



BPM in Europe

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Gaudi & Gravity

The “La Sagrada Família” in Barcelona Spain is one of the world’s most well known and impressive churches. In 1883 Antoni Gaudi started to lead the construction. Well before the age of CAD/CAM he had to design a building based on his dreams as an artist. “While designing buildings, he observed the forces of gravity and related catenary principles. Gaudí designed many of his structures upside down by hanging various weights on interconnected strings or chains, using gravity to calculate catenaries for a natural curved arch or vault.^[1]” “In mathematics, the catenary (derived from the Latin word *catena*, which means chain) is the shape of a hanging flexible chain or cable when supported at its ends and acted upon by a uniform gravitational force.^[2]” See the pictures below showing the model and the end result.



So basically, Gaudi used the law of gravity to model and create this impressive and complex building in the real physical world.

When we create a model of our imaginary world of IT, organization, and processes, we often refer to models of the physical world. We speak of the change management iceberg or the information architecture iceberg; we create, e.g., a strategy pyramid or ICT Governance Pyramid. And when describing the architecture of our organization or ICT we speak of a house with a roof, rooms, and a foundation. But why is only one ninth of the volume of an iceberg above water? Why does a pyramid have such a broad base? And why does a house need a foundation to stay upright? Yes! You've already guessed it: Newton's law of gravity.

To continue this line to thinking, you could wonder: Is there an equivalent for gravity in our imaginary world of IT, organization, and processes? If there is such an equivalent then we probably would have some very simple principles to shape our complex imaginary world. Just like Gaudi, we could connect the various chains (= our supply chains and processes!) of our organization, hang it upside down and let "i-gravity" do its thing to show us what the end result should look like; i.e., this could lead to a major reduction in the complexity of creating and aligning organizations.

To be honest, I do not know if the law of "i-gravity" actually exists but, if it does, I suspect that then the business process is the rope in Gaudi's model and entities like competitors, shareholders, regulations, and, most important of all, clients will pull an organization into its optimum shape.

As described, for example, in Gareth Morgan's book, *Images of Organization*, I realize that any metaphor has its shortcomings. It could even be that there is no equivalent of gravity in the imaginary world. However, if that is the case, then the argument could be that we should stop using icebergs, pyramids, or houses to describe the imaginary world as these may be limiting the way we could be looking at it.

Either way, I would like to ask the reader to consider if there is indeed a law of "i-gravity" or, if it does not exist, what alternative images can we begin to use? In any case, I hope that Gaudi will inspire you to think about some creative solutions.

[1] – quote from wikipedia.org on Gaudi

[2] – quote from wikipedia.org on Catenary.