The Evolution of the Business Architect

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Introduction

The way we interact with business is changing, from offline to online. Organizations are going through fundamental upheaval. At the heart of this change is the business architect. Once considered a niche role, the business architect is now one that most organizations have on the employee headcount, responsible for tackling strategy to leading and shaping transformation.

As the business architecture discipline matures, most organizations are hiring more and more business architects, but we find ourselves at a crossroads. Why is this? Why are some business architecture practices successful and why do others fail? What is the fundamental role of the business architect? Where do the successful business architects go once they have mastered their discipline? In this paper, we answer some of these core questions, with the aim of providing a blueprint for the evolution of business architecture and the business architect role for practitioners, for organizations, and for the business architecture discipline overall.

The Role of the Business Architect

The business architect role was envisioned to be a strategic, senior role responsible for architecting new organizations or re-architecting aspects of existing ones in response to change. As a result of technology, the volume and rate of change that organizations now need to adapt to have increased so significantly that most are performing enterprise-wide transformation and preparing to become more agile. Business architecture is a critical enabler of both, which is why the demand for the business architect role has increased.

Role Confusion and Evolution

Even with the increased demand for true enterprise-wide business designers, the business architect role has not always been deployed as such, and this disconnect has created confusion about the role and a lack of qualified resources to truly meet the demand. The confusion comes from whether the role of a business architect is to create and maintain the enterprise business architecture knowledgebase, including blueprints such as capability maps and value streams, or to shape the business and translate strategy using these blueprints.

There are solid reasons for this confusion and for how the business architect role has evolved, all reflective of the maturity of the business architecture discipline. First, although all organizations have a business architecture, in most cases, it is not written down, and if it is, it is not documented from an enterprise perspective or aligned with industry standards. As a result, before business architects can do any strategy

translation or architecting, they first need to build the business architecture knowledgebase. Second, because business architecture is relatively new in comparison to other disciplines, the Business Architecture Guild's *A Guide to the Business Architecture Body of Knowledge®* (*BIZBOK® Guide*) — and the training based upon it — initially focused on the aspects of building a business architecture in order to establish consistency and train business architects on the basics. One additional reason is that the skills and interests of many people who have been drawn to the business architect role have been more heavily related to the building aspect.

Responsibilities of the Business Architect

The reality is that there are three areas of responsibility which need to be addressed by a business architecture function, and they may or may not be able to be covered by one role that encompasses them all. Due to the natural variance in business architects in terms of skills, experience, interests, and even personalities, it is not realistic to expect one person to have the ability to perform all three areas of responsibility. The structure and scope of the role(s) must be adaptable and flexible to allow organizations to best meet their needs.

The three areas of responsibility include:

1. **Applying business architecture (strategy translator)** – This area includes using the business architecture in a variety of business scenarios to assess areas for improvement and changes necessary to carry out strategy or reshape the business. While the other two areas are absolutely necessary, this one is the reason why business architecture exists: to provide value.

2. **Building a business architecture (map maker)** – This area includes creating and maintaining the business architecture knowledgebase and connecting it to domains outside of business architecture (e.g., customer journeys, processes, system applications).

3. **Managing the practice (practice manager)** – As the business architecture within an organization matures and the decision is made to establish a practice, this area includes socialization and formalizing the supporting infrastructure such as role definition and organizational structure, training, methodology, governance, and tools.

While there may be clarity in the distinct areas of responsibility of a business architect, due to the unique value the role brings and its relative newness in the organizational structure, it is not always clear where business architects fit and who they interact with. The table below compares the roles of a business leader, a business architect, and an execution role (e.g., a business analyst) for a common set of responsibilities that are often confused.

Responsibility	Business Leader	Business Architect	Execution Role
Business direction	Set	Translate	Deliver in initiative context
Business decisions	Make	Inform (i.e., share insights and compile facts for objective decision-making) and translate into concrete actions	Deliver in initiative context
Architectural decisions	Make	Recommend and govern	Consume in initiative context
Business architecture knowledgebase	Own (content), inform, and consume in scenario context	Steward, create, maintain, report out, and consume in scenario context for insights	Consume overall and in initiative context
Architect change[1]	Own (target architecture and strategic roadmap), inform, and govern	Steward, create, maintain, and communicate	Consume in initiative context
Execution (for architected changes)	Oversee, guide, inform, align to objectives and outcomes, and approve	Guide, align to architecture, objectives, and outcomes, and measure success	Execute initiatives
Operations management[2]	Run, manage, and improve the business, including key performance indicators (KPIs), manage people, own business health assessments (content), and initiate improvement initiatives	Steward business health assessments and identify and recommend improvement initiatives (high level based on architecture)	Steward operating model-related health assessments, identify and recommend improvement initiatives (detailed operational level such as related to process)

The Deployment of Business Architecture

While the role of the business architect is now somewhat clearer, the next question is how an organization should deploy the business architecture function. This question is the one that comes up the most, and, in some respects, is the one that has no one-size-fits-all answer. It is the expectation of a one-size-fits-all approach that often leads to failure in vast numbers of business architecture practices, as it is often driven from past employee experience that does not align or a lack of long-term business architecture vision. Just like the role definition, the business architecture team structure

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[1] Includes architecting changes as a result of strategy translation, transformation, mergers and acquisitions, etc., which are reflected in target architectures and strategic roadmaps that are input to planning and execution.
[2] Includes all activities to run the business, including regulatory and compliance management.

needs to be adaptable and flexible to best meet the needs of an organization. In fact, in many cases, how business architects are deployed shifts over time to reflect an organization's evolving needs and understanding of what the discipline can do.

Business architects can be deployed in different ways to address the three areas of responsibilities described above, including:

- **Business architects deployed as part of a dedicated business architecture practice** – This is one of the most common structures where business architects work in a team that focuses on all areas of responsibility, and they are then assigned to work on change initiatives that apply business architecture to various scenarios and scopes of the business. This structure allows for the appropriate focus and incubation of the business architecture function but may lead to some separation between the team and the business people who they serve. In all cases, business architects should work upstream before planning and execution versus at the project level or their effectiveness will be limited.

- **Business architects deployed as part of a multi-disciplinary design team** – This emerging structure is potentially underutilized and is either formed temporarily, such as where agile teams deliver a specific capability, or permanently such as in a digital or mobile area. This structure emphasizes the business architect's role as a part of strategy execution and enterprise design and allows them to be more closely integrated into the business and more valuable, though it can make it more difficult to ensure cohesiveness and consistency of the business architecture function.

- **Business architecture responsibilities deployed as part of multiple people's roles** – This structure is rare but emerging. In this case, business architecture responsibilities are performed not just by business architects, but by people in other roles as they utilize and refine the business architecture as part of their jobs. This structure allows business architecture to scale, be adopted, and permeate across an organization, though again, it may be difficult to ensure cohesiveness and consistency of the function.

Regardless of the business architecture deployment approach, there are important considerations. First, the business architecture team structure is flexible. An organization may deploy business architecture using a combination of the options described above. For example, a dedicated business architecture practice may be established with business architects who maintain the knowledgebase and practices and are assigned to various initiatives, while other roles are trained to use the business architecture in various scenarios and do so fairly independently. As previously mentioned, the structure and even the size of a business architecture team may also change over time to meet the organization's evolving needs and understanding. Business architecture practices and standards must also remain agile to change and adapt as well. Second, the business architecture team typically reports within the business to a leader in strategy, planning, transformation, innovation, or another function that allows them to be strategically positioned and work

across business units. There are many teams who report within IT, and this may be the most feasible place to incubate the function, but as business architecture becomes more integrated into the strategy execution lifecycle, it is often better suited to report to the business while maintaining a close relationship with the IT architecture disciplines. Finally, regardless of structure, the business architect's most important focus is to provide business and customer value and play a critical role in strategy translation. They should provide an enterprise, cross-business unit perspective on the architecture and shape initiatives as input to planning.

Maturity Progression of a Business Architecture Function

The manner in which the business architecture team is structured and positioned, as well as how the business architect role is defined, directly and indirectly speak volumes about strategic importance, scope of responsibility, and key relationships. Certain choices made up front will make it easier to obtain organizational buy-in and perform the role at a strategic level.

Thankfully, the clues to how we should deliver business architecture are in front of us, and they can be found in our environment. When approaching the formation of a business architecture practice, an organization must first look at its own needs as well as its experience in the business architecture discipline and key related functions such as strategy and change management.

Business Architecture Team Structure and Maturity

The business architecture team structure defines how business architects are distributed across leaders. Some common options are having a fully centralized team, a fully decentralized team, or a full hub-and-spoke (hybrid) operating model. The table below describes each team structure option, the level of business architecture maturity it is best suited for, and pros and cons.

Option	Maturity	Description	Pros	Cons
Centralized	New practice	All business architects report centrally to a core business architecture team. Practices and standards are managed centrally by the same team.	• More likely to ensure an enterprise view of business architecture • Provides a focal point for the discipline and ensures consistent business architecture practices	• Potentially seen as too distant from the business, leading to lack of buy-in and access • Can be challenges with socialization

Option	Maturity	Description	Pros	Cons
Decentralized	Experienced	Business architects report to different business units. Practices and standards may be managed individually by the business units or centrally by a core business architecture team.	• Close to the business leading to buy-in and access • Can lead to quicker socialization of the discipline	• Potentially fragmented view of business architecture • Potentially inconsistent business architecture practices • Business architects may lose focus with non-business architecture assignments
Hub and Spoke (Hybrid)	Advanced	Business architects are distributed across the business, though some may also report centrally to a core business architecture team. Practices and standards are managed centrally by a core business architecture team.	• Generally provides the benefits of both the centralized and decentralized options together • Business architects are deployed in the business and are owned by the business leading to full buy-in and access • Practices and standards are maintained centrally, allowing business architects to focus on architecting versus the knowledgebase or practices	• Generally none as long as virtual collaboration mechanisms are effective, but it requires significant maturity and coordination across each deployed business architecture team

The choice of team structure is influenced by an organization's business architecture maturity and other organizational dynamics. Some structural options work better at certain stages of maturity though there is not a required progression through them. Most importantly, the structure must be adaptable to evolve with the organization's needs.

The Business Architect Career Path

W hile it is clear there are options on how to deliver business architecture and the path to success is clearly not easy, the question is what happens once you have been successful? What happens once you have successfully made business architecture a key component of your organization? And as a business architect, where do you go next?

It might seem odd to raise such questions for an emerging discipline, but we are already seeing success stories, and business architects are going to eventually want to continue their career path. There are already multiple examples of how organizations have used business architecture to add value, and, at the heart of these successes, there are business architects who have gained recognition across the global business architecture community.

Fortunately, there are options for business architects — of all levels — to advance their careers.

Career Options

For some business architects, there is a temptation to think that the only path is to spend the rest of their careers in architecture. While this mentality is the right path for some people, it does not have to be the case for others because a good business architect overtime will develop some significant advantages, including:

- Awareness of how the organization creates value

- Understanding of the organization from end-to-end

- Recognition as a trusted advisor and partner across all stakeholders

- Enabler of strategies

Clearly, these examples are just a snapshot of some of the core advantages, and what is really interesting is that they apply to a variety of disciplines and can provide a business architect with some clear career choices, including:

- *Accept a business architecture specialist* position – This role is the most obvious move. It provides the business architect a platform to become an industry-leading specialist. In this capacity, the architect is able to either lead practices or architect increasingly complex and large change initiatives. In some cases, a business architect can be hired for his or her expertise and experience in the business architecture field.

- *Move to a role in the business (or IT)* – We are already seeing some senior business architects moving into the business. This transition may seem odd, but if we think about it, most of the skills needed to

lead are at the core of the business architect's toolbox. Business roles such as product owners, strategists, or even heads of business units are starting to become serious options for the next leg of a business architect's career.

- *Become an interdisciplinary person* – The growth of new businesses spurred on by digital and mobile has seen an increase of people joining startups instead of the traditional corporate world. The startup world demands not only speed, but people with a variety of skills. Business architects are required to have a variety of skills, but also an awareness of business and operating models. These skills are valuable for any start up, and offer a business architect a unique career choice.

- *Become a management consultant* – Business architecture has become a key component for translating strategy and shaping change and initiatives. These skills are now in even greater demand, and we are seeing traditional management consulting firms looking for people who have these experiences and skills. It provides the business architect a logical next step, which can either be working for themselves or as part of an established firm.

What is obvious is that the role of a business architect is not constrained, and opens the door to numerous future opportunities. Business architecture offers significant visibility and learning, but it's about the journey of the individual. The career options listed above are just a few examples of what is possible, but each person must decide what they want to do. The business architect role can be a long-term career or part of a journey. The good news is that in both cases, a business architect will gain significant benefits regardless of the route chosen.

Recommendations

Where do we go from here in order to continue evolving and make these ideas actionable? As we look towards the next chapter where the business architect career path will continue to be practiced, shaped, and formalized, we pose some questions for thoughtful consideration.

For business architecture practitioners:

- As a business architect, do you think of yourself not only as an architect, but also as a leader and change agent?

- What do you want your long-term career path to look like and where do you want to take your career next?

- What experiences do you need to achieve your career aspirations? For example, do you need more or different responsibilities, a bigger scope to architect, positioning further upstream in the strategy execution lifecycle, or more leadership opportunities?

For organizations:

- How well is your current business architect role definition and team structure meeting the organization's needs and your vision for business architecture? Is it aligned to your current level of business architecture maturity or is it time to evolve?

- How flexible is your business architecture organizational structure and can it continually adapt as the organization changes?

- Do you have a business architect career path defined? Does it go far enough and allow for nonbusiness architecture advancement which enables you to not only retain individuals but also develop new leaders for the organization?

For the business architecture discipline:

- As role and competency models are formalized, how best should the three major areas of responsibility of a business architecture function be reflected, especially considering the variation in business architect skills and interests? How can the business architect role be designed so that it is adaptable and flexible for organizations to structure it in the way which best meets their needs?

- How does training need to evolve to teach business architects how to architect, not just how to create and utilize business architecture blueprints?

- How can the business architecture discipline continue to evolve to ensure it plays a role as technology innovations become part of business and customers' lives? How can we ensure that business architects are educated on and aligned with trends so they can help and advise organizations on how to deploy these changes within a business context?

- How can professional organizations serving the business architecture industry continue to advocate for and establish the role of business architects strategically within for profit, non-profit, and governmental organizations?

- How can business architects be positioned to architect across organizational ecosystems, both for the purposes of conducting business as well as helping us solve some of the greatest challenges of our time?

Conclusion

What is clear is that changes in business architecture and the architecture of business are going to accelerate as business and technology continue to evolve at pace. Business architects have a clear role to play in this space, especially as they continue to transition from architects to leaders, their value to organizations will be crucial.

For the individual, what was once seen as a niche discipline is now becoming more understood and is starting to open numerous doors, enabling architects of today to become tomorrow's business leaders. The integrated business and technology thinking business architecture requires is now almost an expected competency and is providing numerous opportunities for new and experienced practitioners.

From driving forward strategy to participation in agile teams, the future has never looked so bright for the individual business architect and the discipline of business architecture itself. To move forward, organizations must have a vision for how they want to deploy it. Furthermore, individuals must take control of their journeys and become almost unconstrained by their own discipline and use what they know across all aspects of business.

The next five years of business evolution is clearly unpredictable, but with strong business architecture capabilities in place, we are sure that organizations and the individuals that serve them will be able to navigate the changeable conditions and leverage opportunities that lie ahead.

About the Authors

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