

# Benefits management: Lost or found in translation



Richard Breese <sup>a,\*</sup>, Stephen Jenner <sup>b</sup>, Carlos Eduardo Martins Serra <sup>c</sup>, John Thorp <sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Sheffield Business School, Sheffield Hallam University, UK*

<sup>b</sup> *QUT Graduate School of Business, Australia*

<sup>c</sup> *Lloyd's Register Energy, London, UK*

<sup>d</sup> *The Thorp Network Inc., Victoria, BC, Canada*

Received 4 November 2014; received in revised form 5 June 2015; accepted 7 June 2015

Available online 30 June 2015

## Abstract

It is now about 25 years since the emergence of benefits management (BM), but hitherto it has had limited impact on project management and even less on general management practices. This is despite evidence that a focus on benefits improves the success rate of projects and programmes. One of the areas for research to explain the limited uptake concerns the spread of knowledge on BM and its adoption by organisations. The theoretical lens of translation is used to examine this issue, which focuses on the processes through which management ideas spread and influence management practice. The global development of BM is traced to identify the changes in translation processes over time and the current geographical patterns of usage. This analysis is used in conjunction with the limited evidence available on translation processes at the level of the organisation to identify key factors for the impact of BM in the future.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. APM and IPMA. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Benefits management; Benefits realisation; Value management; Managing programmes and portfolios; Knowledge management

## 1. Introduction

The term ‘benefits management’ was first used in the late 1980s (Farbey et al., 1999), when concerns were raised that major investments in business change shaped and enabled by ICT were not achieving the expected benefits (Bradley, 2006; Marchand, 2004; Thorp, 1998; Ward and Daniel, 2006). The interest in benefits and the linked concept of ‘value’ have been associated with the introduction of programme and portfolio management levels (OGC, 2007, 2011), as part of what Morris (2011) has called ‘enterprise-wide’ project management. Benefits management<sup>1</sup> (BM) has therefore been an important part of the development of project management in the late

twentieth and early twenty-first century, as efforts have been made to link individual projects, together with the management of change, more closely to organisational strategies and the focus has moved from product creation to value creation (Winter et al., 2006).

There is a growing body of evidence that the use of BM practices enhances the likelihood of projects achieving organisational goals, both in relation to IT investments (Ashurst, 2012; Ward and Daniel, 2012; Ward et al., 2007) and more generally (Serra and Kunc, 2015). Despite this, the uptake of BM practices has been low, with few organisations taking a comprehensive, full life-cycle approach to BM. A greater focus on BM could therefore help to address the persistently high failure rate of projects, particularly those involving IT-enabled change (Standish Group, 2013; Ward and Daniel, 2012).

There are a number of factors which might explain the low take up of BM. There are problems over the concepts of ‘benefits’ and ‘value’ which are partly due to the multiple meanings of the terms themselves (Winter et al., 2006) and the lack of consistency in the definitions developed by different

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [r.breese@shu.ac.uk](mailto:r.breese@shu.ac.uk) (R. Breese).

<sup>1</sup> There are minor variations on the term ‘benefits management’ in both business practice and the academic literature, such as ‘benefit management’ (Zwikael, 2014) or ‘benefit(s) realisation management’ (Bradley, 2006). These alternative terms are treated here as being synonymous with ‘benefits management’.

professional groups, such as economists, accountants and project managers, which means that there is a lack of agreement on how to classify and measure benefits (Jenner, 2009). Furthermore, focusing attention on the creation of value and the realisation of benefits has implications for the organisation as a whole, affecting strategies at corporate, business and operational levels (Johnson et al., 2014) and diverse management domains, such as asset management and performance management. This means it challenges the wider mindset in an organisation (Jenner, 2009; Thorp, 1998) and hence may struggle to gain acceptance.

The literature on BM is poorly developed compared to many other aspects of project management. Thus, in the analysis of the evolution of project management research by Turner et al. (2011), BM does not figure as a research category. The literature which does exist tends to be either ‘how to do it’ guides (Bradley, 2006, 2010; Payne, 2007; Thorp, 1998, 2003) or analysis of BM processes and practices (APM, 2010; APM, 2012; Ashurst, 2012; Breese, 2012; Coombs, 2015; Lin and Pervan, 2003; Lin et al., 2005b; Serra and Kunc, 2015; Ward et al., 2007). Where the processes involved in the adoption of BM are mentioned they may be identified as being subject to further analysis of the data (Ward et al., 2007) or as a topic for further research (Serra and Kunc, 2015). A few studies, mainly of IT enabled change in Scandinavia, have investigated the transfer of BM ideas and practices, either between organisations or within organisations (Hellang et al., 2013; Nielsen, 2013; Paivarinta et al., 2007), starting to build up an evidence base on the adoption of BM at the micro-scale. At the macro-scale, there has been little analysis of the current patterns of usage of BM on a global basis or exploration of the historical development of BM which has led to those patterns. This article addresses the neglect in the literature on the macro-scale level (Sections 3 and 4), and then reviews the emerging literature at the micro-scale (Section 5). This leads on to a discussion of the implications for the future of BM as a management idea, in terms of its impact on management practices (Section 6). In focussing attention on the uptake of BM, this article will be of use to academics seeking to explain current patterns of adoption, and also practitioners, trainers, policy makers and professional bodies who are seeking to promote the use of BM.

## 2. Theoretical background

This article uses the theoretical lens of translation to examine the spread of knowledge on BM and its adoption and usage. Translation is an alternative to the traditional approach to analysis of the transfer of innovations in management ideas and practices, which is based on the passive notion of *diffusion* (Rogers, 2003). Translation is a more fluid concept for exploring knowledge transfer (Freeman, 2009), focusing on the trajectories that management ideas take across space and time (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996; Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005). It has developed out of actor-network theory and various forms of institutionalism — ‘old’, ‘new’ and ‘Scandinavian’, (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996, 2005). Translation of management ideas involves them being turned into objects, in the form of books, guidance and presentations, so they can be communicated

from place to place and adopted by organisations (a process of institutionalisation). The organisations can then use them as a basis for action. During its trajectories, there will be changes to the management idea, affecting both those who do the translating and those to whom it is translated (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996). The analysis of what changes and what stays the same in the process of translation is an aid to explanation. For example, the Best Value reform in the UK was closely imitated in Sweden without using the name, whereas in Victoria, Australia, the state government adopted the term but there were more differences than similarities in what was implemented. (Solli et al., 2005).

The concept of translation was seen to offer opportunities for explanation of the patterns of uptake of BM because it focuses attention on the complexities of the process of transferring knowledge. It allows for multiple meanings of concepts and the difficulties involved in translating from one language to another (Freeman, 2009). The phase ‘lost in translation’ is a commonly used one, while ‘found in translation’ conveys the notion of *discovery* which occurs when a management idea is first encountered by an individual and changes their approach to their work in some way. Both the person and the idea are changed in the act of discovery (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996). Translation is therefore a particularly appropriate concept for analysing new management ideas, such as BM, which challenge existing organisational cultures.

Translation research has a cross-disciplinary focus (Freeman, 2009) and is relevant to many management fields, such as organisational change, innovation and learning, and institutional theory. It is itself continuing to evolve as a management idea (Spyridonidis et al., 2014) and be used in new research domains. A translational approach to organisational project management research is becoming more common (Drouin et al., 2014), but this has generally focussed on the translation of research findings into project management practice (Aubry, 2014) or the translation of other branches of strategic management theory into project management research contexts (Killen et al., 2014). This article is primarily concerned with the translation of management ideas into and within organisations and their adoption in management practice.

Only one example of BM research (Nielsen, 2013) has been found in the literature which refers to the bodies of theory associated with translation. Therefore, translation is used as a lens through which to analyse the evidence base on BM. Section 3 is concerned with the translation of BM over time, examining how BM has developed from its origins to the present day. It is based on surveys of the literature on BM and related themes, as well as the personal knowledge of the authors, whose perspective is informed in each case by their involvement in the historical development of BM. Section 3 uses the theoretical lens of translation to develop a layers/stages model of the development of BM over time. Section 4 builds on this model to incorporate an explicitly spatial dimension into the analysis of translation processes. Focusing at the global level, it explores the spread of BM across geographical and linguistic boundaries. Section 5 outlines the growing research interest in the adoption of BM and reviews studies which contain insights about the translation of BM at the micro-scale,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/275555>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/275555>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)