

DEVELOPING COMMERCIAL PROCESSES IN A CHANGING WORLD

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Sammanfattning

Detta examensarbete syftar till att identifiera förbättrade metoder för kommersiella processer inom organisationer genom att analysera best-in-class principer och aktuella trender inom vetenskaplig forskning. Arbetet omfattar en litteraturstudie, en semistrukturerad intervju med IKEA samt en dokumentstudie av fall från McKinsey & Company.

Syftet är att kartlägga processmetodik och identifiera ledande arbetssätt för att bidra till kontinuerlig utveckling av kommersiella processer, med särskilt fokus på företag som Volvo Cars. Ambitionen är att presentera konkreta förbättringsförslag som kan användas för att effektivisera kommersiella flöden med hänsyn till kundvärde, hållbarhet och digitalisering.

Studien genomfördes med en induktiv forskningsansats, där teori och empiri kombinerades för att generera insikter. Litteraturstudien baserades på högt citerade vetenskapliga artiklar publicerade främst mellan 2020 och 2025 i databasen Web of Science. Det empiriska materialet analyserades kvalitativt med hjälp av öppen kodning och tematisering.

Resultaten visar att förändringsarbetets inledande fas är avgörande för framgång. Att skapa en tydlig processtruktur och identifiera flaskhalsar möjliggör fokuserade förbättringsinsatser där de gör störst nytta. Flera verktyg lyfts fram som centrala, bland annat Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA), Define-Measure-Analyze-Improve-Control (DMAIC), de sju kvalitetsverktygen och process mining. Dessa metoder betonar vikten av ett strukturerat förbättringsarbete med fokus på värdeskapande aktiviteter.

För att uppnå hög effektivitet och bibehålla konkurrenskraft rekommenderas ett kundcentrerat arbetssätt som främjar hållbarhet, digital transformation och en inkluderande företagskultur. ISO 26000 har använts som vägledande ramverk för socialt ansvarstagande, där principer som transparens, rättvisa arbetsvillkor och hållbar utveckling understryker kopplingen till samhällsnytta.

Denna uppsats presenterar ett konkret och visualiserat förbättringsförslag i form av en stegvis modell för framtida utveckling av kommersiella processer. Modellen bygger på ett datadrivet, transparent och kundorienterat angreppssätt där återkoppling används som motor för kontinuerlig förbättring.

Abstract

This thesis aims to identify improved methods for commercial processes within organizations by analyzing best-in-class principles and current trends in academic research. The study includes a literature review, a semi-structured interview with IKEA, and a document study of cases from McKinsey & Company.

The purpose is to map out process methodologies and identify leading practices that contribute to the continuous development of commercial processes, with a specific focus on organizations such as Volvo Cars. The goal is to present concrete improvement proposals that enhance commercial operations in terms of customer value, sustainability, and digitalization.

The study was conducted using an inductive research design, where theoretical and empirical insights were combined to generate deeper understanding. The literature review was based on highly cited scientific articles published between 2020 and 2025, retrieved from the Web of Science database. The empirical material was analyzed qualitatively through open coding and thematic categorization.

The results shows that the initial phase of a change process is critical to success. Establishing a clear process structure and identifying bottlenecks enable focused improvements where they are most impactful. Several tools are highlighted as essential, including Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA), Define-Measure-Analyze-Improve-Control (DMAIC), the seven quality tools, and process mining. These methods emphasize structured improvement work and a focus on value-creating activities.

To maintain high efficiency and competitiveness, a customer-centric approach that promotes sustainability, digital transformation, and an inclusive organizational culture is recommended. ISO 26000 served as a guiding framework for social responsibility, reinforcing the importance of transparency, fair working conditions, and sustainable development as drivers of societal value.

The thesis presents a concrete and visualized improvement proposal in the form of a step-by-step model for the future development of commercial processes. The model is based on a data-driven, transparent, and customer-oriented approach in which feedback is used as a driver for continuous improvement.

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List of abbreviations and key concepts

Abbreviation	Term	Definition
AI	Artificial intelligence	AI is a set of technologies that are based primarily on machine learning and deep learning
Best-in-class		Industry leading methods or processes considered as benchmarks.
CMMI	Capability Maturity Model Integration	A process improvement framework that gives guidelines for developing effective process across different mature levels
Commercial process		A set of activities from first customer contact to delivery and post-sale activity
DMAIC	Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control	A structured Six Sigma methods for process improvements
DT	Digital Transformation	The integration of digital technologies into all areas of business to fundamentally change how they operate and deliver value to customer
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning	A type of business software that integrates core business functions such as finance, sales and human resources
KPI	Key Performance Indicator	A measure of performance over time
Lean		A method to eliminate waste and improve
PDCA	Plan. Do, Check, Act	An improvement cycle used to optimize processes by
Six Sigma		A quality management tool that reduces variation and defects
SWOT	Strength, Weakness, opportunities, Threats	A tool used to identify a projects or company's strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats
Volvo Cars		The case company for this thesis
VSM	Value Stream Mapping	A Lean technique for visualizing and improving the flow of materials and information

1. INTRODUCTION

Commercial processes form the backbone of how companies generate value and meet customer needs. These processes span from marketing and pricing to customer service and logistics. As markets and technologies evolve rapidly, organizations face increasing pressure to improve these processes through both structural innovation and cultural adaptation.

This thesis explores how leading companies approach commercial development by identifying key patterns and practices through empirical data. Using open coding, we identify five recurring themes, digital innovation, customer focus, operational excellence, strategic and cultural approaches, and commercial performance. These themes guide our analysis and form the basis for comparing strategic models and practical implementations.

1.1 Background

The definition of commercial process refers to a structured sequence of activities and workflows that an organization undertakes in order to sell, deliver their products and services to customers. This workflow includes multiple departments such as marketing, sales, order processing, production, delivering and customer service. An efficient and well optimized commercial process is crucial to the organization's success since it impacts customer satisfaction, which affects revenue. An optimal process ensures that customers receive a good purchasing experience simultaneously as costs are minimized and competitiveness rises (Law Insider n.d.).

Digital technology began to impact business operations as early as the 1950s, when advancements in computer systems and communication infrastructure laid the foundation for new organizational structures and methods of conducting business. These technological shifts required companies to adapt their business practices, an evolution that has continued ever since. By the 1990s workflow systems were developed, which was the start of commercial processes being documented (van der Aalst 2013). Since then, digital transformation has continued to reshape how businesses operate. Recent research emphasizes that digitalization today is not only a matter of technology, but also requires alignment between organizational structure, culture and processes to achieve full impact (Dąbrowska et al. 2022). Furthermore, Sehlin, Truedsson and Cronemyr (2020) highlight the importance of combining process management with digital innovation to enable more flexible, customer-oriented operations. This is particularly relevant for large organizations aiming to adapt their commercial processes in line with changing market conditions and technological advancements.

This thesis aims to understand how commercial processes operate in large sized companies. It is important to examine how it is done today according to academic literature and compare different organizations processes and what the future holds. The thesis will explore through trend spotting in scientific research and an interview with a prominent industry. This will lead to finding best-in-class methods on how to optimize the commercial process. The goal is to provide concrete improvement proposals, based on both theory and empirical findings, for Volvo Cars and other organizations with similar needs (Bergman & Klefsjö 2023).

Volvo Cars, one of the world's leading premium car manufacturers, has a comprehensive structure of commercial processes ranging from the customer's first contact with the company to delivery of the car and under the car's lifetime. This process includes everything from when a customer begins their journey to buy a Volvo car to owning it (Volvo Group n.d.).

The societal benefit of this work lies in promoting more sustainable and efficient business practices, which in turn contribute to economic growth, reduced resource waste, and enhanced competitiveness on a global scale. Improving commercial processes not only supports organizational resilience but also creates ripple effects, boosting employment quality, strengthening supply chains, and fostering innovation across industries. It also boosts communities by increasing employment opportunities with sustainable working conditions with fair compensation. These values align with the principles in ISO 26000, that emphasizes social responsibility, ethical behavior, respect for the law and human rights (ISO 2010).

1.2 Problem statement

The Customers' journey develops and changes continuously. Organizations must keep up with the trends and streamline their processes to remain competitive and efficient. A central challenge is to keep commercial processes aligned with structured methodologies while simultaneously ensuring customer satisfaction, profitability, and sustainability. If this is not achieved it could lead to inefficient labor, different ways of solving the same task and irregularities in data storage. Process methodologies refer to structured approaches and tools that help organizations improve commercial processes by increasing efficiency, reducing waste and ensuring consistent quality. These methods provide a foundation for continuous improvement and are essential for adapting to rapid changes in technology and customer expectations. Prior research shows that the absence of structured and standardized commercial processes often leads to inefficiencies and inconsistent customer experiences (Sehlin, Truedsson & Cronemyr 2020; Zhou et al. 2023). Unclear workflows and silo-based decision making can decelerate responsiveness and flexibility, aspects that are crucial in a competitive and fast-changing market.

There is an increasing demand to innovate and find a better way to streamline commercial processes. Organizations face challenges in ensuring the right number of products in the right place at the right time. Success depends on adaptability and the ability to respond quickly to market trends. A significant portion of costs are often tied up in storage, which needs to change to avoid capital being tied up. As globalization expands and competitiveness intensifies, organizations that fail to adapt to changes in the external environment risk not surviving in the future. Studies have shown that optimized and customer-centric processes significantly improve operational outcomes. Bergman and Klefsjö (2023) emphasize the relationship between process quality, customer satisfaction and business success, while Modig and Åhlström (2015) demonstrate how inefficient flows reduce value creation and increase internal complexity. In the context of digital transformation, organizations must not only streamline workflows but also integrate data-driven and transparent methods to remain agile (Dąbrowska et al. 2022).

To better understand these challenges and how they are handled in practice, this thesis used open coding to analyze empirical material from leading companies. By identifying recurring patterns and categorizing the data into central themes, the method enables a deeper insight into how organizations approach commercial development. This structured coding process helps uncover critical areas such as inefficiencies, technology usage, and customer focus, which form the foundation of the analysis in later chapters (Eriksson 2024).

The first problem statement gives a big picture based on qualitative data what is the best way to handle commercial processes. Question two goes into to how this would be applied in an

organization. This problem statement will highlight risks as well as pros and cons when implementing new methods.

1.3 Purpose

To ensure efficiency and competitiveness in today's rapidly evolving business landscape, continuous development and improvement of commercial processes is essential. Process methodologies play a central role in this work, as they provide structured approaches to optimizing both time and cost. Against this background, there is a need to review and compare established methodologies to identify what can be considered best practices. The purpose is:

To investigate the efficiency of existing process methodologies in commercial operations.

To achieve this purpose, a deeper understanding is needed of how different process methodologies influence business outcomes. Therefore, it is of particular interest to investigate the practical application and outcomes of these methodologies within organizations' commercial operations.

The following research questions have been developed to operationalize the purpose.

1. How can commercial processes be streamlined in terms of time and cost?
2. How should process methodologies be applied based on qualitative data and identified best-in-class principles?

1.4 Limitations

The scope of the thesis is restricted to commercial processes, with a specific focus on sales, order management, and customer service. Related areas such as marketing, logistics, and product development are excluded in order to maintain a clear analytical scope for customer-facing operations. Furthermore, the thesis aims only to identify and analyze best-practice models. It does not include implementation or follow-up of these practices in an operational setting.

2. THEORY

In this chapter relevant theoretical frameworks and concepts form the foundation. The aim is to create a deeper understanding of key concepts related to commercial processes, continuous improvement, sustainability and digital transformation. By reviewing relevant literature and having an interview, this chapter highlights how organizations can optimize their workflows with best-in-class practices.

To ensure that the theoretical foundation reflects the most recent developments in commercial process optimization and digital transformation, the literature review primarily includes sources published between 2020 and 2025. This period was chosen because it captures the shift in organizational priorities and methods, including an increased focus on digital tools, process integration and agility (Dąbrowska et al. 2022). Foundational works prior to 2020, such as Deming (1993), van der Aalst (2013), and Modig and Åhlström (2015), are also included to provide historical and conceptual depth.

2.1 Finding of articles

Literature was identified using a structured literature review (Eriksson 2025). The initial search terms included “commercial”, “customer”, “best-in-class”, and “process”, which were later expanded into synonymous terms. These terms were later expanded into synonyms; for example, “best-in-class” was associated with “leading,” “best practice,” and “trends” (Table 1).

Table 1: Creation of search terms

Main terms (AND)	Alternate terms	Search term (OR)
Commercial process	Commercial	commercial
		business
		sales
	Customer	customer
		consumer
	Best-in-class	best-in-class
		leading
		best practice
		trends
	Process	process
		procedure
		method
		strategy

The search strings were used to find articles for the research (Table 2). Between the search terms OR was used and between alternate terms AND was used. To obtain more recent articles and narrow the search results, the date range from 2020 to 2025 was used. There are two different search strings due to the need for more articles within a business process.

Table 2: Databases and search strings

Database	Search string
Web of Science	TS=((commercial OR business OR sales) AND (customer OR consumer) AND ("best-in-class" OR leading OR "best practice" OR trends) AND (process OR procedure OR method OR strategy))
	TS=(("business process") AND (optimization))

Next step was to go through the titles and remove the ones that were not relevant. Twenty-nine respective five titles were removed. After reading through the abstracts, more articles were removed due to irrelevancy to the subject. In the end, five and four articles were left and selected for the literature review (Table 3).

Table 3: Screening strategy performed in three steps

Database	WoS, first search string	WoS, second search string
Hits	42	9
Title removal	29	5
Abstract removal	8	0
Full-paper review and snowballing	5	4
Final sample	Dabrowska et al. (2022); Gautam et al. (2024); Li et al. (2024); Nascimento et al. (2024); Wang et al. (2024)	Gorski et al. (2021); Nuerk et al. (2023); Zhou et al. (2023); Berniak-Wozny et al. (2024)

2.2 Commercial processes

Commercial processes comprise a series of activities, from the first customer encounter to the final sale and post-sale services. The goal is to ensure customer satisfaction over time. The importance of structured, cross-functional commercial processes is highlighted by Sehlin et al. (2020), who emphasize the need to integrate digital tools and process management to enhance efficiency and responsiveness in large organizations.

The term commercial process refers to a structured and recurring sequence of activities within an organization that is focused on creating value through the sale and delivery of goods and services to customers. While the term process broadly describes any structured set of activities designed to achieve a specific outcome ranging from manufacturing and administrative workflows to service operations, a commercial process specifically pertains to business related workflows that generate economic value. It emphasizes customer interactions, revenue generation, and value creation within a commercial setting. Every commercial process has a defined beginning and end, as well as designated customers and suppliers. It should also be measurable to enable optimization and adaptation to change market conditions (Bergman & Klefsjö 2023).

In an academic and business strategy context, a commercial process is defined as a sequence of related activities that interact to meet customer needs. These activities range from marketing and sales to order processing, production, distribution, and after-sales services (Law Insider, n.d.). The efficiency of the process directly impacts an organization's profitability and competitiveness, as it determines how well customer needs can be met while minimizing costs.

2.2.1 Structure and components of a commercial process

A commercial process can be divided into different phases and components depending on the organization's business model. According to Rentzhog (1998), processes are generally categorized into core processes, support processes, and management processes (Figure 1).

Core Processes: These are the backbone of the business and are responsible for delivering value to external customers. Examples of such processes include sales, product development, and order fulfillment.

Support Processes: These provide resources and assistance to the core processes, such as recruitment, IT support, or internal logistics services. These processes serve internal customers within the organization.

Management Processes: Responsible for strategy, management, and continuous improvement of the business. These processes involve decision making regarding organizational goals, strategic priorities, assessment, and improvement of other processes.

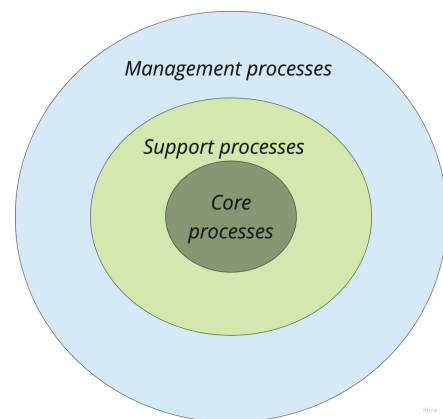


Figure 1: All the processes. Illustration created by authors using Miro

2.2.2 The importance of process focus, efficiency and improvements

One of the most crucial perspectives on commercial processes is that process efficiency is often more critical than individual performance. Instead of focusing on “who does what”, organizations should analyze how results are produced and how value is created. Well-designed processes matter more than individual efforts because they deliver results efficiently. Poorly structured process wastes resources which can lead to sub optimization, where resources are used inefficiently, and customer value is lost (Bergman & Klefsjö 2023).

Research suggests flow focused processes can cut delivery time. Flow efficiency prioritizes delivering value to customers quickly, unlike resource efficiency, which keeps staff occupied even if it can create bottlenecks. The concept of flow efficiency has gained increasing attention in modern process development. Flow efficiency measures how much value is created per time unit from the customer's perspective, in contrast to resource efficiency, which focuses on maximizing the use of internal resources. A company that prioritizes only resource efficiency risks tying up capital in inventory and unnecessary work steps, which in turn reduces cash flow and creates bottlenecks (Bergman & Klefsjö 2023).

This distinction is supported by Modig and Åhlström (2015), who argue that organizations focusing only on resource efficiency risk creating internal bottlenecks and losing sight of

customer value. Flow efficiency ensures that value is continuously delivered throughout the process, reducing wait times and increasing responsiveness.

To ensure that commercial processes remain competitive, a systematic approach to process management and improvement is required. Process management can be divided into four key steps (Bergman & Klefsjö 2023).

- Organizing for Improvement – Identifying process owners and improvement teams responsible for analysis and development.
- Understanding the Process – Mapping process interfaces, identifying customers and suppliers, and analyzing existing workflows.
- Observing the Process – Establishing relevant measurement points and conducting regular analyses.
- Continuously Improving the Process – Utilizing collected data and feedback to optimize and adapt the processes.

Another essential aspect is benchmarking, or process comparison, where organizations compare their processes with industry leaders to identify areas for improvement.

A commercial process is a central part of an organization's business model and directly influences its ability to create value for customers. By understanding and optimizing these processes, companies can achieve higher efficiency, improve customer satisfaction, and increase their competitiveness. Process management and flow efficiency are crucial factors in handling the challenges that arise in a constantly changing business environment, and organizations that continuously improve their commercial processes have greater potential to adapt to market demands and strengthen their position in the industry (Bergman & Klefsjö 2023).

2.3 Process improvement tools and methods

Continuous improvement is essential for optimizing commercial processes and enhancing organizational efficiency. Bergman and Klefsjö (2023) explore a way of thinking about improvements, based on, "Profound Knowledge" originally introduced by Deming (1993), to present a structured approach to process improvement. This framework provides a theoretical foundation for systematic and long-term improvement efforts within organizations.

This approach is grounded in four interrelated areas, variation, psychology, theory of knowledge, and systems thinking. Variation means understanding why processes change, not just seeing them as random. Psychology covers motivation and decision-making. The theory of knowledge, per Deming (1993), mixes data and theory to predict the future: "To make a prediction, we need to know the present and the past and have a theory" (freely translated from Bergman & Klefsjö 2023, p. 188). Systems thinking focuses on the big picture and shared goals.

Improving businesses is a critical aspect of meeting today's demands, and methods like Six Sigma, Lean, and quality development are among the most effective methodologies for meeting modern business demands. These programs are widely used because they help organizations boost quality, cut costs, and focus on what customers need. Bergman and Klefsjö (2023) explain

how these approaches work together, offering tools to systematically improve processes in both production and services.

Six Sigma was developed to cut down unwanted variation in processes, especially in things that matter to customers. Anything that doesn't add value is seen as unnecessary, with the goal of making the flow as smooth as possible. Modig and Åhlström (2015) say it's more about flow efficiency than just using resources well. A key success factor was the active involvement of top management. Bergman and Klefsjö (2023) discuss that without engaged, wholehearted, and persistent support from top management, programs like Six Sigma struggle to survive and make big breakthroughs in the organization. By reducing variation in critical parameters, it led to better outcomes, like faster deliveries or fewer mistakes. Another key factor was knowledge, the book highlighted the need for a solid training program, where knowledge was put into practice right away. Some companies even asked improvement leaders to prove cost savings to pass training, tying theory to real results.

Working with continuous improvement means that operational levels and strategic leadership are actively engaged in developing processes (Figure 2). For operators and employees in day-to-day work this can involve identifying waste, suggesting improvements and following up on the result. The role of leadership is to create the right conditions through clear goals, resources, training and a supportive culture where improvement work is encouraged. According to Bergman and Klefsjö (2023) shared responsibility, and a long-term perspective are required for improvement efforts to become a natural part of daily operations.

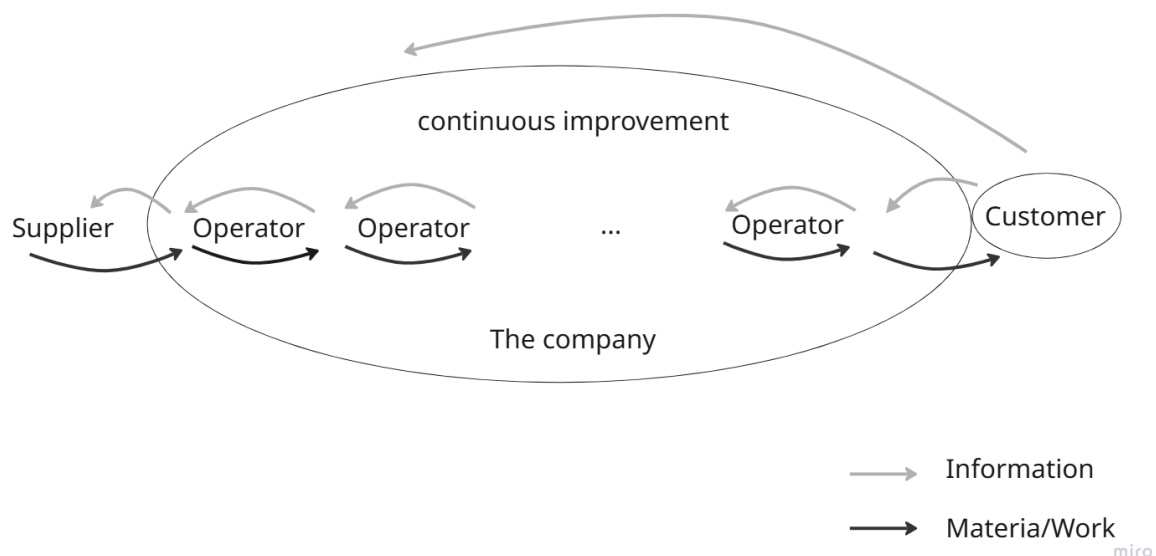


Figure 2: Continuous improvement. Illustration created by the authors using Miro

2.3.1 Lean and Six Sigma

Lean is about removing waste and improving workflow by focusing on what creates value for the customer. Anything that does not help the customer now or in the future is seen as a waste. Lean emphasizes that companies should only produce what is needed, when it is needed. It uses tools like 5S, Kanban and Andon to support step-by-step improvements. By improving the entire process, Lean helps companies deliver faster, reduce costs and better meet customer needs (Modig & Åhlström 2015; Bergman & Klefsjö 2023).

Setiawan et al. (2021) further demonstrate that Lean principles, when applied to service environments such as customer service and sales, can significantly improve lead times and customer satisfaction. Their findings highlight the importance of mapping invisible processes that often contribute to hidden inefficiencies. This approach is particularly effective in dynamic environments where short lead times and customer responsiveness are critical for competitiveness. Despite its benefits, Lean requires more than just tools, it demands culture change. Without leadership support and employee engagement.

Six Sigma is a method that helps reduce problems and variation in processes. It requires strong involvement from top management and long-term support to succeed. Six Sigma uses data and tools, such as design of experiments, to find and fix root causes of variation. This method helped companies improve quality and become more efficient over time (Bergman & Klefsjö 2023).

Six Sigma is powerful but resource demanding. Without strong leadership and integration into strategy, it may fail to deliver lasting results. Its success relies heavily on an organization's ability to collect and analyze data systematically, as well as sustained managing support.

Combined Lean and Six Sigma form Lean Six Sigma, a powerful mix. It blends Six Sigma structure and tools for cutting variation with Lean focus on flow and customer value. Bergman and Klefsjö (2023) view it as more than a quick fix, it's a mindset and a strategy for the whole business. It shifts attention to early stages of the product lifecycle, like design and planning, building quality from the start. This fits commercial processes by making them more efficient and tailored to customer needs, while also supporting trends like sustainability and long-term growth.

2.3.2 Value stream mapping

Value stream mapping (VSM) is a Lean tool that maps out processes to find waste and improve flow. Setiawan et al. (2021) explain how it works well for areas like sales, order processing and customer service. By identifying delays, extra steps and bottlenecks that increases the total lead time helps cut time and costs while keeping customers happy. A key part is reviewing how much time employees spend on active work. For example, it might show that out of an 8-hour day, only 2 hours go to actual tasks, while 6 hours could be spent waiting or fixing errors. VSM focuses on smooth operations rather than just using resources, which suits the need for efficient work across different industries. It is about seeing the whole picture, from start to finish and making it better step by step.

VSM can improve workflows by visualizing where changes are needed, but it requires effort like training staff and getting everyone on board. Practically it starts with drawing a map of the current process (Figure 3). Next step is tracking an order from request to delivery, then marking where time gets wasted. According to Setiawan et al. (2021, p. 7), VSM has the potential “to eliminate the largest waste by 36%, then increase customer satisfaction by 28%, shorten cycle time by 18%, save costs and increase profit by 10% and improve service quality by 8%”. This makes VSM a strong option for organizations wanting to streamline their processes and stay ahead. It's not just about quick fixes, it's a way to rethink how work gets done and keep improving over time. By mapping out what is really happening, VSM helps turn messy processes into something that runs smoother and delivers more value to the customer. By visualizing dependencies between departments that are often overlooked in organizations.

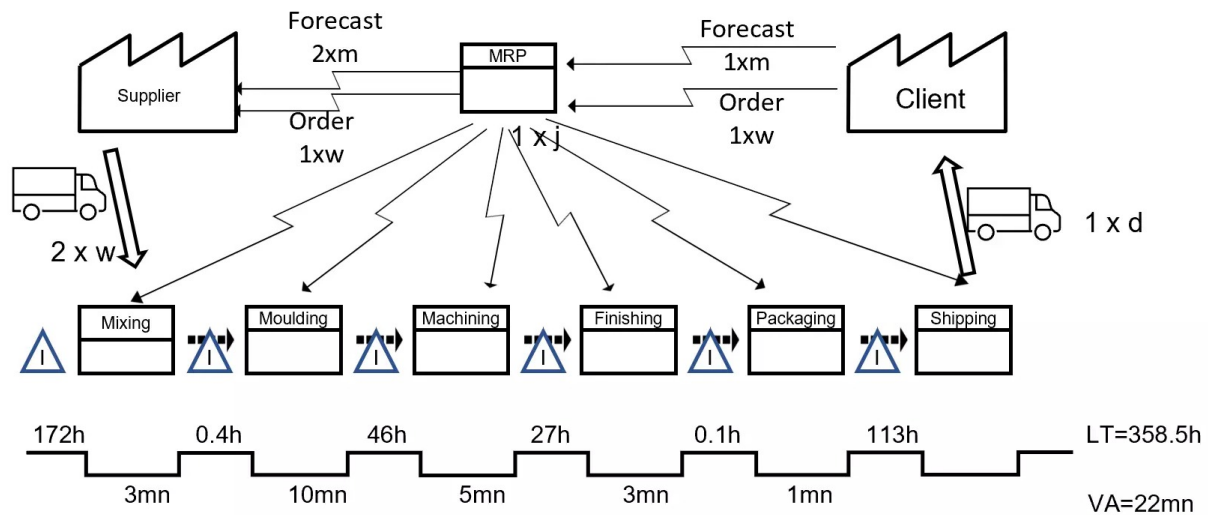


Figure 3: Example of VSM (Wevalgo n.d.)

2.3.3 PDCA and DMAIC

To implement, there are two tools, Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) and Define-Measure-Analyze-Improve-Control (DMAIC). PDCA tests step by step, while DMAIC analyzes deeper (Bergman & Klefsjö 2023). Quality improvement boards show projects in seven steps: planning, data collection, analysis, actions, study, standardize, and future planning. They make information visible, Bergman and Klefsjö (freely translated from 2023, p. 204) quote Modig and Åhlström (2015) “information must be a glance away”. This way of thinking makes commercial processes smoother by solving issues and testing solutions, supporting a culture of learning, where small experiments can scale into long-term structural improvements.

PDCA is a simple cycle used to improve processes step by step (Figure 4). In the Plan phase, the root cause of a problem is identified often using tools like cause-and-effect or Pareto diagrams. In Do, a team tests solutions on a small scale. Check involves measuring and analyzing the results. If the solution works, the Act phase ensures the change becomes a standard. Many companies also add learning and standardizing to keep improvements and share them across the organization (Bergman & Klefsjö 2023; Deming 1993). Deming who developed the PDCA cycle, emphasized that learning and systematic feedback loops are essential for long-term process improvement. The method enables organizations to test hypotheses on a small scale before scaling improvements, which reduces risk and promotes organizational learning.

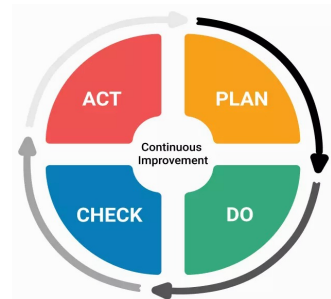


Figure 4: PDCA (Passionned Group n.d.)

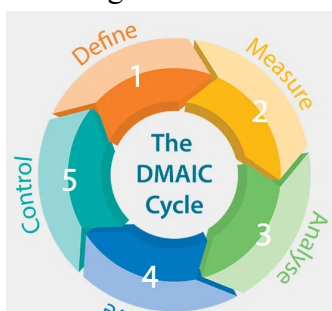


Figure 5: DMAIC (AhaSlides 2025)

DMAIC is a more detailed improvement method from Six Sigma (Figure 5). It begins with Define, where the problem and goals are clearly described. In Measure, data is collected to understand current performance. Analyze looks for the root cause and Improve focuses on finding and testing solutions. Finally, Control makes sure the improvement lasts over time. DMAIC is helpful for complex problems and gives a clear structure for teams to follow (Bergman & Klefsjö 2023).

2.3.4 Seven QC tools

There are seven Quality Control (QC) tools check sheet, histogram, fishbone diagram, pareto chart, control chart, scatter diagram and stratification. The purpose of the seven QC tools were to provide several different ways to implement effective methods for problem-solving and process improvement in quality management. All the tools have different goals but together they help teams analyze data and identify root causes in a structured and standardized form. They also provide a shared analytic language across teams, which enhances collaboration and decision-making consistency. Fishbone diagrams also called Ishikawa diagrams developed in the 1950s from a Japanese professor of engineering called Kaoru Ishikawa (Bergman & Klefsjö 2023, pp. 216-221).

The fishbone diagram creates a visualization of the causes and what effect it leads too. A cause could be broken down into multiple smaller causes that all lead to the same effect. After building the diagram a measure plan is made, where each cause and effect is described. With questions such as how it could be measured, when, who is responsible for the effect and is the cause known. While answering the measure plan precision and accuracy is important. The plan is used when analyzing why the issues exist and what could be changed (Bergman & Klefsjö 2023, p. 253).

2.3.5 Digitalized value chain

Digitalization has created big opportunities to improve production processes by making them more efficient and connecting parts across the world. Bergman and Klefsjö (2023) explain how this fast development means most products today are linked to the internet in some way. It opens new ways to work and manage processes.

Sehlin et al. (2020) see digitalization as a path to innovation and process maturity, where flexible processes can quickly match what customers want. Tools like smart industry use data to improve processes, with examples of 3D printing and digital twins, based on Zonnenschain and Kenett's (2020) capability maturity model integration (CMMI) by the CMMI Institute (Figure 6).

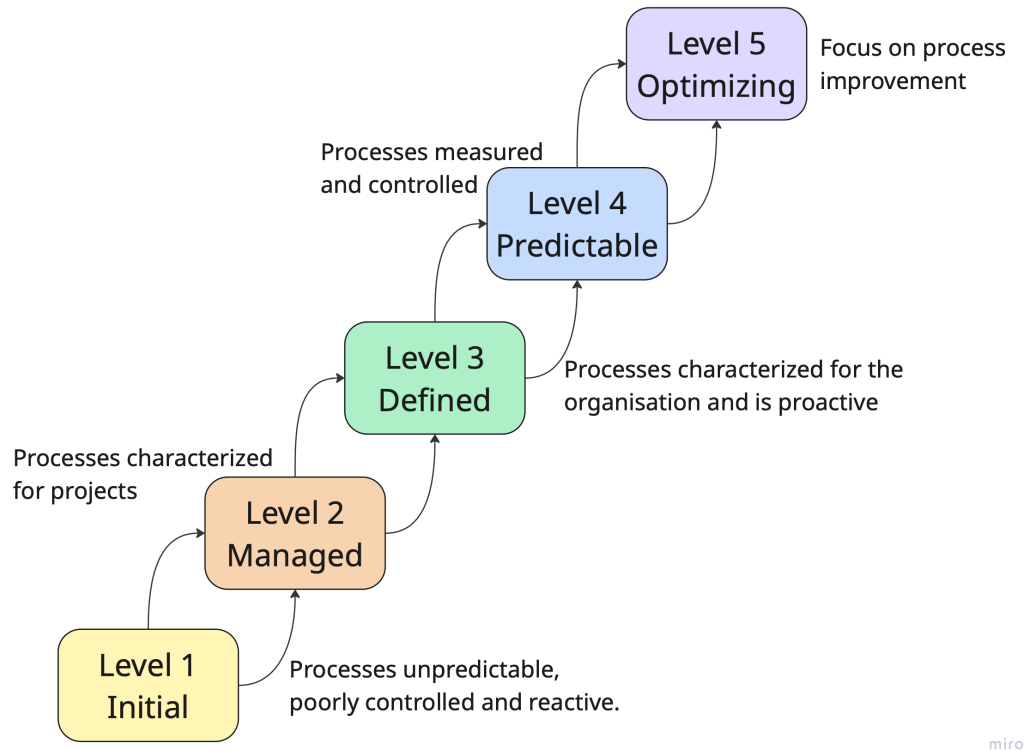


Figure 6: Capability maturity model integration. Illustration created by the authors using Miro

This ties into commercial processes by enhancing the customer experience. “The digital customer journey can be an invaluable support when linking new services to existing offerings” (freely translated from Bergman & Klefsjö 2023, p. 449). Customers can track their product from purchase to recycling, while companies handle billing, complaints, and early warnings. Enabling information in one place that can be updated simultaneously.

2.4 Sustainability

Sustainability has gained increasing importance in recent years, with stricter regulations being implemented to ensure that companies operate responsibly and in compliance with sustainability standards. According to industry 4.0, agenda 2030 and Systems Engineering (SE) Vision 2035 of the International Council on Systems Engineering (INCOSE) platform driven business models need to evaluate and develop their supply chain (Nuerk & Darena 2023).

Sustainability refers to the integration of environmental, social, and economic considerations in delivering long-term value to stakeholders. Wang et al. (2024) analyzed 139,075 green product review to identify consumers preferences. Findings included that quality, design and trustworthy eco-certifications were the main drive for consumers choice. High prices and poor customer service made consumers doubt companies' ability. “The green consumption sentiment of consumers has an increasingly positive time trend.” (Wang et al. 2024, abstract) Consumers are attracted to green products because of their safety, environmental benefits and aesthetic appeal which added value. A way that Wang et al. (2024) lifted to gain consumers trust was promoting transparency.

Promoting transparency about green products and running educational campaigns can help build trust and address doubts about the credibility of green claims. Wang et al. (2024)

emphasize that businesses must use consumer insights and address barriers such as price and skepticism to make green products more appealing. By prioritizing quality, aesthetics and honest communication, companies can encourage more consumers to choose sustainable products.

To enable this transition and encourage consumers to purchase green products, departments must also actively contribute to the effort. “Efforts in SC integration strongly affect a firm’s performance, improving operational performance relative to competitors by reducing delays, tasks, and inefficient flows. But integration effort requires different collaborative work modes from people across an entire system.” (Nuerk & Darena 2023, p. 661)

Nascimento and Lourerio (2024) analyzed 1,509 articles, the study highlights the importance of including sustainability in business strategies to meet consumer expectations. Actions like eco-labeling and sustainable packaging help build trust and create lasting relationships with consumers. CSR also plays a key role in sustainability branding by increasing brand value and benefiting society through activities like ethical sourcing and charity work (Nascimento & Lourerio 2024)

Two international standards that support sustainable and responsible business practices are ISO 9000 and ISO 26000. ISO 9000:2015 outlines basic principles and terminology in quality management and helps organizations improve communication, consistency and long-term performance across sectors (ISO, 2015). ISO 26000:2010 focuses on social responsibility, encouraging organizations to go beyond legal compliance and align with broader sustainability goals (ISO, 2010). Together, these frameworks promote the integration of quality and social responsibility into modern business strategy.

Sustainability branding faces several challenges, such as measuring results, coordinating efforts across global operations and maintaining authenticity. Using consumer data and creative marketing strategies can make sustainability more effective. Future research should explore how digital tools and technologies can help solve these challenges and improve sustainability branding (Nascimento & Lourerio 2024).

2.5 Digitalization

Digital transformation (DT) represents a fundamental shift in how organizations manage commercial processes such as sales, order processing, and customer service. It involves integrating digital technologies to increase efficiency and reduce operational costs. Defined as a “socioeconomic change driven by digital technologies” (Dąbrowska et al. 2022, p. 931), DT aligns with process management principles (Bergman & Klefsjö 2023) by focusing on optimized workflows. Research highlights its potential to address time and cost challenges, making it a critical framework for improving commercial operations, though implementation requires overcoming both technical and organizational barriers.

DT has also been shown to improve supply chain performance, as evidenced by Li and Zhao (2024), who demonstrate that it enhances total factor productivity (TFP) through improved demand forecasting, inventory control, and logistics coordination. For example, an ERP system (Enterprise Resource Planning) can integrate order management with supplier schedules, reducing lead times which could have a negative impact on the flow efficiency (Bergman &

Klefsjö 2023). This demand driven capability (Li and Zhao 2024) also promotes synergistic effects across the supply chain, enabling better collaboration with external partners. However, realizing these benefits demands robust IT infrastructure and effective vertical linkages, both of which pose significant setup challenges.

Beyond supply chains, DT impacts multiple organizational levels. Dąbrowska et al. (2022) propose the PIAI framework (Perception, Interpretation, Action, Impact) to structure this transformation (Figure 7). It highlights the importance of employees to acquire skills for tools like CRM systems (Customer Relationship Management) in sales or AI for order management.

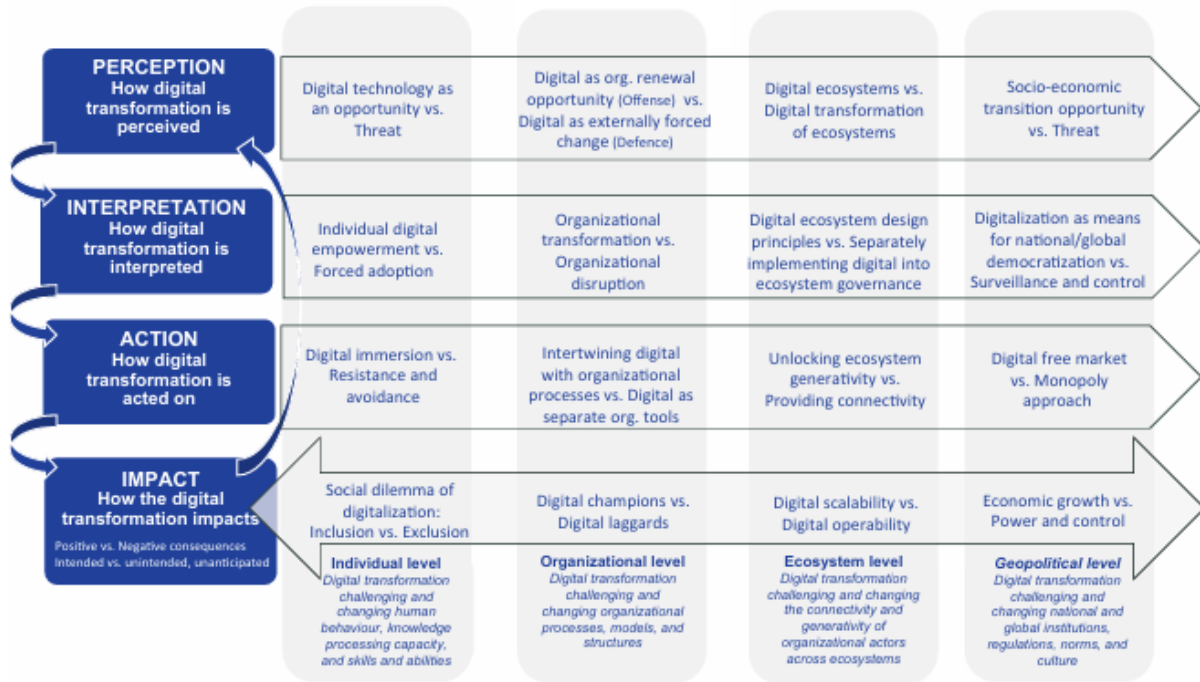


Figure 7: PIAI framework (Dąbrowska et al. 2022, p.938)

The PIAI framework provides practical guidance for implementing DT in a structured way, with a strong focus on employee involvement and learning. This contrasts the more technology-centric focus of Li and Zhao (2024). In addition to improving efficiency, it can also drive creativity and value creation, such as innovative service offerings or data-driven customer insights. A major challenge is employee resistance, which can undermine transformation efforts if training and support are lacking (Dąbrowska et al. 2022). This underlines the importance of human-centered strategies to ensure successful digital implementation.

Process complexity further complicates efficiency. Zhou et al. (2023) identify four important causes. Too many steps in the process, unclear or complicated workflows, poor data sharing, and resources that are not used in the right way. The most critical problem is often unclear workflows, which can make tasks take longer. For example, complicated sales processes can delay transactions and in customer service limited access to information can slow down response times. One way to deal with this is by using process mining. Process mining offers a solution by identifying inefficiencies, particularly in workflows, but current methods often fail to capture all the data, leaving a measurement gap. Automated tools can help reduce costs through simplification, but these tools are still being developed and are not yet fully capable of all situations.

Another way would be process orchestration which is a set of tools that organizations can use to automate and manage workflows. The benefits from process orchestration are streamlined workflows, faster turnaround time and personalized service. This results in shorter wait times, reduced delays and meeting every customer's need. The challenges with process orchestration were the complexity of integration, scalability and maintenance. To minimize these challenges, it is important to have digital maturity where the data is homogeneous (Pega n.d.).

DT offers a comprehensive approach to streamline commercial processes by connecting real time data to established process theory (Bergman & Klefsjö 2023). It supports faster sales cycles, more efficient order handling, and improved service delivery, directly addressing time and cost priorities. For organizations seeking best-in-class methods DT requires investment in technology, training, and metrics to fully reach its benefits.

3. METHOD

The thesis will use an inductive research method, combining theoretical insights from a literature review with empirical data from a semi-structured interview with IKEA and reports from McKinsey & Company that were analyzed using open coding. Interviews were only conducted if access can be granted to individuals with relevant knowledge and direct involvement in commercial processes. Given the sensitivity of such operations, it is often challenging to identify and secure interviews with the appropriate personnel. In cases where suitable interviewees are not available, secondary data, such as public reports, case studies, or industry analyses, is used as a substitute.

The choice of this method was to strengthen the theory with real-world practice, ensuring that conclusions are informed by both academic literature and practical insights. This approach ensures that the study remains focused on high quality and relevant data, although this may limit the empirical depth, but still allows for the identification of best-practice principles that can be analyzed and discussed in relation to the research questions.

3.1 Interview

A semi-structured interview provides a solid foundation by allowing open-ended questions, guided by thematic prompts, while enabling the interviewer to probe and clarify responses. Semi-structured interviews give a good foundation because they enable open questions but under different themes as well as the opportunity to prompt, probe and check the respondent. A well-designed interview guide enhances the ability to explore the respondent's experiences and perspectives on the topic (Säfsen & Gustavsson 2019, p. 152). This allows for both consistency across themes and flexibility to explore individual perspectives in depth, which is particularly valuable when studying complex organizational processes.

IKEA was chosen for the interview, due to its status as one of Sweden's largest companies and a leader in customer-driven operations. IKEA relies on customer satisfaction and price variety to make their products available to a wider audience. Their business idea is to have their customers build the furniture at home enabling flat packaging which streamlines the logistical chain. Interviewing IKEA will contribute to understanding how a successful company describes its commercial processes and how these can be optimized (IKEA n.d.).

To carry out the interview, Lisa Svärd, deputy market manager at IKEA Kålleröd, was selected as respondent. Her extensive experience in sales management provided relevant insights for exploring the research questions. The interview was conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing for both guided and open-ended discussion (Appendix A).

3.2 Document study

A document study is a method of data collection in which preexisting materials, known as secondary data, are systematically analyzed. The documents can vary in nature, including written, digital, visual, or physical materials, and may originate from both public and private sources (Säfsen & Gustavsson 2019). In this study, documents and statistics from McKinsey & Company's publicly available reports were used (Appendix B).

McKinsey & Company was chosen because it is a well-established consultancy with extensive insight into the automotive industry's transformation. The reports are grounded in empirical data, offering credible and practically applicable insights. Furthermore, McKinsey & Company

focused on digital transformation, commercial excellence, and customer experience directly aligns with the core themes identified in this thesis, making the cases particularly relevant for contextualizing the patterns found in our coded material. These cases provide practical insights into how best-in-class companies in the automotive sector approach digital transformation, commercial excellence, and customer experience. Among them, the concept of a “playbook” and the use of “lighthouse” pilots stand out as structured yet adaptable methods for scaling improvement across large organizations, practices that align with key patterns identified in our coded material.

To ensure source credibility, a critical perspective was applied throughout the study. “Being able to assess the plausibility and truthfulness of documents is necessary to avoid being misled by disinformation” (Säfsen & Gustavsson 2019, p. 172). McKinsey & Company is a consulting organization that publishes reports based on business surveys. Although they do not directly profit from the content of these reports, it is essential to scrutinize each source regarding potential bias and the purpose of publication.

3.3 Open coding

In addition to critically evaluating the sources, the thesis has applied a structured approach to the analysis through open coding. Relevant citations were extracted and categorized inductively to identify recurring themes across the selected documents. This strengthens the analytical depth of the document study by ensuring that the material is examined systematically and consistently, while allowing patterns to emerge organically from the data (Eriksson 2025).

Open coding is a qualitative analysis method where categories are not defined in advance. Instead, they gradually emerge from the material as the research engages with the content. The approach is inductive and well suited for exploring patterns, trends and recurring ideas in unstructured texts (Eriksson 2025).

The process started with a close review of selected McKinsey & Company’s reports, where relevant sections and quotations were marked and collected. These quotations were connected to the overarching goal of understanding how commercial processes are described and developed in practice. All quotations were entered into a spreadsheet, including source information, such as author, year, page number when available. To ensure the reliability of the coding, the categories were discussed within the group, and certain quotations were reclassified when necessary to refine the analysis (Eriksson 2025).

As more material was reviewed, recurring patterns started to appear leading to the formation of preliminary categories. These reflected common themes in how McKinsey & Company discusses change management, customer focus, digital transformation, competence needs and strategic direction. The categories were refined gradually as the analysis progressed. The final coding structure forms the foundation of the thematic analysis presented in this thesis. This approach made it possible to work systematically with the empirical material and ensure transparency in how the themes were developed, aligned with the methodological description provided by Eriksson (2025).

3.4 Combining interview and open coding

The combination of a semi-structured interview and open coding of documents allows for a comprehensive understanding of the research topic from both practical and theoretical-strategic perspectives. These two methods complement each other by offering different types of insights.

The interview provides an in-depth, experience-based perspective on how commercial processes are handled in a real-world setting. Through dialogue with a key practitioner, the study gains access to rich, contextualized information that reflects internal priorities, challenges, and practices. This method is particularly useful for uncovering nuances and interpretations that are not captured in general reports or secondary data.

At the same time, open coding of documents, specifically reports from McKinsey & Company, offers a structured and systematic way to extract recurring themes and patterns from publicly available business data. This method provides analytical generalization based on how commercial processes are discussed and framed in a broader business context.

Together, these findings strengthen the credibility and analytical depth of the thesis. The interview anchors the research in practice, while open coding adds thematic structure and enables systematic comparisons across data sources. The insights from these two approaches achieve a more robust and multifaceted analysis of commercial processes in theory and practice.

3.5 SWOT analysis

The project has strong potential to deliver valuable results thanks to support from Volvo Cars and a focus on industry leading practices. To succeed, the project must address weaknesses such as parallel course reading and dependency on external companies for data collection. Opportunities exist not only to improve organizations processes, but also to contribute to academic knowledge. It is crucial to identify risks early and have a contingency plan to address potential obstacles, such as missed interviews or implementation challenges.

A SWOT analysis was made to identify the projects Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and threats (Table 4). This will help the thesis to understand internal and external factors that can influence decision making and planning.

Table 4: SWOT Analysis

Current Situation Analysis	
SWOT Analysis	
Strengths • Access to resources and expertise • Scientific studies provide high-quality data • Committed project members	Weaknesses • Parallel courses with exams • Data availability from companies • Dependent on external parties
Opportunities • Identify innovative solutions • Strengthen relationships with companies • Contribute to academic knowledge	Threats • Lack of participation from external companies • Implementation challenges • Risk of generalization

3.6 Validity and reliability

To strengthen internal validity, this thesis deliberately selected highly cited scientific articles from the Web of Science database and supplemented these with relevant course literature from previous academic modules. This triangulation of sources ensures that the theoretical framework is well-founded and corroborated by multiple, independent references. Additionally, a conscious choice was made to study IKEA, to enhance the external validity of the findings to similar companies operating under comparable conditions.

The thesis's reliability is supported through methodological transparency and the use of standardized interview protocols. Although only one employee at IKEA, Lisa Svärd, was interviewed, insights from this interview were combined with other empirical sources, such as literature studies and external case documents, contributing to a broader understanding of the topic. The reliability would likely have been further enhanced had more employees been interviewed, a point that is also acknowledged in the discussion of limitations.

A systematic comparison was conducted between theoretical insights and empirical observations. Since the case organization operates with standardized work processes, the observations are expected to be replicable to some extent, even though qualitative research does not aim for generalizability in the same way as quantitative studies. Moreover, the empirical findings were continuously contrasted with established theory throughout the thesis, further strengthening the trustworthiness of the results (Säfsten & Gustavsson, 2019, p. 225).

4. RESULTS AND EMPIRICAL

This chapter presents the empirical findings from the study, drawing on two data sources, a document analysis of McKinsey & Company's reports and a semi-structured interview with IKEA. The aim is to explore how digital transformation, commercial development, and organizational change are described and applied in practice. Through open coding, key themes were identified to structure the analysis. The findings compare strategic insights from McKinsey & Company with practical applications at IKEA, providing a comprehensive view of the research questions.

4.1 Interview

IKEA, one of the largest companies in the Gothenburg region, was selected for the semi-structured interview based on several strategic criteria. First, its extensive market presence in the region makes it a significant player for comparative analysis. Second, like Volvo Cars, IKEA operates with parallel processes and shares a strong Swedish heritage. Both companies emphasize innovative design, sustainability, and quality, making them ideal for a comparative study of corporate culture and operational strategies.

To gain further insights, an interview was held with Lisa Svärd, the deputy market manager at IKEA Kållerød, who has extensive experience in sales management. Her background and expertise provided valuable knowledge for our research.

4.1.1 IKEA's commercial process

IKEA defines its commercial process as "how we generate sales" (Lisa Svärd), covering everything from pricing and business planning to coordination across various departments. The company strongly believes in long-term planning to keep work organized and goals on track. This happens through a 10/5/1 year plan that sets clear priorities. A key planning tool is the commercial process calendar, offering a 360-degree view and operating in defined cycles.

IKEA uses matrix management to spread responsibility and keep everyone accountable. There is a main process owner who oversees everything, while lower-level managers handle the day-to-day leading to shared responsibility. When IKEA changes their way of working, they focus on change management. Firstly, they make a plan over who is affected and when. Secondly, they want everyone on board. Getting people on board is a big challenge and IKEA tackles this by valuing everyone equally, focusing on inclusion and having a prominent work culture. Instead of what a typical project management style might look like, it is about keeping the employees engaged and open-minded, which creates new ideas.

4.1.2 What makes IKEA best-in-class

IKEA always puts their customers first. By blending digital tools with their physical and online stores they can keep up with new technology and methods by actively monitoring trends and adapting processes and products as needed. Today IKEA uses digital solutions to understand their customers better. The digital tools shape IKEA's processes by analyzing sales and understanding how customers move through the stores. With their membership cards and free wi-fi they can track and analyze customer movement patterns to identify potential bottlenecks. For example, crowded areas and in what season they might need to ramp up the personnel. Digital solutions also help them speed up supply chains and manage stock more efficiently.

4.1.3 Challenges and solutions

Balancing costs with customer satisfaction is hard but IKEA have a good guide phrase, “For the many people”. They monitor satisfaction using KPIs such as the “Happy Customer” index to ensure expectations are met. One of the biggest priorities and challenges is ensuring the stock of the products at the right time and place. Better planning and digital tools have improved operations however they still see room to improve, especially with the fast-going phase with short trends.

The interview ended with Lisa Svärd giving a recommendation when improving commercial processes. Understand the connections, final results and do not forget the customer. See the bigger picture, make sure every part of the process connects and aims for the same result. Customers are the primary focus and need to be the main factor during the decision-making process. Include everyone in the process, value each person’s contribution and capitalize the knowledge and interest.

4.2 Overview of themes

To analyze the material from McKinsey & Company’s reports, open coding was used. This method finds repeating patterns in the quotes, which then was grouped into five main categories, digital and technological innovation, customer focus, operational excellence, strategic and cultural approaches, and commercial and sales performance (Table 5). The coding was carried out iteratively, where quotes were identified and grouped based on recurring patterns and common themes.

Table 5: All categories with explanation and authors

Category	Explanation	Authors
Digital and technological innovation	This category shows how companies use new digital tools and technologies like AI and self-service to improve how they operate and connect with customers. It focuses on technology as a driver of growth, efficiency, and new ways of working.	Flötotto, M. et al., 2023, Lamarre, E. et al, 2023, Das, A. et al 2023, Plotkin, C.L et al., 2018, Blackader, B. et al 2025, Batista, B. et al., 2024 & Tavakoli, A. et al., 2024
Customer focus	Organizations increasingly adapt their strategies to meet changing customer expectations. Personalization, convenience, and seamless service across channels are key aspects in this shift toward customer-centric thinking.	Grüntges, V. et al., 2021, Asif, C. et al, 2017, Maechler, N. et al 2016, Cruz, G. et al., 2022, Plotkin, C. et al., 2024, Breuer, R. et al., 2020, Buesing, E. et al 2024 & Gregg, B. et al., 2021
Operational Excellence	Improving processes, using data effectively, and breaking down silos are central to how companies increase efficiency. The aim is to support both business goals and customer value through smarter operations.	Maurer, I. et al., 2025, Goyal, A. et al., 2012, Dilda, V. et al, 2023, Stoyanov, A. 2024, Behrendt, A. et al., 2024, Flesher, N. et al., 2024, Chui, M. et al., 2023, Singla, A. et al., 2025, Eklund, S et al., 2022, Castro A. et al., 2024, Buesing, E. et al 2024, Bykowsky, E. et al., 2025, Bhandari, R. et al., 2017, Dierks, A. et al., 2025, Wachinger, T. et al., 2019 & F. et al., 2024
Strategic and Culture Approaches	This category reflects leadership and cultural aspects of transformation. It includes aligning people, vision, and ways of working to support long-term change and innovation.	Jochim, M. et al., 2019, Lamarre, E. et al, 2024, Colotla, I. et al., 2024, Jochim, M. et al., 2019, Angevine, C. et al, 2021, Bick, R. et al, 2022, Erhlich, O. et al., 2017, Buesing, E. et al 2024, Groves, R. et al., 2018, Libarikian, A. et al., 2024, Mayer, H. et al., 2025, Yee, L. et al., 2024 & Dumitrescu, E. et al., 2022
Commercial and Sales performance	Sales and marketing functions are becoming more data-driven and digitally enabled. Companies focus on better targeting, faster conversions, and stronger customer relationships to improve commercial outcomes.	Griffin, S. et al 2023, Hudelson, P. et al., 2021, Colter, T. et al., 2018, Furtado, B. et al., 2025, Atkins, C. et al, 2022, Donchak, L. et al., 2023, Buesing, E. et al., 2024, Donchak, L. et al., 2022 & Cencioni, P. et al., 2024

These categories give structure to the results and make it easier to understand the different parts of the material. Each one shows a specific area of how companies work with digital change, business development, and internal improvements. A summary table is included above with short explanations of each category (Appendix C).

4.2.1 Digital and technological innovation

A total of seven quotations in this category demonstrate how emerging technologies are driving structural and strategic change within organizations. The material reflects three key aspects of digital innovation. First, generative AI is highlighted for its ability to enhance customer service through automation, personalization, and real-time responsiveness, enabling better service at lower cost. Second, the concept of technological scalability and reuse is emphasized, where companies assetize digital solutions to reduce duplication and speed up deployment. Lastly, the data points to a shift in how businesses reach their customers, with direct-to-consumer models and self-service platforms becoming more prominent.

These findings suggest that digital technology is not only a support function, but a strategic asset that redefines how value is created and delivered in modern business environments. The practices reflect elements of technological adoption theory, where ease of use and perceived benefits influence how innovations like AI and automation are integrated into business processes (Dąbrowska et al. 2021).

4.2.2 Customer focus

This category is built on eight quotations, all emphasizing the growing importance of customer experience as a strategic priority. The quotes reflect a shift in mindset, from treating customer service as a support function to embedding it across all departments, including product development and IT. Several quotations describe how companies are redesigning customer journeys from scratch, aiming to create seamless, personalized, and omnichannel experiences. The data also shows that customer behavior is evolving, with newer generations expecting speed, simplicity, and value in every interaction. Some organizations report measurable improvements, including higher satisfaction and lower service costs, because of technology driven experience design. Together, these insights show that customer focus is no longer a differentiator, it has become a baseline for relevance and growth. This customer-centric shift aligns with service-dominant logic, where value is co-created through personalized service and deep understanding of customer needs.

4.2.3 Operational Excellence

The operational excellence category is supported by 15 quotations, making it one of the most substantial categories in the material. The findings highlight how companies are shifting from fragmented improvements to more holistic and data-driven operational strategies. Several quotes illustrate how organizations are using tools such as process mining and advanced analytics to identify inefficiencies, uncover hidden cost drivers, and improve cross-functional coordination.

A recurring point is the role of AI in operational enhancement, from automating quality assurance tasks to improving sales targeting and real-time decision-making. Generative AI is not only viewed as a support tool but as a catalyst for increased productivity and better customer outcomes. Furthermore, operational excellence is shown to require not just better technology but also redesigned processes and organizational structures. This includes integrated planning, the elimination of silos, and the standardization of core workflows based on business impact.

The data also reflects a clear business case for these efforts. Several organizations report concrete results such as increased output, fewer errors, improved customer satisfaction, and cost reductions. Rather than efficiency being seen as purely financial, the category illustrates a broader transformation logic, where operations are reconfigured to be smarter, more responsive, and better aligned with strategic goals. Several of these practices echo lean principles, particularly the use of data to map value-adding and non-value-adding activities, in line with Value Stream Mapping (Modig & Åhlström 2015).

4.2.4 Strategic and Culture Approaches

Thirteen quotations support the view that successful transformation relies not only on technology but equally on strong leadership and a supportive company culture. The material emphasizes the need to improve collaboration across departments, align strategies between teams, and work toward shared objectives. Tools such as integrated business planning (IBP) and cross-functional teams are frequently highlighted as effective methods for fostering alignment and unlocking organizational performance.

A key theme is that digital transformation is not only a technical shift, but a cultural one. Leaders are expected to inspire, guide change efforts, and build organizational readiness by developing internal talent and fostering collaboration. Several quotations stress that engaging employees and defining a clear purpose are essential to long-term success. Overall, this

category reflects how leadership, structure, and mindset must evolve in parallel with new technologies for transformation to be sustainable.

4.2.5 Commercial and Sales performance

This category is based on nine quotations that show how companies are modernizing their sales and commercial strategies by combining digital tools with new approaches to selling. Several quotes describe the use of omnichannel models, where online and offline interactions are fully integrated to meet customer expectations. Remote selling and hybrid roles allow sales teams to reach more clients at lower cost, without compromising on service quality.

Data and analytics also play a growing role, helping companies to optimize pricing, identify buying patterns, and personalize offers in real time. In some cases, organizations report significant improvements in conversion rates and acquisition efficiency. Overall, the material reflects a shift toward more agile, insight-driven commercial organizations that are better equipped to respond to fast-changing markets and customer demands.

4.2.6 Qualitative analysis of three cases

To deepen the inductive analysis from our open coding of 53 academic articles, three selected case studies from McKinsey & Company were included. These reports strengthen the theoretical framework by illustrating how the identified principles are applied in practice. Through the use of quantitative data and real-world statistics, the case studies provide tangible evidence that supports and enriches the theoretical insights developed in this thesis.

The 2025 report *Boosting Auto Sales Productivity: A Playbook for Excellence* (Maurer & Kramer 2025) outlines a three-step approach: define a sales vision, test and refine new methods through lighthouse dealers, and then scale the model through centralized systems and real-time tracking. This structured methodology reflects principles such as flow efficiency, continuous improvement (Bergman & Klefsjö 2023), and capability maturity. The lighthouse dealer concept is central to the playbook, serving as a testing ground to refine sales processes before broader implementation. This approach ensures efficiency through integrated systems, employee training, and transparent performance tracking, fostering a data-driven culture. While the report focuses on the U.S. market, its strategies are adaptable globally, offering Volvo Cars practical insights for improving commercial processes. However, it lacks detail on potential barriers to implementation, which could be a limitation for applying the playbook universally.

The other two case studies support this transformation logic by focusing on evolving customer expectations. The *New Key to Automotive Success: Put Customer Experience in the Driver's Seat* (Grüntges et al. 2021) highlights the strategic importance of seamless, digital-first customer experiences. Companies like Tesla and NIO demonstrate how tools like AI chatbots, over-the-air updates, and streamlined buying processes drive loyalty and reduce acquisition costs. The 2023 report *Online Sales and Subscriptions Will Shape Tomorrow's Car Financing Journey* (Flötotto et al. 2023) further illustrates how customer behavior is shifting towards fully online purchases and flexible models like subscriptions. Together, these cases reinforce the need for organizations to align their commercial models with changing digital behaviors, a theme also echoed in the coded literature on agility, customer-centricity, and value co-creation.

By combining broad academic insights with detailed practical strategies, McKinsey & Company's cases help bridge the gap between theory and practice. They illustrate how structured transformation models can be applied in the automotive industry to meet emerging customer demands while enhancing commercial performance. These case insights not only

validate the patterns found in our open coding but also offer tangible guidance for organizations navigating digital and organizational transformation.

4.3 Comparison between IKEA and McKinsey & Company reports

By comparing the insights from the IKEA interview with the findings from the open coding of McKinsey & Company's reports, several patterns and differences emerge (Table 6). Both sources emphasize the importance of customer focus, structured planning, and digital tools as key enablers of commercial development. For example, IKEA uses long-term planning and a commercial calendar to keep processes aligned, which reflects many of the planning and integration practices described under operational excellence in the McKinsey & Company's data.

Another clear connection is seen in the use of digital tools. IKEA applies digital solutions to track customer movement, plan staffing, and improve supply chains, practices that align with the themes of data-driven insights and digital innovation. However, the IKEA interview also highlights the cultural side of change, particularly the importance of inclusion, engagement, and shared responsibility. While this is discussed in the McKinsey & Company's material as well, it appears more practically grounded in IKEA's case.

In contrast, McKinsey & Company's material puts more weight on AI-driven tools and structured transformation models across sectors, whereas IKEA's approach is more human-centered and locally adapted. Together, these perspectives complement each other and show that digital and strategic development is not one-size-fits-all but requires both structural and cultural alignment.

Table 6: Comparison of IKEA and McKinsey & Company

Theme	IKEA (Interview)	McKinsey (Reports)	Key takeaway
Digital and technological innovation	Practical use of digital tools for customer tracking and supply chain. Focus on usability, not AI.	Emphasis on scalable tech like AI and automation to drive transformation.	McKinsey promotes tech-driven change, IKEA focuses on practical use
Customer focus	Customer-first mindset, measured via inclusion and satisfaction KPIs.	Prioritizes seamless omnichannel journeys and data-driven personalization.	Both prioritize the customer, but IKEA emphasizes culture, McKinsey emphasizes data.
Operational Excellence	Long-term planning (10/5/1-year), shared responsibility via matrix setup.	Uses analytics and integration to improve efficiency and break silos.	IKEA uses structured planning, McKinsey pushes analytics and optimization
Strategic and Culture Approaches	Focus on inclusion, engagement, and shared purpose in change.	Highlights leadership, planning tools, and formal change models	IKEA emphasizes people and values, McKinsey emphasizes structure and models.
Commercial and Sales performance	Trend-sensitive planning and customer value. Less focus on tech.	AI-driven sales tools, hybrid roles, and agile pricing for higher efficiency.	IKEA favors planning and experience, McKinsey promotes tech-enabled sales.

4.4 Summary of empirical findings

The empirical material, combining insights from McKinsey & Company's reports and the IKEA interview, offers a comprehensive picture of how companies navigate digital transformation and commercial development. Through open coding, five main themes were identified, each reflecting a specific aspect of how organizations use technology, improve internal processes, strengthen customer focus, adapt sales strategies, and drive strategic and cultural change.

The quotes from McKinsey & Company highlight trends and patterns across industries, while the IKEA interview adds a practical, real-world dimension to these themes. IKEA's structured

planning, digital tools, and inclusive culture illustrate how abstract strategies are translated into daily practices.

Together, these findings address the research questions by showing how digital transformation is applied in practice, what strategies are used in commercial development, and how organizational culture influences these processes. They suggest that effective transformation requires more than just tools or systems, it depends equally on leadership, collaboration, and a clear customer orientation. Organizations that balance technological innovation with human-centered approaches are better positioned to achieve long-term success.

5. ANALYSIS

The following analysis is based on the themes identified through open coding of the empirical material. By grouping patterns from both the McKinsey & Company's cases and the IKEA interview, five core themes were developed: digital and technological innovation, customer focus, operational excellence, strategic and cultural approaches, and commercial and sales performance. These categories structure the discussion and allow for a systematic interpretation of how digital transformation and commercial processes are understood and applied in practice.

Each theme is discussed in relation to the thesis's research questions:

1. How can commercial processes be streamlined in terms of time and cost?
2. How should process methodologies be applied based on qualitative data and identified best-in-class principles?

Throughout the chapter, a comparison between the more strategic and technology-driven perspectives presented in the McKinsey & Company's reports with the people-oriented and practical insights provided by IKEA. The comparison was built from table 6 to guide our discussion. By contrasting these viewpoints, the analysis highlights both common challenges and solutions that fit specific contexts. The analysis will also look at how companies balance technology and people, and if these themes apply to other types of businesses.

5.1 Relevance and analytical use of the framework

Table 5 was constructed through open coding captures five distinct yet interrelated themes that represent essential dimensions of contemporary commercial processes. The width of the framework lies in its ability to encompass both operational structures and strategic intentions, making it relevant across various organizational contexts. Each category ranging from digital innovation to cultural alignment addresses a specific aspect of commercial transformation, and together they form a comprehensive model that reflects the multidimensional nature of commercial operations today.

What strengthens the generalizability of this framework is that it is grounded in a large collection of secondary data derived from McKinsey & Company's cross-industry reports, complemented by a primary interview with a practitioner from IKEA. This enhances the analytical robustness and relevance of the identified categories. The categories are not limited to one sector or function but apply to a range of organizational efforts aimed at improving efficiency, customer orientation, technological adaptation, and leadership alignment. Therefore, the framework can be seen as a valid representation of the core domains where commercial processes are shaped and redefined in response to digital and strategic change.

The thematic framework presented in table 5 is not only a summary of empirical findings but also serves as an analytical tool for future evaluation and development of commercial processes. Derived from systematic open coding, the five categories capture key dimensions of transformation, including technology adoption, customer orientation, and operational efficiency. By applying this framework, organizations and researchers can assess current practices, identify improvement areas, and align development efforts with strategic goals. In academic settings, the framework offers a structure for analyzing empirical material in similar studies, allowing comparisons across industries or organizational types. In practice, it may be used for benchmarking, internal reviews, or as a foundation for workshops and strategic

planning. Its clarity and empirical grounding make it applicable for both research and applied contexts aiming to understand or improve commercial process maturity.

5.2 A broader view of the applicability

While the framework was derived from data primarily collected through McKinsey & Company's industry reports and an interview with IKEA, its relevance extends far beyond these specific sources. The categories are not confined to any single sector, geography, or organizational size. Rather, they capture foundational capabilities that are increasingly essential across a wide range of industries undergoing digital and strategic transformation.

In manufacturing sectors, for instance, operational excellence and process optimization have long been central themes. However, the rise of AI and automation tools, as illustrated in McKinsey & Company's material, signals a shift toward data-driven and intelligent operations where real-time data replaces manual routines. Likewise, in service and retail sectors, customer-centric approaches and digital self-service solutions are becoming baseline expectations rather than competitive differentiators. This suggests that the framework can serve as a diagnostic tool not only for high-tech or digitally mature organizations, but also for more traditional businesses seeking to modernize.

Furthermore, the strategic and cultural dimensions of the framework are particularly applicable to organizations undergoing large-scale change or aiming to foster innovation. Public institutions, healthcare providers, and even educational organizations face similar challenges in aligning leadership, culture, and process reform, especially in digital transformation initiatives. The inclusion of cultural and leadership themes enhances the framework's relevance for contexts where human and organizational factors are critical to success.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) may also benefit from the framework, especially as they increasingly face pressure to digitize and scale. While resource constraints may limit full implementation of advanced systems, the underlying principles, such as iterative process improvement, customer alignment, and cross-functional collaboration, remain applicable and adaptable to smaller contexts.

The framework offers a flexible structure that can be adapted to varied empirical settings. Its components are grounded in universally relevant principles of efficiency, adaptability, and value creation. As such, it not only reflects the current state of commercial practice among leading firms but also provides guidance for organizations across sectors that seek to develop more resilient and responsive commercial processes.

5.3 Answers to research questions

The framework developed through open coding provides a comprehensive lens for answering both research questions. Regarding the first question:

1. How can commercial processes be streamlined in terms of time and cost?

The empirical categories shed light on multiple success factors. Particularly, the operational excellence theme highlights practices such as integrated planning, automation, and data-driven process analysis (e.g., process mining and real-time analytics). These methods resonate strongly with continuous improvement cycles like PDCA and DMAIC, which promote incremental change through testing, feedback, and refinement. Moreover, the emphasis on scalability and reuse of digital tools, as seen in the digital innovation category, illustrates how technology can serve as a multiplier of efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

From a strategic perspective, both the IKEA interview and the document study stress the importance of designing processes with the customer in mind. It is important to start from the customer's perspective, as Lisa Svärd pointed out. Today there are numerous digital tools that could simplify customers' journey and enable organizations to track customer behavior. When a commercial process is built it is important with engagement and cultural foundation, which parallels the principles of Lean. To minimize costs and time it is crucial to get it right from the start, doing a preliminary analysis, meaning that before building the process a thorough understanding of the market demands must be established. Simply implementing the right tools is not enough, the process must be tested in a prototype setting with continuous changes along the way.

In summary, streamlining commercial processes requires both a clear strategic focus and the right analytical tools. Concepts like VSM, the Maurer and Kramer playbook and process mining all serve as steppingstones toward the same goal. Enabling informed decision making, reducing operational costs and addressing inefficiencies.

In response to the second research question:

2. How should process methodologies be applied based on qualitative data and identified best-in-class principles?

The framework shows that application must be context sensitive and guided by both structure and culture. The strategic and culture approaches category provides evidence that leadership alignment, employee engagement, and collaborative structures are prerequisites for successful implementation. These factors are further reinforced by IKEA's experience, where process development is tightly coupled with inclusion, feedback loops, and internal communication. Continuous efforts in change management and training staff have proven to be an effective way to increase inclusiveness and collaboration. This underlines that process change must be supported by culture change, leadership, and inclusiveness as key factors.

When processes are applied in an organization, it is important to have a clear information stream at all levels. This enables information to reach both upward and downward, giving all the employees the opportunity to receive the information. Data-driven decision-making supports adaptability and responsiveness in process implementation. A transparent information flow is also crucial for enabling fast decisions and keeping improvement of work aligned across levels. These insights affirm that combining qualitative understanding with structured methodologies leads to more effective and sustainable process outcomes.

In summary, the framework derived from this thesis serves not only as a descriptive model but as an actionable tool for understanding how commercial processes can be both optimized and human centered. It bridges theory and practice, and addresses both the technical and organizational layers necessary for meaningful transformation.

5.4 Theoretical process improvement methods in practice

McKinsey & Company's reports are closely aligned with structured improvement models such as DMAIC. The five phases can be seen in how McKinsey & Company approaches commercial process transformation. They measure current performance and defining ownership before implementing changes consistent with Six Sigma methodology. This structure also echoes the PDCA cycle, which is commonly used in continuous improvement programs. According to Bergman and Klefsjö (2023), PDCA provides a feedback-oriented structure to support ongoing

optimization and McKinsey & Company's approach fits this pattern. Both the PDCA cycle and the CMMI framework are methods where continuous improvement is embedded in everyday operations in management processes. This suggests that traditional process models like PDCA and CMMI remain relevant and applicable, even in modern, tech-driven settings (Bergman & Klefsjö 2023; Sehlin et al. 2020).

While IKEA did not explicitly refer to DMAIC or PDCA in the interview, the company emphasized long-term thinking, process transparency and collaboration, all of which support continuous improvement. These values are consistent with the cultural foundations of Lean (Modig & Åhlström 2015). Both IKEA and McKinsey & Company stress the importance of effective change management. Inclusion, transparency and communication across all levels are crucial to successful implementation. This mirrors Deming's (1993) system of profound knowledge, particularly the aspects of systems thinking and motivation, where organizational culture and learning are key to achieving sustainable improvement.

5.5 Challenges in digital transformation

Digital transformation is a central theme across the studied organizations, although they differ in maturity and application. McKinsey & Company emphasized how digital tools support real-time data analysis, automated monitoring, and cross-functional integration. Capabilities that reflect the perspective of Dąbrowska et al. (2022) on digital transformation. Their structured and data-driven approach enables greater flexibility and adaptability in dynamic market environments.

Zhou et al. (2023) point out that reducing process complexity, particularly control-flow and data-flow complexity is critical to improving responsiveness and scalability. McKinsey & Company's approach actively addresses these dimensions through process mapping, ownership definition and system-wide visibility. On the other hand, if change management proves ineffective, the organizations may experience significant setbacks. Human resources are essential, as they represent both the customer and the employees. Without the collective commitment to embrace change and assets performance, the organizations risk falling behind their competitors. In today's era of digitalization, failure to adapt and fully leverage the technological advancements may severely undermine competitive positioning.

This could be done by applying the PIAI framework, which offers structured guidance for the implementation of digital initiatives. Another could be using process orchestration to automate and coordinate the tasks and system to follow demands. Moreover, keeping pace with the emerging trends is a vital aspect of successful digitalization. Current market trends are heavily focused on DT, and research has demonstrated that integrating digital technologies into business processes leads to improved outcomes and operational efficiency.

IKEA acknowledges that, although digital initiatives have been implemented, there is still room for further integration and enhancement. One of their biggest challenges, according to Lisa Svärd, is having the right product in the right place at the right time. With short-lived trends and faster changes in demand, it becomes more difficult to plan and allocate resources. These findings suggest that best-in-class methods are not solely based on technology, but rather on a holistic integration of processes, people and digital tools.

6. DISCUSSION

The results highlight the key findings from the empirical studies and are based on interviews with IKEA and open coding with 53 reports. These include how commercial processes are currently managed, existing challenges, how to solve them and how organizations can work differently. These insights provide a foundation for understanding how structured process improvement tools can be applied not only in sales but also in commercial contexts where speed, coordination and customer value are key.

6.1 Critical reflections

The methodology applied in this thesis was based primarily on qualitative analysis using McKinsey & Company's reports as secondary data, supplemented by a targeted interview with an IKEA manager. McKinsey & Company was considered a credible source due to its reputation as a global consultancy with access to extensive industry data. As an external actor with no vested interest in the companies it studies, McKinsey & Company's insights are generally considered unbiased and reliable. IKEA, on the other hand, represents a company known for its high standards in workplace culture and operational efficiency, making it a valuable complementary case. The interview with an experienced IKEA manager provided valuable first-hand insight grounded in real-world practice.

However, there were some limitations. The empirical data relied heavily on one main source, McKinsey & Company, which may have narrowed the perspective. Furthermore, only one interview was conducted, which limited the ability to validate insights through triangulation. Additional interviews with other companies or actors could have strengthened the findings and supported broader generalizations.

While the chosen scope focused on commercial processes within the automotive sector, narrowing the study to Volvo Cars and specific cases allowed for a deeper understanding of the selected context. Still, this limited generalizability. A broader scope, perhaps including multiple firms or industries, could have revealed additional variation or contrasting approaches, but might also have reduced the depth of analysis and contextual richness.

Had the thesis not been limited in scope, it might have been possible to follow through with a practical implementation of the proposed changes. This could have offered richer insight into which improvements are most effective in practice, which steps are unnecessary, and how organizations respond to actual change efforts. It would also have added an empirical layer on how process improvement unfolds in real-time within a corporate setting.

Alternative methods, such as a quantitative survey, might have produced broader statistical results and strengthened the study's generalizability. However, such methods are less suited for capturing the nuanced, strategic, and cultural dynamics central to process implementation. The qualitative approach, combined with open coding, offered deeper insight into these softer but crucial factors.

Finally, a fundamentally different research design, employing both a broader scope and a different method, could have yielded a more comprehensive overview. But this would likely have come at the cost of clarity and depth. The selected method maintained a strong alignment between research questions, methodology, and the kind of deep, context-sensitive findings the study set out to explore.

6.2 Societal responsibility

Throughout the interviews and case studies, several organizations highlighted the growing importance of environmental issues in their commercial processes. By improving and digitalizing their workflows, they could reduce their environmental impact. Companies that focus on the environment also get a stronger trust from customers. This demonstrates that environmental responsibility can lead to innovation and better competitiveness, which aligns with the principles in ISO 26000 (ISO 2010).

By studying and identifying best-in-class practices related to digitalization, sustainability and customer experience, this thesis also holds broader societal value. More efficient commercial processes not only lead to increased profitability for the company, but also enable better resource utilization, reduced environmental impact and improved customer relations. When companies implement data-driven and customer-centric approaches, it also has effects such as shorter lead times, reduced waste and more flexible services that benefit consumers, employees and the overall economy. This holistic value creation strengthens long-term competitiveness while supporting societal development goals.

Therefore, the knowledge gained from this thesis is not only of internal value to companies but can also be seen as part of a greater effort to strengthen the competitiveness of Swedish industry and contribute to a more sustainable and customer-oriented future. This leads to stronger communities with improved quality of life, increased equality, enhanced environmental outcomes, reduced social exclusion and greater inclusion. Factors that collectively support societal development (SKR 2023).

These findings confirm that commercial process improvement is not just about operational gains, but also about strengthening long-term business resilience and contributing to broader societal goals. The tools and models explored in this thesis provide a starting point for companies aiming to align their commercial operations with customer value, digital capability and sustainability.

6.3 Implications

The results indicate that leading organizations benefit from structured frameworks for process management and continuous improvement. This supports earlier research showing that structured improvement is essential to long-term competitiveness and adaptability (Setiawan et al. 2021; Bergman & Klefsjö 2023).

To evaluate which way to implement, different tools can be used. Firstly, the fishbone diagram can be used to create a visualization of the causes and what effect it leads to. Secondly, VSM can be used to visualize the flow and the way of working. Here cycle time is shown concretely to easily show where bottlenecks occur. PDCA and DMAIC can be used for continuous improvements.

A reliable way to implement it in the process is to follow the CMMI model. To see if the process has been implemented effectively, it is to originate from the customers' perspective. Does the process add value to the customer? Is it aligned with their needs and expectations? By originating from the customer's need, the organization's values do not get lost and unnecessary processes are not added.

To clearly visualize how this transformation could be achieved, a visual representation of the necessary steps needed (Figure 8). The process begins with conducting a VSM, to identify

existing bottlenecks and establish reachable goals. The implementation phase incorporates several elements from both the theoretical and empirical section with the customer in focus, reinforcing the importance of value creation. This process operates in a continuous cycle with ongoing improvements, essential for sustainable long-term development and organizational growth.

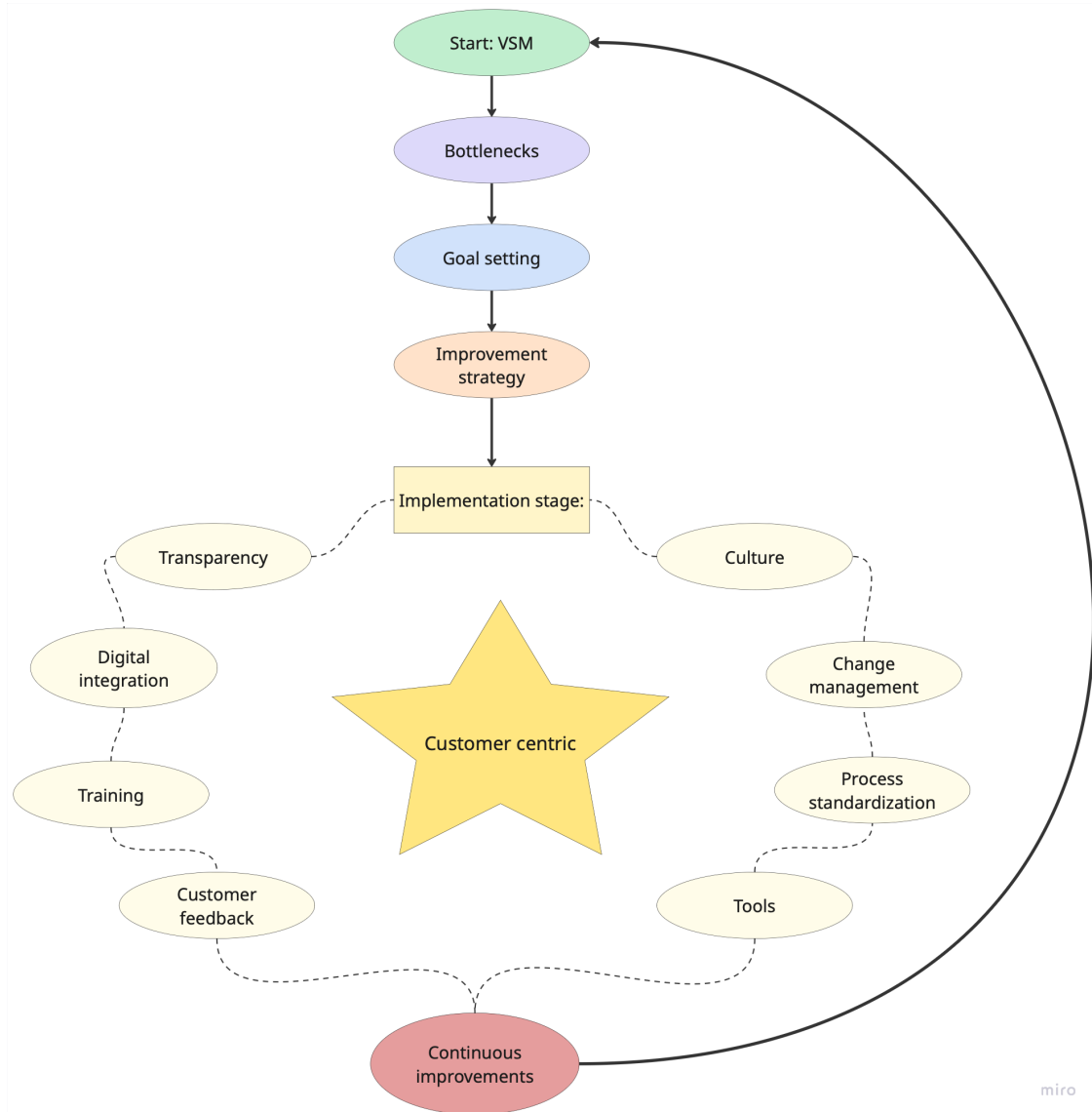


Figure 8: Visualization of the transformational steps. Illustration created by the authors using Miro

6.4 Future research

Future research could focus on the practical implementation of this thesis's findings. One potential approach would be to utilize the playbook presented by Maurer and Kramer (2025), beginning with setting up a prototype environment where proposed changes can be implemented, visualized, and evaluated. An implementation would be both insightful and educational, offering a firsthand understanding of the difference. An initial first step would involve performing a VSM analysis that incorporates cycle time, storage levels and customer satisfaction. This would help reveal the current bottlenecks within the organization and provide a clear starting point for the improvement process. By applying our theoretical tools into business processes, it becomes possible to observe firsthand the improvements that can be

achieved. Documenting such implementation efforts could form the basis for new case studies, offering empirical insights.

The future is uncertain, and every organization must determine what kind of company they aspire to be. Will it act as a trendsetter, or simply following existing trends? Should it follow long-term trends or respond to short-lived trends on platforms such as TikTok? Trends were not initially expected to play such a significant role. However, our research has shown that trends influence strongly over the customer. Ultimately, it is the customers who decide which products succeed and which fail, making it crucial for companies to remain closely attuned to customer preferences.

Theory highlights that sustainability is becoming increasingly important to consumers and can serve as a competitive advantage. By including sustainable practices in the organization, being transparent on changes and the beneficial effects can strengthen consumer trust. This transparency increases the likelihood that customers will support sustainable choices and remain loyal to brands that align with their value.

The digital transformation is progressing rapidly and continuously, however our observations indicate that maintaining human interaction remains important for customers. Support processes should be implemented for organizations to ease the handling of change. Changing to AI chatbots has been in many organizations' interests but research suggests that customers value speaking with a real person, especially when facing issues or concerns. To ensure a positive customer experience, it is important to recognize that not all aspects of the service should be fully digitalized, some elements of human interaction should be preserved.

6.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to evaluate how commercial processes can be streamlined in terms of time and cost, as well as to explore how best-in-class methods can be effectively applied within an organizational context. By integrating qualitative data, theory, interviews, and real-world case studies, the objective has been to develop a set of recommendations to Volvo Cars, with potential applicability across a broader range of organizations. The conclusions presented here aim to bridge the gap between theory and empirical sections, offering tools and frameworks that are rooted in research and aligned with real-world operations.

Furthermore, the thesis underscores the increasing relevance of sustainability and digital transformation for organizations. Maintaining transparent communication aligned with customer values and finding a balance between human interaction and AI are key to delivering a high-quality customer experience. The integration of digital tools should not replace human engagement but rather complement and strengthen it where appropriate. This balance is particularly relevant in customer-facing processes, where trust and experience are often built through personal interaction.

1. How can commercial processes be streamlined in terms of time and cost?

Achieving time and cost efficiency requires both strategic clarity and operational insights, supported by the right mix of data and structure. Identifying recurring bottlenecks and setting an attainable goal are essential steps in streamlining operations. Tools such as Value Stream Mapping (VSM), process mining and the structured playbook approach presented by Maurer and Kramer (2025) has proven effective in enhancing efficiency, optimizing stock management and reducing operational waste.

2. How should process methodologies be applied based on qualitative data and identified best-in-class principles?

This thesis emphasizes the importance of a strong organizational culture, particularly one that incorporates effective change management and a customer centric mindset. Both IKEA and McKinsey & Company showcase the value of early employee involvement, making sure of information transparency and that the work environment is inclusive. Tools such as PDCA, DMAIC, PIAI framework, process frameworks like CMMI and digital tools like CRM systems were explored as practical ways to improve commercial processes. Together, these elements form the foundation for sustainable improvement, where customer value and internal capability evolve in parallel.

In summary, a step-by-step improvement model (Figure 8), which organizations can follow to implement these recommendations in practice. We extend our gratitude to Volvo Cars for initiating this idea of best-in-class methods for commercial processes, and we hope that both Volvo Cars and other organizations find the insights presented in this thesis valuable and applicable.

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Appendix A – Interview questions

IKEA Interview with Lisa Svård:

Beginning:

1. How do you define your commercial processes?
2. Do you have process owners and if so, what levels?
3. Which part of the commercial processes do you consider to be most important and is it well-functioning?
4. What challenges have you faced when implementing new ways of working within your commercial processes and how did you solve them?
5. How do you work to identify and eliminate bottlenecks in the process?
6. How do you see the balance between cost and customer satisfaction?

Best-in-class

7. How do you keep your organization up to date so that you follow the latest technology and methods?
8. What areas of improvement do you see in your current processes and how do you plan to work with these in the future?

Digitalization and innovation

9. In what way does digitalization affect your processes?
10. What trends and new technologies do you see as particularly important for the future?

Finish

11. If you were to give three recommendations for improving commercial processes, what would they be?
12. Is there anything you would like to add that we have not touched on?
13. Would you be open to a possible follow-up if we have more questions later?

Appendix B – Reports for document study

Title	Authors, year	Title	Authors, year
Online sales and subscriptions will shape tomorrow's car financing journey	Flötotto, M. et al., 2023	Future of B2B Sales: Building the right team and talent to drive growth in an uncertain	Donchak, L. et al., 2023
The new key to automotive success: Put customer experience in the driver's seat	Grüntges, V. et al., 2021	Future of B2B sales: The big reframe	Cruz, G. et al., 2022
Boosting auto sales productivity: A playbook for excellence	Maurer, I. et al., 2025	Five ways B2B sales leaders can win with tech and AI	Bykowsky, E. et al., 2025
The future of B2B sales is hybrid	Donchak, L. et al., 2022	Five fundamental truths: How B2B winners keep growing	Plotkin, C. et al., 2024
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