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ENTERPRISE ARCHITECT OR SHARED SERVICE ARCHITECT?

Inevitably, the design and implementation of any shared service will also involve a long, hard look at the methods of delivery and almost certainly SSAs and SS(PRAC)s will want to take advantage of the opportunity to rebuild those services and embrace “digital” (although that trendy term can, and does, mean different things to different people).

One thing is certain though – “digital” is more than just web enabling a service or introducing an app – it involves a fundamental rethink of how interactions, processes and the organisation itself are all constructed to deliver this service.

But how can you be sure that you have considered all of the business and technical issues that come out of the woodwork?

Another trendy phrase of the moment, Enterprise Architecture, can help you frame these issues. This article can only scratch the surface but will hopefully give you some pointers for further research.

Put simply, Enterprise Architecture is a blueprint that defines the structure and operation of an organisation – or what we do and how we do it.

This blueprint is formed of four layers, or “perspectives” which start by focusing on the “what” an organisation does and then become more detailed as they start to concentrate on the “how”.

The Target Operating Model (TOM)

In a nutshell, a TOM is a description of the desired state of the operations of a business.

Typically, a TOM also includes the roadmap over time that specifies what the company needs to do to move from the “as is” to the “to be”. So what it does, is provide you with the vision for an organization that is undergoing change – hopefully you can start to see the parallels with some of the tools in the *Shared Services Architect’s Trust & Shared Vision Toolbox!*

Like all of the other shared services tools, it’s not about the technology – people and processes are more important.

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The Four Perspectives of Enterprise Architecture



Business perspective

Application perspective

Information perspective

Technology perspective

Each of these so-called “perspectives” helps you to produce a set of documentation (or at least an outline understanding) detailing what is going on at various layers of abstraction, and collectively helps to ensure that you are using the right technology, information and applications to deliver the aims of your organisation...

The Four Perspectives of Enterprise Architecture

There are many variations on the Enterprise Architecture theme and a number of models with varying degrees of complexity. I prefer to use a simple model that uses four different viewpoints to build an understanding of the enterprise – The Open Group Architecture Framework (TOGAF).

Each of these so-called “perspectives” helps you to produce a set of documentation (or at least an outline understanding) detailing what is going on at various layers of abstraction, and collectively helps to ensure that you are using the right technology, information and applications to deliver the aims of your organisation:

The Business Architecture describes the business strategy, models, processes, services and organisation. It provides the foundation upon which the other enterprise architecture dimensions base their decisions.

Application Architecture defines the specification of technology enabled solutions in support of the business architecture, and provides a view on how services should be bundled to support a business process – which applications are used, the interactions between them and what functionality will be exposed.

Information Architecture identifies, documents and manages the information needs of the enterprise, assigns ownership and accountability for this information, and describes how data is stored by and exchanged between stakeholders.

Technical Architecture defines the strategies and standards for technologies and methods used to develop, execute and operate the Application Architecture – the basic IT infrastructure in terms of hardware, software, networking and security.

Of course, each one of these layers will use specific tools to help define the architecture, ranging from SWOT, Six Sigma and balanced scorecard at the strategic level, through to business process reengineering, business cases and down to things like ITIL and software analysis and design techniques.

Now, you don’t need to be an expert in all these things – you just need to have enough awareness to ask the stupid questions that turn out not to be so stupid after all!

So, why do this?

Well, if you don’t, there are some immediate impacts:

- Lack of information to support decision making
- Inability to adapt to changing demands or market conditions
- Inefficient and redundant processes
- Sub-optimal use of organisational assets

And, just in case there was any doubt about the relevance of this to your work as a shared services professional, look at the skill-set that is most often associated with a successful Enterprise Architect – one who is able to take on board the different perspectives and help define new ways of working. For example:

- Leading/working in/empowering a team towards a common goal
- Evaluating the technical, business and economic impact, viability and integration requirements of technologies
- Negotiating skills
- Stakeholder Management
- Team building and consulting skills
- Strong tactical and strategic skills
- Information gathering skills, including interviewing

It appears that the roles of an Enterprise Architect (EA) and a Shared Service Architect (SSA™) are close in their skills requirement.

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