

## STRATEGIC BALANCING OF EXPLOITATION AND EXPLORATION IN A SHARED SERVICE CENTER: A RESEARCH STUDY ON PROCESS-PROJECT ORGANIZATION RELATIONSHIP

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**Purpose:** This paper explores the challenge of balancing exploitation and exploration in finance shared service center (SSC) from a process-project organization perspective. The study aims to identify strategies for achieving ambidexterity in German SSC and emphasizes the role of process-project oriented organization in facilitating this balance.

**Design/methodology/approach:** A case study approach was used to analyze SSC in a large multinational organization employing over 600 people. Interviews with 10 managers, team leaders and experts, as well as an analysis of organizational structures, process architecture and projects documentation were conducted to gather data.

**Findings:** The study found that successful ambidexterity in SSC requires a contextual approach that considers both process and project management, with an emphasis on collaboration and knowledge sharing. Dynamic capabilities such as agility and adaptability were also found to be crucial in achieving a balance between exploitation and exploration.

**Research limitations:** The study's findings are limited to a single SSC in a large multinational organization, and the generalizability of the results may be constrained.

**Practical implications:** The paper provides insights into the challenges and opportunities for achieving ambidexterity in SSC and offers practical recommendations for managers seeking to achieve this balance in their organizations.

**Originality/value:** This study contributes to the literature on achieving ambidexterity in SSCs by providing a process-project organization perspective and highlighting the importance of dynamic capabilities in balancing exploitation and exploration. The results presented represent a continuation of the study carried out at the same SSC in 2021.

**Keywords:** Ambidexterity, Shared Service Center, Ambidexterity, Process-Project Organization, Strategic Balancing, Exploitation and Exploration, Contextual Ambidexterity.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper.

## 1. Introduction

The turbulent nature of the of socio-economic changes in the market environment generates a state, in which organizations focus their activity on the attempts to pursue highly flexible systemic management formulas enabling dynamic response to exogenous (i.e., such external factors as the processes taking place on a macro scale) and endogenous factors (the impulses generated inside an organization) (Cf.: Zakrzewska-Bielawska, 2016). The digitization of enterprises changes the nature of work in organizations into ever stronger cooperation with technology, reducing manual work's workload towards interdisciplinary and creativity-based work. Digital transformation constitutes one of the considerable faced by traditional companies, affecting all corporate functions, procedures, processes, operations, services and products (Bouncken et al., 2021; Dehnert, 2020). According to Afriliana and Ramadhan (2022), implementation of digital transformation can help companies maintain their performance, efficiency, and compliance. The nature of management is thus changing, due to the increase in the level of employees' education, their greater empowerment, and the increased performance of the repetitive and operational activities via technology, which means that people may be shifted towards exploration activities, *inter alia*, aimed at processization through the use of exploitation activity technology. A product as a service often becomes unique, while the technology of Industry 4.0 enables mass adaptation, at a lower cost, to individual consumers' requirements. As such, the process and design organizations generating value, based on creativity - exploration, are becoming more and more suitable, while the process (exploitation) layer becomes automated, as to reduce the costs of creative activities, e.g., the prospect of developing individual patterns - cocreation of products by customers. It should be emphasized here, that the assumptions of a process and project organization necessitate integration of the concepts and methods of both business process management and project management (Cf. Sliż, 2021).

The article addresses the challenge of dynamic balancing the exploitation and exploration spheres in finance shared service centers (SSCs), from the perspective of process-project organization assumptions. The research problem has been centered around the question of how SSCs can simultaneously optimize existing processes while also exploring new improvement opportunities? The main aim of the paper is to exemplify a process and project mature organization and characterize the exploitation and exploration activities, and, consequently, reconstruct an organizational structure that allows discounting of the benefits resulting from the dynamism of business processes and projects. Research methods such as literature review, participant observation, as well as semi-structured interviews with managerial and expert position employee were used to achieve the objective. The study is a continuation of the empirical investigation carried out in 2021 (Sliż, 2021). The article attempts to identify and assess the changes throughout the period of 18 months. The re-verification enables a comparison of the state during COVID-19 with the post-pandemic conditions of 2023.

Overall, this article provides insights into the challenges and opportunities for achieving ambidexterity in SSCs and presents practical recommendations for managers seeking to achieve this balance in their organizations. In addition to the focus on SSC, this article offers a unique contribution by examining the role of a process and project organization in facilitating ambidexterity within service organizations. The study highlights the importance of balancing exploitation and exploration in main service processes and offers insights into how organizations can leverage technology, to optimize existing processes while also exploring new opportunities for service innovation.

This study is organized into five sections. Section 1 provides an introduction to the research problem and aims. Section 2 reviews the literature on ambidexterity, business process management (BPM) and project management integration, with a focus on balancing exploitation and exploration. In Section 3, the study provides an overview of a large multinational organization with over 600 employees and its finance shared service center (SSC). Research methods employed in this case study are also discussed in this section. Section 4 presents the findings of the case study, particularly on strategies for achieving ambidexterity in SSCs. Finally, Section 5 concludes the article by discussing its contribution to scholarly knowledge and practical implications for managers seeking to achieve a balance between exploitation and exploration in SSCs.

## **2. Theoretical background**

### **2.1. Ambidexterity – exploration and exploitation dilemma**

Ambidexterity is perceived as the ability of the firm to carry out exploration and exploitation at the same time (Anzenbacher, Wagner, 2020). In the balanced perspective, ambidexterity can be described as midpoint, or an optimal point on a continuum, with exploitation and exploration lying at the two ends. While in the combined perspective, exploitation and exploration are considered independent activities, where their maximized level can produce a high degree of ambidexterity (Kassotaki, 2022). The implementation of ambidexterity requires a combination of organizational routines, resources, or capabilities that, to some extent, contradict each other: organizational efficiency (exploitation) and organizational flexibility (exploration) (Raisch et al., 2009). The ambidexterity concept has evolved since its emergence in scientific research from structural construct described by Duncan (1976) and Tushman and O'Reilly (1996) to contextual ambidexterity - its focus is put on the multitude of ways that organizations seek to manage the tensions involved in doing two different things at the same time (Birkinshaw, Gupta, 2013). Initial scholar's efforts focused on organising ambidexterity within a firm's boundaries (Tushman, O'Reilly, 1996). In studies

ambidexterity is considered as a source of sustainable competitive advantage (O'Reilly, Tushman, 2008; Luo et al., 2018, Ragazou et al., 2022; Ashrafi, Zareravasan, 2022; Ed-Dafali et al., 2023) or a strategy that enables companies simultaneously pursuing differentiation and cost advantages for achieving long-term success (Liu et al., 2020) and this leads researchers to investigate how entrepreneurial orientation influences differentiation–cost advantage ambidexterity (Chen et al., 2023). Over time researchers have introduced ambidexterity research in a geographic context (Roth, Corsi, 2023). It may bring promising insights not only into how a multinational ambidexterity strategy can provide organisations, that operate in complex innovation networks, with a global competitive advantage (Ciasullo et al., 2020), but also specifically into how international small and medium-sized enterprises (ISMEs) improve adaptive marketing capabilities through ambidexterity (Su et al., 2022).

As Gulati and Puranam (2009) claim organizations are attempting to address many types of dualities, such as efficiency and flexibility, adaptability and alignment, integration and responsiveness, and exploration and exploitation. Raisch et al. (2009) perceive ambidexterity as a new research paradigm in organization theory and try to explore four “central tensions” that need to be addressed to enable further progress in research on ambidexterity. Scholars seek answers to specific questions: Should organizations achieve ambidexterity through differentiation or through integration? Does ambidexterity occur at the individual or organizational level? Must organizations take a static or dynamic perspective on ambidexterity? Can ambidexterity arise internally, or do firms have to externalize some processes? As exploration helps a firm identify new market opportunities and build new capabilities, exploitation allows a firm to utilize current market opportunities and improve its existing capabilities (Benner, Tushman, 2003). He and Wong (2004) emphasize that exploration and exploitation require substantially different structures, processes, strategies, capabilities, and cultures to pursue and may have different impacts on firm adaptation and performance. Scholars point that exploration is associated with organic structures, loosely coupled systems, path breaking, improvisation, autonomy and chaos, and emerging markets and technologies. While exploitation is associated with mechanistic structures, tightly coupled systems, path dependence, routinization, control and bureaucracy, and stable markets and technologies (Ancona et al., 2001). Different ambidextrous strategies may be distinguished in order to manage different tensions. The first one is temporal separation or sequential ambidexterity (Benner, Tushman, 2003; Duncan, 1976) - it can be achieved through separating explorative and exploitive in time. The second one is structural ambidexterity (O'Reilly, Tushman, 2004) that aims at reaching such tensions simultaneously through the allocation of different processes into separate sub-units or change management team, each with distinct cultures, structure, control systems and incentives, by ensuring at a managerial level the synergic integration and maximization of the economies of scale and scope of each unit. In other words structural ambidexterity is achieved through a structural separation of exploration and exploitation oriented work (Chen, 2017; O'Reilly, Tushman, 2013). Moreover, structural ambidexterity

places high demands on top management, where the integration is expected to take place (Chen, 2017). And the third one is contextual ambidexterity. It concentrate on both exploitive and explorative tasks that are performed within the same organizational entity/structure – mainly by the same people. The contextual ambidexterity can be reconceptualized into a productive process for change, which can be beneficial in changing industries (Pregmark, 2019).

Strategic balancing between exploration and exploitation activities in turbulent and unpredictable environment requires dynamic capabilities. Innovation capacity is one of the main factors ensuring the survival of the organizations. The appropriate organization structure for innovation is the organic structure. The innovation may be easily developed in ambidextrous organization structures supporting both radical and incremental innovation (Gürkan, Tükeltürk, 2017). While technological capacity is one of the main antecedents in efforts to achieve the organizational ambidexterity (Yunita et al., 2023). The authors of the article special focus lie among others dynamic capabilities that affect ambidexterity, especially: collaboration (Hoessler, Carbon, 2023) knowledge sharing (Haider et al., 2023; Yang, 2021), strategic agility (Kowalik, Pleśniak, 2022; Alamsjah, Yunus, 2022; Liang et al., 2022), and adaptability (Lin, 2023; Bhatti et al., 2022). The impact of these dynamic capabilities on dealing with the tension between exploitative and explorative activities will be further discussed in the empirical part of the article.

## **2.2. From ambidextrous organization to process-project organization concept**

The literature on the subject shows a growing number of publications devoted to process organizations and project organizations. So far, these issues, just as BPM and project management, have developed in parallel with the increasing voices of both researchers and managerial personnel representatives, regarding the search for attempts to integrate the concepts and methods of process and project management (Cf. Nowosielski, 2018). A process-project organization is identified as a complex system based on a coexistence of processes and projects within the exploitation and exploration layers of an organization, leading to synergies between these operational categories. The essence of the described concept of a process-project organization lies in the integration of process and project management concepts and methods as well as in the implementation of the assumptions of organizational ambidexterity. This call for an organization subdivision into the layers of exploitation (focused on increasing the added value within genotypic activity) and exploration (focused on implementing innovative activity in search for new areas of added value generation). Correspondingly, it necessitates an extension of the process and project typology, to include the category of exploitative and explorative processes and reactive and proactive projects. Particular attention should be paid to explorative processes, which can be identified as carriers of improvement, optimization, and innovation in an organization. Considering the current state of knowledge on explorative business process management, the boundary between these categories is quite blurry and calls

for determination of further research directions on the subject of the methods involving identification, formalization, measurement of both categories and, as a result, the management of explorative processes (Sliż, 2021). Implementation of the concept of ambidexterity, which per the definition presented constitutes its foundation and directs management activities towards balancing the organization's exploitative and explorative activities, in order to achieve market supremacy, ought to be indicated as an important component of a process-project organization. Tushman and O'Reilly (1995) define an ambidextrous organization as one characterized by the ability to implement incremental (exploitative) and revolutionary (explorative) changes. According to Lubatkin et al. (2006), it is an organization that is able to use its existing competencies and new opportunities with equal (the same) agility. This illuminates two dimensions of organizational ambidexterity (Bierly et al., 2009; Donate, Guadamillas, 2011; Guisado-González et al., 2017; Caniels et al., 2017). The former is aimed at extending current knowledge, seeking greater efficiency, and implementing improvements that enable incremental innovation, whereas the explorative dimension involves refinement of new knowledge and search for variation and novelty, which are needed for more radical innovation (Atuahene-Gima, 2005). Examples of such contradiction management include: efficiency vs. flexibility, evolutionary vs. revolutionary change (Simons, 1991) or global vs. local integration (Devinney et al., 2000).

Implementation process-project organization based on the ambidexterity concept requires seeking integrative and holistic organization models. A systems-oriented view of environment, organization and management regards an organization as a complex value creation system that is embedded in a dynamic environment. Moreover systems-oriented view understand the dynamics that appear in interdependences not only between the organization seen a complex value creation system and it's environment, but also among the organization's elements. On the basis of systems theory and cybernetics the St. Gallen Management Model (SGMM) was developed to create an integral framework for explaining organizations and all their complex interrelationships and diverse environments (Ruëg, Stürm, 2019). The basic assumptions of the SGMM authors was to make business-science theory more relevant to practitioners by integrating existing management practices into one model (Ulrich, Krieg, 1972). As Höhn (2012) notice subsequent additions to the model appear to have been inspired more by changes in management theory than by practical observations. However, the New St. Gallen Management Model is not simply a collection of conceptual frameworks it comprises of two complementary perspectives on the interplay of environment, organization, and management. The task perspective focuses on a business-oriented conceptualization of organizational value creation as a key management task. The practice perspective complements the task perspective by illuminating the basic resource-related, cultural, and communicative prerequisites for management to become effective (<https://www.sgmm.ch/en/>) According to the SGMM, the internal core of an organisation is structured by (Mock, Zipper, 2020):

- structuring forces: strategy, structures, culture,
- processes: management, business, support,
- modes of development: renewal, optimization.

This core is encapsulated in external (Mock, Zipper, 2020):

- interaction issues: strategy, norms and values, concerns and interests,
- environmental spheres: society, nature, technology, economy.

Taking above into account, authors consider the New St. Gallen Management Model as a concept which allows integration of exploration and exploitation activities in the process – project organization. In other words, integration of business process management and project management is possible in accordance with the concept of an ambidextrous organization.

Expanding on the integrated process-project approach in organizational management presented earlier in this article, it can be defined as a concept involving dynamic balancing of exploitation and exploration, utilizing processes and projects in the implementation of an organization's strategy, based on ambidexterity assumptions. The balancing of two layers involves consideration of all subsystems of the organization, but also alignment of the organizational structure with the type of approach in achieving ambidexterity. Thereby, the assumptions of process-project organization (Sliž, 2021) are akin to the essence of an ambidextrous organization. One can even claim that every process-project organization is an ambidextrous organization, yet not every ambidextrous organization is a process-project organization. Moreover, in the era of the digital economy, observing the complexity of organizations and the growth of interest in Industry 4.0 and 5.0, it should be emphasized that the core of this type of organization lies in modern ICT technologies. This research area needs to be further explored, if only in the context of identifying the technologies supporting achievement of ambidextrousness in an organization.

### 3. Materials and methods

The research carried out constitutes part of an ongoing project addressing the issues of process and project management concept and method integration, extending it with components pertaining to ambidexterity and ICT technology. The organization selected for examination and described in this paper was qualified on the basis of a quantitative research carried out to assess the degree of process and project maturity (See: Sliž, 2021). For this purpose, two maturity assessment models - MMPM (process maturity) (Sliž, 2018) and H. Kerzner's PMMM (project maturity) (Kerzner, 2001; 2003) - were used. As per the measurement methodology adopted, the entity described in this publication has been classified at level 4 of process maturity, i.e., a state in which in the organization business processes are identified, formalized or explored, measured and managed in accordance with BPM principles. In terms of project

maturity, the organization was also qualified at level 4, i.e., a confirmed state of: quantitative and qualitative analyses implementation, establishment of organizational roles and units responsible for project implementation (e.g., project management office), as well as focus on process improvement and knowledge diffusion in the organization, realized through training (See: Kerzner, 2001).

The first study on this type of organizations was carried out in June 2021, based on a quantitative survey, and described in the paper (Sliż, 2021). After over 18 months, an attempt was made to continue the empirical investigation in the post-pandemic era (after the COVID-19 pandemic). This enabled, in particular, the observation of the development or regression of activities aimed at implementation of process-project organization assumptions, but also outlines additional supporting potentials and limiting factors in the implementation of this type of solution.

The organization examined is an international enterprise identified as a Finance Shared Service Centre (SSC). It operates with German capital and is located in Poland. Currently, the SSC under analysis employs more than 600 people, therefore, in terms of employment size (number-of-employees criterion), it is identified in Poland as a large organization. Its core activity entails provision of financial and accounting services for other branches of the company. The organization's functioning is oriented at delivering process results in accordance with customer expectations, in external (main processes) and internal (sub-processes) terms. Moreover, as per the information obtained from the managerial personnel, the organization is certified for quality management ISO 22301 and 9001. unit of measurement.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Exploitation activity in the SSC examined**

Employing the assumptions of the MMPM descriptive model of organizational process maturity assessment (See: Sliż, 2018), it has been confirmed, via semi-structured interviews and a research questionnaire, that in the organization examined, processes are identified and formalized in the form of descriptive documentation and a graphical process flow map. This applies to core processes and sub-processes. Auxiliary processes are also explored using process mining, based on the data generated in SAP. The survey interviews, conducted with the organization's employees, provided information on and allowed familiarization with the functioning of an INTRANET IT tool developed, which allows improvements to be read and submitted in formalized process maps. All SSC employees have access to this tool, regardless of their position. Throughout 2021-2023, no differences were discerned in this regard. The organization remained at the same level 4 of process-project maturity (See: Sliż, 2021).



The division of processes in the SSC examined was made according to the hierarchy criterion. This means that in the entity under analysis, processes are divided into managerial, core and auxiliary processes. The SSC utilizes a system of process measures, with particular emphasis on measuring the level of external and internal customer satisfaction. It should be noted here that the incentive subsystem utilizes the data generated by the internal customer satisfaction assessment system. The level of satisfaction determines the size of an employee's annual bonus, which, according to managers, positively affects the management of relations within the organization (between departments and teams). As of 2022, the external and internal customer satisfaction evaluation system is being adapted to include cooperation with the implementers of the processes that have been outsourced. According to the employees surveyed, this is all the more important since some of the employees working in SSCs have been transferred to external companies.

Processes are continuously monitored via dedicated IT solutions and analyzed with respect to such parameters as: process execution time, process flexibility, the quality of the effect generated, and the cost. When process analysis shows states that negatively affect the level of customer satisfaction, corrective actions are initiated, which can be aimed at e.g., a change in the course of action in a given process or correction of its level of autonomy. It is also worth noting that, within the space of the SSC examined, processes are compared with one another in terms of the parameters adopted, and inter-team transfer of good practices takes place on internal benchmarking basis, via the use of workshops. The BPM process management method has been implemented in the organization. This is primarily reflected in the identified, formalized and measured process architecture, the implementation of a market relations mechanism inside the organization, the implementation of modern information and communication tools supporting process management, the implementation of a planned training cycle on process management, the establishment of organizational roles characteristic of a process organization, and the focus on generating process results consistent with customer expectations.

In the last 2 years, efforts are being made to implement chatbots, enabling the reconfiguration of the employee specialization dimensions towards activation of employees in projects, through the use of their expertise, to enable process automation and robotization. In summary, the interviews with employees did not reveal any differences in the functioning of the exploitation layer in the period between the first (2021) and second surveys (2023), as its implementation has been primarily driven by core activities. A dynamic increase in the interest in assessing the potential of implementing such ICT technologies as Robotic Process Automation, Artificial Intelligence, Process Automation, ChatBots to increase the performance metrics studied by the systems has been observed. This is closely linked to the exploitation layer assumptions in the organization under study. The exploitation processes carried out in the

studied surveyed include order to cash, purchase to pay, hire to retire, accounting to report and accounts payable. In the SSC examined, exploitation processes are characterized by a high potential for standardization and robotization. These processes are also highly repetitive and routine, with a high share of procedures.

#### **4.2. Exploration activities in the SSC examined**

In the context of exploitation and exploration layer functioning in an organization, it must be stated that, these layers are neither identified nor formalized in the entity examined, nevertheless, the implementation of operational categories (processes and projects) indicates that the organizational part of the SSC under analysis is divided into a layer of genotypical (exploitative) activities and a layer linked to innovation, research and improvement of the sphere in which added value is hitherto generated. No differences have been noted in this regard since 2021.

In 2023, process and project development in the exploratory layer has been noted, compared to the survey conducted in 2021, to which such processes as Business Intelligence Process (analysis of financial and operational data), Risk Management Process (enabling identification and assessment as well as management of financial risks in the organization), Process Improvement Process (enabling identification of processes or process steps with high potential for optimization, with a focus on robotization and implementation of modern ICT technologies), compliance management process (enabling monitoring and management of process execution compliance with GPO assumptions) were qualified. The interview with executives revealed that, at this stage, implementation of a new nomenclature could cause misunderstanding among employees, therefore, exploration is equated with project activities, and exploration activities are identified as projects. Likewise, no use of term exploration process was observed.

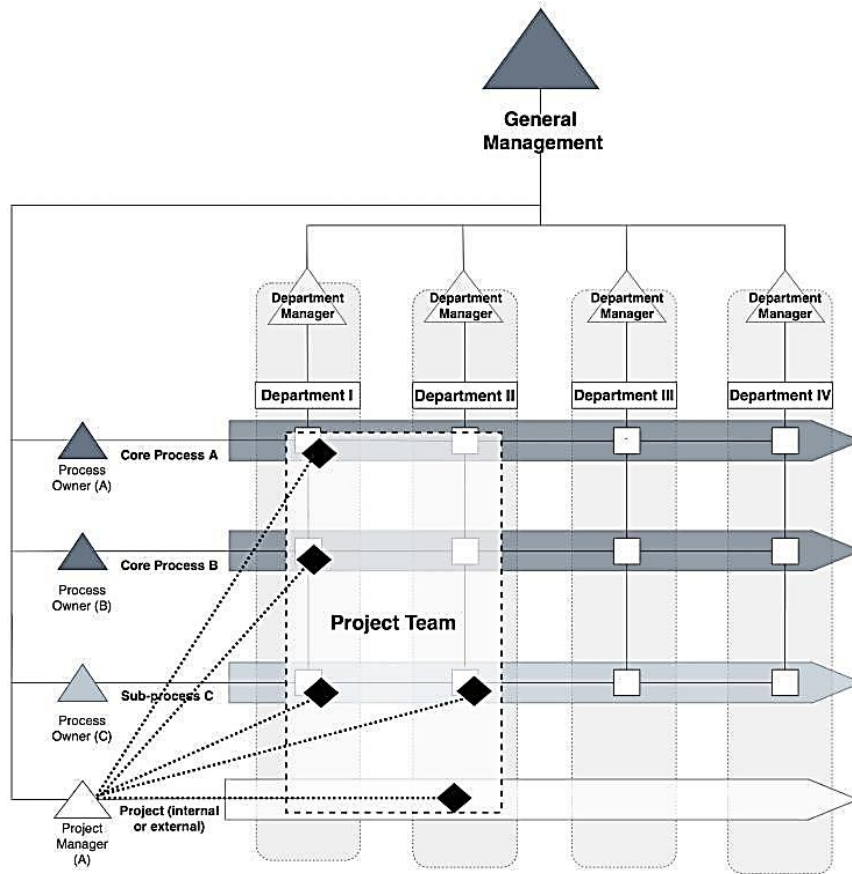
In the sphere of operational category permeation within the exploratory layer, in contrast, such new projects have been identified as financial processes standardization, outsourcing, integration of process execution with external contractors, implementation of a chatbot to handle internal email correspondence.

Based on the interviews with employees in 2021, a sample project of a new VAT Operational Process (VTO) development was presented. The VTO process is meant to check for legal and tax compliance of the accounting performed as part of the Accounts Payable Process (AP). The VTO process entails two stages. In the first stage, control activities are carried out in terms of formal liability compliance, while in the second, liability compliance is verified in terms of the tax specificity of the country in which it arose. In addition to operational activities, VTO process executors also organize trainings for AP process executors, on the tax law in force in particular countries, as well as on the requirements concerning the outputs

generated in the AP process, which constitute inputs to the VTO process. The main objective of the project described was to design and implement a new VAT Operational Process, whereas the sub-objectives included codification of knowledge on the legal conditions in the countries serviced by the shared service center examined, identification of common elements in the legal regulations, determination of the level of process standardization, design of process documentation, design and implementation of a verification mechanism. To implement the project described, competencies were reviewed across the organization. This means that, in this regard, activity was undertaken to find the necessary competencies within the shared service centers located in other countries but operating under the same organization. The employee interviews indicated that an interdisciplinary project team was established for this purpose, consisting of both project area (exploration layer) representatives and exploitation process (exploitation layer) implementers. A project manager was appointed to lead the team. The teams were membered by the employees appointed, based on their competence, knowledge and language skills, to implement the process designed. Substantive support was provided by accountants representing various countries. The team also included a trainer, whose task was to manage the diffusion of knowledge on the legal and tax aspects. It should be emphasized that the team's activities were supported by an expert employed through an external consulting organization (e.g., EY or PwC). The example presented shows the so-called market of competences functioning within the entire organization; in case of a lack of suitable competences, they are obtained outside the organization. The project teams are of interdisciplinary character and comprise employees who carry out both projects and processes (Sliz, 2021).

#### **4.3. Ambidextrous organizational structure in the SSC examined**

The structural dimension has been widely described in the context of ambidexterity in the works: (Stelzl et al., 2020; Güttel, Konlechner, 2009; Mirow et al., 2008). For the purpose of this study, an attempt was made to reconstruct the organizational structure, based on the available documentation and the interviews with managerial level and expert position employees. As a result, functional areas (departments) were identified within the vertical layer, and business processes and projects were identified within the horizontal layer. The SSC analyzed is characterized by a matrix organizational structure, the assumptions of which are presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** A conceptual diagram of organizational structure in the organization examined.

Source: Own research carried out in 2021-2022.

In the organization examined, it was assumed that the role of department managers is to supply, on market terms, the resources needed for the processes and projects under implementation. This in particular applies to human resources, material resources and the resources generated in the organization and its environment. The role of process owners and project managers, in turn, is to generate, respectively, process and project results, in accordance with the adopted objectives, and to monitor the course of the implementation thereof. Process owners and process experts also use process mining, importing data from Systems Applications and Products (SAP), in order to generate process improvement and optimization. It is worth emphasizing that within the structural dimension, the support potential is provided by the organizational roles established, which are specific to the state in which the methods for managing these operational categories have been implemented. The following such roles have been identified: process owner for core processes and sub-processes, process expert, project manager, and project coordinator. It should be noted that the role of an expert in the SSC analyzed is oriented towards intra-team knowledge diffusion and trainings for process implementers. What is more, within their prerogatives, experts are able to report improvements, both in the process in the implementation of which they are involved, as well as in other processes in the organization.

The survey carried out in 2023 revealed a flattening of the organizational structure, in relation to 2021. The centralization and standardization dimensions are being leveled, which favors the implementation of ambidexterity and process-project-organization assumptions. It also results from the outsourcing of selected processes to external companies and SSCs located in Asia. The structure increasingly targets projects (the exploration layer), while exploitation activities are assessed from an economic perspective, as an outsourcing potential. An additional factor affecting the focus on exploration in the SSC surveyed is the increase in the implementation of ICT solutions in exploitation processes.

## **5. Conclusion, implications and limitation**

### **5.1. Reserach conclusion**

The study results presented provide evidence that the conceptual assumptions regarding the integration of process and project management, described in the works (Reiss, 1992; Zehrer, 2002; Gareis, Stummer, 2006; Bitkowska, 2019; Nowosielski, 2017), are reflected in business practice. Based on the study, three generalizing conclusions were formulated.

Based on the identification of the processes, activities and technologies employed in the exploitation layer of the SSC under study, the concept of exploitative business process has been defined as a planned sequence of activities carried out to ensure the operation of the organization in the exploitative layer, focused on the performance of the core organization (genotype business). In a service organization such as SSC, these include the day-to-day operational activities of order processing, payment settlement, bookkeeping, preparation of financial reports. The main metrics used to assess such processes involve parameters such as efficiency, turnaround time and compliance with customer requirements, which provides high application potential for the use of modern technologies and IT tools, with a particular focus on process mining techniques. Explorative business process (ErBP), in turn, is an operational category similar to exploitative business process (EiBP) identified with the classical meaning of business process. In contrast to this conception, the purpose of ErBP entails implementation of activities aimed at generation of a tangible or intangible effect (process result) in the form of a new idea, opportunity, information, and knowledge for business activities. The implementation of ErBPM takes place in an environment saturated with technology, knowledge, research and development, experiments involving risk-taking to discover solutions to existing problems in the organization, or transfer of generated knowledge to the exploitation layer to improve and/or optimize the implementation of business processes. The differences between the above described operational categories present in the organization examined are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.***Differences between exploitative and explorative processes in the surveyed SSC*

Differential criteria	Exploitative process	Exploratory process
Process implementation objective	Maintaining the organization's core business, increasing the efficiency of genotype business execution.	Search for new areas to generate added value in the organization.
Dimension	Achievement of short-term goals.	Achievement of long-term goals.
Level of standardization	High level of process repeatability.	Low level of process repeatability.
Implementation time	Cyclical.	Occasionally one-off.
Type of activities in the process	Routine. Highly repeatable.	Creative, modified during implementation.
Measures	Efficiency Performance Quality Cost Customer satisfaction	Flexibility Level of innovation Assessment of ability to implement new ideas Risk assessment Creating customer value Innovativeness

Source: own elaboration based on the study carried out.

Compared to EiBPM, ErBPs are even more oriented at dynamic adaptation of the process flow to the turbulent economic environment, so as to enable identification of the customer needs and expectations, both externally and internally, in the shortest time possible. These processes demand different skills and tools than traditional business processes, as they often require a more open and experimental approach to problem solving. Successful exploratory business processes call for a strong focus on innovation, creativity and flexibility, alongside a willingness to take risks and learn from failures.

## 5.2. Managerial implications

The qualitative research carried out on the example of the organization described, which is characterized by a high (4) level of process and project maturity, yielded existence of a potential for the SSC under analysis to reach a higher (fifth) level of process and project maturity. It should be stressed that the decision to undertake activity aimed at achievement of the highest, fifth level should be preceded by analysis of the benefits for the organization and analysis of the potential in terms of the resources necessary to reach that level and the availability thereof. Based on the case studies carried out in 2021 and 2023, a set of recommendations supporting the examined SSC's achievement of the fifth level of process-project maturity was proposed.

First, the organization examined is currently employing a contextual approach to the achievement of ambidexterity in the context of a dynamic balancing of exploitative (exploitative processes and projects) and exploratory (exploratory processes and projects) activities. Alas, the study carried out in 2021 and 2023 revealed fragmentary implementation of the ambidexterity achievement strategy. In the Authors' opinion, a long-term strategy needs to be developed to outline the target state of process-project maturity, taking the implementation of ICT technologies into account, in both exploitation and exploration. It is worth emphasizing here that, in addition to the system layer, it would be worthwhile to factor in flexibilization of the organization's structure towards ambidextrous or process-project solutions.

Second, mechanisms should be put in place to enable knowledge management between exploitation and exploration, particularly between explorative processes (highly saturated with knowledge) and exploitative processes. The knowledge generated through the processes and projects implemented in the organization was found to be codified and available to the stakeholders within the organization, allowing the transfer thereof from projects to processes and vice versa.

### 5.3. Research limitation

As any such study, this one also is subject to limitations associated with exemplifying a process-project organization that is based on the ambidexterity concept assumptions. These limitations apply to the focus on one organization, with a clear indication that the results of research on process and project maturity indicate that most organizations in Poland are classified at relatively low levels, which has been noted in various works (Sliž, 2021). This also generates a state, in which directions for further research enabling construction of theoretical and in-depth models allowing identification of an organization's maturity, with regard to the degree of BPM, project management and ambidexterity concept implementation have been set, and attempts to identify the factors supporting and limiting this level of maturity by the degree of ICT implementation have been made.

Summing up, the study has outlined three cognitive gaps (L). L1: There are no studies illustrating the use the technologies supporting big data exploration and analysis in the exploitation and exploration layer of organizations (Cf. Dezi et al., 2018). L2: There is scarcity of academic studies focusing on the so-called explorative BPM (Cf. Kohlborn et al., 2014) in business process management.

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