Business Architecture

A Practical Guide

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GOWER
The Business Architect Role

Given that there is no single universally agreed definition of what business architecture is (or architecture in general in the context of organizations), the role of business architect is somewhat elusive. The role tends to be relative to the organization (and more specifically the people within it who write the job specification). In some ways, everyone’s an architect. Browsing through job descriptions in the marketplace, one could easily believe that a business architect has to be all things to all people. Many business architect role specifications describe a role that few individuals (if any) would be able to fulfil.

In Chapter 3 we identified four levels within an organization to which business architecture can be applied:

1. **Macro** – establishing the vision and desired target state and the benefits the organization brings to its stakeholders

2. **Strategic** – supplementing the vision with target capabilities, supporting principles and policies and a current state environmental assessment to provide contextual rationale

3. **Segment/programme** – translating the strategic activities into delivery-focused change initiatives at the segment or programme level

4. **Project** – engaging with projects to communicate the architecture and oversee alignment to it.

A business architect may operate at one or more of these levels, although operating at all four is unlikely, especially in a large organization – time would
not allow for it. Nevertheless, all levels are needed. Creating the vision is one thing; having the resources who understand the vision, understand what is necessary to make it happen and make it happen is another. The more mature the organization in terms of architecture, the higher the level at which the role exists.

Business architecture role specifications tend to vary depending on the level at which the role is expected to operate. However, the common denominators that should exist at all levels relate to the engagement principles discussed in Chapter 12:

- Understand the organization.
- Gain executive sponsorship.
- Interact with stakeholders.
- Communicate the architecture.
- Demonstrate value.
- Establish a sustainable proposition.

In addition, professional and personal development is necessary to ensure that skills and knowledge remain current. The pace of change we discussed in earlier chapters demands that architects ride the wave of change rather than get caught in its wake.

The typical core activities undertaken by a business architect are shown in Figure 13.1.

In Table 7.7 we mapped these architecture services to the various business life cycles (Strategic Planning, Programmes, Projects and so on). Business architects may also provide supporting activities; we have summarized these in Appendix 1, again showing a mapping to the various business life cycles.

There are many factors that can influence the execution of the role of business architect. Here are a few examples.
The role can extend to the qualities and attributes of the architect. Great theoretical architects may not carry authority within an organization if they cannot connect with the C-suite players. Conversely a savvy, results-driven, business-knowledgeable strong communicator with gravitas doesn’t necessarily have to have deep technical knowledge to be an influential player; an appreciation of the technology and an understanding of the opportunities, limitations and pitfalls of technology should be sufficient.

Business architects need to know how to build business cases, develop benefit profiles and put forward compelling propositions.

THE SIZE OF THE ORGANIZATION

Larger organizations tend to have the capacity for specific architecture roles, whereas in smaller organizations, practising architecture is part of a broader role – you don’t have to be an architect by title to practice architecture, but you
do need the competencies (see the section ‘The Competencies of a Business Architect’ later in the chapter).

THE ARCHITECTURAL MATURITY OF THE ORGANIZATION

Organizations embrace business architecture relative to their architecture maturity. We discuss this further in the next section – ‘Business Architecture’s Position in the Organization’.

THE BELIEFS AND DESIRES OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS

These are typically, but not exclusively, the C-suite stakeholders. If there is a recognition of the need for the role, and its value can be demonstrated, then it is more likely to gain traction. The beliefs and desires of key stakeholders is also a factor in the architectural maturity of the organization.

The role can change over time, moving with the maturity of the architecture practice and the skills, competencies and experience of the business architects within it. So in different stages of the business architecture practice life cycle, different types of individuals may be required.

The lack of clear definition of the business architect’s role with an organization can cause confusion and conflict. This often occurs where, for example, a business analyst undertakes the role of business architect but fails to take the broader architecture view and hence is unable to deliver the value proposition of business architecture.

Business Architecture’s Position in the Organization

Business architecture is about viewing the organization as a cohesive whole, in which the individual parts and the relationship between those parts can be identified and optimized. It is about identifying problems and opportunities and formulating changes to address those problems and exploit the opportunities.

To date, the vast majority of business architecture practices reside in the IT function and report either to the CIO, CTO or another role within that function. In many cases, this is for historical reasons. Architecture as a discipline has its roots in IT infrastructure and systems. As the role extends into information and business, the problems and opportunities to be addressed are broader and
have a greater impact. The fact that they reside in the IT function does not mean they are not delivering value; they may be there for a very good reason. Business architecture needs to be cognizant of the key influences that can shape and determine the behaviour, and ultimately the success, of organizations, and technology is a significant influence. In theory, business architecture should be loosely coupled from the technology such that if the technology changes, that technology can be replaced with minimal impact and exploited with positive benefits. Reality is some distance removed from that aspiration, although it is a useful architectural principle to follow.

Business architecture may exist at all levels, and the model employed should map to the operating model of the organization. Business architecture defined at the Macro level needs to permeate through the levels to ensure that projects are aligned for the value to be realized. Different segment architectures may have different operating models, although this represents a relatively complex implementation. The path of least resistance is to develop a unified model for the organization as a whole. Any progression from one architecture level to another, or from one operating model to another, should be carefully planned.

Business architecture is a discipline devoted to shaping, articulating and guiding business change and defining the optimum course between strategy and its realization. This highly collaborative role acts as catalyst and facilitator in shaping and defining the future organization with the organizational leaders and senior managers. That alone sets the role apart from any other role in the organization.

With this remit, our conclusion is that the business architecture practice should report into the Strategy function or the office of the CEO.

The Competencies of a Business Architect

The competencies of the Business Architect can determine the level within the organization at which they are able to operate.

In Table 13.1 we present some broad categories of skills and competencies that we believe are important.
Table 13.1  Skills and competencies of a business architect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills and Competencies</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soft</td>
<td>Leadership, team working, consulting, communication, negotiating, relationship management and emotional intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Business case development, strategic development and planning, operational risk, business continuity, innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Modelling, systems thinking, information modelling, business process design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Management</td>
<td>Portfolio, programme and project management methods and tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General IT Knowledge</td>
<td>Technology awareness and its application, information security risk</td>
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TOGAF includes an Architecture Skills Framework that defines a set of competencies (and associated proficiency levels) for various architecture roles. The framework provides:

- ‘the roles within a work area;
- the skills required by each role;
- the depth of knowledge required to fulfil the role successfully.’

Similarly, the Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA) ‘provides a common reference model for the identification of the skills needed to develop effective Information Systems’.

Some organizations use psychometric tests to assess potential candidates as well as existing and potential practitioners within their organization. These include:

- the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator
- TDF International
- Belbin (for teams)
- proprietary tests (for example, those defined and used by management consultancies such as Social Styles)

So what are the necessary competencies required of a good business architect? The usual candidates include the hard (technical, industry, architecture methods and so on) and soft (personal, social, political and so on); today’s business architect is expected to be a leader, a motivator, an innovator, a communicator,
a strategic thinker, a deliverer, a politician, a diplomat, a relationship councillor, a game changer – the list goes on. Business architects are usually expected to be educated to degree level, and there is an increasing expectation that candidates will have an MBA.

Jeff Scott, formerly of Forrester, has often been asked what makes a good architect, and more often now, what makes a good business architect. He cites six competencies, as follows.

A SOUND UNDERSTANDING OF BUSINESS PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS

Most IT types think understanding the business is all about understanding the business processes, but this is not what business leaders are interested in. Business architects should understand how the market context affects the business, how value is created, what differentiates their company from its competitors, and how products are created, marketed, and sold. They should have a good understanding of how business strategy is developed – even if it is never articulated.

AN ABILITY TO THINK ABOUT BUSINESS PROCESSES OUTSIDE THE TECHNOLOGY CONTEXT

Even business people have a hard time with this. I have had more than one business architect share his frustration with business project people who continually talk about business processes in terms of how their applications work. Although business architects need to understand how to leverage IT for business value, they need to be able to draw a wide, heavy line between business processes and the technologies that enable them.

A REALLY STRONG CONSULTING MINDSET

Building a good business architecture is more about listening and reading between the lines than selling a concept or framework. At the end of the day, a successful business architecture will be one that resonates with business leaders. Business architects should see themselves as business consultants looking for problems to solve.

A STRATEGIC POINT OF VIEW

Business architects need the ability to challenge people’s thinking, to get them out of the current issues and current systems and into thinking about the
possibilities of the future. As one of my clients so eloquently put it: ‘It’s not so much about thinking outside the box as it is thinking outside your box.’

GOOD AT DESIGN THINKING

‘I want business architects who can bring order out of the typical strategy chaos at most companies.’ This means that they can listen to lots of ideas and create a view that resonates across the width of the organization. It means they have the ability to see what others are blind to and can create a clear line of sight between business intention and business action.

A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

At the end of the day, business architecture isn’t worth the napkin it is scribbled on if the organization doesn’t change. Business architects should see themselves as change agents first, and architects second. They should use business architecture as a tool to agitate and initiate action.

We also believe that for business architecture to gain traction, the business architect has to be flexible and pragmatic – happy to role-play for the benefit of the customer. That may include being able to work outside your normal mode, perhaps outside your comfort zone. The ability to adapt is critical; smaller team size means having to cover more ground – for example, if your soccer team loses a player, the remaining players have to be versatile enough to cover the ground, to cover more than one position.

Business architects need to keep an eye on trends and their implications: social networks, gamification, disruptive technologies and so on. And there are many ways to keep up to date, including attending conferences, researching, networking or training. Ultimately, there needs to be a desire to learn and understand.

Certification

Certification brings a degree of assurance that an individual meets a set of defined criteria considered necessary to fulfil the role. Certification also promotes standardization of skills within and across industries, as well as encouraging some uniformity among practitioners in terms of the definition and purpose of business architecture and greater clarity to all architecture
stakeholders. This is particularly relevant in a field that is, compared to the disciplines it interacts with, in its infancy and rapidly evolving. Furthermore, the periodic renewal of certification means that practitioners keep abreast of developments – a requisite in such a fast-moving discipline.

Increasingly, organizations are requiring their existing architects to become certified, and expect new hires and consultants to be certified. It also adds to the credibility of supplier and partner organizations.

Architecture certification schemes come into existence and evolve as the discipline itself evolves. Open and proprietary certification schemes exist for the mainstream architecture frameworks (TOGAF, DODAF, FEAF, Zachman and so on), although only elements of these focus on business architecture. We are beginning to see specific business architecture certification schemes and a much closer association to MBA programmes – for example, the Business Architects Association Certified Business Architect® (CBA) scheme.1 We also expect business architecture modules and courses to be more prevalent in higher education, and also recognized in the certification schemes of other disciplines such as MSP and PRINCE2. Like business architecture itself, business architecture certification schemes are evolving, and it is not always easy to determine which may be the most appropriate to pursue. The decision is often not a personal decision, but a corporate one that is dependent on the framework that has been selected for use.

As business architects are viewed as game-changers, leaders, communicators and so on, in addition to the harder skills (methods and techniques), an increasingly important aspect of the role is the soft skills. Although certification schemes today focus on the more technical aspects of the discipline, we would expect certification programmes to incorporate soft skills in due course. Organizations are looking for strong soft skills, and where certification is mandatory, soft skills become the differentiator between prospective candidates.

*The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook.*

*William James*

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