

Gartner Clarifies the Definition of the Term 'Enterprise Architecture'

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We frequently find that the term "enterprise architecture" (EA) means significantly different things to different organizations (or even among different constituencies in the same organization!). Enterprise architects should use this definition to help articulate what enterprise architecture is within their organizations.

Key Findings

- Numerous, conflicting interpretations of the term "enterprise architecture" cause confusion and obstruct the benefits that a common understanding of the concept enables.
- It is important to differentiate between the role of the enterprise architect and the process of enterprise architecture in order to avoid the misconception that EA is "trying to own the world."
- The most important deliverable of enterprise architecture is change. Without a real impact on the way the enterprise effectively changes, all those deliverables are for naught.

Recommendations

- Focus on the process of EA rather than on the deliverables that are produced.
- Distinguish between the role of the EA team and the process of enterprise architecture.
- Ensure that enterprise architecture guidance is actionable.
- Clearly articulate who in the enterprise uses EA guidance — and how.
- Remember that an EA process must effect change in the enterprise — all the deliverables in the world make no difference if change continues to be chaotic and inefficient.
- Refine the EA definition to communicate what EA is in your enterprise.

ANALYSIS

Two years ago, Gartner's EA research community came together to develop a comprehensive, consistent definition for the term "enterprise architecture." Our goal was to create a definition that would cover multiple dimensions of the subject:

- **What it is:** What does it comprise?
- **What the scope is:** What does it cover?
- **What the result is:** What do you get when you're done?
- **What the benefit is:** Why do organizations do this?

The Gartner definition of enterprise architecture is as follows:

Enterprise architecture is the process of translating business vision and strategy into effective enterprise change by creating, communicating and improving the key requirements, principles and models that describe the enterprise's future state and enable its evolution. The scope of the enterprise architecture includes the people, processes, information and technology of the enterprise, and their relationships to one another and to the external environment. Enterprise architects compose holistic solutions that address the business challenges of the enterprise and support the governance needed to implement them.

This was a good definition, but feedback from our customers, our fellow analysts and additional refinements in our thinking suggest that there are aspects of the definition that we need to clarify.

Distinguishing Between the Noun and the Verb

Our definition of enterprise architecture has focused on the "verb" — because we feel it is important to emphasize the fact that enterprise architecture is a process. This is important because we find that often, when people focus on the outputs ("the noun") rather than the process, they tend to be more concerned about producing a predefined set of deliverables than they are about meeting the strategic imperatives of the enterprise. This single-minded focus on deliverables is a mistake because it can lead to mountains of "artifacts" (requirements, models, principles, guidelines, standards) that are not necessarily connected to the strategic imperatives of the enterprise and are therefore not leveraged across the organization.

"Enterprise architecture is the process of translating business vision and strategy into effective enterprise change" Our definition emphasizes that EA is a translation process; the environmental trends affecting the enterprise and its business strategies are articulated and examined so that the optimal future-state vision can be derived.

"... by creating, communicating and improving the key requirements, principles and models that describe the enterprise's future state and enable its evolution." The outputs of this EA process are the requirements, principles and models that describe the optimal future state, an analysis of the gaps between the future state and the current state, and road maps that support the evolution of the enterprise to the future state by closing the gaps.

We have often seen that EA teams refer to the collection of artifacts that are produced as the "enterprise architecture." **We cannot state strongly enough that this view is flawed.** The process by which those artifacts are derived and applied is far more important than the artifacts themselves. By focusing the definition of enterprise architecture on the process that creates, applies and maintains the artifacts, the proper emphasis is maintained.

Distinguishing Between the Role and the Process

One of the key criticisms of our definition is that it could be read as "EA is the center of the universe" or "EA wants to take over the world." We want to stress the fact that EA is a process facilitated by enterprise architects. Adoption of the EA process does not mean that the line management or senior leadership of the enterprise is abdicating decision authority to architects.

People often confuse the process of enterprise architecture with the role of the enterprise architect. This leads to a great deal of confusion, because the process is far-reaching in scope and, when done properly, touches everything in the enterprise. If one confuses the role of the architect with the process, then one might believe that the enterprise architecture team is trying to "own" all the strategic decision making of the enterprise. In reality, enterprise architects (who typically drive the EA program) are facilitators and do not have decision rights over all the critical issues of the enterprise.

The participants in the EA process include the business, IT and operations, as well as representatives of the competency centers supporting specific disciplines such as business intelligence and the various management disciplines of the enterprise (like business strategy and portfolio management). These participants retain their decision rights, but in an architected enterprise, those decisions are made in collaboration with other enterprise stakeholders as part of the EA process, rather than being made in individual functional silos (see "Myth Busting: What Enterprise Architecture Is Not").

Successful EA programs are not governed or delivered by the EA team alone. EA teams are typically small. Successful organizations embed EA into the culture of everyday activities. They practice a variety of strategic and operational disciplines integrated with EA, such as strategic planning, shared services, portfolio management and governance. By doing so, they make the turn away from siloed one-off projects, information inconsistency, duplicative business processes and tactical focus, toward a future where a unified view of the strategic imperatives drives daily decision making and an integrated approach to change can be realistically achieved. The facilitative and consultative skills of the EA team help to ensure that the EA program is embedded into the culture of the institution. The EA team members must persuade the enterprise to believe and share the enterprise vision by communicating, advocating and planning. Their primary role is to facilitate the enterprise change agenda.

Emphasizing the Actionable Nature of EA Work

Enterprise architecture is often accused of being an "ivory tower exercise" that is divorced from the realities of implementation. An EA process that delivers business value to the enterprise produces several things:

- An articulation of the strategic requirements of the enterprise
- Models of the future state, which illustrate what the enterprise should look like across all EA viewpoints in support of the business strategy
- A road map of the change initiatives required to reach that future state
- The requirements, principles, standards and guidelines that will steer the implementation of change initiatives

A successful EA program is not just about setting standards — it is about solving problems. As the definition says, *"Enterprise architects compose holistic solutions that address the business challenges of the enterprise."*

It is important to emphasize the fact that EA is supposed to drive tangible business benefit — all the future-state models in the world will not "enable the evolution" of the enterprise without the gap analysis and road maps to support that evolution. It is also important to recognize that EA guidance must be justified in terms of the strategic direction of the business. Without such justification, EA guidance is susceptible to arguments about the validity of one technical approach versus another, or worse — complete indifference on the part of implementation teams, which are concerned only with delivering the project at hand as quickly as possible.

Clarifying Which Processes Consume EA Output — and How

While the definition emphasizes that communicating is an essential aspect of the EA process, it did not go into any detail about what should be communicated, or to whom. This section of our clarification addresses the issue of how the outputs of the EA process are utilized by other enterprise processes — a component that our clients and fellow analysts told us was missing from the original definition. The outputs of the enterprise architecture process are as follows:

- Planning processes (such as portfolio management) use the requirements, principles and models to evaluate items in the portfolio for strategic alignment.
- Management disciplines (like business process management and enterprise information management) use the future-state vision to identify strategic objectives and the requirements, principles and models to constrain implementation.
- Executing disciplines (such as program management) use the requirements, principles and models to constrain and bound the implementation of change initiatives.
- Governance processes measure compliance and the degree to which the enterprise has evolved against the requirements, principles and models that represent the future-state vision.

Remembering That the Most Important Deliverable of EA Is Change

Enterprises undertake the process of enterprise architecture for a variety of reasons. Some want to reduce technology diversity. Others want to simplify a complex application landscape. Still others want to improve time to market for new products, or to take a more strategic approach to a transformation initiative. Whatever the reason for initiating an enterprise architecture program, there is one common objective: change.

The enterprise wants to perform better by doing things differently, and it expects the EA program to effect that change. It is critical to remember this when evaluating the outputs of the EA program. All the future-state models, principles and road maps will be for naught unless they are actually implemented. This requires a robust governance mechanism that will ensure that EA guidance is followed and that there is strong integration with the IT strategy, enterprise program management and portfolio management functions, in order to ensure that common strategic goals are shared.

*"Enterprise architecture is the process of translating business vision and strategy into **effective enterprise change**"* This is not just a one-shot change, but continuous, sustainable change. It is not enough just to "clean up" the technical chaos that has grown up over the years; EA must help prevent the chaos from returning. It is not enough to simplify an application portfolio this year; EA must help maintain simplicity in future years. The more successful the EA process is year over year, the easier change should become — each future-state iteration becomes more evolvable than the last.

Summary

In summary, every enterprise's definition of EA is a bit different because an EA program that delivers business value is customized to the culture, strategic maturity and strategy of the enterprise (see "Toolkit Case Study: Safeco Recharters EA to Focus on Value Delivery"). Gartner's definition of EA should be used as the basis for developing a definition that will articulate EA's value in a particular enterprise.

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