



Enterprise Architects
will be key through the recovery in 2021

Following the events of 2020, it is no surprise that many industries are struggling, and a general recession may be on the way. As with every downturn, the strong will survive, and enterprise architects will have a major role in ensuring that their organizations remain robust throughout the tumultuous times that occur. In this paper, we will explore how architects can help guide firms through the difficulty and evolve their EA function to enhance digital transformation initiatives.





The Situation.

Despite initial successes, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to plague much of the world, forcing ongoing restrictions and disrupting the normal processes of everyday life. Industries such as hospitality continue to be almost entirely unable to function, while many others will have difficulty operating at maximum efficiency. The few winners are those with robust digital operations, taking advantage of e-commerce or the large growth in available consumer time.

Vaccines have now been approved in many countries, and the rollout has already started in some cases. This provides hopes for a spring or early summer end for the pandemic, depending on the speed of the rollouts. While that may bring back a sense of normalcy, it won't undo the economic implications of the fight against the virus. Many businesses have already gone bust, unable to cope with the disruption, while governments around the world have spent huge sums which will almost certainly result in hefty tax rises to help pay back their borrowing.



In the UK, GDP remains significantly below the level it was at prior to the pandemic, and the latest figures only go up to October, ending before the second and third lockdowns that have taken place over the winter. In the US, jobs have fallen for the first time since April, with employment levels still not at pre-pandemic levels, and though the economy rebounded quickly in the third quarter, like the UK it has not been able to recover all the lost growth. Though many Asia Pacific nations have managed to avoid major disruption and damage, the globalized nature of the economy means that the damage suffered in Europe and the US will reverberate around the world, and likely stymie growth in the short and medium term.

None of this is particularly new information, with the implications of the pandemic having been fairly clear since the initial lockdowns took place, but it illustrates just what businesses will have to face if they wish to survive, and hopefully thrive in the future.






How Enterprise Architecture will Drive Firms Forward.

When it comes to dealing with crises or with drops in demand, firms have many tools in their arsenal. What is that makes enterprise architecture not just important, but perhaps one of the best tools for dealing with the post pandemic recovery?

One part is the direct cost savings and efficiencies gained through common use cases. Application Rationalization, for example, can be a quick method of achieving large cost savings by slashing unnecessary applications, which are often overlooked. Dealing with risk is another area that will be continually beneficial, even if a lot of damage may already have been done. Whatever form the recovery takes, it isn't likely to be smooth sailing. Whether the risk is a traditional danger such as cash flow or public relations issues, or the continuation of the pandemic due to new variants or vaccine problems, risk preparation and mitigation is going to remain vital.





However, these impacts, while useful, are unlikely to have a transformative effect on the firm. Rather, it is the more abstract advantages that will allow EA to truly shine. Gartner suggests that 2 concepts will be key: Insight and Intelligence.

Due to the positions of architects within the firm, they are uniquely placed to provide insight on business activities. Possessing broad understandings of both business and IT, and working across departments and functions, an architect can be invaluable in fitting disparate ideas together and assisting strategies for organizational change.

However, simply having a broad view of an organization is not enough in modern business where decisions must be data driven. Hence the second aspect provided by architects, intelligence. Enterprise Architecture draws in information from across the organization, and provides the modeling and analysis tools necessary to turn raw data into actionable intelligence.

Gartner foresees a three stage 'reset': first is "Respond", which as you can guess refers to the initial response to the crisis. Though we have stressed earlier that the pandemic is by no means dealt with, we can safely assume that this stage has already been passed for the vast majority of firms. That leaves the next two stages for businesses to handle. The second stage is "Recover", while the third is "Renew".



Gartner®



For “Recover”, EA does not need to be too radical. The aforementioned efficiencies through the likes of application rationalization are going to be sufficient to protect and improve the core of the business. It is in the third stage of “Renew” that architects and EA leaders will need to move beyond this. As firms come through short term concerns, they will look to medium and long term growth, aiming to come out of the recovery period in a stronger position. This will demand new services and experiences, not only due to natural competition, but also potential impacts of the pandemic on consumer behavior. E-commerce is unlikely to lose the gains it has made during lockdowns, people may continue to be more cautious and adverse to gathering in large crowds, and of course businesses themselves will surely realize the advantages that more extensive home working and teleconferencing have brought.

All of these trends will place heavy emphasis on digital capability. What is more, emerging technologies will need to be explored. Could parts of hospitality and tourism be replaced by VR? Will business meetings make use of holographic technology for a blended approach? Will self-driving or delivery drones be the final nail in the coffin for in-person retail? In a sense, you can already see markets betting on this last example, with the stock prices of Tesla and Amazon being driven to massive heights thanks to their bets on technology.

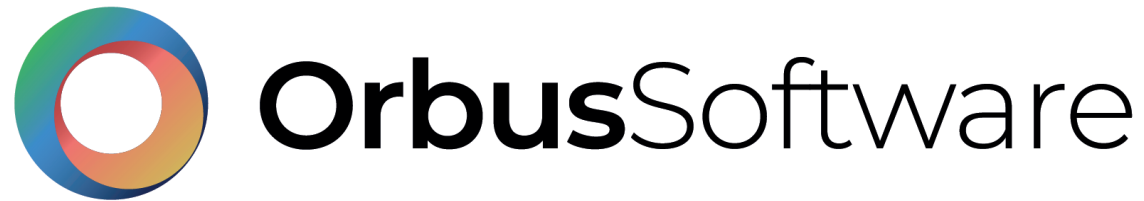




Conclusion.

There's no doubt that digital transformation will play a major role in the next few years for businesses both large and small. Every organization would have had their eyes on potential technological disruption, but the impact of the pandemic, and the forthcoming economic pain, will only intensify the need for organizations to get everything they can from their digital initiatives. We emphasized the importance of more radical efforts from enterprise architecture, but there should be no illusion that simple productivity gains are still very relevant, and not easy to pull off. Enterprise Architects will need to look for efficiency in every possible area to stay ahead; one of the reasons Orbus Software have emphasized provision for a huge range of possible use cases is the necessity for EA to be involved in every facet of the business to help create value.

Nonetheless, businesses do not exist to merely survive. Emerging from the pandemic has already proved beyond many great old organizations, but it will all be for naught if a firm ends up collapsing in the next crisis, or misses the chance to seize an opportunity created by the disruption of COVID-19. The enterprise architect that helps to deliver long term value creation will cement themselves as one of the key members of any enterprise.



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