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A Comparative Study of the Processes of Bank Melli Iran with the APQC Reference Model Aiming to Develop an Optimal Organizational Structure

Mohaddese Izadifard^{1,*}, Mehrdad Agha Mohammad Ali Kermani² , Reyhane Naghdi Takaldan³

¹ Department of Economic and Social Systems, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran; izadifardmohaddese@gmail.com.

² Department of Economic Engineering, School of Management, Economics, and Progress Engineering, Iran University of Science and Technology, Tehran, Iran; m_kermaniAT@iust.ac.ir.

³ Department of Industrial Management and Information Technology, Shahid Beheshti University, Iran; r.naghditakaldani@gmail.sbu.ac.ir.

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Abstract


Due to the rapid changes in the business environment, the shortening of product and service life cycles, and the necessity of technology integration at all levels of industry, the need for process orientation in organizations is clearly evident. Therefore, designing an organizational structure based on processes emerges as a fundamental necessity. This research aims to provide a comprehensive methodology for developing an optimal organizational structure, with a focus on Bank Melli Iran as a case study. Initially, the strategic components of the bank were analyzed, and then a list of Bank Melli's processes was developed based on the American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC) standard. Following this, through interviews with bank experts, the existing processes were identified and analyzed. Additionally, a process architecture document was created, and the bank's legal and regulatory constraints were also examined. Finally, by aligning the identified processes with the results obtained from previous stages, an optimal organizational structure for Bank Melli Iran was proposed, which can lead to improvements in organizational efficiency and flexibility.


Keywords: Organizational structure design, Process management, Bank Melli Iran.

1 | Introduction

Developing an organizational structure based on processes not only helps improve organizational performance, but it can also be used as a strategic tool to respond to rapid changes in the business environment [1]. Studies have shown that process orientation in the design of organizational structure can lead to improved decision-making, cost reduction, and increased productivity. Furthermore, process-oriented

 Corresponding Author: izadifardmohaddese@gmail.com

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structures often facilitate innovation and enhance the organization's ability to manage changes. Specifically, this approach can lead to a reduction in bureaucracy and accelerate the implementation of strategies, which in turn can result in a sustainable competitive advantage [2]. The importance of developing an organizational structure based on processes in optimizing performance and efficiency in organizations is undeniable. Processes, as the main element in shaping organizational structures, lead to a focus on key activities and reduce the need for coordination between different units. By utilizing process-based structures, organizations can organize their units around core processes and add other processes to these units, which helps minimize the need for coordination between units. This type of structure enables organizations to perform better in dynamic and complex environments, increasing their productivity and flexibility [3].

2| The Importance of Using Comparative Studies for Developing Organizational Structure

Developing an organizational structure using the benchmarking method allows organizations to create a more optimal and efficient structure by thoroughly evaluating their existing processes in comparison to the best practices of similar organizations.

In a paper published by Oliver et al. [4], it was shown that process benchmarking helps organizations identify their strengths and weaknesses by analyzing and comparing processes. Using this information, organizations can make necessary changes to improve organizational performance and achieve a competitive advantage over other organizations. This method serves as a powerful tool for enhancing the quality and efficiency of processes within organizations and continuously facilitates the improvement of the organizational structure.

Additionally, in a paper written by Drew [5], it was shown that through benchmarking, organizations can optimize their processes and achieve higher standards by identifying and adopting best practices from top organizations. This approach not only leads to improved efficiency and effectiveness of the organization but also enables organizations to absorb and apply new knowledge within their structure systematically. Thus, benchmarking, as a strategic tool, can accelerate transformation in organizational structure and put the organization on the path of continuous improvement.

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This importance is highlighted in a paper published by Delprino [7], which shows that benchmarking helps organizations identify best practices and compare their performance with leading organizations, creating a foundation for positive changes and improving internal processes. This comparative process not only enhances organizational awareness but also reduces resistance to change and accelerates innovation. By using benchmarking, organizations can create a more flexible and efficient structure that improves their ability to respond to environmental challenges and achieve long-term goals.

3| The Importance and Necessity of Aligning American Productivity and Quality Center Processes with the Processes Identified in Organizations

Aligning the processes identified in an organization with reference models such as the American Productivity And Quality Center (APQC) is recognized as a critical step in improving organizational performance. This process allows organizations to compare their internal processes with global best practices and accurately identify their strengths and weaknesses. By using this alignment, organizations can identify gaps in efficiency and productivity and propose solutions for their improvement. This approach not only helps optimize current processes but also enables the organization to align better with its strategic goals. Numerous studies have

shown that organizations that align their processes with reference models such as APQC are more successful in increasing productivity and improving performance management [8].

4 | Literature Review

Studying the sources related to the research topic provides the necessary awareness regarding relevant activities and areas, as well as the scope of the study. For this purpose, scholarly sources from various databases were reviewed. In a study conducted by Dash [9], it was shown that developing an IT process structure using the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) standard and comparing it with existing processes through benchmarking helps organizations create continuous improvements in their IT service performance and achieve best-in-class standards. This paper introduces the combination of ITIL and Six Sigma as a strategy for improving IT service quality, which, through ontology-based benchmarking, helps reduce operational costs and increase process efficiency.

Additionally, in a paper written by Hermenegildo Gil-Gómez et al. [6], the application of ITIL as a framework for service quality management and improving internal processes in organizations was examined. This paper demonstrates how the use of ITIL can help improve internal business processes and achieve other benefits, including better internal communication.

In his paper, Rubio and Arcilla [10] demonstrated that to achieve optimal results, he presents an algorithm for the optimal sequencing of ITIL processes through benchmarking, which helps organizations implement ITIL processes optimally by considering both internal and external parameters.

In his paper, Goncharuk and Getman [11] examine the alignment of marketing processes in pharmaceutical companies using the APQC framework and identifies best practices for improving company performance. In a paper written in 2010, Srivastava and Mazzoleni [12] propose a framework based on the APQC-PCF for comparing services in business transformation projects, which allows clients to compare different tools and methods using a common framework.

In his paper, Peppard [13] examines the alignment of business processes with the strategic objectives of the organization using benchmarking and reengineering, and provides frameworks for focusing on key processes.

5 | Proposed Research Methodology

Organizational structure is one of the key factors in enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of organizations. Developing an efficient and effective organizational structure is a necessary condition for achieving both short-term and long-term organizational goals. In this study, a comprehensive approach for designing an optimal organizational structure is presented. In the first step, the guiding pillars of the organization, including the value chain, are identified and analyzed. Then, through comparative studies and by benchmarking against reference standards such as the APQC standard, the best practices employed in other organizations are identified and reviewed by examining global and domestic trends in the banking sector. The APQC standard, used as the primary reference, serves to categorize and organize business processes across various industries. The list of organizational processes is developed based on this standard. Next, the existing organizational processes must be identified and explored. Following this, the enterprise architecture document and relevant legal constraints within the organization should be addressed. Then, aligning the current processes with the APQC standard and other findings from the previous steps will serve as the basis for designing an optimal organizational structure. The complete methodology is illustrated in *Fig. 1*.

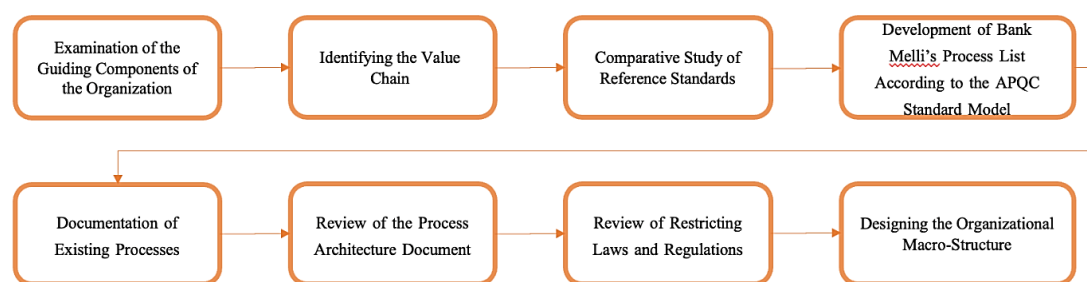


Fig. 1. The proposed research identification method.

5.1| Examination of the Guiding Components of the Organization

The identification of guiding components was carried out through interviews with experts and the review of higher-level documents and legal requirements related to the bank's activities, which reflect the internal or external status of the organization (Such as the bank's goals, main priorities, and policies). This process led to the identification of the guiding components and strategic issues of Bank Melli Iran. Some of the documents studied to identify the guiding components at Bank Melli Iran include:

- I. Strategic document of Bank Melli Iran
- II. Goals and main priorities of Bank Melli Iran (Approved in December 2021)
- III. Citizen rights charter at Bank Melli Iran
- IV. Policy on Integrated Management System at Bank Melli Iran
- V. Strategic objectives and themes of the Bank (Approved in November 2019)
- VI. Internal control charter of Bank Melli Iran
- VII. Risk management committee charter of Bank Melli Iran
- VIII. Risk culture policy of Bank Melli Iran
- IX. Statement of the desired risk appetite at Bank Melli Iran, strategic liquidity risk document of Bank Melli Iran (Approved in March 2022)

5.2| Identifying the Value Chain

The value chain of Bank Melli Iran was identified by utilizing the results obtained from the previous steps, including the identification and analysis of the guiding pillars, the mission statement, the strategic themes and objectives of the bank, and the comparative study of reference models for banking value chains such as the Bayan Reference Banking Value Chain Model, the Commercial Banking Value Chain Model, the Corporate Banking (IFC's SME) Model, and the Investment Banking Model. Additionally, the knowledge and experience of organizational experts were leveraged through meetings with managers and specialists at Bank Melli Iran. Activities that create value for the organization were identified and categorized based on whether they are primary activities, meaning they directly produce value, or support activities, meaning they indirectly contribute to value creation. These efforts ultimately led to the extraction of the value chain elements for Bank Melli Iran. The proposed value chain of Bank Melli Iran is presented in *Fig. 2*.



Fig. 2. The value chain of Bank Melli Iran.

5.3 | Comparative Study of Reference Standards

Benchmarking is defined as an effective tool for searching for best practices from other organizations in order to implement these practices within the organization to gain certain benefits. In other words, by identifying, understanding, and aligning with the best practices of other organizations, they can improve their performance by learning from similar or different organizations. And organizations can identify their performance gaps, strengths, and weaknesses in comparison to other organizations [14]. Given that today's organizations need models and frameworks to address their issues and re-engineer business processes, they must model their activities based on these frameworks entirely and optimally. Then, by identifying the strengths, weaknesses, and process deficiencies, they can proceed to correct and improve the business activities. The chosen framework should categorize and present all the activities of an organization. In this regard, one of the best frameworks for categorizing processes within an organization is the process classification model provided by the APQC, known as the Process Classification Framework (PCF), which can be utilized [2].

5.3.1 | Reviewing global trends in the banking sector

Reviewing global trends involves analyzing new trends and innovations across various organizational and managerial fields that are utilized internationally by leading companies and organizations. These trends are typically related to environmental, technological, economic, and cultural changes that impact the way organizations are structured, managed, and operated. The purpose of this analysis is to identify best practices and emerging models that can be applied in the design and redesign of organizational structures. To this end, several up-to-date global reports in the banking sector have been reviewed, and the findings from these reviews are presented in *Table 1*.

Table 1. Output of the global banking trends study.

Banking Trends	Manufacturer Company	Report Name
Alignment with the ecosystem, leveraging platforms and creating value from data adoption and digitalization, digital and emerging technologies, organizational agility, data integration and analytics, cybersecurity, and financial crimes	Deloitte	Bank of 2030: Transform boldly
Digitalization of banks, simplification of regulations, scaling up, digitalization of customer experience, product strategy integration, changing the way banks operate, cost reduction towards value creation, promoting open banking, obsolescence of traditional programming, platforms facing the challenge of innovation	Accenture	Banking: The future is back
Utilizing growth opportunities, regulatory compliance, and moving towards artificial	Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC)	Next in banking and capital markets 2025

5.3.2 | Comparative study with domestic banks

Comparative studies were conducted to compare the macro-structures of Bank Melli Iran with selected domestic banks. In this regard, the organizational macro-structures of the studied banks were systematically compared and analyzed against the current structure of Bank Melli Iran. The objective of this comparison was to identify similarities, differences, and opportunities for structural improvement, with an emphasis on successful domestic experiences. The results of this comparative analysis are presented in *Table 2* and provide a foundation for developing reform proposals for the macro-structure of Bank Melli Iran.

Table 2. Comparison of the macro structure of domestic banks and Bank Melli Iran.

Descriptions	Agriculture Bank	Pasargad Bank	Bank Mellat	Tejarat Bank	Bank Melli Iran
Based on the conducted studies and the alignment assessment of this general directorate's processes with the APQC standard, this general directorate is not positioned as an independent entity within the structure.	Absence of an independent directorate general for payment systems	Absence of an independent general directorate of payment systems	Lack of an independent general directorate of payment systems	The absence of the general directorate of payment systems as an independent department	The existence of the general directorate of payment systems as an independent department
According to the central bank's requirements, a department titled "Security Department" must be established within the structure. This department exists in the structure of Tejarat Bank but is currently absent in the structure of Bank Melli Iran.	Presence of a security general directorate under the technology division	Presence of a security general directorate under the IT division	Presence of a Security general directorate under the Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	Existence of a security general directorate reporting to the CEO	Absence of a security general directorate in the bank's structure
Based on the conducted alignment assessment, it is necessary to incorporate a series of processes for establishing digital transformation and modern banking within the structure of Bank Melli Iran.	Presence of a general directorate of transformation and innovation under the business development deputy	Presence of a digital banking business unit	Presence of a Chief Digital Transformation Officer (CDTO)	Presence of the IT planning and transformation department	Absence of a general directorate titled Digital Transformation Directorate
Based on the comparative study of the APQC standard, this directorate falls under the financial resources provision category and is grouped alongside financial processes and the credit division.	Presence of the general directorate of claims collection under the legal affairs and claims collection division	Presence of the general directorate of claims collection under the credit division	Presence of the general directorate of claims collection under the credit deputy	Presence of the management of follow-up and supervision of claims collection under the legal affairs deputy	Presence of the general directorate of collection and follow-up of claims under the legal affairs and claims collection deputy

Table 2. Continued.

Descriptions	Agriculture Bank	Pasargad Bank	Bank Mellat	Tejarat Bank	Bank Melli Iran
Based on the conducted studies and alignment assessments, this directorate should be placed under the support division.	Lack of an independent general directorate for the sale of seized assets	Absence of an independent general directorate for the sale of seized assets	Absence of an independent general directorate for the sale of seized assets sales	Presence of the asset monetization and property sales unit under the investment and corporate affairs division	Presence of the general directorate of seized assets sales as an independent directorate under the legal affairs and litigation division
Based on the conducted studies and alignment assessments, this department should be placed under the credit division.	Absence of a separate department for foreign currency guarantees	Presence of the department of remittances, guarantees, and exports under the deputy of international affairs and foreign exchange operations	Absence of an independent general directorate for foreign currency guarantees	Presence of the department of foreign guarantees and foreign currency facilities under the affairs manager and the international division	Presence of the general directorate of foreign currency guarantees under the foreign exchange and international division
According to the conducted studies and the review of the overall structure of the analyzed domestic banks, the establishment of a department for marketing activities and a general directorate for data analysis and reporting is essential.	Presence of the marketing and service sales department under the marketing and branch affairs coordination division	Presence of the marketing department under the branch affairs and customer services division	Presence of the general directorate of marketing, development, and product creation under the planning and transformation division	Presence of the digital marketing and data analytics department	Absence of the general directorate of marketing and data analytics
Based on the conducted studies and alignment assessments, the general directorate of project evaluation can be merged with another general directorate.	Absence of an independent general directorate of project evaluation	Presence of the general directorate of project evaluation and investment under the credit and investment banking division	Lack of a general directorate of project evaluation under a division	Absence of a general directorate of project evaluation under any division	Presence of the general directorate of project evaluation under the credit division
The processes of this general directorate in other banks are not organized as an independent directorate and are merged with the foreign affairs or foreign exchange operations directorate.	Absence of the general directorate of partnerships and international network development	Absence of the general directorate of partnerships and international network development	Lack of a general directorate of partnerships and international network development	Absence of the general directorate of partnerships and international network development	Presence of the general directorate of partnerships and international network development

Table 2. Continued.

Descriptions	Agriculture Bank	Pasargad Bank	Bank Mellat	Tejarat Bank	Bank Melli Iran
Based on the conducted comparative studies and the APQC framework, it is necessary to establish a general directorate responsible for data cleansing, visualization, reporting, and analysis activities.	Presence of an independent directorate titled the general directorate of Business Data Statistics and Analysis under the Technology Division	Absence of an independent directorate titled the General Directorate of Statistics and Data Analysis	Presence of an independent directorate titled the general directorate of Statistics and Data Processing under the IT division	Presence of the digital banking and data analytics department under the personal banking customer division	Absence of an independent directorate titled the General Directorate of Statistics and Data Analysis

5.4 | Development of Bank Melli's Process List According to the American Productivity and Quality Center Standard Model

The APQC is a globally recognized center for process and performance improvement, helping organizations quickly adapt to the changing environment, select better and newer ways to perform their activities, and succeed in the competitive market. With a focus on productivity, knowledge management, benchmarking, and quality improvement initiatives, APQC collaborates with its member organizations to identify best practices, discover effective improvement methods, and disseminate them. It also connects organizations with the necessary knowledge, training, and tools for success [15].

The APQC-PCF framework provides a five-level hierarchical structure of processes, categorizing the highest level of all business processes within an organization in a chain inspired by Porter's value chain. The APQC model consists of 13 main process groups, which are further divided into management and support processes, as well as operational processes [2].

5.5 | Documentation of Existing Processes

Documentation of processes was carried out for the purpose of discovering and modeling processes. Process modeling refers to a set of skills and processes that enable individuals to understand, communicate, measure, and manage the key components of business processes.

Process modeling is an activity carried out by process analysts to extract and display existing processes, which serve as input for designing improved processes. Documentation of processes is used in developing an optimal organizational structure. The identified processes were categorized into three groups: Core processes, support processes, and development processes.

5.6 | Review of the Process Architecture Document

Business process architecture can be defined as an overall view of business processes. This process architecture greatly helps us to determine the relationships between our processes. Process architecture can be used as a tool to design the structure of existing processes within an organization before the processes are designed in detail. An organization's structure does not provide any suggestions or perspectives regarding how inter-unit management should be handled. Traditional management is a reflection of the organizational structure, meaning that managers manage from top to bottom or from bottom to top. At the same time, tasks are carried out horizontally but managed vertically. Process architecture is a tool to address this management error in organizations. The mission, vision, values, value chain, or any other document that reflects the guiding components of an organization can serve as the basis for developing the process architecture document. An organization's values are created through inter-unit processes within the organization, and these inter-unit

processes are documented in the organization's process architecture document. Therefore, process architecture is a blueprint and plan for implementing and executing the organization's strategies. "In *Fig (3)*, the proposed process architecture document for Bank Melli is presented.

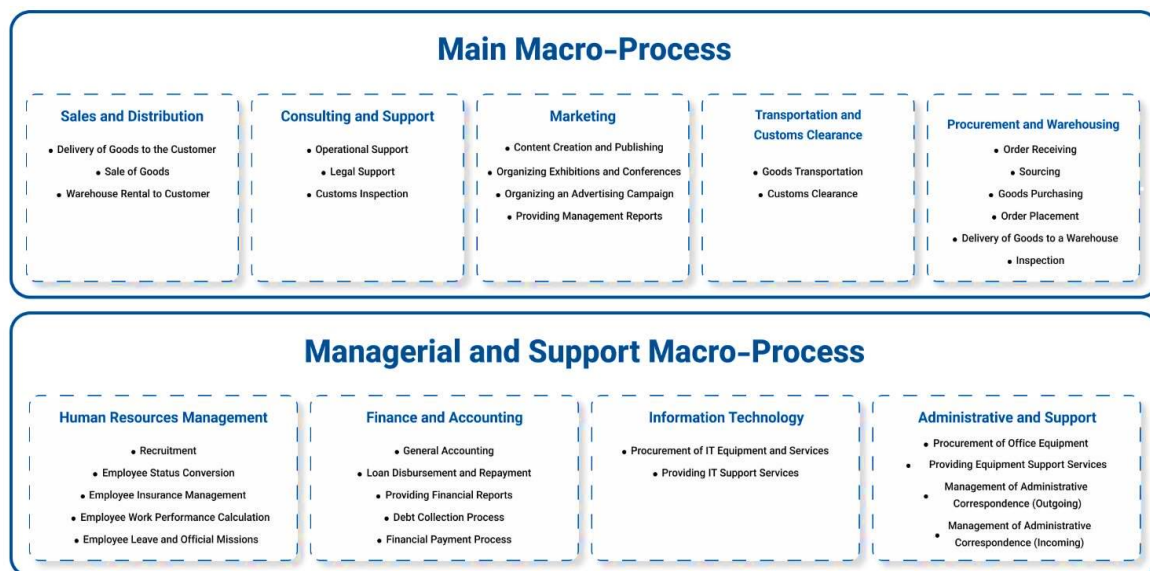


Fig. 3. The proposed architecture document of Bank Melli Iran's processes.

5.7 | Review of Restricting Laws and Regulations

When developing organizational structures, it is essential to review the restricting laws and regulations. In developing the organizational structure for banks, considering the supervision of higher-level organizations, such as the Central Bank and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance over the country's banks, higher-level regulations are of significant importance, and banks are required to comply with these regulations. These higher-level regulations have been developed in various areas such as finance, credit, risk management, structure, and so on. Some of the documents reviewed to identify the restricting laws and regulations in the development of the overall structure of Bank Melli Iran include:

- I. Law of the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- II. Regulations on requirements for corporate governance in non-governmental credit institutions
- III. Document of administrative laws and regulations with a focus on the civil service management law
- IV. Policy document for compliance with the laws and regulations of Bank Melli Iran (Approved in December 2022)
- V. Guidelines for the formation and organization of the anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing unit in banks and non-banking credit institutions, anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing policy document of Bank Melli Ira
- VI. Compliance framework (Alignment) of Bank Melli Iran (Approved in Summer 2021)
- VII. Conflict of interest management policy of Bank Melli Iran (Approved in November 2023)

5.8 | Designing the Organizational Macro-Structure

Relying on the results from the value chain analysis, the review of organizational process architecture, and comparative studies with the organizational structures of leading domestic and international banks, a proposed model for the organizational structure of Bank Melli Iran was designed. This proposal was developed with the aim of enhancing efficiency and aligning the structure with the bank's key processes. At the same time, legal requirements, regulatory constraints, and the local characteristics of the country's banking

system were carefully considered, ensuring that the structural changes not only have strong analytical backing but are also practically implementable and institutionally adaptable.

6 | Results

Based on the studies of the guiding components of Bank Melli Iran, the proposed organizational structure of Bank Melli Iran should focus on the contents of comprehensive banking, digital transformation, optimal resource management, financing and asset mobilization of frozen assets, financial discipline, development of the international sector and foreign trade services, and the excellence of human capital. Additionally, the process list of Bank Melli was developed in accordance with the APQC standard. Subsequently, in order to discover and identify the existing processes of Bank Melli, documentation and modeling were carried out. A total of 176 existing processes for 37 general departments of Bank Melli Iran were identified, and the processes were categorized into three groups: core, support, and development processes. Afterward, by reviewing the process architecture document and the restricting laws and regulations of the bank, the alignment of the discovered processes and the results obtained from previous stages was carried out. Based on the results of the analyses presented in *Table 3*, an optimal organizational macro-structure was proposed for Bank Melli Iran. In this structure, several changes and mergers have been suggested to improve agility, enhance coordination between units, and increase organizational efficiency. In the first step, the establishment of the general department of security and the general department of transformation and digital banking under the deputy of information technology and communications has been proposed to strengthen the focus on security and digital innovation in line with technological developments. Additionally, the general department of payment systems has been merged with the general department of treasury.

Other key changes include the transfer of the general department of claims follow-up and collection from the legal affairs deputy to the credit deputy, aimed at achieving greater alignment of responsibilities. Additionally, the general department of asset sales has been moved from the legal affairs deputy to the support deputy. The establishment of new departments, namely, the general department of research and product development, the general department of marketing, the general department of international affairs, and the general department of Branch Currency Affairs, has also been proposed. These new units are designed to increase specialized focus and enhance performance in the bank's key operational areas.

Table 3. Conformance assessment of the current processes of Bank Melli Iran with the standard processes of the American productivity and quality center model.

Number of Processes Similar between Bank Melli's General Directorates and APQC Main Process Groups	General Directorates of Bank Melli Iran	Main Process Group of APQC	Row
13	General directorate of organization and methods	Vision and strategy development	1
9	General directorate of research and strategic management		
2	General directorate of commercial banking	Product and service design/development	2
1	General directorate of retail and small business banking		
3	General directorate of credit planning and supervision	Product marketing and sales	3
1	General directorate of physical and technical protection	Supply chain management for products and services	4

Table 3. Continued.

Number of Processes Similar between Bank Melli's General Directorates and APQC Main Process Groups	General Directorates of Bank Melli Iran	Main Process Group of APQC	Row
6	General directorate of credits	Service delivery/sales	5
3	General directorate of foreign currency guarantee		
2	General directorate of commercial banking		
1	General directorate of retail and small business banking		
2	General directorate of commercial banking	Customer relationship management	6
1	General directorate of retail and small business banking		
3	General directorate of foreign currency guarantees		
14	General directorate of human capital	Human capital management	7
9	General directorate of training		
9	General directorate of research and strategic management		
5	General directorate of welfare and healthcare		
1	General directorate of selection	Information technology management	8
2	General directorate of systems development		
4	General directorate of banking operations		
12	General directorate of network and infrastructure		
2	General directorate of banking information	Financial management	9
8	General directorate of procurement		
1	General directorate of debt collection and recovery		
3	General directorate of management accounting and budget		
5	General directorate of treasury	Physical asset management	10
6	General directorate of credit		
5	General directorate of financial accounting		
2	General directorate of payment systems		
8	General directorate of procurement		
4	General directorate of sale of seized and surplus assets		
1	General directorate of physical and technical security		
9	General directorate of research and strategic management		
8	General directorate of real estate and engineering		

Table 3. Continued.

Number of Processes Similar between Bank Melli's General Directorates and APQC Main Process Groups	General Directorates of Bank Melli Iran	Main Process Group of APQC	Row
1	General directorate of compliance with laws and regulations	Auditing, compliance, and business resilience	11
5	General directorate of inspection		
1	General directorate of internal audit		
2	General directorate of anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism		
2	General directorate of risk management		
2	General directorate of commercial banking	External relations management	12
3	General directorate of legal affairs and litigation		
5	General directorate of inspection		
6	General directorate of partnerships and international affairs		
12	General directorate of public relations		
1	General directorate of corporate banking and investment	Business capability management development	13
8	General directorate of investment and corporate affairs		
4	General directorate of management affairs		
8	General directorate of foreign affairs		
9	General directorate of training		
13	General directorate of organization and methods		
9	General directorate of research and strategic management		
8	General directorate of investment and corporate affairs		
1	General directorate of project evaluation		

7 | Conclusion

In order to survive and thrive in complex and dynamic environments, organizations must quickly adapt to changes. Therefore, designing a process-based organizational structure appears to be essential. This study aims to present a dedicated methodology for developing an optimal organizational structure. In this regard, the departments of Bank Melli Iran were selected as the case study. Initially, based on the proposed methodology, the guiding pillars of the organization were examined. Subsequently, through comparative studies, a list of Bank Melli's processes was prepared according to the APQC standard, identifying 176 processes across 37 departments. Following this, the process architecture document for Bank Melli was developed. Finally, by analyzing restrictive laws and regulations and aligning the existing processes with the outcomes of the previous stages and the APQC standard, an optimal organizational structure for Bank Melli Iran was proposed. Among the advantages of the proposed structure are the integration of processes, increased efficiency, improved organizational relations and communications, and ultimately the promotion and advancement of the bank.

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