Business Architecture: Dispelling Twelve Common Myths

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Business Architecture: An Evolving Discipline

Business architecture is a maturing discipline and drawing significant interest from a variety of organizations worldwide. It serves as a bridge between strategy and execution, making activities such as business transformation, enterprise planning, portfolio management, and mergers and acquisitions more strategic and effective.

Yet business architecture is often misperceived as to its uses, origins, and value proposition. While business architecture has matured as a discipline over the past few years, the myths surrounding it have grown as well. Confusion remains as past misconceptions linger due, in part, to organizations that perpetuate confusion by promoting outdated, non-standard approaches on well-meaning business architecture teams. These misperceptions stand as the greatest barrier to adoption, preventing businesses from getting business architecture efforts off the ground, undercutting sponsorship and business engagement, and slowing the maturation of the discipline.

Business architecture is not a buzzword or a quick fix solution for a broken process, a computer system, or a single project or business unit. It is a holistic discipline that is most effective when applied across business units, practices, disciplines, and stakeholders.

This paper provides a brief introduction to business architecture, describes and dispels twelve commonly held misconceptions or myths, and gives a glimpse of the future.

An Introduction to Business Architecture

Prior to dispelling the twelve myths, it is helpful to provide a brief overview of business architecture, including discussing what it is, what it is used for, who uses it, where it comes from, and why now is the time to consider the discipline.

Business Architecture: What Is It?

Business architecture is a holistic perspective of what a business does, how it delivers stakeholder value, how it communicates, and how it is organized. In other words, business architecture is an abstraction of a business, using standardized views, that improves the outcomes of a wide range of planning and execution initiatives. These standardized views include the following core "domain" categories.

- What a business does (capabilities)
- The vocabulary it uses (information)
- How a business is organized (organization)
- How a business delivers value to key stakeholders (value streams)

Independently, each of these business perspectives has value, but when viewed in aggregate, they serve as a basis for delivering significant transparency to various stakeholders engaged in issue analysis and resolution. Organizations that embrace business architecture ultimately shift more and more of their planning, impact analysis, operational delivery, and

solution deployment activities towards relying on these standardized domain perspectives. While the four core domains serve as a foundation for a business architecture, an extended set of perspectives offers even greater insights including:

- What a business should do to compete and thrive (strategies)
- What dictates strategy, investment, and actions (policies)
- Who are the internal and external players (stakeholders)
- How to achieve goals and objectives (initiatives)
- What to offer customers (products)
- How well the business is performing (metrics)

While each of these perspectives is built out with a specific focus, the overall ecosystem provides a business with a rich set of perspectives that inform planning through solution definition and deployment. When fully formed, an almost infinite variety of analysis viewpoints and options emerge.

Business Architecture: What Is It Used For?

Business architecture is an all-purpose discipline that applies to many scenarios. Business architecture is not a goal in and of itself. Business architecture is rather a means to an end for delivering any number of business scenarios. Consider the following sample uses for business architecture.

- Framing and communicating impacts of strategic business objectives
- Aligning strategies and plans across business units
- Realizing business model aspirations
- Determining cross-program, cross-project impacts and dependencies
- Assessing the impact of regulatory and policy changes
- Improving customer and third party engagement and experience
- Informing investment decisions within and across portfolios
- Framing, scoping, articulating, and reusing business requirements
- Scoping information technology investments
- Defining target state IT architectures
- Enabling strategic business transformation
- Integrating companies during a merger or acquisition

Business Architecture: Who Uses It?

Business architecture is used by wide variety of business areas and benefits the following stakeholder categories.

- *Business Strategists and Leaders* – for issue visioning and option impact analysis
- *Planning Teams* – for framing and establishing execution scenarios
- *Portfolio Managers* – for assessing investment focal points and cross-impacts and prioritizing options
- *Risk, Audit, and Oversight Teams* – for surfacing risks and assessing what should or should not be done
- *Business Process Analysts* – for focusing and aligning process optimization and case management efforts
- *Business Analysts and User Experience Teams* – for framing requirements and user experience analysis
- *IT Architects and Execution Teams* – for transformation planning and solution architecture definition

Business Architecture: Where Does It Come From?

The business architecture comes from the business. Experience has shown that business architectures created by third parties, IT organizations, or business surrogates with inadequate business knowledge are flawed and limited in depth, content, accuracy, and usefulness. A poorly constructed business architecture that does not fully and accurately represent the business in its own language creates a result that is of limited value.

Business Architecture: Why Now?

Business environments continue to become more volatile and more global. Competition is coming from innovation and unforeseeable directions. In addition, businesses are being called upon to engage more consistently and effectively with customers, move into new markets and regions, and streamline delivery of improved products and services.

A documented business architecture establishes a formal, consistent point of reference that is used to deliver value from planning through deployment, enabling innovative business designs and solutions. Without it, the ability to quickly and effectively introduce change into a business is dramatically diminished. When the competition leverages business architecture, it makes it harder for those organizations ignoring this discipline to compete and thrive.

Business Architecture: Dispelling Common Myths

Twelve commonly held myths about business architecture are identified below, along with appropriate counterpoints that dispel each myth.

Myth #1: Business architecture is complicated.

Building the foundational business architecture is a straight forward discipline, requiring only a basic understanding of foundational principles. Business architecture teams and business units are more likely to be stymied by a lack of business subject matter expertise and not by the difficultly of the discipline. The intellectually challenging aspects of business architecture occur when the business architecture is being applied to complex business scenarios.

Myth #2: Business architecture is expensive.

Because it is managed in-house, business architecture costs "pennies on the dollar" compared with other major disciplines. In addition, a well-defined business architecture is robust and can serve a business for many years, only requiring ongoing refinements. This myth tends to drive organizations towards unnecessary and ineffective "proof of concept" or return-on-investment (ROI) analysis exercises that are too narrow in scope to be useful. These proof of concept efforts are further flawed because business architecture requires socialization and adoption that is almost impossible to deliver in an abbreviated timeframe.
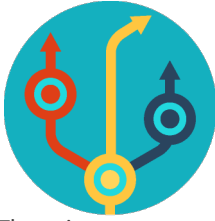
Myth #3: There is no commonly defined approach to business architecture.

There is a common approach, it is well-defined, and in use across numerous businesses and industries worldwide. This myth is propagated by those who benefit by keeping people confused, presenting business architecture more as art than science. As long as business architecture is viewed as an "anything goes" discipline, self-interested parties will continue to prolong the journey towards deriving business architecture value or attempt to sell "one off", non-standard approaches that are not actionable.

Myth #4: A business architecture can be built with limited business engagement and commitment.

Ineffective business architectures that do not reflect the business are the result of a lack of engagement with business subject matter experts, which in turn can be linked to a lack of business commitment and support. Pursuing this myth invariably leads to a suboptimal business architecture that is likely to be ignored and never used. Lack of business engagement and commitment is a sure path to failure.

Myth #5: Business architecture can be licensed or acquired.

A business architecture is unique to a given business. Prepackaged perspectives rarely, if ever, meet requisite levels of specificity and further lack a useful vocabulary and structure. Customization is what makes business architecture valuable to organizations that need to differentiate themselves from the competition, improve customer value delivery, and standout as innovators.
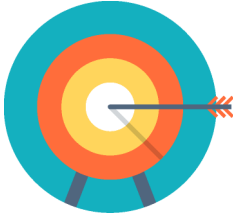
Myth #6: Businesses do not need business architecture because they already understand all they need to know about the business.

Business architecture transparency delivers the most value when applied on a cross-business unit, cross-program, and cross-project perspective. Business vocabularies, mental models, and stakeholder engagement perspectives vary widely across business units and are often fragmented. Business architecture surfaces issues that are often hidden from a given business unit's or executive's line of sight. In addition, everyone sees the business from a single angle or perspective, which makes issue analysis and resolution on anything but a small problem difficult. Business architecture brings a common perspective to every challenge, regardless of how far reaching or nuanced.

Myth #7: Business architecture is an IT discipline

Business architecture represents the business, not data, solution, application, or technical architectures. As a result, the business has to participate in, understand, and leverage business architecture in order to capitalize on the discipline. Anyone confusing business architecture with IT architecture needs to understand its use in strategy alignment, initiative management, and other business initiatives.

Myth #8: Business architecture is program, project, or business unit specific.

Business architecture should not be restricted by project or business unit. The more narrowly defined, the less value business architecture delivers. Once the business architecture foundation is established, the results are leveraged over and over again, with sustainable value building as the discipline moves into more and more corners of the business.
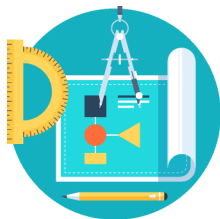
Myth #9: The business architecture capability map is the deliverable

The capability map is only one business architecture deliverable and of limited value when not incorporated with other aspects of business architecture. Capabilities in the absence of value streams lack context in terms of their

value and impact on the business. Real value is achieved when business architecture as a whole is integrated into broader business practices and management disciplines.

Myth #10: Business architecture is fancy term for business analysis.

Business analysis defines requirements and solutions for resolving specific business issues, often on a project-by-project basis. Business architecture provides the cross-portfolio transparency that enables business analysts to perform more effectively and deliver better solutions. The two disciplines are unique and distinct, and business analysts should have access to and leverage business architecture. Transparency delivered by business architecture brings an entirely new and valuable set of perspectives to business analysts who have been struggling with reconciling disparate, conflicting business perspectives on project after project.

Myth #11: Business process is part of business architecture.

Business process and business architecture are two separate but mutually beneficial disciplines. They differ in form, function and intent. Business architecture enables a business to realize its business model, while process enables it to realize its operating model. However, both disciplines can be connected to provide a more comprehensive perspective on business impact analysis, translation of strategy into actionable plans, and business improvement.

Myth #12: Business architecture impedes an organization's agility.

Agile development practices alone do not enable an organization to achieve end-to-end enterprise agility. In fact, these practices may potentially accelerate creation of the wrong solutions. Business architecture provides a common mental model of a business, ensures that the business is working on the *right* things, frames and accelerates solution development, and measures results against business objectives. It also enables dynamic re-planning to respond to evolving external conditions. Business architecture is not impediment to an organization's agility, but is in fact the gateway to successfully achieving agility.

Business Architecture: A Vision for the Future

What does the future of business architecture look like? We have to consider the evolution of the discipline to visualize the future. The industry is still in the early stages of capitalizing on business architecture but maturing at an unusually rapid pace. Business architecture has evolved much more quickly than other business disciplines that are decades old in many cases. Five years ago there was little adoption of a formal framework for business architecture, yet today a generally accepted framework is in place, a widely leveraged body of knowledge is in growing use,[1] and a formal, business architecture certification program was rolled out in 2015.[2]

Tools are evolving to support the formalization of the business architecture practice. Those tools will continue to evolve to provide a sophisticated impact analysis framework that will enable a wide variety of assessment and impact analysis scenarios. These tools will eventually link to requirements analysis, program management, and solution design and delivery.

Long-term, business architecture will be woven into the fabric of numerous business practices and disciplines. As foundational business architectures are established, strategic planning, portfolio management, change and risk management, business analysis, IT architecture definition, and solution deployment will incorporate business architecture. Business architecture will become a critical, indispensable discipline in the business community.

Given that individuals within a business can focus on what's good for the business as a whole versus what's good for their small team or even for themselves, businesses will ultimately evolve to view planning, issue analysis, and issue resolution option analysis through the increasingly sophisticated lens of business architecture. In this future vision, what if scenarios are simulated through a holistic perspective, where each team and business unit can see how it affects the whole. Decisions will be made based on transparency of facts, with impact analysis at everyone's fingertips.

Businesses can begin to capitalize on this rapid evolution by formalizing their business architecture now. As the industry matures, these leading organizations will be well out in front of their competition, while providing new, innovative solutions to their customers.

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1 Business Architecture Guild, *A Guide to the Business Architecture Body of Knowledge™ (BIZBOK® Guide)* Version 4.5. www.businessarchitectureguild.org

2 Business Architecture Guild. www.businessarchitectureguild.org

About the Authors

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William Ulrich is President of TSG, Inc., President of the Business Architecture Guild and Co-founder of Business Architecture Associates, a company that specializes in business architecture education. He is a thought leader in the business architecture community, serving as an originating contributor to *A Guide to the Business Architecture Body of Knowledge™ (BIZBOK® Guide)*, author of *Business Architecture: The Art and Practice of Business Transformation* MK Press (2011), and lead on the Guild's "Certified Business Architect (CBA)®" certification program. Mr. Ulrich serves in the role of advisor, mentor, and workshop leader to corporations and government agencies across a number of industries.

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Whynde Kuehn is Founder and Managing Director of S2E Transformation Inc. and Co-founder of Business Architecture Associates, a company that specializes in business architecture education. She is a long-time business architecture practitioner, educator, and thought leader. In this regard, Ms. Kuehn has developed business architecture for some of the largest business transformations in the world and has extensive experience helping clients to build their own business architecture practices. She is a Co-Founder, Board Member, and Editorial Board Member of the Business Architecture Guild. She also applies her experience to help social entrepreneurs and non-profit organizations start, scale, and sustain successful businesses.

About Business Architecture Associates

Ms. Kuehn and Mr. Ulrich are co-founders of Business Architecture Associates, a professional training organization. Business Architecture Associates' mission is to *improve your business by providing effective, business-focused training in all aspects of business architecture.* We strive to help businesses and organizations build an advantage with business architecture. We train your staff to improve sales, productivity, organization, company culture, and employee relations.

Business Architecture Associates offers a complete set of courses to establish a strong foundation for business architecture that works. This includes a series of in-house business architecture training courses. The courses are based on practical experience that reflects the latest advances in the field. Course content reflects what works and is not theoretical in nature. Course instructors work in the field of business architecture, with hands on, leading edge experience, which reflects the approaches to course delivery. Contact Business Architecture Associates at:
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