

A year of IT Architecture – The Governance angle

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Its been a full year since I took on a complete Architecture role. Previously I'd been an Architect / Development Manager / Project Manager. Stay in development long enough and you'll end out taking a path away from 'straight' development into a speciality or more focussed specialisation.

A few things have taken me by surprise in the last year in terms of the specific change to a pure Architectural role. One of these is the Governance angle.

What is Governance?

Good old Wikipedia has a pretty extensive article on exactly what Governance is here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It_governance but that doesn't really explain what it is in practice.

So I always knew that being an Architect (of any of the disciplines 'IA,TA, EA' etc) would involve quite a lot of discovery and design work. But I had not anticipated just how much of a Governance role it involves. Designing and communicating technical specification is pretty standard legwork, but without the added angle of Governance on top of it what you are essentially doing is 'recommendation' over management.

In real terms day to day Governance within a large organisation takes the form of both project aligned IT direction and an overall company wide IT strategy view. By this I mean that as an Architect we have to ensure that whatever is going on within the company aligns to the overall Architectural principles and core strategy that have been stated by IT Management. We are in effect 'policy enforcers'.

This is an incredibly empowering role to fill within a project / company. It often means that you are the last person to sign off on something, or

viewed as the key decision maker. This also means you are often the person that says 'No' to something.

'No.' is a tricky option for ex developers turned Architects. Personality wise I'm a bit of an enabler. I think IT allows businesses to accomplish their goals effectively and more often than not I'm pushing the scope of what was requested to try and increase the options IT systems provide. Saying no goes right against this principle, so more often than not 'No' is often followed by several other options. Never appear to be a block, a dead end, to something, you'll soon probably find your business support disappearing.

The scale of this Governance role has been the biggest surprise. It has certainly given me a different view of 'in practice' Architecture roles. If you aren't shy about shaping company wide decisions and enjoy technical process then I'd recommend looking into Architecture as a role.

Next time I'm talking about stakeholder management, which has also been a journey of revelations.