TRAPS AND SURPRISES:

What to Expect When Implementing a Business Process Management System

WEBCON®

00 INTRODUCTION

For centuries, human innovations emerged as answers to specific problems, and it is no different in the field of business process management these days. Organizations start to consider innovative approaches when they are prevented from taking advantage of their full potential, or are forced to waste resources like time, labor and money.

One such problem that a business process management (BPM) solution usually solves first is excessive paperwork, most often in the form of invoices or correspondence. However, with time, enterprises begin to consider their BPM solution in a broader perspective. Many organizations **expand their systems within the first year, even though they initially had no such plans.** This is because workflows do not operate in a void. A single active workflow creates the need to simplify consequential operations by transforming them into digital processes. This is why organizations want to create more and more applications within the system: tangible benefits experienced in every area and every level of the company.

But before this happens, the first implementation of a Business Process Management (BPM) system is usually a journey into the unknown. **The venture's success greatly depends on developing an appropriate approach to the implementation and planning the whole process in a way that allows you to understand the specifics of individual stages,** thereby eliminating potential disappointment.

80%

of projects start with **a single document workflow**

92%

of projects is continued even in the first year after implementation

Fig. 1 Observations based on 1000+ business application projects implemented over 11 years. Source: WEBCON

IMPLEMENTATION COURSE:

| 01 ANALYSIS | 02 CONFIGURATION | 03 TESTS | 04 LAUNCH |

Fig. 2. The course of implementation

01 ANALYSIS

The implementation process starts with the **analysis stage**. Here we collect the general, and then specific requirements of the future BPM solution. The requirements pertain to the system's target function and the processes it is intended to improve. At this stage, **one of the most common traps to avoid is trying a 1:1 conversion of an analog process into a digital one.**

Often existing operations in a company are surprisingly complicated, and deeply entrenched. When the initial focus is only on the configuration of the tool, the selected solution's potential is limited and can't be used as the foundation for optimization. Only after launching the system and experiencing its advantages does it become obvious that certain operations can be done in an optimized way.

On the other hand, there is also the temptation to **adapt existing processes to an inflexible solution, thus forcing the process to work counterintuitively** e.g. in the case of an advanced approval system. In such instances, optimization is not organic and does not follow a conscious decision. Rather, it is artificial, often forced, or introduced as a matter of principle. This situation can be avoided if an experienced consultant recommends the alternative possibilities of the system that can be applied in that instance.

Another element hindering efficient implementation is **a prolonged approval process of the analysis stage**. The reason is often the decision makers' attempt to cross all the t's and dot all the i's in the project scenario, to avoid responsibility for any missing requirement. In extreme cases, a long approval process can even make the conducted analysis obsolete. One real-life example is a client abandoning their previously chosen solution in favor of WEBCON BPS, after eight months of futile analysis. WEBCON BPS was then successfully implemented in just three months.

As shown in the example presented above, **not only is preparing for all potential situations not recommended, but it is simply not feasible**. This is because conditions of the business environment are subject to constant change, not to mention other legal, economic, or social factors. It is therefore very important **to ensure the option of gradual expansion and modification of the chosen system, according to emerging business needs**.

The best option at the analysis stage is to apply the Pareto principle and try to **handle 80% of processes with 20% of resources, leaving remaining processes to subsequent stages of development**. Doing so will ensure you achieve major business benefits in a short time span.
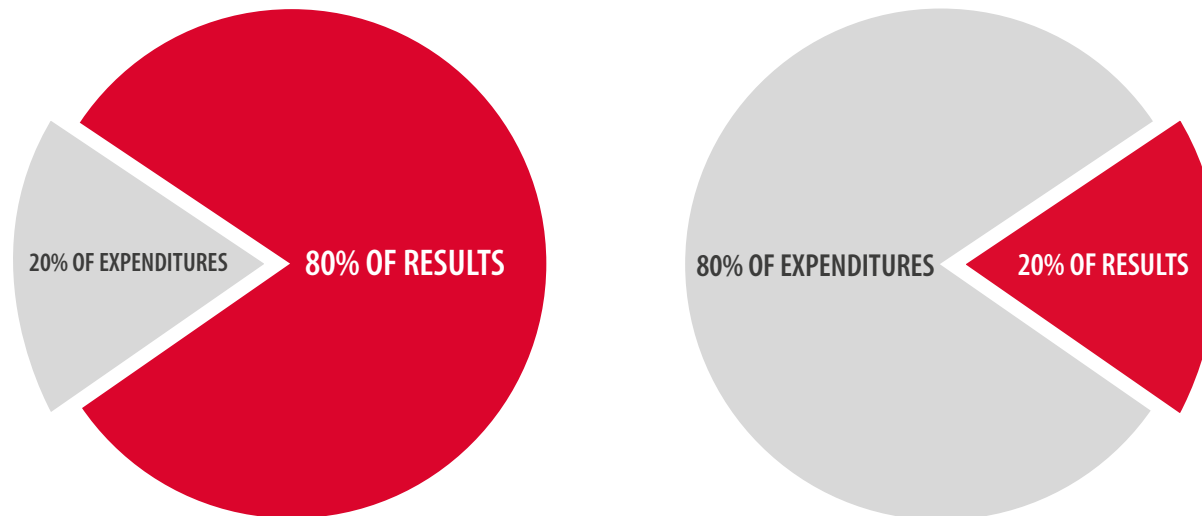
THE PARETO PRINCIPLE (80/20):

Fig. 3 The Pareto principle (80/20)

02 CONFIGURATION

The configuration stage is when the solution is prepared based on the previously established and approved guidelines. For some systems, once this decision has been made, the parameters either cannot be changed or such changes are too expensive or inconvenient to be feasible.

In turnkey systems, **the potential for future adjustments is thwarted** as custom coding prevents changes to the code during the system's development. Modifications are possible only when the work is done, but even then it is not an easy task.

Off-the-shelf solutions introduce other challenges as well. One of them is t**he inconvenience brought by employee rotation**. A certain WEBCON client learned this fact under very unpleasant circumstances. The programmer who was developing their dedicated solution for nine months moved to a different company. The unfinished system was handed over to an external company and it soon turned out that continuing the project would cost almost as much as developing a new system from scratch.

Another inconvenience facing companies implementing BPM systems is **no implementation iteration**. This means that progress can't be seen until the project's configuration stage is complete. **Since there are no visible results here, it becomes harder for the business to trust IT**. When there is no trust, it is harder to perform tests and the users have no motivation to engage in trying the delivered solutions, as they do not trust the tool's potential from the very start. However, when business sees the results during the implementation process, they feel like an equal partner with IT, whose needs are taken into consideration in the optimization process. **This approach not only improves trust in IT, but also supports the testing stage**. When employees want to test the solution that has been created for them, the development of the whole project is accelerated and accomplished more efficiently.

The configuration stage must include integration with current systems and recognize their potential to change in the future. WEBCON's experience has shown that **existing external systems are often linked to no longer existing workflows**. This is because subsequent workflows and external systems, including niche and industry-specific, were not taken into consideration. The integration capabilities of any BPM tool you consider should be able to meet both current and future needs, to eliminate any potential for future disappointment. WEBCON BPS makes it easy for clients to integrate newly-acquired companies. Regardless of whether the new company is located in the same country or abroad, the platform lets them operate harmoniously without changing the ERP system already in place. In one case, WEBCON BPS is being used to synchronize 17 different ERP systems!

01 ANALYSIS   02 CONFIGURATION   **03 TESTS**   04 LAUNCH

The testing stage is when previously unplanned requirements for the BPM system are discovered. They are followed by the first change requests that come in.

When choosing a solution, you will want to make sure that it will accept changes even after the project is closed. This is often impossible and end users are left only testing what the vendor provided, followed by fixes of any potential bugs. This approach makes it hard to maintain the involvement of business departments, as they see such tests as an additional burden. As they are unable to follow the appropriate paths, they become frustrated and unwilling to perform the tests. This might delay the implementation or derail it altogether.

Furthermore, if the employee's first contact with the system is difficult and tedious, and they know they will have to cope with the existing bugs on a daily basis until the next major update, they will have a negative attitude towards the tool right from the start. On the other hand, **when an employee sees that reported comments and fixes are implemented right away, they will not hesitate to test the tool and use it in the future. They will be assured that the system will do its job and that any missing features will be quickly introduced**.

Another frequently omitted element in the system test is the **human factor**. The implementation of a BPM system leads to a change in the way people work. Digital transformations are not limited to the technical aspect of introducing a new tool, but require appropriate management adjustments. A new way of organizing work affects many people and their work habits. Employees won't consent to using any tool without appropriate preparation, and even then success may only be superficial. **When the system is released, the people who will use it should be instructed about its benefits and encouraged to use it**. An intuitive interface which does not intimidate the user and helps them perform complicated or tedious tasks will certainly be appreciated here!

04 LAUNCH

When the solution is finally implemented, the role of the vendor may seemingly end. However, from the perspective of a BPM system, the first application is only the beginning of the digital transformation, rather than the end of the road.

WEBCON's market experience proves that **within one month of the first implementation, more operating aspects appear which can be improved and simplified**. Change is inevitable after all, as procedures change over time. If the previous stages of implementation have been carried out correctly, the employees themselves will likely be coming to IT with requests for new applications.

A single application will always "branch out" with workflows that support related processes. Over time, satisfied employees of business departments will ask IT for further improvements. These include applications related to administration, business trips, vacations, correspondence, etc.. As a result, the most important feature of a BPM system is its ability to convert requests and processes into workflows (even more so when it comes to industry-, or company-specific processes).

This flexibility is showcased in workflows created independently by WEBCON's clients using the WEBCON BPS platform. These include niche business applications like supporting sensory tests of products, cistern cleanliness, and monitoring cargo of incoming and departing trucks.

05 CONCLUSION

Embracing the digital transformation is no longer a privilege only available to the most innovative companies. At this point, **companies must accept digitization and automation to stay competitive in the market**.

According to the experts at Gartner, **83% of companies worldwide will be using a technology-based business model by 2019**. However, many organizations are still afraid of BPM systems. This is not just because of the costs involved, but mainly due to the tremendous challenges of digitization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution they see.

When the implementation of a BPM system is appropriately planned and performed, the risk is mitigated. Moreover, the business benefits are seen right away, provided you remember the following:

1. The selected BPM system must be as flexible as possible. This is to enable easy and inexpensive management of changes at every implementation stage, throughout the lifespan of the solution.

2. The BPM system cannot slow the business. On the contrary, it should be an effective resource used to support every aspect of the company's operations.

3. Implementation of the first workflow initiates a groundbreaking change in how the organization works. This is something that cannot be omitted or disregarded.

4. Successful implementations are determined by the human factor. This also applies to the system's adaptation among the end-users. Implementation will never be 100% successful without the right people working for both the client and the system's vendor.

Choosing the right solution is just as important as obtaining the right human expertise. BPM consultants can provide useful advice on maximizing the benefits both now and in the future.

Questions? Doubts? Contact us at **www.webcon.com**

About the author:

Tomasz Borek is enthusiastic about applying easy solutions in complicated issues. He has 10 years of experience in customer consultancy, and for 4 years has been analyzing business processes for **WEBCON**. As Senior Consultant, he merges the roles of BPM expert, Key Account Manager and Technical Consultant.

Tomasz is a keen advocate of **WEBCON BPS**, as he believes that any process can be improved. In devoting himself fully to the growth of his clients, he develops professionally and strives for mutual success. His professional credibility and skills gained him the trust of a number of discerning clients, both Polish and international.

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