Enterprise Architecture:
Powerful Enterprise-Wide Performance Analysis

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Businesses are facing an increasing need to visualize the enterprise in an integrated manner. We need to see what is happening, how, when, where, why, who does it, and what tools are needed. There are volumes of accounts about analyzing and improving specific parts or views of a business, such as its processes, information flow, data structures, and other such discrete, concrete parts. Such bounded views deal effectively with their detached piece of the enterprise, but they fail to address the enterprise as a whole. Each view addresses a specific concern from a specific perspective, for a specific area, with little or no regard for accommodating the enterprise as a whole.

In pursuit of improvement, businesses typically focus on only one of three operational areas: process, people or technology; and at only one of three organizational levels: corporate, business unit or workforce. A business spans each of these areas, which must all work together. This means integrating the company's vision with its business processes, information systems, and most importantly, with its workforce.

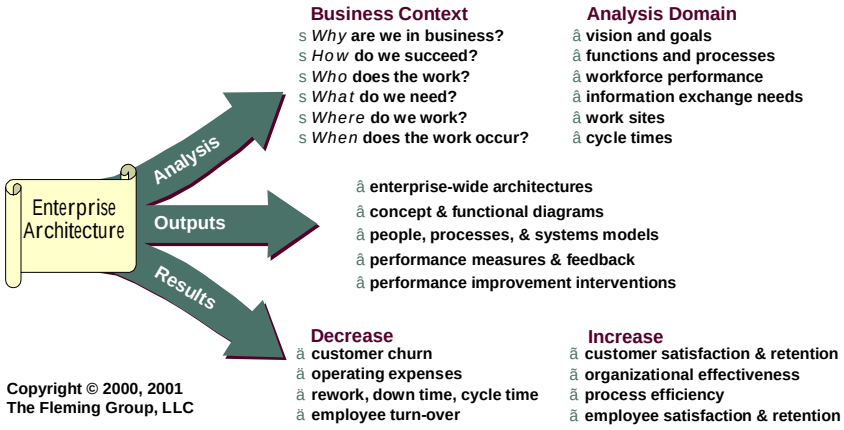
I wish to share with you an exciting and powerful approach for enterprise-wide performance improvement called Enterprise Architecture (EA).

What is Enterprise Architecture?

EA provides an enterprise-wide methodology for analyzing, modeling, and simulating the organization from various business contexts:

- what business functions are performed
- who performs them
- where and when the functions are performed
- how the functions are performed
- most importantly, why the business is performing, or needs to perform, these functions.

Targeted analysis is conducted within these business contexts. Following analysis, EA produces architectural-style blueprints or models that describe the enterprise within each context. Such outputs range from common organizational charts, to complex functional diagrams and process flow charts, to detailed information exchange matrices that capture who talks to whom about what. These outputs are used to identify, design, develop, and implement improvement initiatives to produce results of value to the organization. Examples of business contexts, analysis domains, outputs, and results are illustrated in the following graphic. In this way, EA models the entire enterprise, integrating not only information technology systems and business process systems, but also an organization's most essential system, its people



Architecture as Analogy

The term "architecture" is relevant here. Think about an office building. A building has more than one type of inhabitant or user and is expected to satisfy those various occupants' requirements. Similarly, a business enterprise must accommodate the various perspectives of the owner, the customer, and the employees. Furthermore, like a building, a business is composed of many different parts, such as its physical structure and equipment, financial means, type of market, and of course, its workforce. With all of the building's blueprints, building plans, wiring diagrams, etc., we can visualize some very important things:

- what the finished building will look like and how it will function
- how to make changes to the building without destroying it
- when it is time to abandon the building and start over.

The outputs of EA allow us to make changes to the business without running the risk of destroying it. With business architectures, we can:

- identify what's working and what's not across the entire enterprise
- diagnose problems and match appropriate improvement interventions
- run simulations to test improvement options before implementing changes
- identify when a business might have exceeded its useful life.

Enterprise Architecture and Performance Technology

Enterprise architecture is especially exciting to those of us in performance technology because EA spans all organizational and operational levels and integrates a company's vision with its business processes, information systems, and most importantly, with its workforce. Furthermore, EA provides a front-end approach for performance analysis, cause analysis, and intervention selection activities.

The power of EA is in analyzing organizational, unit and workforce-level performance and then modeling and simulating both the "as is" (actual) and "to be" (desired) states. That is, EA provides a disciplined approach for analyzing and modeling an organization's current and future states (gap analysis), identifying root causes of problems, revealing performance improvement opportunities, planning future performance needs, and simulating them before implementing changes.

The compatibility of EA and performance technology is energizing. Both disciplines draw from eclectic origins and broad-mindedly adapt tools from diverse disciplines. Close relatives of EA include information systems and business process engineering. An influential contributor to EA has been information systems and before that, data processing. The essence of creating systems architectures has been successfully expanded to analyze and improve business processes and a business's most important system, its workforce. Unlike the field of information systems, which focuses on defining, designing, and building technology systems, then retro-fitting the people systems, EA takes the approach that people are a primary rather than a secondary "system." The methodologies of business process improvement and total quality management are also keenly integrated within EA.

Practical Application

I had the good fortune to first become certified in EA and then experience the application and outputs of EA first hand, most recently in an on-going project to improve current performance and plan future performance requirements in one of the largest, most complex, and ever-changing organizations in the world, the U.S. Army. I saw for myself not only the tremendous potential of EA, but also its realized benefits. In this on-going project, the Army needed to:

- capture the "to be" vision, operating concepts, functional hierarchy, information exchange requirements, process modeling for the Army of the future
- ensure that the right information gets to the right people at the right time
- meet congressional mandates to achieve modernization standards within prescribed budgets.

Here are just some of the many outcomes resulting from the EA effort:

- to date, 29 military organizations have been restructured to meet modernization requirements
- EA outputs from architectures of 78 military organizations have led to approval and distribution of information systems to meet the information exchange requirements
- the Army is in compliance with congressional mandates to achieve modernization standards within prescribed budgets.

I will admit, however, that the "real world" EA process that I experienced (in contrast to the EA process in the certification program) evolved through a considerable learning curve. Of course, such evolution and tailoring of a process is not unusual. No doubt many of us have had to "reengineer" a textbook process to work in the real world. In fact, we recently completed engineering, standardizing, and documenting the EA process for this project, the results of which are now the basis for designing and developing performance support tools for executing the process more effectively and efficiently.

Learn More

I hope I have tweaked your interest in EA. Please feel free to contact me to learn more about EA.

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