

INTRODUCING A PROFESSIONAL COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT: THE CASE OF A FLEET MANAGEMENT COMPANY

Teaching Case

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Abstract

In times of high market transparency and rapidly evolving technologies, customer requirements are constantly rising and long-term customer loyalty is hard to achieve. Therefore, enterprises have spent enormous efforts on professionalizing their customer relationship management (CRM). Complaint management holds a key position in CRM, since it helps restoring customer satisfaction and repurchase intentions.

This teaching case deals with the development of a complaint management process at a German fleet management company using PROMET BPR, a well-established method for business process reengineering (BPR). Further, the introduction of a software that supports the newly introduced complaint management process is described. The teaching case presents valuable findings for practitioners, planning to establish professional complaint management procedures within their own company, as well as students, learning how a scientific grounded BPR method can be applied in practice.

Keywords: Complaint management, Teaching case, Business process.

1 Introduction

FleetComService¹ is an internationally operating fleet management company and one of the three leading German Business Mobility- and Leasing-providers for cars of all makes. As a member of a German automotive group, the fleet management company offers mobility and financial service knowledge in 19 countries. In Germany, the company operates seven branch offices and manages 120,000 vehicles. On a worldwide scale, it manages over 500,000 vehicles. Examples taken from the variety of products and services offered are the following:

- **Finance management:** The focus of this service is to ease buying and selling cars considering all tax and legal issues. Thus, the finance management service includes operational lease, financial lease as well as sale-and-lease-back.
- **Service management:** The service allows customers to effectively manage and maintain their company car fleet by supporting all activities of the fleet management such as acquisition, maintenance, servicing, taxation and disposal. This helps to reduce administration costs.

¹ The real company name was anonymized on request of the fleet management company considered.

- **Contract management:** This service includes fleet reporting to provide the customers with optimal transparency of their fleet (e.g., type of cars, contracts). It comprises customized invoicing to minimize internal charging as well as contract adjustments to budget the car fleet costs accurately.

Providing the customer with high quality solutions is one of the company's central mission statements: *"We expect our customers to expect a lot. We're passionately committed to excellence in everything we do."* (Source: company webpage)

Further, the head of quality management states: *"Our primary goal must be to achieve the highest customer satisfaction with customer-oriented products and services as well as cost-efficient processes. This requires a deep understanding of customer requirements and asks for competent and responsible acting of all employees."* (Source: head of quality management, location: Munich, personal interview)

Nevertheless, the fleet management company had to deal with an unusually high amount of complaints referring to unsatisfactory customer service as well as invoicing errors recently. Management recognized that current working standards obviously did no longer meet customer expectations. An exemplary complaint, the company received from a director of a large business client via email, was the following: *"Since February 8th, my employee has not received any statement from you as to when we will get an offer for a leasing contract! Your account manager gave some hints that he will not be able to handle our request for a leasing contract as usual. Today's enquiry brought no results once again! Do I have to contact you personally to get any information at least? This behavior on your part is not acceptable!"*

According to the head of quality management, such statements of customer dissatisfaction could *"severely hamper the mutual trust with our customers"*. Professionally handling these problems was acknowledged as essential to avoid customer migration and to re-establish customer confidence. Consequently, management strived for a realignment of the business strategy, proclaiming "customer-orientation" and "quality" as the company's central success factors to stay competitive in future. In this process of strategic realignment, management set up a strategy map which explicitly considered the new quality goals strived for. These goals comprised the (1) "uncomplicated and profitable business relationship", (2) "practicable, innovative solutions and individual customer care", (3) "assured mobility for customers", (4) "consolidation of customer retention", (5) "promotion of individual talents of employees", and (6) "competitive advantages by increased advisory skills and excellent service quality". In that context, a professional customer complaint management system (CCMS)² was seen as a major contribution to goals 2, 4 and 6 in particular. Therefore, the corporate management set up a project which had two major goals: at first, a complaint management process was to be defined for the company. The process should be designed to meet the requirements of customers, employees and stakeholders alike. A second goal was to introduce software to support the complaint management process as defined. The head of quality management was appointed as the project leader. Three employees of the "organization" department plus one external employee formed the core project team.

This teaching case describes the development of the complaint management process at the aforementioned fleet management company using PROMET BPR, a well-established business process reengineering (BPR) method. In addition, the introduction of software to support the newly implemented complaint management is highlighted. The authors of this teaching case were members of the project team and directly involved in all project stages. The case helps to understand how a professional complaint management process can be systematically developed to fit a company's individual needs. Further, insights on the mandatory steps of a structured process design project are provided. In addition, issues occurring when introducing software support for a newly designed business process are described. Therefore, the teaching case presents beneficial findings for practitioners, planning to estab-

² A functioning CCMS comprises a well-defined complaint management process and supporting software.

lish professional complaint management procedures within their own company, as well as students, learning how a scientific grounded BPR method can be applied in a real life setting.

The case is structured as follows: after an introduction to customer relationship management (CRM) and complaint management (section 2), the development of the complaint management process at the company is explained (section 3). Subsequently, the introduction of complaint management software is described (section 4). The case is rounded off with a conclusion and lessons learned.

2 Basics and Case Background

2.1 CRM and Complaint Management

With the paradigm shift from transaction marketing (focusing on the single transaction with a customer), which was predominant in the 1970s and early 1980s, to relationship marketing (focusing on attracting, maintaining and enhancing customer relationships (Berry, 1983)) in the mid-1980s and early 1990s (cf. Grönroos, 1994; Gummesson, 1987; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Peppers and Rogers, 1994), the need to manage the customer relationship increased. Therefore, the aim of customer relationship management is to create value for customers in long-term customer relationships (Greenberg, 2010; Grönroos, 2000; Mukerjee, 2013). To evolve a customer relationship, different phases are suggested in literature. For example, Dwyer et al. (1987) suggest the following ones: (1) awareness, (2) exploration, (3) expansion, (4) commitment, and (5) dissolution. Figure 1 depicts a customer life cycle that contains these phases and shows that different topics like customer interests, customer retention and re-gaining customers need to be managed.

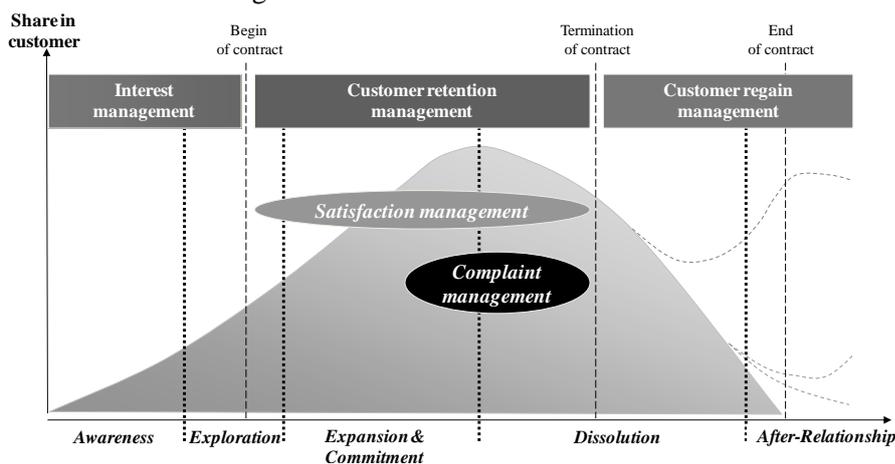


Figure 1. Customer life cycle (according to Zellner (2004) based on Dwyer et al. (1987))

In recent years, new technologies (e.g., social media) have led to a tremendous increase of market transparency (Bruhn, 2013; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011; Sharma and Baoku, 2013). For customers it is easy to compare prices and study product reviews online (Hung and Hsu, 2013; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Mitic and Kapoulas, 2012). As a result, long-term customer loyalty is hard to achieve these days (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011; Mukerjee, 2013). Consequently, CRM has experienced a “second spring” in the last couple of years as many companies have undergone enormous efforts to professionalize their CRM activities (Faed et al., 2014; Greenberg, 2010). Enterprises have increasingly become aware of the fact that knowledge about customers is highly valuable for optimizing organizational processes such as customer service or product development (Khodakarami and Chan, 2014). Because of that, CRM systems have a great significance in a company’s IT application landscape as they help to capture and analyze customer knowledge supporting decision-making (Khodakarami and Chan, 2014).

Companies put a strong emphasis on retention management to avoid customer migration (Chan and Ngai, 2010). Retention management comprises all tasks to bind existing customers and establish long-

term customer loyalty (Homburg et al., 2012; Stauss and Seidel, 2004). Complaint management holds a key position in retention management, since it helps restoring customer satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and repurchase intentions that might have been flawed due to product defects or service failures (Faed et al., 2014; Johnston, 2001; Linder et al., 2014; Stauss and Seidel, 2012).

Generally speaking a complaint is an *“articulation of dissatisfaction”* that aims at *“making a provider aware of a behavior that is subjectively experienced as harmful”* by the complainant (Stauss and Seidel, 2004, p. 16). Accordingly, complaint management refers to the *“way firms deal with problems that their customers communicate to them about aspects of their service that generate a certain degree of dissatisfaction”* (Álvarez et al., 2011, p. 145). Customers who receive an adequate response to their complaints are more likely to stay (Chan and Ngai, 2010; Homburg et al., 2010). Further, positive attitude changes, positive word-of-mouth propaganda and an increased readiness to buy from the same supplier again will be achieved (Homburg et al., 2012; Linder et al., 2014; Scott et al., 2011; Stauss, 2002). Considering this, it is extremely important for companies to establish a functioning complaint management process supported by adequate software.

In general, several suggestions on the design of complaint management processes can be found in literature. For example, the 8D-method was developed by the automotive industry, which is an eight-step procedure for handling complaints (Behrens et al., 2007). Kaulbars and Nunn (2012) introduce a complaint management process for the cruise industry. Effey and Schmitt (2012) review existing complaint procedures (e.g., 8D-method) and derive a three-step approach for complaint handling. However, these approaches either underlie a branch-specific imprint, or only give very abstract descriptions of complaint handling procedures as they claim general validity (Krishna et al., 2011).

Further, it needs to be taken into account that the implementation of a professional customer complaint management is a challenging task since enterprise-specific properties (e.g., customer type, branch) need to be considered carefully (Stauss and Seidel, 2012). Whereas the design of business processes has been a subject of business process management (BPM) research for a long time (cf. Davenport, 1993; Dumas et al., 2013; Hammer and Champy, 1993; Harrington, 1991; Österle, 1995), detailed guidelines on how to particularly implement a complaint management process are missing.

2.2 Status Quo – Complaint Management at the Company

Initially, a defined customer complaint management process did not exist at the fleet management company. Incoming complaints were handled in an ad-hoc manner. It was the complaint receiver’s decision how the complaint was going to be handled. The complaint channels “email”, “phone”, “fax”, “letter”, and “online form” were communicated via the company’s homepage. Usually, if the person receiving the complaint did not feel responsible for it, the complaint was forwarded to another employee who the initial receiver believed to be in charge of that matter. A tracking of incoming complaints enabling the control of their processing status was not done. There was an MS Excel-sheet stored on the central server which employees were supposed to use for recording complaint reasons. Complaints which seemed to be easy to solve were answered quickly and handled with preference as opposed to more difficult problems. In general, the benefits of complaint management (cf. Cook, 2012; Faed et al., 2014) were not recognized by most employees.

“Answering complaints is something we do during our day-to-day business and at our own discretion. Documenting complaints takes a lot of time and we want to get complaints off our desks as quickly as possible. What’s the use of documenting complaints?” (Source: service employee, location: Munich)

Several problems resulted from this current practice: first, numerous complaints got lost due to the missing documentation. This led to subsequent complaints of the same customer and to adversely affected customer relationships. Second, valuable information contained in the complaints, e.g., details on the customer relationship or opportunities for process improvement, was neglected that way. Third, recurring problems (e.g., errors in the calculation of car values) did not become apparent to the man-

agement because of a missing complaint reporting. Fourth, complaint processing could not be tracked which often led to delayed feedback to customers.

Management recognized this way of handling complaints as incompatible with the newly defined quality goals (see section 1). Hence, the establishment of a professional complaint management system was a central project in the company's realignment and reorganization efforts. For that purpose, characteristics of the company needed to be considered: first, the company served corporate customers only. Contract negotiations and conclusions were usually conducted in face-to-face meetings. Therefore, complaints were often uttered to the company's account managers or sales employees directly. Second, the company's customers could be characterized as "conservative customers" (cf. Fernandes et al., 2013), preferring traditional channels to communicate with the customer service (e.g., personal meeting, phone). Hence, there were no plans to use Web 2.0 technologies for immediate complaint handling (cf. Pinto and Mansfield, 2012). Third, the customers expected services and products to be adapted to their individual needs. Thus, each complaint had to be properly analyzed and customer-specific solutions needed to be worked out.

3 Design of the Complaint Management Process

In the following, a brief overview of methods for process design and visualization is given. Then, PROMET (PROcess METHod) BPR, which was used for designing the complaint management process at the fleet management company, is introduced and its application is described.

3.1 Methods for Designing and Visualizing Processes

Current research and practice have shown that the introduction of CRM software does not automatically lead to beneficial knowledge about customers that can be used in a value adding way (e.g., for process improvement or marketing initiatives) since an alignment of IT with a company's working procedures and culture needs to be performed (Khodakarami and Chan, 2014). Therefore, in IT-projects it is essential to precisely define a business process – in our case the complaint management process – to be aware of the information handled during process execution and thus to be able to derive requirements on software matching the particular needs of a company (cf. Dumas et al., 2005; Österle, 1995).

In general, several approaches to design and visualize a process, such as the architecture of integrated information systems (ARIS) (Scheer and Schneider, 2006) – building on "Event Driven Process Chains (EPCs)" – or process modeling languages like the "Business Process Model and Notation (BPMN)" (OMG, 2013) respectively "Unified Modeling Language (UML) activity diagrams" (OMG, 2011), exist. In the area of business process improvement (BPI), many approaches to design, restructure and improve business processes can be found as well. Nevertheless, most of them lack a methodical support (Zellner, 2011). Lee and Chuah (2001) introduce a five-phase procedure building on ideas from "continuous process improvement", "business process reengineering" and "business process benchmarking" for example. However, the approach does not provide the user with techniques or guidelines, to perform the phases. Further, Adesola and Baines (2005) or Povey (1998) derive new BPI methodologies from existing approaches (cf. Kettinger et al., 1997). But they do not assign techniques to each step of their procedures which hampers the usability. One of the most prominent approaches that has been developed in that context is the methodology of Harrington (1991). Whereas techniques supporting the five-step procedure are suggested (e.g., bureaucracy elimination) their exact description stays rather abstract in some cases. These weaknesses hamper the operationalization of the aforementioned approaches for being used for the development of a complaint management process.

3.2 Procedure for Defining the Complaint Management Process

As a means to define the complaint management process, the PROMET BPR method was selected. The method was developed as a best practice method to support the design of business processes and was used in manifold consulting projects over decades (IMG, 1997; Österle, 1995). PROMET BPR

offers a structured procedure consisting of defined phases that are supported by techniques to create clearly specified result documents. This procedure also allows considering stakeholder requirements for the process design. In addition, the techniques of PROMET BPR have been proven suitable for being used in workshops that integrate employees into BPR projects. Because of these benefits and being well-structured, PROMET BPR was chosen as the method for designing the process.

The PROMET BPR procedure model comprises the three phases “preliminary study”, “macro-design” and “micro-design” (see Figure 2). The approach can be flexibly adapted to users’ needs. Thus, certain phases and activities of the procedure model may be omitted without experiencing adverse effects on project goal achievement. In the case of the fleet management company, it was carefully analyzed which results already existed (e.g., business strategy) and which ones had to be worked out for establishing a professional complaint management. Regarding the preliminary study, central documents about the business strategy and processes (e.g., process landscape) were present at this time, which were examined to analyze the existing practices of handling complaints accordingly. The micro-design phase was postponed since, to start with, the basis for a complaint management system was needed, not a detailed micro process. So the main focus was on the macro-design phase. The activities in this phase help to develop a process vision, to implement process management, to conduct a process output analysis, and to perform flow planning on a macro level. The implementation of a process management was not focused in the described case, as this had already been established for the company. In the following, the other three activities applied will be described in short.

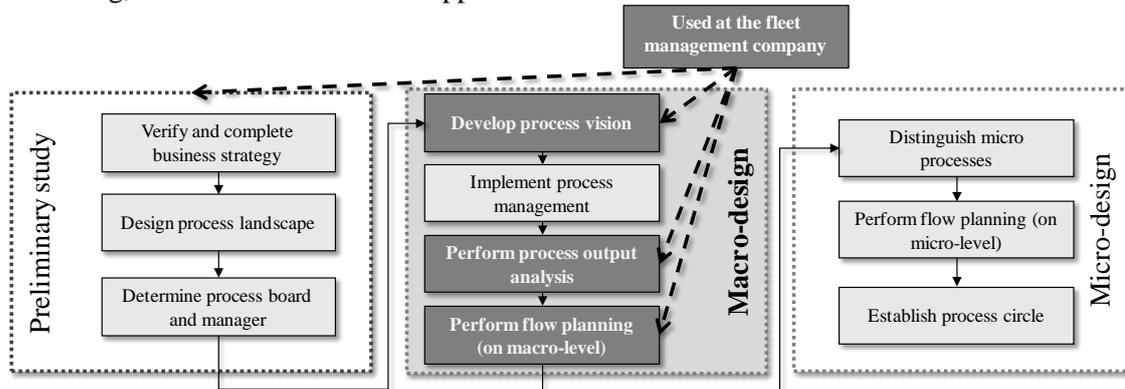


Figure 2. Procedure model of PROMET BPR adapted from IMG (1997)

The aim of developing a process vision is to identify new solutions and innovations, aligned with strategy and processes, with a middle-term to long-term orientation based on IT potentials. At the end of this activity, the fundamentals of the target process are defined. The output analysis aims to derive a realistic estimation of the process output from the needs of the process customer and the competitors. Therefore, the output is described using a context diagram and an output catalogue (Österle, 1995). The context diagram shows the flow of output between (sub-)processes. The output catalogue is a corresponding verbal description of this output (Österle, 1995). Afterwards, flow planning is conducted. Hence, the activities of a process are defined and logically arranged (Österle, 1995).

3.3 The Application of the Approach at the Fleet Management Company

In the project at hand, not all activities of the PROMET BPR method were applied. Instead, the method was adapted to the company’s needs as described in section 3.2. The preliminary study started with the analysis and description of the existing complaint management procedure to learn how complaints were handled until that date. Therefore, the process documentation was analyzed and interviews with employees were conducted. This phase took two months and ran from January to February (see APPENDIX I). In the macro-design phase, the designing of the new process started. Table 1 shows the activities that were performed as well as the results created within each activity. The process vision phase was performed in the first half of March. The following activities lasted until mid-April.

Activity	Description	Result
1) Develop process vision	Collect ideas (requirements) on the process design	List of ideas (requirements) regarding the target process
	Define fundamentals of the target process	Fundamentals of the target process (see Table 2)
2) Perform process output analysis	Create a context diagram	Context diagram (see Figure 4)
	Develop an output catalogue	Output catalogue (see Table 3)
3) Perform flow planning	Derive the process flow	Activity chain diagram (see Figure 5)

Table 1. Activities and results in the macro-design phase

1) Develop a process vision for the complaint management process: The process vision provides the outline of the process to be designed (Österle, 1995). Therefore, ideas from manifold sources (e.g., employees, business strategy, customer surveys) are gathered. This guarantees that the process design matches with the requirements of stakeholders and customers. The collection of ideas and requirements on the process design was done in an email request organized by the project core team asking all quality managers of the different sites in Germany to participate. The quality managers were chosen since they had the best insight into the complaint handling procedures at the different locations of the fleet management company. An email survey was considered an efficient approach since it did not require the respondents to be physically present. As a supporting source for idea development the reference process for complaint management by Stauss and Seidel (2012) was attached to the request. The process by Stauss and Seidel (2012) was chosen since it represents the current state-of-the-art in modeling complaint management processes (Effey and Schmitt, 2012) and describes complaint management from a branch-independent perspective. It thus serves as a good starting point for developing ideas for an enterprise-specific should-be concept for complaint management. Stauss and Seidel (2012) distinguish between a direct and an indirect complaint management process. The direct process deals with the individual customer complaint using the steps “complaint stimulation”, “complaint acceptance”, “complaint processing” and “complaint reaction” (Stauss and Seidel, 2012). The indirect process consists of tasks which do not affect the complaint directly (e.g., complaint analysis), but analyze and utilize the information attached to complaints (Stauss and Seidel, 2012).

Besides listing their own requirements and ideas derived from customer surveys as well as dialogues with customers, the quality managers were asked to collect the voice of their employees in addition. Afterwards, the quality managers sent the consolidated ideas and requirements directly to the core project team. In summary, the main ideas were: Complaint channels should comprise “fax”, “phone”, “email”, “online form”, and “letter” which were the preferred communication channels of the customers. These channels should be explicitly communicated, inviting customers to complain. That way, the number of “hidden” but not uttered complaints should be reduced (cf. Rad, 2011; Stauss and Seidel, 2008). In addition, complaining directly to the sales employees should be possible as well. There should be no “central department” for handling complaints, but complaints were supposed to be handled by the employee best familiar with the topic of the complaint (e.g., form of contract). This was due to customers’ individually designed contracts and product portfolios. Often, the customers directly addressed the account manager they were familiar with or uttered their complaint to the company without naming a certain employee. In the latter case, it was planned that such complaints should be directly received by the quality management department for further processing. In addition, there should be a regular process-oriented complaint reporting.

Complaints bear enormous potential for improving a company’s business processes since they contain information on weaknesses and nuisances in a process (Linder et al., 2014). The challenge of modern enterprises in times of large amounts of available but unorganized datasets is to transform this information into explicit process knowledge that can be documented, communicated and processed throughout the whole company (Chen et al., 2012; McAfee and Brynjolfsson, 2012; Nonaka, 2007). In this regard, reports are a beneficial means for codifying knowledge and serving employees’ information demand (Anaby-Tavor et al., 2010; Dalkir, 2005). The knowledge about customer problems, captured in corresponding complaint reports, may thus be used for deriving innovative suggestions for business process improvement (cf. Khodakarami and Chan, 2014). However, most enterprises have

problems in adequately categorizing customer complaints (Faed et al., 2014) and thus to derive valuable complaint reports. In literature, some suggestions on complaint categories can be found (cf. Hill, 2012), but they neglect company-specific requirements and remain abstract. Hence, an enterprise-specific categorization of complaints was strived for at the fleet management company. Further, performance measurements for the complaint management process (cf. Stauss and Seidel, 2008) should be considered by the complaint report.

In summary, the complaint report was supposed to provide beneficial insights (1) into customer problems for triggering process improvement projects and to indicate (2) the effectiveness resp. efficiency of the complaint management process. For that purpose, employees involved in process improvement were asked by the core project team how complaint data should be prepared and structured to be directly used for corresponding projects. It turned out that the report was needed to show clearly to which business process a complaint referred, what the reason for the complaint reason was, how “severely” the problem affected the customer relationship and how the frequency of complaints had developed over the preceding quarters. Further, the core project team discussed which internal information concerning the performance of complaint handling (e.g., the processing time of a complaint) was to be measured after the roll-out of the newly designed process. To reduce complexity it was determined, that cost-related performance indicators (e.g., staff costs for complaint handling) were to be measured not earlier than at least six or even twelve months after the establishment of a complaint management in the company. Therefore, only time-related information and the number of recurring complaints were focused. Figure 3 gives an overview of the aspired content of the report and the insights that could be derived from it.

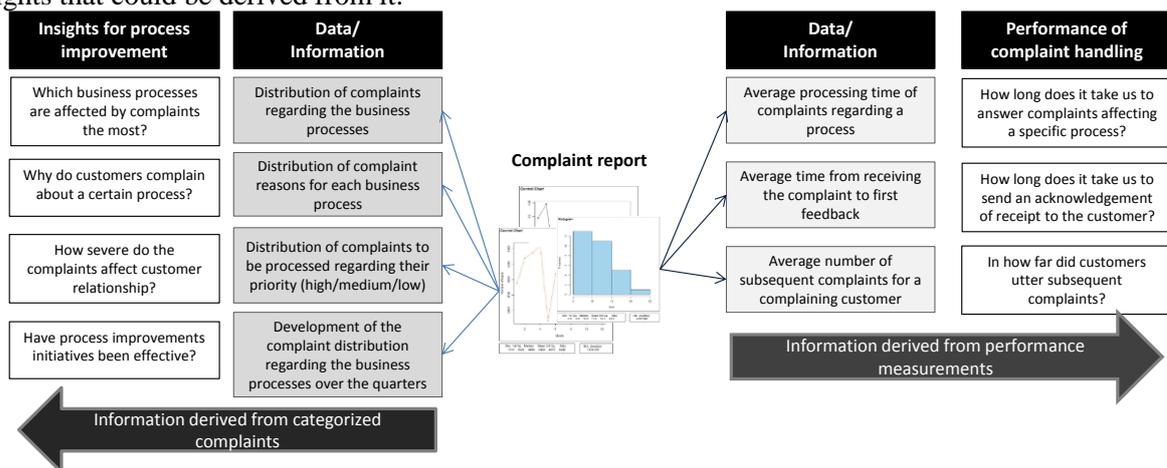


Figure 3. Aspired content of the complaint report

The main thoughts behind the ideas described above were summarized by one of the quality managers: “I think the multitude of complaint channels will definitely stimulate our customers to complain! Since our account managers know the customers best, they are predestined to handle their complaints. I am looking forward to the newly designed complaint report! I think we can learn much from our customers on how to perform better in future!” (Source: quality manager, location: Stuttgart)

Category	Process fundamentals
Objectives of complaint management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resolve customer dissatisfaction and strengthen customer relationship Build positive company image and learn from complaint information
IT-support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A professional complaint management software is to be introduced The software should track the processing of complaints but also serve as a knowledge base for employees on causes and solutions for recurring complaints
Process design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active communication of complaint channels (fax, phone, letter, email, sales employees) Automatic processing of a complaint from the complaint owner to a responsible employee Automatic confirmation of receipt; individual solutions for customers
...	...

Table 2. Process fundamentals for the complaint management process

Based on the collection of ideas, fundamentals of the target process were derived by the core project team. As the step “process vision” builds on the creative ideas of individuals, the collected results needed to be adequately consolidated. Thus, first, similar ideas were summarized. Then, the ideas were clustered, reformulated as process fundamentals and assigned to categories as proposed by IMG (1997) (see Table 2). These fundamentals represented the main requirements for the design of the complaint management process to be implemented at the fleet management company.

2) Perform process output analysis for the complaint management process: In a subsequent step, an output analysis (cf. Österle, 1995) of the target process was conducted. The intention was to identify and specify the output transferred between the customer and the fleet management company. The output could be documents (e.g., complaint), data (e.g., report data) or information (e.g., complaint information). The output analysis builds on the results of the process vision and specifies them further to use them for the process flow design in a subsequent step (Österle, 1995). The output analysis was done in a half-day workshop with the core project team, the quality managers and selected employees of the operational departments. The context diagram shows the input- and output-relationships between the (sub-)processes (respectively tasks), that were derived from the complaint management reference process by Stauss and Seidel (2012). The context diagram is shown in Figure 4 and served as a starting point for a detailed specification in the so called output catalogue (see Table 3).

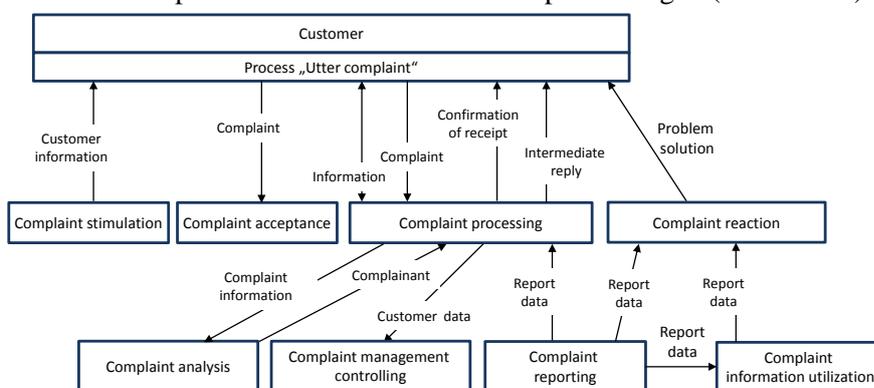


Figure 4. Context diagram for the complaint management process

The context diagram helped to identify which information was to be processed during the management of complaints. However, the context diagram only gives a general view of this information, abstracting from the concrete realities within a company (cf. Österle, 1995). Because of that, the structure and the handling of each output were further specified and talked over with the participants of the workshop regarding a should-be concept for the complaint management process. For example it was discussed how the “confirmation of receipt” and the affiliated tasks to be performed in the corresponding subprocess “complaint processing” should look like. It was determined that the employee receiving the complaint was the “complaint owner” (cf. Stauss and Seidel, 2012) and thus being responsible to forward the complaint to the employee best familiar with the problem described. The results of the discussion were documented in the so called “output catalogue” which was enhanced by preliminary requirements on software. An excerpt is shown in Table 3.

Output	Description	Requirements on IT
Confirmation of receipt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standardized confirmation of receipt To be generated automatically and sent via IT-system ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sending of confirmation of receipt using the IT-system ...
...

Table 3. Excerpt of the output catalogue

3) Perform flow planning for the complaint management process: After these preliminary works had been done, the target process map was visualized by the core project team as an activity chain diagram (cf. IMG, 1997) at the macro level (see Figure 5). The macro level gives an overview of the process and the activities to be performed by different employees (Österle, 1995). For that purpose, the

results from the process vision and the output analysis were operationalized as activities arranged in a logical order. Responsibilities for performing the activities were then defined. As the activity chain diagrams build on a very intuitive modeling notation, all team members could directly engage in this step without requiring in-depth knowledge on process visualization techniques.

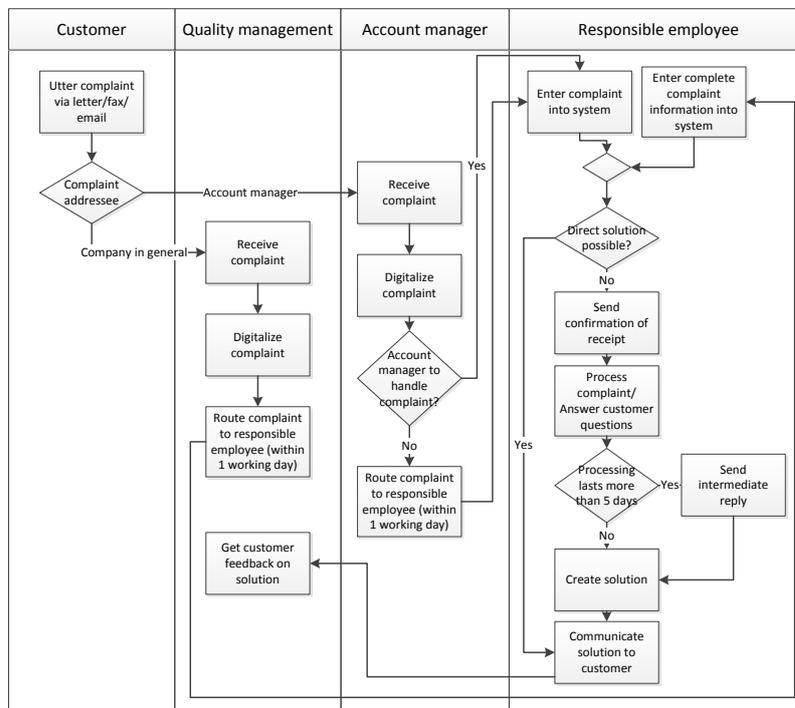


Figure 5. Activity chain diagram for the complaint channel “fax/letter/email”

However, before presenting the activity chain to the management, it was sent to the workshop participants and all quality managers of the locations in Germany in order to get their approval and eliminate possible misunderstandings. Participants’ feedback and comments were collected, changes made and it was only after this revision that the results were presented to the management. Three activity chain diagrams resulted covering all complaint channels mentioned (see Table 2). Figure 5 shows the activity chain diagram at the macro level for the channel “fax/letter/email”.

This process design harmonized with the ideas and process fundamentals as defined in the process vision phase (see Table 2) and was approved by the management: “This design allows ingoing complaints to be treated individually by an employee best familiar with the customer and her/his product portfolio. The database of the upcoming software will help employees in finding predefined solutions serving as a knowledge base. However, it is very important to seek for customers’ feedback to evaluate outcome satisfaction! This is considered as well!” (Source: board of management)

The activity chain diagrams at the macro level were further specified by the core project team to get activity chain diagrams for the micro level.

By using the PROMET BPR approach as described, the employees’ initial ideas on the design of the process were systematically structured and further detailed by applying corresponding techniques (e.g., context diagram, output catalogue) leading to a concrete specification of the complaint management process and the activities to be performed (see Figure 5).

4 Introducing Software Support for the Process

The following section describes the introduction of complaint management software, supporting the newly designed complaint management process.

4.1 Definition of Requirements

Because of the quantity of complaints a company receives, a complaint management can only be realized efficiently by using software support (Homburg et al., 2012). Therefore, certain core functionalities and general requirements on complaint software have been formulated in literature (cf. Stauss and Seidel, 2004; Stauss and Seidel, 2014). These requirements are exemplified in Table 4.

#	Requirements	Description
1	Documentation of internal complaint handling	Especially the complaint stages processing and reaction are predetermined for the support of software systems. They can help to steer the complaint processing procedures and thereby ensure rapid and consistent problem-solving.
2	Structured documentation of complaint information	A differentiation between complaint processing information and the documentation of the complaint is necessary. This requires the structuring of the relevant information according to the complaint stages acceptance, processing and reaction.
3	Rapid documentation of complaint information	To support the rapid documentation, appropriate classification attributes for individual complaint data need to be defined and made available in the system.
...

Table 4. Excerpt of general requirements (Stauss and Seidel, 2004, 2014)

This list of general requirements from literature serves as a good starting point for classifying the specific requirements that emerge in a project. First, the general requirements are formulated in a universally applicable way and can thus be easily adapted for own projects. Second, the list assures that all relevant functionalities (e.g., structured and rapid documentation) are adequately considered when specific requirements are defined. Thus in our project, it was used as a reference for the upcoming step, namely the formulation of the requirements on the complaint software at the company.

	No.	General requirement (see Table 4)	Specific requirement	Description
Must-have	1	Documentation of internal complaint handling	Selection field for “confirmation of receipt”.	The software must have a selection field to document whether the confirmation of receipt is “pending”, “sent” or “not necessary (direct solution possible)”.
			Field for documenting the solution.	A free text field is required for documenting the solution offered for each complaint.
	2	Structured documentation of complaint information	Selection field for processes “affected” by the complaint.	A selection field enables to document which process a certain complaint refers to. This is seen as a prerequisite for the complaint report as defined (see Figure 3).

Nice-to-have	1	Documentation of internal complaint handling	The point in time when the confirmation of receipt was sent should be documented.	The date field indicates when exactly the “confirmation of receipt” was sent to the customer.
...

Table 5. Excerpt of specific requirements on the complaint management software

The specification of the requirements was done by the core project team. For that purpose, the output catalogue (see Table 3) was referred to as a first source. In the output analysis, concrete requirements on the supporting software were specified by the workshop participants. More, the activity chain diagrams from the “flow planning” phase served as an additional source. Based on the activities that should be supported by the software, extra requirements were identified (e.g., role based access control). Once these specific requirements had been defined, they were classified according to the general functionalities of complaint software as introduced by Stauss and Seidel (2004) (see Table 4). This helped to check whether the essential requirements had been adequately considered. Additionally, all requirements were classified as “must-have” or “nice-to-have” requirements. “Must-have” requirements were considered to be the mandatory functionality which the complaint management software had to offer to support the complaint management process as defined. These requirements comprised the proper documentation of the information required to handle the complaints (e.g., basic claims data) and to create the complaint reports (see Figure 3). The “nice-to-have” requirements were those aspects that were not expected, but enabled an easier handling of complaints. In total, the core project team agreed on a list of 19 requirements which should guide the selection of software. Table 5 shows an excerpt.

4.2 Selection and Implementation of the Complaint Management Software

After the list of requirements had been defined and approved by management, the search for software started. The fleet management company had already been using a CRM system (Oracle CRM on demand) for customer administration purposes. However, its complaint management package had neither been configured nor used until that date. After consultation with the management it was decided that the existing CRM system should be checked first as to whether its complaint management package could be adapted to meet the requirements as defined. The CRM system was already in use and accepted by employees and the introduction of further applications could be avoided in case the CRM system proved suitable.

In a first step, the core project team thus evaluated the existing complaint management package of the CRM software. For that purpose, it was checked to which degree the software fulfilled each of the requirements that had been formulated before (see Table 5). In addition, the handling of complaints by means of the software was simulated using fictitious as well as real complaint cases. By that, not only insights into the software’s functionality but also into its handling and potential “bugs” regarding the newly defined process could be gained. This evaluation showed that some drawbacks existed regarding both the must-have criteria and the nice-to-have requirements. For example, there was no possibility to relate complaints to business processes yet (see Table 5). Thus, it had to be analyzed in how far these requirements could be covered by adapting the complaint management package of the CRM system. A workshop was organized in which the head of the IT department, the IT employees responsible for the CRM system, the core project team members as well as an external IT provider participated. The purpose of the workshop was to evaluate if the complaint management component of the CRM system could be configured to support the requirements as defined. It soon turned out that most of the must-have requirements and most of the nice-to-have requirements could be implemented quite easily. However, some of the other requirements proved to be more difficult to realize (e.g., enhancing the log-file by information regarding changes in the free text fields) or turned out to be impossible to be realized from a technical point of view (e.g., defining substitute agreements manually). Based on the results of this discussion, the core project team suggested to build on the existing CRM software and to adapt its complaint management package. This recommendation was approved by the management that appreciated the use of the existing CRM system, as hardly any reservations from the workforce were to be expected in that case. Since it was not possible to consider all change requirements for the next annual release of the CRM system (provided by the external IT provider), a prioritization of requirements was carried out to enable a “rapid implementation” and provide quick support for the process (cf. Homburg et al., 2012). It was decided that the must-have requirements were to be considered completely, while the nice-to-have requirements should be dealt with in an upcoming release. Furthermore, the data export interface was modified to generate reports as shown in Figure 3. Table 6 presents an excerpt of the final complaint report. The left graphic shows the distribution of complaints regarding company processes. The right graphic highlights the complaints for one particular process.

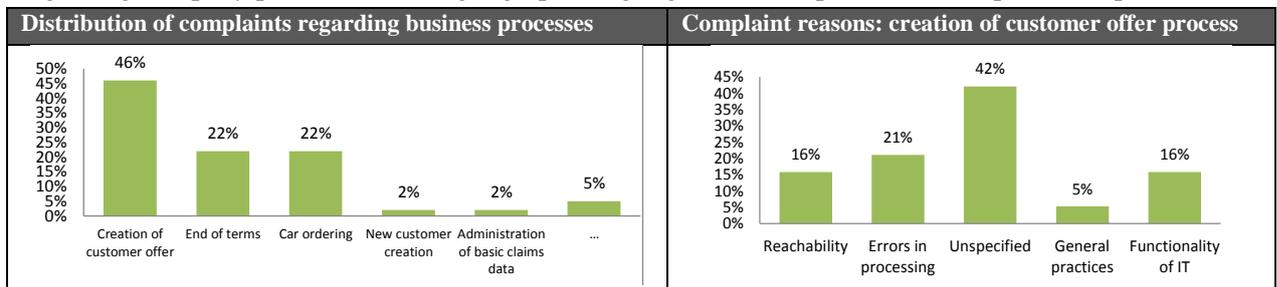


Table 6. Excerpt from the complaint report

Before going live, the software was intensively tested using real complaints as test cases. After the correct functioning of the software had been approved, it was rolled out and training courses were offered for the staff. The training material was prepared by the core project team. The purpose of the

training courses was twofold: first, the employees should learn how to document complaints using the revised CRM system. Second, employees' attitude towards complaints was supposed to be modified. Complaints should no longer be seen as a hindrance in the daily routines, but as an opportunity to restore customer satisfaction and to derive improvement potentials. Thus, the importance of documenting complaints as a prerequisite to generate complaint reports was strongly emphasized in the courses. The reports were planned to be directly communicated to the management raising problem awareness. Until then, there had been a multitude of complaint reasons the company was confronted with repeatedly, but no actions for improvement had been taken. By the complaint reports, management should be presented the most acute problems so that measures to overcome them could be initiated immediately. Employees recognized that the number of recurring complaints could be significantly reduced that way. Resources for value creating activities (e.g., gaining new customers) would thus be set free for each employee outweighing the time required for documenting complaints. Further, the dangers of negative word-of-mouth propaganda due to customer dissatisfaction were clearly communicated in the training courses as well. The role of complaint handling to avoid a negative impact for business performance was realized by all training participants. These arguments and the perspective on substantially reduced time required for dealing with complaints in future led to a large commitment among the employees to document complaints from now on. In that context, employees also appreciated the use of the existing CRM system they were familiar with.

4.3 Benefits

Several benefits were achieved right after the introduction of the new complaint management process and software. First, the complaint information documented in the complaint reports served as direct input for several running as well as newly triggered quality initiatives. For example, the customer complaints were used to define critical-to-quality characteristics (CTQs) (cf. Meran et al., 2013) in corresponding Six Sigma initiatives. Second, employees were now able to search the database of the system for common solutions to recurring customer problems. This tremendously helped employees who were in the company for a short period of time only and were not yet familiar with the company's practices to appease customers. Further, the complaints were seen as a valuable source to learn about current customer relationships and to anticipate customer losses. Third, the customer satisfaction index (CSI) improved from a value indicating a "medium level of satisfaction" to "high satisfaction" within few months only. According to the company's marketing experts the new complaint handling had a huge share in it. This became obvious in the customer feedback received: *"Thank you so much for the fast response yesterday. Can I nominate you for the Making the Difference Award? Your speedy service certainly made a difference to me!"* (Source: anonymous customer, petroleum products, fleet size 1,000)

Within the first few months, it was estimated that 60% of those customers who had been determined to end their customer relationship could be put off from migrating to a competitor simply by restoring their customer satisfaction by individual complaint solutions. Whereas details on financial benefits based on repurchase intentions and positive mouth-to-mouth propaganda cannot be quantified due to the short time the new complaint management has been in use, the positive impact on the service-profit chain (see APPENDIX II) already became evident. The complaint information helped to improve internal procedures and processes, positively influencing the internal service quality, employee productivity as well as the service offered to customers.

5 Conclusions and Lessons Learned

This case deals with the introduction of a professional complaint management system at a German fleet management company. Complaint management has been recognized as a central success factor for restoring customer satisfaction, relationship satisfaction and repurchase intentions. The importance of complaint management in retention management is often underestimated, since usually service development (cf. Sigala, 2012), customer acquisition (cf. Becker et al., 2009) and the customer process

for generating business results (cf. Donabedian, 2003) are the center of attention. Further, the information captured in complaints provides beneficial insights on a company's weaknesses. A prerequisite for their elimination is the adequate analysis of the complaint information using reports.

The case builds on two central concepts: PROMET BPR as a method for process design (cf. IMG, 1997; Österle, 1995) and complaint management as a core concept in customer relationship management (cf. Stauss and Seidel, 2012). Throughout the project it became obvious that employees tend to utter their ideas in an unconsidered and unorganized manner. In that context, the first lesson learned was that a structured BPR method, such as PROMET BPR, provides a valuable procedure for transforming the tacit knowledge and ideas of employees into explicit suggestions for process design. This knowledge is captured, documented and processed within a project by corresponding model types (e.g., context diagram, activity chain diagram) or result documents (e.g., tables such as the output catalogue). In that context, the benefits of reference processes became evident as well, which was a further lesson learned. At several stages of the project (e.g., process vision, flow planning) the complaint management reference process of Stauss and Seidel (2012) supported employees in structuring and finding ideas for process design. An additional lesson was that the information captured in complaints needs to be adequately structured to generate valuable insights (see Figure 3). A further key challenge was to change employees' mindset regarding complaints. This was mandatory for the company to gain the benefits associated with complaint management (see section 4.3). Employees needed to recognize the personal benefits of documenting complaints (e.g., setting free of resources, management awareness for problems) for being willing to take the effort associated with it. In the project at hand, a lot of time was spent in the training courses for persuading employees on that particular matter.

According to literature, enterprises do not fully exploit the potential of CRM systems to benefit from the use of customer knowledge to improve organizational processes or to strengthen customer relationships (Khodakarami and Chan, 2014). However, it is widely acknowledged that information about customers strongly supports managerial decision-making and helps to avoid customer migration as well as to retain customer confidence (Stein et al., 2013). In the case of the German fleet management company, knowledge about customer problems and concerns extracted from complaints had not been used to the full extent before the project. In general, the "ad-hoc" handling of complaints is still very common in many enterprises. Therefore, the underlying problem is widely spread, making the fleet management company an interesting subject of study for companies that are in a similar situation.

The teaching case provides valuable insights into how a company can establish means to use complaint information by designing an elaborate complaint management process. In so doing, the case also contributes to IS research which, until recently, gave only little attention to the management and operationalization of customer knowledge in organizations (cf. Khodakarami and Chan, 2014). Further, the applied procedure for process design using the domain-independent PROMET BPR method can be transferred to other branches and projects as well. In summary, the new complaint management system was appreciated by the employees of the fleet management company. The additional effort of documenting complaints was outweighed by the benefits drawn from a professional complaint handling.

In future work, the complaint management software will be enhanced by the requirements that have not yet been implemented. Further, the complaint management process, representing the first approach to dealing with complaints in a professional way at the fleet management company, will be further developed. The complaint reports will be extended by cost-related performance indicators to demonstrate the efficiency of the complaint handling. This perspective on costs had been postponed in a first roll-out of the process in order to reduce project complexity and to be able to provide prompt support for employees in handling complaints. Further, the implementation of a responsive design of the software enabling an appropriate use via mobile devices by the sales force is a topic to be considered. In addition, an automatic routing of complaint reports to decision makers is envisaged, speeding up the communication of results from complaint analysis within the organization.

Case Questions

Question 1: What are the central steps of a complaint management process?

Question 2: Why was it important for the fleet management company to introduce a complaint management system?

Question 3: What requirements on customer complaint management software were defined by the fleet management company?

Question 4: How does the PROMET BPR approach work?

Question 5: How was the complaint report designed at the fleet management company and why was this design considered as important?

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Appendix

I) Project Plan and Milestones/Key Events

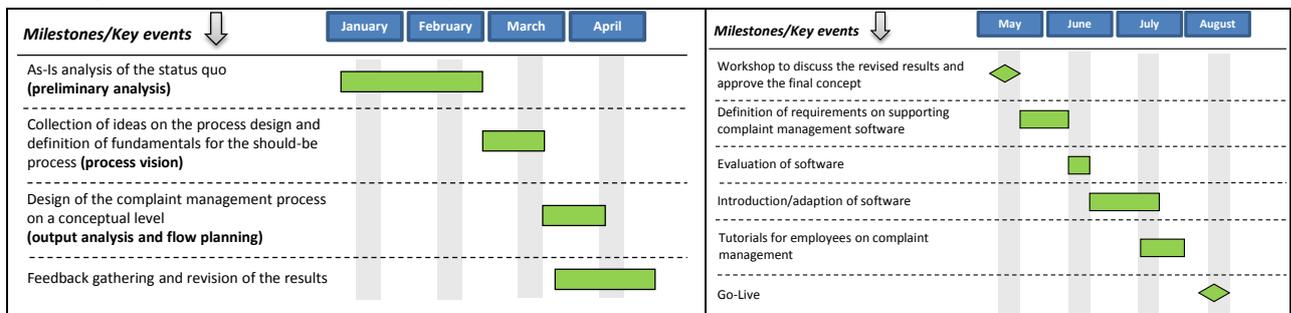


Figure 6. Project plan

II) The Service-Profit Chain and Benefits of Complaint Management

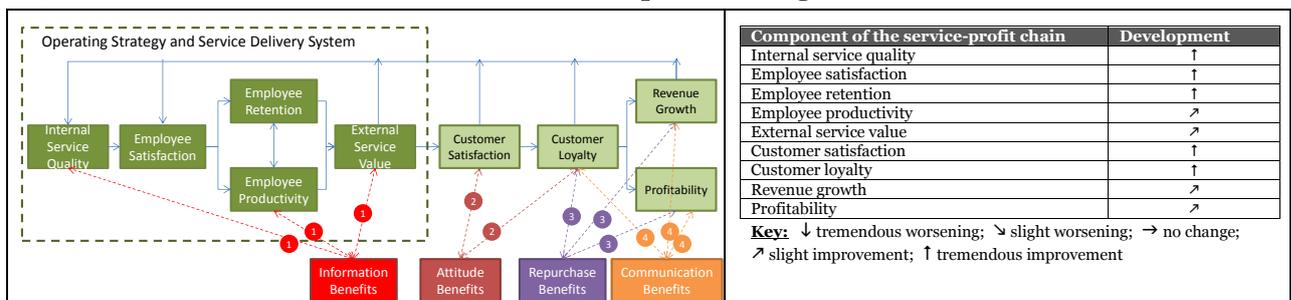


Figure 7. The service-profit chain (Heskett et al., 1994) and the benefits of complaint management

The service-profit chain model was developed to create a better understanding for the interrelations between service quality, service value, customer and employee satisfaction as well as company success (Heskett et al., 1994). It is based on the idea that profit and growth stem from customer loyalty which requires satisfied customers (Heskett et al., 1994). Stauss and Seidel (2004) identify four main benefits of complaint management: information benefits, attitude benefits, repurchase benefits and communication benefits. These can be related to components of the service-profit chain as shown in Figure 7. After the complaint management had been established at the fleet management company, the participants of the training courses were asked to rate its impact. In summary, employees felt a positive development of employee satisfaction, retention and productivity (see Figure 7).

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