

Business Architecture Helps Business Leaders Decide and Communicate Changes

Transcript of a BriefingsDirect sponsored podcast on business architecture recorded live at The Open Group's Enterprise Architecture Practitioners Conference in Seattle, Washington.

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Dana Gardner: Hi, this is [Dana Gardner](#), principal analyst at [Interarbor Solutions](#), and you're listening to [BriefingsDirect](#).



Today, we present a sponsored podcast discussion coming to you from The Open Group's [Enterprise Architecture Practitioners Conference](#) in Seattle, the week of February 1, 2010.

We're going to look at the topic of the difference between [enterprise architecture \(EA\)](#) and [business architecture \(BA\)](#). We will be talking with [Tim Westbrook](#), Managing Director of [EAdirections](#). Welcome to the show, Tim.

Tim Westbrook: How are you doing, Dana?

Gardner: We're doing great. I really enjoyed your presentation today. Can you tell us a little bit about some of the high-level takeaways. Principally, how do you define BA?

Westbrook: Well, the premise of my discussion today is that, in order for EA to maintain and continue to evolve, we have to go outside the domain of IT. Hence, the conversation about BA. To me, BA is an intrinsic component of EA, but what most people really perform in most organizations that I see is IT architecture.



A real business-owned enterprise business architecture and enterprise information architecture are really the differentiating factors for me. I'm not one of these guys that is straight about definitions. You've got to get a sense from the words that you use.

To me enterprise business architecture is a set of artifacts and methods that helps business leaders make decisions about direction and communicate the changes that are required in order to achieve that vision.

Gardner: How do we get here? What's been the progression? And, why has there been such a gulf between what the IT people eat, sleep, and drink, and what the business people expect?

Westbrook: There are a lot of factors in that. Back in the late '80s and early '90s, we got really good at providing solutions really quickly in isolated spots. What happened in most

organizations is that you had really good isolated solutions all over the place. Integrated? No. Was there a need to integrate? Eventually. And, that's when we began really piling up the complexity.

We went from an environment, where we had one main vendor or two main vendors, to every specific solution having multiple vendors contributing to the software and the hardware environment.

That complexity is something that the business doesn't really understand, and we haven't done a real good job of getting the business to understand the implications of that complexity. But, it's not something they should really be worried about. It's our excuse sometimes that it's too complex to change quickly.

Focus on capabilities

We really need to focus the conversation on capabilities. Part of my presentation talked about deriving capabilities as the next layer of abstraction down from business strategy, business outcomes, and business objectives. It's a more finite discussion of the real changes that have to happen in an organization, to the channel, to the marketing approach, to the skill mix, and to the compensation. They're real things that have to change for an organization to achieve its strategies.



In IT architecture, we talk about the changes in the systems. What are the changes in the data? What are the changes in the infrastructure? Those are capabilities that need to change as well. But, we don't need to talk about the details of that. We need to understand the capabilities that the business requires. So, we talk to folks a lot about understanding capabilities and deriving them from business direction.

Gardner: It seems to me that, over the past 20 or 30 years, the pace of IT technological change was very rapid -- business change, not so much. But now, it seems as if the technology change is not quite as fast, but the business change is. Is that a fair characterization?

Westbrock: It's unbelievably fast now. It amazes me when I come across an organization now that's surviving and they can't get a new product out the door in less than a year -- 18 months, 24 months. How in a world are they responding to what their customers are looking for, if it takes that long to get system changes products out the door?

We're looking at organizations trying monthly, every six weeks, every two months, quarterly to get significant product system changes out the door in production. You've got to be able to respond that quickly.

Gardner: So, in the past, the IT people had to really adapt and change to the technology that was so rapidly shifting around them, but now the IT people need to think about the rapidly shifting business environment around them.

Westbrock: "Think about," yes, but not "figure out." That's the whole point. BA is a means by which we can engage as IT professionals with the business leadership, the business decision-makers who are really deciding how the business is going to change.

Some of that change is a natural response to government regulations, competitive pressures, political pressures, and demographics, but some of it is strategic, conscious decisions, and there are implications and dependencies that come along with that.

Sometimes, the businesses are aware of them and sometimes they're not. Sometimes, we understand as IT professionals -- some not all -- about those dependencies and those implications. By having that meaningful dialogue on an ongoing basis, not just as a result of the big implementation, we can start to shorten that time to market.

Gardner: So, the folks who are practitioners of BA, rather than more narrowly EA, have to fill this role of Rosetta Stone in the organization. They have to translate cultural frames of mind and ideas about the priorities between that IT side and the business side.

Understanding your audience

Westbrock: This isn't a technical skill, but understanding your audience is a big part of doing this. We like to joke about executives being ADD and not really being into the details, but you know what, some are. We've got to figure out the right way to communicate with this set of leadership that's really steering the course for our enterprise.

That's why there's no, "This is the artifact to create." There's no, "This is the type of information that they require." There is no, "This is the specific set of requirements to discuss."

That's why we like to start broad. Can you build the picture of the enterprise on one page and have conversations maybe that zero in on a particular part of that? Then, you go down to other levels of detail. But, you don't know that until you start having the conversation.

Gardner: Okay, as we close out, you mentioned something called "strategic capability changes." Explain that for us?

Westbrock: To me, so many organizations have great vision and strategy. It comes from their leadership. They understand it. They think about it. But, there's a missing linkage between that vision, that strategy, that direction, and the actual activities that are going on in an organization. Decisions are being made about who to hire, the kinds of projects we decide to invest in, and where we're going to build our next manufacturing facility. All those are real decisions and real activities that are going on on a daily basis.

This jump from high-level strategy down to tactical daily decision-making and activities is too broad of a gap. So, we talk about strategic capability changes as being the vehicle that folks can use to have that conversation and to bring that discussion down to another level.

When we talk about strategic capability changes, it's the answer to the question, "What capabilities do we need to change about our enterprise in order to achieve our strategy?" But, that's a little bit too high level still. So, we help people carve out the specific questions that you would ask about business capability changes, about information capability changes, system, and technology.

Gardner: We've been talking about the evolution from enterprise architecture to business architecture. Joining us has been Tim Westbrook, Managing Director of EAdirections. Thank you, Tim.

Westbrock: Thank you, Dana.

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I'm Dana Gardner, principal analyst at Interarbor Solutions, and you've been listening to BriefingsDirect. Thanks for joining, and come back next time.

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