TOGAF®: "Out-of-the-Box" Vs. Customization

by Roger Evernden

I frequently get asked whether it's practical to use TOGAF "out-of-the-box" – without any customization. Architects and clients are looking for a turnkey approach that they can easily plug into their enterprise with the hope of quick results – they don't want something that requires too much effort.

The simple and practical answer is – no: you can't get the best out of TOGAF if you use it without adapting it to your needs! But this answer ignores the fact that much of TOGAF can be used without any customization. And it also fails to explain why you need to adapt TOGAF, or how you go about doing so.

In this article I'm going to briefly overview the arguments for using TOGAF out-of-the-box, and the reasons for customization.

Why can't you get the best out of TOGAF without adaptation? Because every enterprise is unique. Within its architectures there will be some common components – for example, things that are true for all companies, or all business, such as all banks or all airlines. There will also be some systems that are common for pretty much any enterprise, such as enterprise interfaces to web technologies.

TOGAF of course recognizes this distinction, between generic and enterprise-specific, in the Enterprise Continuum. The Enterprise Continuum makes an explicit distin

- Foundation Archite almost universal fu
- Common Systems A architectures that are widely reused across many domains,
- And Industry Architectures that recognize commonality across an industry sector.
- But that still leaves the Organization-Specific Architectures that are – well, "organization-specific"!

Using the Enterprise Continuum we might find that an Organization-Specific Architecture actually uses 25% foundation, 15% common systems, and 20% industry components, leaving only 40% that is truly organization-specific.

Adapting TOGAF to your needs follows a similar continuum.

Parts of TOGAF can be considered a generic Foundation. This covers any "universal truths" about EA. TOGAF is weak here.

- For example, good enterprise architects frequently use the idea of a continuum[i]. But TOGAF will ... the Enterprise Continuum ... mentioned above, and it fails to explain the underlying conventions on ...
- Other parts of TOGAF work better if you are ... architectural style or approach.

There is a strong leaning in TOGAF towards Service-Oriented Architecture (SOA), while there are less obvious references to Object-Oriented Architecture.

... AF use of views, ... – which is formally ... standard[ii]. While this ... t works very well for some organizations, there are many others that don't follow this approach.

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Then there are the parts of TOGAF that are "TOGAF-specific". By this I mean that, like other EA approaches, TOGAF has its own peculiarities and language.

For example, this is evident in TOGAF certification questions that begin with the phrase, "according to TOGAF..." The answer to these questions depends more on memorizing the specific way in which TOGAF documentation describes something than on understanding what a trained architect would do in the field!

Now if you have gone to a lot of trouble to learn about TOGAF, I hope you are not thinking that this time has been wasted. I must emphasize that TOGAF does a great job at documenting architectural practice. The TOGAF documentation fills a huge gap – for example, before TOGAF it was hard to find a well-defined process for developing architecture; now this is provided by the ADM. Similarly TOGAF has done a great job of standardizing things like architecture language and meta-models.

But I also need to point out that there is a lot that TOGAF doesn't yet [illegible] of architectural fundamentals. It covers certain architectural styles, but not others. And some of the TOGAF [illegible] from that in your enterprise. So it is unlikely that your enterprise will use, or be able to [illegible] without some customization.

So let me leave you with these thoughts:

- As you use TOGAF, use it with as little customization as possible. Try in the first instance to use TOGAF without adaptation.
- At the same time, think about what you are trying to achieve. And if TOGAF doesn't cover it out-of-the-box, then make the necessary customizations to ensure your success!

[i] a continuous sequence in which adjacent elements are not perceptibly different from each other, although the extremes are quite distinct

[ii] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISO/IEC_42010

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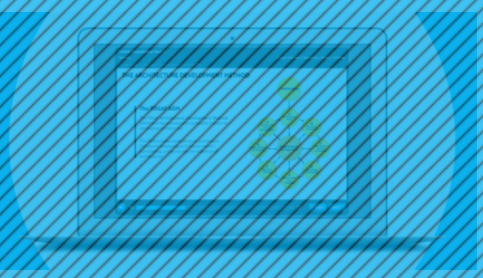

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