

Architectural Governance driven through the application of Principles

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Most organisations with an Architectural practice of some kind also have a Governance structure, either controlled by, or at least populated with Architect of various flavours.

Key success factors for any Governance board are:

1. Consistency of entry, decision and output
2. Established engagement model, i.e. how to enter and exit them, what will you be judged on?
3. Established workflow, somewhat as above, what is the process to trigger Governance
4. A standard, well rounded group of individuals that can understand the implications of what they are governing
5. Established, identifiable rules to Govern against, i.e. a set of Principles and Patterns

So why bother with Principles and Patterns? Why use them to Govern against, than say just general opinion around the room? There are a few key things that using established principles bring to the table that 'Governance by opinion' doesn't.

Inheritance across Strategies

Within a Governance board how do you know that submissions align to Strategy? Either business or IT Strategies? Typically it's a cascade through a series of artefacts, each slightly lower in its level of detail, each depending on the existence of the previous one. So let's step through the things that should be in place already that lead to our Principles.

1. Business Vision
2. Business Strategy (Based on the Vision)
3. IT Strategy (based on the Business Strategy)

4. Architecture Principles (Defined from the IT Strategy)
5. Architecture Patterns (Applicable principles)

So based on the hierarchy above we can assume that our principles will align to the Business Strategy and IT Strategy. So if our Architecture aligns to the principles, it must then align to our Strategies.

Why align to strategy through principles?

So what does that give us? Why even have them? The alternative is Governance by opinion. In real world terms this is where each of the members of a Governance board effectively apply their own point of view to what is being presented. This is, by its nature subjective and undefined and leads to variances in the outcome. What's to say that the same artefact wouldn't be presented several times, but based on the atmosphere in the room, meet with different outcomes each time?

You have to confidence that a Governance board has standards, and that what you are bringing to them will be judged on those standards, otherwise why employ Architects?

Of course, as soon as you have standards, you also have consistency of Governance, which leads to consistency of Architecture, which is a vital part of an operating Architecture practice if you have a large volume of Architects, all driving solutions with overlapping dependencies.