



## The August Lull

by Roger Evernden

There is nothing in the TOGAF documentation that says you need to take time out to reflect on or review all of your architectural work. Nothing that says – step outside of the main flow of work and take a close look at what you’ve produced. Nothing that says – go back over things that you’ve produced in the past to see if there is anything that is worth keeping and reusing. Nothing that says – how could you make life easier in the future if you took some of the project-specific deliverables and made them more generally useful.

Truth to tell, most of us are so busy all of the time, and we don’t give ourselves the luxury of time to stop and think, to halt the never-ending flow of deadlines for a short while so that we can get back in touch with who we really are.

One exception might be during the holiday season when we get away from our desks. Many companies experience the “August Lull” and many European countries, August is “the quiet month”. (Hague, 2014) August has been one of the best times to catch-up on things. My suggestion is that for the EA team it is an ideal time to reflect on the artifacts you have produced, to discover the most useful, reusable catalogs, matrices or diagrams, and to turn them into highly practical reference models, patterns or templates.

From experience, this could be done as near as much as it shows. I frequently put a lot of effort into products that remain project-specific. I could easily leverage this effort by turning it into something valuable and long-lasting.

Let me give you a couple of examples. Most companies using TOGAF refer to the business capabilities that they are changing or enhancing. So when a project starts out, one of the first steps (step 4, Evaluate Business Capabilities, the Architecture Vision phase) is to identify which capabilities are affected by the request for architecture work. In many cases this is done on a project-by-project basis. Say that we are creating integrated multi-channel business processes, the relevant capabilities might be Customer Acquisition and Real-Time Marketing. At the end of the project, these two capabilities are then forgotten. Another project starts up, and this time it aims to improve the Online Enquiry Response and Product Bundling capabilities; and again, at the end of this second project, any documentation about the capabilities gets buried along with countless other project deliverables.

But if you can map in isolation from the project, a capability map can show the value that is added from the capability to the business. These capabilities are catalogued for individual projects into an enterprise-wide capability reference model. The value is generated by a set of capabilities – rather than individual ones. And a good capability model has value for the business managers, for senior decision makers, and for strategists, as well as for the EA team. It just takes a little time to extract this knowledge from project-specific deliverables into something greater.

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This is exactly what the Enterprise Continuum is all about. Except that TOGAF only shows the continuum as running from Foundation through Common Services and Industry to Enterprise-specific, whereas the continuum actually continues within the enterprise, passing through divisions and business units to projects! Simply moving artifacts from the project level to the enterprise level makes them more useful and reusable. This is a question of generalizing project-specific details to make a more comprehensive and universal template, model or pattern. And generalization is one of the fundamental techniques in EA.

Let me give you another simple example. Many EA teams still present information about their architectures using documents, and most of the deliverables in TOGAF are described as such – for example, the Architecture Definition Document. But documents tend to be single-use – they are produced for a particular purpose and then archived. Think of a document as a file in a container, which depicts relationships in a particular way.

- Firstly there is the structure and format of the document itself. That is, what do you regularly produce. Could you produce a standard document template that would streamline or simplify its format?
- Would a document template make it easier to include standard reference materials, or better still, include them? For example, if there is a set of principles, a document could refer to the ones rather than repeating them.
- And what about the artifacts included in the document. Are there any diagrams that could be extracted and reused?

It is also useful to compare documents from different projects. For example, in one company they found that each document described and visualised applications differently. There were more than 100 different diagram types to represent applications. The EA team picked 5 diagrams that showed the underlying architectural configurations, and then made these standard templates for picturing applications.

These are simple ideas to make the life of an architect much easier. And they can be whenever there is a spare moment for reflection – not just in the August lull.

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