# Agility Calls for Maturity

## Janne J. Korhonen

## SOA Cannot Be Bought

The most important promise of Service-Oriented Architecture (SOA) is agility: business process development and change through reassembly of context-independent building blocks – services. This kind of agility, however, calls for discipline and maturity. Mature organizations work systematically, not through the sporadic efforts of individual heroes.

SOA cannot be bought. It also cannot simply be built. SOA is about a way of working and conducting business, and it cannot be achieved with a one-off development project; it requires sustained organizational learning. The organization must adopt a new behavioral model in which the organizational assets at all levels are aligned for the benefit of the whole. If each party merely optimizes its local operations, the entire organization is sub-optimized. To optimize the entire system, the sub-systems need to be sub-optimized in a way that supports the whole. Working for the whole requires concessions and compromises from all parties involved.

This calls for a holistic governance model – principles, mechanisms, and procedures that specify the decision-making rights at all levels of the organization. In a good governance model, each party knows its role and the pertinent expectations, makes independent decisions in its area of influence, and understands its part in the wider context. This kind of governance model enables dynamic steering outside-in and top-down, allowing the organization to make many fast decisions and adapt its internal organization continually to changing external circumstances.

## Exemplary Governance Structure

Figure 1 provides an example of a structure for such a governance model. Topmost, there is a strategic level steering committee that sponsors all architecture work in the enterprise. The steering committee articulates the vision, strategy, and goals of the enterprise and aligns business development endeavors accordingly. It creates the framework for an enterprise-wide multi-year change journey.

Underneath the steering committee, a number of tactical development programs are run. Each program is typically led by a business process owner who is responsible for the development of the end-to-end business process. Process development is further distributed among operational development projects based on the natural division of responsibilities in the organization.

Business development is supported by a center of excellence that coordinates the development programs from an architectural point of view and also governs the requisite technical artifacts. It coaches, guides, and helps the programs; builds the process architecture in alignment with the strategy; develops standards and guidelines to be used; and enforces best practices. It also monitors the use of architectural standards, guidelines, principles, and constraints in the programs and assesses the process performance.

Operational development is supported by an integration competence center that supplies the processes with requisite technical integrations, or by a service factory that supplies services. It ensures that the services are being built according to consistent architectural principles, best practices and rules, and that they fulfill the pertinent functional and non-functional requirements.

The implementation of services is coordinated by IT management that maintains the application, infrastructure, and IT project portfolios of the enterprise. It organizes the development work procured by the ICC or service factory to IT projects and subsequent operations that are responsible for providing and maintaining the services.
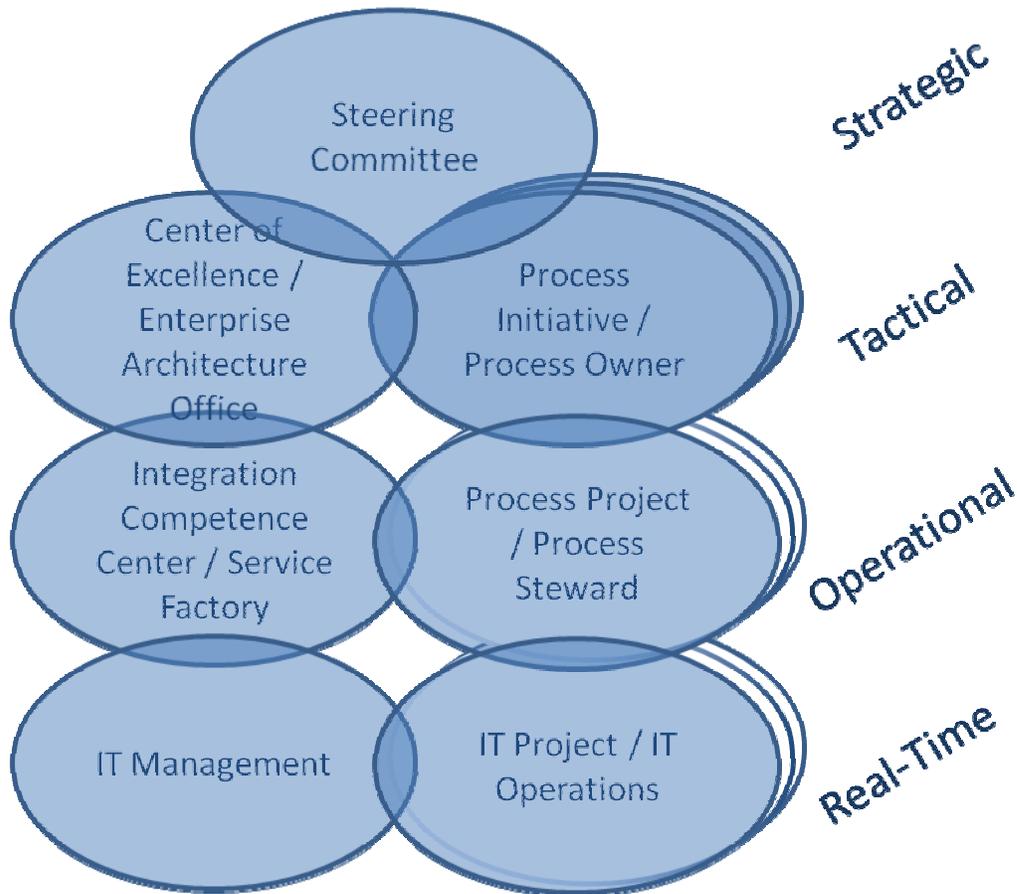
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Strategic

Tactical

Operational

Real-Time

Steering Committee

Center of Excellence / Enterprise Architecture Office

Process Initiative / Process Owner

Integration Competence Center / Service Factory

Process Project / Process Steward

IT Management

IT Project / IT Operations

**Figure 1.  Exemplary governance structure.**

## Structure Catalyzes Change

Building a governance model is a gradual process; not all structures can be employed to their full extent at the same time, but the fundaments of the model need to be instilled right at the outset when the organization is starting its journey of change. The governance structure catalyzes cultural change towards higher levels of architectural capability, such as a service-oriented process organization. Meanwhile, the structure strengthens as the organization matures.

For a compass on the journey, a maturity model can be used. It sets measurable criteria for the target maturity levels in different domains. The target business model determines the prerequisites for the governance model, architecture, development methodologies, and infrastructure; a roadmap for holistic organizational development can be charted accordingly.

Service-Oriented Architecture (SOA) enables synchronic co-development of business and IT, but only when the organization has implemented a holistic governance model, aligned with its strategy.

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