

WHITE PAPER

The Evolution of the Business Architect

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3 July, 2017

Introduction

The way we interact with business is changing, from online to offline. Organizations are going through fundamental upheaval. At the heart of this change is the business architect. Once considered a niche role, the business architect is now one that most organisations have on the employee headcount, for tackling strategy to leading and shaping transformation.

As the discipline matures, most organisations are hiring more and more business architects, but we find ourselves at a crossroads. Why is this? Why are some business architecture practices and disciplines successful and why do some fail? What is the fundamental role of the business architect? Where do the successful business architects go, once they have mastered their discipline? In this paper we try to answer some of these core questions, with the aim of laying down a blueprint for the evolution of business architecture and the business architect role for business architecture practitioners, for organisations, and for the business architecture discipline overall.

The Role of the Business Architect

The business architect role was envisioned to be a strategic, senior role responsible for architecting new organisations or re-architecting aspects of existing ones in response to change. As a result of technology, the volume and rate of change that organisations now need to adapt to has increased so significantly that most are performing enterprise-wide transformation and preparing to become more agile. Business architecture is a critical enabler of both, which is why there is more demand for the business architect role.

Role Confusion and Evolution

Even with the increased demand for true enterprise business designers, the business architect role has not always been deployed as such, and this has created confusion about the role and a lack of qualified resources to truly meet the demand. The essence of the confusion is about whether the role of a business architect is to create and maintain the enterprise business architecture knowledgebase, including blueprints such as capability maps and value streams, or to shape the business and translate strategy using these blueprints.

There are solid reasons for this confusion and evolution of the role, all reflective of the maturity of the business architecture discipline. First, while all organisations have a business architecture, in most cases it is not written down, and if it is, it is not documented from an enterprise perspective or aligned with industry standards. As a result, before a business architect can do any strategy translation or architecting, they first

need to build the business architecture knowledgebase. Second, because business architecture is relatively new in comparison to other disciplines, the body of knowledge (BIZBOK® Guide) and the training based upon it initially focused on the aspects of building a business architecture in order to establish consistency and train business architects on the basics. One additional reason is that the skills and interests of many people who have been drawn to the business architect role have been more heavily related to the building aspect.

Responsibilities of the Business Architect

The reality is that there are three areas of responsibility which need to be addressed by a business architecture function, and they may or may not be able to be covered by one role that encompasses them all. Due to the natural variance in business architects in terms of skills, experience, interests and even personalities, it is not realistic to expect one person to have the ability to perform all three areas of responsibility. The role(s) must be adaptable and flexible to allow organisations to structure it in the way which best meets their needs.

The three areas of responsibility include:

- *Applying business architecture (strategy translator)* – This includes using the business architecture in a variety of business scenarios to assess areas for improvement and changes necessary to carry out strategy or reshape the business. While the other two areas are absolutely necessary, this one is the reason why business architecture exists: to provide value.
- *Building a business architecture (map maker)* – This includes creating and maintaining the business architecture knowledgebase and connecting it to domains outside of business architecture (e.g. customer journeys, processes, system applications).
- *Managing the practice (practice manager)* – As the business architecture within an organisation matures and the decision is made to establish a practice, this includes socialization and formalizing the supporting infrastructure such as role definition and organizational structure, training, methodology, governance and tools.

Whilst there may be clarity in the distinct areas of responsibility of a business architect, due to the unique value the role brings and its relative newness in the organisational structure, it is not always clear where business architects fit and who they interact with. The table below compares the roles of a business leader, a business architect and an execution role (e.g. a business analyst) for a common set of responsibilities which are often confused.

Responsibility	Business Leader	Business Architect	Execution Role
Business direction	Set	Translate	Deliver in initiative context
Business decisions	Make	Translate, inform (pull information together and bring the “science”) and action against	Deliver in initiative context
Architectural decisions	Make	Recommend and govern	Consume in initiative context
Business architecture knowledgebase	Own (content), inform and consume in scenario context	Steward, create, maintain, report out and consume in scenario context for insights	Consume overall and in initiative context
Architect change ¹	Own (target architecture and strategic roadmap), inform and govern	Steward, create, maintain and communicate	Consume in initiative context
Execution (for architected changes)	Oversee, guide, inform, align to objectives and outcomes, and approve	Guide, align to architecture, objectives and outcomes, and measure success	Execute initiatives
Operations management ²	Run, manage and improve the business including performance (KPIs), manage people, own business health assessments (content) and initiative improvement initiatives	Steward business health assessments, identify and recommend improvement initiatives (high level based on architecture)	Steward operating model-related health assessments, identify and recommend improvement initiatives (detailed operational level such as related to process)

The Deployment of Business Architecture

Whilst the role of the business architect is now somewhat clearer, the next question is how an organisation should deploy the business architecture function. This question is the one that comes up the most, and in some respects is the one that sadly has no one size fits all answer. It is the expectation of a one size fits all approach that often leads to failure in vast numbers of business architecture practices, as it is often driven from past employee experience that does not align or a lack of long-term business architecture vision. Just like the role definition, the business architecture team structure needs to be adaptable and flexible to best meet the needs of an organisation. In fact, in many cases, how

¹ Includes architecting changes as a result of strategy translation, transformation, mergers and acquisitions, etc., which are reflected in target architectures and strategic roadmaps that are input to planning and execution.

² Includes all activities to run the business, including regulatory and compliance management.

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business architects are deployed shifts over time to reflect an organisation's evolving needs and understanding of what the discipline can do.

Business architecture can be deployed in different ways to address the three areas of responsibilities described above, including:

- *Business architects deployed as part of a dedicated business architecture practice* – This is one of the most common structures where business architects work in a team which focuses on all areas of responsibility, and they are then assigned to work on change initiatives which apply business architecture to various scenarios and scopes of the business. This structure allows for the appropriate focus and incubation of the business architecture function, but may lead to some separation between the team and the business people who they serve. In all cases, business architects should work upstream before planning and execution versus at the project level or their effectiveness will be limited.
- *Business architects deployed as part of a multi-disciplinary design team* – This emerging structure is potentially underutilized and is either formed temporarily, such as where agile teams deliver a specific capability, or permanently such as in a digital or mobile area. This structure emphasizes the business architect's role as a part of strategy execution and enterprise design, and allows them to be more closely integrated into the business and more valuable, though it can make it more difficult to ensure cohesiveness and consistency of the business architecture function.
- *Business architecture responsibilities deployed as part of multiple people's roles* – This structure is rare, but emerging. In this case, business architecture responsibilities are performed not just by business architects, but by people in other roles as they utilize and refine the business architecture as part of their jobs. This structure allows business architecture to scale, be adopted and permeate across an organisation, though again, it may be difficult to ensure cohesiveness and consistency of the function.

Regardless of the business architecture deployment approach, there are important considerations. First, the business architecture team structure is flexible. An organisation may deploy business architecture using a combination of the options described above. For example, a dedicated business architecture practice may be established with business architects who maintain the knowledgebase and practices and are assigned to various initiatives, while other roles are trained to use the business architecture in various scenarios and do so fairly independently. As mentioned previously, the structure and even the size of a business architecture team may also change over time to meet the organisation's evolving needs and understanding. Business architecture practices and standards must also remain agile to change and adapt as well. Second, the business architecture team typically reports within the business to a leader in strategy, planning, transformation, innovation, or another function which allows them to be strategically positioned and work across business units. There are many teams who report within IT, and this may be the most feasible place

to incubate the function, but as business architecture becomes more integrated into the strategy execution life cycle, it is often better suited to report to the business while maintaining a close relationship with the IT architecture disciplines. Finally, regardless of structure, the business architect's most important focus is to provide business and customer value and play a critical role in strategy translation. They should provide an enterprise, cross-business unit perspective on the architecture and shape initiatives as input to planning.

Maturity Progression of a Business Architecture Function

The manner in which the business architecture team is structured and positioned, as well as how the business architect role is defined, directly and indirectly speak volumes about strategic importance, scope of responsibility and key relationships. Certain choices made up front will make it easier to obtain organizational buy-in and perform the role at a strategic level.

Thankfully the clues to how we should deliver business architecture are in front of us, and these can be found in our environment. When approaching the formation of a business architecture practice, an organisation must first look at its own needs as well as its experience in the business architecture discipline and key related functions such as strategy and change management.

Business Architecture Team Structure and Maturity

The business architecture team structure defines how business architects will be assigned across one or more leaders. Some common options are having a fully centralized team, a fully decentralized team, or a full hub and spoke (hybrid) operating model. The table below describes each team structure option, the level of business architecture maturity it is best suited for, and pros and cons.

Option	Maturity	Description	Pros	Cons
Centralised	New practice	All business architects report centrally to a core business architecture team. Practices and standards are managed centrally by the same team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More likely to ensure an enterprise view of business architecture• Provides a focal point for the discipline and ensures consistent business architecture practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potentially seen as too distant from the business, leading to lack of buy-in and access• Can be challenges with socialization

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Option	Maturity	Description	Pros	Cons
Decentralised	Experienced	Business architects report to different business units. Practices and standards may be managed individually by the business units or centrally by a core business architecture team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close to the business leading to buy-in and access • Can lead to quicker socialization of the discipline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially fragmented view of business architecture • Potentially inconsistent business architecture practices • Business architects may lose focus with non-business architecture assignments
Hub and Spoke (Hybrid)	Advanced	Business architects are distributed across the business, though some may also report centrally to a core business architecture team. Practices and standards are managed centrally by a core business architecture team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally provides the benefits of both the centralised and decentralized options together • Business Architects are deployed in the business and are owned by the business leading to full buy-in and access • Practices and standards are maintained centrally, allowing business architects to focus on architecting versus the knowledgebase or practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally none as long as virtual collaboration mechanisms are effective, but this requires significant maturity and coordination across each deployed business architecture team

The choice of team structure is influenced by an organisation's business architecture maturity and other organisational dynamics. Some structural options work better at certain stages of maturity though there is not a required progression through them. Most importantly, the structure must be adaptable to evolve with the organisation's needs.

The Business Architect Career Path

Whilst it's clear there are options on how to deliver business architecture, and the path to success is clearly not easy, the question is what happens once you have been successful? What happens once you have successfully made business architecture a key component of your organisation, and as a business architect where do you go next?

It might seem odd to raise such a question for an emerging discipline, but we are already seeing success stories, and eventually business architects are going to want to continue their career path. There are already multiple examples of how organisations have used business architecture to add value to their organisations, and equally how the business architects at the heart of this have gained recognition across the global business architecture community.

Following their success what would be next? And for business architects in similar situations, what options are available to continue career growth?

Career Options

For business architects there is a temptation to think that the only path is to spend the rest of their career in architecture. Whilst this is the right path for some people, it does not have to be the case for others because a good business architect overtime will develop some significant advantages:

- Awareness of how the organisation creates value
- Understanding of the full end-to-end of the organisation
- Recognition as a trusted advisor and partner across all stakeholders
- Enabler of strategies

Clearly this is just a snapshot of some of the core advantages, but what is interesting is that they apply to a variety of disciplines and provide a business architect some clear choices:

- *Business architecture specialist* – This is the most obvious move, it provides the business architect a platform to become an industry-leading specialist. In this capacity they are able to either lead practices or architect increasingly complex and large change initiatives, or in some cases are hired for their expertise and experience in the business architecture field.
- *Move to a role in the business (or IT)* – We are already starting to see some senior business architects moving into the business. This may seem odd, but if we think about it, most of the skills needed to lead are at the core of the business architect's toolbox. Business roles such as product owners,

strategists or even heads of business units are starting to become serious options for the next leg of a business architect's career.

- *Become an interdisciplinary person* – The growth of new businesses spurred on by digital and mobile has seen an increase of people joining startups instead of the traditional corporate world. The startup world demands not only speed, but people with a variety of skills. Business architects are required to have a variety of skills, but also an awareness of business and operating models. These skills are valuable for any start up, and offer a business architect a unique career choice.
- *Become a management consultant* – Business architecture has become a key component for translating strategy, and also shaping change and initiatives. These skills are now in even greater demand, and we are seeing traditional management consultancies looking for people who have this experience and skills. It provides the business architect a logical next step, which can either be working for themselves or as part of an established firm.

What is hopefully obvious is that the role of a business architect is not constrained, and opens the door to numerous future opportunities. Business architecture offers significant visibility and learning, but it's about the journey of the individual. The career options listed are just an example of what is possible, but each person must decide what they want to do. The business architect role can be a long term career or part of a journey. The good news is that in both cases, a business architect will gain significant benefits regardless of the route chosen.

Recommendations

Where do we go from here to continue evolving and make these ideas actionable? As we look towards the next chapter where the business architect career path will continue to be practised, shaped and formalized, we pose some questions for thoughtful consideration.

For Business Architecture Practitioners

- As a business architect, do you think of yourself not only as an architect, but also as a leader and change agent?
- What do you want your long-term career path to look like and where do you want to take your career next?
- What experiences do you need today to achieve your career aspirations of the future? For example, do you need more or different responsibilities, a bigger scope to architect, positioning further upstream in the strategy execution life cycle or more leadership opportunities?

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For Organisations

- How well is your current business architect role definition and team structure meeting the organisation's needs and your vision for business architecture? Is it aligned to your current level of business architecture maturity or is it time to evolve?
- How flexible is your business architecture organisational structure and can it continually adapt as the organisation changes?
- Do you have a business architect career path defined? Does it go far enough and also allow for non-business architecture advancement which enables you to not only retain individuals but also develop new leaders for the organisation?

For the Business Architecture Discipline

- As role and competency models are formalized, how best should the three major areas of responsibility of a business architecture function be reflected, especially considering the variation in business architect skills and interests? How can the business architect role be designed so that it is adaptable and flexible for organisations to structure it in the way which best meets their needs?
- How does training need to evolve to teach business architects how to architect, not just how to create and utilize business architecture blueprints?
- How can the business architecture discipline continue to evolve to ensure it plays a role as technology innovations become part of business and customer's lives? How can we ensure that business architects are educated on and aligned with trends so they can help and advise organisations on how to deploy these changes within a business context?
- How can business architecture industry professional organisations continue to advocate for and establish the role of business architects strategically within for profit, non-profit and governmental organisations?
- How can business architects be positioned to architect across organisational ecosystems, both for the purposes of conducting business as well as helping us to solve some of the greatest challenges of our time?

Conclusion

What is clear is that changes in business architecture and importantly the architecture of business are going to accelerate as business and technology continue to evolve at pace. Business architects have a clear role to play in this space, especially as they continue to transition from architect to leader, their value to organisations will be crucial.

For the individual, what was once seen as a niche discipline is now becoming more understood, and is starting to open numerous doors, allowing the architect of today to become tomorrow's business leader. The system thinking business architecture requires is now almost an expected competency, and is providing numerous opportunities for new and experienced practitioners.

From driving forward strategy to participation in agile teams, the future has never looked so bright for the individual business architect and the discipline of business architecture itself. To move forward, organisations must have a vision for how they want to deploy it and individuals must take control of their journeys, and become almost unconstrained by their own discipline and use what they know across all aspects of business.

The next five years of business evolution is clearly unpredictable, but with strong business architecture capabilities in place we are sure that organisations and individuals will be able to navigate the changeable conditions and leverage opportunities that lie ahead.

About the Authors



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Mike Clark is the founder of Cohesion 360, a small but leading consultancy in London with international scope, which focuses on helping organisations leverage digital and mobile technologies to deliver meaningful customer outcomes. He has led numerous business architecture practices for a variety of Fortune 500 companies. Mr. Clark is renowned for bringing innovative approaches to existing disciplines, most notably bringing design into the world of architecture, to create better outcomes for customers. He is also co-creator of the Cohesive Enterprise Design Framework, which brings together architecture and design, with the aim of turning customer insights and business outcomes into viable products and services. Mr. Clark has also served as an Advisory Board member of the Business Architecture Guild®.



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