Moving Enterprise Architecture Teams Out of IT and Into the Business
Introduction

The discipline of enterprise architecture (EA) is evolving to play a more strategic role within organizations. One driver for this evolution is executive-level expectations to realize a return on investment for their EA initiatives. At the same time, it’s the result of increased pressure on organizations to evolve their operations and more quickly adapt to changing market conditions and regulatory requirements than ever before.

For EA to move up the value chain within an organization, IT must leverage its operational knowledge and collaborate with its business counterparts to design and manage the implementation of desired changes necessary to support business requirements. It is imperative that IT sees itself working in the business to deliver demonstrable value through the strategic application of technology. It doesn’t matter if IT personnel do so by moving out of the IT organization and into the business or by working with the business as part of virtual teams. What matters is taking steps to change the current paradigm.

According to a recent Gartner report, several trends are driving EA to more closely align with their business counterparts. One such trend is that business users have gained greater freedom to lead and make technology decisions. This is due in large part to more CIOs adopting the view that IT strategies must reflect the business’s strategic priorities. At the same time, new practices and disciplines have emerged that focus on enabling EA practitioners to better communicate and collaborate with business leaders. This confluence of events is pushing EA teams to realize ROI faster than ever before by better aligning the IT function to business needs and addressing them more quickly than previously possible.

With higher expectations come higher demands. As EA teams find themselves more accountable for results, they must produce business value similar to that of any other internal program. They can do so by taking advantage of the foundation enabled by EA and applying new tools that support better requirements gathering, design and management of the transition from current to desired state. These actions help EA teams understand the business’s current capabilities and how they can leverage existing business services more broadly across the enterprise. As a result, EAs become an integral part of the team that drives targeted and quantifiable business results.

Why Does the Gap Exist?

When it comes to improving enterprise performance via technology, IT and the business usually approach the same problem from two vastly different perspectives. Each relies on a separate and distinct set of information that informs its view of the problem in a unique way. As a result, businesspeople often lack an appreciation for the technical ramifications of adopting a new process or technology and IT teams can find business requirements unrealistic. If they are unable to bridge that gap in a highly collaborative way, the consequences can be significant.

Consider the common scenario in which the business makes what it believes to be a simple functional request only to hear back from IT that this request will add six months to the project. While it may be true that there are substantial technical implications associated with specific business requests, IT should not expect business users to understand the full impact of all the IT management details – and it isn’t necessary for them to. A better approach would be for IT to focus on translating the IT management details into business language. Once IT fully comprehends what the business is trying to accomplish, it may be able to offer an alternative approach that meets the fundamental business requirement in a shorter time frame.

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**Enterprise Architects are Getting More Strategic**

- 53% of EA practitioners surveyed stated that senior management expected EA to be focused on a business strategic vision.
- 68% of respondents said that their primary focus for EA during 2011 and 2012 will be on aligning with business, delivering business value or transforming the business.

*Source: Gartner, Beyond the Tipping Point: EA Is Strategic, 15 March 2011*
Working together on essential business capabilities instead of implementation details, IT and business can often identify solutions that blend the two perspectives. In fact, such collaboration often enables the business to leverage what IT knows about current capabilities or best practices in other parts of the organization. It requires both points of view to ensure that the approach will enable the business to meet market demands.

Further, this type of collaboration positions IT to lead the charge in looking for solutions that are synchronized with business needs. If IT can facilitate a shift in the paradigm to a form a cooperative relationship, both sides will gain in terms of efficiency and results. Rather than responding to requests from business, IT can proactively offer solutions and alternatives.

**A Blueprint for Success: How EA Can Help Fulfill the Strategic Vision**

Long-standing walls between the business and IT still exist in many organizations today. The ultimate long-term goal should not be to align the two but to fuse them so that business becomes a driver of IT, and vice versa. After all, at the end of the day, all employees – even those in IT – are in the business.

To close the gap between what business expects and IT delivers, everyone must work from a common, shared vision. This requires firmly grasping what the company is trying to achieve, how it operates today, and what the business needs to do to accomplish its goals. In other words, both sides should come together around a shared understanding of what incremental changes need to be made in the current operations to advance the business. While it takes time for organizations to unite in this way, doing so can have a positive multiplier effect on each subsequent project.

EA is in a unique position to make this common vision happen. With a view across business units, EA teams can profile enterprise capabilities and innovation to create a roadmap for achieving results. In fact, EA practitioners can help organizations both discover and standardize their best practices to increase overall business performance. Different areas of the business often work in silos, with each area having little insight into what the other does. EA can help bridge the gaps and share best practices so that each department or unit can optimize the way it works based on lessons learned across the enterprise. These departments and units may also be able to leverage capabilities already developed by other units in order to improve their current operations. By emulating top performers, the entire enterprise can achieve better results.

From a direct ROI perspective, EA’s benchmarking can quickly have an impact. By profiling best practices, the EA team can provide the business with cost comparisons of different project approaches. For example, the business may consider making a request of IT for an approach that requires a 9-month effort. But if the EA team proactively shares its profiles and best practices, the business team may see an option that suits its need and requires a significantly reduced effort. As this occurs more frequently, IT begins to increase its value to the company by enabling operational excellence and becoming a trusted advisor to the business. Business users don’t always think to ask IT how others may already be doing things. By thinking in terms of how business users are benefiting from systems, EA will be able to say, “We just rolled that out in another location, and here’s the approach that worked.” This cross-unit view is critical to increasing EA value.

Note that sharing best practices addresses only half the challenge of performing EA correctly. Communications represents the other half. EA teams need to create a language that fills the gap between what the business and IT understand about each other. In order for EA teams to lead the charge to fuse the enterprise, they must be supported by the proper tools and skill set to create new channels of communication between themselves and the business. One major need is a tool set that supports...
real-time collaboration. A common set of core elements should allow users to see multiple views and their interconnections, rather than users seeing different views that never connect to one another. The method is analogous to that practiced by building architects and construction teams. Different pages of a blueprint represent varied perspectives of the same building, but everyone still works from a common understanding. A blueprint accommodates unique perspectives while greatly improving the chances of getting the building built right as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Fusing EA and the business requires a fundamental shift in the way IT and the business think about each other. This shift will only occur if executives and individuals from both sides realize the business imperative and support the steps necessary to make it happen. In the end, open communications between the business and IT — at all levels — will be crucial to EA’s impact on the bottom line.

United Airlines’ Enterprise Architecture Team: Effectively Bridging the Gap

At United Airlines, the Enterprise Architecture team bridges the gap between business and an IT group of nearly 1,300 people. As a result of the merger with Continental Airlines, the company sought to migrate from two separate global systems and business practices to one unified operating model — moving all reservations, inventory, and related information to new systems.

With the program involving more than 200 people across multiple business organizations, United Airlines created an EA team to model the “as-is” and “to-be” states of the business systems. Such modeling required a dialogue between IT and the business. The EA team knew that it must focus the conversations on process. Otherwise, various IT teams would bring the discussions down different paths, with each taking away a slightly different understanding from the discussion.

To make the dialogue business-friendly, the EA team built a capability map that allowed business users to describe their needs in terms of system capabilities rather than technical requirements. Not only did this ease understanding between groups, it helped the business to maintain ownership of the process and validate how the process could be changed. The team also collaborated with the program office on multi-year planning. With a process model in hand, they held business analyst community meetings and developed a listing of projects and capabilities that the projects would impact. The EA team quickly identified capabilities with multiple stakeholders and brought them together to discuss their overlaps. Many people from different areas had not realized that they had overlaps. In this way, the EA team uncovered a major opportunity to optimize development and achieve the same goal while addressing multiple projects at once.

Having the insights gathered by the EA team, the technology teams (including information architecture and technology architecture), more easily determined the technology solution that would satisfy the exact needs of all stakeholders. At the same time, the EA team made sure that all projects aligned with business strategies and outcomes. This helped it build ROI measures across the entire portfolio rather than just individual projects, making the measurements more meaningful on the bottom line.

For years, EA teams have faced the same problems discussed in this report. Issues with acceptance, selling to the business, and achieving strategic objectives permeate all of IT’s strategic bodies. In 2011, EA teams will make adjustments to their priorities to minimize the height of these obstacles and position themselves to hurdle over them.”