THE REALITY OF ADHERING TO BEST PRACTICES: THE CASE OF INFORMATION SYSTEM INITIATIVES

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Standards are written by practitioners for practitioners. It is therefore logical that project managers should comply with project management standards. Benefits management is a domain within program management. The focus of benefits management is to deliver benefits of initiatives beyond the closure of a normal program or project. This is not the case with projects within the information systems (IS) discipline, implying that IS program and project managers are not adhering to standards. The purpose of this article is to determine whether the best practices associated with benefits management are applied to IS initiatives in order to maximise the benefits of these initiatives.

Design/methodology/approach: Senior and middle managers in South African organisations were interviewed to determine how benefits are managed within their various projects. The purpose of the interviews was to determine adherence to standards and especially benefits management and, secondly, to determine whether these organisations are achieving any benefits and ultimately value.

Findings: There is an overwhelming non-adherence to benefits management best practices within the IS discipline, and IS program and project managers do not have the slightest idea how to perform benefits management. Irrespective of this, organisations do believe that they are receiving benefits and value from these IS initiatives.

Research limitations/implications: The research was only done in South Africa with the specific focus of information systems. The results are thus very specific and opens the door for more comprehensive research that focuses on various industries, countries and standards.

Practical implications: The results have several implications ranging from how standards are written to the professionalism of IS programs and project managers. Organisations are not achieving the optimal benefits from investments. The fact that organisations do realise benefits from a broken process, implies that more benefits can be realised when the entire benefits realisation process is followed. Governance controls should also be put in place to ensure that program and project managers are adhering to standards.

Originality/value: Standards are dominating the project management discipline and there is a general assumption that program and project managers are adhering these standards. This research queries the value of standards as the results indicate that there is limited adherence to standards and best practices.

KEYWORDS: Benefits management, Standards, Information systems, South Africa, Program Management

THE REALITY OF ADHERENCE TO BEST PRACTICES FOR INFORMATION SYSTEM INITIATIVES

INTRODUCTION

The chicken or the egg? Theory or practice? Which was first? This is the age-old question that humankind tries to answer. The answer is dependent on the lens that is used. Academics will make a convincing argument that theory, or in this case standards, should inform practice. Practitioners, on the other hand, will suggest the opposite. Maybe it is both and maybe the pendulum swings between these two answers. Whichever lens is used, standards try to accommodate both views and provide best practices for practitioners.

Benefits management is currently documented as part of program management. However, there are calls for the knowledge domain of benefits management to be expanded to form part of project management as well (Dupont & Eskerod, 2016; Marnewick, 2016; Zwikael & Smyrk, 2012). All types of projects, irrespective of the industry or discipline, should deliver benefits and ultimately value to the organisation. This is also the case for information systems (IS) initiatives. Yet, these initiatives whether they are projects or programs, are plagued by poor success rates, creating the impression that it is difficult or almost impossible to derive benefits and value. Since there is a body of knowledge on benefits management, including standards, the question then is whether these standards are sufficiently adhered to in order to deliver the required benefits from IS initiatives and investments. Project management standards were originally developed to implement the organisational strategy (Bredillet, 2003) and to develop the competence of project managers (Crawford, 2005). Over the last decade, standards themselves, the way they are developed and their value have been questioned by practitioners and academics (Grau, 2013; Hällgren, Nilsson, Blomquist, & Söderholm, 2012; Morris, Crawford, Hodgson, Shepherd, & Thomas, 2006). Project, program and portfolio (P3) management standards are created by practitioners for practitioners. When individuals directly or indirectly involved IS projects, are not following these standards and subsequent best practices, the question then is: Why is this the case? Are these standards not applicable to the IS discipline or are these individuals ignorant of what should be done? There is currently no research within the South African context that addresses this concern of perceived non-adherence to benefits management best practices. Project management literature also focuses on the broader aspect of standards and the value that standards play in the bigger project management environment. Research has also not investigated adherence to these standards. There is a general perception that P3 managers in general are adhering to these standards without empirical proof that this is actually the case.

This article addresses this gap within a South African context. IS initiatives are not perceived as successful and the benefits of these investments are questioned by organisations (Joseph, Erasmus, & Marnewick, 2014). The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) claims that standards are beneficial to organisations as they lower costs and, for a developing country such as South Africa, they level the playing field against developed countries. The non-adherence to benefits management standards can in the long run be detrimental to organisations, as they will see less and less value from their investments. A renewed focus on adherence to best practices as described in the various project, program and portfolio management standards is critical at this time. South African organisations cannot tolerate the wastage associated with IS investments caused by the non-conformance of its agents, i.e. program and project managers. Adherence to benefits management best practices should increase the benefits and value that organisations receive from their investments.

Twenty-eight interviews were conducted with individuals directly or indirectly involved in managing IS initiatives and the respective benefits of these initiatives. The interviews were conducted to uncover how organisations are managing the benefits of IS initiatives and whether these organisations' program and project managers are actually adhering to the standards. These interviews focused on two main aspects. The first aim was to determine how benefits are managed and the second was whether organisations are of the opinion that they are achieving benefits. The unit of analysis was the Program Benefits Management performance domain as per the Standard for Program Management of the Project Management Institute (PMI).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bredillet (2003) states that project management standards are essential to implement organisational strategies and that they are key factors in the delivery of economic development. In addition, Crawford (2005) explains that project management standards were developed to ensure that project managers are competent in the field of project management. Morris et al. (2006) raise two concerns with regard to standards writing. The first is that the standards do not include any vision of the future. Standards are based on how things are currently done. Secondly, the practitioners involved in standards writing might have limited exposure or might even be junior practitioners. They will then not be able to add richness to the standard.

ISO states that a standard is "*a document that provides requirements, specifications, guidelines or characteristics that can be used consistently to ensure that materials, products, processes and services are fit for their purpose*[1]". National standards organisations as well as ISO are generating revenue through the sale of standards, i.e. for ISO $40 million (International Standards Organization, 2014), American National Standards Institute $21 676 million (American National Standards Institute, 2015) and for Standards Australia $5.8 million (Standards Australia, 2015).

The PMI defines a standard as a "*document, established by consensus and approved by a recognized body, which provides for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines or characteristics for activities or their results, aimed at the achievement of the optimum degree of order in a given context*[2]". The PMI goes further and states that its standards provide guidelines for the achievement of specific results within the domains of portfolio, program and project management. There is a plethora of standards and ISO itself has 20 500 standards (International standards Organization, 2015). The PMI has four foundation standards and six practice standards. These ten standards are all focused on portfolio, program and project management.

The question that springs to mind is why project, program and portfolio managers should conform to the various standards and what the benefits are in adhering to them. ISO is of the opinion that products and services are safe, reliable and of good quality when they are based on international standards. Standards also facilitate economic development. Bredillet (2003) mentions various financial benefits, such as costs that are reduced by minimising waste and errors and increasing productivity. Standards also facilitate access to new markets, level the playing field for developing countries and facilitate free and fair global trade (ISO http://www.iso.org/iso/home/standards.htm). Ahlemann, Teuteberg, and Vogelsang (2009) also identify some other benefits, including better communication through the consistent use of terminology and faster process implementation Standards are also used for competence development of individuals and the organisation at large (Bredillet, 2003). Communities of

[1] http://www.iso.org/iso/home/standards.htm

[2] http://www.pmi.org/pmbok-guide-and-standards/standards-overview.aspx

practice are created based on standards and professionals can belong to these communities if they fulfil the requirements as stipulated by these standards. Standards are used as a means of achieving recognition of project management as a profession (Hällgren et al., 2012).

But, like all good things in life, negative connotations are also ascribed to standards. Ahlemann et al. (2009) list the following: too theoretical, lack of flexibility, not applicable to a specific implementation scenario, administrative overheads, lack of acceptance and inefficient processes or practices. Hällgren et al. (2012) are also of the opinion that a standard is not necessarily a better depiction of the practice.

The process in the development of a standard follows more or less the same steps as illustrated in

table 1. It is important to note that both ISO and PMI use a consensus-based process to develop and approve a new standard.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

The development of a standard is not a quick process and might sometimes take a couple of years. During the implementation of initiatives, project managers must adhere to different standards. These standards range from project, program and portfolio management to quality and security standards. Grau (2013) categorises standards into four categories, as do Ahlemann et al. (2009). The first category focuses on specialised standards. These standards are industry or even company specific. *De facto* standards are the accumulation of knowledge which is presented to the community for training and certification. *De jure* standards are developed by an official standards body such as ISO, ANSI, DIN or SABS. The fourth type of standard focuses more on maturity models.

It is important to distinguish between a standard and a methodology, as these are two distinct concepts. A methodology can be defined as the procedures that are followed in implementing processes in a given project (Lewis, 2000). These procedures may include forms and/or templates that must be completed, various meetings and change approval procedures. Bal and Teo (2001) agree and define a methodology as "*a collection of procedures, techniques, tools, and documentation aids which will help*" P3 managers to implement an IS initiative. Phillips (2002) are of the opinion that a methodology is a process that is successful regardless of the scope and size of the initiative, the tools used for the project and the people working on the project. A methodology is a repeatable process with project-specific methods, best practices, rules, guidelines, templates, checklists and other features for building quality systems that are manageable and deliver value to an organisation (Murch, 2005). With regard to a project management methodology, it is a structured approach comprising a set of processes with clearly defined activities aimed at the delivery of projects (Terlizzi, Meirelles, & de Moraes, 2016). A method is what is applied in a particular situation and a methodology is the sum of all methods and the related understanding of them (Joslin & Müller, 2015).

Figure 1 highlights the difference between a standard and a methodology.

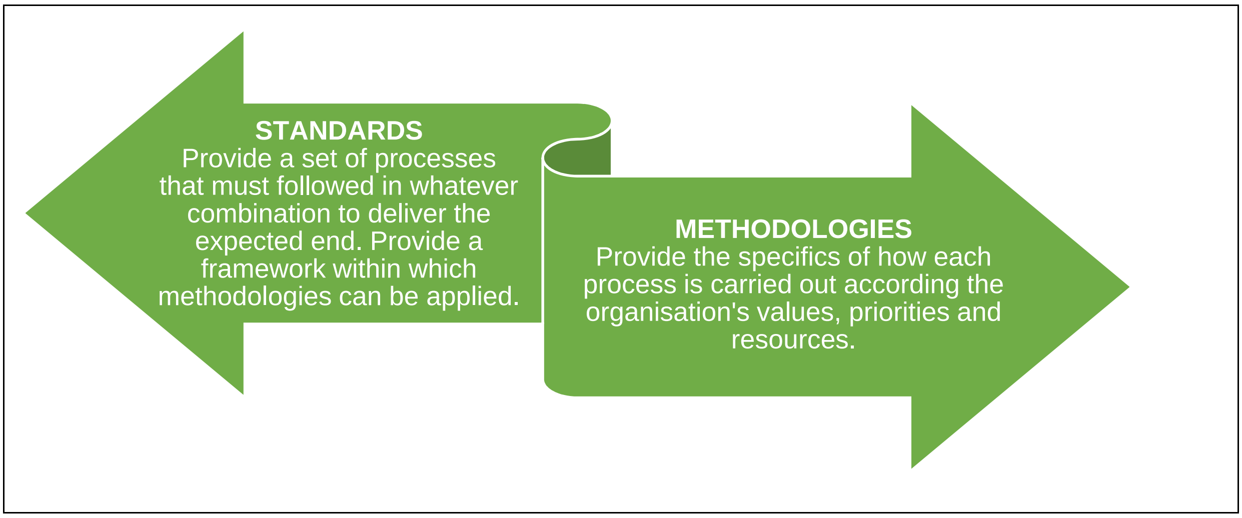

Figure 1. Relationship between project management standards and methodologies

IS initiatives are notorious for the huge costs associated with these projects versus the low return on benefits. This imbalance necessitates the rationale of benefits management with regard to IS projects.

A warning was issued by Bennington & Baccarini (2004) as well as Dhillon (2005) to organisations to address this imbalance. Organisations cannot afford to sponsor IS initiatives that do not deliver on the promised benefits. Smith, Dombo, and Nkehli (2008) support this notion and claim that IS project managers are fixated on the final system rather than the promised benefits. As such, many IS projects fail to show the net benefits identified in the initial project justification. This argument is echoed by Richard (2012), who suggests that the focus should move away from delivering a purely technical solution to a solution that is technical in nature but that delivers benefits to the organisation as a whole and underpins the sustainability of the organisation in the long run. This renewed focus addresses how success is measured. Bannerman (2008) suggests that success should be determined based on its contribution to the overall organisational benefit. IS initiatives should therefore be scrutinised for the promised benefits and this should be the only motivation for initiating an IS project or program. Lin and Pervan (2003) caution that it is not that easy to determine whether these initiatives deliver on the promised benefits. Organisations experience difficulties in assessing whether the benefits have been realised due to the cost that is involved to manage post-implementation reviews of benefits.

This difficulty in measuring the benefits is addressed by program management standards. Benefits management is incorporated into program management, and the PMI's Standard for Program Management (Project Management Institute, 2013) as well as Managing Successful Programmes by the Office of Government Commerce (Sowden, 2011) testify to this.

PMI's Standard for Program Management

The PMI's Standard for Program Management is currently available in its third edition (Project Management Institute, 2013). This particular standard is in the process of being reviewed, as is the case with all PMI's core standards[3].

The Project Management Institute (2013, p. 1) clarifies the purpose of the Standard for Program Management as follows: "*It provides principle-based guidelines for managing programs. It provides generally accepted definitions of programs and program management and concepts important to their success—program management performance domains, the program management life cycle, and important program management principles, practices, and activities*." Whereas the first and second editions were process-based, the third and fourth editions are principle-based. There are currently 1 509 certified program management professionals (Project Management Institute, 2016b). Within South Africa, there are only 12 certified program management professionals (van Rooyen, 2016).

Figure 2 indicates the program life cycle and program benefits management.

[3] http://www.pmi.org/PMBOK-Guide-and-Standards/Standards-Current-PMI-Standards-Projects.aspx

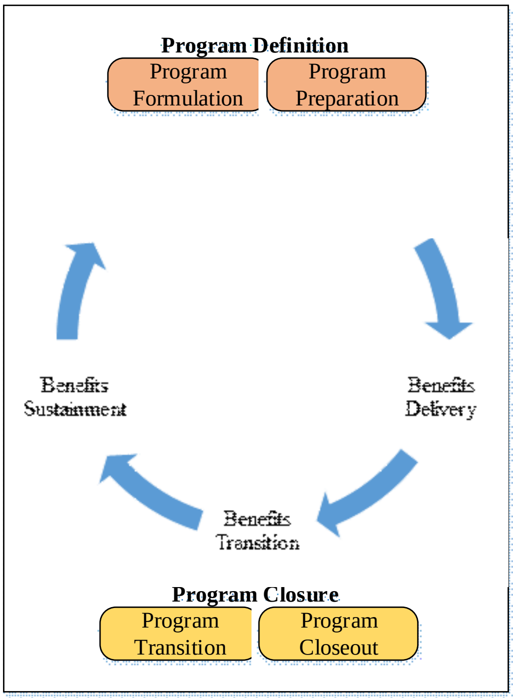

Figure 2. Program life cycle and program benefits management (3rd edition) (Adapted from Project Management Institute, 2013, p. 35)

Benefits management spans across the entire life cycle of a program as well as the subsequent projects. In the IS environment, it implies that the final product or service should be measured based on the delivered benefits which were defined at the start of the program or project.

OGC's Managing Successful Programs (MSP)

Figure 3 indicates where the benefits management governance theme fits within the overall management of a program. Benefits management is perceived as the reason why programs do exist and the entire management of a program should be focused on how benefits are realised.

Figure 3. Overview of benefits management within MSP (Adapted from Sowden, 2011, p. 75)

Within this governance theme, there is a process called *realising the benefits* (Sowden, 2011). This process focuses exclusively on the preparation, delivery and reviewing of activities to take the capability delivered and embed it within the business operations to realise the intended benefits. The process is illustrated in figure 4.

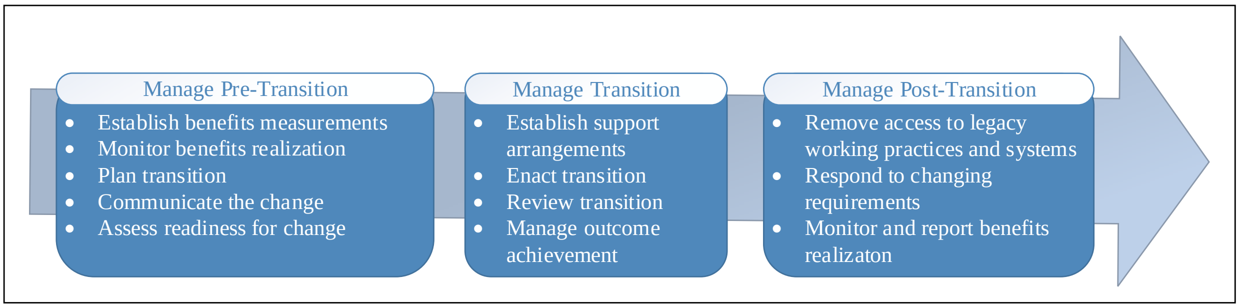

Figure 4. MSP benefits realisation process (Adapted from Sowden (2011))

In principle, the benefits realisation process of MSP is the same as the process of PMI's Standard for Program Management. The focus of both these standards is to determine the promised benefits upfront, manage them throughout the program's life cycle and continue to ensure that the promised benefits are realised during and after completion of the program.

Given the fact that IS projects and therefor ultimately IS programs are not delivering on the promised benefits and that there are standards that focus on benefits management, the following is proposed: ***IS project and program managers do not adhere to benefits management best practices***.

The next section focuses on the research methodology. The Program Benefits Management performance domain of the PMI's Standard for Program Management is used in this study as the unit of analysis. The reason is that South Africa is traditionally biased towards the Standard for Program Management and not necessarily MSP.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Interviews were chosen as the research method. There are several advantages to using interviews, as stipulated by Cunningham (2008) as well as Kwok and Ku (2008). Researchers tend to fully understand the interviewee's experiences and a broad range and depth of information is provided. Researchers can also be flexible during the interview itself.

A semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the Program Benefits Management performance domain of the PMI's Standard for Program Management. The two main focus areas were:

1. The interviewee's role and responsibilities within the organisation. This information provided the researcher with evidence that the interviewee answered the questions in the second focus area with the necessary knowledge and authority.
2. The way in which organisations initiate projects, manage benefits and determine the overall contribution of IS projects to the achievement of the organisational strategies. The aim was to determine whether actual practices follow the best practices as prescribed by the Standard for Program Management.

A total of 28 interviews were conducted over a period of 6 months. The roles and responsibilities of the interviewees varied depending on the type of organisation. Irrespective of their individual roles, all the interviewees are either directly or indirectly involved in the benefits management process and understand the benefits management process as well as the importance of benefits management. They are indirectly involved as product owners or are directly managing the benefits management process. The roles of the interviewees are depicted in table 2.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

The interviews were transcribed directly from the digital voice recordings. The transcripts were then checked for accuracy and correctness by comparing them to the digital voice recordings. The interviewees were provided with the opportunity to verify that the transcriptions were a true reflection of the interviews. The verified transcriptions were loaded into Atlas.ti, along with any supporting documentation.

Atlas.ti enables researchers to 'code' the transcriptions for analysis purposes, that is, to test the relationship between issues, concepts and themes, and to develop broader or higher order categories (Lewins & Silver, 2008). Coding also facilitates the development of a detailed understanding of the phenomena which the data is seen to be presenting (Atherton & Elsmore, 2007). A deductive coding approach was used. The codes were based on the process as depicted in figure 2. Seventeen codes were deducted and used during the coding process. A network view (figure 6) was drawn from the codes to display the various co-occurrences among the 17 codes. Network views are used primarily for the analytical purpose of moving the researcher's thinking forward, but they also support the merging of codes, unpacking complicated co-occurring codes and the grouping of codes.

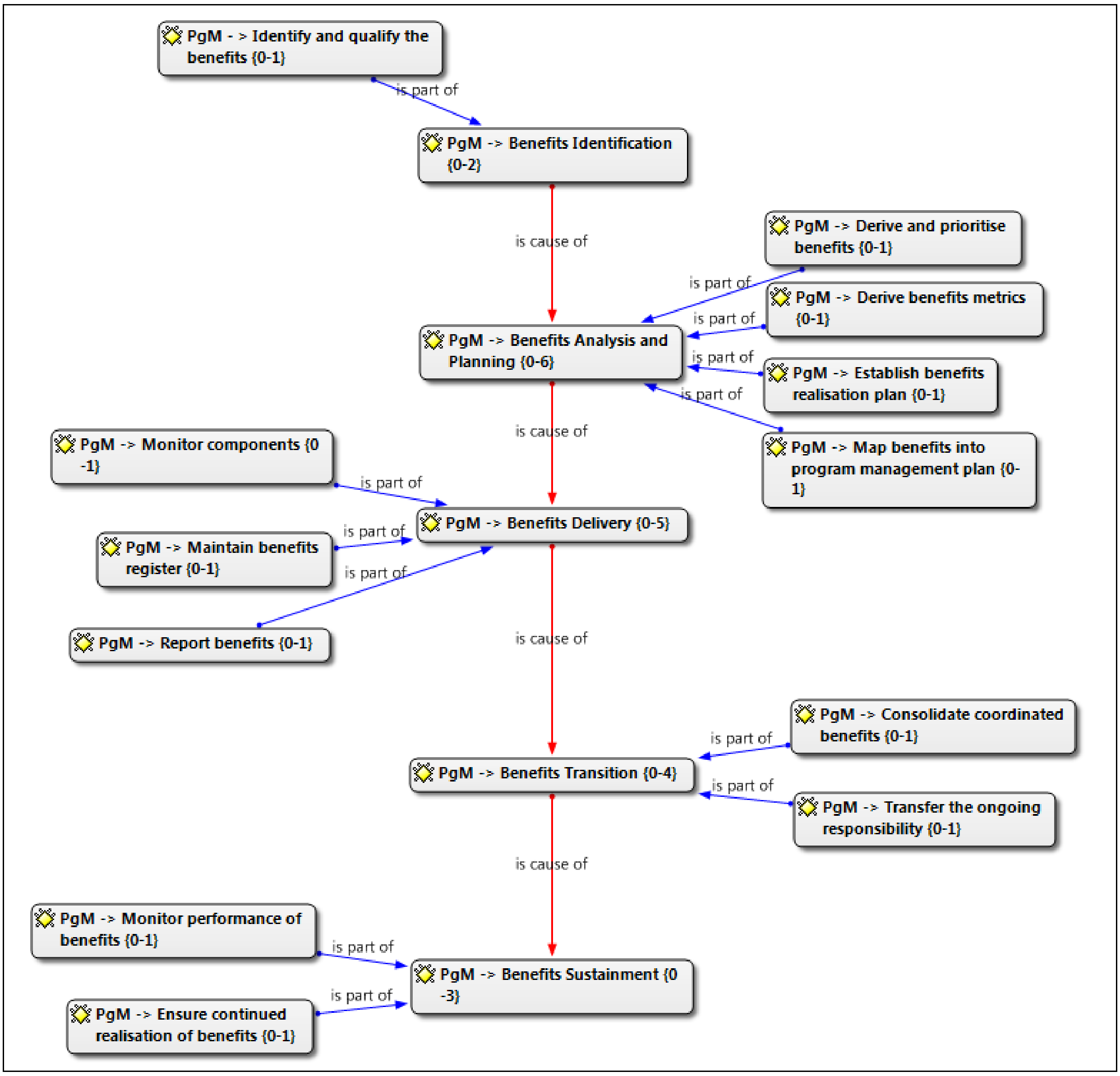

Figure 5. Network view

Based on this process, the data was analysed in order to develop a better understanding of the phenomenon at hand.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The analysis of the interviews indicates that although some processes are followed, the majority are not. In some instances, the process is not followed or addressed at all. Each of the five major processes of benefits management was analysed to determine the level of adherence.

Benefits identification

Benefits identification focuses on analysing the available information about organisational and business strategies, internal and external influences and program drivers to identify and qualify the benefits that program stakeholders expect to realise (Project Management Institute, 2013, p. 35).

Most of the interviewees identified and qualified the benefits as per the following statement: "*We will set out what we need to do and what the thing will do and we will go as far as the benefits components of what we need to get out of it - why we doing it and the reason behind it and the business problem that we need to resolve with putting it in at this stage*" [COO, financial institution]. This sentiment was echoed by the CIO of a pension fund who stated that "*it's obligatory to define your benefits to the company if you make a business case, if you can't do it you're having problems*". Most of the identified benefits actually focus on the financial benefits and not necessarily on non-tangible benefits as organisations "*look mainly at commercial or financial benefits*" [portfolio executive, freight company].

The opposite is also true where organisations do not identify and qualify benefits. "*What is a benefit? We don't have experience about benefits so it is very hard to write down smart benefits so we can track the benefit*" [program manager, financial institution].

Proposition 1: Although 86% of the interviewees engaged in the identification of benefits, the emphasis is still highly focused on the financial aspect. Organisations must ensure that other non-tangible benefits are also included and addressed, such as sustainability. A way must be determined for identifying and then quantifying these non-tangible benefits. It is also proposed that project managers be involved in the identification of benefits as they sometimes fulfil the role as program manager.

Benefits analysis and planning

This phase focuses on the establishment of a benefits realisation plan, the development of benefits metrics as well as a framework for monitoring and controlling the measurement of benefits (Project Management Institute, 2013, p. 37). This phase consists of four activities as per figure 2.

1. The first activity focuses on prioritising the identified benefits. This prioritisation determines which components within the program should be implemented first. This is done to optimise the benefits that should be gained. Only 29% of the interviewees actually performed this activity. Those organisations that used benefits for prioritisation followed a robust process to do so: "*during the prioritisation discussion those benefits are challenged very hard to make sure that it's not just a number that they plug in there to get the project going*" [CIO, financial institution].
2. The prioritised benefits need to be measured and that is the focus of the second activity. Meaningful measures assist the organisation in determining whether or not benefits exceed their control thresholds and whether they are delivered in a timely manner. A mere five of the interviewees admitted that their organisations actively derived measures for the

benefits. The project management office within a financial institution "*describe[s] every single benefit that you can think of and you describe how you are going to be measuring that you have actually delivered it and you describe when you are going to be doing that measure*" [project management officer, financial institution]. One of the interviewees claimed that their biggest problem was that "*we don't have benchmarks and we don't have experience numbers about those kinds of stuff. So that is mostly the problem when you write down the benefit".*

3. Unfortunately none of the interviewees performed the third and fourth activities, which are establishing a benefits realisation plan and mapping this plan into the overall project or program plan.

Proposition 2: The analysis and planning of benefits within the bigger picture are lost due to the fact that after the identification of the benefits, not much happens with these benefits. It is proposed that organisations must have a consistent and fair process to prioritise the identified benefits. Once the benefits are prioritised, organisations can then focus on how to implement and manage the benefits. Organisations need to take cognisance of the integration of a benefits plan into the overall program and even a project. Calls are made that benefits management should also be part of a project (Dupont & Eskerod, 2016; Marnewick, 2016; Zwikael & Smyrk, 2012). It is also proposed that organisations have a formal benefits realisation plan. This plan is the result of benefits prioritisation. The overall project or program plan should include the benefits realisation plan, which then focuses on when and how the benefits will be realised.

Benefits delivery

Benefits delivery ensures that the program or project delivers the expected benefits, as defined in the benefits realisation plan. This caused a problem in this research as the interviewees did not create a benefits realisation plan. This phase consists of three major activities:

1. The first activity is to monitor the various components within the program. This is done to ensure that any deviations are reflected in the benefits realisation plan. Eleven of the interviewees performed this activity through managing "*your benefit on a monthly basis and [reprioritising] your plans on a monthly basis*" [portfolio project manager, financial institution]. This was confirmed by the general manager of a telecommunications company, who stated "*what we've changed since last year is that we have now formally started to track benefits*".
2. The second activity is to update the benefits register and benefits realisation plan based on the results of the previous activity. Only two interviewees claimed that they performed this duty.
3. The third activity within the benefits delivery phase focuses on the reporting of benefits. The purpose is to report to the stakeholders on the progress of benefits realisation. Over half of the interviewees (57%) indicated that they reported on the benefits. Part of this reporting includes "*this is the reality, this is what I did, this is how the business case changed, this is the benefits that I said I would bring, this is the benefits that I brought*" [portfolio project manager, financial institution]. Another interviewee [project manager, custody financial institution] claimed that the reporting of benefits "*falls into our project reporting in that as well so we report on a project at the end or a project that has been implemented we now talk about the benefits*". Although some interviewees stated that they reported on benefits, they admitted that "*the detailed governance of that is not currently happening*" [CIO, stolen vehicle recovery company].

Proposition 3: The results from the interviewees highlight something interesting. Although the organisations did not necessarily monitor the benefits and update the benefits register, it is almost implied that they performed these activities. To report on the benefits at the end of a program or project, these activities must have been performed. It is proposed that organisations enforce stricter governance forcing program and project managers to monitor and update the benefits. This can be achieved through regular reporting as part of the project or program's status reports. Accountability must also be assigned to the benefits and the accountable person should report on the delivery or non-delivery of the intended benefits.

Benefits transition

The fourth phase focuses on the transfer of benefits to the operational areas and the sustainment of these benefits once they are transferred. The focus is on value creation, which is achieved once the organisation is able to utilise these benefits. This phase consists of two activities:

1. Two interviewees consolidated the coordinated benefits. The CIO of the stolen vehicle recovery company mentioned that "*one thing along this is starting to see other potential benefits and there is one angle that we actually can link it to, a strategic initiative*". The other interviewee claimed that "*the project gets delivered and then we take the benefits once the project is finished*" [project management officer, financial institution].
2. With regard to transferring the responsibility to the operational divisions, three interviewees performed this activity. This is not an easy activity as people do not want to take ownership, especially if the benefits were promised by someone else: "*Sometimes it's not possible but certainly because you are doing ongoing tracking, you would look to see who would then take over the ownership, so then part of you would then on, you would then hand over your benefits because you are then going to be called to account*" [chief operating officer, financial institution].

Proposition 4: The impression is created that benefits transition is treated as an afterthought. It seems that once the program or project is completed, the benefits are not harvested and incorporated into the daily operations of the organisation. Emphasis should be placed on transitioning the benefits into the operational areas. This transition should be planned for and monitored in a controlled way. Without proper transition, benefits will not be realised and the value of the program and project will be questioned. This speaks directly to the notion that IS initiative costs outweigh their benefits and value. Organisations should incorporate the transition of benefits into the respective project and program plans. Engagement should take place between all the stakeholders to determine how and when the benefits will be transitioned. This should form part of the overall program management plan and accountability should be assigned.

Benefits sustainment

The fifth and final stage focuses on the transition of ongoing sustainment activities into the appropriate operational entities or even subsequent programs and projects to steward the ongoing post-transition work.

Two activities form part of this phase, i.e. continuously monitoring the performance of benefits and ensuring the continued realisation of benefits. Surprisingly, 71% and 43% of the interviewees, respectively, performed these two activities. "*What the guys typically do in terms of their benefits planning and the business case, would say go live date plus 2 months*" [general manager, cellphone operator]. Another view is that "*[this] is the process that we call benefit marketing which is right at the end of the project life cycle*" [project manager, financial institution]. The opposite is also true - the CIO of one institution admitted that they did not track benefits at all.

Proposition 5: Organisations to a certain degree monitor the performance of benefits after the benefits have been handed over to the operational divisions. It is evident that this is done on an ad hoc basis and that it does not necessarily form part of the organisation's benefits management process. Organisations must place governance structures and processes to gain the maximum from the realised benefits. These structures and processes will ensure that benefits sustainment forms an integral part of program and project management and the organisation itself.

Table 3 summarises the organisations' adherence to the activities that need to be performed as part of benefits management. The results indicate that organisations are doing well in the identification of the benefits, but that the actual tracking of the benefits is dismal. Although 71% of the interviewees indicated that they monitored the performance of the benefits, only 43% then followed through to ensure the continued realisation of the benefits. The only other activity that was performed fairly well was the reporting of benefits.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

DISCUSSION

The results of the interviews indicate that there is a disjoint between standards on the one hand and practice on the other. The question can rightfully be asked why this is the case.

Benefits management forms part of governance within MSP. The PMI defines program management governance as "*the framework, functions and processes that guide program management activities in order to deliver business value to meet organisational strategic and operational goals*" (Project Management Institute, 2016a, p. 4). This definition focuses on the business value that needs to be delivered by a program and its subsequent components. IS initiatives should also be governed within the context of CobiT (Marnewick & Labuschagne, 2011). CobiT makes specific reference to how benefits should be governed (IT Governance Institute, 2012). *EDM02 – Ensure Benefits Delivery* focuses on optimising the value contribution of IT investments to the business. Within the South African context King III stipulates that IT should be aligned with the performance and sustainability strategies of the organisation (Institute of Directors Southern Africa, 2009). Within the context of all these governance principles, it is then rightful to query why IS initiatives are not adhering to the best practices as prescribed by the Standard for Program Management.

1. The definition of a standard states that it provides consistent processes which, if followed, produce the required results. The results in table 3 indicate that within a South African context, people involved in managing IS initiatives, do not follow the activities or processes. This raises the question whether their programs or projects deliver value. In an independent study by Chalale (2016), it was found that IS projects are on average 71% more expensive than the original budget and take 71% more time to complete. In spite of this, the stakeholders still believed that they received business value from these projects. Only 4.3% indicated that they did not get any value. The interviewees of the current study as well as Chalale's study, were unanimous in their response that the IS initiatives did provide value to the organisation and that the organisation, in turn, is achieving its vision and strategies. The results indicate then that irrespective of whether best practices are applied or not, benefits are realised and deliver value to the organisation. How is this possible if the entire benefits management process is not adhered to?
2. To report on benefits, the six activities between benefits identification and benefits reporting should have been performed. There is no possibility that an IS project and program manager can report on a benefit if the previous activities have not been performed. The same applies to the monitoring of the benefits. The benefits have to be transitioned irrespective of the fact that the results indicate that this is not done. It can be deduced that the salient activities are actually performed during implementation. A governance issue is

created as these salient activities cannot be monitored and evaluated. IS project and program managers should therefore focus on explicitly performing each activity. This should also address the notion of governance as each activity can be measured and addressed if issues and concerns are raised.

3. Standards are used to improve the competence of the practitioners that apply the standard (Bredillet, 2003). If standards are then used to determine the competence of IS program and project managers, then the results clearly indicate that South African IS project and program managers are not competent. Organisations are achieving value from IS initiatives as per the first point. This negates the fact that IS project and program managers are incompetent, which then raises the question of the value of standards as a competence enabler. But, even if IS program and project managers are not certified against standards, they should still follow (i) the governance principles of CobiT and (ii) the best practices as per the standards that they adhere to.
4. Hällgren et al. (2012) warn that standards do not necessarily depict practice. It is evident from the results of this study that the Standard for Program Management does not depict the practice in South Africa. This raises yet another question whether standards are really adhered to and what their purpose is within the lives of ordinary IS project and program managers.

Implications and Recommendations

The four points mentioned raise some concerns that have implications on the way and manner that organisations perceive standards and best practices.

- The first and most important implication is that organisations are not achieving the optimal benefits from any investment. The fact that organisations do realise benefits from a broken process, implies that more benefits can be realised when the entire benefits realisation process is followed. This in return implies that organisations should achieve a higher return on investment for IS initiatives.
- As a counter-argument for Hällgren et al. (2012) warning, organisations that are involved in the writing of standard, must ensure that the practitioners that are involved in the writing process, are actually practicing practitioners. This ensures that there will be a closer relationship between best practices and practice itself. It also implies that standards should be informed by current and relevant research. Research will inform current best practices on new perspectives and will introduce new thinking during the writing of standards.
- Governance is an important aspect within any organisation and a lapse in governance can have serious repercussions for organisations. The results imply that non-adherence to standards creates a governance issue within an organisation. Managers cannot claim that they are not aware of standards and should ultimately be accountable for this lapse in governance.
- A final implication suggested by the results are the possible total disregard of conformance to standards. If 3P managers are disregarding one aspect of a standard and in the case of this article, benefits management, the question is raised how much of other standards are ignored or discarded. At the end of the day, everything boils down to governance. Organisations must ensure that 3P managers are adhering to standards and hold these 3P managers accountable for any lapse in governance.

This research raises more questions than it provides answers. Standards are there to provide consistency and adherence to best practices. The benefits of standards have been highlighted but despite these benefits, best practices are negated by role-players involved in IS initiatives for whatever reason. Despite this, IS initiatives still provide value to organisations. On one side of the coin, IS project and program managers are not adhering to best practices but still deliver value. On the other side of the coin, if IS project and program managers adhere to these best practices, more value might be created for the organisation.

CONCLUSIONS

Standards play an important role. They generate income for the issuing standards body and provide a platform for the creation of consistent best practices for a specific industry or discipline. The project management discipline is no different and various project, program and portfolio standards have been issued by various standards bodies, such as ISO, PMI and DIN. These standards are used to create communities of practice and to determine the competence of project managers based on these standards. Standards have various benefits as well as challenges as highlighted by Ahlemann et al. (2009), Bredillet (2003) and Hällgren et al. (2012). The consensus, however, is that standards in general contribute to the project management profession.

Benefits management is a domain within program management standards such as the PMI’s Standard for Program Management and the OGC’s Managing Successful Programmes. Phases and activities are defined to ensure the successful management of benefits from identification to sustainment. For the purpose of this article, PMI’s benefits management phases and activities were used as a benchmark. The goal of the research was to determine whether South African organisations adhere to this standard and whether they achieve benefits and ultimately value from their investments in IS.

A qualitative approach was followed and 28 interviews were conducted. The purpose of the interviews was to determine to what extent organisations adhere to the standard and whether organisations achieve value from their IS investments. The interviews were analysed through the usage of Atlas.ti and deductive codes were used that captured the essence of the benefits management domain. The results indicate that IS project managers do not adhere to the phases and activities. Only three activities were performed by more than 50% of the interviewees: (i) Identify and qualify business benefits, (ii) report benefits and (iii) monitor performance of benefits. The rest of the activities are negated and two activities are actually not performed at all. Despite this, organisations believe that they are achieving value from their IS investments.

The perception is created that standards and best practices do not have to be adhered to, since the value that organisations require from their IS investments will still be created. However, this thinking negates the purpose of standards. IS project and program managers must also guard against using only part of a standard. This creates inconsistencies and raises the question of which sections they do adhere to and which sections they negate.

It is recommended that stakeholders involved in IS initiatives enforce governance with regard to CobiT as well as program and project management. This compliance will have two positive contributions. Firstly, IS project and program managers will have to think of how they manage benefits and achieve even more value for the organisation. Secondly, the competence levels of these IS project and program managers will be improved as they start to be measured against the standards that their organisations follow.

The solution is that organisations must enforce compliance with standards. This compliance must be incorporated into the daily management of programs and projects. Audits should also measure the level of compliance with the standards. Certification might play a role in a higher adherence rate, but the value of certification needs to be investigated.

Although the research was of exploratory nature, one of the shortcomings of the research is that the focus was not specifically linked to program managers and how they manage benefits within their projects. Interviewing only program managers would have provided a more accurate description on how organisations adhere to benefits management. Another shortcoming, is that some project managers fulfil the role of a program manager and manage the benefits management process. Future research should therefor focus on practitioners that are actively involved in managing benefits irrespective of their role or job description.

This research was of an exploratory nature and future research will involve the use of a quantitative study to determine adherence to benefits management best practices. This quantitative study will be open to a wider audience and the results can be used to compare disciplines and industries with one another.

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Table 1. Process of developing standards

#	**ISO Process**[4]	**PMI Process**[2]
1	A new standard is proposed to the relevant technical committee.	A committee is chartered to develop a specific standard. This committee includes a chair, vice-chair and volunteers. A PMI staff member is also assigned as a resource.
2	A working group of experts starts the discussion to prepare a working draft.	The committee meets over a period of several months to draft and refine the standard.
3	The first working draft is shared with the technical committee and with the ISO Central Secretariat.	The standards member advisory group (MAG) and a group of subject matter experts review the draft and return it to the committee for revision.
4	The draft is shared with all ISO national members, who are asked to comment.	The revised exposure draft is made available for public comment, which the committee considers and revises again.
5	The final draft is sent to all ISO members.	The finished standard is sent for approval to the PMI consensus body, a group of independent volunteer members responsible for validating the development process of each PMI standard.
6	The ISO international standard comes into existence.	Upon recommendation by the PMI standards manager, the new standard is approved by the PMI president and CEO.

[4] http://www.iso.org/iso/home/standards_development.htm

Table 2. Breakdown of Interviewee Roles

Role	Percentage
Program Manager	32%
Executive Management	21%
Chief Information Officer	18%
Portfolio Manager	11%
Project Manager	7%
Project Management Officer	7%
Chief Operating Officer	4%
TOTAL	**100%**

Table 3. Summary of adherence to activities

	Benefits Identification	Benefits Analysis and Planning				Benefits Delivery			Benefits Transition		Benefits Sustainment	
Activities	Identify & qualify business benefits	Derive & prioritise benefits	Derive benefits metrics	Establish BR plan & monitor	Map benefits into program plan	Monitor components	Maintain benefits register	Report benefits	Consolidate coordinated benefits	Transfer ongoing responsibility	Monitor performance of benefits	Ensure continued realisation of benefits
Number of Interviewees	24	8	5	0	0	11	2	16	2	3	20	12
%	86%	29%	18%	0%	0%	39%	7%	57%	7%	11%	71%	43%