



How do I Think Like an Architect?

by Roger Evernden

What is unique about using TOGAF® to architect an enterprise? In this blog post I'm going to talk about what it means to architect. The key thing to remember is to "think" like an architect!

Let me explain what I mean by giving you an example. I went to a meeting recently that was convened to discuss problems with the enterprise web presence. It was a large group, with attendees from many different areas, including some business managers, solution architects, project managers, IT and Internet specialists, and a couple of enterprise architects.

The meeting was being led by one of the enterprise architects, but it was going horribly wrong. Everyone had a comment to make, and everyone seemed to know all the answers. But they just weren't thinking architecturally.

- The business managers were concerned about how the problem would affect their customers and causing them to leave for different business units. Their answers were about how to get more sales, solve the problems, or how to control and minimize operational breakdowns.
- The solution architects were more interested in their project deliverables and milestones. They were only interested in the solution if it helped meet these deadlines, or if it seemed likely to disrupt their work.

- The project managers again had deadlines to meet. Some felt that their projects would solve the apparent problems, so the meeting was a waste of time. Others felt that any new investment would take away valuable people or resources from existing projects.
- And the IT and Internet specialists seemed to have a ready-made solution that simply solved all of the issues. The only problem was that each specialist had their own ideas, which didn't match those of the other specialists!

So where did the enterprise architects come in? Well, they should have been able to reconcile and balance all of these viewpoints. TOGAF defines stakeholders as "An individual, team, or organization (or classes thereof) with interests in, or concerns relative to, the outcome of the architecture. Different stakeholders with different interests and concerns."

And TOGAF defines Stakeholder Management in [Part III: ADM Guidelines and techniques], in particular TOGAF describes the concepts of views and viewpoints to capture the concerns of the different stakeholders. But in this meeting, the enterprise architects didn't even raise this idea as a way of capturing or resolving everyone's concerns!

This meeting was a disaster, but we used the discussion on what it meant to think like

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The key learning point is that enterprise architects deal with the BIG PICTURE. They have to think holistically. Therefore, they have to take into account many diverse opinions and ideas, so they need ways to deal with divergent thinking, and then reconcile the contradictions into a coherent image of the architectural landscape and how it will evolve. We need to use the TOGAF concepts of stakeholder, views and viewpoints. It is essential that you work these into every architectural discussion and debate. Ask yourself:

1. What concerns does this individual, team or organization have? How would I classify their position? Note that TOGAF has a useful diagram depicting the key Categories of Stakeholder.
2. How can I capture their views? Remember that a view is defined in TOGAF as "the representation of a related set of concerns. A view is what is seen from a viewpoint. An architecture view may be used to create a model to demonstrate the structure of the areas of interest in the architecture. A view does not have to be a graphical or physical nature." So they are happy with how you present their views. A good copy of the TOGAF standard will have everything their ideas and opinions. A good copy of the TOGAF standard will have everything their ideas and opinions.

Thinking like an architect is different from thinking as a solution designer or software developer, or thinking as a business process specialist or project manager.

It is so important when you apply TOGAF to think like an architect – and not as a developer or project manager.

Keep it in mind as you apply TOGAF. Remind yourself to think like an architect. Challenge yourself in meetings or in conversation with stakeholders to make sure that you include all views and viewpoints.

And above all, make sure that you avoid thinking as you might if you were a different type of professional!

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