

Projects deliver no value!

The interview with Mark Smalley about scoping projects to ensure that value is realized for years to come, conducted by Mirosław Dąbrowski

Mirosław Dąbrowski (interviewer, ASL BiSL Foundation Ambassador Poland), Lucile van der Hagen (ABF Managing Director) and Mark Smalley (ABF Ambassador-in-Chief) during the meeting in ASL BiSL Foundation Headquarters in Utrecht / Netherlands. Source: Mirosław Dąbrowski

Could you please introduce yourself to our readers?

I started in IT as a programmer in the late 70s, working for a large external IT services provider in the Netherlands. I still live there, on the southern outskirts of Amsterdam, but was born in London, where I met my Dutch wife. I've had positions in application development and management, business unit management, sales support, consultancy and training, product development and marketing.

I have been self-employed since 2012 and I work part-time for the non-profit ASL BiSL Foundation. I have two main activities at the moment: IT departments use my training and consultancy to improve their performance and the ASL BiSL Foundation sends me around the globe to generate awareness and interest for the ASL and BiSL frameworks and practices. Hopefully this also contributes to improving how IT is used.

What are ASL and BiSL?

They are both process frameworks, supported by training and a certification scheme.

The Application Services Library describes how applications are supported, maintained and renewed, and how application lifecycle and portfolio management is executed. It also describes the management activities to facilitate and direct these activities, such as planning and control, financial management, supplier management and contract management. It covers everything after the initial development of applications, which usually only represents 20% of the total cost of ownership of application. To summarize it helps to keep an organization's application portfolio up-and-running, up-to-date, and under control.

Where ASL offers guidance how to **provide** applications and related services, the Business Information Services Library offers guidance to business people who **consume** IT as a busi-

ness asset. Their concerns are typically: How much budget should I allocate to information and technology, as opposed to other business assets such as people, machines, buildings? What kind of information and technology do I need to help my business both survive and succeed? How do I deal effectively with the IT department? How do I ensure that the users actually realize the value from the significant investments? How can I demonstrate that I am managing information and technology in accordance with its importance to the organization?

BiSL helps business departments with these issues, offering guidance how to manage information and how to deal with IT from a business perspective. The focus is demand and use, rather than supply. The guidance is aimed at roles in the business such as system owner, process owner, information manager, super user. In other words people who are tasked with managing information, dealing with the IT department or external IT service providers, and support users from a functional perspective.

Both ASL and BiSL are accompanied by examples of how organizations have applied them. There are also many supporting publications, plus an independent certification scheme that is executed by APMG-International. Commercial training providers offer training, which is typically a two day course for each of the frameworks.

Why is this relevant for project managers?

Because projects deliver no value! They only deliver **potential value** (also known as capabilities). Value is only realized when the project deliverables are actually used. So it is crucial that the project scope not only includes the information system but also the organization that is needed to manage the system from both a supply point of view, and also from the demand and use perspective that the business takes.

The supply perspective is usually fulfilled by the IT department, and although there are often difficulties in the transfer of responsibilities from the project to the permanent organization, sooner or later this is sorted out. The business side, however, is frequently the weakest link in the chain. Yes, somebody is responsible for the financial aspects of the system. Yes, there is somebody who deals with the IT department. Yes, there is an experienced user who helps colleagues when asked. But is this enough? This is the area that BiSL addresses.

Organizations and their customers now depend on information systems to a much stronger degree than in the past. And because the market changes much more rapidly than previously, the business must change quickly, including the implications for use of information and technology.

Any project manager who wants to be taken seriously cannot get away with by simply scoping the organizational side out of his or her project. Unless he or she is assured that somebody else is going to take care of it. If you ignore this, when things go wrong due to problems outside your formal scope, you will still be associated with a Bad Project and could be guilty of an act of omission. As a professional project manager you have an obligation to advise your client about risks and this is a Serious Risk.

So how can project managers avoid this risk?

The easiest thing that they can do is at the start of the project. Perform a quick scan that assesses the "maturity" of the permanent IT-related roles in the business that will be responsible after the project organization has been dismantled. If the project manager does not want to take on any extra work, he or she can either just advise the customer about the kind of roles that should be in place, and the

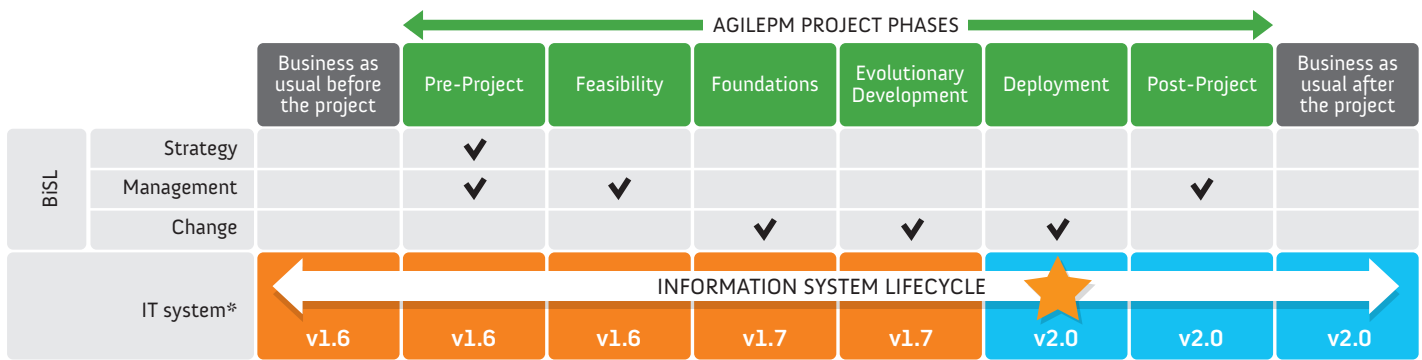


Table 1 - How BiSL process levels interact with AgilePM processes.

* In the example mentioned in the interview, information system (e.g. web portal) v 1.6 is now running in live/production environment. Through utilizing AgilePM method organization is planning to release major update, release v2.0.

current state of maturity. If however, the project manager is capable of dealing with organizational change, he or she can propose to include this in the project scope. Either way, the issue has been addressed, not ignored.

How can project managers find this quick scan?

There's plenty of information freely available on the ASL BiSL Foundation website (www.aslbiisfoundation.org) but it's probably easier to get in touch with a human being at the Foundation and get some free support that is tailored to their particular needs.

How does this all fit into modern approaches such as AgilePM?

First we have to view things from the right perspective. While AgilePM takes a project lifecycle point of view, ASL and BiSL look at the information system lifecycle. 90% of information systems live from 3 months to 30 years – on average about 12 years. And during that time 70%-90% of the total cost of ownership is spent, as compared to 10%-30% on the initial project. So on average there's a 20:80 divide between the cost of release 1.0 and everything that happens during the active life of the system. How much of the 80% is related to projects? Well, about a third of the 80% is related to keeping an application up and running, and therefore two thirds is spent on change. 60% of change is business-driven, while 40% is technical change. I'd say that two thirds of the changes are straightforward enough to be dealt with as part of an ongoing maintenance process, while the other changes are financially significant or technically complex and are therefore treated as projects. So in addition to the 20% spent on release 1.0, about 25% is spent on project-based maintenance and renewal.

The way AgilePM and BiSL intersect is many places [see the attached table]. Imagine that an information system has been used for 18 months and that through routine maintenance, the system has undergone 6 minor releases, so it is now version 1.6. BiSL makes a distinction between Strategic processes in which the longer-term plans for the information systems are defined, Managing processes for the major decision-making, Change for changes to the information system, and Operations for keeping the system up and running and of course for its use.

In AgilePM's Pre-Project phase, the initiative is taken to consider a major release, v2.0.

This could be part of a strategic plan for the information system, or simply some change requests from business operations that are complex enough to need more rigorous management than the regular maintenance processes offers. This coincides with BiSL's managing activities, in which the business initiates the project and takes decisions.

Business people who are tasked with managing the information system from their business perspective, are the ideal candidates to fulfil the AgilePM business roles Business Sponsor, Business Visionary, Business Advisor, Business Ambassador and Business Analyst.

It is also desirable that members of the "permanent" maintenance team participate in the project. Not only to provide information about the system that they know intimately, but also to acquire knowledge of the new changes so that they can act quickly when urgent maintenance is needed long after the project is dismantled.

While the project progresses through the next phases, some urgent maintenance is needed and version 1.7 is developed and released. This obviously needs coordination with the project. During the AgilePM Deployment phase the new release is taken into production. The project is evaluated in the Post-Project phase, after which the information system continues to be used, supported, maintained and managed on a more process-oriented basis. Until the next project is needed.

So you see how the two approaches interface. ASL and BiSL recommend that complex and risky activities should be managed as projects but the frameworks do not prescribe any particular approach. This depends on the characteristics of the specific information systems, the required changes and the organization. So AgilePM not only interfaces with ASL and BiSL from a practical point of view, but it is also part of the ASL-BiSL philosophy to work in conjunction with other frameworks, standards and bodies of knowledge to form a practical way of working for each organization.

Can you tell us more about the ASL BiSL Foundation?

The ASL BiSL Foundation is based in the Netherlands, where it was created in 2002. ASL and BiSL are the de facto standards for many organizations in the Netherlands, who often use a proven combination of BiSL plus ASL and ITIL to address their main IT management concerns.

The Foundation gives an annual award to the organization that has achieved significant improvement by using ASL and/or BiSL. We have recently published a book with these case studies at public and private organizations. They reported benefits in three categories and I'll mention an example in each category: **Pure business benefits** – the Dutch Police Force reduced criminality by persistent offenders by improving how they managed information across various semi-autonomous Police-departments. **IT-related business benefits** – Saxion University of Applied Sciences took control of IT by making governance demand-based instead of supplier-dominated. **Benefits for the IT department** – insurance company Achmea improved their IT services and reduced costs by using both BiSL and ASL to create a process model that connected multiple autonomous business divisions with the centralized IT department.

The ASL BiSL Foundation is a membership organization as relies to a strong degree on enthusiastic volunteers to support our interests. We now have ambassadors who represent our interests in Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Poland, Portugal, Russia, and the United States. ■



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