Aventario

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SAVINGS AS A SERVICE

Focus on Standardization

One company, 47 different types of fridges: why decentralized purchasing quietly costs you 15–25%.

A Savings aaS perspective on standardizing equipment and processes across locations. Standardization is not a procurement preference. It is a real margin lever for the business.

€20m+

Saved across standardization business cases we supported, within 2 to 10 years.

25–50%

Lower energy use and cost after standardizing the fridge fleet in the case study.

49 / 33

49 fridges bought a year, in 33 different types. The same job, 33 buying decisions.

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1. Introduction

Most multi-site companies buy the same things many times over, each site on its own terms. The cost of that rarely shows up until someone puts the data on the table. This is one of those moments.

> *"So, what you are saying is, that the analysis of our sourcing data shows, we are purchasing 49 fridges a year on a global base and 33 of them are different types, and if we buy the same ones we pay in some regions nearly the double than in others?"*

Marc looks doubtfully in the camera. Awkward silence. The team of manufacturing experts, technical specialists, sourcing professionals, site heads and IT leads usually work on their very specific tasks in different countries of the world. In an online meeting, the results of a wide range cost analysis are presented. The analysis shows irregularities here and there and some fields of actions are identified. The big unvoiced question in the room is, what to do next? Where and how to start?

Over the many years of success and growth the company has grown into various fields of business with production sites in Europe, North and South America, Southeast Asia and Northern Africa. With mergers and acquisitions growth came fast and sometimes uncoordinated. Sites are organized on their own and centralized organization is a new phenomenon. The turbulent economic times led management to order cost cutting and even more centralization. There are already some saving measures in discussion, standardization is one of them. But what is standardization? Does it pay off? When does it pay off? How much costs and effort are necessary to realize standardization? Is it really worth it?

In this paper you will get insights into standardization business cases we supported at different customers, which helped to save more than 20 million within 2 to 10 years. It is shown that standardization is not a procurement preference but a real margin lever for business.

2. Whom is it for?

This paper targets CIOs, CPOs, CFOs, people in technical management positions or sourcing experts in organizations operating across multiple locations or country entities, where purchasing decisions are made locally rather than centrally. Also, for organizations with many similar workstations that are not well aligned, it has interesting insights. If your organization already operates a fully centralized procurement function with harmonized contracts, this paper will be of limited use.

3. Cost saving, disadvantages & advantages, risks & chances, and the introduction of standards

Cost saving

Looking into cost saving, it can for example be seen in a time span of when measures can be applied and savings realized. Costs can be saved in a short-term, mid-term or long-term.

Short-term cost saving is when cost need to be saved immediately, e.g., to ensure liquidity. Some short-term savings can be realized within a month, and liquidity can be ensured quickly. Examples for short term cost saving are stopping change processes, stopping IT implementations, cancelling software licenses, cutting on power usage, slowing or stopping of processes, etc. Mostly short-term cost saving is a rescue move to save a company and not sustainable for business as long-term goals are interrupted, people cannot work properly and rumours within the company can create poor employee climate.

Mid-term cost saving is more sustainable, realization can take from 3 months to 3 or more years, depending on the measures. Standardization is an example for mid-term cost saving, e.g., process standardization can have quick win effects and can be realized and rolled out even on a global scale within a few months. Equipment standardization can have an even greater saving impact but usually also takes more time, until savings are realized and measurable.

Long-term saving is about big assets, asset management and strategy. These savings are rather long-term goals and are realized in more than 10 years.

We focus on standardization as a mid-term cost saving measure. No matter if talking about similar workstations or locations, which are organized independently and negotiated independently, there is always a fragmentation of costs. If you locally buy a fridge in Helsinki or in Dallas, the same overheads are funded always again, e.g., legal review, vendor onboarding, contract administration. It is necessary at each site when purchasing a fridge at site A, B, or Y. It is local overhead cost paid each time a fridge is purchased. We experienced at customer sites that when the customer's site A purchased at a certain vendor and got offered certain base prices, another site B got offered different discounts and sometimes even different base prices, even in the same country. Besides overheads, the customer sites are treated asymmetrically, not as one big customer with a certain purchasing power. Rather they are treated as different small customers and so are the prices and discount levels. Thus, even if dozens of the same type of device are purchased on a global base at the same vendor, negotiations always depend on local sourcing power, which is barely comparable to global sourcing power.

Disadvantages & advantages, risks & chances

But what are the actual disadvantages of standardization? Standardization always means also centralization. More centralization means less flexibility on a local base, for example on how fast decisions can be made, or who can decide. In terms of flexibility, it can be a great deal for local decision makers. A stakeholder in one of our standardization projects was in the role of the decision maker for purchasing the items to be standardized for years. The items were big and expensive; he used to feel proud to have the right to sign contracts and the negotiation power to decide for or against devices worth millions of US-$. When the standardization project came to an end, and the decision for a certain type and supplier was made on a top management level, this specific person was outraged to not be able to decide freely for a type and supplier anymore. His individual decision power was cut immensely, he was quite upset, and though it was communicated all the time that this moment would come, when it was about time, the realization hit him hard. So, the change process from a non-standardized environment to a standardized environment needs to reach acceptance within expert and end-user ranks.

Another experience from one of our projects was in the area of maintenance services. The customer wanted to get maintenance service for his standardized devices from the supplier of the devices itself. After requesting a quote, the supplier denied offering such services, as they run a local dealership model. The next step was to contact all respective local dealers and request a quote on the same scope. Depending on the economic strength of the region, prices varied a lot. In some countries it was so much more expensive than the former no-name maintenance provider that anger arose at local sites, the experts there did not want their spend to increase for the same service as before. We aligned with Sourcing that well-established maintenance providers must follow the new standardized maintenance service catalogue, but a change to another

supplier was not necessary, to save costs but not lose quality. Standardizing sometimes can have the consequence of saving on a regional base, but an increase of prices in certain locations. Careful alignment with these locations and evaluation of the situation is necessary; whether a standardization then makes sense, to what cost, or whether sourcing can negotiate further are relevant questions.

Automation plays a major role here. It is great to negotiate global deals, realizing volume discounts to cut costs on a global base, but this only makes sense when not every standardized device needs to go through a global approval process. If negotiated globally, the purchasing from local sites needs to work easily and smoothly, as no one needs negotiations, contracting or legal alignments here anymore. If the purchasing process of globally standardized devices stays complex, or in the worst case becomes even more complex, the acceptance from local stakeholders towards the standard will fall quickly to a very low point, workarounds will be daily routine, and the lower prices negotiated mostly cannot be realized anymore.

Positive but barely measurable side effects of standardization are, for example, improved and quicker purchasing processes. Imagine someone in a laboratory needs a fridge and first needs a big market overview of all suppliers and all devices, then requests specification sheets, compares them and finally decides. Then goes to sourcing and requests the chosen fridge, but sourcing has a deal with another supplier and everything gets overthrown. Complex, frustrating and not very efficient. If a device is standardized, the variety to choose from is massively decreased, potentially to only one device per defined size, so there is less time to invest in market, supplier and type research from the end-user perspective. More valuable time for the end-user to do meaningful work instead of researching machine specifications. If the deal is globally negotiated, local sourcing and local legal are not involved anymore with each device purchased, so there is more valuable time for these roles as well. The highest stage is when the purchasing process goes through an automated purchasing portal: only the standardized suppliers and types are available, only one type for one pre-defined size, easy and quick to order. Click on your device, order, and in the background a clearance process runs; when accepted, it is automatically ordered and delivered, without touching any global sourcing or legal entity. Other positive side effects are that you need less personnel to know many different devices for maintenance, and technical expert knowledge is potentially enough once per region and not necessary on each site anymore. Well chosen standard devices also have a lower failure potential. Special case: qualification. If your devices need to be qualified before they are used, e.g., in life sciences or in air transportation areas, you can try to establish a family approach and test the first ten devices delivered and then only every tenth. This can facilitate resources in your qualification department immensely and save a lot of time and money.

Besides less effort during the purchasing process, standardization also helps to reduce the number of suppliers, making life better for sourcing. Still, it is vital to always ponder whether a single vendor strategy is really something to go for. There are some central risks implicated with a single vendor strategy, e.g., losing market overview and so price comparability, and growing dependency on one supplier. What if a natural disaster, fire or chemical hazard strikes at this supplier's main manufacturing facility, are deliveries still secured? What if a destabilizing president decides to put high tariffs on the standardized items from a certain country, does the vendor have other manufacturing facilities to keep prices stable? Also, if there is more than one supplier, you can keep them both motivated by letting them compete after each standard contracting cycle to get more contract volume with innovative devices, so prices are kept low and innovation high. Of course, fair and friendly competition is recommended, so as not to lose a supplier completely or lose device quality.

Standardization makes sense for devices, items and processes which are the same in each and every set-up or site, if the devices do the same everywhere and are rather simple, or you just standardize the base, hull or structure instead of the whole device.

But how do you keep standards up to date? A central role responsible for a standard is very helpful here; the role could be called standard owner. This role needs to regularly get in touch with different end users to get information about issues, reliability and the general handling of a standardized device. It also needs to be in touch with different suppliers and regularly check the market for innovation, to stay up to date and update the standard in a pre-defined lifecycle. It is also responsible for potential internal regulations and updating them. Be aware, standardization has its limits. Sometimes there are use cases which a standardized device just does not fit, then an exemption process needs to be in place. It makes sense to use the global standard owner as gatekeeper to decide whether an exemption makes sense, or whether it is a try to work around the standard, as this role understands the business side and has the standardization focus. An exemption should come with good reasoning and explanation of the situation, so the decision can be made quickly and the process does not get artificially prolonged. Sometimes a minor artificial prolongation of an exemption can help to make the end-user re-think the exemption need and maybe find a solution in which the standard device fits. This should not be exaggerated, though.

Standardization is a mid-term cost saving instrument which can overcome the fragmentation of costs and sites being treated asymmetrically. Introducing it takes away flexibility and power from individuals, so sensitive change management is necessary. Automating purchasing processes is one key element of successful standardization: it decreases sourcing and legal overheads and earns better acceptance within your key-user group. Standardized equipment saves you time in maintenance, and if you need it, in qualifying your devices with the family approach. To keep your standards on the latest technical level, establishing a standard owner is vital, who cares about performance feedback from your end-users, keeps a sharp eye on market innovation and is a gatekeeper for exemptions.

Introduction of standards

Sometimes standardization can go too far. If actual business use cases get more difficult or more time-consuming because the standardized device has a smaller range of abilities, this can be highly counterproductive and increase costs instead of decreasing them. To make sure you select the best fitting devices, close alignment with all stakeholders is very important. Stakeholder identification, selection, onboarding and continuous communication is one of the key aspects of a standardization change process.

Besides stakeholder alignment, data gathering is the key element of standardization. In the best case you have defined the vital attributes for the devices to be standardized together with stakeholders upfront. When these attributes are defined, the data gathering starts. It depends highly on the data sources available; of course ERP systems are a preferred source. Then more data alignment is necessary. A detailed gathering of data is a time-consuming process, which leads us to the different standardization approaches.

Standardization approaches

The two approaches sit at different ends of the same trade-off: certainty versus speed.

	Approach 1 — data first	Approach 2 — trust first
When to use	Actions need to be reported regularly; stakeholder commitment is rather poor.	Stakeholder commitment and management trust are high.
How	Gather as much data as possible, validate decisions up to the highest management level, make valid cost-saving predictions. A tender is always recommended.	Gather data only on the most recommended and reliable devices, then go directly into talks with trusted suppliers. A tender is also recommended.
Predictions	Valid, well-evidenced.	Rather high-level; decisions can be questioned more easily, trust is lower.
Project time	6 months to 2 years.	6 to 12 months.

Approach 1. You can choose the time-consuming path of gathering as much data as possible and then validating your decisions to the highest management level and make valid cost saving predictions. A tender is always recommended. Prepare yourself for standardization project times from 6 months to 2 years. This method is recommended if your actions need to be reported regularly and if you have rather poor stakeholder commitment.

Approach 2. If stakeholder commitment and management trust is high, you can go also a faster route by still gaining your stakeholders' trust and gather data only about most recommended and reliable devices and then directly go into talks with the recommended, trusted suppliers. Also for this approach a tender is recommended. Your cost saving predictions will be rather high-level, and decisions can be questioned more easily and trust in the standardization is lower. But you will save time, in 6-12 months such a project can be finished.

Project time always highly depends on the availability of the project members, of stakeholders and of data, on device complexity and geographical scope (a local standard is always quicker realized than a global one), on supplier availability, and on the need to adapt processes and IT systems.

Project phases

Generally, a standardization project should run with the following phases:

After identifying your stakeholders and kicking off the project, you gather information on important technical attributes, the number of devices or the process scope. In the conception phase you aggregate and evaluate data, conduct workshops with stakeholders to get the data interpretation right, and decide whether further standardization is worth it or not. In the specification, a requirement catalogue is created, you research potential recommended suppliers, types and systems from your stakeholders, invite suppliers to present their products, and potentially organize an RFI and RFP, depending on the standardized item. In the implementation phase decisions for types and suppliers are taken, contracts negotiated, systems adapted, and first devices purchased at test sites. In the closing phase the processes are fine-tuned, stakeholder satisfaction is measured, and lessons-learned sessions are organized. And most important during all the phases: communication takes place with stakeholders, key users, later all users, and management, to reach a wide base of commitment.

4. Case Study

A German customer with more than 50,000 employees and roughly 30 production sites situated all over the globe requested support for a cost-saving project with a focus on standardization. A rough data analysis was already done when we stepped in, but it was missing a recommendation on where to really start. Quite some areas to focus on were identified, but it was impossible to see clearly how to tackle the improvement areas. We recommended workshops at the sites with well chosen stakeholders, open-minded and hands-on users from all hierarchies, age groups and professions. After evaluating the workshop outcomes, some areas of standardization were identified, along with some volunteers for certain devices and topics. The cost-saving program started with device standardization, process standardization and regulation evaluation.

Examples of different standardization projects are fridges, air filters in HVAC systems, air compressors for pneumatic solutions, and a people-centred process for cost saving with small purchases.

Standardization projects have big cost-saving chances but sometimes take a while to be effective and for real savings to occur. The projects above are only a couple of examples of a whole standardization program. We supported the customer to save more than €20 million in the next 10 years. In some projects it was extremely difficult to get hold of the specific experts at certain locations, then to get their commitment, as they already had a big workload or did not see a proper positive effect for their role. A fine feeling for communication and good reasoning was some of the expertise we brought in. As a standardization team we also had to face harsh criticism from different locations; sometimes a decision and clear commitment from high-level management was necessary to continue. Time is always a constraint: standardization is for local technical experts mostly an added project, outside of their direct line of command and consuming time. Though, mostly the stakeholders saw the advantages and supported where possible.

Fridges

The fridge project was very time-consuming due to different factors. The identification of stakeholders went well; we had another project with a similar scope before. The data gathering went extremely well: compared to the project before, one of our project team partners got access to the global ERP, which helped a lot. Still, data quality was again poor and data cleansing took quite a while. The first approach of standardization was chosen, so besides the stakeholders, data was our most vital source of truth. What we underestimated was the number of different use cases for the devices. In the project before, the use case was globally quite singular; in this project requirements from key users were manifold, and not all of our preferred suppliers were as flexible as estimated. What really took most of the time was inconvenient support by one of the suppliers. We had five different suppliers present their products based on internal recommendations and global availability, which led to exclusions of some of the suppliers for different reasons. One of the most favoured suppliers left us waiting for product details for unbelievable amounts of time, and mostly details came back still with errors or with data missing. An exhausting experience, and though sourcing really put high pressure on them, their commitment was slow and tenacious. As key-user commitment to their products was very high and prices were competitive, we kept them in and finally got a great deal. For this project energy consumption played a major role; the sourcing negotiation was very successful, and on top of that the energy consumption with the new devices was cut 25 to 50%, and so were costs. After a long project we supported the customer to a great deal of savings.

Air Filters

In the air filter project, we had to gather data from sites individually and merge it into an overarching comparison file to get a global data overview. When we finally received all the data, we encountered the next issue. Even where the same filters were used, the suppliers had different article numbers in each country, and the filter names were in different languages. This data alignment was very time-consuming but paid off. We successfully identified some thousands of filters of the same kind and could prove that one supplier offered sometimes four different prices in the same country, even different prices at the same site, depending on which department purchased the filters. With an RFI we got an industry benchmark and identified that 80% of the filters were 10 to 60% cheaper at other dealers, all filters from the same supplier. These results were a proper lever for sourcing to very successfully renegotiate the deal for the future.

Air Compressors

Air compressors are very complex machines; a standardization to only one type does not make sense. They are also mostly put into a facility's inner core and used for very different purposes, sometimes for pneumatics, sometimes in manufacturing processes. Here the task was to identify all use cases on a global scale and to catalogue them. For each use case a requirement list was defined. We could shrink the use cases down to six. This catalogue system helps the local engineers more easily choose what they really need, and they can take the catalogue and do a tender with the required device. The choosing and tender process was significantly sped up.

Purchasing Process

Our customer had purchasing limits set. If a device was over the site's limit, sourcing had to be involved. If the device cost less than the limit, it was not necessary to involve sourcing, and below this limit, prices were rarely compared to other suppliers' offers and rarely negotiated. We were requested to create and introduce a motivation and documentation for all stakeholders regularly purchasing below the sourcing limit. In some countries this cost-saving chance was embraced and realized quickly; it spread via key stakeholders who were trained, and savings were realized quickly. In other countries it never got to start, even after the third introduction: people seemed to have great hesitation to ask their suppliers for a small discount. It was clearly stated that the effort should be kept low, that an end user has no sourcing duty, but that at least a request or a call should be made. For some countries it came naturally, for some it was undoable. In the countries where it was introduced, the savings were way higher than expected.

In a nutshell, standardization of devices or processes can be very different due to the nature of the different devices or processes. Still, a standardization process always follows the same steps: good communication with stakeholders, data quality and management commitment are key. Standardization always makes sense if you have a decentralized structure and would like to save costs by investing in centralizing certain things, if you have time-consuming processes which can be automated or facilitated to a certain extent, or if you have a big number of devices of the same kind but from different suppliers.

5. How We Can Help

Standardization rarely fails on the numbers. It fails on the people, the data, and whether anyone owns the follow-through. That is the part we work on with you.

What is your next step? If you already have an idea where to start, we take the fast lane with you. We take your data evaluation and support you in identifying how to start, e.g., with prioritization options and local sites, or by directly starting with a team from your side. Or you book our Savings as a Service analysis. We support you in the very first global data analysis to identify areas with potential and develop a meaningful, quantified prioritization. That is important for deciding which areas to focus on. From standardization program and project management to detailed data evaluation and communication experience, we support your project where necessary. Sensitiveness to different cultures, hands-on mentality and data expertise are our strengths for your standardization projects in all areas.

> Book a 30-minute scoping call with us to get a first insight into the potential in your business. Maybe it is worth millions.

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