

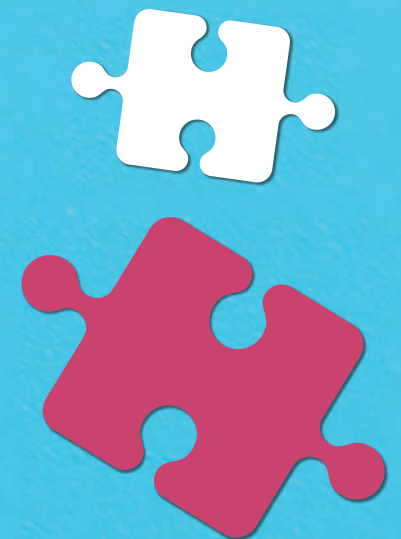
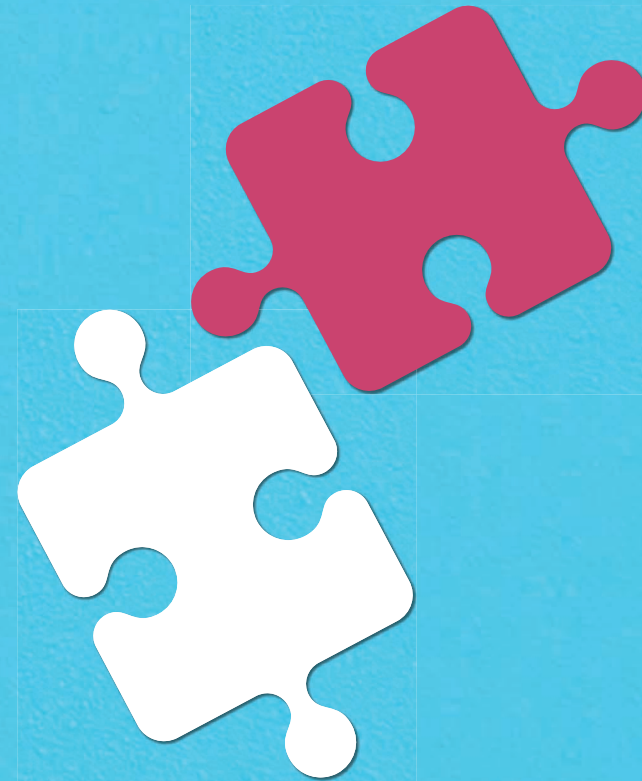


Solution Architecture:
How To Deliver Value Through
Enterprise Architecture

Enterprise Architecture (EA) is now a feature of many, many organizations and it's fair to say that businesses are now very much on board with enterprise architecture as a necessary function. Nonetheless, EA does still suffer from a perception that it's not a big driver of value creation for businesses. This is perhaps unsurprising, as EA can be opaque to non-architects, while some of the biggest use cases are arguably complements to other functions instead of value drivers themselves. Business Capability Modeling or Technology Roadmapping can help a lot with strategy and planning, but won't have a direct link to increases in value.

Of course, there are many possible parts of an enterprise architecture function, some of which are much better at delivering identifiable value to an organization. Forrester report that, over the next five years, leading EA pros focus on delivering value, not on creating architecture repositories. How does Forrester see this change occurring? Through the function of Solution Architecture.

What is Solution Architecture? It's actually quite simple: A Solution Architecture is an architectural design of a specific solution, typically applying to a single project. So where Enterprise Architecture will cover the entire organization, Solution Architecture is much more focused, and arguably more forward looking than traditional EA.





The Solution Architect.

In fact, not only does Forrester foresee a rise in Solution Architecture, but they even predict a separation of the roles of enterprise architect and solution architect, with the latter becoming embedded in delivery teams while enterprise architects focus more on planning. This does not necessarily mean that the solution architect role becomes markedly different from an EA role, and indeed you can expect largely the same skillsets to permeate both roles. Rather, splitting the roles is a prime way for enterprise architects to both demonstrate real, direct value creation, while also continuing to contribute to the important tasks of EA that may not have the same level of stakeholder buy-in. Some firms may even choose to rotate architects between the roles, giving every architect the option of being on the front line of digital transformation as well as their traditional architecture experience.

What kind of skills can you expect from a solution architect? As mentioned above, you shouldn't expect something too dissimilar to an enterprise architect, but there are considerations to take into account. Metamodel and framework experience is likely to be de-emphasized, as these are more suited to the wider enterprise, though Solution Architecture initiatives have been a part of EA for a long time. A broader level of knowledge of the firm's functions is likely to be more relevant, as solutions may be deployed anywhere, and you would not want for an architect with no supply chain experience to work on a supply chain solution, for example.

Delivering Value.

How would the solution architect go about delivering value in a more noticeable way than an enterprise architect? Solutions are more outcome driven than most architectural projects. According to Forester:

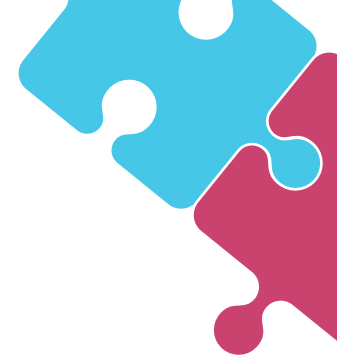
EA professionals viewed firms' architecture as a portfolio of technology assets. This was a bottom-up architecture... However, there was a perceived lack of business value.



Nonetheless, they do not see architects devolving into some kind of project management style role, but rather anticipate that solution architects can be the strategic link between individual solutions and the direction of the firm:

Leading EA pros are strengthening their strategic solution focus — with many being solution-first/platform-second rather than focusing only on the solution.





Broadly, we can see the emergence of the architect as not just a change manager, but a change driver, one who pushes transformation forwards instead of just helping its path.

Still, we shouldn't discount the importance of the EA function when it comes to Solution Architecture. Often, a well documented Solution Architecture will include specific viewpoints of the areas of the designed solution with the stakeholders' perspective in mind. For example, a Solution Architecture may include a target business process, a proposed infrastructure design and roadmap for migrating to a new application – all part of a single solution. At the moment, Solution Architecture is very much downstream of EA, and so as the title of this eBook suggests, Solution Architecture is simply the way in which EA demonstrates its value. However, it is clear that Solution Architecture can have a role to play that is somewhat separate from the main EA function, even while the two are closely interlinked.

Steps for Solution Architects.

Regardless of how the importance of solution architecture changes, the process of creating a solution architecture will remain broadly similar. There are 4 common steps:

1. Requirements gathering

In order to create a solution, architects must know the requirements. Using an EA tool like iServer, architects can swiftly centralize storage of all necessary architecture elements, providing a single source of truth for each solution. Using the iServer portal, stakeholder feedback can be delivered at every stage.

2. Conceptual architecture

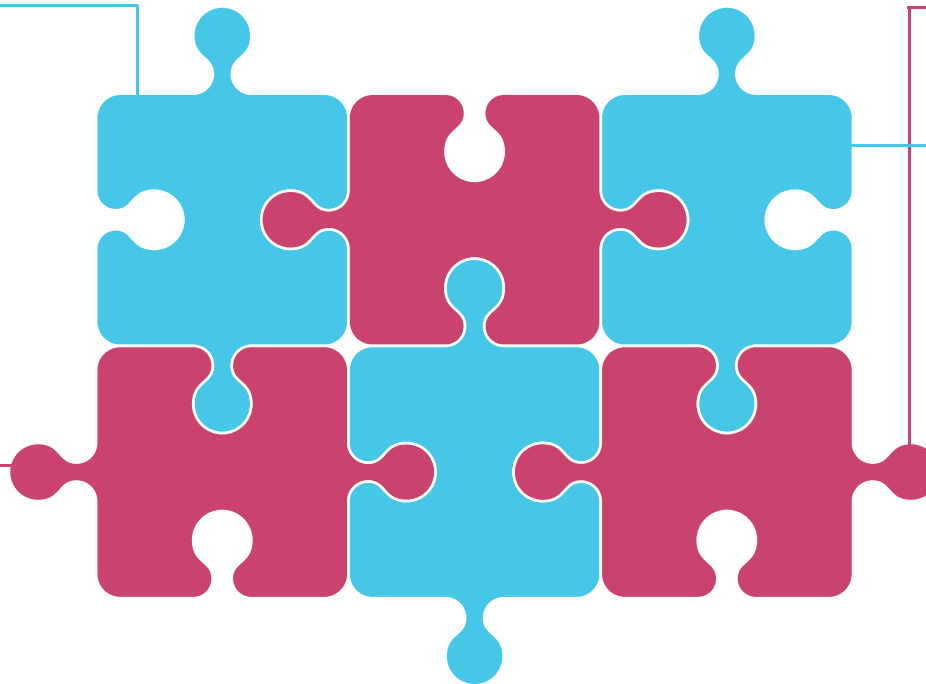
Next is conceptualizing what to do based on the requirements. iServer provide out of the box templates and Visio templates to speed this stage up, as well as support for UML and other frameworks that allow for high level description.

3. Design

The most important step is designing the solution. Solutions need multiple things to work together, and need to have up to date catalog views, and Strategic Portfolio Management (SPM), allowing for documentations with out of the box Visio templates.

4. Distribution

Finally, the solution needs to be distributed to a wider audience. Again, a tool like iServer can perform this step easily, using Live docs and the Portal to quickly disseminate the information.





To document solution architecture, iServer contains out of the box templates with viewpoints specifically for solution architecture. Visio templates allow for solution architects to visualize designed solutions, including roadmaps, business processes and infrastructure design.

SPM dashboards (in packs for every domain) allow for further analysis and visualization of data enabling transformation. SPM includes built in out of the box dashboards that enables further analysis for transformation:

-  Application Roadmap
-  Technology Roadmap
-  Business Process Management
-  Capabilities by Application
-  Projects by Capability



The Risks.

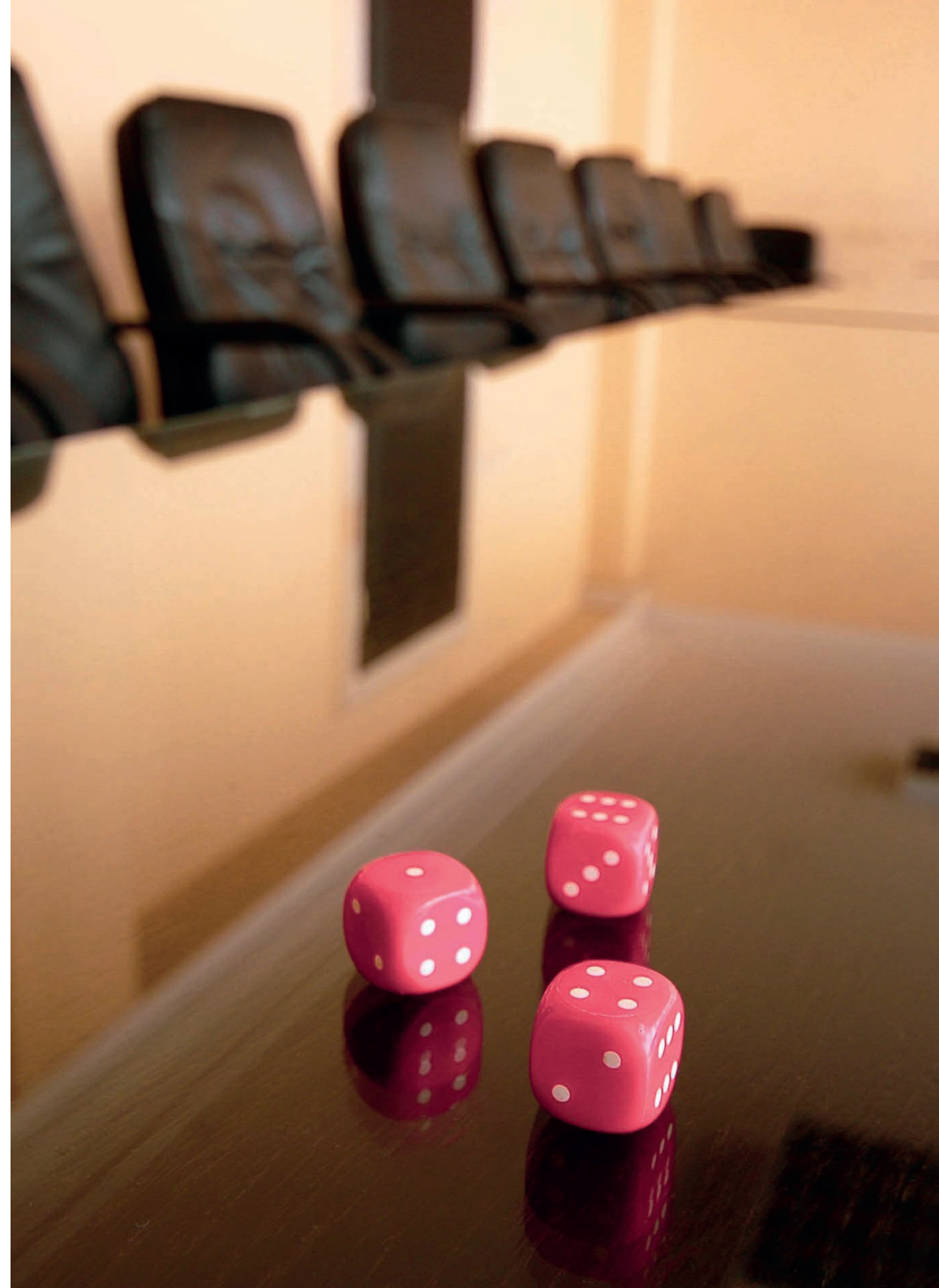
So far, everything sounds easy going, but if this move was so easy then every firm would already have done it. Inevitably, there are risks to a movement towards an outcome driven approach.

The first is simply experience. Forrester categorize enterprise architecture in three waves, with the drive towards outcomes defined as the third wave for mature architectures. It is not an approach that organizations can leap into without first having established a baseline of EA competence, which involves having a proper technology architecture in wave 1, before a focus on business capabilities in wave 2, in which the architecture moves beyond technology to other business areas. This maturity cannot be skipped or rushed through.

Another issue relates to power. For solution architects to make a difference, they will need to be empowered to move beyond architecture, to take ownership of value streams and to influence strategy. Inevitably, attempts to change how power is wielded in a firm will run into stakeholder opposition, as entrenched interests seek to maintain their positions. Though this can often be a rational response to unnecessary change (the classic example being the new manager who tries to force a new culture, damaging the team), neutering solution architects will also neuter their value creation.

Finally, as already mentioned the skillset of the solution architect will not be identical, and it may be difficult to find the right people for what is an ambitious target. Forrester recommends:

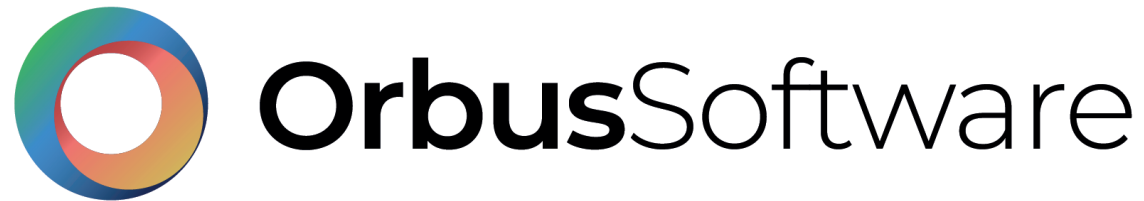
Use just enough methodology, with focus ...leading EA pros do not become slaves to methodology when it impedes their ability to provide what their customers need, when and where they need it EA pros will craft their own lightweight fit-for-purpose architecture approaches, focusing on design skills rather than methodologies



Summary.

Solution Architecture has been a part of Enterprise Architecture for many years, but it has perhaps not been afforded the relevance it could have had. Though it has often been used as a method for 'implementing' enterprise architecture, it has perhaps followed the lead instead of solution architects using their position to drive change. As Enterprise Architecture matures, this should change, and help to change the perception of EA from a mere technology or efficiency initiative into a genuine value creation tool.





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