

**BENTLEY PRUNES ITS
IT PROCESSES FOR EFFICIENCY**

THE MASTERMINDS



PHOTO_BENTLEY

A quickly expanding company often requires considerable IT support. As a result, information scientists may have to contend with a project bottleneck. But Bentley has solved the problem: departments now work together with IT experts in deciding what will be pushed through the eye of the needle—and when.

📄 ULF J. FROITZHEIM

Bentley Motors is on a successful course. In 2012 the British luxury brand sold 22 percent more sedans, coupes, and convertibles than in 2011—a total of 8,510 vehicles. The convertible version of the Continental GT has proven to be a true favorite among customers in the important growth markets of the USA and China. Nearly one in three buyers in 2012 selected this new convertible, whose most powerful “Speed” version featuring a 12-cylinder twin-turbo engine brings 625 horsepower to the road. Because of the success of its top models in particular, the company increased its revenues by nearly 30 percent.

Reports from Crewe, a town situated within the triangle formed by Manchester, Liverpool, and Birmingham—which has also been the production site for the Windsor family’s vehicles of state since 1946—also envision a strong rate of growth for the years to come. The management of Bentley, a subsidiary of VW, is not interested in compromises. It regularly assesses not only the satisfaction of its customers but also of its employees. Bentley was recently honored as one of Britain’s Top Employers on account of its good working atmosphere.

THE SENSITIVE NERVOUS SYSTEM

In order for its business strategy to work, however, Bentley not only has to make luxury sedans, sports coupes, convertibles, and perhaps soon also SUVs that meet the taste of target groups in markets as diverse as China, Russia, the USA, and the oil-producing nations of the Middle East. To do so, it also needs all manner of software. “IT is in effect the company’s nervous system,” says Dr. Roy Sauer, Chief Information Officer (CIO) at headquarters. “It lays the technical foundations for the business processes that add value.” Contrary to the promises made by some providers, the required applications are rarely ready for use right off the shelf. This means that these applications have to be adapted in the business processes for most tasks.

The more dynamic a company’s development the greater its requirements for customized solutions. IT experts can find themselves inundated with requests from various departments, because viewed subjectively, each request is very important and of course extremely urgent

as well. Such requests frequently include large-scale projects that, for reasons of capacity, have had to be postponed more than once. They also include small projects with large-scale effects—projects that would have been completed if the developer in charge weren’t actively involved in a larger project. There are “must-do” projects, such as those required for implementing legal changes, and “can-do” projects that help smooth out some of the bumps in a business process. However, what is often missing in practice is an authoritative, clearly regulated decision-making process that ensures that departmental objectives do not inadvertently take precedence over the good of the company.

Bentley, too, was confronted with this challenge—and sought out Porsche Consulting for guidance. How should a process be designed so that the IT systems can be further developed as optimally as possible? And what does this mean for the employees and how they work? “Neither departments nor IT experts were particularly happy before we started the project,” recalls Dr. Roy Sauer—who has a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering and is a quality control expert—as he thinks back to when he began working in Crewe. This became crystal clear when IT experts and their important in-house “customers” were surveyed regarding their thoughts on the role of the IT department: “When it came to defining business processes, some primarily expected technical specifications, while others had anticipatory support in mind.” The IT experts, on the other hand, asked themselves where they were supposed to fit in on the scale between order programming and business administration. Moreover, priorities frequently changed. “Projects were often brought to a sudden halt,” Sauer notes, “because it turned out that they were not in fact that important or urgent. And it’s always annoying when something like that happens to your project.”

FOCUSING ON THE BUSINESS PROCESS

The conclusion of this baseline study indicated considerable potential for the 4,000-employee company: the IT organization worked pragmatically, but overall it was too technology-oriented and insufficiently systematic and proactive. Its overall focus was on ensuring day-to-day IT operations. Staff members shied away from saying no to departmental requests that—upon closer examination of the →



“AFTER ALL, THE IT DEPARTMENT IS THE COMPANY’S ‘NERVOUS SYSTEM’”

DR. ROY SAUER

**Chief Information Officer (CIO)
at Bentley headquarters in Crewe**

development outlay—were not worth pursuing. Principal Kashif Ansari, project manager Dr. Stephen Hellhammer, and their team of Porsche consultants therefore collaborated with Sauer’s team and his in-house Bentley customers to develop an IT governance process: a structured, systematic, and above all long-term course of action for apportioning the limited staff capacities among large and smaller IT projects. “The goal was explicit: to enhance the effectiveness of the existing IT team, while always keeping firmly in mind that employee satisfaction is one of the company’s strategic goals,” says Ansari. To achieve this, the first step was to define guidelines for the new IT organization. The proven process model was adapted to the IT landscape at Bentley, and then tasks were reassigned. The new organizational structure is flatter; only two of the previous three hierarchical levels remain. Teams now have up to twelve members, with team managers reporting directly to CIO Sauer.

Only one-fourth of Bentley IT employees have not been affected by this reorganization: they still work on the same team for the same supervisor and on the same topics. Everyone else either has a new supervisor, has joined a new team—or both. 15 percent of employees also have different tasks than previously. The restructuring process has already resulted in tangible improvements for employees: “Cooperation between the IT department and specialist divisions has unquestionably improved,” says Sauer.

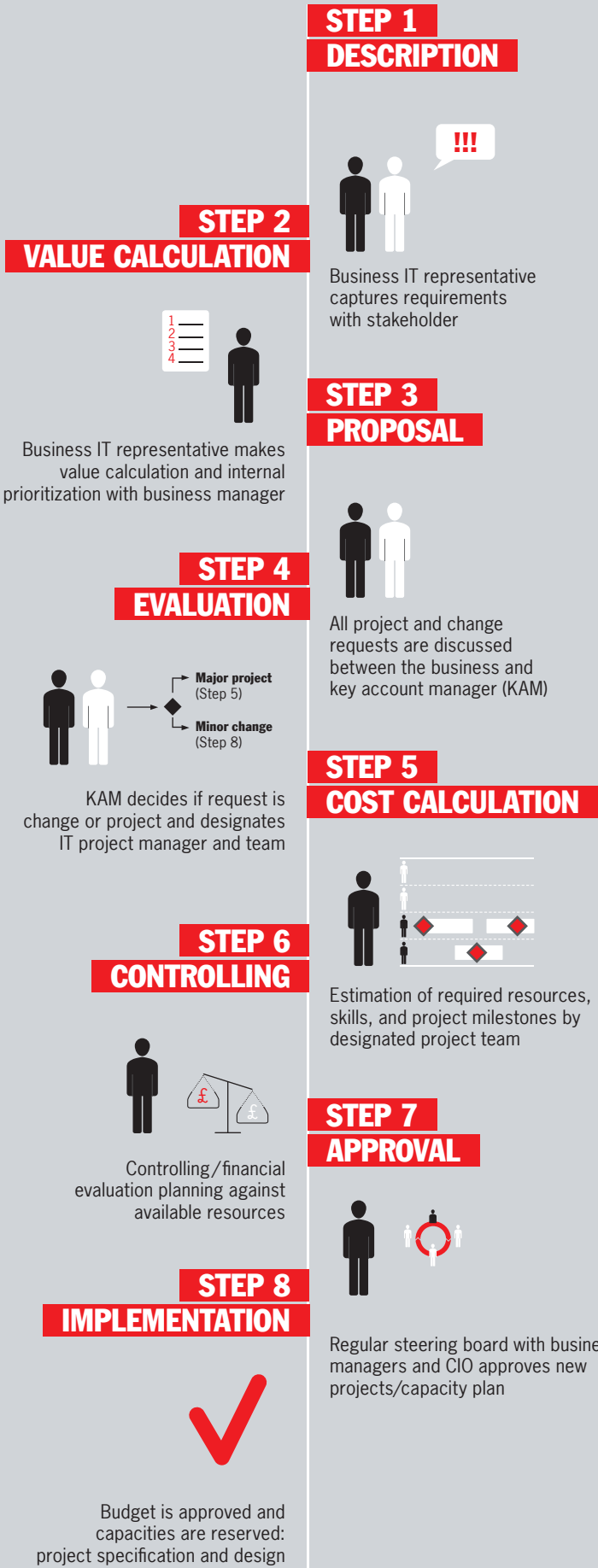
CUTTING IN LINE? NOT ANY MORE

The other major change is the introduction of an “IT Board.” Managers representing the IT department and “customers” periodically hold a round-table discussion to set priorities for processing upcoming or

requested projects. To make sure that no one is omitted, every department is included in the decision process. To ensure that the procedure is as objective as possible, each manager uses a specified list of criteria to state in writing how his or her proposed project would benefit the company. The projects are then ranked according to a point system. Must-do projects, which implement new laws or strategic management resolutions, are given the most weight. Can-do projects are primarily ranked according to business case, in other words, according to the expected contribution to the strategic company goals. All of this ensures that in the battle over division of IT resources, the biggest piece of the pie no longer goes to the loudest department. And the traditional FIFO (first in first out) model, in which everything proceeds according to who is first in line, has now been consigned to the past as well.

The system adopted by the IT Board, known as rolling portfolio planning, is flexible enough to open up spontaneous opportunities for smaller projects: point values are not for perpetuity; if conditions change, the board can respond at any time to accommodate them. At the time that project priorities are established, an estimate is also made regarding the number of person days and the particular skills that will be needed; this minimizes the risk that a project will be cancelled.

Dr. Roy Sauer is satisfied with the results of a trial run with the sales and marketing department as a pilot customer. And more than that: cooperation amongst colleagues sitting together in a round-table discussion encourages greater comprehension on the part of division managers as to how IT experts work, what they can do, and what they cannot do: “People now understand more clearly that we have only so many resources,” says the Bentley IT boss. In an era where there seems to be a cheap app on the Internet for just about anything imaginable, it’s all too easy to forget this basic fact. ←



**IN THE
FUTURE ONE
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