

ENABLING THE PROJECT OWNER ROLE FOR BENEFITS REALIZATION MANAGEMENT:

A CASE STUDY OF AN IT PROJECT IN A PUBLIC ORGANIZATION

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Abstract: The added value from projects doesn't depend only on the temporary organization; rather it is deeply modulated by the actions undertaken by the permanent organization that has defined the project and will transform the project deliverables in outcomes, and then in organizational benefits. Research has introduced the role of the project owner as an organizational capability to realize benefits. Based on a case study, this paper aims at analyzing the organizational enablers allowing the adoption of the project owner role for the benefit realization. We identified six organizational enablers, such as benefits management practices, change management practices, organizational leadership, information infrastructure, strong relationship with the project supplier and urgency for realizing benefits. Our results reveal that organizational enablers for enabling the project owner role emerged within and throughout the entire business unit that has launched the project and obtained the expected benefits.

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizations undertake projects as a way to strengthen their capabilities to add more organizational value (Martinsuo and Killen, 2014; Martinsuo, Klakegg and van Marrewijk 2019). However, research points that information and communication technology (ICT) projects have notoriously underperformed (Bardan, Krishnan and Lin, 2007) and reported low return on investments (Chae, Koh and Prybutok, 2014). This failure does not necessarily relate to the delivery of an ICT project on time and within cost; it actually involves delivering the benefits expected from its deliverables (Mir and Pinnington,

2014). Added value from ICT projects doesn't depend only on the project manager and his team (i.e., temporary organization) and how they perform for deploying the technology; rather, it is deeply created and captured within the organization that has defined the project and receive the project deliverables (i.e., permanent organization) (Romero-Torres and Brunet, 2021) and depends on how this organization is available to transform the deliverables in project outcomes, and then in organizational benefits. Marchand and Peppard (2013) add that understanding how the organization is conducted more important than the new ICT itself with regard to benefit management.

Benefits management, defined as the process for identifying, defining, planning, tracking and realizing organizational benefits (APM, 2012), has been poorly explored in the literature (Breese et al., 2015). In particular, research on factors enabling the adoption of benefits management practices is the absence of conclusive evidence. Breese et al. (2015) explain that there is limited empirical evidence on benefits management since this process operates at different levels: it considers setting of managerial practices, techniques tools, but more important it is a way of thinking which should be incorporated in the organization values and behaviors. Breesse et al. (2015) add there is an unclear vision for defining specific roles, responsibilities and outcomes related to the benefits management.

Turner and Müller (2004), Andersen and Grude (2018) and Meredith and Zwikael (2020) have introduced the “project owner”, as a role responsible for supporting realizing benefits. Krane, Olsson and Rolstadås (2012) define the project owner as a stakeholder from the permanent organization whose primary interest is receiving the benefits from the project. However, there is a debate in the literature to define who should be the project owner (Winch and Leiringer, 2016): while Morris and Hough (1986) and Bryde, Broquetas, and Volm (2013) argue that the project owner is the entire permanent organization that has launched the project and received the project deliverables, Meredith and Zwikael (2020) give this role to a single senior management in the permanent organization (i.e., the operation manager). This paper aims at contributing to the above debate by analyzing the organizational enablers in the permanent organization enabling project owner role for the benefits realization. To accomplish this objective, we analyze a case study of a public organization in North America (organization ABC) for an ICT project enabling specific tangible and intangible benefits for a single business unit (business unit alpha) inside the organization ABC. Research points internal capabilities can enhance the organization ability to

acquire and exploit external resources and capabilities. In project management, this capacity is considered as a dynamic capability that enables project flexibility and adaptation to a changing environment (Davis and Brady, 2016). Therefore, it is important to investigate which organizational enablers allow to mobilize the project owner role as an organizational capability (Winch and Leiringer, 2016) to sustain project benefits realization.

This paper is structured as follows. Following an introduction, the second section provides background information on benefit management, project owner role and organizational enablers. The third section describes the methodology used for data collection and analysis. The fourth section contains the results from the case study describing factors and mechanisms enabling the project owner to realize project benefits. The sixth section includes a discussion, followed by the concluding remarks.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. Benefits management

The Association of Project Management (APM) defines a benefit as a positive and measurable outcome of change (APM, 2019). APM adds that in some cases there may be unavoidable negative impacts that are acceptable in the context of greater benefits which are referred to as disbenefits. Bradley (2010) points out that a benefit is an outcome of change perceived as positive by one or more stakeholders, and which contributes towards one or more organizational objectives. Extant literature indicates that there are several types of benefits. Becerik (2006) categorizes benefits into three types: (i) tangible benefit is quantifiable and measurable in monetary terms, (ii) quasi-tangible benefits often focus on improving the efficiency of an existing organization and processes that are quantifiable but difficult to measure, and (iii) intangible benefits are neither quantifiable nor easy to measure but are the most important benefits for the investor in the long term. Intangible benefits are the reasons for doing things measurable benefits cannot

justify.

Jenner (2009) and Breese et al. (2015) note the lack of consensus on how to measure and categorize benefits, in particular because the terms “value” or “benefits” do not mean the same for everyone. The vagueness of this terminology is also, according to them, a major obstacle to the dissemination of knowledge on this subject and the adoption of good practices for benefit realization management, both within than outside organizations. Morris (2013) argues that benefit management focuses on why the project or program is undertaken, whereas value management is evaluated by functional performance and input cost (i.e., Value = Benefits / Input Cost). Therefore, the concept of benefits captures something broader which is not always easily financialized, such as intangible benefits.

Benefits management is defined as “the process of organizing and managing such that the potential benefits arising from the use of IS/IT are actually realized” (Ward and Daniel, 2012, p. 8). Zwikael and Smyrk (2012, p. 11) define this process as “the flows of value that arise from a project”. It includes five major activities: alignment of benefits with organizational objectives, benefits categorization, benefits management cycle, optimizes and search for other benefits and benefits management within the transformational flow (Cabinet Office, 2011). These activities confirm Marnewick (2016)’s vision that defines five main propositions: (i) a clear strategic alignment is the cornerstone for benefit management, ii) the benefits and the corresponding targets must be clearly identified in the business cases, iii) a decision-making structure should be adopted to select projects in function of their anticipated benefits, iv) checkpoints should be established throughout the life cycle of projects or programs to assess where the benefits are realized, and v) organizations should extend the life cycle of projects beyond their delivery to measure the realization of benefits once the project or program is transferred to operations.

Following the above view, Morris (2013) provides a wider perspective for benefits management defining the realization of benefits beyond the cycle of life of programs and project by including the operational phase for the deliverables. He defines two main stakeholders responsible for the value creation by projects: the temporary organization (project supplier) and the permanent organization (the project owner). The temporary organization is responsible for delivering the project outcomes once the benefits and the project and/or program objectives have been defined (Romero-Torres and Brunet, 2021). The permanent organization must carry out the entire process for the benefits management: it defines and plans benefits during the project front end, monitors and controls the benefit realization during the project execution and transfer of project deliverables to operations, and finally, assesses benefits during the project back-end. This conceptualization enables to involvement the entire organization and link its strategic objectives to its operations, which can contribute to the blurring of responsibilities for benefits management (Ashurst and Hodge, 2011).

2.2. Project owner

Zwikael and collaborators (2019) point out that benefits management accountability is not clear. Romero-Torres, Paré and Khemeci (2018) explain that current project management and benefits management standards and guidelines define best practices to enable the entire cycle of benefit realization, but they don’t define clear roles and responsibilities to support these practices. Project and/or program management from the supplier side cannot be accountable for benefits management since this cycle goes beyond project and program boundaries. As noticed by Ashurst and Hodges (2010), organizations can only assess project benefits once deliverables have been appropriated by the organization and their related outcomes and changes have been institutionalized.

Godbold (2016) suggests to clearly understand the project context for benefits realization. He introduces two types of project managers: the client project managers (client-side or permanent organization) and delivery project managers (supplier side or temporary organization). The context of client project managers covers the strategic context including the operational benefits mechanism and the commercial arrangement of projects. In contrast, the roles and responsibilities of delivery project managers are focused on the delivery of the contract and bridging the skills between subcontractors and project clients. Based on the agency theory (Ross, 1973; Eisenhardt, 1989a), Morris and Hough (1987), and more recently, Zwikael and Meredith (2018) introduce the “project owner” and “strong owner” to reflect organizational, and more specifically, the individual accountability for the project strategy and benefits realization. Similarly, Aritua Male and Bower (2009) suggest the concept of the ‘intelligent client’, but in their definition, the role of the client is still limited. From this perspective, benefits realization cannot be completed during the project and/or program life cycle (Zwikael and Smyrk, 2012; Breese et al., 2015); project benefits can be evaluated and realized through the reliable operation of project deliverables (Godbold, 2016). Thus, a project owner needs to consider the realization of post-implementation benefits as well as the project accomplishment itself. Therefore, project owner’s capabilities need to be understood within a wider approach by recognizing the managerial continuity from the project stage to the operation stage (Godbold, 2016; Zwikael and Meredith, 2018).

Project management literature vaguely defines if a project sponsor can take the role of the project owner. The project sponsor is a key stakeholder in any project, and the sponsor can have a large impact on the success or failure of the project (Bryde, 2008). PMI (2013) defines the sponsor as “the person or group who provides resources and support for the project and is accountable for enabling success” (p. 32). The sponsor is often the project’s direct link to upper management (Bresse, Couch and Turner, 2020),

having a large influence on the project and a variety of roles to perform throughout the project including business ownership, governance, and championing the project. In this paper, we focus on his business ownership role, where he leads the creation of the business case in the aim of getting the project approved. This business case can be seen as a contract between an organization and the project team that resources will be allocated for use if the benefits are returned (Dinsmore & Cooke-Davies, 2006). The project sponsor as the business owner is responsible for making sure the benefits and business requirements are defined, setting project priorities and objectives, and defining project success benchmarks (Bryde, 2008). As part of the role of business owners, one of the responsibilities of the project sponsor is accountability for the results of the project. Therefore, he is accountable for ensuring that the benefits expected from the project are delivered as stated in the business case, or project charter (Dinsmore & Cooke-Davies, 2006).

Winch and Leiringer (2016) develop the project owner role by defining his responsibilities for the project and organization. They identified three main elements: at the strategical level, project owner is responsible for the project selection, project mission definition, capital raising, stakeholder managing and project portfolio management, at the commercial level, he is responsible for external procurement and contracting relationship; and at the governance level, he is responsible for assurance, project coordination and asset integration. For governance role, Andersen (2012) defines that project owner must participate in deciding the project mission, goals, plans and organization, while Andersen and Grude (2018) suggest he must validate the project plan. Finally, Zwikael, Meredith and Smyrk (2019) determine six project owners’ responsibilities for benefits realization: (i) define project target benefits (Musawir et al., 2017; Winch and Leiringer. 2016), (ii) develop a benefit realization plan (Ashurst, 2008), (iii) make appropriate project tradeoff decisions, for example between benefits and cost, to ensure strategic alignment is

kept (Ashurst, 2008), (iv) manage strategic stakeholders, especially those with sufficient power to substantially reduce the target benefits (Winch and Leiringer, 2016; Krane, 2012; Ashurst, 2008), (v) manage strategic risks, by searching for dangers to the realization of the benefits from the project (Krane, 2012; Ashurst, 2008), and (iv) lead the preparation of a benefits closeout report (Zwikael, Meredith and Smyrk, 2019).

Winch and Cha (2020) investigate the project owner challenges to support the project in general, and specifically, project value creation. Authors describe project owner faces two main challenges to enable his role for benefits realization: for benefit and value proposition when he is responsible for defining a suitable benefit realization strategy (including definition of benefit type, beneficiaries and required capability) and, for the value capture when he is responsible for supporting operations to accept project deliverables and outcomes. They suggest mobilizing project owner’s leadership and strategy competencies, his human and relational skills and the technology and information assets to enhance his role for benefit realization (Winch and Cha, 2020).

2.3. Organizational enablers

The project owner as an organizational capability to sustain the project delivery and creating value (Winch and Leiringer, 2016) should be deeply explored to

identify factors that will influence this role, which is known as organizational enablers. PMI (2013, p. 36) defined as organization enablers “structural, cultural, technological, and human-resource practices” that can be leveraged to support and sustain the implementation of strategic goals.

Muller, Pemsel and Shao (2014) propose to consider as organizational enablers either the factors or mechanisms that enhance project management and project governance by two means the process facilitators and disruptive abilities. In this case, process facilitator factors are “tangible characteristics, conditions and variables directly impacting the effectiveness, efficiency and viability of governance”, process facilitator mechanisms are “the means to increase likelihood of certain outcomes”, discursive ability factors are “the communicative and interaction characteristics that impact the mentality and attitudes of people” and the discursive ability mechanisms are “structure supportive of organizational sense-making and discourse” (Muller, 2016, p. 85). The **figure 1** presents the above organizational enabler elements describing examples for each of them for project governance.

In the context of the project owner, several organizational factors and mechanisms could impact the project owner capability. In the literature, some studies identify organizational enablers for realization project benefits and create organizational value.

		Process facilitators	Discursive abilities
		Combination of policies, structures, practices and routines that allow for results to emerge	Organizational actors’ abilities to construct and articulate persuasive accounts of the world.
Factors	Power or instrument for achievement	Standards for project governance	Organizational culture
Mechanisms	Agency or means by which an effect is produced	Meetings	Rules and regulations

Figure 1. Elements associated with organizational enablers (adapted from Muller, Pemsel and Shao, 2014)

The formalization of benefits management practices can be considered as a process facilitator factor for benefit realization. Specific qualifications have been developed and are incorporated as a standard for project, program and portfolio managers. Qualifications are based on the main sources of standards and methodologies, such as Program Benefits Management Practice Guide from Project Management Institute, Management of Value from Axelos, Managing Benefits Handbook from APMG-International. According to Jenner (2015), these methodologies lead to complex organizational processes. It is therefore important to have flexible mechanisms to constantly monitor and review the benefits (Jenner 2015). Breese (2011) also points out there is a need to implement dynamic benefits management, which tolerates ambiguity and change and thus better reflects "real life".

The acquisition of skills is a central mechanism for benefits realization (Ashurst and Hodges, 2010). Actors related to the benefit management process should understand and correctly execute the different processes for benefits management. In 2008, Ashurst created a model which includes four skills to be developed: benefits planning (the ability to identify the anticipated benefits of an IT solution as well as the means to take to materialize them), benefits delivery (the ability to design and execute the organizational change necessary to achieve the expected benefits), benefits exploration (ability to adopt the practices required to exploit the deliverables of the project throughout its life cycle) and, benefits assessment (the ability to assess the success of the project in terms of achieved benefits and to identify improvements to reap even more benefits).

Bresse (2011) identifies the organizational culture as a factor that influences the realization of benefits. A culture that prioritizes value management will be more conducive to implementing a standardized benefit management process. Organizations that look to embark on this path will need to have a strong stakeholder management and communication

strategy. Changing an organizational culture is no small task; it brings us to change management. The vast majority of projects represent a change. But for change to be successful, humans must change: they must change their behavior to adapt to new ways of doing things, new tools, etc. (Boaz and Fox, 2014). According to Ashurst and Hodges (2010), considering and managing all the changes brought by a project is central to the ability to realize the benefits.

Research on benefits management highlights as a factor influence benefits realization the involvement of top management who is responsible for project strategic alignment and establishing a governance structure that oversees the selection of projects and benefit realization (Chih and Zwikael, 2014; Ashurst and Hodge, 2011). Chih and Zwikael (2014) add that benefits management will be best performed if top management can communicate long-term organizational vision but leaves flexibility to managers to be on the lookout for short-term opportunities.

3. METHODOLOGY

Given the exploratory nature of this study, the case-study approach was found to be appropriate, as it provides a deeper description and understanding of the social phenomenon of trust development (Eisenhardt, 1989b). A single-case study was chosen to get a thorough understanding of the project owner enablers, as we could not find rich case descriptions on this topic in the literature, and we were uncertain about the use of this organizational capability in organizations. Single-case studies allow for generalization of findings (Flyvbjerg, 2006) and can provide significant contributions to scientific development.

The case was selected from an organization, called organization ABC, which has established benefit management practices for more than eight years. Our analysis unit is the project owner represented by the business unit, called business unit alpha, responsible for identifying, planning and assessing the benefits from an ICT project considering two different consecutive delivery phases. Qualitative method

research was executed once the first delivery phase was closed and its related benefits were delivered. During the data collection, the second delivery phase was in execution. This study collected data in the form of semi-structured questionnaires and document analysis, so that the findings could be triangulated. Method triangulation was used to increase the strength of results, credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Creswell, 2014). When themes are established from the collection of several sources of data or perspectives of study participants, then the triangulation process can be claimed as adding validity to the study (Creswell, 2014).

Data were mainly obtained from document analysis and open-ended interviews. Document analysis was carried out to understand business unit alpha and IT program context and identify established mechanisms to enable benefit realization. We analyzed program business case, program charter, project reports, benefit plan and benefit reports. Then, we executed fourteen interviews with main benefit stakeholders: including six actors from the business unit alpha, four actors involved in the IT project for the two delivery phases, two actors responsible for defining the project management practices in the organization ABC and two actors responsible for portfolio management in the organization ABC. The open-ended interviews were conducted by the author. All interviews were performed during summer 2017. We used an interview guide to get participants to describe their involvement in the IT project and in the realization of its benefits. We focused specifically on how business unit alpha has led the definition, planning and controlling of benefits, including the organizational enablers for this role. The interviews lasted from 45 to 50 minutes, Interview transcriptions were imported into NVivo for qualitative analysis, where the material was coded into groups that described factors and mechanisms in the organization ABC and business unit alpha enabling the project owner role.

4. RESULTS

This section presents a detailed description of our research unit (business unit alpha from organization ABC) and describes the factors and mechanism enabling the project owner role for realizing benefits.

4.1. Case description

Organization ABC offers public transportation services in a geographical area in North America and promotes several types of projects, including transportation infrastructure and ICT solutions. This organization has integrated benefit management practices since 2013. It establishes a benefit realization plan as the main document for validating definition of projects and launching their execution. The plan considers the definition of tangible benefits and their corresponding targets, as well as the definition of a business unit that is accountable for the benefits realization. This plan also includes indicators for monitoring and controlling benefits realization in the project dashboard during project execution and outcomes transfer to operation, as well as practices to analyze change request impact on target benefits.

Even if organization ABC has improved the benefits realization practices for more than five years, actors responsible for the project governance highlight that their benefit approach remains immature and several challenges should be addressed. First of all, there is little or no consequence of not realizing the anticipated benefits for the project manager or project owner. As a consequence, stakeholders have little motivation to execute the benefits realization plan. Second, many project teams do not feel responsible for tracking the benefits, as they are only materialized once the project has been delivered to operations. There, they refuse to be engaged in the benefits management and report inaccurate information for benefits monitoring indicators. Finally, promoters are not required to report on benefit realization once they received the project deliverables. As a consequence, portfolio managers and senior management are not aware if the anticipated benefits have been realized.

However, portfolio managers point out an ICT project promoted from the business unit alpha as a case where the project owner, here the business unit alpha, was strongly engaged to the realization of anticipated and unexpected benefits. The business unit alpha is responsible for personalizing transportation services for people presenting physical and intellectual limitations. To reduce its operation costs and improve service quality, business unit alpha has launched in 2014 several initiatives such as the implementation of an ICT solution to enable scheduling transportation services in function of customers' needs in real-time. An ICT project has been planned in two different delivery phases: the first one included the ICT solution implementation for internal use (from 2015 to 2017) and the second one included its delivery to the customers (from 2017 to 2018). The project was executed by an ICT external service provider with the support of different business units in the organization ABC, such as the business unit alpha, the PMO, the IT unit and the customer service unit. The expected

benefit for the first deliverable phase was reducing the cost per trip through more efficient optimization of twinning arrangements (anticipated benefit: US\$ 300,000 versus real benefit at the data collection time (a year after the first delivery): US\$ 950,000). Participants in this research state that this target was conservative, which probably explains why the result measured showed a performance three times better. Business unit alpha also reported realizing an unexpected benefit: better payment control (anticipated benefit: \$ 0, real benefit: additional income of US\$ 200,000). The expected benefits for the second delivery phases were (i) the cost reduction per trip by real-time optimization, absorption of growth costs and reduction of late cancellation; (ii) reduction of taximeter billing discrepancies and, (iii) improvement of customer experience (intangible benefit).

4.2. Organizational enablers

Based on the case study, we identified six main enablers for the project owner for realizing benefits (see figure 2).

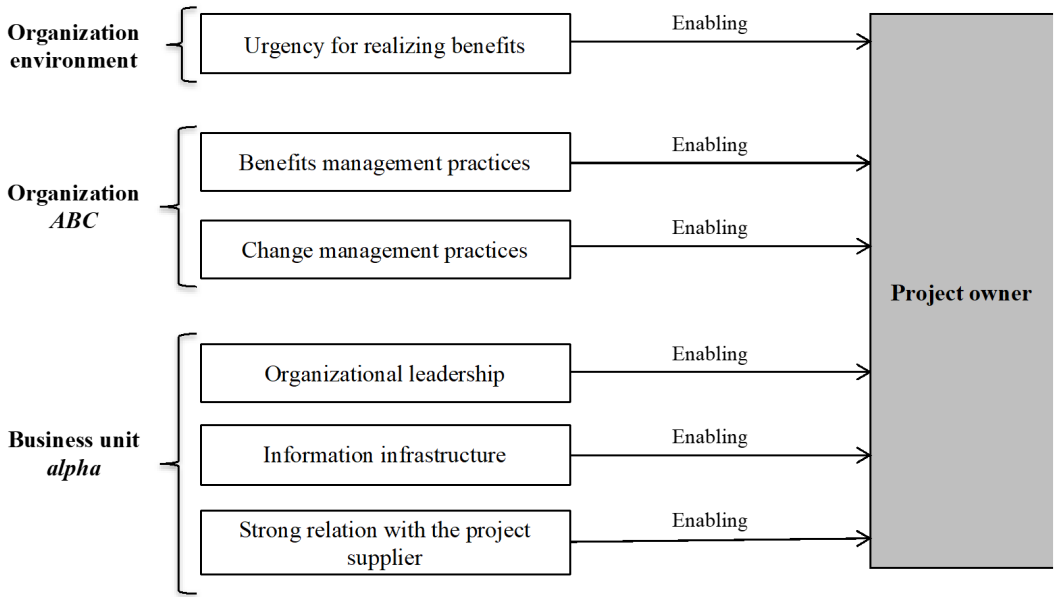


Figure 1. Elements associated with organizational enablers (adapted from Muller, Pemsel and Shao, 2014)

Urgency for realizing project benefits

As noticed by senior management, the financial context drove to engage all the management team from the business unit alpha. State government used to give a subsidy to finance public transportation for people presenting physical and intellectual limitations and then, business unit alpha used this subsidy to finance its operations. However, this subsidy was frozen from 2012 to 2017, but operation costs increased. According to the project business case, the demand for services offered by this unit increased by 126% between 2003 and 2013. Thus, the business unit alpha had been forced to review its operations to reduce its cost and improve productivity. These two elements were defined as the tangible benefits to obtain from the proposed project. As an operation manager stated, “we might not have had to adopt this rigour to reduce costs per service if we didn’t have severe financial constraints.”

Benefits management practices

As described in the section 4.1, organization ABC has established different initiatives to support the realization of benefits by introducing benefits management practices, such as the benefits realization plan. To enhance the role of the project owner in the business unit alpha, employees involved in this business, and specifically, those responsible for managing project benefits received a specialized training to carry out benefit management processes: Axelos Management of Value. Using this framework, project owner-managers have been able to mobilize their competencies and relevant resources (processes, tools and techniques developed by the organization ABC) to identify, estimate, plan and monitor benefits with rigour. Some participants point that received training helps them to better understand and apply best practices to support their work.

Change management approach

Support by the senior and portfolio managers from the organization ABC, business unit alpha has implemented a change management approach to support the appropriation of the IT solution by internal and external users. A change management team was integrated into the project since the project beginning, where they executed an impact analysis to identify enablers and blockers for the IT solution appropriation. Additionally, information about the tangible and intangible project benefits was included in all the communication artifacts from the business unit alpha to sensitize users on the urgency. The change management team supports the IT project team and the business unit alpha throughout the project execution and the IT solution transfer to the business unit.

Organizational leadership

All the participants to this research recognized its organizational leadership of the business unit alpha as the project owner since this unit has shown expertise and mastering for defining and governing the project, as well as, defining, planning and monitoring benefits. This business unit alpha runs all of its business processes almost autonomously and most of these processes are documented and standardized, including benefit management processes. Additionally, some participants underlined the role of its senior managers who introduced and mobilized a lean and agile approach to coordinate operations and initiatives. This business set up a team dedicated to collect information necessary to support the planning and monitoring of its operations, with specific performance indicators related to the project benefits. Furthermore, the business unit alpha participated in analyzing the impact of project change requests on anticipated benefits and was responsible for validating the final decision for change request having an important impact on benefits. Thus, when the IT project manager documented a change request, the

project owner team set to work to assess the impact on the benefits by using a list of business needs related to the project objectives and benefits and the estimation of effort required to apply the change.

Information infrastructure.

All the participants underline the great maturity of the business unit alpha in terms of information management. The project team did not have to create specific indicators for assessing the evolution of benefits. The team used the information already available to estimate and monitor project benefits. Since the definition of the project, all the stakeholders get a detailed overview of the vast amount of data available for identifying the project needs and defining benefits and related targets: A portfolio manager stated, "it is certain that maturity in terms of management information is a prerequisite for proper identification of benefits. Having access to this information enables us to quantify the benefits from the start." This infrastructure also supports the project owner role for accountability responsibilities. The business unit alpha sends a benefits report, called benefit monitoring report, every six months to declare the current benefits status to the portfolio committee and senior management. This information is then used by the finance department to adjust the business unit alpha budget.

A strong relationship with the project services provider

The IT service provider had a strong knowledge of the IT system to be delivered and a long-standing relationship with the business unit alpha. These two factors have contributed to reducing information asymmetry between the permanent and temporary organizations. According to the business unit alpha project manager: "our relationship has a positive impact on the project deliverable and benefits". Project team was able to collaborate continuously with stakeholders in the permanent organization. A

business unit manager added, "we have a common language and a very good proximity which allows us to innovate and avoid status quo."

5. DISCUSSION

Our research reveals different organizational enablers that have positively influence the project owner role for realizing project benefits. These enablers are not only related to a single individual in the organization. Indeed, they emerged within and throughout the entire business unit that has launched the project and obtained the expected benefits. Our results align to Bryde, Broquetas, and Volm (2013) research work which suggests assigning the project owner role to the entire permanent organization. Meredith and Zwikael (2020) suggest giving this role to a senior manager. However, it will be difficult to perform this role if he is not supported by his organization enabling him access to information, leadership, change management and engagement. This lack of clear direction can be ruinous, as Andersen (2012) has found permanent organization, including the project owner, to be a predictor for project success or failure.

As shown in the **figure 3**, identified organizational enablers for the project owner role to support benefits realization are all associated with the different elements defined by Muller, Pemsel and Shao (2014). Process facilitator factors such as the business management practices established by the organization ABC and followed by the business unit alpha permit the project owner to understand his intervention for defining benefits and their targets before launching the project, monitoring the project executing in function the anticipated benefits and realizing the benefits once the deliverables were transferred. Change management practices were another process facilitator factors enabling the project owner role for transforming the project deliverables in outcomes and, finally, in benefits. Organizational leadership from the business unit alpha is considered as a discursive ability factor for the project owner role since it enables to construct and

		Process facilitators	Discursive abilities
		Combination of policies, structures, practices and routines that allow for results to emerge	Organizational actors' abilities to construct and articulate persuasive accounts of the world.
Factors	Power or instrument for achievement	Benefits management practices Change management practices	Organizational leadership
Mechanisms	Agency or means by which an effect is produced	Information infrastructure Strong relationship with provider	Urgency for realizing project benefits

Figure 3. Elements enabling the project owner role for benefits realization

articulate processes, tools and techniques for benefits realization. As noticed by Ashurst and Hodge (2011) and Chih and Zwikael (2014), senior management involvement is a key factor to realize benefits since it's responsible for establishing a long-term organizational vision and engaging benefit stakeholders.

In the case of project owner mechanism to realize benefits, our research reveals three main elements. The business unit alpha uses as a process facilitator mechanism its infrastructure to collect and analyze data for defining benefits and their targets, but also for communicating the benefits management plan and benefits monitoring reports. Thor (2013) points out that benefits identification is complex since this process depends on how the management information is available and accurate. If the targets are established from erroneous information or rough estimates, it is almost normal not to be able to reach them afterwards. Winch and Cha (2020) also point to the information technology infrastructure as a key element to enhance the project owner role. ù

The second process facilitator mechanism is the relationship between the project owner (here, the business unit alpha) the project supplier. They have worked closely throughout the entire cycle of benefits realization (project front-end, project delivery and project back-end), which allowed them to increase their coordination, get a strong involvement and collaborate for project and benefits issues. Finally, the external pressures for the business unit alpha and the

organization ABC are considered as a discursive ability mechanism since the financial constraints have generated urgency to realize the project benefits for all the stakeholders, including, the project owner, the project supplier and the senior management from organization ABC. According to Ashurst and Hodge (2011), stakeholder involvement is crucial to realize benefits since they contribute in different ways to identify and plan the project benefits, to execute the benefit management plan, to support change process for creating value and finally to monitor benefits.

6. CONCLUSION

In this research, we can identify organizational enablers to allow the project owner role for realizing benefits. Six organizational enablers were revealed: benefits management practices, change management practices, organizational leadership, information infrastructure, strong relation with the project supplier and urgency for the benefits realization. These enablers are not only related to the project owner who has promoted the project and receiving the benefits. But they also depend on the external and internal environment of the organization. Even if, project owner can be accountable for the benefits realization, we have shown that this responsibility must be enhanced by external process facilitators factors, such as benefits and change management practices and a sense of urgency.

The results generated from this research provide insights into the benefits of accountability. Zwikael

and collaborators (2019) stated that benefit accountability doesn’t depend on a single actor or business unit. This research reveals that the project owner can play an active role in realizing benefits, but its role should be supported by organizational factors and mechanisms. This research also provides additional contributions to the literature on the project owner, in the sense that evidence arises from this research illustrating this role in the case of an ICT project and in a public organization.

Last but not least, similar to other single case studies, the findings of our case have limited external generalizability, and the findings reported should be generalized to other contexts with caution. In this case, the financial constraints imposed by the government and the long-standing work by the analyzed organization to enhance benefit management approach can influence the evidence from this research. Research in other organizational contexts should be conducted to extend what we have found in this research, especially, comparative investigations of benefits management approaches would be of great significance.

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