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**The impact of communication and leadership in the optimisation of  
service processes**

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**Master Thesis**

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*To my beautiful family but specially to my dad.*

## **Abstract**

As technology increases its impact on all business areas, it is only natural that organizations use it and adapt to it. Companies have been dealing with this challenge for a long time, however although the use of technology has been increasing, the technology mindset, that is fully incorporating it in all process, sometimes has not been completely changed. Some companies did not implement technology to its full potential, only targeting the activities that were previously done manually. This research aims to understand technology usage in a specific context and the link to the employee's perceptions of their workplace. To that end, one of the goals is to understand the relationship between the design of processes – whether these were created to fit technology or the other way around - and the impact that leadership and communication might have had on it. Another goal for this project, was to improve one process. This process is part of the Purchasing Department daily tasks and its tasks are all done manually. The research details two different approaches for the improvement solution: one is simpler but does not automatize the process, the second one integrates a Web Service and makes the process work without Human interaction.

The study used qualitative methods to understand current employees' perceptions towards the organization, namely how they perceived it and identify the main organizational challenges. For this research, twenty participants were interviewed from several areas and different hierarchy levels within the organization. Data collection enabled to understand employees' views on several areas like processes, improvements, and also the leadership style and communication within the organization. The results enable the understanding of the relationship between the data found in the qualitative research and the processes designed using the Business Process Modelling. The processes were mapped according to what was found during the qualitative research, allowing them to be improved as the study was being undertaken.

Finally, the study shows a process within the Purchasing Department of a book retailer, in its version AS-IS as well as two TO-BE versions. Then two solutions to the problem are proposed: one semi-automated and an automated version.

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## List of abbreviations

**API** - Application Program Interface

**BPI** – Business Process Improvement

**BPM** – Business Process Modelling

**CPLP** – Comunidade de Países de Língua Portuguesa

**ERP** – Enterprise Resource Planning

**ISBN** – International Standard Book Number

**PD** – Purchasing Department

**REST** – Representational State Transfer

**SKU** – Stock Keeping Unit

**URL** – Universal Resource Locator

## 1. Introduction

The changing economic environment has led to an increasing interest in improving organizational business processes to enhance performance (McCormack et al., in press, Ranganathan and Dhaliwal, 2001). Businesses can no longer rely on top managers to make all the decisions if they want to be ahead of competition and perform better overall.

As Lee and Dale (1998) said all the improvement processes start with top management leadership. To make sure that processes are well defined and successful in long-term, DeToro and McCabe (1997) say that under a process management structure, all stakeholders involved are thinkers and doers on their work design. They inspect the outputs, and redesign work systems, making sure to get improvements. They also state that teams are responsible for every aspect of a process: meeting customers' requirements, reducing cycle time, lowering cost, and improving the consistency of outputs.

It is important to understand how organizations should implement business process modelling as well as its improvement and the impact of communication and leadership within organizations regarding the optimisation of their processes.

Next, will be presented the organization where this project took place, the research objectives and the context of the project.

### 1.1. The organization: Grupo Almedina

Founded in 1955 in Coimbra by Joaquim Machado, the *Almedina* Grupo is currently composed by *Almedina* Editores, *Edições 70*, *Actual Editora*, *Minotauro*, 11 bookshops, *Almedina.net* and *Almedina* Brasil. Although initially it started its business as a book shop, its proximity with the universities in Coimbra and the need of having academic books, soon set *Almedina* in the Publishing business. *Edições Almedina*, was elected as leader in legal area in Portugal, as well as, among others, in the areas of medicine, psychology, education, economics and exact sciences.

Along with the publishing business, the Group has expanded its bookshop network, being close to the main academic centers of the country: Braga, Porto, Coimbra and Lisbon. At the present date, there are twelve physical bookstores and an online bookshop, [www.almedina.net](http://www.almedina.net), with a general offer privileging the editorial quality.

The *Almedina* Group has been particularly attentive to the *Comunidade Portuguesa de Língua Portuguesa* (CPLP) markets, having created, in 2005, *Almedina* Brasil, based in São Paulo, and having highlighted the markets of Angola and Mozambique.

*Almedina's* commitment to quality implies that the needs and expectations of their clients are satisfied, whilst guaranteeing a service of excellence that provides intellectual pleasure with cultural relevance; the satisfaction of requirements of customers and other interested parties, as well as all other applicable: legal, normative and regulatory requirements, assuming social and environmental responsibilities by acting responsibly;

To conquer a service of excellence and a level of total and efficient response to the requirements and expectations of the customers and stakeholders, obtaining its full satisfaction, guaranteeing

a continuous improvement to the Quality Management System; establish lasting and fruitful partnerships with their suppliers and other stakeholders.

Provide resources for the continuous development of their employees, promoting the training of their workforce so that it is committed to the execution of its activity.

Commitment to good governance, to focus on good practices, social innovation, planning and continuous improvement, using all resources efficiently, in order to guarantee the economic and financial balance of *Almedina* and a sustainable development of their activity.

Grupo *Almedina* has been a well-known brand with good reputation for the last 64 years and aims at being recognized not only as a Publisher but also as a Book Shop network by ensuring that all potential customers choose them when looking for any type of book. In order to reach that goal, *Almedina* has been developing internal tools to allow their activity to run in a more efficient way and also to make sure the experience they offer to each individual customer follows the same service and methods without losing its personal touch of knowledge and excellence.

## **1.2. The Almedina Project in the Purchasing Department**

This research was undertaken within the *Almedina* Purchasing Department. The main purpose was to speed up its Time-to-Market and consequently, reduce the number of processes, as well as the time they take to be finished.

The purchasing process is going to be described next. The purchasing department establishes the agreement with the interested supplier and sends an excel file that compiles a list of information that is needed to be filled by them. This file is sent by e-mail to the supplier, who, after fulfilling all the fields with the relevant information about the title (book), sends it back by e-mail.

The e-mail is sent to the purchasing department's general inbox and an officer is responsible for checking the information. The information that is sent in the Excel file is not always right and there is an infinite list of things that can be wrong: the name of the author is incorrect, the synopsis is not accurate, the SKU might have fewer numbers than expected, the book's cover image might not have the right size or resolution, some details might be missing, etc. If one of the fields is wrong, an e-mail or phone call to the supplier will have to take place and the creation of this article will be in stand-by. Only after the information is correctly sent to the PD, does the process start.

The process in the system starts with the creation of an article. An article is the informatic information that corresponds to a book, or in technical vocabulary, to a SKU. Every book that *Almedina* buys from a supplier or edits from its own publisher, is inserted in their system with the creation of an individual article. The problem is, the article follows a time-consuming process: first, it is inserted manually on an Excel file by a supplier which will be then confirmed by the officer in the Purchasing Department. Secondly, this officer will take this Excel file and copy each single field manually (copy and paste) to *Almedina*'s ERP – Sage X3. Finally, this article is then copied and again, manually, to another platform that will allow its upload to the online platform so that it can be published on *Almedina.net*.

This process is not only tiring, as it makes the same person do the same job three times but also, it is preventing *Almedina* from being fast and respond to the market in a more efficient and fast

manner. This research aims to improve this process, design a possible solution or solutions and understand the underlying organizational reasons preventing the organization from applying the solution.

### 1.3. Research Questions and Dissertation outline

As part of the *Almedina* project and focusing on a way of solving bottlenecks in the process within the Purchasing Department, a study was carried out in order to understand the reasons why organizations keep repeating processes that are not effective nor efficient and what prevents them from implementing better solutions.

To answer these questions, several interviews were made in different departments across different organizational levels, to gather information and understand in a more realistic scenario the problem underlying reasons. This research will focus on exploring two distinct scenarios: improving the process and the organizational aspects necessary for its implementation.

First, a solution is going to be presented on how to improve the process within a purchasing department in a book retailer – giving two distinct options, one that still holds manual tasks and another that is fully automated. These two have the same goal: minimize the time taken to finalize the article creation and consequently, improve the time-to-market for books.

Second, the necessary organizational conditions to successfully implement new processes or change existing processes will be identified. To this end the impact of the factors below will be studied:

1. Leadership
2. Employee satisfaction/motivation
3. Communication between departments

The next section presents the literature review on the topics relevant to problem under study. In the literature review, subjects related to business process modelling, communication and leadership, employee satisfaction and motivation were analyzed. Still on that section, the problem and research gaps are addressed, giving a broader view on what is lacking in the literature related with this topic.

Next, the methodology is explained, what methods were used and how these are applied to the research. The methods used were Qualitative Research, Business Process Modelling, Sampling and finally, Interviewing and data analysis.

Following the methodology, the results of this study are addressed. This part of the report explains how the presented process can be improved and what benefits it would bring to the department as well as the organization. It will also demonstrate the major elements that are not allowing *Almedina* to lead the way when it comes to being faster against its competition. It also shows how the interviews contributed to a further analysis on the impact that communication and leadership have regarding an improvement implementation.

Finally, the last section of this research discusses the practical and theoretical contributions that were made, the conclusions and opportunities for future research.

## **2. Literature Review**

The present chapter presents the relevant literature for this research. The literature review focused on understanding processes and their optimization, business culture together with leadership and communication within organizations, employee satisfaction, engagement and motivation, organizational objectives and rewards and finally, the relation between employee satisfaction and organization productivity.

### **2.1. Business Process Modelling (BPM)**

Talwar (1993) defines a process as a “sequence of pre-defined activities executed to achieve a pre-specified type or range of outcomes”. There can be two types of processes, as indicated by Ould (1995). Those are:

1. “the sort that starts when necessary and finishes sometime in the future;
2. “the sort that is constantly running.”

Processes are generally cross-functional, horizontal in nature, lie outside the usual vertical, hierarchical company structure, and no single person has responsibility for the entire process (Lee and Dale 1998).

Business process modelling (BPM) is “a structured approach to analyse and continually improve fundamental activities such as manufacturing, marketing, communications and other major elements of a company’s operations.” (Zairi 1997). Meaning that this method can be applied to any organisation in all areas.

Using BPM, the organisation is viewed as a series of functional processes linked across the organisation, describing how the work actually gets done. Policy and direction are still set from the top, but the authority to examine, challenge and change work methods is delegated to cross-functional work teams (DeToro & McCabe 1997).

According to Zairi (1997) “BPM is concerned with the main aspects of business operations where there is high leverage and a big proportion of added value.” There are rules that need to be followed such as:

1. The most important activities must be mapped and documented.
2. The customer is the main focus through a horizontal linkage that connects all the important activities.
3. Systems and procedures must be based on discipline, consistency and repeatability to ensure quality.
4. There is the need of assessing the performance of each process, set objectives and deliver output levels that meet the organization’s goals.
5. Optimization needs to be continuous, allowing problem solving and getting more benefits through it.
6. Must be falling on best practices ensuring that the organization is ahead of competition.
7. BPM will affect the whole culture on the organization, changing it. It does require more than good systems and a right structure. People need to be ready for it, too.

Finally, Lee and Dale (1998) consider BPM as an approach that is customer-focused to the systematic management, measurement and improvement of all the processes by applying cross-functional team-work and employee empowerment. Furthermore, BPM is often regarded as a best-practice management principle to help companies sustain competitive advantage (Hung 2006).

## **2.2. Processes and continuous improvement**

Business environments are complex. Almost everywhere organisations are undergoing rapid and significant changes driven by pressures such as customer expectations, new technologies, and growing global competition. As a result, many business processes within organisations are dynamic and constantly changing. In order to survive in such environments, practitioners are forced to continually revise their business processes to respond quickly to changes. There are some methodologies and tools available to help businesses improve their processes, however, none of these adequately support the practitioner through all stages in the business process improvement (BPI) activity (Adesola & Baines 2005).

Grant (2002) states that one of the main causes of failure is focusing on one aspect of the process and forgetting about other equally important factors (e.g. technology). Also, organizations must effectively align their strategy and structure with the competitive environment if they are to perform effectively (Rogers, Miller, & Judge 1999).

To achieve this, Trkman (2010) states that “consequently, a constant assurance of the fit between business processes and technology is also needed. Both the renovation of the processes and their continuous improvement require proper informatization”. Therefore, “a real fit between technology and business processes must be established and maintained, otherwise the users and managers may circumvent information systems” (Bendoly & Cotteleer 2008).

By placing business processes on centre stage, corporations can gain the capabilities they need to innovate, reenergize performance and deliver the value today’s markets demand. Process management discovers what you do, and then manages the lifecycle of improvement and optimization, in a way that translates directly to operation. Whether you wish to adopt industry best practices for efficiency or pursue competitive differentiation, you will need process management (Smith & Fingar 2003).

## **2.3. Leadership and Communication**

Organizations must create a climate to encourage and foster positive and creative thinking of their employees. In other words, they must seek to eliminate organizational barriers at work that could complicate and hinder creativity (Politis 2004).

As Geneen (1984) states: Leadership is the heart and soul of an organization. No one really manages an organization by shuffling numbers or rearranging organizational charts. What is really managed in an organization is people! Leadership is the ability to inspire people to work together as a team to achieve common objectives. People want to follow an effective leader. The researcher is also convinced that leadership is, no doubt, the single most important ingredient in organizational management, and good leadership which inspires people to excel contributes as much as 80-90 per cent to an organization’s success. (Geneen 1984)

Several authors have emphasized that communication is central to leadership (Awamleh and Gardner 1999; Den Hartog and Verburg 1997; Frese et al. 2003; Kirkpatrick and Locke 1996; Riggio et al. 2003; Shamir et al. 1994; Spangler and House 1991; Towler 2003). Communication can be defined as the lubricant used to turn the wheels in any leadership role (Spinks & Wells 1995).

Leaders are people who are able to express themselves fully; they know what they want, why they want it, and more important, how to communicate what they want to others to gain co-operation and support. (Bennis 1989). MacLeod and Clarke (2009) emphasize that employees require clear communication from superiors to relate their role with leadership vision.

Men (2014) says that a communication system that is open, two-way, and responsive will invite feedback; address the opinions and concerns of employees; boost mutual understanding, collaboration, and dialogue; and nurture employee satisfaction.

Communication is also what makes employees engaged within the organization, making them feel valued and empowered, so agree several authors, that say that internal communication is an organizational practice, that conveys all its values to all employees, obtaining their support in reaching organizational goals. Thus, internal communication is crucial to ensure employee feel engaged within organisations. (Bindle and Parker, 2010; Papalexandris and Galanaki, 2009; Bakker et al, 2011).

It is reasonable to expect that, if employees experience an empowering workplace that fosters a fit between their expectations and their working conditions, they would be more engaged in their work (Greco, Laschinger and Wong 2006).

Knowing that communication is key in order to have engaged and motivated employees, it is also important to have a great leader to lead this voice. Goble (1972) defined leadership as stirring people so that they are moved from within. People are excited when they know the organizations' goals. By setting a personal example, enthusiastic about the job and allowing the flow of communication with workers: listening as well as talking. Leadership is giving merit and putting down demerit, honestly and fairly. Combining these qualities, will have people doing the work well in order to be successful personally and organizationally.

The leaders like to know the importance of their work to the organization's overall direction and performance. In that case, they should also communicate to their teams in the same way. This fits with a transformational approach to leadership (Bass, 1997), and is in keeping with the primary factor identified here, supports team. (Xu & Thomas 2011).

The transformational leaders are open to different opinions and invite employees to participate in the decision-making process (Hackman & Johnson, 2004). They genuinely care about the well-being and feelings of their followers. Accordingly, such leaders often communicate well and closely interact with employees to understand and address their higher order needs. By communicating a desirable, inspirational, and attainable vision, transformational leaders give followers a sense of meaning within the organization (Yukl, 2006) and thus improve their relational satisfaction.

To sum up, leadership is only achieved in a good manner if communicated well to the followers. If not, the leader will not be guiding the employees towards the right direction that the organization is pursuing.

## **2.4. Employee Satisfaction, Engagement and Motivation**

Organizations need to allow employees to make their work exciting and to create an environment where they feel engaged with their work. Every organization knows that the employees are their key assets. Thus, it is necessary to give them the space and time to work and have fun within their workplace. If not, they will disengage very easily. Organizations are dependent on the employees to fulfil their goals and objectives, but this happens the other way around too. That way, the organizations' culture needs to put as top priority, the employee engagement. This should be a continuous process of learning, improvement and action. Employees should see their expectations being fulfilled actively by the organization, causing a positive impact on their performance, which directly affects the organizations' performance. (Bedarkar & Pandita 2014).

Engagement has been defined as “the extent to which employees commit to something or someone in their organization, [and] how hard they work and how long they stay as a result of that commitment” (Corporate Leadership Council, 2004). According to Bedarkar & Pandita (2014) employee engagement has emerged as a critical driver of business today. It practically affects the employee morale, productivity and reasons for retaining in the company. Seijit (2006) identified the 10 Cs of Employee Engagement, namely Connect, Career, Clarity, Convey, Congratulate, Contribute, Control, Collaborate, Credibility & Confidence.

Papalexandris and Galanki (2009) identify two factors which are positively linked with engagement, namely, management and mentoring behaviours such as imparting confidence to followers, power sharing, communication, providing role clarification and articulation of vision which could be characterized as inspirational, visionary, decisive and team-oriented.

Psychological empowerment increases employees' sense of personal control and motivates them to engage in work, which in turn results in positive managerial and organisational outcomes and also empowered people feel that their work is important to them and they care about what they are doing (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997).

Maslow (1971) wrote that individuals who do not perceive the workplace as meaningful and purposeful will not work up to their professional capacity.

To motivate employees towards quality productivity, measurable goals must be set with input from employees. If no goals are set or if employees do not have input in formulating goals, employees are often not motivated to complete the tasks successfully. Perhaps, they do not realize the importance and value of the tasks (Wells and Spinks, 1992).

Therefore, organisations need to make sure they provide their employees with a prosperous workplace where they feel they are part of, are able to communicate bottom-up and also that rewards them for their productivity by setting measurable goals. This way, employees will achieve a good state-of-mind and should be top productive.

## **2.5. Problem and Research Gaps**

Tremendous pressure is put on organisations to improve their performance and increase their competitiveness in the continuously changing world of work (Ndlovu & Parumasur, 2005). The organizations need to adapt to this evolving fierce business world, where potential candidates for their job openings, are more aware of other companies' structure, conditions and



wages. This means that for long-established companies to thrive and obtain sustainable growth, a shift of mindset needs to happen.

In order to improve performance and increase competitiveness, organisations need to be adaptable. To do so, their processes must be mapped, documented and in constant evolution, so that they can be changed throughout the time.

*Grupo Almedina* has recently invested time and financial resources in order to develop a tool that would standardize all processes across stores as well as within the main office. This tool has had good acceptance by *Almedina*'s employees and has been used since its implementation. However, most processes were created by simply putting in paper the tasks that were being carried out. By doing this, and without further analysis, some tasks are being done more than one time, others are just not working well.

Organisations are responsible for making sure they modernize their business culture in order to enjoy a better working environment where ideas are shared, and knowledge is transferred from department to department. However, this way of thinking is new and organisations like *Almedina*, established early in the 60ths are still finding their pace to this trend.

The literature research lacks information on the relationship between processes optimisation and communication and leadership within organisations. Therefore, the present study aims to unveil information on this topic by relating hardships on the optimisation of business process with communication difficulties and insufficient leadership.

This is a topic that might bring some insight on how organisations should develop and improve their communication throughout all Business Units in order to be up-to-date regarding its processes and how these should be improved.

Finally, a solution for this particular problem as well as an improvement in the Purchasing Department's process, will be presented.

This project aims to explore the gaps found in the literature review, using a qualitative methodology. These topics will be covered in the following chapters.

### **3. Methodology**

In order to answer the research objectives, the methodology used qualitative research combined with business process modelling. This enables to better understand the perception of employees have regarding the organization (leadership, communication, etc.) as well as an understanding of the processes.

The initial exploration of the problem within the company helped to understand that the process was not working efficiently. As such, it was necessary to explore what was preventing the processes from working well and faster, and also how it could be improved. Initially, the problem under study seemed to be about process improvements, however the evolution of the work showed several underlying problems that would stop the solution from being implemented, namely managerial and team difficulties.

Thus, after considering several alternatives to approach this problem and considering existing constraints, Qualitative Research and BPM as methods were chosen. Qualitative analysis enabled to perform a deeper explorative analysis using interviews, which gave broader views on current issues within the organization and how these can be preventing it from reaching a better and developed agreement regarding processes.

The second method, BPM, is a useful tool in order to map the processes, find bottlenecks and improve them from within. Other options could have been considered; however, this was the most adaptable as it is based on a continuous improvement ground. It was proven to be quite helpful as it allowed the research to be evolving as it was being undertaken.

#### **3.1. Qualitative Research**

Different methods are available for data collection and analysis. Quantitative research uses numerical data as output and can help the researcher getting information by analyzing numbers. On the other hand, qualitative research offers an in-depth understanding of underlying reasons and motivations, providing the researcher with data in the form of words and pictures (Neuman, 2005).

A quantitative method was discarded for the current study, considering that it would not allow the researcher to understand the underlying reasons why leadership and communication could be affecting the organization from improving. Quantitative methods can be very useful and can complement qualitative ones, but in this case, it was not perceived as necessary. This method fails to take account of people's unique ability to interpret their experiences, construct their own meanings and act on these (Creswell 1994), which was considered very important in this study.

In contrast to what happens in a quantitative research, the researcher in a qualitative approach is integral part of the research process and assumes an active role in all aspects of the study (Marshall 1996). This method is typically exploratory and/or investigative in nature and its findings are often not conclusive and cannot be generalized. However, it is important for developing a deep understanding of a specific complex situation (ATLAS.ti n.d.).

To legitimize the qualitative research, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss developed the constant comparative method – the Grounded Theory Method. Grounded theory is a type of qualitative research methodology that allows theory/theories to emerge from the data that is collected. Grounded theory research follows a systematic yet flexible process to collect data,

code the data, make connections and see what theory/theories are generated or are built from the data (Astalin 2013).

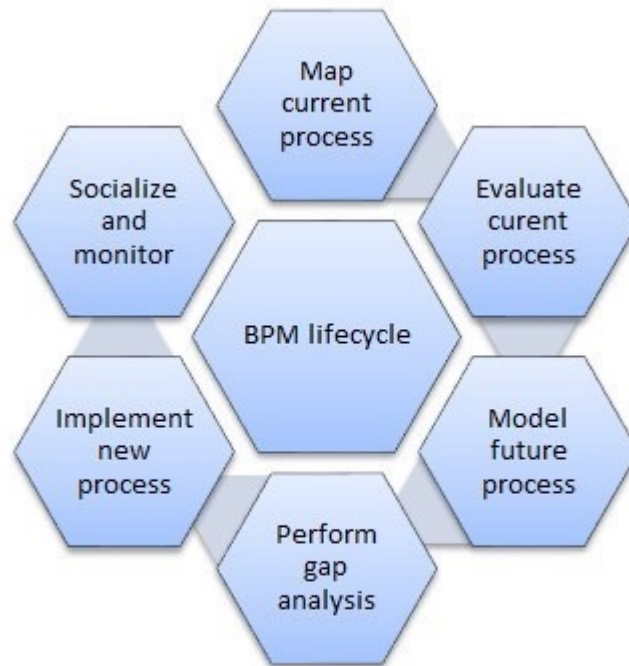


Figure 1 The Business Process Management Lifecycle (Darwish 2011)

The Qualitative Research has proven to be very suitable for exploring, understanding and learning more about people's experiences and events in their lives, as they allow the openness needed to see data in new ways and explore new ideas (Charmaz 2006). Hence, based on the information above and how relevant these methods are to the project, the qualitative research was the chosen approach.

### 3.2. Business Process Modelling

The methodology followed in this project was divided in different stages. The first one was understanding the problem that needs be solved. First, the problem regarding the process was described by the Purchasing Department Director. This offered a broader view on what was currently happening within the department and what was the main goal they wanted to reach. Having this view, a conversation with the department's manager happened in order to map the processes that needed improvement. This was done according to the Business Process Lifecycle, where first the process as is must be mapped and then it should be created a new formula to-be (see Figure 1). To perform the gap analysis, as stated previously, a qualitative analysis of the employees' perception of the organization was done. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. In a semi-structured interview, there is an incomplete script where the researcher may have prepared some questions beforehand, but there is a need for improvisation. (Myers & Newman 2007).

This data collection allowed a better understanding of the problem and to propose two different approaches for the process improvement ideation. In that case, three different versions of this process were created: the first as-is, and two to-be, that have distinctive features and can be implemented differently. These were only possible by interviewing different employees in different areas.

In the end, an analysis on the process implementation was made, to find out why the as-is process was in its current state and also why the two to-be proposed improvements could not be applied.

This way, although this cycle ends with “implement new process” and “socialize and monitor”, these two were not possible to do within this project and the reasons for it will be explained as the study advances.

### **3.3. Sampling**

For this project, it is important not to have a sample that gives context to what is being studied. Marshall (1996) states that a “random sample provides the best opportunity to generalize the results to the population but is not the most effective way of developing an understanding of complex issues relating to human behavior.”.

The author also defined three main approaches that are used to select a sample for a qualitative study, those are: Convenience sample - the selection of the most accessible subjects; Judgement sample – based on the researcher's practical knowledge of the research area, the available literature and evidence from the study itself; and Theoretical - defined as the research develops, it adapts itself from the emerging data (new samples can be elaborated through the process). This research uses the latter, theoretical sampling, as it was necessary to be adaptable as the analysis progressed.

By using this strategy, the researcher analyses data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them. The researcher begins by identifying some key concepts and features impacting the sampling for the project (Glaser 1986). A desired sample was created for this project's purpose that was used during the interviews. (See table 1).

<b>Sample of 15 store employees</b>
<u>A sample of 10 book clerks</u> It is important to understand how these employees perceive the organization and how the processes work for them. By being the ones who are in contact with the customer, it is mandatory to hear what they have to say.
<u>A sample of 5 managers</u> The store managers deal directly with the purchasing department. Therefore, these stakeholders are able to point out bottlenecks more easily.
<b>Sample of 5 office employees</b>
<u>A sample of 5 Office Employees</u> The process under study relates almost exclusively with this department. Knowing the time spent in each task and how this affects their final result is crucial.

Table 1 Sample used for the data collection

A sample of 20 people was selected from employees from different areas and different hierarchy levels inside *Almedina*. These employees were chosen due to their relation to the Purchasing Department. Therefore, all the people interviewed have a relationship with the process that is intended to be improved. (See figure 2).



Figure 2 Relationship of Purchasing Department within the organization

### 3.4. Interviewing and data analysis

To collect the relevant data for this study, 20 semi-structured interviews were carried out within one month. There was a pre-selection of employees whose functions were relevant for the project and who were available to be interviewed during that period of time. These people were contacted by e-mail and phone to schedule a date for the interview and asked whether they preferred it to be face-to-face or by video-chat – Skype, in this case.

All interviews, except three were conducted face-to-face. Most interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Most interviewees agreed to be subjected to these recordings and signed an informed consent form created by the researcher. Those who did not agree with the recording, agreed with having their speech written onto Word as they spoke and also signed the consent form (see APPENDIX A).

All interviews started with a short explanation about the project and what was the main objective. The consent form was also given at that moment for the interviewee to be informed on their rights and what was expected from them. They were assured that their data was safe and would not be disclosed to anyone.

Following Charmaz (2006) guidelines on best practices for interviews, an interview guide with open-ended, non-judgmental questions encouraging unexpected stories to rise was created.

During the interview, the researcher expressed interest about the topics that would arise, not forgetting to guide the interviewee towards the end goal.

The interview guide started by asking the interviewee about their function, how many years they had been working at *Almedina* and how they felt about it. After describing their job, the researcher would ask about what is going well and possible difficulties, in order to find out the personal perspective of the employee. Following this question, the employee would be asked about current processes – if they are all working well and well implemented. This would allow the interviewee to elaborate on any possible problem that is recurring. Next, they were asked whether they were in need of more or better training and in what area. After this, they were questioned about how sales could be improved – this was asked in relation to the main goal of the process improvement being develop the time-to-market. Finally, interviewees were allowed to propose some improvements, things they want to see change and were asked how they saw this being achieved.

Table 2 show the demographics on these interviews:

Gender	
Female	9
Male	11
Hierarchy Level	
Manager	8
Non-manager	12
No. Years working in Almedina	
0 - 2	3
2 - 5	4
5 - 10	3
10+	10

Table 2 Participants Socio-Demographic Information

Data analysis was done using the software NVIVO 12, to assist in the coding process, and followed Charmaz (2006) guidelines for qualitative research. The coding process started with the coding of interviews. Coding means categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data. Codes show how you select, separate, and sort data to begin an analytic accounting of them (Charmaz 2006). The coding process started with an initial phase – initial coding– involving naming each word, line or segment of data and code that data as actions. The initial coding was followed by a focused, selective phase – focused coding that uses the most important and frequent initial codes to sort and organize larger segments of data, consolidating developed categories and finding new ones.

## **4. Results**

This section is presented in two parts: the first – processes, shows the process that was presented by Almedina's Purchasing Department, that needs improvement. It explains it, the challenges it presents to the company and why it had to be improved. It also shows the solutions found for this problem: one that has manual tasks and the other that is fully automated.

The second, explores the main findings obtained through the interview's analysis and respective coding. The goal was to find out what are the main challenges the employees face in the organization and the understand how leadership and communication impacts their perception on it. The results will be supported by quotes from some participants, providing a sneak peek on their feedback, which facilitates the reflection on their views (Charmaz, 2006).

### **4.1. Processes**

The start of this analysis began with not knowing what a third party, the suppliers, thought about the process as-is. Unfortunately, even though the company tried to schedule interviews with their authors and/or publishers, none of them showed interest in participating on the study, thus, limiting the results and possible solutions.

Another constraint was the limited financial resources. The way the problem was described, it was evident that a cheap solution would be the choice, preferably without costs associated. The organization was not ready to take on such expenses at this point. For instance, looking for a change on the ERP, having a consultancy company doing the job for them, could not be considered after knowing the price was a condition.

Also, the human resources of the company are scarce and cannot be taken out of their daily duties to discuss hypotheses, it was imperative to design solutions that were easy to apply or that would require no human interaction – automating the process exactly as it works now but removing tasks done manually.

Considering the problem and its context, two solutions were designed. The first proposed solution, which will be explained next, shows a polished process with fewer manual tasks, that will allow the process to finish faster than it currently is. This one involves little or no cost and could be easily implemented. The second solution, even though it might need more investment would certainly allow the organization to have a much faster time-to-market, even comparing to the other proposed solution. This is believed to be right, considering that it is a fully automated process where the only human interaction is related with the supplier, allowing the company to focus on other important tasks. This solution will be also explained in detail on the following pages.

#### **Process As-is**

The following process designed as a flowchart, as described on previous chapters, explains the way an article (book) is created since the beginning: from collecting the relevant information about the book, checking and correcting it, inserting on the system to getting online.

The articles are created three times in total – first, an Excel file is sent to the supplier (editor, author, etc.) (see APPENDIX C). Here, the officer has to wait for the Excel file to be sent back by e-mail to the Purchasing Department. Once the file is received, it is mandatory that the



information that is on the file is checked. They have to see all the fields and make sure nothing is wrong. Below are all the pieces of information that must be confirmed:

1. Author(s)
2. Author(s) Biography
3. Barcode
4. Day/Month/Year of Publishing
5. ISBN 13 (digits)
6. Number of pages
7. Publisher
8. Retail Price (including tax)
9. Subtheme
10. Subtitle
11. Synopsis
12. Theme
13. Title
14. Type of Cover
15. Weight

Often some information sent is incorrect. Attached to the e-mail is also sent the book's cover picture. These details are often misspelled, incorrect, the name of the author is not right, or the image does not have a good dimension, ending in bad quality. The officer that receives this and confirms that information is not correct, has to send another e-mail to the supplier asking for the information to be sent back corrected. This means that another e-mail is awaited, and more time is spent just on the first stage of this process.

Once the e-mail with the corrected data is received, it is time to add it to the system. If this is from a supplier who has been already working with *Almedina*, the next action is immediate. If not, the Purchasing Department has to send an e-mail to the Accounting Department asking for the Supplier to be created on the ERP. To better understand the process, it was mapped as shown in figure 3.

The second stage is to add the article on the ERP – Sage X3. This is manually done, there is no tool the officers can use that allows the information to be collected from Excel. Therefore, it is all done on a copy/paste basis.

The third and finally stage of the process is to create the article online. Again, this is all done manually and, on a copy/paste basis. Because the online store has no connection with Sage X3, this is not changeable and not automatic. The articles all go through the same process and this is very time consuming and repetitive.

It is important to also mention that there are a large number of articles to process each day and this task takes about 4 minutes per article.

Also, sometimes articles are not uploaded online because of the scarcity of quality information, however, they are always created in X3 if they are from an important supplier.

Figure 4 shows another process that was mapped as the solution was being designed. This one explains how the Purchasing Department acts every time they get a new proposal by a supplier that they have never done business with. Although this process does not interfere with the other, it was important to analyze it, in order to find out if there was any other task that could be affected by an automated solution. In the end, it was clear that the process mapped on figure 7 had no direct interference with article creation and it is only presented for a better understanding on how the Purchasing Department currently works.

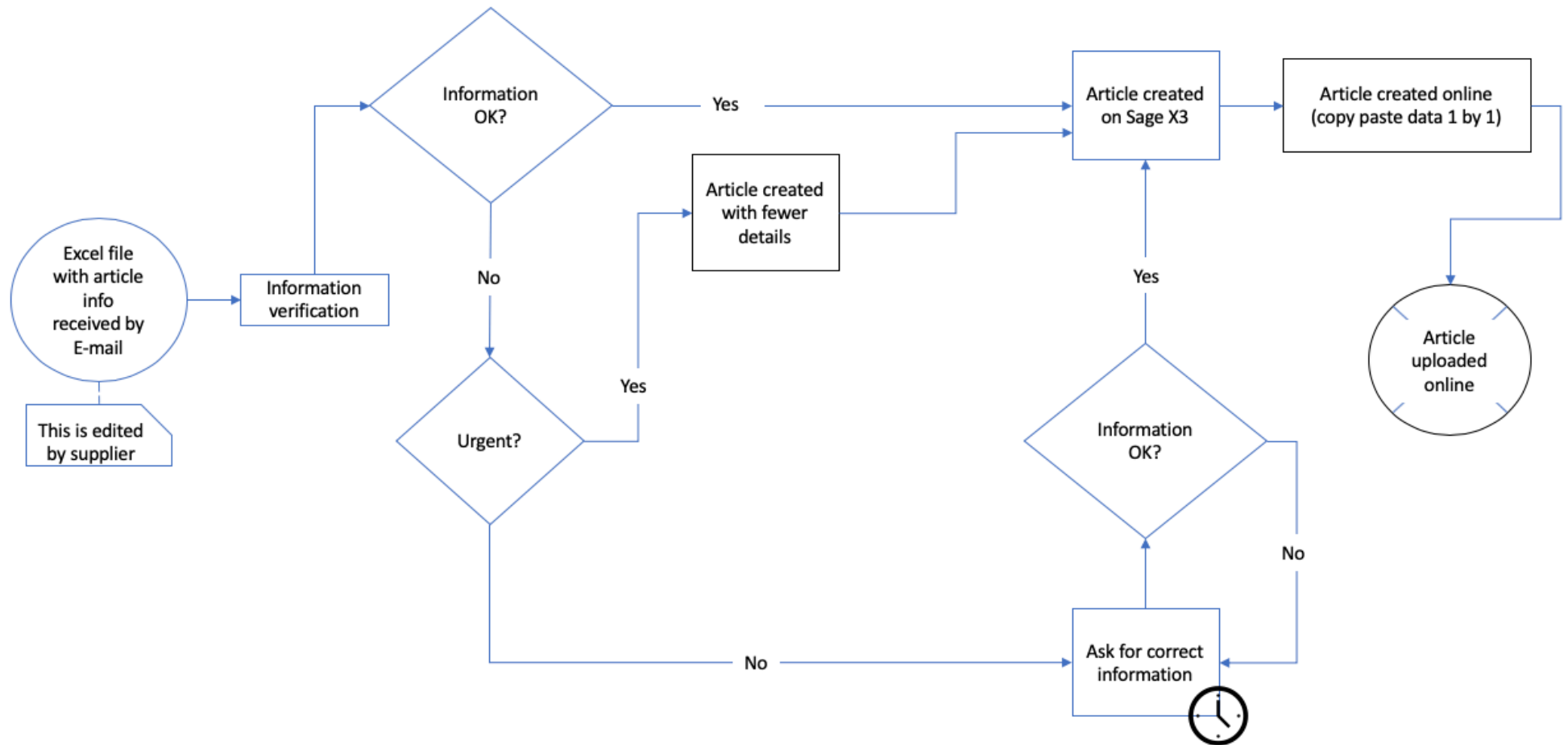
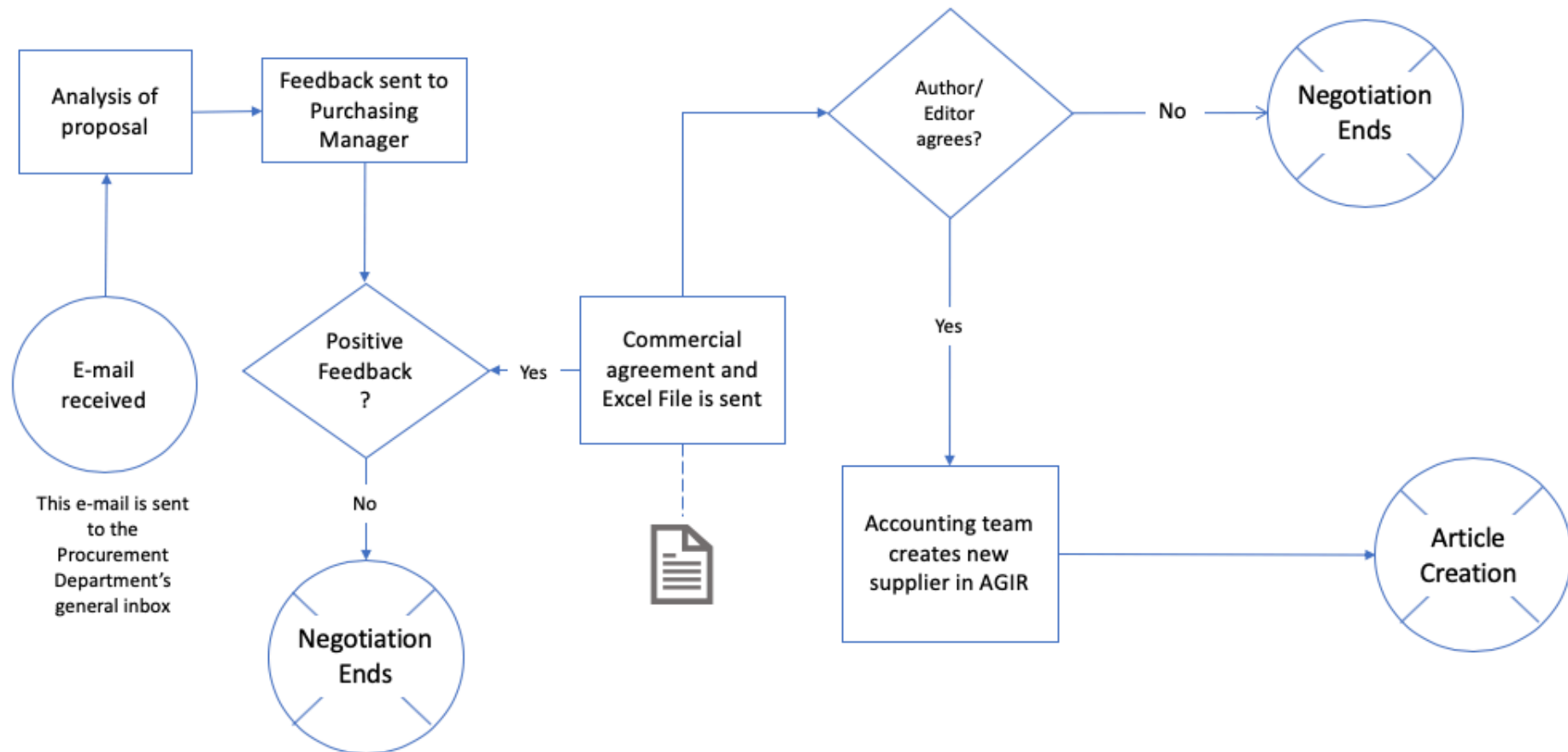


Figure 3 Process As-is: Article creation



If the email is from a vendor and the response is negative, the article is created anyway in case there is a customer interested in the book. The client can always request the book even if it is not in the physical / online store;  
 In the case of a contact by a non-supplier, the contact is final, there is no article creation.

Figure 4 Process: Proposal from new Supplier

### **Process To-be (Human interaction)**

The flowchart that is presented on the next page indicate how the process could be improved by removing some of the tasks that are done manually. (See figure 5)

Figure 5 shows the initially thought that was created using the available tools.

Based on the fact that there is a website – Almedina.net, and this is used to also upload the articles on the final stage, the first idea was to create a back-office for each supplier with a given username and password. This back-office, equipped with a pre-created form with all the necessary details for the article creation, would allow the supplier to add as many books as they like. This form would be created in a way that the details that are manageable and controllable, would not allow the user to make mistakes.

For instance, on the ISBN 13 field, it would be mandatory to add 13 digits, this way preventing the supplier from sending an incorrect number (with fewer or more digits than expected). As for other details, like the cover's picture, it would also be designed to ask for a certain image size, in order to make sure only good quality pictures are sent.

This idea would then cut the first stage of the process – sending the Excel file to the supplier and avoiding the never-ending exchange of e-mails that seem to be happening. It would also make the task of adding the information, happen once: when the officer needs to add the information on the ERP, since this is not integrated with the online shop.

This proposed solution, although quite efficient given the tools at hand, is not solving one main issue, that is, the officer necessity of adding the details one-by-one onto SAGE X3. The perfect scenario would be, having the supplier doing all this for *Almedina*, having them only checking if everything was going right.

For this proposed solution see the next page's flowchart, Figure 9.

Considering the first approach, there are still many manual tasks performed by the Purchasing Department. Therefore, it cannot be seen as an optimal process. Hence, it was crucial that an integrated version was created that could be applied to the current ERP, to eliminate any human interaction except for the one that is the supplier's duty – adding the article's information.

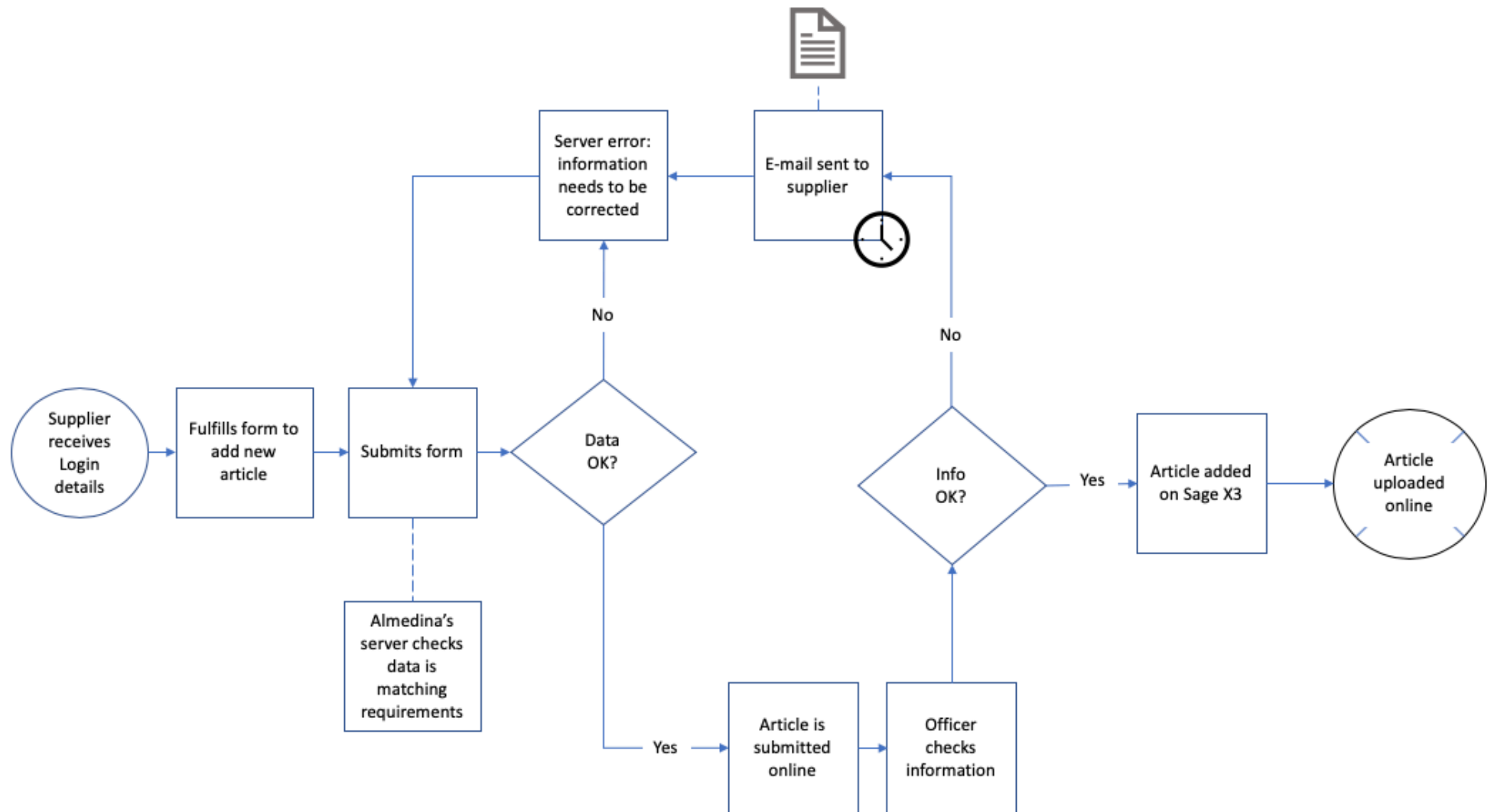


Figure 5 Process To-be without integration

### **Process To-be (Web Service version)**

A new process was designed as a Swimlane that explains how the Article Creation Process could be optimized, by integrating a Web Service to it. This method is simple and starts off with the creation of the same form but on a designated webserver, which will be used by the supplier to add the new articles. This form will be connected to an external database that will hold all new data that supplier upload there.

Once a form is submitted, after the server confirms the details are correct and so on, the database saves it and it stays there in cache.

At the same time, a routine running in the background is sent by SAGE ERP to the Web Service (REST) that will run to collect new data coming from the database. The method is simple, if there is new data, the data is transferred to SAGE and a new article is created with this information. If not, the program goes back to its starting point and the trigger will deploy within an established time-frame, that will be set by *Almedina* – this could be minutes, hours, or on a daily basis depending on the volume of the information.

Another trigger in the background will be deployed to check whether there are new articles created on SAGE. If the answer is positive, the article will be uploaded to Almedina.net and will be inserted on the online shop. If not, the program waits for the time to deploy the trigger again. This routine will work the same way as the other one, it will be running as many times as the program sets it to run (see figure 9).

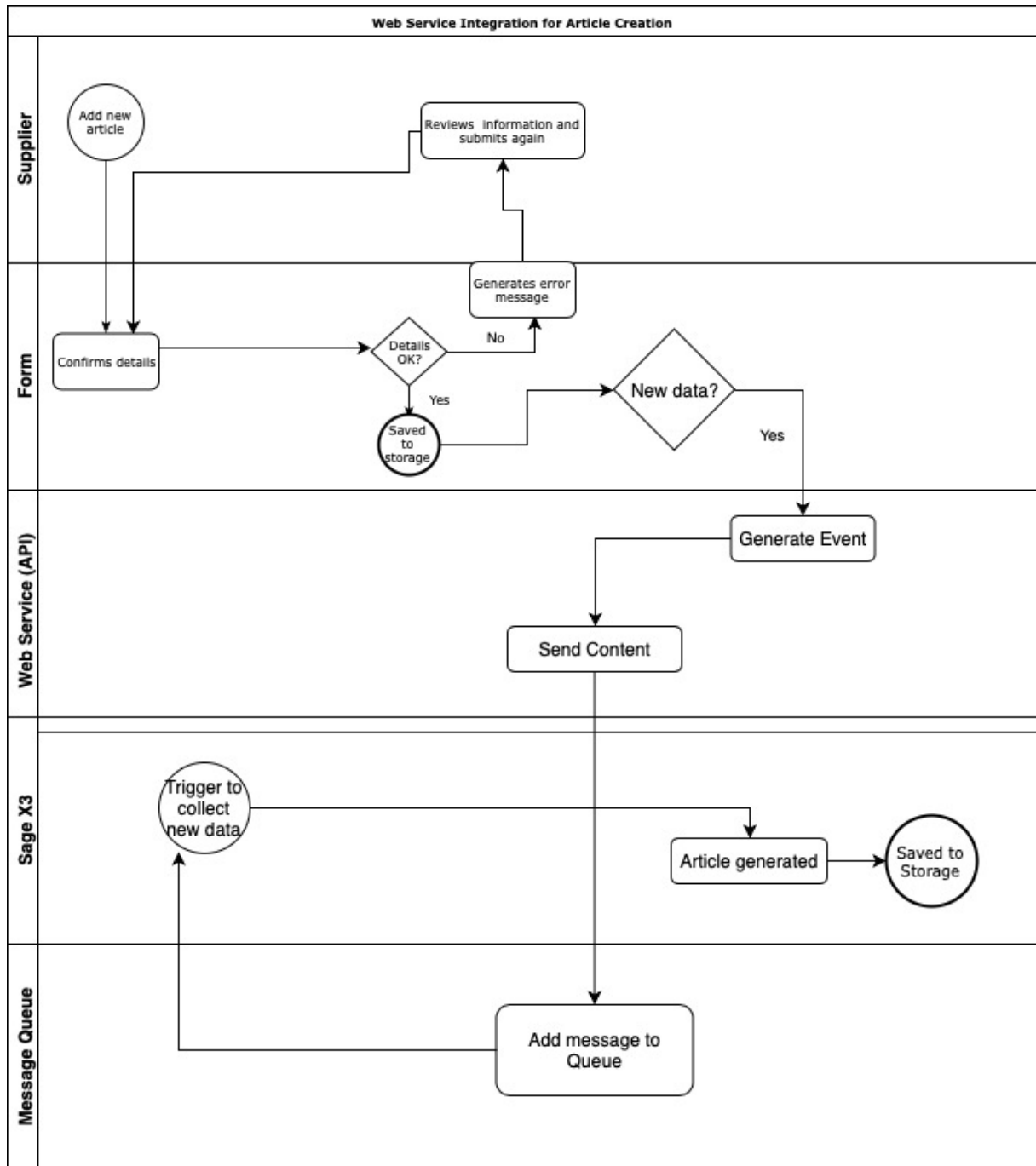


Figure 6 Web Service for Article Creation (to-be)



On the diagram represented on Figure 7, it is possible to see how the Web Service Architecture would be achieved. To better understand how it works on the background, this will give some information on what each mentioned application does:

The Rabbit MQ is a message broker, which in other words, it is similar to a cloud queue that is self-managed. The API is a script that can be written in any programming language that has a bit of code which uses REST requests.

The flow would work in the following way: every time a webform is filled, it is inserted in the database. If the insertion is successful, a REST request is triggered in which the content of the form can be sent as body of the request (POST is the REST method and URL is the address of the Web Service, so the API's website) or, instead of sending directly the content of the webform, it can send an identifier, and the API responds with a GET Request that reads from a database table according to the identifier.

Then, the API connects to the Queue and send a message to it. The message contains as body the content of the webform.

On the Sage ERP side there is a script or a bit coded as a listener that continuously listens on the queue. When a message arrives, it consumes it, which means that it reads the information from the body and the queue eliminates the message.

Then, the ERP can insert the information in the database and further make a REST Request to another website (Almedina.net), sending the info in the same way as previously explained.

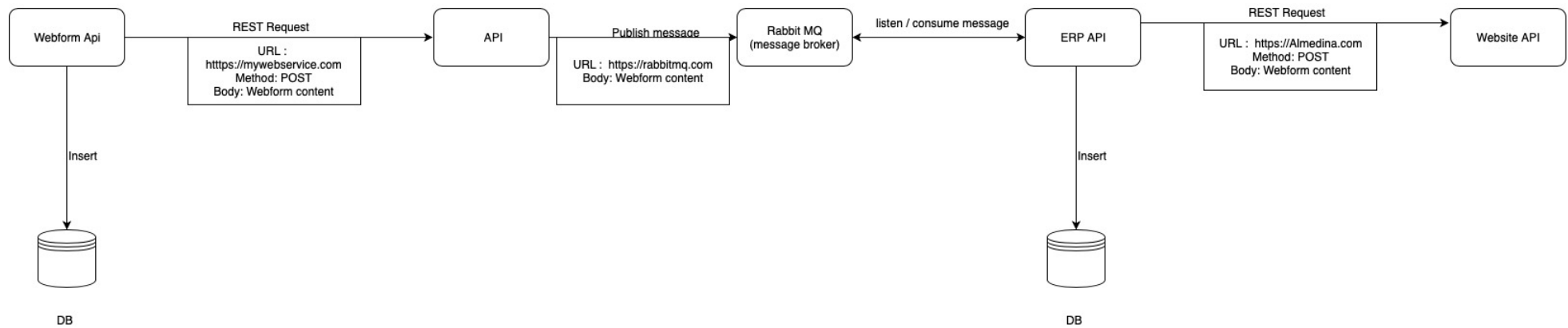


Figure 7 Web Service Architecture

### **Solutions conclusion**

Considering both solutions presented above, it is clear that the second proposed solution would allow the company to obtain a much faster time-to-market than by opting for the first solution. However, both options offer their benefits and it is a decision that the company needs to make. That is, whether to choose cost over benefit or benefit over cost. In that case, cost over benefit would be obtainable by choosing a semi-automated process and, of course, benefit over cost, would lead the choice towards the fully automated version of the process.

In any case, this research shows how the process can be improved and offers the organization two solutions that would bring benefit to the team and to the greater goal: enhance their response and a fiercer competitiveness.

### **4.2. Contextual interviews**

Almedina's concern is currently finding out a way of improving the process of inserting articles onto the system and therefore have a better time-to-market. After studying the possibilities, it was visible that there were other barriers that were making it harder for the organization to implement any proposed solutions. This turned out to be an issue and therefore, the study had to be extended and the interviews were carried out throughout the whole organization and not only to the Purchasing Department.

By carrying out semi-structured interviews, the research got richer data as interviewees' spoke about their experience at the organization, giving some insights on what is going well but also what could be improved.

The present analysis focused on finding the main issues that would best explain why the processes were not being well designed since the beginning. Through this analysis, it was possible to gather some insights on what is going wrong and what can be done to achieve a better work method and environment.

Figure 7 shows the Sunburst created by NVIVO 12 with the main nodes and which one is the most frequent. A Sunburst is a radial tree map. Hierarchy levels are presented as rings—the innermost ring is the top level of the hierarchy. The nodes created are related with the questions that were made during the interviews and should be read inside out. The dimension of each ring shows how much the topic was spoken during the conversations between the researcher and interviewees.

In total, there are 9 rings that were created as main nodes. From the biggest to the smallest, the rings are: Marketing and Sales, Communication, Employee, Work Environment, The Organization, Campaigns, Procedures, Training and Evaluation. The method to create these nodes was to open them as the interviews were analyzed. This explains why there is a node called 'Campaigns'.

The nodes will be explored on the next chapter; however, it is important to specify what each one relates to. Therefore, below is a short summary for each one of the 9 rings:

1. Marketing and Sales – explores employees' view on how Almedina sells their brand and what can be improved or changed regarding its sales.
2. Communication – gives a deeper understanding on what the employees currently think about communication within the organization.

3. Employee – as the name says, this is to explore their feelings in the company and how they are treated.
4. Work Environment – gathers information about positive and negative aspects about the workplace.
5. The Organization – what the employees think about Almedina.
6. Campaigns – one of the most challenging topics across all interviews. Explores how these are being carried out and how the employees perceive them.
7. Procedures – how processes are being done, if they are well implemented and whether these are being respected or not.
8. Training – gathers information about current training being adopted and in what areas the employees need more training.
9. Evaluation – another topic that was mentioned many times. Explores how the new quality system is working for the employees and how they feel about it.

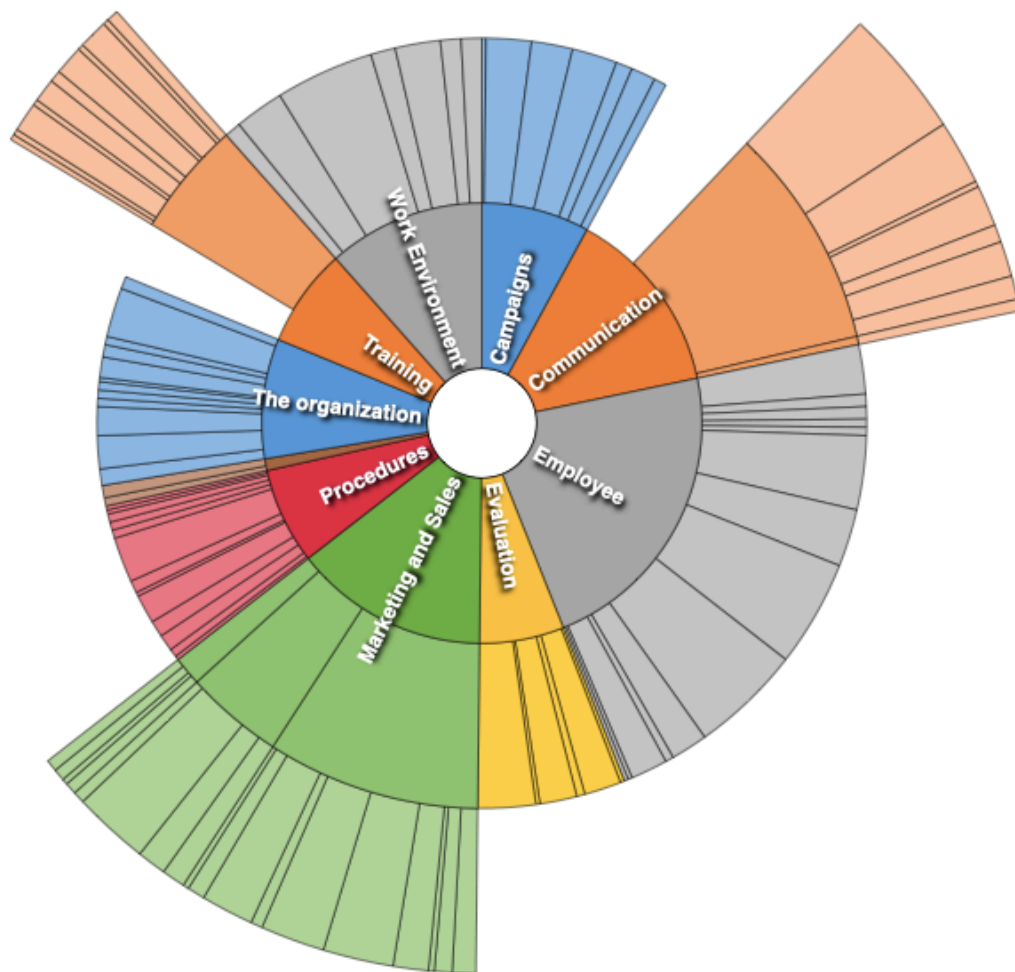


Figure 8 Coding sunburst created by NVIVO 12 software

### Communication Issues

As the first question was related with difficulties the employees face when working at *Almedina*, the results were very broad but also had some interesting findings. Most workers said the biggest challenge for them was the communication throughout departments. They say that even though there are other things happening that could be improved, most of them would be solved by improving the way the departments communicate between each other and also bottom-up, top-down.

P01: *Communication is the main flaw of this company. (Office employee)*

P02: *There is are a lot of flaws regarding communication. (Store employee)*

Communication indeed seems to be the main issue inside the organization and employees recognize that other things fail due to the lack of information flow. Something that *Almedina* does quite often are campaigns. Campaigns are promotional days or weeks, following a trend or theme that is popular at a given time and allow the customer to buy more for less. However, all interviewees mentioned that these promotions are not being well delivered. Most employees agreed that these are not well prepared and are badly communicated to the store workers. Employees believe that the campaigns should be better anticipated, the store employees should be informed about when the books would be arriving to the stores and what which ones will be in the promotional days. As they do not receive this information within a right time-frame, they get overwhelmed when they receive the parcels with books because they were not expecting these to arrive at a given day. The employees referred that an e-mail would do, they would feel part of the organization if they were informed about upcoming campaigns and could act accordingly.

They also mentioned that there are books that are always being sent back and returned to stores. This happens because the central office decides to include books in campaigns, but these are not selected according to what sells in each store. Employees feel that if the central office listened to them, this extra cost of books being returned and delivered again would be smaller and also, they could sell other things that made more sense in their store, or geographical area.

P03: *[Campaigns] should be communicated to the teams earlier. There are situations where the books arrive, and the team does not know whether there will be a campaign or not. Information is not flowing. (Store Manager)*

P04: *I'm in doubt if the campaigns work, I don't think so, lately it they haven't worked. I receive the orders and return them. (Book Clerk)*

Communication makes it easier in all aspects of an organization's workflow. Most interviewees said that the managers do not share new information with them, they are not aware of the company's structure and the decisions are not made taking their opinion or input into account. They said that they are excluded from the decisions and they are always communicated on top of events and the managers never ask them anything.

P05: *The communication is made almost exclusively between managers existing little or none with the operational part, booksellers or administration. (Office employee)*

P06: *We are meeting other realities and Almedina remains pyramidal and not horizontal. (Office employee).*

### Positive aspects about organization

When asked about what is going well at *Almedina*, most interviewees referred quite immediately that they loved their teams. They said that they get along very well and there is a very positive environment and team-work. Employees mentioned that the environment they work under is very chill and although there is pressure to achieve results like in any other company, they do not feel it and they are glad about this.

P08: *There's no pressure like in other companies, even though it exists. (Store manager)*

P09: *Excellent staff - works very well, good routines, knows what to do. Coherent team, no big trouble. (Store Manager)*

The employees also mentioned that *Almedina*, as a brand, was very secure and safe. They said this related with the fact that it made them feel proud, working for a well-reputed name within the book retail industry.

P10: *I like to work for an important retailer in the bookseller market, that makes me proud. (Office Employee)*

Another positive thing that happens at *Almedina* is the fact that internal recruitment is a practice. The organization knows the talent they have within and looks for it when filling a vacancy, in whatever area. It is not impossible for a person who works at a bookshop to be hired for a position in the office in Coimbra, for example, in another totally different area. This seems to be a valued by the interviewees.

### Training

It was important to know what type and the amount of training employees were given throughout the year. This particular question would allow the researcher to understand whether processes were being affected by lack of knowledge or just difficulties. Considering the interviews were semi-structured, the interviewees were able to discuss other training they would like to see happening, however, some mentioned that they would also like to be more practical with software and able to learn other tasks that could help them improve their daily routines as a team.

However, responses were varied and training in areas like customer service, complaints management, sales techniques and software were mentioned. Most employees found the training given by *Almedina* lacking and too spread out over time. They also stated that even if they ask for a particular type of training, most of the times they are not heard which brings us back to the point of communication.

P11: *I haven't done any training in a while, maybe, three years. (Office Employee)*

Another finding that is of relevance for this study, is the fact that most employees understand that the training they are given is not appropriate to the function that carry out. They even say that it feels like they are there just because it is mandatory for organizations to offer training to every employee and therefore, they are obligated to be learning something that truly does not add anything to their daily performance.

P12: *Training is not adequate. (Book clerk)*

## Processes

Processes seem to have many diverging opinions among the interviewees. Initially when asked about it, many said that everything was running smoothly, and nothing was there to change. However, when given certain input from previous gathered information, that is, when asked about certain aspects and how they felt towards it, they were able to point out things that are not working so well at the time being.

A few interviewees believe that when processes are not working as they should, the information they end up giving to the customer is incorrect. They believe that some processes were inserted onto the system, informatically but were not adapted to it. One example is the credit the customer keeps on their card after making a purchase. This credit can only be used on the next day and the customer is advised about that. However, the system does not recognize this rule and has a limitation, as the credit is immediately available. The customer is then informed that they cannot use the credit but when they go to another *Almedina* store on the same day, the employee will ask them whether they want to use the available credit. The interviewees said they work around this issue, but it is a process and it is not well implemented.

P13: *The information is given in every sale, but the available tools are not working together with the procedure. (Store manager)*

By being a family business, *Almedina*'s owners are known by recurrent customers in many stores. That said, the interviewees stated that sometimes it is hard to just follow the procedures as they are supposed to. When asked about this, they say that a lot of times, customers will say they know the owner and that he would give them the discount they want. When the book clerk goes against it, the customer usually speaks with someone related in the family and there is no way the employee will not do as he says. This is problematic as there are exceptions being created a lot of times and the book clerk is left wondering how to proceed next time. As a company hits a certain dimension, it is important to leave these exceptions behind and with a quality system implemented, the processes need to be kept standardized.

Regarding the database, another interesting finding was knowing that the Database not only works very slowly due to the software being used, but also is many times outdated. There are books that are not being sold anymore and are kept on the list. This makes it harder for a book clerk to search for a particular title, given that many times there are a vast number of the same title published in different years. And as an interviewee mentioned:

P14: *AlmedinaPT – has not correct stocks. Almedina.net doesn't have the titles, sometimes we have to go to Wook's website. (Store employee).*

*Wook* is one of *Almedina*'s main competitor and has a large book database. *Almedina* works hard to maintain high standards and to have accurate information on their database and website by making sure that the books are only listed when the information is correct and all in one place. *Wook*, however, does not do this and will upload any book with any information at any given time. It is understandable that *Almedina* works the way it is currently working but indeed, the time-to-market process needs improvement or else, the database will continue to be outdated and therefore making the lives of the employees harder.

Whilst waiting for some interviewees, the researcher was also able to observe a complaint happening of a woman who had been the previous day at the store asking for a particular ISBN. The book clerk searched for the title, never to find it on the database. However, this woman

went there on the day of the interviews and found the book she was after. This complaint shows that there is improvement to be done to the database or the organization will definitely see more similar cases happening again.

The processes seem to have been standardized and are working towards a greater goal, which is to help everyone aligning within the organization. However, it seems that many were just copied from what was already being carried out and without further analysis. This way, these processes were not adapted to the reality of an informatic system.

### **Sales and Marketing**

As the time-to-market influences the customer experience in store and how they perceive the brand after that, it was important to assess what were the views of the employees regarding what could be done to improve sales and marketing. There were many opinions and suggestions, which will be described next.

Firstly, it is extremely relevant to mention how the brand is perceived by people – customers, employees' friends and family, etc. Most of the interviewees stated that the perception that people have of *Almedina* is not of a bookshop but instead, they know it for its books, that is, as a publisher.

*P15: The focus is towards the publisher and not towards the bookstore itself. (Book clerk)*

This is something that will need to be addressed by the organization if they want to be able to be the first place a potential customer thinks of, to buy books.

Also, many employees stated that *Almedina* does not compete directly with other bookshops because the offer, although being extremely good up to a certain point, does not keep up with what the competition. They do not want to be perceived as “supermarket of books”, however, being strict to the publishers they work with and themselves, is not allowing them to offer the same number of titles that other bookshops do. The book clerks feel like they are missing out on sales due to this issue and this does not make them very happy as a professional. They want their voices to be heard about subjects like this.

*P16: When you know you're going to sell, you gotta have better planning. There's more stock because you know you come looking after someone's already bought it. (Book clerk)*

This quote mentions the difficulties that the organization has in following trends. The employees face this struggle a lot of times, they know a book is selling well but *Almedina* does not send them enough stock to face the demand.

If *Almedina*'s goal is to be known as a bookshop and not as a publisher only, they should invest in advertising, according to the interviewees. They believe that what is being done up to now is not enough and the organization needs to position itself better in order to reach more customers and gain a new perception as a brand. The employees referred that it would be important to spend some resources on publicity on the media (TV, outlets, etc.) as well as online social media. They believe that the organization is not working well online and the social networks they are using are not being well explored.

Regarding geographic positioning, *Almedina*'s stores are not spread out across the country. Instead, the stores are only located in the North of Portugal and down until Lisbon area. This seems to be a concern for the employees as well as they perceive this as a bad sign in terms of competitive advantage.



*P17: We are well located in Lisbon and in the north – from those points down, we do not exist. (Bookshop manager)*

Indeed, the stores seem to be a crucial factor that the employees see as negative. Many said that problematic stores should be closed – the ones that do not sell, investment on new stores in other locations should be seen as a priority and the online store should be improved – even this one seems to position *Almedina* as a publisher and not a bookshop considering that the books displayed on the homepage are all from the editor. (See figure 9)

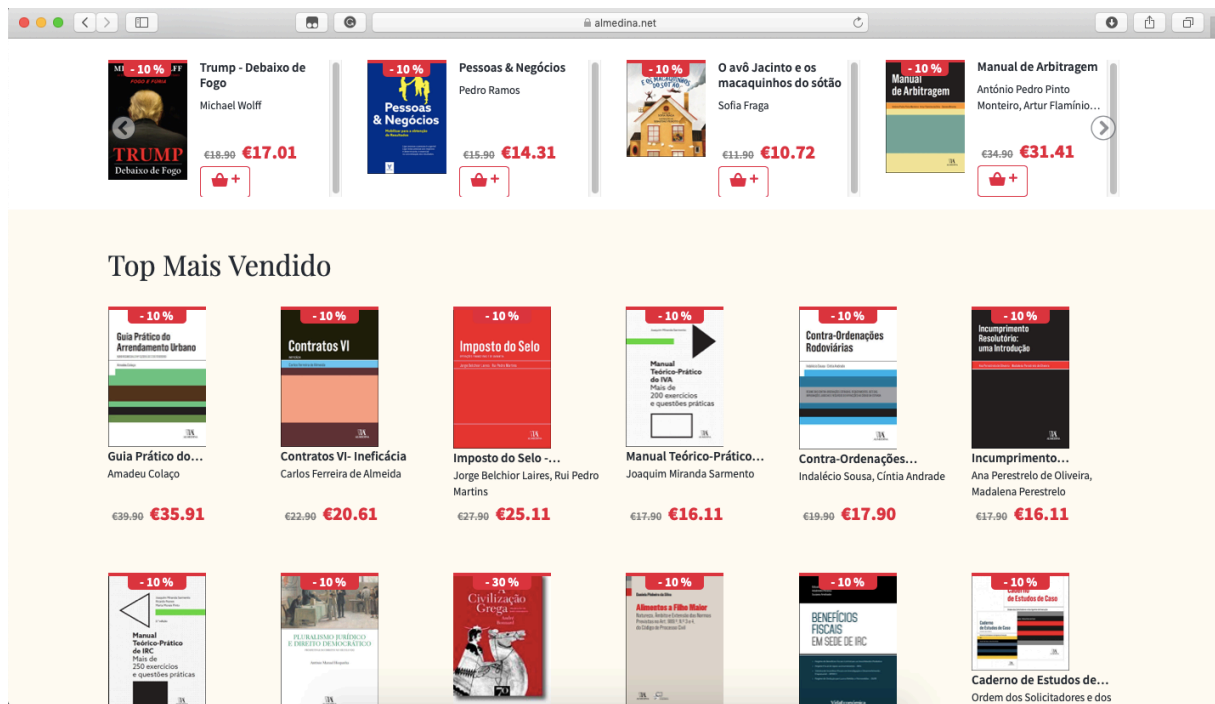


Figure 9 Almedina.net homepage

## Employee and the Organization

This category is important because it finally unveils the perception of the employee towards the organization and as a professional there – how the employee feels while working at *Almedina*.

Starting with the perception on the organization, the data shows that it is still perceived as a family business.

*P18: We haven't left family business for a normal one. (Store manager)*

As a family business, the organization is still pyramidal and there is a lot of hierarchy. More than two employees even mentioned that there are more managers than regular employees – so the pyramid is actually inverted in this case.

*P19: There's are bosses over bosses. The lower part of the company, booksellers, 1 bookseller has 9 people above. (Office worker)*

Most interviewees said that there is distance between officers and managers and that their voice is not heard (when compared with other jobs they had in the past). Also, they referred that the

Human Resources do not do their job in relation to helping employees integrate in the organization or simply to make them part of it – there is a very small connection between the HR and everybody else.

P20: *There is a great gap between the people and the people of the headquarters. (Store manager)*

P21: (...), *I think it has a structure too heavy, antiquated and stratified. (Book clerk)*

Now regarding the personal experience, the interviewees said that they feel disappointed. They are disappointed with many things like, the hierarchy, the lack of communication, feeling like they are only a number to the organization, the same campaigns over and over again, not being heard and also not being greeted by top positioned staff and lastly, but most important, they feel like they are not compensated for their work with anything.

P22: *You feel that you are not heard, and you become unmotivated because of this. (Book seller)*

P23: *Sometimes I say we're just numbers. (Office worker)*

P24: *There is no communication and people are not even nice: they don't say hello. They don't treat each other like colleagues – sometimes there's not even a greet when they [office managers] come to the stores. This shows distance between people. There's no affinity between people. (Book seller)*

The one thing that all interviewees, without exception, mentioned was the lack of autonomy. There seems to be an undeniable discontent with this situation, employees want to be able to decide and take decisions when things happen and instead, they are forced to wait for an answer for anything they want to do. They stated that if people are delegated with tasks, they should be trusted and without autonomy, this trust is not showing.

P25: *Right now, I feel like I'm out of autonomy. (Store manager)*

Generally speaking, the employees all show lack of motivation as well. This happens because, as they mentioned several times, the salaries are low and have not been updated for years. This makes the employees feel like they are not appreciated for being in the company for many years and doing a good job. They say that a better salary would definitely make them feel motivated to perform better and to give their best every day.

P26: *The effort must be rewarded. The financial part has to be revised. (Office worker)*

They also indicated that not only increases on the salary would motivate them. They would also appreciate other things like contests and different campaigns so that they do not see the same books all the time. When asked about what type of contests, the interviewees said that it could be a contest on displaying books (chosen by each employee) and checking what sells the most, for example. They said that if this would come with incentives, would be also good.

The evaluation system that was implemented by the organization seems to be affecting the employees in a negative way. Firstly, the interviewees referred that they do not know their evaluation's structure and believe that it is not fruitful.

P07: *There isn't communication about annual evaluations. These end up being for nothing, are not being taken seriously. (Office employee)*

The evaluation was implemented when the new quality system was dynamized within the organization. With this new quality system working, *Almedina* decided that an evaluation on their employee's performance should be carried out. Thus, evaluations are sent to the managers and they are supposed to send the employee's performance in detail to the responsible party, showing what was well done and what was not. However, after doing this, one of two times and receiving no feedback or reward for a positive evaluation, the employees do not recognize this tool as beneficial and therefore the results that are sent are not even updated anymore.

Another aspect that makes employees feeling demotivated, is not being given proper recognition. They say that it does not matter the number of years they spend working for *Almedina*, their work is never congratulated for. They feel that their efforts and dedication are never recognized and never compensated. The employees would like to be valued, to feel part of the business and being told so. The work is being well carried out, people are doing their best and yet, the organization does nothing to show appreciation for this. To add up, the employees complain they are there to produce, not to give feedback/opinions: again, they feel like they are only numbers and should be quiet.

Finally, several interviewees stated they would leave to pursue other jobs given the opportunity. Some said they have gotten used to the job and the conditions and are too old to leave now, however, should that be different, they definitely would like to grab other opportunities. It means that *Almedina* needs to check these factors or it will risk losing the most valued employees, the ones who really love what they do and deserve to be compensated for it.

## **5. Discussion of results**

The research shows that there are several issues on the organization that need to be addressed soon, in order for employees to feel recognized and motivated at work. The interviews have supported the understanding that communication is crucial for organizations to thrive and employees do not feel empowered when this does not flow in a good manner.

The employees also demonstrated disappointment towards what they are given concerning rewards and how hierarchized the organization still is.

There are some improvements that should be implemented. First, in order for employees to feel better and part of a bigger picture, the communication needs to flow accordingly, and they should be included in meetings when discussing subjects, they are related to.

Hierarchies need to be addressed as well, if there is distance between colleagues, it should be changed so that proximity is achieved instead. All employees should know each other and speak to anyone, no matter their position in the company. This would allow the managers to receive different feedback and look for solutions with a broader view, the view of the operational staff.

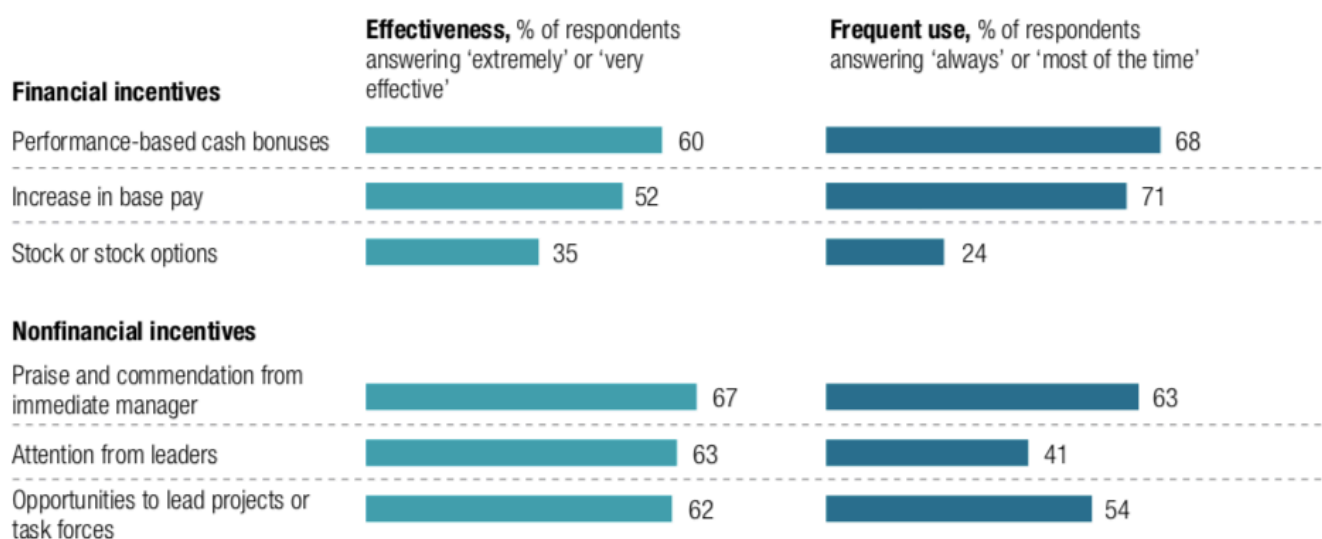
Motivating the employees is also very important and should be top priority. In order to do that, *Almedina* needs to work on a better Campaign balance, making sure that everybody is aligned, knows what and when to expect promotions and they are able to give suggestions on the books that will be on the sales. Employees from stores are the ones who understand the customer of their location and can better suggest books that are more likely to sell – giving them a voice could prove to be a good decision.

Next, in order to become better in regard to brand awareness, *Almedina* surely needs to understand its competition and surpass it. Therefore, investing in Marketing to change people's perspective about the bookshop seems to be on top of the list, too. It is mandatory that *Almedina* is seen as a bookshop, and not exclusively as a publisher, as it is now. Plus, social media should be worked on, according to their employees.

Locating problematic stores and look for places where an *Almedina* Bookshop could thrive is also something that could have a positive impact when it comes to selling more and to a more diversified market. Many bookshops are already working across the country and *Almedina* should aim to be in strategic locations of Portugal as well. Of course, this involves strategic planning and deep analysis, however, it was important to mention as it was brought up by the interviewees many times and seems to be their concern, too.

Regarding employees' welfare and happiness, salaries seem to have a great impact that are demotivating them. It is important to make sure the employees are understood and compensated accordingly. When the organization is not able to provide them with salary increases, should use the objectives tool to better assess who is entitled to a bonus. Hence, productivity and performance evaluations need to be seen as important and need to be better done. This way, the organization will be able to offer its employees rewards that can be seen as recognition and will make them much interested in performing better and always achieve the goals.

Dewhurst, Guthridge & Mohr (2009) studied possible alternatives other than financial, in order to offer different rewards to employees. On their research they found out that most people will opt for appraisal or attention from leaders more than increase in base pay for example, or stock options. This means that employees do not really want to be only rewarded with payment, although that is obviously good for them. They want to know they belong and that the work they are doing matters. (See Figure 9)



Source: June 2009 McKinsey global survey of 1,047 executives, managers, and employees from a range of sectors

Figure 10 Motivating people: Getting beyond money, A McKinsey Study

People want to be part of the organization and want to know who they work with. They would very much benefit from having an annual gathering where the organization would show the targets that were attained and how each department contributed to reach that goal. Showing all employees appreciation for their effort and giving them a chance to speak to everyone and put a face to a voice, would be very good and could make the team spirit that is so good, be kept and maybe boosted.

All of these points are proving to affect the creation and maintenance of processes. Many hierarchies and more managers than regular employees are not efficient and leads to an inefficient leadership. Too many people making decisions could prove not to be the best practice. Furthermore, bottom-levels are not heard, and decisions are taken without balancing their views and could turn into situations that are not the best as they could be.

The process that will be addressed on the next chapter will show how the system is and how it could be improved. This seems to be something that was done without really checking the procedure first and without adapting the available technology to it, creating the process as it was being done initially which is definitely not lean. In that case, this could show how the communication and leadership had an effect on this process of article creation.

## 6. Conclusion and Future Research

### 6.1. Conclusion

This research adopted an employee-centric approach where their experience within the company and towards different scenarios was, to hereinafter, find out and improve the quality of the communication and leadership inside the organization. The research's main objective was to optimize the process of creating articles carried out by the Purchasing Department at *Almedina*. Considering the constraints that were found in the beginning of the project, it was necessary to adopt the best approach to the problem. The greatest constraints found were not only related with human resources – few people to discuss the issue and brainstorm solutions, but also with costs and also the impossibility of interviewing the suppliers which were one of the involved stakeholders with higher importance on the process.

Thus, to achieve the proposed goal, it was conducted a qualitative study with content analysis. The data collection and coding led to finding the important categories that would forge this research. A number of 20 participants is satisfactory but not perfect for the purpose of the present research. Due to time related issues, this number could not be extended to improve the sample, which is a limitation of this research.

The improvement of the process was performed using Flowcharts following the Business Process Modeling approach and taking into account any relevant information given by employees from the Department as well as contributions from other departments in the organization.

Following a qualitative research and exploring leadership and communication within the organization, this research tries to relate this two with the quality of processes creation. However, since the literature and use cases about these subjects were found lacking, it would be important that future research goes deeper on these topics and continues to study the work developed herein. This research is only a case and was applied to a truly specific context (process) so, as future research, it would be interesting to see the impact of leadership and communication in other procedures of the organization.

This research has met the goal it set itself to, which was designing a solution for the process and based on the research, two were created. The qualitative research used along the project provided valuable insights in order to understand how communication is working within the company and also proved to be useful in finding other topics that can be valuable for them. Finally, it also showed a way of improving a process that clearly needs to be changed to improve the current time-to-market.

With this project, the gaps of leadership and communication to improve processes advanced to becoming closer to closing and an improved process came to life. However, in spite of having reached this objective, it will be important to pursue further research in this field, including in different contexts.

### 6.2. Future Research

Communication is very important inside organizations and in *Almedina's* case, that communication and leadership could be improved. They need to provide its employees with a

prosperous environment where their contributions are heard and used whenever they see fit. For that, next there will be a proposition of a set of theoretical and practical contributions.

From a theoretical perspective, the literature related with communication and leadership topics related with processes optimization is lacking and thus, this project contributes with some insights on how these may be affecting organizations growth and for the present time being, it will be important to discover more about this.

On a managerial point of view, this research brought some insights on how the organization is perceived by its employees, which was not well known. There were pointed out a few negative aspects that employees had the opportunity to mention and ways of solving those. In order to motivate the employees, the organization should make them feel part of the Group and empowered. Managers can use the information from this study to make more informed decisions on what is reasonable for them to do in the short-term.

Another positive outcome of this research was having the possibility of giving suggestions for the sales and marketing approaches that organizations could use to improve their brand's awareness as well as generate more profit. Two different approaches for the challenge that was proposed by the organization, an improvement to the process with the available tools and a second one where investment will be necessary. This is now a call that the studied company will need to do. Knowing that their time-to-market is considered as a priority, they could use one of these updated processes to apply within the Purchasing Department, to improve it.

In spite of having studied a way of improving the process that was presented on this challenge, this was not validated by the IT department and should be tested before choosing to implement it. However, it would be important to verify together with the suppliers, if the proposed solution – back-office method of submitting new articles, would be beneficial for them too.

To conclude, there is still more work to do, on a managerial perspective. It is necessary to study the organization as a whole, finding out more bottlenecks that might be impacting in a negative way, the organization's competitiveness. Also, performing more interviews regarding communication would be beneficial, as it is visible that the employees bring valuable insight to the study and can show more issues that need to be addressed. Therefore, this study can be complemented with future research getting solid information that can lead to more robust conclusions and allow a better understanding of what is necessary to do. It would be also important to interview other stakeholders as well as perform benchmarking to understand what the competition does, in order to understand best practices.

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## 8. APPENDIX A: Consent Form



### CONSENTIMENTO INFORMADO

Estamos a solicitar a sua participação para um estudo no âmbito do projecto “Melhoria do processo da criação de artigos no Departamento de Compras” estabelecido entre a Faculdade de Engenharia da Universidade do Porto e o Grupo Almedina.

Este estudo tem como objetivo avaliar as necessidades e experiência dos diferentes atores relacionados com os processos no sentido de apurar novas melhorias que vão ao encontro das suas necessidades. Nesse sentido, estamos a realizar entrevistas com os colaboradores do grupo de diversas áreas e funções. A sua participação fornecerá informações importantes para este projeto.

Estas entrevistas serão gravadas para possibilitar a sua transcrição e análise aprofundada. Só iniciaremos a gravação após a sua concordância, expressa através da assinatura deste consentimento informado.

A informação recolhida é estritamente confidencial e será apenas utilizada no âmbito deste estudo. Os resultados serão reportados de forma agregada, sem identificar individualmente os entrevistados. A informação poderá ser usada para relatórios, apresentações ou artigos científicos, mas o seu nome não será identificado.

A sua participação neste estudo é voluntária, pelo que a poderá interromper a qualquer momento. Nesse caso toda a informação recolhida até ao momento será inutilizada.

Para qualquer esclarecimento adicional, poderá contactar Teresa Teles de Almeida, da Faculdade de Engenharia da Universidade do Porto, através do contacto móvel 916 583 900 ou pelo e-mail up201700415@fe.up.pt.

O investigador:

Nome: \_\_\_\_\_

Assinatura: \_\_\_\_\_ Data \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

O participante:

*Declaro ter lido e compreendido este documento, bem como as informações verbais fornecidas e aceito participar nesta investigação. Permito a utilização dos dados que forneço de forma voluntária, confiando em que apenas serão utilizados para investigação e com as garantias de confidencialidade e anonimato que me são dadas pelo investigador.*

Nome: \_\_\_\_\_


Assinatura: \_\_\_\_\_ Data \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

ESTE DOCUMENTO É FEITO EM DUPLICADO: UM PARA O PARTICIPANTE E OUTRO PARA O INVESTIGADOR.

## **9. APPENDIX B: Interview Guide**

1. Name:
2. Job Function:
3. How long have you been working here?
4. Have you always worked as [job position] or did you change?
5. What do you like about working at *Almedina*? What do you see as positive?
6. What are the main challenges you face on a normal working day?
7. Do you feel like you and your team need training? In what area and why?
  - 7.1 How long have you not had training?
8. How are the processes working for you? How do you find them – objective, easy to understand...?
9. What would you like to change to boost sales here?
10. Please list the improvements you would like to suggest in any area that you can think of.

# 10. APPENDIX C: Excel File sent to Supplier

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