The Strategic Enterprise Architect's Dilemma — a Summary

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The Central Concept of the Book

Maintaining a viable capability is the primary task of every enterprise. While ensuring that enterprise systems are fit for this purpose is necessary, it is not enough. For an organization to continue to deliver on its unique value and vision, it must also design its systems to be flexible, able to recognize and readily adapt to disruptions in the changing strategic context. Key points:

- Every enterprise faces potentially significant disruptions in their context, and failure to respond appropriately may result in significant damage or even destruction of the enterprise's value to its stakeholders, including its customers, users, and other interested parties.

- Enterprise strategists therefore need to recognize, analyze, and understand disruptions that represent large risks or opportunities. They should assess the impact of the changed context on the organization (its mission, vision, culture, etc.), identify suitable responses, and carry them out effectively. The primary actors in this activity are the strategic stakeholders, individuals within and outside an enterprise who set or influence the organization's strategy.

  Some stakeholders may find it difficult to recognize certain disruptions because their mental models prevent them from seeing the true risks and opportunities available. A broad, diverse group of strategic stakeholders may be able to challenge biases and clear up misunderstandings, allowing the strategists to craft appropriate responses to changing conditions. Members of a varied group might break with traditional thinking and identify new kinds of adaptations that are "good enough" and avoid costly delays.

- How should strategic stakeholders address the uncertain and changeable nature of a disruptive context? They will need an organized approach that enables them to anticipate and prepare for future disruptions.

  One organized approach involves defining the set of *plausible* scenarios of contextual changes that may well impact the enterprise, directly or indirectly. Selecting scenarios based on plausibility accomplishes two things: (1) it emphasizes possibility rather than likelihood, e.g., whether a supply chain could be disrupted and therefore needs to include alternative sources, and (2) it helps eliminate those scenarios that may be desirable, but may not fit an emerging context. For example, Netflix realized that streaming was the future and that their lucrative DVD rental dominance would soon become irrelevant.

  Once the scenarios are defined, strategists and architects can determine the flexibility in the enterprise systems that will be needed to address each scenario, and they can then plan for initiatives that adapt these systems to fit the scenarios.

- The process is continuous and cyclic, responding to signals of significant contextual change by reassessing the impact of the disruptions on the organization.

- Our Adaptive Enterprise Cycle includes phases for recognizing and interpreting contextual changes, building flexibility into the strategy and architecture, and adapting to improve the

fitness wherever possible. Where existing flexibility for adapting is too limited to handle a disruption, a new cycle is initiated to deal with the changed context.

- The Adaptive Enterprise Cycle works with Strategic Enterprise Architecture (EA) Views, which are representations of the overall enterprise system from the perspective of a related set of stakeholder concerns. The full set of views together provide the complete architectural description for the enterprise.

The Disruption-Driven Adaptive Enterprise Cycle and Views
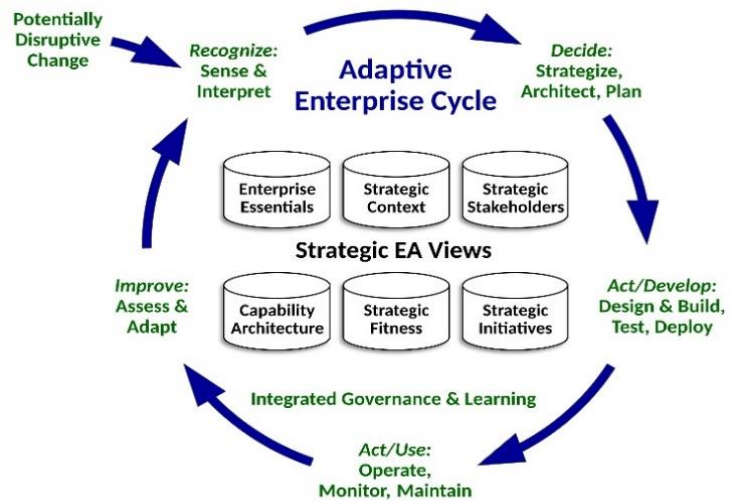
Next, we discuss why a strategic enterprise architect is needed and why an open culture and robust process for managing disruptive change are key.

Why the Strategic Enterprise Architect Role Is Needed

Strategic requirements documents are often deficient, especially if key stakeholders have not participated in their development. No document can capture all of the deliberations that resulted in the statement of requirements, including the rationales, the alternatives considered, and what would be a good enough fulfilment of the strategic needs of the enterprise.

The strategic enterprise architect role (possibly called the "chief digital officer" in some enterprises) addresses this problem. The architect participates in those deliberations, helps assess the enterprise's fitness for the evolving context, and helps define the needed enterprise capability adaptations. They then define the models and principles for strategic system initiatives, and oversee the design, deployment, operation, and improvement of the adapted systems.

The strategic enterprise architect also acts as a bridge to other enterprise architects and IT professionals who can contribute to and need to be kept informed of the emerging strategy.

The dilemma for strategic enterprise architects is how to balance efforts to achieve fitness for future contextual disruptions against urgent work on ongoing initiatives.

A Key Need: An Open Culture and Robust Process for Managing Disruptive Change

Participants in strategy development must be free to challenge prevailing mental models of the changing context. Key points:

- A continuous, iterative cycle needs designated experts who monitor and identify important ways in which the enterprise may no longer be fit for the context.

- Strategic signals flag events or trends that indicate potentially significant contextual changes. Strategists need to treat them as an opportunity to reevaluate the current situation, revise forecasts, reassess the strategy, and update the capability to remain viable in the new context.

  These strategic signals may already be identified as possible future events to watch for, or they may be recognized when they occur by the experts who continuously monitor the context.

  Some disruptions may require the enterprise to update its declared vision or even mission in order to better fit the new context.