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10 perspectives on EA

10 thoughts/10 people on enterprise architecture

BY John Pulley

Published on Aug. 27, 2007 Some things in life are hard to fathom: your telephone bill, the lyrics to "Stairway to Heaven," why no one ever hooked up with Ginger or Mary Ann — and enterprise architecture. What is it?

The investigative unit at Federal Computer Week went looking for answers. Sadly, we've been on hold with Verizon since February, Led Zeppelin didn't return our calls, and Gilligan is long gone. We did, however, talk to Kshemendra Paul, the Justice Department's chief architect, and some other smart people in government and industry who know a thing or two about enterprise architecture.

If enterprise architecture has you flummoxed, read on. If there's a bustle in your hedgerow, don't be alarmed now.

1. EA is an overall goal.

Glenn Perry, senior procurement executive at the Education Department

I've been looking at it as a sort of overall structure or goal for how we focus our business and performance environment and then how we use data and technology and services to meet those performance goals at the larger agencywide level.

Then what's federal enterprise architecture?

It's the architecture that captures the business performance goals of the government as a whole. Together, those provide a framework for things folks are doing on the ground.

Why does the government need a federal enterprise architecture?

It gives a framework so that the sum of your parts ends up having greater benefit to more people — to the agencies and to the public. It provides a structure for people to see where their piece fits in, rather than having a bunch of separate programs and projects that are standing on their own. You can start to put together the pieces of the puzzle into that structure and have more meaning for individual projects. You can make better business decisions about how you resource those projects. You can make decisions about what's important and what's not.

2. EA is a business tool.

Mayi Canales, chief executive officer of M Squared Strategies

EA basically should be a business tool for making business investments. It should help you put your finger on or easily access and understand the existing investments you have in place, now and in the future. Notice that I haven't mentioned IT. EA is a business tool. Everybody attaches it to the CIO and thinks of it as techie thing.

How's that different from federal enterprise architecture?

FEA should be the same thing. I see no difference. There should not be a difference.




And it's good to have a federal enterprise architecture?

The biggest benefit should be that we are clearly identifying our service lines, our business lines and how they intersect. We should be

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able to identify opportunities for investment across the federal government, eliminate redundancy, reduce spending and enhance the value of the investments we make. A person should be able to go to a Web site or phone number and access an entity in government and get the information they need without making seven phone calls or 30 mouse clicks.

3. EA is a management discipline.

Austin Russ, chief enterprise architect at Robbins-Gioia

I think of it as a set of analytical and management disciplines that allow an organization to understand how its assets — people, processes and things — support its mission and priorities and to make informed decisions to reallocate or reapply those resources to better support those missions.

EA should not be limited to IT. Technology does not drive the business. It enables it. Two concepts in most definitions of EA address linking resources to organization mission/strategy and developing a plan to implement change. EA is most effective when integrated with strategic planning, investment/portfolio/budget management, and program management.

Your thoughts on federal enterprise architecture?

FEA is a set of reference models that establish a common language by which the government can identify and reduce duplication and inefficiencies across agencies, and agencies can identify and reduce duplication and inefficiencies within their own domain. In many organizations, EA, strategic planning, investment/portfolio management, and program management are disjointed and much of their benefit is not realized.

What's the value of federal enterprise architecture to the government?

Anytime an agency tries to quantify its performance, it puts itself in a good position.

4. EA is a blueprint.

Paul Lawrence, executive director of civilian agencies at Mitre

Enterprise means organizationwide. Architecture strikes me as much more of a blueprint to see how everything works together to deliver results.

What's your understanding of federal enterprise architecture?

For a government organization, delivering results becomes a little less straightforward. I think EA is particularly important in the federal context because it gives people a real sense of how what they are doing contributes to the mission of an organization, what citizens want and the results managers are supposed to be delivering. If you're the HR guy in an organization, you might think, "My goal is to run HR stuff." Really, it's to help recruit talented IT people who run the system. Enterprise architecture allows you to see that flow.

And so the value of federal enterprise architecture is what?

I definitely think it's the whole results-oriented thing and how you plug into it. Here's my analogy: I would say that the FEA is to government results as a playbook is to a football team. Included in the FEA is everything you do and how it all makes sense, but you still need good managers to pull it all together.

5. EA reduces costs and duplication.

Daniel Chenok, vice president at SRA International

EA aligns what an agency does — the information it uses, the services and software it uses to provide the information, and the hardware it uses to run the services and the software — and does it in a way that achieves a performance goal at reduced cost and duplication.

And how is that different from federal enterprise architecture?

The federal enterprise architecture makes visible what the federal government does, from performance through business processes, through information, through services and software, through technology and hardware standards. It aligns activities so you can see what the government does horizontally, so that an agency can array its resources vertically.

What's the value of this?

The value of the FEA is that you can align within and across agencies both horizontally within a particular layer of the architecture as well as vertically, meaning across layers from an as-is state to a to-be state. This alignment drives better performance at reduced cost and duplication.

6. EA is an organizing framework.

Robert Haycock, instructor at ESI International

EA is an organizing framework and methodology to help you understand what business you're in, how you establish your businesses processes and how you bring assets into that — whether it's people or things. IT is another asset you bring into an organization to help you create your product or deliver your service. It's a set of processes and ultimately a set of tools, such as databases, to help you understand your business and where you want to go.

How do you explain federal enterprise architecture to people?

FEA had some simple purposes. One was to come up with a common way to talk about common things across the federal government. It's really not an architecture. It's more of a taxonomy. It's a reference model framework.

Another purpose was to categorize agency investments in a consistent way, to look at agency business functions to see where you could discover duplication and redundancy and places where you could consolidate across multiple agencies.

So the value of federal enterprise architecture is greater efficiency in government?

The value is pretty straightforward: to identify commonalities across the federal government where you can do common things to save money and increase interoperability.

7. EA is an approach to technology governance.

Felix Martinez, strategic account manager at GTSI

It's an approach to technology governance that allows organizations to align the business needs of an organization with services, applications, data and technology to meet the business strategic direction and measure performance.

And federal enterprise architecture?

It's OMB's approach to defining the government's core lines of business. It's a business and technology methodology that requires the alignment of government technology with a defined government mission.

What's the value of the federal enterprise architecture?

It lets OMB remove redundant, obsolete and unnecessary technology and process expenses by focusing spending only on initiatives that are necessary to support a defined government mission or a predetermined line of business. It allows government to strategically spend technology dollars on current and emerging lines of business.

8. EA is a rigorous methodology.

Bruce Brody, vice president of information assurance at CACI International

It is, or it should be, the blueprint for an organization's information infrastructure. It is a rigorous way of making sure that systems and applications address the needs of the organization and its mission.

My friend John Zachman, who wrote the Zachman Framework for Enterprise Architecture, describes the unfortunate typical approach to enterprise architecture as, "You go start writing code, and I'll go ask the users what they want."

Good one! Is federal enterprise architecture much different from that?

According to Wikipedia, it's a set of reference models that provide a common taxonomy and ontology, or data model, for describing IT resources. Some would argue that the reference models were built one-by-one and are therefore disjointed. To most federal CIOs, the federal enterprise architecture is a complicated framework that they claim their agency is compliant with in order to satisfy OMB's budget process requirements.

Do you see value in the federal enterprise architecture?

The idea is that the government can be doing business more efficiently. Scores of systems that should share data cannot do so today, and the government has missed opportunities for improving processes. Ultimately, improved mission processes create improved government.

9. EA has three parts.

Thomas Mowbray, chief architect at Keane

EA has three major activities. Segment architecture planning re-engineers a group of enterprisewide business activities into a consolidated process. Enterprise mapping takes isolated business processes, IT programs and systems and represents them transparently and explicitly. EA governance is a process of standardization, communication and quality assurance that enables the organization to leverage its intellectual capital to optimize decision-making for the benefit of the entire enterprise.

What are your thoughts on the federal enterprise architecture?

Government EA can be a challenge due to the unique constraints and scale and complexity of operations. Government enterprise architects have to plan in the context of legal, regulatory and labor relations that are not easily changed. Many of those constraints are unique to each agency and can change substantially during system life cycles due to new laws, judicial decisions and incidents, such as security breaches and national emergencies.

Is it good to have a federal enterprise architecture?

EA engenders consolidation, transparency and IT standardization that results in cost avoidance, faster/cheaper development, operational performance improvement, and greater automation and transparency of operational information. It can also increase strategic transparency. EA is exactly what is needed to survive budget cuts because it actively discovers and eliminates inefficiencies and redundant spending.

10. EA is like a jungle gym.

Kshemendra Paul, chief architect at the Justice Department

Enterprise architecture is like a jungle gym on the playground. It's the structure that everything else climbs on. It is a set of tools focused on organizing and articulating details in support of complex enterprise transformation. These tools support analysis, calibrate performance and help senior managers understand where they are in the transformation journey.

What is an architect's definition of federal enterprise architecture?

Federal enterprise architecture is the application of enterprise architecture to the federal government enterprise. Three factors shape this application: The federal government is huge, it's extremely federated and decentralized, and some of its most pressing challenges are crosscutting in nature.

That's a benefit that most people could appreciate.

FEA emphasizes formal methods and documentation standards, reference models and processes to ensure that the enterprise architecture transformation map is used effectively for budgeting and investment, IT governance and oversight and overall performance management.

Federal enterprise architecture is a strategic management tool used across the government to deliver crosscutting technology that supports complex business needs, such information sharing to prevent crime and terrorism.

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