



How is EA Used to Justify Business and IT Investments?

by Roger Evernden

The TOGAF documentation doesn't really explain how EA can be used to justify business or IT investments. And yet enterprise architecture describes the essence of an enterprise, by cataloguing the building blocks that form the enterprise, and by explaining how these components relate to one another and interact to enable the capabilities the enterprise needs to survive. In this sense, the enterprise architecture is the "body" of the enterprise – its skeleton and muscles. Investments are made so that this "body" can do what is required of it.

Investments – whether they come from business or IT – will always have an impact on the enterprise architecture. Sometimes the impact isn't that great. A lot of resources, time and money can be spent without any significant changes occurring. Then there are investments that simply maintain the current architecture. And of course, there are investments aimed at bringing about big, radical change – which require a paradigm shift in the enterprise architecture.

So how is EA used to justify business and IT investments? The short answer is that every investment should be mapped to the relevant components in the architecture that are affected by the investment. It's then possible to show whether the plan to invest in these components allows the business to deliver the value expected by business leaders in return for some of the money spent on investment and change.

- Investments in maintenance, repairs, or fixes. In this case, we wouldn't expect to see a significant change in the architecture – after all, we are simply repairing something that isn't working properly. Here we need to demonstrate that this is the best thing to do – and that the current architecture is actually the right one, but that it is somehow temporarily broken. A simple example might be an application that needs updating to the latest release. The key point here is that the EA team need to justify the decision to stick with the existing architecture. For example, a decision to build a new data centre by reusing the same (current) architectural patterns used for existing data centres may not be a wise decision; instead it might be time to make the transition to a more efficient or higher capacity or outsourced option.

Investments that make little or no change to the enterprise architecture. In some ways, these decisions are similar to the ones made in the EA team need to provide rationale for keeping things pretty much as they are. For example, investment in restructuring the organization might include reducing the number of physical locations in which it operates; while there is clearly potential for architectural changes in this business, you might argue that it is better to business restructure architectural changes. These changes to the business architecture (locations, organization units, responsibilities) which might lead to more significant future changes such as standardising processes, introducing a business rules engine, and gaining a high

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degree of integration across business silos. In other words, the current investments are a necessary first step to enable future architectural options.

- Changing architectural patterns. Well in this situation the EA team should not only be using EA to justify business and IT investments, they should be involved in, and even leading discussions about alternative ways to leverage those investments. It is important here to realise that there is always more than one way to do things, and the EA team are often in the best position to identify and quantify the alternatives.

As I mentioned at the outset, TOGAF doesn't have a lot to say about how EA can be used to justify investments. In section 22.5, Enterprise Architecture and SOA, the documentation states that "Through its linking of the business context to IT, enterprise architecture readily identifies and provides justification for many IT programs in relation to the business. It can be derived from the effort." But this omits the point. Firstly it reads "the EA team" and it overlooks the fact that EA provides a systemic holistic view of the business and IT that make up an enterprise. It only goes from through business to IT. EA isn't simply something that provides alignment between business and IT. Secondly it fails to mention how EA provides justification by making the architectural context explicit.

I've underlined those last few words because without that explicit architectural context it is impossible to explain the part that EA plays in justifying business and IT investments. Every investment will either reinforce the status quo by maintaining the current architecture, or it will replace the current architecture with a different architectural pattern or state. In fact, most investments will be a mix of or balance between these two extremes.

How is EA used to justify business and IT investments? By showing exactly and explicitly the mapping between investment and the changes required to architectural components or behaviour to make that investment worthwhile.

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