BPM Implementations:
Does One Approach Fit All?

John Jeston and Johan Nelis


In their book, Jeston & Nelis spend a significant amount of time discussing their project implementation Framework and the importance of a structured approach to BPM projects. This article discusses how to use their Framework as a result of the way an organization initiates BPM projects and the resulting project implementation scenario selected.

As professor Tom Davenport states in his Foreword to the book, “What’s exceptional about the book is its extraordinary common sense. It suggests seemingly prosaic ideas such as that multiple different levels of process change are necessary under different circumstances,…to bring about process change. These ideas seem obvious, but they are not often encountered in the world of business process management, or BPM. In fact, in order for you to fully appreciate the virtues of this book, you need to know something about what’s wrong with BPM.”

So what we have extracted from the book is an overview of …

**Why A “One Approach Fits All” Philosophy Does Not Work**

The difficulty with any structured approach to business projects, whether a BPM project or not, is that organizations often adopt a *one approach fits all* philosophy.

Many people suggest that a BPM project should start by first obtaining the full and complete support of the CEO, and, unquestionably, this is the ideal method. In reality, most CEOs either do not know about the BPM project or will not be interested because it is considered “just another project.” If they are aware of the project and it is one of the first BPM projects within the organization, they might want proof of the benefits that BPM can bring.

Even if the CEO is interested, it is often the case that the BPM initiative does not get sufficient attention, time, and resources from the CEO. Business processes are at the heart of an organization and require more than just lip service to monitor, manage, and improve them. This lack of attention, time, and resources can have a significant negative impact on the execution of the BPM initiative.

In addition, most approaches do not cater to the various stages of experience and embedding of BPM within an organization – from the first initial orientation of BPM as an important part of management, through to a business as usual activity. Obviously, there will be fundamentally different approaches, depending upon the level of organizational experience with BPM.

In the ideal situation the organization will have established and published their strategic vision, objectives, and goals. They will have embraced BPM, aligned the organization strategy with it, and set about establishing the process architecture – the pillars upon which individual BPM projects can be launched. The process architecture will also have been aligned with the organization’s strategy and the IT and business architectures. In most situations this will not be the case.
How Are BPM Projects Selected?

How an organization determines that a BPM project is required is fundamental to how the project will be conducted and how the Framework will be used by the organization and the project team.

We believe there are two primary methods used by organizations to commence a BPM project. The method will significantly influence why, where, and how a project is selected. The particular needs of the organization, the BPM maturity of the leadership team, and the leadership style of the CEO and senior executive management will determine which method is selected. The two methods of BPM project initiation we refer to are a **strategy driven** approach and an **operational initiative** approach.

1. **Strategy Driven Approach**

This is where the leadership team is executing the organization’s strategy, and the transition from strategy to implementation will mean that the organization’s leadership will have determined that certain implementation projects will have an impact upon some of the organization’s business processes. To address this impact there will be a need to change or redesign of a number of business processes, which will mean commencing BPM projects. This is “top down” management of an organization’s processes. The BPM project portfolio will, therefore, be determined, planned, and reviewed as a result of the strategy process, which comes either from a strategic change or a periodic strategic review.

Figure 1 shows the impact this will have on the Framework. The sequence is that the organization strategy will have determined that a BPM project is necessary and will know which processes will be impacted and, therefore, which processes will be part of the BPM project. As this is likely to be a BPM mature organization, they will, in all probability, have a process architecture, which will need to be referenced throughout the project. The Launch Pad phase may complete a few of the steps in less detail than normal but will still need to establish the project structure and team. The remaining Framework phases will still need to be completed.

![Figure 1. Strategy driven BPM projects](image)

2. **Operational Initiative Approach**

An operational initiative approach will, as the name suggests, be an initiative driven by the operational needs of an organization, business unit, or department. The triggers for this type of BPM project are likely to originate from a business problem.

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1 Each of the Framework’s ten phases and three *essentials* are explained in the book in great detail.
Operational initiatives will mean that the determination that a BPM project is required is at a lower level within an organization than the strategy level. The likely starting point will, therefore, be at the Launch Pad phase. A small project team will commence several of the Launch Pad phase steps to scope and gather sufficient information to know exactly where to start and how to determine the depth of the project (which steps will be necessary and how they will be executed are discussed in detail in the book). This will mean that the Organization Strategy phase and Process Architecture phase of the Framework will not be completed in their entirety, but only referenced for relevant information. It remains crucial to ensure alignment with the Organizational Strategy. Refer to Figure 2.

If compliance is the reason to commence a BPM project, it should be considered from a strategic perspective. If it has the backing of executive management, then it is a strategic driven approach; if it does not have the backing of executive management, then it should be considered as an operational initiative approach.

The organization strategy and process architecture are the foundation of any BPM project. The more extensive and bigger the project, the stronger the foundations must be. This is why in a strategy driven approach project there must be more effort in phases one and two than in an operational initiative approach project.

No matter how the need for a BPM project is determined, the next decision the organization will need to make is what type of BPM project will it be.

**Four scenarios of implementing BPM**

We would distinguish between the following four BPM project scenarios. Which one is selected will be determined by many factors, and these will be discussed:

1. “*Business as usual*” – this will be selected by the most BPM mature organizations. The organization and business managers will be totally committed to a process-centric organization, and BPM projects are simply business as usual activities or projects.

2. “*In the drivers seat*” is the next level of BPM maturity and is where there is a fully informed business manager who is totally committed to the implementation of BPM within the organization or business unit he/she is responsible for.

3. “*Pilot project*” is where there is a fully informed business manager who is yet to be totally convinced of the benefits of BPM and is willing to try it out on a small scale to start with before fully committing his/herself.

4. “*Under the radar*” - this is the least BPM mature organization and is where there is a partially informed business manager who is not yet committed and is not paying any, or much,
attention to BPM within the organization. This scenario could be a project under the guise of process improvement, and BPM may not be mentioned at all. An interesting observation of this type of project scenario is that some organizations may complete many “under the radar” BPM projects and still not obtain the attention of the appropriate business management in order to undertake BPM on a wider scale within the organization.

How To Determine Which Scenario Is Applicable?

The scenario depends upon the involvement and commitment of the business manager. In this context the business manager is the person who determines the business strategy, e.g., executive general manager or CEO. The more involved and committed they are, the more impact the project can, and should have, on the organization. This is shown in Figure 3, indicating that it important, first, to determine the business manager’s involvement, and only then is it appropriate to review the impact on the organization. Once an organization has fully implemented BPM (is process-centric and BPM mature), all BPM initiatives, whether small or large, will be in a “business as usual” project.

![Figure 3. BPM project scenarios](image)

Common characteristics of the various BPM scenarios are described in Table 1.

Once the organization has selected the implementation scenario for the BPM project and the project team has a clear understanding of how the BPM project was initiated, they will be able to commence using the Framework.

Where appropriate, we have mentioned at each phase in the Framework the impact of the scenarios on the steps to be used and the depth of use that is needed.

Implementation Framework

Creating a BPM project or program and project implementation framework that is appropriate to all organizations, and that will suit all circumstances, is challenging, especially when organizations are not the same. Even if organizations were the same, the approach to the implementation of BPM varies enormously both from organization to organization and within an organization.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Under the Radar</th>
<th>Pilot</th>
<th>In the Driver’s Seat</th>
<th>Business as Usual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of BPM initiative</strong></td>
<td>Project</td>
<td>Project or a</td>
<td>Program or an</td>
<td>Organizational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td>initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experience with BPM</strong></td>
<td>None / limited</td>
<td>None / limited</td>
<td>A number of</td>
<td>BPM embedded within the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>One or two</td>
<td>successful BPM projects or programs</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BPM projects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BPM Maturity of the</strong></td>
<td>Initial</td>
<td>Initial</td>
<td>Repeatable</td>
<td>Managed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Repeatable</td>
<td>Defined</td>
<td>Optimized</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Managed</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Optimized</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Triggers for BPM initiative</strong></td>
<td>Operational problem</td>
<td>Range of wide operational problem</td>
<td>Strategic issues: e.g. mergers, compliance</td>
<td>From operational problems to Strategic issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategic issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>People impacted</strong></td>
<td>Limited numbers</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Potentially everyone the relevant business unit</td>
<td>Depending on size of project: from small to everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational level</strong></td>
<td>Department</td>
<td>Business Unit</td>
<td>Organization or business unit</td>
<td>Depends on size of project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Project</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Common Characteristics of the Various BPM Scenarios.

Our experience as BPM consultants and implementation practitioners has provided us with the opportunity of developing such a framework, and one that we have used and refined in the implementation of BPM programs and projects. There are ten phases in the framework and these are described in detail in the book. The phases are: Organization strategy; Process architecture; Launch pad; Understand; Innovate; Develop; People; Implement; Realize value; and Sustainable performance. The three “essentials” are: Project Management; People Change Management; and Leadership.

**Iterative Approach**

On a first look it appears than our phased approach looks forward, with the completion of one phase before the next phase. However, a closer examination of each phase will reveal that there are links to the phases before and after. There are two different levels of interfaces:

- **Project level interface:** These are the interfaces between the various phases of a project. Some phases can be iterative; for example, between the Innovate and Develop phase there could be feedback and feedforward. A BPM solution could be chosen in the Innovate phase that, in the Develop phase, either provides additional features – or not all the required features – which necessitates going back to the Innovate phase to review the situation and determine how to proceed. At the beginning of each phase we show the main inputs from other phases. At the end of the chapter we show and describe the main outputs from the current phase. These provide the main feed-forward and feedback interfaces between phases.

- **Organization level interface:** BPM itself is also a process, and, as described in the book, no process is complete without sufficient feedback loops to ensure that the organization learns from their experiences (Refer to Figure 4). For example, as a result of executing a BPM project, there will be information obtained that may necessitate the review of the organization’s strategy and process architecture. At a more detailed level, a project post
implementation review will provide lessons learned that could be incorporated into future BPM projects (for example, the business case formulation in the Launch Pad phase).

![Figure 4. Organizational level iteration](image)

While we have provided a brief overview of how the Framework can be approached or used, the book provides in excess of 400 pages. This covers an overview section for executives of frequently asked BPM questions, a detailed explanation of the Framework phases (and the individual phase steps), and three essentials, as well as over 100 pages in the appendices of practical tools and techniques to assist the practitioner in implementations. There is also more than 50 case studies.

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