

Down Under

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A Powerful Metaphor for a Balanced BPM Implementation

Many BPM projects fail to deliver the projected business benefits, and in our experience we have found the most critical elements for success are a:

- committed leadership
- solution that is business-driven rather than IT-driven
- adequate people change management
- continuous focus on the achievement of the business benefits.

While most people are aware of these critical success factors, they fail to continuously and systematically apply them during the project implementation.

We would like to offer a metaphor that will help to highlight the importance of each of these components.

Problem analysis

The first mistake is that many BPM project sponsors are either:

- just managing the project, instead of leading it; or
- are simply not senior enough to achieve the fundamental changes required in the organization.

Ambitious BPM projects touch the core of an organization: its people and its business processes. It is an illusion to think that the people and business processes can fundamentally improve with a “management as usual” approach. It requires an active and inspiring leadership from senior management, particularly in showing and demonstrating the need for the change in the first place.

Many managers find it difficult to fully understand and appreciate the opportunities that BPM can provide an organization, as well as the challenges it provides on the way to success. Unfortunately some managers fall for the temptation to implement an automated BPM solution as the “silver-bullet”. While automation can bring significant benefits, it is critical that the business drives the changes, rather than the IT-department or an external vendor. It is also critical to fully analyze and understand if the automated solution is the correct course of action for the business problem that is being addressed. If not, there is an increased risk that a working solution is delivered that doesn’t necessarily fit within the organizational strategy and business problem.

When implementing new business processes, the project’s focus is often limited to an employees *ability* to work in the new situation, rather than their *willingness* to work in the new situation. This is often highlighted by one-way communication, such as, presentations, speeches, newsletters, email and posters informing employees about the project and the new way of working. Another indication is that employees only find out about the magnitude and type of the proposed changes when they are being trained or conducting User Acceptance Testing. This risks either wide-spread dissatisfaction or, at least, last minute system or process changes. These last minute changes inevitably lead to a sub-optimal overall solution.

Most projects complete a business-case. Most will report progress against the agreed projects costs and project plan. However, few will closely monitor and manage the business benefits as the project unfolds, especially the impact of delays on the projected benefits. Furthermore, not many projects have a solid baseline for true comparative analysis, or revisit the benefits once the detailed solution is agreed and implemented. The result of this lack of benefits management is that, at the end of the project, either the realization of the business case business benefits are not achieved, or that the results are 'surprisingly' disappointing.

The metaphor

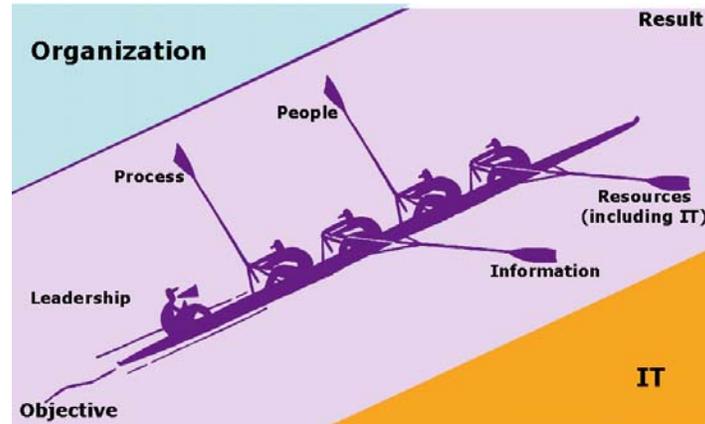


Figure 1 – The metaphor

Source: *Regatta* from Sogeti

The metaphor we use for a BPM project is a rowing team in a race to the finish line. We examine each of the components that are necessary for the team to cross the finish line within the allocated timeframe, without damaging the boat or crew. While this metaphor is described in our book, we have written this column as implementation is still the Achilles heel of most BPM projects.

Leadership: It is critical that *Leadership* supports the project team not just during the race, but also assists the team with the necessary training and provides advice and coaching. Leadership needs to provide the inspiration to go faster (at a sensible and appropriate speed). *Leadership should not be restricted to attending Steering Committees. Leadership requires hands-on support and coaching for the project team and active promotion of the project throughout the organization. Thus, this requires that sufficient time is available to perform this role. A BPM project which is one of the dozens of priorities of the leadership will not get sufficient attention to be successful.*

Process at first oar: The *Process* is at first oar and sets the speed for the other rowers: People, Resources and Information will follow Process. *In a BPM initiative the business process should be leading and Resources (including IT), People and Information should follow. Technology can provide significant benefits to the improvement of the business Process, however this should be business-driven rather than IT-driven.*

Balanced: If the rowers are out-of-sync because their speed or strength differs, it causes the boat to either stall or get stuck on one of the river banks. Balance is achieved by carefully matching the strength, weight and experience of all the participants in the boat. *Projects require that all implementation aspects of Process, People, Resources (including IT) and Information are balanced and aligned. If a BPM project/organization places too much emphasis on resources and information (the IT aspects) then the project will be pushed onto, and could get stuck on, the Organization bank (aspect), for example, people who are not committed.*

Result-orientation: There needs to be a continuous alignment between the finish line, the banks (staying within your allocated race lane) and the course of the boat. The progress should be measured at various pre-defined points in the course (e.g. every 200 meters) and relative to competitors. *BPM projects need to continuously calibrate their progress against the end-result.*

Reliable baselines metrics, detailed benefits and a tracking mechanism are essential. Furthermore, BPM managers are encouraged to continually measure their project's overall valued-add against other initiatives within the organization. This will ensure that they are still justified to claim the scarce time of the executives and deliver stakeholder expectations..

The result

As readers of BP Trends, we know we are preaching to the converted regarding the importance of a well planned implementation. We will, however, provide you with some more ammunition to convince the scores of managers and project managers who still want to slash implementation costs. In the figures below we demonstrate the benefits (including tangible dollars) that can be realized by implementing correctly.

A **traditional implementation** (figure 2) is characterized by little up-front effort and investment. By the time the solution is implemented, last minute changes have to be made, resulting in a significant, unforeseen, additional investment and lower sustainable results.

These situations are also characterized by delays in the actual implementation date, or the implementation itself running longer due to the need to run processes in parallel.

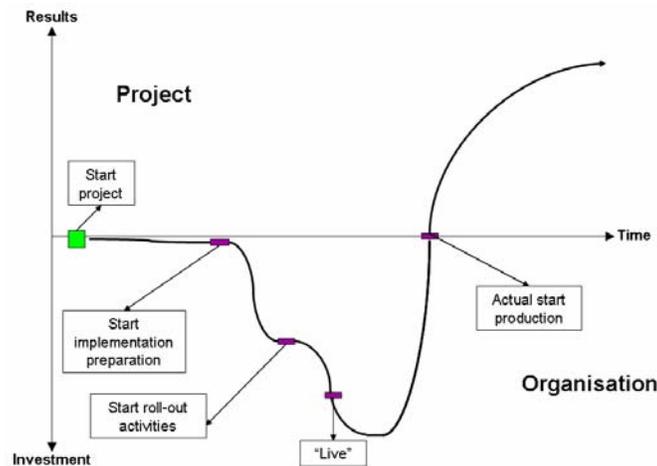


Figure 2 – Traditional implementation approach

A **structured implementation approach** (figure 3) requires that implementation preparations are commenced during the initiation phase of the project. This requires a higher up-front investment, however, once implemented the solution will be off to a flying start, resulting in quicker and better sustainable results.

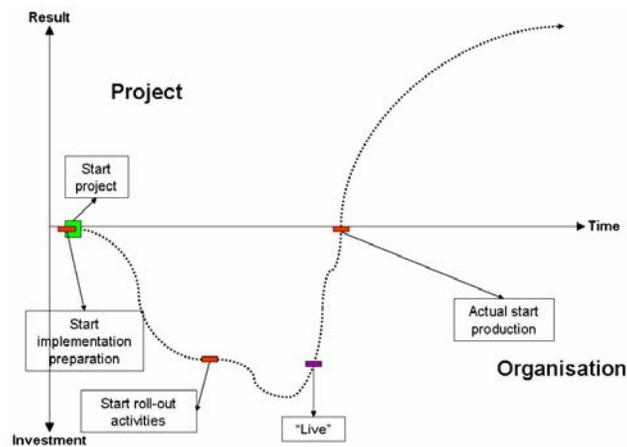
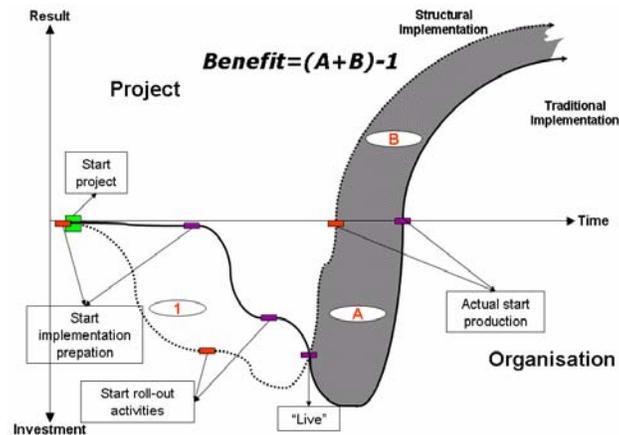


Figure 3 – Structured implementation approach

The additional investment can be reduced by leveraging the leadership commitment and enthusiasm of affected employees who will become active supporters of the project.

The overall result (figure 4) is evident: If we compare the two approaches, we can clearly see that despite the early additional investment in implementation thinking, the benefits of this approach are substantially higher than the tradition approach, because of:

- no additional cost at going “live”
- faster break-even
- higher benefits in long term
- the right commitment of employees, it is likely that the benefits will accelerate due to achieving continuous improvement.



Source: Regatta of Sogeti

Figure 4 – Overall result

Conclusion

A balanced implementation is a way of working that requires continuous application and diligence during project execution. We hope that this metaphor will assist you in continuously applying these commonly understood success factors of projects and in convincing your stakeholders to abide by them.

However, in practice most projects require an additional component to ensure success and that is a structural implementation approach/framework, with clear phases, steps and checklists to ensure that this concept is truly and consistently applied.

This sounds like “common sense”, but unfortunately, it is still to uncommon in most BPM projects.

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