Guideline – How to get practical advice on using TOGAF® - Part 1
by Roger Evernden

One of the biggest criticisms of TOGAF is that it doesn’t provide much in the way of practical, hands-on instruction. In this three-part Guideline, we look at what this means for you as you prepare for the TOGAF exam, and we give you plenty of useful advice so that you can supplement the TOGAF material with a knowledge of everyday enterprise architecture practice.

TOGAF® documentation and certification is probably the most common entry point for someone to start learning about enterprise architecture.

On the plus side:
• It is better than not having TOGAF
• There is a lot of material in the documentation
• It is very popular
• It is accepted by many individuals and organizations as a “standard”
• The syllabus is well structured, with clearly defined learning points and outcomes
• The exam provides a benchmark to show that someone has acquired a basic, entry-level knowledge of enterprise architecture
• It is well suited to online training, which allows you to work at your own pace
• Online training may also provide a host of supplementary material and support (Good e-Learning has a very large range of resources such as posters, quizzes, guidelines, and blogs)

But on the downside:
• There is a lot of material to cover
• Classroom training is typically only four days in duration – which isn’t enough to really learn about becoming an enterprise architect (think about the time it takes to learn to play an instrument or learn a foreign language!)
• TOGAF covers a lot of ground, but doesn’t cover all you need to know about enterprise architecture
• It is a reasonable stab at documenting what architects do, but it is hard to really document good or best practice
• The exam is limited to multiple choice questions – which isn’t the best way to check understanding or EA capability

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The key question that emerges here is: how do you go about supplementing the Level 1 and Level 2 training covered by TOGAF training and certification with an additional level of more practical, hands-on instruction?

This question comes up frequently. So here are some tips, guidelines and suggestions.

The nature of TOGAF

It might help if I explain about the nature of the TOGAF training and certification program...

TOGAF certification is based purely on the ability of a student to get a pass mark in two multiple choice exams. Because these are multiple choice exams, they only test your ability to remember key things in the TOGAF documentation, or, in the case of the second level exam, your ability to remember a group of things and how they should be applied according to TOGAF.

Most training courses only cover these very basic learning requirements.

But to become an enterprise architect you really need to learn how to apply the ideas described in TOGAF. You really need a Level 3 for the TOGAF training, that shows you how to apply TOGAF in real life situations. This is impossible to cover in a multiple-choice type exam.

I would recommend that you work your way through the TOGAF course, and make the best of the material given its limitations. After you've gained TOGAF certification you may want to seek out further, more practical guidance on how to be an enterprise architect. The tips included in this Guideline will point you in the right direction for this next step – to take you to a Level 3.

There is a lot of excellent guidance in our online blog – which covers issues like this that are not adequately covered by TOGAF. You will also find a lot of excellent interpretations of the TOGAF material in our online resources. After that, try an internet search for practical, hands-on enterprise architecture training, or search for an enterprise architecture mentor or coach.

The question arises as to how you can best prepare for these more practical, hands-on training options.

Open-Ended Exercises and Scenarios

Some EA courses supplement the closed format material in TOGAF with exercises and scenarios that are more open-ended. These additional exercises help you think about applying the TOGAF material in a practical way.

If you are familiar with the TOGAF questions then you will know that it is important to learn the official TOGAF descriptions, definitions and explanations. If you want to pass the exam, I know of several highly experienced architects who have taken the TOGAF exam later in their career, and found it difficult to restrict their ideas to the TOGAF way of thinking. You may have noticed that many of the example questions in your training preface their answer with the phrase, “according to TOGAF”. So that the answer must correspond to what it says in the documentation.

So, you may come across practice exercises that encourage you to think more openly. The problem with these questions is that it can be difficult for the trainer to provide an answer… by definition, an open-ended question will have more than one “right” answer. The important thing is that, as an enterprise architect, you know why you gave the answer you did give, and you feel that it is the right answer for the given situation.

This can be particularly frustrating if you are taking an online course. Because these are open-ended exercises, there is no definitive answer. And it is difficult for the course provider to include discussion on such questions to meet the training needs of all students. This is okay; TOGAF courses and exercises are limited to what is in the documentation. The important thing is that these have a lot of material to cover in four days, so there isn't a lot of time to allow for open-ended exercises and worked examples.

Tip: Seek out open-ended exercises or worked examples to help you understand how to really apply the material in TOGAF, but be aware of the limitations for these in both online and in-house courses. As you work through the these exercises, try to imagine what you would do if this was a real-life situation in the company where you currently work.

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