

## Business Benefits Realization

*By Melvyn Lee*

Large enterprises today are concerned about securing their IT investments. They are looking for palpable returns that are measurable and maintainable throughout their business growth to justify their decisions on IT project investments.

Apart from technology benefit sound bites, the immaculacy of technology replacing “brawn” work, by way of automation, cannot really justify true IT investments. Shareholders and stakeholders alike are much more informed and bold enough today to delve into deeper return values because there are “more than meet the eyes” in any project implementations. These interest groups are seeking profitable benefits that can show superior values from their completed projects.

### **Business User Community Knows Best**

IT Service Providers seldom have the true picture of how best to reap from sowing substantial amount of dollar investments into IT projects. That is because they are simply not running the businesses of their prospects. IT Providers devoid of sufficient insights into the business needs of an organization can only focus on their product features and seldom understand the intrinsic business challenges to map product features to business requirements in order to generate strategic business benefits.

Invariably, it is IT Providers that change existing business practices of an organization by demanding their prospects to conform to its product offerings, often citing time and cost constraints to restrict tailoring of their products. A lack of business alignment to a client’s business expectations can therefore cause a loss of heritage of practices of the organization that have been proven successful over the years.

Running a business is an art and IT products are used as scientific methods or facilitators to support a business, not overruling it. This is because business users of an organization with deep set of their industry needs can end up frustrated with the advent of “fresh” practices that are not practical and lack relevance or instinctiveness to market needs.

It is imperative for business users to know the benefits that can be produced after a project completes. Their business planning management must be able to strategically weave into the quilt of the product capabilities in order to take them through the business journey and produce the required business benefits. IT vendors and users must engage deeply in developing business strategy, not just to complete the project sake itself.

In many high budget IT initiatives, there must be a business board group acting as the backbone and prime decision makers to see through and support the implementations. These should be the ones who are visionary, experts in the organization business environment and are willing to take risks to push the project to the finish line, to bring positive changes to the corporate realm. These business decision makers are also pundits in business policies so they should also be fully sensitive to any changes that might “strike a chord” on existing fundamentals of their organization’s business. Their job is also to sound the alarm and intervene where required if in anticipation of any malignant outcome of a change implementation.

Analogically speaking, if a surgery (a type of implementation) that does not bring about systemic change (a type of benefit) to the overall health of a person, then a serious re-diagnosis should be called forth. It does perceptively reveal that the underlying cause has failed to be located.

### **Transformational Change with Benefit Impact**

Big changes with beneficial aims are called transformational change. Transformational changes must never claim to be of grandeur level if an organization cannot experience a new shift to higher productivity or quality values.

True transformational changes must impact people level. People should experience a release from “captivity” of old mindset and embrace a new culture of doing things. A transformational change when successful will deliver intrinsic and extrinsic values in people’s pattern of working. It changes the workforce behavioral pattern, emotionally enabling them to appreciate the productivity level they can attain in their daily works. Eventually, they will accept and graft themselves into the corporate identity of their organizations.

The results of transformational changes should also provide management a strategic space to develop new ideas to pursue long term vision or to reinforce the existing ones. Benefits can open up timely avenues to access new resources for further development which were not available before.

Needless to say, any transformation change must be taken advantage of. The secret to transformational advantage is to discern the outworking of a possible chain reaction that can intentionally birth greater benefits. A simple example, a change that significantly reduces a product lifecycle time could lend an advantage to revising an important marketing strategy in order to deliver the product on a quicker turnaround time.

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## **Mistaken Identity: End Product is Not Benefit**

A product or service created by a project will produce new functionalities at best. However the product or service itself is not an end. They are actually personification of things to come. They are medium to bring changes that will deliver real benefits.

Tragically, many projects traditionally attribute success to project KPI chiefly because they are not aware of how to quantify real benefits. A project may claim its success in its implementation, but if deliver no or little benefits it will fail to permeate influence in the minds of shareholders. In a matter of time the project will lose its credential instead of stoking the fire of interest for more investments for future initiatives.

The art of creating benefits is to maximize a product or service as a vehicle to deliver something larger than the product or service itself. Benefits must outgrow the end product or service to bring about a reign of transformation. When a Human Resource project implementation completes, it produces HR products or functionalities so that the benefits can be experienced at staff level whose work efforts are captured and recognized. Such benefit is a win-win for the employer and employee who will see an increase in productivity with an ability to validate labor hours put into the working environment.

Recognizing benefits of a product or service requires envisioning inspiration. We need to see the end from the beginning. A product or service must be harnessed in a right way before its benefits effects show up. No benefits should be accidental nor should a product or service be maneuvered to justify the means.

Therefore, we must ask critical questions before embarking on a project. It must revolve around the end product in relation to producing the right benefits. Only then it deserves our shareholders attention to help start the journey of a project.

## **Realistic About Benefits Achievements**

Organizations that are not true to what can be achieved after an IT transformational project completes will only deceive themselves into experiencing surficial changes when the inner sanctum of their businesses remain status quo. Such “feel good” change can in fact incur more cost. And lack of end values felt in a so-called changed environment will only deliver a placebo effect.

Benefits realization is a program and must be crafted into a roadmap. With a roadmap we know where and when to start campaigning for benefits. When realistic benefits are campaigned from the start of a project, we can create an atmosphere of expectations among direct and non-direct stakeholders. This will develop confidence at all levels of an organization creating momentum towards achieving the vision of benefits.

Whilst profit returns is the touchstone of a transformation pursuit, empirical evidence must be available to show convincingly the symptoms of benefits development. If a politician rhetoric speech continues to speak of change that would increase employment rate yet the state level is showing dull progress on job creations in ratio to its populace, we would know the vision is merely a pipedream.

Naturally, shareholders and stakeholders alike are eager to see the contrast between the before and after impact of a project. Reliable indicators must be developed before we can experience the full manifestation of benefits. This is important in monitoring the progress of benefits.

However, not all benefits are unfolded at the moment a project ends. Creation of benefits goes through a crystallization process. The popular phrase the horse must come before the cart applies. Changes must come before benefits. And changes bring discomfort. It gets people to comply with new rules of business, report differently than what they used to do and may have imposed conditions before we get the right results. There are also process relationships which take time to work through before the pearls of benefits can be formed and savored at a broader level.

We need to be realistic of the outworking and outcome of our projects before we can enjoy the fruits of our benefits.

### **Benefits Categorization**

When the purpose of benefits is ambiguous, we can dangerously miss who we are supposed to target when the project is over. By aiming benefits to the right audience, we gain early and continual support even after the project has long gone completed.

By way of focusing, we provide opportunities for more sponsorship to take ownership when our stakeholders are confident of the type of benefits they would experience. By categorizing benefits, we sharpen our focus on the vision of a project with lasting impact in mind.

Benefits categorization will prepare stakeholders for imminence. This gives them a binocular vision to feel who would benefits and how far the benefits will take them to experience those benefits in the distance.

Different target audiences have different expectations of benefits. Benefits can take on many facets. Some benefits can replace predecessor benefits. Others can compound upon earlier benefits while many others can accentuate current benefits. Benefits can also be integrated with other benefits to consummate a larger purpose. However the outcome of benefits, they must be focused on who would be the beneficiaries.

## **Process of Change**

The process of change requires adjustments and for others it can be a gut wrenching experience. As the saying goes, before things get better, they will get worse first. No shell shocking should hit anyone. Benefits must serve the people who participate in the change or outside the change process otherwise it is called consequences. A fully developed benefit may ostensibly dilute the concentration of job activities with possible removal of existing roles. We must therefore also embrace both the “good” and “dark” side of changes if we want to see the greater effects of benefits.

Changes and benefits are inseparable twins. All benefits reaped will vindicate changes sowed. Therefore, in sequence, as changes take place, the silhouette of benefits should also begin to take form. And as the process of change begin to breakdown fortified mindsets, new patterns of working become more acceptable. Over a passage of time, benefits become a natural outcome because we have people engaging the benefits rather than ignoring or going against them.

It is true that transformational changes can traumatize the defenders of the status quo. Good education, frequent dialogues and “top-down” campaign must be set off prior to the start of a project. Since people are made up of mass of nerves, emotional change must be managed prudently before physical changes can set in. If advocating benefits remain unconvincing and draws drumbeat of criticism, we have a doom script in our hands.

The subject on change process can plummet into deeper discussion and behooves a whole new chapter to deal with this area.

## **Timeline for Change**

Because human emotions are involved in any transformational change, timeline for the change is essential. People’s perception on a project and their sensory must be related to the proximity of benefits. Because most stakeholders are unable to experience immediate benefits, the task of a project sponsor is to lay down the benefits into time line. Vanguards of benefits should know how to break down benefits into stages in relation to time and season to prepare others for the coming benefits.

We need to debut on pilot runs if a transformational change is drastic. Foretasting some early benefits can teardown early walls of resistance. The proverbial “time can heal” should be applicable to benefits realization. Adaptation to new benefits is time bound before it is welcomed as norm practice. It is therefore crucial that no project should be deferred too long so as not to wear out the expectations of stakeholders.

Battle of people’s minds must be top of the agenda to move transformational change into full swing. This is because the minds of people are inordinately moored to complacency and current orders. Our mind is a series of hurdle which must be

overcome through stages. The fear is that if the users of benefits lose their grip on its benefit purposes over time, we will no longer have sustaining power to convince them of existing or further benefits. Therefore, when developing benefits we need long term development for sustenance purpose. The benefits we have in mind must resonant many years to come.

We must make full use of timeline and strategically develop benefits to associate them with quality of life. These associations matter most to cover the basic needs of people be it within the organization or outside of it.

### **Helming the Benefits**

Without doubt, the whole process of delivering benefits demands good leadership. It takes visionary leaders with good foresight to behold the benefits and see its far reaching effects. Because benefit is an ultimate experience, leaders must manage and led the people to become recipients of it. They must wrestle with impending resistance and win the hearts of the people to see new progress ahead.

Benefits are sometimes attached with high risks. High risks projects today are in dire need of leaders not managers to lead the path where others have not gone before.

### **Sustaining the Benefits**

Maintaining benefits remain a challenge and will involve people to make it happen. We must look to passionate people as agent of sustenance. Benefits program and its process path can only serve to establish a proper delivery infrastructure. However, it is people that apply the kinetics on benefits program and help sustain it as a lifelong cycle.

Benefits delivery when regulated through formal and conscious practices should become part of an organization DNA. This will cultivate into an operating lifestyle. Overtime, the enduring ability to sustain benefits can create a new platform for innovative solutions. When people are deeply committed to making sure it delivers the correct benefits, its effects can create a future with hope for tomorrow.

Now when considering to divest an existing product or service, the benefits can likewise go into extinction. It is important for the benefits themselves to outweigh the cost of sustaining the product or service, for it to survive the onslaught of cost escalation. The overall sustenance plan will need to consider the total cost ownership of the product or service and benefits delivery in order to continue with the passion of benefits delivery.

## **Creating Benefits Chain**

Benefits chain is what excites alliances and business network partners alike. Benefits production can open new ideas and change internal process of our business partners to follow suite with the effects of benefits. By adding benefit to the network chain, we plow the ground for our partners to develop their own seeds of benefits within their delivery capacity.

Although many projects are aimed at localizing benefits, the coming of age is to develop benefit models that would evolve to become global using Benefit Creation Partnership. Our vision on benefits, therefore, should be borderless.

Cross boundary products are already extending geographically for user clients to enjoy the same benefits program no matter which part of the globe they are located at. The trend to come is to develop single source of product or service to become benefit customizable so as to suite any local preferences and become a product or service with benefits diversification. That should be the way forward developing and implementing IT products or services.

## **Conclusion**

IT implementers must look beyond the horizon of their implementations. The benefits produced from an implementation will speak for themselves. When benefits of a product or service receive credible feedbacks, the product or service becomes a testament of success without much touting.

We must understand the existing and future business landscape of our clients to understand the purpose and longevity of our products or services. Benefit visualization is the hope of things to come. As modernization impacts social change, visionary and innovative people are much needed assets in organizations to create leading edge products or services to birth benefits.

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## About the Author



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