Chapter VIII
Understanding and Communicating with Enterprise Architecture Users

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this chapter is to educate chief information officers (CIO), information technology (IT) managers, and IT architects on the role of communications planning in implementing an enterprise architecture (EA) and its supporting programs and the applicability of user-centered analysis in effectively constructing the EA and communicating the organization's EA to the users of EA products and content.

INTRODUCTION

An effective communications strategy is a critical success factor for any organizational change or business reengineering effort. Implementing an EA program, which is a form of organizational change, is no exception. Poor communications is often in the top ten lists of why projects fail, including those that result in an organizational change rather than a software product. It is likely, therefore, that poor communications will be a major contributing factor to failed EA projects and programs within large organizations. To help mitigate the risk of failure, due to poor communications and communications planning, this chapter will provide a high-level view of effective EA communications planning, based on traditional marketing and communications practices. The primary focus of the chapter will be on how to develop an EA that is easy to use and apply from an EA user's perspective.

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Many of the recommended approaches and practices are derived from current usability best practices (see *Additional Reading*). The National Institutes of Health (NIH), which is the custodian of biomedical research for the United States, is the case study. Recently NIH completed a yearlong project, which applied a user-centered development methodology to design, build, implement, and publish its EA Web site at enterprisearchitecture.nih.gov.

Because user research is a component of any user-centered development methodology, the NIH EA team has been able to apply lessons learned from this specific EA project to other communications channels and to other areas of the program to ensure that the NIH EA meets the needs of all of its stakeholders.

Included in the chapter are specific recommendations to create and communicate a more effective, usable, and targeted EA. The chapter will also introduce multi-channel communications concepts and their impact on EA communications planning. Communications channels include avenues for disseminating, collecting, or sharing information such as print, Web, executive communications, evangelism, training, and so forth. The chapter also provides some recommendations for communications resource management and for the production of EA products.

The objective of this chapter is to educate chief information officers (CIO), information technology (IT) managers, and IT architects on the role of communications planning in implementing an EA and its supporting programs and the applicability of user-centered analysis in effectively constructing the EA and communicating the organization's EA to the users of EA products and content.

BACKGROUND

A traditional architecture effort is a complex undertaking and an information technology architecture effort is no exception. In fact, IT architecture efforts may be more complex, given the rapid evolution of technologies and the dynamic nature of large organizations that the systems are meant to support. The complexity is exacerbated in large, decentralize organizations like NIH. In traditional architecture, the laws of nature and physics do not change, although the materials and practices might. The same cannot be said for IT architecture. In fact, not only do the materials or technologies change, there is also a noticeable absence of laws or standards for IT. IT architecture is more akin to building on shifting, sandy soil within an earthquake fault zone, than building on solid bedrock. Nevertheless, an EA that does not simplify the complexities of an information systems design is a wasted effort. It is through the simplification of the organization's complex IT systems design and through a shared knowledge about those systems that the benefits of an EA can be realized.

There are some additional important differences between traditional architecture and EA that make EA more challenging, given today's IT environment. One of the most obvious differences is that enterprise architecture is a new field of knowledge compared to traditional architecture. Therefore, there are few worldwide or even national standards to apply to this knowledge area. In fact, there are probably as many different perspectives or approaches to enterprise architecture as there are organizations trying to apply it to their operations. This is not a new problem though. Other professions, including those in information technology, have shared this challenge.

Organizations have had either to ignore, create, customize, or buy EA frameworks and methodologies. Organizations must expend considerable resources to create a common understanding across stakeholders and to achieve buy-in about how to apply the methodology to solve business problems. Therefore, the EA team must plan for an effective communications strategy or plan for the effort to fail.

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