

Business Process Management as a Foundation for Human–AI Synergy in Community-Based Tourism: Evidence from the Shiripuno Community Tourism Center in Ecuador

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Abstract

To examine how Business Process Management (BPM) can support digital transformation and future human–AI collaboration in community-based tourism organizations through the optimization of visitor experience and operational efficiency. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining direct observation (n=15), key informant interviews (n=15), document analysis, and visitor surveys (n=387). Operational processes were analyzed using the BPM AS-IS/TO-BE framework. The study identified critical operational bottlenecks in visitor registration, food service delivery, and reservation management. The proposed BPM model projects a 40% reduction in processing time and a 35% increase in operational satisfaction. Findings suggest that process standardization enhances organizational readiness for future digital technologies, including AI-supported service delivery. The proposed framework provides community-based tourism organizations with a pathway toward digital transformation while preserving cultural authenticity and community governance structures. This study extends BPM research in tourism by positioning process optimization as a precursor to human–AI collaboration and digital transformation in indigenous community-based tourism settings.

Keywords: Business Process Management; Human–AI Collaboration; Digital Transformation; Community-Based Tourism; Visitor Experience; HRM; Ecuador.

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1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI), digital technologies, and data-driven decision-making are rapidly transforming service industries worldwide. Organizations operating in tourism, hospitality, and related service sectors increasingly adopt digital solutions to improve operational efficiency, enhance customer experiences, and strengthen competitiveness in dynamic environments (Baquero et al., 2026). The emergence of AI-powered applications, including intelligent reservation systems, predictive analytics, virtual assistants, and automated customer service tools, has accelerated the pace of digital transformation and created new opportunities for organizations seeking to deliver higher-quality services while optimizing internal processes.

Despite these opportunities, successful digital transformation extends beyond the adoption of technological tools. Organizations must first develop the internal capabilities required to integrate technology effectively into their operations. Human resource management (HRM), organizational culture, employee readiness, and process efficiency have become critical factors influencing the success of digital transformation initiatives. Recent studies suggest that technological innovation generates the greatest value when it complements human capabilities rather than replacing them, creating collaborative systems in which employees and technologies work together to achieve organizational objectives (Félix & García, 2020).

This perspective is particularly relevant in tourism and hospitality organizations, where human interaction remains a fundamental component of the service experience. While digital technologies can support operational activities and facilitate decision-making, the quality of visitor experiences continues to depend heavily on employees' knowledge, interpersonal skills, cultural understanding, and service orientation (Molina, Salazar & Proaño, 2021). Consequently, tourism organizations face the challenge of balancing technological innovation with the preservation of authentic human-centered experiences.

The challenge becomes even more significant in community-based tourism organizations. Unlike conventional tourism businesses, community-based tourism initiatives operate within unique social, cultural, and environmental contexts where tourism activities are closely connected to local traditions, indigenous knowledge, and community participation (Matovelle & Molina, 2019a). These organizations frequently pursue economic development objectives while simultaneously protecting cultural heritage and promoting environmental sustainability (Nila et al., 2021). Therefore, any transformation process must ensure that innovation strengthens rather than undermines the cultural values that differentiate these destinations.

Community-based tourism has emerged as an important development strategy across Latin America, particularly in indigenous territories where tourism provides opportunities for economic diversification, cultural preservation, and community empowerment (Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2007). In Ecuador, community-based tourism has received considerable institutional support over the last two decades, contributing to the creation of numerous Community Tourism Centers (CTCs) that offer visitors authentic cultural and nature-based experiences. These initiatives have generated employment opportunities, strengthened local governance structures, and enhanced the visibility of indigenous cultures within national and international tourism markets.

However, despite their social and cultural contributions, many community-based tourism organizations continue to face significant operational challenges. Limited financial resources, insufficient managerial capabilities, lack of process standardization, and restricted access to technological innovation frequently constrain their competitiveness (Banco Central del Ecuador, 2025). Previous research has shown that many community tourism enterprises rely heavily on informal management practices, resulting in operational inefficiencies, service inconsistencies, and difficulties in responding to changing visitor expectations (Garrido, C. V. 2016).

These challenges are particularly important in the context of ongoing digital transformation. Before organizations can successfully implement advanced technologies such as AI-supported systems, they must establish efficient operational foundations. Fragmented workflows, poorly defined responsibilities, duplicated activities, and the absence of standardized procedures can significantly reduce the effectiveness of technological investments (Félix & García, 2020). Consequently, process optimization represents a critical preliminary step toward achieving higher levels of digital maturity and organizational readiness.

Business Process Management (BPM) provides a useful framework for addressing these challenges. BPM is a systematic approach that focuses on identifying, analyzing, improving, monitoring, and continuously optimizing organizational processes. Originally developed within business management contexts, BPM has increasingly been applied across service industries to improve operational performance, service quality, customer satisfaction, and organizational efficiency (Özdemir et al., 2019). By emphasizing process standardization, performance measurement, and continuous improvement, BPM offers organizations a structured pathway for enhancing operational effectiveness while supporting strategic objectives.

Within tourism and hospitality settings, BPM has demonstrated considerable potential for improving service delivery and customer experiences. Previous studies have shown that process optimization can reduce waiting times, improve service consistency, enhance resource utilization, and increase visitor satisfaction. Furthermore, BPM contributes to organizational learning by encouraging systematic evaluation of operational activities and facilitating the implementation of evidence-based improvements. These benefits are particularly relevant for community-based tourism organizations seeking to strengthen competitiveness while preserving their distinctive cultural characteristics.

From the perspective of digital transformation, BPM may also serve as an important organizational capability that facilitates future technology adoption. According to Dynamic Capabilities Theory, organizations must continuously develop, integrate, and reconfigure internal resources and capabilities in order to adapt successfully to changing environments. Efficient operational processes constitute one such capability, enabling organizations to absorb technological innovations and translate them into improved organizational performance. In this sense, BPM can be viewed as a foundational mechanism that prepares organizations for future human–AI collaboration by creating the process discipline necessary for effective technology integration.

The present study examines these issues through the case of the Shiripuno Community Tourism Center, located in Napo Province within the Ecuadorian Amazon. Managed primarily by members of the local Kichwa community, Shiripuno represents a valuable example of community-based tourism that combines cultural experiences, environmental conservation, and local participation. Since its

establishment, the center has contributed to community development while offering visitors opportunities to engage directly with Amazonian culture and natural environments.

Despite these achievements, several operational limitations have been identified within the organization. Preliminary observations revealed inefficiencies related to visitor registration procedures, food service operations, reservation management, and overall process coordination. These limitations have the potential to negatively affect visitor experiences, reduce operational efficiency, and constrain future organizational development. At the same time, the community seeks to preserve its cultural identity and governance structures, requiring improvement strategies that respect local values while enhancing organizational performance.

To address these challenges, this study proposes the application of Business Process Management as a mechanism for optimizing visitor experiences and strengthening organizational readiness for future digital transformation initiatives (Mullo Romero et al., 2019). Rather than viewing technology as a substitute for human participation, the study adopts a human-centered perspective in which process improvement enhances employees' ability to deliver authentic, culturally meaningful experiences while creating the organizational conditions necessary for future technological integration.

Using a mixed-methods approach that combines direct observation, key informant interviews, document analysis, and visitor surveys, the research identifies operational bottlenecks and develops a BPM-based improvement framework using AS-IS and TO-BE process modeling. The study evaluates key operational areas and proposes improvements designed to enhance efficiency, service quality, and visitor satisfaction while maintaining the cultural authenticity that characterizes the Shiripuno experience.

This research contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it extends existing knowledge regarding the application of BPM within community-based tourism contexts, an area that remains relatively underexplored. Second, it responds to growing calls for research examining the organizational foundations of digital transformation in service industries. Third, it contributes to emerging discussions surrounding human-AI collaboration by demonstrating how process optimization can create the organizational readiness necessary for future technology adoption. Finally, the study provides practical insights for managers, policymakers, and community leaders seeking to strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of community tourism organizations.

Accordingly, the main objective of this study is to examine how Business Process Management can enhance visitor experiences, improve operational efficiency, and strengthen organizational readiness for future digital transformation and human-AI collaboration within community-based tourism organizations. Through the case of the Shiripuno Community Tourism Center, the study seeks to demonstrate how process innovation can support sustainable tourism development while preserving cultural identity and community values.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Digital Transformation in Service Industries

Digital transformation has emerged as one of the most significant strategic priorities for organizations operating in service industries. The increasing availability of advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, cloud computing, and automation systems, has fundamentally altered the way organizations create value, interact with customers, and manage internal operations (Baquero et al., 2026).

Unlike simple technological adoption, digital transformation represents a comprehensive organizational process involving structural, cultural, and operational changes. It requires organizations to redesign processes, develop new capabilities, and align human resources with evolving technological environments (Isaac, 2026). Consequently, successful digital transformation depends not only on technological investments but also on organizational readiness and the ability to adapt existing processes to new operational realities.

Within tourism and hospitality industries, digital transformation has accelerated in response to changing customer expectations and increasing market competition. Tourists increasingly demand personalized services, seamless digital interactions, rapid responses, and integrated travel experiences. To address these demands, organizations have adopted digital tools for reservations, customer relationship management, service personalization, and operational planning.

Recent research suggests that organizations capable of integrating technology with human expertise achieve superior outcomes in terms of service quality, operational efficiency, and customer satisfaction. Therefore, digital transformation should be viewed as a process that enhances human capabilities rather than replacing them.

2.2. Human–AI Collaboration and Service Delivery

Artificial intelligence has become one of the most influential technologies shaping contemporary service industries (Abdelaziz et al., 2026). AI applications are increasingly used to support customer service, automate repetitive tasks, improve decision-making, and optimize resource allocation. In tourism and hospitality settings, AI technologies include chatbots, recommendation systems, predictive analytics, demand forecasting tools, and automated reservation management platforms.

Despite concerns regarding technological displacement, contemporary research increasingly emphasizes the concept of human–AI collaboration. This perspective argues that the greatest value is generated when artificial intelligence complements human intelligence, allowing employees to focus on tasks requiring creativity, empathy, cultural understanding, and interpersonal communication.

Service industries provide an especially relevant context for human–AI collaboration because customer experiences often depend on emotional interactions and personalized attention. While AI systems can process large volumes of information and automate routine activities, human employees remain essential for interpreting complex situations, managing relationships, and delivering authentic experiences.

In tourism contexts, the combination of technological efficiency and human interaction creates opportunities to improve service quality while preserving the experiential dimensions that visitors value most (Zambrano et al, 2019). Consequently, organizations seeking to benefit from AI adoption

must establish organizational structures and operational processes capable of supporting effective collaboration between people and technology.

2.3. Dynamic Capabilities Theory and Organizational Readiness

This study is grounded in Dynamic Capabilities Theory, which provides a useful framework for understanding how organizations adapt to changing environments and emerging technological opportunities.

According to Teece et al. (1997), dynamic capabilities refer to an organization's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external resources in response to environmental changes. Organizations operating in highly dynamic environments must continuously develop new competencies to maintain competitiveness and sustain long-term performance.

Within the context of digital transformation, dynamic capabilities become particularly important because technological change requires organizations to redesign processes, acquire new knowledge, and modify existing routines. Digital transformation therefore depends not only on technological resources but also on the organizational capabilities that enable successful implementation.

Several scholars argue that process management capabilities represent an important form of dynamic capability because they allow organizations to identify inefficiencies, redesign workflows, and continuously improve operational performance. Process optimization enables organizations to become more agile, adaptive, and capable of integrating future technological innovations.

From this perspective, BPM can be understood as a foundational capability that strengthens organizational readiness for future digital transformation initiatives, including AI-supported service systems. Organizations that possess efficient, standardized, and well-documented processes are generally better positioned to benefit from technological innovation than organizations characterized by fragmented or informal operational structures.

2.4. Business Process Management in Tourism Organizations

Business Process Management (BPM) is a systematic management approach that focuses on the identification, analysis, design, implementation, monitoring, and continuous improvement of organizational processes (Chalupa & Petricek, 2020).

The fundamental objective of BPM is to ensure that organizational activities generate value efficiently while maintaining alignment with strategic goals. BPM emphasizes process visibility, standardization, performance measurement, and continuous improvement, allowing organizations to reduce inefficiencies and enhance operational effectiveness.

Within tourism and hospitality industries, BPM has been applied to improve reservation systems, customer service procedures, accommodation management, food and beverage operations, and visitor experience management. Previous studies have demonstrated that process optimization can reduce service delays, improve resource utilization, enhance coordination between departments, and increase customer satisfaction (Krstić et al. 2015).

The AS-IS and TO-BE methodology represents one of the most widely used BPM approaches. The AS-IS model examines current operational conditions and identifies inefficiencies, bottlenecks, and process redundancies. Subsequently, the TO-BE model proposes redesigned processes aimed at improving efficiency and service quality (Moussa et al., 2025).

In tourism organizations, BPM contributes not only to operational improvements but also to organizational learning. By systematically analyzing activities and performance indicators, managers can make more informed decisions and establish a culture of continuous improvement (Han et al., 2019).

Furthermore, BPM supports future digitalization efforts because standardized processes facilitate the integration of digital technologies, automation systems, and AI-based tools. As a result, BPM has become increasingly recognized as a critical component of digital transformation strategies (BOC Group, 2025).

2.5. Community-Based Tourism and Visitor Experience

Community-based tourism (CBT) has gained considerable attention as a sustainable tourism model capable of generating economic benefits while preserving cultural heritage and environmental resources (Chinchay-Villarreyes et al., 2020). Unlike conventional tourism models, CBT emphasizes local participation, community ownership, cultural authenticity, and equitable distribution of tourism benefits (Abella, 2020).

In many developing countries, community-based tourism initiatives provide opportunities for indigenous and rural communities to diversify income sources while strengthening local identity and governance structures. Ecuador has been particularly active in promoting community tourism as a mechanism for supporting sustainable development and cultural preservation (Araújo & de Sevilha, 2017).

Visitor experience represents a central determinant of success within community tourism destinations (Molina et al., 2022). Positive visitor experiences contribute to satisfaction, loyalty, positive word-of-mouth communication, and destination competitiveness. Previous research indicates that visitor satisfaction is influenced by multiple dimensions, including service quality, cultural authenticity, hospitality, accessibility, environmental conditions, and operational efficiency (Molina, Naranjo & Torres, 2020).

Although visitors often value authentic experiences more than highly standardized services, operational inefficiencies can negatively affect overall satisfaction. Long waiting times, poor communication, reservation errors, and inconsistent service delivery may reduce the perceived quality of the tourism experience (Matovelle & Molina, 2019b).

Therefore, community-based tourism organizations face the challenge of balancing authenticity with operational excellence. Process optimization approaches such as BPM offer a potential solution by improving efficiency while preserving the cultural characteristics that distinguish community tourism experiences (Korstanje, 2020; Martínez-Sala, 2020).

2.6. Research Gap and Conceptual Framework

Although previous studies have separately examined digital transformation, artificial intelligence, Business Process Management, and community-based tourism, limited research has explored the relationships among these concepts within indigenous tourism organizations.

Existing studies primarily focus on technological adoption in large tourism enterprises, hotels, and urban service organizations, while relatively little attention has been devoted to understanding how community-based tourism organizations can prepare for future digital transformation. Similarly, BPM research has traditionally emphasized efficiency improvements without explicitly considering its role in facilitating human–AI collaboration and organizational readiness.

This study addresses these gaps by proposing that BPM serves as a strategic capability that simultaneously enhances visitor experiences, improves operational performance, and creates the organizational foundations necessary for future digital transformation initiatives.

Based on Dynamic Capabilities Theory, the conceptual framework suggests that process optimization strengthens organizational readiness, which in turn facilitates future human–AI collaboration while preserving cultural authenticity and improving visitor experiences in community-based tourism settings.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the research.



3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of operational processes and visitor experiences at the Shiripuno Community Tourism Center (CTC) in Ecuador. Mixed-methods research is particularly suitable for tourism studies because it enables the integration of numerical evidence with contextual and experiential insights, providing a richer understanding of complex organizational phenomena.

The study adopted a case study approach focused on the Shiripuno Community Tourism Center, an indigenous community-based tourism organization located in Napo Province within the Ecuadorian Amazon. Case study research is appropriate when investigating contemporary phenomena within their real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident.

The research was conducted between March and August 2025 and followed the principles of Business Process Management (BPM) to identify operational inefficiencies, evaluate visitor perceptions, and develop process improvement proposals aimed at enhancing service quality and organizational readiness for future digital transformation initiatives.

3.2. Study Context

The Shiripuno Community Tourism Center is located in the Amazon region of Ecuador and is managed primarily by members of the local Kichwa community. Community participation and local leadership play a central role in the governance and operation of tourism activities, particularly through the active involvement of women in community decision-making processes (Garrido, M. G., 2016). The center offers a variety of tourism services, including accommodation, gastronomy, cultural activities, nature interpretation, ecotourism experiences, and community-based tourism programs.

The organization plays an important role in supporting local economic development while preserving cultural heritage and promoting environmental sustainability (Guijarro, Pacheco & Verdesoto, 2018). However, like many community-based tourism enterprises, the center faces operational challenges associated with limited resources, informal management structures, and increasing visitor expectations.

The selection of Shiripuno as the case study was based on its relevance as a representative example of community-based tourism in the Ecuadorian Amazon and its willingness to participate in organizational improvement initiatives.

3.3. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection involved multiple sources of evidence to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings. The research combined document analysis, direct observation, semi-structured interviews, and visitor surveys.

Relevant institutional documents, operational records, tourism reports, community regulations, and publicly available information related to community-based tourism in Ecuador were reviewed. This phase provided background information regarding organizational structure, tourism activities, governance mechanisms, and operational procedures.

Direct observation was conducted during multiple visits to the tourism center. A total of fifteen observation sessions were undertaken across different operational areas, including reception, accommodation, gastronomy, cultural activities, ecotourism services, and visitor assistance processes. Observation focused on identifying operational workflows, service delivery procedures, waiting times,

communication patterns, bottlenecks, and interactions between staff members and visitors. Detailed field notes were recorded during each session.

Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including community leaders, tourism operators, administrative personnel, guides, and service providers involved in the management of the tourism center.

The interviews explored perceptions regarding current operational practices, service quality challenges, organizational strengths, improvement opportunities, and future development priorities. Interviews lasted between 40 and 75 minutes and were conducted in Spanish.

A structured questionnaire was administered to visitors who had completed their tourism experience at the Shiripuno Community Tourism Center. The survey collected information related to visitor demographics, travel characteristics, service quality perceptions, satisfaction levels, cultural experiences, environmental sustainability perceptions, communication effectiveness, and overall visitor experience. A total of 387 valid questionnaires were collected and included in the analysis. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the academic purpose of the study. Table 1 shows a summary of data collection methods.

Table 1. Summary of Data Collection Methods

Method	Participants	Purpose
Direct observation	15 sessions	Identify operational inefficiencies
Interviews	15 stakeholders	Explore management challenges
Visitors' surveys	387 visitors	Assess visitor experiences
Document analysis	Internal records	Process mapping

Source: Authors' elaboration.

3.4. Sample Characteristics

The quantitative component of the study consisted of 387 visitors who participated in tourism activities at the Shiripuno Community Tourism Center during the study period.

The qualitative component included 15 key informants selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in tourism operations and decision-making processes within the community. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because it allowed the researchers to obtain information-rich perspectives from individuals with substantial knowledge of the organization's operations and development challenges.

3.5. Process Analysis and BPM Framework

The analytical framework was based on Business Process Management (BPM), a systematic methodology aimed at identifying, analyzing, improving, and monitoring organizational processes.

The study followed four sequential stages:

Stage 1: Process Identification

Operational processes across key service areas were mapped and documented. Particular attention was given to visitor-facing processes with direct implications for service quality and visitor satisfaction.

Stage 2: AS-IS Process Modeling

Current operational procedures were analyzed to identify inefficiencies, delays, redundancies, and coordination problems. Process maps were developed to visualize workflows and operational interactions.

Stage 3: Bottleneck Analysis

Critical bottlenecks were identified through quantitative measurements, observational evidence, interview findings, and visitor feedback. Particular attention was paid to registration procedures, food service delivery, and reservation management processes.

Stage 4: TO-BE Process Design

Based on the identified deficiencies, redesigned process models were developed to improve efficiency, reduce waiting times, strengthen coordination, and enhance service quality while maintaining cultural authenticity and community participation.

3.6. Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from visitor surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies, percentages, means, and comparative indicators. These analyses provided insights into visitor satisfaction levels and service quality perceptions.

Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis. Responses were systematically coded and grouped into categories related to operational performance, visitor experience, service quality, organizational challenges, and improvement opportunities.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled triangulation, enhancing the credibility and robustness of the results.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical research principles. Participation in interviews and surveys was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent prior to data collection.

Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed throughout the research process. Information obtained from participants was used exclusively for academic purposes, and no personal identifiers were included in the analysis or reporting of results.

Special consideration was given to respecting the cultural values, traditions, and governance structures of the Kichwa community. The research was conducted in collaboration with local stakeholders to

ensure that findings and recommendations were aligned with community interests and development objectives.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Organizational Diagnosis of the Shiripuno Community Tourism Center

The diagnostic phase revealed that the Shiripuno Community Tourism Center operates through a community-based management model involving multiple service areas, including visitor reception, accommodation, gastronomy, cultural activities, ecotourism, administration, sustainability management, marketing, and community development.

Field observations and stakeholder interviews indicated that the tourism center maintains strong cultural authenticity and high levels of community participation. Community members actively contribute to tourism operations, preserving traditional Kichwa knowledge and cultural practices while providing tourism services to visitors.

However, the analysis also identified operational challenges associated with process standardization, coordination among service areas, communication procedures, and service delivery consistency. These limitations were particularly evident during periods of higher visitor demand.

Overall, respondents highlighted the importance of maintaining cultural authenticity while simultaneously improving operational efficiency and service quality.

4.2. Visitor Experience Assessment

The survey results demonstrated generally positive visitor perceptions regarding the tourism experience offered by the Shiripuno Community Tourism Center.

Visitors reported high levels of appreciation for cultural authenticity, community hospitality, interaction with local residents, natural attractions and biodiversity, traditional gastronomy, and environmental conservation practices.

The dimensions receiving the highest evaluations were related to cultural experiences and interpersonal interactions with community members.

Despite these positive evaluations, several operational aspects received lower scores. Visitors frequently mentioned waiting times, communication difficulties, reservation management issues, and service delays as areas requiring improvement.

These findings suggest that while the destination successfully delivers authentic tourism experiences, operational inefficiencies may negatively influence overall visitor satisfaction.

4.3. BPM-Based Process Diagnosis

Using the Business Process Management framework, nine operational areas were examined to identify inefficiencies and opportunities for improvement.

The analysis revealed significant variations in process maturity across operational areas. Activities directly linked to cultural interpretation and visitor interaction demonstrated relatively high performance levels, largely due to the experience and commitment of community members.

In contrast, administrative and support processes exhibited lower levels of formalization. Several activities depended heavily on individual experience rather than documented procedures, creating inconsistencies in service delivery.

The BPM diagnosis identified three processes with the greatest impact on visitor experiences:

- Visitor registration and reception.
- Gastronomic service preparation and delivery.
- Reservation management.

These processes became the focus of subsequent improvement efforts due to their direct influence on visitor satisfaction and operational performance. These can be seen at Table 2.

Table 2. BPM diagnostic of operational areas.

Operational area	Performance level	Main Issue Identified
Reception	Medium	Long registration times
Accommodation	Medium	Lack of SOPs
Gastronomy	Low	Delays in service delivery
Cultural Activities	High	Minor coordination issues
Ecotourism	High	Limited scheduling control
Administration	Medium	Manual procedures
Finance	Medium	Informal controls
Sustainability	High	Good practices maintained
Marketing	Low	Limited digital presence

Source: Authors' elaboration.

4.4. Identification of Critical Bottlenecks

The analysis of operational workflows revealed several bottlenecks affecting service efficiency. The registration process exhibited the highest level of inefficiency among all visitor-facing activities.

Observational data showed an average registration time of approximately 32 minutes per visitor group. Delays were primarily associated with manual information collection, fragmented communication procedures, and the absence of standardized registration protocols. The process frequently generated queues during visitor arrivals, affecting first impressions and reducing operational efficiency.

Food preparation and delivery represented the second most significant operational challenge. The average service time was approximately 52 minutes between order placement and meal delivery. Interviews revealed that delays were often caused by reactive planning practices, limited coordination among personnel, and the absence of standardized preparation procedures. Visitors generally expressed satisfaction with food quality; however, waiting times negatively influenced perceptions of service efficiency.

Reservation management was characterized by fragmented communication channels and limited process formalization. Reservations were frequently managed through informal communication methods, increasing the likelihood of misunderstandings, duplicated information, and scheduling difficulties. Stakeholders reported that reservation-related issues generated unnecessary administrative workloads and occasionally affected visitor expectations.

4.5. AS-IS Process Analysis

The AS-IS process models provided a detailed representation of existing workflows and operational interactions.

The analysis identified several recurring problems:

- Excessive manual activities.
- Lack of documented procedures.
- Limited information sharing among operational areas.
- Absence of performance monitoring mechanisms.
- Dependence on individual knowledge rather than organizational processes.

These deficiencies contributed to process variability and reduced overall operational effectiveness.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that many activities were performed successfully due to the commitment and experience of community members rather than because of formal organizational systems.

4.6. TO-BE Process Design

Based on the identified deficiencies, redesigned TO-BE process models were developed for the three priority operational areas.

The proposed improvements focused on standardization of operational procedures, reduction of unnecessary activities, improved coordination among service providers, clear assignment of responsibilities, enhanced communication mechanisms, and introduction of performance monitoring indicators.

The redesigned processes preserved community participation and cultural authenticity while introducing greater operational structure and efficiency.

4.7. Projected Impact of BPM Improvements

The proposed BPM framework generated substantial projected improvements across the analyzed processes.

Simulation and process redesign analyses indicated:

- Approximately 40% reduction in processing times.
- Approximately 35% improvement in operational satisfaction.
- Reduced service delays.

- Improved coordination among operational areas.
- Enhanced visitor flow management.
- Increased process consistency.

The registration process showed the greatest improvement potential due to the elimination of redundant activities and the introduction of standardized procedures.

Similarly, the gastronomic service process demonstrated considerable opportunities for efficiency gains through improved planning and workflow coordination.

Reservation management improvements were expected to reduce communication errors and enhance service reliability.

4.8. Organizational Readiness for Future Digital Transformation

Although the study did not evaluate artificial intelligence implementation directly, the BPM analysis revealed several factors relevant to future digital transformation initiatives.

The findings suggest that process standardization, workflow documentation, performance measurement, and role clarification constitute essential organizational foundations for future technology adoption.

The proposed BPM model increases organizational readiness by creating more structured and transparent operational processes. Such improvements may facilitate the future integration of digital tools, reservation platforms, customer relationship management systems, predictive analytics applications, and AI-supported service technologies.

Consequently, the results indicate that process optimization can serve as an important preparatory stage for future human–AI collaboration within community-based tourism organizations while preserving cultural authenticity and community governance structures.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that operational efficiency and visitor experience within community-based tourism organizations can be significantly enhanced through the application of Business Process Management (BPM). More importantly, the results suggest that process optimization represents a critical organizational capability that can facilitate future digital transformation initiatives and support the development of human–AI collaborative environments.

The BPM diagnosis revealed that the primary operational challenges at the Shiripuno Community Tourism Center were not related to cultural authenticity or visitor engagement, but rather to administrative inefficiencies, process fragmentation, and the absence of standardized operational procedures. This finding is particularly relevant because it highlights that many community-based tourism organizations possess strong experiential and cultural assets while simultaneously facing managerial and operational limitations that may restrict their long-term competitiveness.

From a Dynamic Capabilities Theory perspective, the results indicate that process management capabilities constitute an important strategic resource for tourism organizations operating in rapidly changing environments. Dynamic Capabilities Theory argues that organizations must continuously develop, integrate, and reconfigure resources to respond effectively to environmental changes and emerging opportunities. In this context, BPM functions as a capability that enables organizations to identify inefficiencies, redesign workflows, and improve operational performance while maintaining strategic flexibility.

The findings support previous research suggesting that process optimization contributes to organizational adaptability and resilience (Smith & Xiao, 2021). By documenting workflows, clarifying responsibilities, and establishing performance indicators, organizations create a more structured operational environment that facilitates future innovation and organizational learning. This is particularly important in service industries, where service quality depends heavily on coordination among employees, operational consistency, and responsiveness to customer needs.

An important contribution of this study concerns the relationship between BPM and digital transformation. Although the research did not directly examine artificial intelligence implementation, the results demonstrate that many of the organizational conditions required for future technology adoption are closely linked to process maturity. Digital transformation initiatives frequently fail not because of technological limitations but because organizations attempt to implement advanced technologies within inefficient operational systems.

The findings suggest that process standardization, workflow transparency, and performance measurement provide the organizational foundations necessary for future digitalization efforts. In this regard, BPM can be understood as a preparatory mechanism that enhances organizational readiness for technological innovation. Organizations that possess clearly defined and optimized processes are generally better positioned to integrate digital tools, automation systems, data analytics platforms, and AI-supported service technologies.

This argument is particularly relevant within the growing literature on human–AI collaboration. Contemporary research increasingly emphasizes that the most successful forms of AI adoption occur when technology complements rather than replaces human capabilities. Service industries such as tourism remain highly dependent on interpersonal interactions, emotional intelligence, cultural interpretation, and relationship-building skills that cannot be fully replicated by technological systems.

The results of the present study reinforce this perspective. Visitors consistently valued cultural authenticity, personal interaction, hospitality, and community engagement as central elements of their tourism experience (Rodríguez & Cárdenas, 2020). These findings suggest that the competitive advantage of community-based tourism organizations resides primarily in their human and cultural dimensions rather than in technological sophistication alone.

Consequently, future AI implementation within community tourism settings should focus on supporting operational activities rather than replacing human interaction. AI-supported reservation systems, visitor information platforms, predictive demand forecasting tools, and operational planning applications may enhance efficiency while allowing community members to dedicate greater attention

to cultural interpretation, hospitality, and visitor engagement. Such an approach aligns with the concept of human–AI synergy, where technology strengthens human performance instead of substituting it.

The findings also have important implications for Human Resource Management (HRM). As service organizations progress toward digital transformation, employees increasingly require new competencies related to digital literacy, process management, adaptability, and continuous learning. Community tourism organizations face the additional challenge of integrating technological innovation while preserving traditional knowledge and cultural practices (Guijarro, Pino & García, 2018).

The BPM model proposed in this study contributes to this objective by establishing a structured operational environment that facilitates employee learning and organizational development. Standardized procedures reduce uncertainty, improve communication, and create opportunities for knowledge sharing among community members. These outcomes are consistent with HRM strategies that emphasize employee empowerment, capability development, and organizational learning as prerequisites for successful digital transformation.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of balancing efficiency improvements with cultural preservation. Unlike conventional tourism enterprises, community-based tourism organizations pursue multiple objectives that extend beyond economic performance. Cultural sustainability, community participation, and environmental stewardship represent essential dimensions of organizational success. Therefore, process optimization initiatives must be carefully designed to support operational effectiveness without undermining local identity or community governance structures.

The Shiripuno case demonstrates that BPM can be adapted to indigenous tourism contexts without compromising cultural authenticity. Rather than imposing external managerial models, the proposed framework integrates process improvement principles with local knowledge, community participation, and cultural values. This finding contributes to the broader discussion regarding the compatibility between modern management approaches and traditional community-based development models.

From a practical perspective, the study suggests that tourism organizations seeking to prepare for future digital transformation should prioritize process optimization before pursuing large-scale technological investments. Process redesign initiatives can generate immediate improvements in operational performance while simultaneously creating the organizational foundations required for future technological integration. This sequence may be particularly valuable for small and medium-sized tourism organizations operating under resource constraints.

Finally, the study contributes to the emerging debate concerning sustainable digital transformation in service industries. As AI technologies become increasingly accessible, organizations must ensure that technological innovation supports inclusive and sustainable development. The results suggest that BPM can serve as a bridge between traditional community-based tourism models and future digital ecosystems, enabling organizations to enhance competitiveness while preserving the social, cultural, and environmental values that define sustainable tourism development.

Overall, the findings indicate that process optimization should not be viewed merely as an operational improvement strategy but as a strategic capability that strengthens organizational readiness for future human–AI collaboration, digital transformation, and sustainable service innovation.

6. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research

The findings of this study provide several implications for Human Resource Management (HRM) and digital transformation within community-based tourism organizations and service industries more broadly.

First, the results highlight the importance of developing organizational capabilities before implementing advanced digital technologies. While artificial intelligence and digital platforms offer significant opportunities for improving operational performance, their effectiveness depends largely on the existence of well-defined and standardized organizational processes. Consequently, HRM strategies should not focus exclusively on technology adoption but also on preparing employees and organizational structures for change.

Second, the study emphasizes the need for continuous employee development. As digital transformation progresses, tourism organizations increasingly require personnel capable of working in technology-enabled environments. This involves not only technical competencies but also adaptability, problem-solving skills, process awareness, and digital literacy. Training programs should therefore combine technological knowledge with service-oriented competencies that remain uniquely human, such as empathy, communication, cultural interpretation, and relationship management.

Third, the findings reinforce the importance of human-centered digital transformation. Community-based tourism derives much of its value from authentic interactions between visitors and local communities. Therefore, AI applications should be designed to support operational efficiency rather than replace human participation. Technologies such as reservation management systems, predictive demand forecasting tools, customer relationship management platforms, and AI-supported information services can reduce administrative burdens while allowing employees to devote greater attention to cultural experiences and visitor engagement.

Fourth, the study highlights the role of HRM in preserving organizational culture during periods of technological change. Community tourism organizations often operate within unique cultural environments where local traditions, indigenous knowledge, and collective governance structures constitute critical organizational assets. Human resource practices should ensure that technological innovation strengthens rather than undermines these assets. This requires participatory approaches that actively involve community members in decision-making processes related to digital transformation.

Finally, the findings suggest that BPM can serve as an effective mechanism for facilitating organizational learning and knowledge transfer. Standardized procedures and documented processes help reduce dependency on individual knowledge while supporting employee development and organizational continuity. Such capabilities become increasingly important as organizations seek to integrate digital technologies into their operations and prepare for future forms of human–AI collaboration.

Overall, the results indicate that successful digital transformation in community-based tourism should be understood as a process of organizational development where technology, people, and culture evolve together to create sustainable and competitive service ecosystems.

This study examined the application of Business Process Management (BPM) as a mechanism for improving visitor experiences and strengthening organizational readiness for future digital transformation within the Shiripuno Community Tourism Center in the Ecuadorian Amazon.

The findings revealed that while the tourism center possesses significant strengths related to cultural authenticity, community participation, hospitality, and environmental sustainability, several operational inefficiencies limit service performance and visitor satisfaction. Through a mixed-methods approach, critical bottlenecks were identified in visitor registration, gastronomic service delivery, and reservation management processes.

The BPM analysis demonstrated that process optimization can generate substantial operational improvements while maintaining the cultural identity and community values that characterize indigenous tourism initiatives. The proposed AS-IS and TO-BE models identified opportunities to reduce processing times, improve service consistency, strengthen coordination among operational areas, and enhance overall visitor experiences.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the literature by linking Business Process Management with Dynamic Capabilities Theory and emerging discussions on digital transformation and human–AI collaboration. The results suggest that process management capabilities represent an important organizational resource that enhances adaptability and supports future technological integration.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that BPM should not be viewed solely as a tool for operational improvement but also as a strategic capability that prepares organizations for future innovation. Standardized processes, performance measurement systems, and workflow transparency create the organizational foundations necessary for successful digital transformation initiatives.

The study also contributes to the growing body of research examining sustainable tourism development. The Shiripuno case demonstrates that modern management approaches can be successfully adapted to community-based tourism contexts without compromising cultural authenticity, local governance, or indigenous values. This finding is particularly relevant for tourism destinations seeking to improve competitiveness while preserving their social and cultural heritage.

Finally, the research highlights the potential for future human–AI collaboration within community tourism organizations. Rather than replacing human interaction, future technological innovations should support operational activities and empower local communities to focus on the cultural and experiential dimensions that create value for visitors. In this sense, BPM provides an important bridge between traditional tourism practices and emerging digital service ecosystems.

Like all research, this study presents several limitations that should be acknowledged.

First, the investigation was conducted as a single case study focused exclusively on the Shiripuno Community Tourism Center. Although the case provides valuable insights into community-based tourism management within the Ecuadorian Amazon, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other tourism organizations operating in different cultural, geographic, or institutional contexts.

Second, the study relied primarily on cross-sectional data collected during a specific period of time. Consequently, the projected impacts of the proposed BPM improvements were not evaluated through a longitudinal implementation process. Future studies should assess the long-term effects of BPM adoption on operational performance, visitor satisfaction, and organizational sustainability.

Third, the research focused primarily on process optimization and organizational readiness rather than on the direct implementation of digital technologies or artificial intelligence systems. Therefore, conclusions regarding future human–AI collaboration remain conceptual and should be interpreted with caution.

Fourth, while visitor perceptions and stakeholder perspectives were incorporated into the analysis, future research could expand the range of participants by including additional community members, policymakers, tourism operators, and technology specialists involved in digital transformation initiatives.

Several opportunities for future research emerge from this study. Comparative studies involving multiple community-based tourism organizations could provide a broader understanding of how BPM contributes to organizational development across different contexts. Similarly, future investigations could examine the relationship between process maturity and digital transformation readiness using larger samples and quantitative methodologies.

Future research may also explore the implementation of specific digital technologies within community tourism settings, including AI-supported reservation systems, predictive analytics, customer relationship management platforms, virtual assistants, and smart destination technologies. Such studies would contribute to understanding how technological innovation can complement human capabilities while preserving cultural authenticity.

Another promising avenue involves examining the role of HRM practices in facilitating digital transformation within indigenous and community-based tourism organizations. Issues such as digital skills development, employee empowerment, organizational learning, technology acceptance, and leadership for innovation deserve greater scholarly attention.

Finally, future studies should investigate how human–AI collaboration can be designed and managed in ways that promote sustainable tourism development, strengthen local communities, and enhance visitor experiences. Such research would provide valuable insights into the creation of tourism ecosystems where technological advancement and cultural preservation coexist in a mutually beneficial manner.

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El Business Process Management como base para la sinergia humano-IA en el turismo comunitario: evidencia del Centro de Turismo Comunitario Shiripuno en Ecuador

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Resumen

El presente estudio examina cómo la Gestión de Procesos Empresariales (Business Process Management, BPM) puede apoyar la transformación digital y la futura colaboración humano-IA en organizaciones de turismo comunitario mediante la optimización de la experiencia del visitante y la eficiencia operativa. Se empleó una metodología mixta que combinó observación directa (n = 15), entrevistas a informantes clave (n = 15), análisis documental y encuestas a visitantes (n = 387). Los procesos operativos fueron analizados utilizando el marco BPM AS-IS/TO-BE. Los resultados identificaron cuellos de botella operativos críticos en los procesos de registro de visitantes, prestación del servicio gastronómico y gestión de reservas. El modelo BPM propuesto proyecta una reducción del 40% en los tiempos de procesamiento y un incremento del 35% en la satisfacción operativa. Los hallazgos sugieren que la estandarización de procesos mejora la preparación organizativa para futuras tecnologías digitales, incluidas aquellas basadas en inteligencia artificial orientadas a la prestación de servicios. El marco propuesto proporciona a las organizaciones de turismo comunitario una vía para avanzar hacia la transformación digital preservando al mismo tiempo la autenticidad cultural y las estructuras de gobernanza comunitaria. Asimismo, este estudio amplía la investigación sobre BPM en turismo al posicionar la optimización de procesos como un precursor de la colaboración humano-IA y de la transformación digital en contextos de turismo comunitario indígena.

Palabras clave: Gestión de Procesos Empresariales (BPM); Colaboración Humano-IA; Transformación Digital; Turismo Comunitario; Experiencia del Visitante; Gestión de Recursos Humanos (HRM); Ecuador.

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