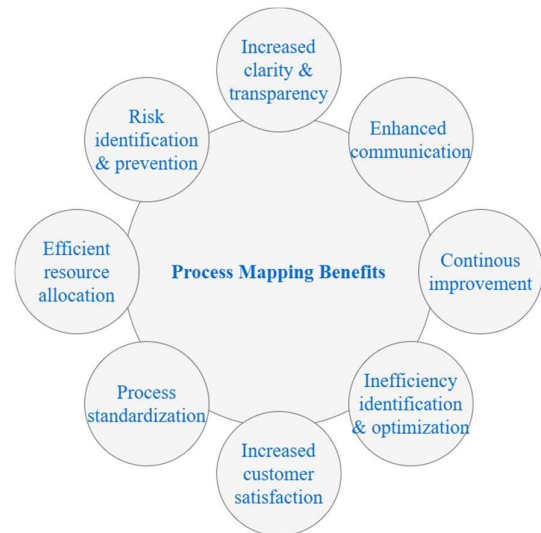


Fig. 1. Process mapping benefits.

It is found that the development of a process map has several beneficial effects on the organization in which it is applied. Figure 1 graphically illustrates the various organizational benefits arising from the use of the process map, according to existing academic studies.

In short, developing and using a process map within a road freight transport organization presents a series of benefits. The most important aspects to be considered are process optimization and standardization, increase of efficiency and alignment with continuous improvement strategies, as well as increasing customer satisfaction.

3. METHODOLOGY

It was observed that in existing literature there are not many models of process mapping applied within road freight transport organizations. Thus, it was resorted to studying theoretical frameworks applied within other fields and adapting them so that they can be applied within the selected field.

First of all, a study conducted on an organization operating in the service industry showcases that, in order to elaborate a process map, there are two key questions that need to be addressed:

- How is the service provided?

- What are the steps that allow for the provision of the service? [15]

However, in establishing a process map, these questions only account for the elaboration phases. To ensure accuracy, it is necessary to

also verify the results according to organizational practices. In Table 1.1, the steps that must be followed to elaborate a process map within a road freight transport organization are presented, showcasing 5 phases with a total of 13 activities that must be carried out.

Table 1

Methodology for process mapping			
	Phase		Activity
Step 1	Process identification, preparation and planning for process mapping	1.1	Ensuring that the person preparing the map has the necessary training
		1.2	Identifying the activity on which the process map is being drawn up
		1.3	Involving people within the organization
		1.4	Identification of processes and subprocesses
Step 2	Analyzing information	2.1	Analyzing processes and subprocesses
		2.2	Identifying workflows
Step 3	Process mapping	3.1	Analyzing how processes work together
		3.2	Combining perspectives on how to work
		3.3	Developing the process map
Step 4	Checking the accuracy of the process map	4.1	Analyzing the process map
		4.2	Identifying any gaps and using the information obtained in the previous steps to fill them
		4.3	Process map validation
Step 5	Using the process map	5.1	Identifying the actions needed to increase organizational efficiency

Source: Adapted from [3]

The previous table briefly presented the steps to be followed in developing a process map. In the following, all the previously mentioned activities will be detailed, so that the methodology used is as clear as possible and each action is described in detail. In addition, it will be identified how the information collected is used within the various stages.

The first step is to identify the processes, prepare and plan the action required to elaborate the process map. It involves carefully analyzing the organization chosen as the object of study both by directly observing the way the organization operates and by means of a qualitative research tool, namely open, semi-structured interviews with employees. During this stage, the research team will be formed. They will develop the interview structure and identify the key aspects that need to be observed within the organization. The people responsible for carrying out the processes to be studied will also be identified in order to involve them.

The first activity is to ensure that the person preparing the process map has the necessary training. This step has a crucial role in the

development of the process map, ensuring its accuracy. Thus, the aim will be to form a research team that is familiar with both process management and the development of process maps, as well as with the field in which the organization operates. Thus, the knowledge that the team collectively possesses is effectively implemented to create a process map that is as relevant as possible.

The next activity is to identify the object of study, the organizational area on which the process map is being drawn up. Given the complexity of an organization, as well as the extremely large number of processes that take place daily within it, key processes will be identified to be analyzed. Related processes such as the administration of the organization, human resources management, financial-accounting or fleet maintenance or any other processes that, although they do not directly or indirectly influence the road transport of goods, shall be considered as they allow the functioning of the organization. Thus, the focus of this study falls onto all the processes necessary for the functioning of the organization. This approach

illustrates organizational complexity and emphasizes the importance of "hidden" processes.

Moving on, involving people within the organization is crucial. During this stage, semi-structured interviews are conducted to ensure that real information is obtained about how the organization operates. Thus, the people who carry out the processes or sub-processes analyzed provide information about the way they work and the communication flows. This step is of particular importance because it gives relevance to the research and ensures a correct correlation between the objective reality and the process map that will be developed. Furthermore, it is necessary to identify all the processes and subprocesses that contribute to the proper functioning of the organization.

The second step in process mapping is analyzing the information collected in the first phase of the research. Thus, the previously identified processes and sub-processes will be analyzed, focusing on how they work together, to highlight the workflows.

The first activity in this stage is analyzing processes and subprocesses. To understand the way the organization works, it is imperative to fully understand the processes and sub-processes. Critically analyzing them is a suitable approach in this regard. The processes will be broken down into sub-processes, detailing the activities that need to be undertaken, as well as the people responsible for carrying them out. In this way, communication flows and the way in which the sub-processes and processes influence each other can be identified.

This step also involves highlighting how processes and sub-processes work together to enable the organization to carry out its activities. For this reason, it is crucial that the previous step is carried out rigorously, as this stage only highlights the results obtained previously.

The next step is process mapping. During this stage, the process map will be developed: a graphical representation of how the organization operates. Thus, all the information obtained from data processing will be translated into a graphical representation of the way of working. In addition, the different methods of carrying out the processes and sub-processes identified

within the organization will be analyzed and the optimal procedures to be followed will be selected, with a view to standardization.

First, it is needed to clearly understand the process flow. Thus, information on the way processes are carried out and workflows will be combined, whenever necessary, to identify how processes work together and highlight, if necessary, the different methods applied by the people responsible for these processes.

Then, a comparative analysis of the different work methods identified needs to be carried out, highlighting the most efficient methods used. This ensures that the process map presents the most efficient way of running processes and subprocesses, which can be standardized within the organization.

The following activity involves the actual creation of the process map, using the information obtained in the previous steps. Special attention is required so that the accuracy is as high as possible. Regarding the graphic representation of the process map, the well-known method in the field of management will be used. Thus, the main processes that make the service provision possible will be illustrated on the main axis, and the sub-processes will be illustrated on the secondary, vertical axes. Thus, the hierarchy of processes and sub-processes will be obtained [8].

In addition, the accuracy and veracity of the process map are to be checked. Thus, it will be determined whether the tool has been used appropriately, by comparing the way of working and the process map developed.

A comparative analysis of the map developed in contrast to the way processes are carried out within the organization shall also be carried out. Thus, it is verified whether the map is in accordance with the procedure used for the actual conduct of operations. In this regard, the information collected both through observation and interviews will be reused.

In addition, during this stage, any gaps in the developed process map will be highlighted. This step is facilitated by its predecessor and has the role of ensuring that the process map reflects the truth and includes all the processes within the studied organization. If non-conformities are

observed between the developed map and reality, these will be resolved.

It is very important that the process map reflects the reality of how the organization operates. Thus, this step also has the role of controlling and ensuring the accuracy and correctness of the process map. If the map is not compliant, the previous steps are resumed.

After the correct development of the process map, it is necessary to use it so that the organization can benefit from the advantages that this tool facilitates. From this point of view, it is necessary to analyze the process map to identify processes that are not carried out with optimal efficiency, as well as any sub-processes that, although they seem necessary, do not add value, and their absence would not affect the smooth running of the activity. Thus, this approach is closely related to the continuous improvement process, aiming at increasing efficiency and eliminating non-conformities.

After identifying areas that can be improved, solutions will be proposed to help increase organizational efficiency. How these actions affect the way organizational processes are carried out shall be verified and only those that have a positive impact on this organizational parameter will be implemented.

It is noted that, for the correct development of the process map, all steps must be followed. Also, the progress of these steps is not necessarily linear, as certain steps require the reanalysis of previous steps. Thus, Figure 2 graphically presents the methodology for developing the process map, emphasizing the way in which the steps are interconnected. The sources of information used in certain steps have also been highlighted in the graphic representation.

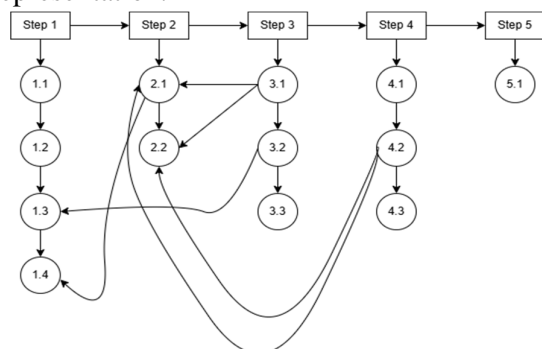


Fig. 2. Process map development methodology

The study was conducted upon analyzing a medium sized road freight transport organization operating within the Romanian market. The enterprise operates through a fleet comprising of more than 250 trucks, either owned or used through strategic partnerships focused on freight forwarding. The organization has a total number of 87 employees and is focusing on continuous growth. What is more, the enterprise has been incorporated more than 25 years ago, showcasing not only resilience and adaptability, but also an approach focused on continuous improvement and sustainable development. Therefore, it is clear that the know-how of the organization is to be analyzed and used within the purpose of this study.

4. PROCESS ANALYSIS

Road freight transport organizations operate through a complex, interconnected network of processes that are carried out in such a way that they can make it possible to carry out the activity well. From the point of view of process-based management, it is of particular importance that processes are planned, executed, coordinated and evaluated in relation to strategic objectives and the organizational context [16]. Therefore, process management is crucial in ensuring the achievement of the organization's strategic objectives and, at the same time, can have effects on profitability. Depending on the role that processes fulfill, they are classified into basic (support) processes, central processes, management processes [17].

In order to facilitate the identification and presentation of processes within a road freight transport organization, it is necessary to understand each category of processes. In this regard, the processes that take place within the organization under study will be identified, focusing on their classification into one of the three categories, as well as on the sub-processes and activities that take place within them. Such an approach facilitates a better understanding of how the organization operates and, simultaneously, highlights the cumulative importance of the activities undertaken. What is more, this method emphasizes the importance of processes that are often not considered in existing literature but are fundamental to the

proper functioning of the organization or even compliance with legal regulations, such as the sanitation and sanitation process, with all its sub-processes, activities and procedures.

This first category, represented by basic or support processes, includes those processes that facilitate the smooth running of the organization's activity but may not be essential for the object of activity. Thus, support processes have the role of facilitating the smooth running of central processes [18]. Without support processes, the organization's activity would be difficult or even almost impossible, as they ensure that the necessary criteria for carrying out the road freight transport activity are met, and that the organization has the necessary resources. Within the organization of road freight transport studied, the following basic processes are observed and noted: cleaning and sanitization, procurement, data operation and accounting. Even if these processes are not properly considered when thinking of road freight transport, their role is essential.

Central processes refer to all the processes that represent the object of activity of the road freight transport organization. These processes are those that make it possible to provide the service requested by customers, implicitly those that actively participate in the creation of added value and the generation of income [18]. Over time, the emphasis has been placed on the fact that the basic processes represent those key processes that make the object of activity of the organization possible and whose good execution incubates the success of the organization, which is why they should not be the subject of outsourcing decisions [19]. Therefore, to assure the performance and the success of the organization, as well as to maintain the secrets of the organizations, these processes should be kept "in-house". Contradictorily, considering the object of activity of the organization, namely the road freight transport, as well as the ways in which the organization operates, both as a carrier and as a forwarding agent, it is noted that the outsourcing of the road freight transport process is imperatively necessary. This is mainly due to the fact that the organization could not meet the demand through its own means, thus resorting to

the freight forwarding activity as a solution to satisfy the growing needs of customers.

Within the road freight transport organization that is the subject of this research, the following basic processes were observed: dispatching, road transport and freight forwarding.

Background processes which constantly and continuously operate within the organization are at the core of success and profitability, assuring smooth organizational functionality. These processes encapsulate strategies regarding the way of organization, development opportunities, the way in which resources are allocated, used and capitalized, the integration of road transport as an essential link in the logistical supply chain and the forecasting and prevention of risks. Thus, this category of processes effectively ensures the organization's ability to function and adapt both to the requirements of the external environment, consisting of customers, suppliers and other categories of stakeholders, and to the requirements of the internal environment. These processes facilitate the formation, operation and performance of departments, as well as inter- and intra-departmental communication. It can be said that management processes oversee the proper functioning of basic and central processes [20]. Using the same organization as the research subject, the following processes were identified within this category: strategic management, human resources management, risk management and knowledge management.

Another very important aspect of the organization's activity is the information flow, which ensures the development and continuity of processes. Thus, it is imperative to ensure the continuity and accuracy of the flow of information within the processes, especially those that concern the road transport of goods. Any interruption, delay or inaccuracy increases the inefficiency of the process and can lead to delays or even temporary stoppage of transport [21], which can lead to the imposition of penalties by the client.

5. PROCESS MAPPING

In the previous subchapters of this research report, the processes, subprocesses and activities within the road freight transport organization

were presented, and for the former mentioned, a detailed analysis was also developed that also captures the communication and information flows. A very important aspect is the fact that certain processes work strictly together, which is why their grouping is absolutely necessary. Management processes are closely linked to each other, being interdependent. For this reason, in the graphic representation they will be illustrated in the form of a common block.

The information collected and presented previously was combined to facilitate the identification of the organization's operating model from a process-oriented point of view. Qualitative data was sourced from the studied organization and analyzed to prepare the process map. This approach has facilitated a better understanding of how the organization operates, ensuring that specific characteristics and work methodologies were taken into consideration and properly represented. Figure 3 shows the process map within the studied road freight transport organization.

It is noted that there are a variety of processes that take place within the organization that has been studied. In addition, it is important to note that the clients, as well as the suppliers, have an

important role in the determination of the transport process, as they provide valuable input and output information regarding the provision of the service [22]. Each process can be broken into lots of sub-processes and activities. Considering the fact that the object of this study is to showcase how process mapping is done within a road freight transport organization and due to constraints regarding the length and conciseness, sub-processes and activities will not be further on detailed.

6.CONCLUSION

All in all, process mapping is a technique that, once applied in a road freight transport organization, showcases a series of benefits such as increased transparency, clarity, communication enhancement, process standardization and optimization. Furthermore, it also facilitates the early identification and prevention of risks.

It has been proven that, even though process mapping is a technique designed to be used in manufacturing organizations, it can be easily adapted for organizations that provide services.

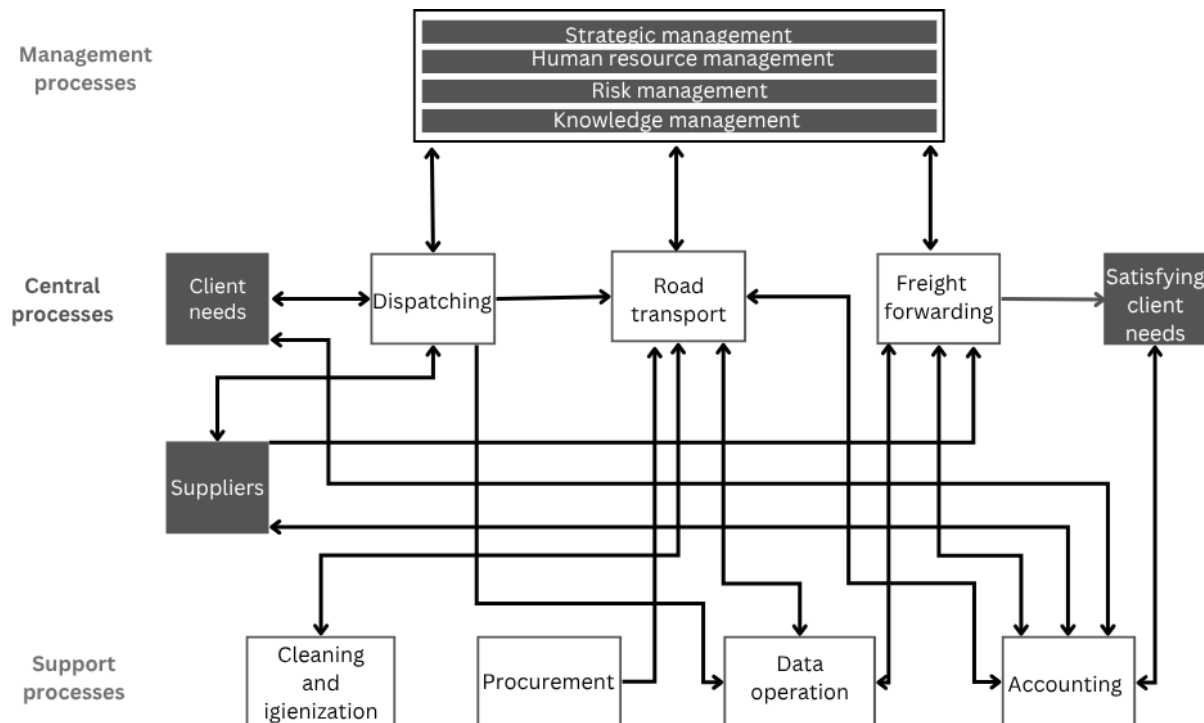


Fig. 3. Process map for a road freight transport organization

Taking into consideration that existing literature does not provide any methodology for this exact field, this piece of work comes as a practical guideline that is aimed at fulfilling this gap. Thus, the steps that need to be followed have been thoroughly explained, with detailed activities.

To conduct this research and test the proposed methodology, a medium road freight transport organization has been chosen as the object of the study. The main types of processes have been presented, and the flow of information has been analyzed. By elaborating a coherent and accurate process map, it has been shown that the proposed methodology can be successfully put into practice.

This piece of work has certain limitations and can be biased, since the study has been conducted on only one organization. Therefore, in order to extrapolate and generalize, it needs to be tested on more subjects. What is more, further research using quantitative methods or mixed methods is needed in order to properly showcase the benefits of elaborating and implementing a process map within such an organization. However, the methodology proposed can still be of high importance to both scholars and practitioners, even if as only a starting point for broader research or a personalized approach. All in all, further research is needed, so that the methodology acknowledges differences between organizations and proposes methods to include their unique characteristics. This will allow the methodology to be more flexible and easier to adapt.

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De la șablon la practică: Aplicarea metodologiilor de elaborare a hărții proceselor în organizațiile de transport rutier de mărfuri – O abordare prin studiu de caz

Harta proceselor, o tehnică utilizată mai ales în organizațiile axate pe producție, a devenit destul de răspândită ca instrument nu numai pentru a obține vizibilitate asupra modului în care procesele lucrează împreună pentru a atinge un obiectiv comun, ci și pentru a identifica ineficiențele și zonele de îmbunătățire. Având în vedere contextul dinamic contemporan și necesitatea de a aplica strategii competitive pentru a supraviețui în această industrie specifică, elaborarea unei hărți a proceselor se dovedește a fi o abordare viabilă. Luând în considerare faptul că această tehnică nu este concepută pentru industria serviciilor, este necesară o metodologie adecvată privind modul de aplicare a acesteia în cadrul unei organizații de transport rutier de mărfuri. Pas cu pas, această lucrare ghidează și prezintă elaborarea unei hărți a proceselor într-o organizație de transport rutier de mărfuri.

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