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Application Portfolio Management in the TOGAF Space

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Introduction

Two common initiatives in enterprise IT departments are Enterprise Architecture, commonly using The Open Group Architecture Framework (TOGAF), and Application Portfolio Management (APM). While such activities are often carried out in isolation, they do in fact have significant synergies. In this paper we examine how the techniques and outputs of TOGAF can supplement and feed into the activities of APM.

Overview of TOGAF

The Open Group Architecture Framework is a comprehensive framework designed to support an organisation in an enterprise architecture initiative. It offers a methodology for how to identify and implement a transition to a desired architecture, supplemented by numerous techniques. A particularly important technique is the application of stakeholder management – both in so far as how to identify and manage stakeholders that may impact the initiative, but also in the application of viewpoints.

A viewpoint is a way of showing part of the architecture, designed to answer a specific set of questions or concerns for a stakeholder. TOGAF defines a comprehensive set of viewpoints covering all layers of the architecture.

Some other aspects of TOGAF are important for our purposes. First of all, TOGAF also provides a comprehensive metamodel that allows you to map from the business (organisational units and business services) down to the applications that support them.

A second aspect is the idea of architecture compliance – the organisation defines a set of principles and then rates aspects of the architecture for how they match these principles. A principle might be, for example, the use of Free Open Source Software (FOSS).

Overview of Application Portfolio Management

It is an unfortunate fact that almost all large organisations possess numerous software applications, some of which may no longer be in use, some of which may duplicate each other's functions. Forrester estimates that around 60% of IT spending in the average department goes to maintaining existing applications.

Application Portfolio Management attempts to address this situation, by creating a catalog of all the applications in an organisation, and rating each one for technical fit, support for the business, cost, number of users and other factors.

This information then feeds into the ability to rate applications for their fitness versus cost of ownership, which in turn can identify applications that could be retired or reduced in scope.
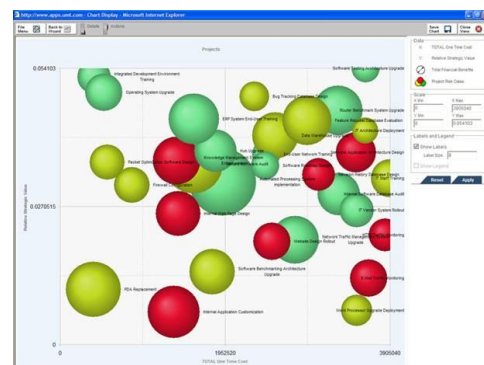
The goal of APM to rate and classify applications to draw conclusions as to retirement and consolidation candidates

Synergies between APM and TOGAF

Now, both of these activities involve analysis of the IT infrastructure. But in actual fact, the crossover is deeper than that. Several of the disciplines that TOGAF lays out have direct application in driving an Application Portfolio Management activity.

To begin with, a key point about TOGAF is you are required to map organisational units to business services that they deliver, and then map the business services to the applications that support them. Inspecting which business services an application supports (and how many) naturally gives a measure of the level of support that an application gives to the business, which feeds into the scoring for business support. Likewise, each architecture component is supposed to be assessed for its architectural compliance to standards and policies; but this is a clear input into the assessment of technical fitness.

This deals with input from TOGAF into the APM analysis, but TOGAF also offers value for the implementation of the conclusions from the analysis. First of all, any attempt to change the application landscape in an organisation will necessarily affect various stakeholders, each of whom will have different concerns. Here the TOGAF technique of stakeholder management has immediate applicability; likewise the use of different viewpoints for different stakeholders delivers value in this situation, and TOGAF does offer numerous viewpoints that are directly relevant. Last of all, the TOGAF ADM offers a methodology for both performing the analysis and implementing it.

TOGAF offers a wide range of viewpoints to communicate to stakeholders

Conclusions

In this paper, we have seen how the two IT disciplines of TOGAF-based Enterprise Architecture and Application Portfolio Management can support and enhance one another. Utilising the techniques offered by TOGAF can provide valuable input into the scoring mechanisms of APM, while at the same time the TOGAF ADM and viewpoint-based approach offers a ready method to implement the conclusions of APM.

This is not to say the approach offers a magic bullet. Challenges still exist. Gaps in the catalog of identified business services may exist, implying that business service mappings are valuable, but cannot be taken as gospel. At the same time, when Application Portfolio Management is undertaken alongside a TOGAF effort, care must be taken to ensure that the two teams are not duplicating each other's efforts, and that information is shared effectively between the two teams.

Despite these concerns, however, the combination of TOGAF and APM offers the opportunity for complementary streams of work to benefit from each other by reducing enterprise overhead and improving business flexibility.