



Developing Architects

by Roger Evernden

I frequently get asked - what's the best training programme to follow if you want to become an enterprise architect? The quick answer is that there isn't one, but that isn't very helpful! Instead, I'd like to explain why there isn't a single "best training programme", and then give some practical tips on what you can do to get trained in the whys and wherefores of enterprise architecture.

Let's start with the simple bit, and explain why there isn't a best training programme.

The most important reason is in the very nature of EA: the architectures for a particular enterprise are always unique and distinctive. Now that may sound unlikely. Surely there are many common elements and patterns, and increasingly every enterprise relies on components that are found in common systems within a broader environmental or social context. It is true that many aspects of EA are similar, their configuration and behaviour will always be specific to an individual enterprise, and this is reflected in the way that each enterprise architect. Every organization has its own take on the process of EA, and the principles governing its evolution. Every organization has its own distinctive EA team structure, and different expectations from its architectural practice.

Even organizations that base their EA practice around a "standard" approach will end up being dissimilar. This is one of the reasons why EA documentation repeatedly needs to be customised and adapted to meet your own needs.

Another major reason why there is no single route to becoming an enterprise architect is that the discipline is still in its infancy (actually, it has probably gone beyond infancy; it might be more accurate to say that EA is pubescent, as the discipline emerges from its childhood to approach adulthood). As a consequence, there is still a lot of debate on what EA is and how it should be done! This is clear in the wide range of EA frameworks that are available. TOGAF® is a valiant attempt to produce a standard approach, but it is still far from comprehensive. For example, TOGAF® doesn't explain exactly how you create or use architecture frameworks; it hasn't integrated the vital concept of patterns into its thinking; and it doesn't even mention many of the fundamental factors or techniques in EA.

The third reason why there isn't a single "best training programme" is that EA is still treated as a niche discipline. If you pass the two levels of the TOGAF® certification programme, then you are registered as a TOGAF® practitioner. If you are a TOGAF® architect it typically involves five years at university followed by two years of practical experience. To become a TOGAF® architect you need to be fully qualified. There are very few courses on EA, and as far as I know there is no programme that provides the same disciplined learning to EA that you would expect from a professional architect or engineer. The University of Toronto is one of the few institutions that has set up its Center for Enterprise Architecture in January 2011. Despite the fact that enterprise architecture is a discipline that expects a university degree to be one of its requirements for enterprise architects.

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So... what can you do to give yourself the best possible training in Enterprise Architecture, and make sure that you stand out from the growing crowd of TOGAF® certified practitioners? Here are a few of my top tips:

- Remember that EA training is a continuous, ongoing process. I've been an enterprise architect since 1984 and I'm still learning!
- Think of your role in the first few years as that of an apprentice. You are learning your craft, and the best way to do that is to learn from a master.
- Go beyond the TOGAF® documentation; read about and explore other EA approaches. Learn the techniques that TOGAF® doesn't describe.
- Focus on learning things that lie at the heart of what EA is all about. Get a strong understanding of the things that are true for all EA approaches.
- Learn about new and innovative techniques that are becoming part of EA. Explore things that you might not find in the TOGAF® architectural template, but that are relevant to the work you are doing.
- Attend EA conferences, or read up on case studies. Read up on real-world best practice by checking out annual EA awards.
- Seek training courses and materials that can be customized and adapted to meet your needs. Search for EA courses that are available and can be easily adapted.
- Be aware that EA is not just about some of the case studies or the technology aspects of EA. It is much more than that. Learn about the strategic, organizational, business and contextual aspects of EA.
- Above all, use all of the above tips to devise your own training programme – using a mix of formal courses, case studies, conferences, mentoring, coaching, books and articles, and apprenticeship.

This list isn't foolproof, but the key point is to make sure that you create your own "best training programme".

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