

Business Process Improvement

Without dedicated time to improve work processes, the people who work in publicly funded organisations can find themselves stuck in a busy cycle of tasks and activities that may be outdated, ill-designed, and misaligned with current objectives. By devoting time and resources to targeted business process improvement, publicly funded organisations and employees can find ways to operate more efficiently and to create more public value.

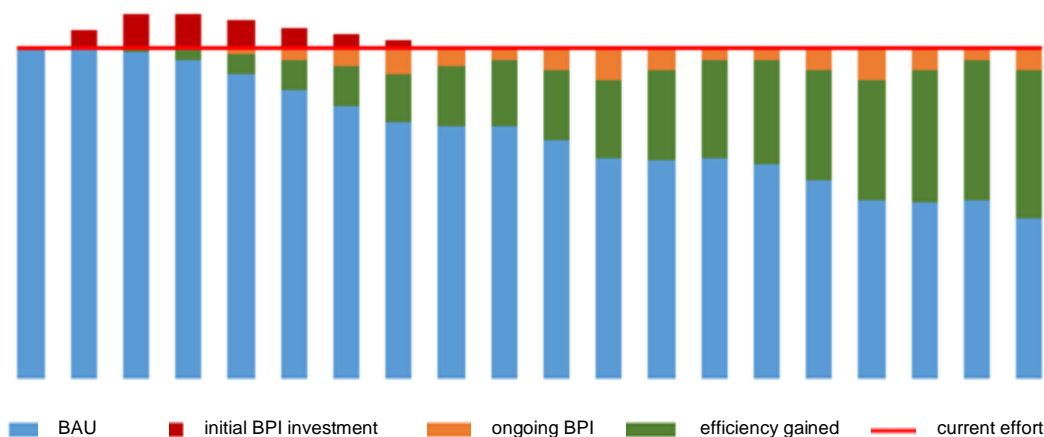
Investment in business process improvement (BPI), particularly in publicly funded organisations, is often subjugated to business as usual (BAU) demands. The challenge of balancing demand for services with resource constraints, and the high priority placed on creating immediate and measurable public value, means that BAU often consumes all available resources. BPI, for which benefits are less immediate and less readily defined, is often neglected.

If all our resources are focused on delivering the same processes day after day, then nothing is left for innovation, improvement, or adaptation to changing needs. This means that publicly funded organisations may struggle to respond to changes or opportunities that should have major implications for their work.

Over time, the misalignment of inflexible business processes with shifting public needs and policy objectives can lead to both inefficiency and ineffectiveness.

Investing in BPI also usually involves short-term risk and an initial diversion of effort from BAU. This can be a challenge for organisations that are more tolerant of an ineffective or inefficient status quo than of failures in the active pursuit of better results.

Organisations with established BPI cultures recognise that the risk of inaction is often greater than the risk of experimentation. These organisations tolerate some risk in the pursuit of longer-term improvement. Cultivating such a culture can encourage staff to find ways to do more, or better, work without extra cost.



Methodologies such as LEAN, Six Sigma, and Total Quality Management can all help to identify and realise business process improvements. The decision to devote meaningful time and resources to BPI is more important than the choice of methodology.

For organisations that consume all available resources in BAU and cannot reallocate any of that effort to BPI, an initial short-term investment of additional resources can create both momentum and space for further BPI efforts. Even small investments can deliver substantial efficiency improvements for organisations that dedicate the resources freed up by BPI to deliver more BPI and gain more efficiency. Larger initial investment gives larger potential returns. Sustained effort builds more returns over time.

Realising these benefits requires deliberate attention to drive adoption of improved processes and to embed a culture of continuous BPI. If superseded processes linger after better processes have been introduced, the organisation will not realise the full benefits of the change. This means resources will not be freed up to do more BAU work, or to do more BPI. Without commitment to rigorous continuous improvement, then benefits can be eroded quickly and the organisation will be less likely to recognise and act on future opportunities for organisation-wide improvement that enable more value to be created with equal effort.

Allocating time and resources for BPI can help publicly funded organisations and managers to break the cycle of being too busy to create more public value.