

## BPM & SOA: A Solution for the Enterprise

Adrian Rossi

Enterprise Architecture is (quoting Wikipedia) "the process of translating business vision and strategy into effective enterprise change by creating, communicating and improving the key requirements, principles and models that describe the enterprise's future state and enable its evolution".

This sounds good but what does it really give us in practice? Firstly let me begin with a fact of sorts. More than 66% of Enterprise Architecture initiatives fail. And that is a conservative estimate based on a Rotterdam University survey back in 2008 (see Jonathan Broer for Rotterdam University, commissioned by IDS Scheer, summer 2008). So, if we accept this study, EA has had a huge failure rate in the past, failure being defined in this case as an activity that consumes a significant number of resources and funding, without providing sufficient tangible benefits to the enterprise to make the whole exercise worthwhile. This begs the question, what went wrong? Assuming that there is a common, core reason for this general failure across different organizations and industries, I would like to chime in and try to answer this question.

Of course various excellent articles have been written (see for example, [http://www.itprojecttemplates.com/WP\\_EA\\_Will\\_Yours\\_Fail.htm](http://www.itprojecttemplates.com/WP_EA_Will_Yours_Fail.htm)) that try to enumerate specific causes of failure, but I believe that all of these are simply manifestations of a single fundamental failure of EA. Simply put, EA has no clear, unambiguous, well-defined, process for moving from the strategic and abstract to the tactical and concrete. In other words Enterprise Architects do a great job of analyzing an enterprise in breadth, providing recommendations for improvement at a strategic level, but they are unable to extend this analysis down into the procedural and technical depths of the organization. It is no fault of theirs; EA frameworks such as TOGAF and Zachman simply do not provide a mechanism to achieve this, and to their defense they do not claim to.

So why do organizations insist on turning to EA to solve problems at a tactical level (for example, to address a troubled integration project or solve chronic problems implementing IT change management)? The real blame lies with the decision makers in the organization. They turn to EA for the wrong reasons and are ultimately disappointed when EA is unable to help them. In a nutshell, EA is NOT a technique for addressing or solving project-level, tactical pain points in your organization, and even less so for addressing those issues within your IT department.

OK that's depressing news. So where does that leave us?

Firstly, what is the real problem we are trying to solve? Typically, most organizations embark on an EA initiative when they are confronted with technology and application consolidation failures. Yet at the same time they claim that these initiatives are driven by the need for better strategic planning, improved business agility, and improved business-IT alignment. What gives? Well, brace yourself reader, for here comes the ultimate wisdom: What these C-level executives are really trying to achieve is improved business agility and business-IT alignment FROM THEIR IT SYSTEMS. And EA is not the solution to this problem.

Thankfully there are other options available. In fact, there is a methodology that was designed to solve this very issue. I have heard this solution referred to as a Business Operations Platform (BOP) and however you refer to it, the underlying idea is the same. To combine BPM and SOA into a unified approach that is able to model an organization's business processes at an abstract, strategic level and then progress the implementation of these processes right down to the software application level. There is no ambiguity here; although moving from abstract to concrete does require skilled architects, the \*process\* is well-defined. And this makes all the difference.

By modeling a business process an organization makes what they do (and the services they provide their customers) explicit to the business. And by servitizing their organization following SOA principles, they can proceed to implement tactical changes that will lead directly to changes in business process which in turn impact agility and contribute to business-IT alignment. The irony should not be missed here; a BOP actually achieves the goals that EA only promises for the issues that organizations are really trying to grapple with.

In conclusion, before you turn to EA consider looking at Business Process Management and Service Oriented Architecture. While useful individually, together they provide an evolutionary approach to making the IT department in your organization both flexible and agile. And that is the real problem organizations are trying to solve.

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