

Five Steps to Designing a Fully Optimized Enterprise Architecture

How to Build a Mature Enterprise
Architecture Practice



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Introduction

Digitalization has seen the modern enterprise get hit by a tidal wave of increased complexity. At the same time predators and competitors circle; not just looking for scraps, but eager and capable of devouring anyone who gets bogged down under the weight of transformation.

As we know, change is constant, technology evolving and adaptability imperative. Anyone who hasn't already recognized this is probably sitting on the scrapheap, consigned to the annals of the pre-digital era. A robust yet flexible enterprise architecture is oft touted as the panacea for large-scale companies that do not want to be overwhelmed by the latest advances or subsequent changes in consumer behavior and demands.

However, establishing a mature, optimized enterprise architecture practice that can stand you in good stead is easier said than done. Moreover, it can sometimes be difficult to benchmark your current level, establish a structured approach and create a plan to enhance your existing EA program.



The enterprise architect must, despite all the technical complexities and challenges, remain outcome focused; rarely are stakeholders interested in the science behind the processes, but rather they are happy to trust their experts. It is simply the results that matter. This requires measurable deliverables and milestones that tangibly demonstrate our progress in an easily digestible format. Working in iterations architects can develop and target a set of goals, tied to key business outcomes.

Throughout the evolution of your EA practice, keep in mind it is a journey and not a destination. By making use of a maturity model, you drill deeper into each iterative step, understanding what it looks like and how to move towards fully optimized enterprise architecture. The Orbus Software Enterprise Architecture Maturity Assessment demonstrates where your organization currently sits, and provides a platform for you to benchmark against competitors, and industry standards. You are able to use the assessment as a way to develop your EA practice to meet the demands of the digital age.





STEP 1: EMERGENT

Organizations at the beginning of their enterprise architecture journey will invariably be at the “emergent” level. How long they spend at this stage will depend on a variety of factors including investment, stakeholder buy-in, urgency, tooling and more. In all likelihood, several of these elements are still being decided upon.

At this point, it is unlikely any formal enterprise architecture is in place, and many stakeholders will be unable to recognize or identify any relevant processes. Most EA activity that does take place is unstructured and undocumented, without adherence to any recognized standards and practices. Instead, it is completely reliant on the knowledge of individuals.

This level is crucial in shaping the future enterprise architecture practice and directing the organization from strategy through to execution. Before embarking on the EA journey it's essential to outline the vision and bring clarity to overarching aims. In doing so, EA investment becomes a logical investment for internal stakeholders and enables the organization to derive elements which can be plotted throughout the ensuing stages. Indeed, the fundamental strategy for these nascent organizations is to start with the end in mind. The recently established EA team can work together to define the deliverables and help implement an architectural framework, mapping business outcomes and targets. Defining the outcomes in an iterative way enables the enterprise architecture function to lay its own foundations.

Some useful questions to help get your teams thinking along the right lines for emergent functions include:

How do you model environments?

How are you storing artifacts?

How are you managing architecture?

Do you have comprehensive standard and framework support?

In identifying the answers to questions such as these, the organization will move on from simply having a vague notion on how to implement EA, and develop a more thorough understanding of the practical steps it needs to take – particularly in relation to the strategic alignment of the business. As the EA function begins to take shape you can begin ticking off measurable objectives along your journey to a fully mature function. Speed is often paramount, but while it's tempting to run before you can walk, getting the right building blocks in place and having clarity of the bigger picture is equally important to the project's success. Failure to do this can result in complications later down the line with unforeseen consequences that cause the whole initiative to fall apart. When a function is interwoven with different departments, mistakes that are not clearly visible will have catastrophic implications for the wider business.



STEP 2: DEVELOPING

As the enterprise architecture becomes operational, the organization moves to the “developing” stage. Here there is some clarity around the base architecture, and standards are being outlined, tracked and monitored.

However, there are still numerous issues to be ironed out, whether between different stakeholders or with regards to the overarching goals. It therefore tends to be unclear precisely how much tangible business value is delivered.

Architects should look to be tactical in how they first apply enterprise architecture; whilst the practice isn’t mature, or even robust, there will nonetheless be quick wins available. With this in mind, it becomes a priority to drill into processes and procedures to identify roadblocks and rectify them – using malleable architecture frameworks enables a pragmatic approach to the development of EA functions and deliverables, which in turn aligns targets to business outcomes and stakeholder concerns, driving best practices. Flexibility is crucial at this stage, because new requirements will arise, rendering it necessary to tweak or adapt the strategy accordingly. The project plan can then begin addressing the first iterations and outcomes – linking the future-state vision to the current is far more practical than the ad hoc point solution approaches most organizations at this stage follow.

Balancing the EA project is another area of focus for businesses at this stage. As the EA initiative develops, some areas may progress and race off into the distance, while others become detached, requiring more care and attention. For example, certain procedures will get up and running very quickly, but if the governance is lacking and they quickly become unmanageable and counter-productive. Indeed, asking how to deliver

business value is only one half of the equation. It is also crucial for organizations to establish robust governance frameworks. This prevents bad habits from seeping in and helps build upon your initial definition and impetus.

Similarly, organizations at this stage looking to advance their EA initiative should look to ensure there are no weaknesses or absent measurements. A lack of depth or comprehensive insight can lead to confusion and ultimately the emergence of silos throughout the business. Furthermore, while the EA team may be well trained, the wider business maybe unfamiliar with EA practice or its goals and targets. Taking a step back and delivering a holistic strategy with a top down approach enables the organization to ensure everyone is working in strategic alignment and understands the wider value of enterprise architecture.



STEP 3: FUNCTIONAL

At a “functional” level the business will start to see tangible value from the EA department. Different teams will benefit as it becomes increasingly integrated, communicating clear, robust processes and metrics which enable an organization to work towards its strategic goals.

At this stage, the enterprise architecture frameworks will be defined, processes documented and the organization using standardized templates. Nonetheless, the effectiveness may be capped by a lack of communication or visibility. This can be counteracted by ensuring:

How do you model environments?

How are you storing artifacts?

How are you managing architecture?

Do you have comprehensive standard and framework support?

Organizations at a functioning level of EA will have the basics in place as they support certain key initiatives, but they are unable to maintain long-term success. While a functioning level of maturity is not a bad position to be in, maximizing the value of your enterprise architecture requires a more nuanced approach to how information is presented. That is to say, delivering the right content to the right audience. Depending on the specifics of a situation, this might require more powerful or user-friendly tooling, more frequent communication with stakeholders or more transparency throughout the business.

The organization will also likely benefit from building upon pre-existing governance work and introducing rigorous enterprise wide adherence to architectural models. Most organizations at this stage are looking solely at trailing rather than leading metrics to measure their EA performance and output, whereas a combination of the two is far more valuable. This includes measuring the success of EA's impact on the business in real-time, as well as promoting the initiative across different functions through easily digestible reports and dashboards. If the business and EA strategies are not tightly aligned, it will never be possible to advance beyond this level of maturity.





STEP 4: PERFORMING

The holy grail for enterprise architecture practices is to have a fully mature, “optimized” EA initiative, providing a great platform for innovation in every aspect of the business. At this stage, the wider organization will have fully intertwined the EA processes with business outcomes and strategies.

All the necessary processes are being followed, and documentation is regularly updated to reflect any changes in the iterative processes. Furthermore, governance is explicit and established processes are in place for managing the full EA lifecycle.

The value of enterprise architecture is well integrated and built into the culture of the wider business, from the top down, with all areas of the organization able to understand its benefits. Outcome driven EA is also beginning to shape the organization’s digital strategy and by collecting, analyzing and executing deliverables EA is able to provide better and more informed insight. Nonetheless, analysis could still be enhanced to assist the decision making process – particularly if the organization wishes to act in realtime.

The key for organizations at this stage is to remember that enterprise architecture is a journey and not a fixed end state. While the practice is delivering on business outcomes at the moment, architects should be asking: Will it be able to adapt to new demands? Focusing on understanding the evolving business requirements helps prepare IT, and facilitates effective strategic portfolio management.

At this stage the organization is looking to address any remaining gaps in its EA capabilities. Success should be clear from performance indicators, and metrics leveraged to enable actionable insight to the business based on data from disparate sources.





STEP 5: OPTIMIZED

The holy grail for enterprise architecture practices is to have a fully mature, “optimized” EA initiative, providing a great platform for innovation in every aspect of the business. At this stage, the wider organization will have fully intertwined the EA processes with business outcomes and strategies.

It should be demonstrating best practices that are comfortable responding at speed to rapid changes caused by the business, technology or consumer behavior. Once EA becomes ubiquitous and inherent to all areas of the business, it enables the organization to drive change, focus on innovating and deliver value to its customers. Moreover, when all processes and procedures are up and running, the enterprise architecture practice itself will be infused with new ideas and enhancements.

Techniques for maintaining a world class enterprise architecture function include studying previous architecture iterations, involving as many stakeholders as possible, disseminating content to generate enterprise-wide value, learning from best practice frameworks, and nurturing governance structure.

At this stage, architects are no longer struggling to get buy-in or prove the value of EA, but rather stakeholder perceptions of what can be achieved are very high, with the practice fully aligned to their requirements and delivering on its initial promises. Capitalize on this position to set effective business and technical targets, as well continuing to make ongoing refinements and improvements based on understanding and analysis of requirements. Indeed, for companies at this level, it is vital to constantly review, maintain and improve process and actions. This fosters a true continuous improvement culture within enterprise architecture and the business as a whole.



Conclusion

Achieving a fully optimized enterprise architecture brings a host of benefits. While everyone's path is different, with the right approach and mentality it becomes possible to elevate your organization to the desired target state, no matter the current situation or level.

Focusing on outcomes, delivering the right information to stakeholders, and aligning strategy and technology will accelerate the EA program. Measurable targets and deliverables should act as checkpoints as the EA function becomes more mature, demonstrating its value to the wider business.

And finding the right tool is easy. OrbusInfinity is the market leading SaaS tool for enterprise architecture, rated as a leader in the field by Forrester. Orbus customers have been making use of the Orbus Software for almost two decades to transform their operations and mature their EA practices. Remembering that enterprise architecture is a journey and not a final destination will also help your organization reach its desired state. A robust yet flexible framework lets you climb the different stages of maturity, delivering insight, and control of applications, processes, data, governance and transformation.



Take your EA to the next level

Book a demo today to find out how OrbusInfinity is the ideal tool for every Enterprise Architecture at every level



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