

Why should you invest in Architectural qualifications?

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Related Categories: TOGAF

As part of an ongoing series of articles covering the skills and process that people go through in order to move into architecture I thought I'd have an exploration through the landscape of professional qualifications.

The key discussion topic was driven from a recent conversation on whether architectural qualification are valid, whether they enhance an architects skills or validate the architect as being more 'architecturally capable'.

I've split the article into what architectural qualifications mean to several different parties, such as individual architects, companies that use architects and the architectural industry as a whole. This is mainly because each of these parties have very different requirements and goals around professional qualifications, reasons to obtain them, and what value they provide.

The Individual view

For the individual architect obtaining a professional, industry recognised qualification can bring several benefits. First, architecture can sometimes be a little intangible. We don't physically produce anything, and often what we produce is proprietary for the industry we are in, making it very hard to measure the quality or validity of output. Possessing a qualification such as TOGAF proves that you know the correct terminology, can recognise architectural artefacts and impacts and are likely to provide architectural documents to a reasonable standard. Its treated somewhat like an architectural 'kite mark', ensuring that there is an inherent quality to the content.

For the working architect its also good to know that your colleagues and peers can understand the content that you produce. If you create a

TOGAF or Zachman aligned document you want to know that your colleagues can consume it, and that as a practice it will fit into your overall approach.

Lastly, it makes you a more attractive resource, if you are seeking employment. It's a very good selling point for recruiters and employers as, explained above, it's an industry standard, so brings with it a certain quality level when filtering applicants for a role.

Corporate view

Companies can often see qualifications like the ones described here as being overly academic and not really driving their overall goals, in terms of focussing on delivery or project specific issues. Qualifications can be an expensive and timely activity to put your teams through, so are often sidelined entirely, or put at such a low priority that they never materialise.

Delivery objectives take over, and all the talk of being a 'people organisation' goes out the window.

Key things a company has to recognise though is that endorsing a professional framework can provide many benefits to them:

1. It shows potential recruits that they are serious about their architecture and that they are prepared to invest in their people
2. It's a handy metric in the review process. Send everyone on a course, and their pass mark is a very good metric in what can be a very ambiguous process (employee reviews)
3. Where a practice aspires to ensure a consistent level of service to other departments from its architects, knowing that they are all qualified to the same level, and know the same content. This somewhat equalises the organic way a team forms.
4. Lastly it's also a good measure of capability. It may sound harsh, but being an architect is a hard role to perform successfully and consistently. If you are unsure of the calibre of the people in your team, an effective way of measuring it would be to send them on a course and measure the results. Similarly if you are trying to build a trainee or junior architect programme they can serve as a good graduate gateway. If a graduate architect wants to consider

themselves a fully functioning member of the team, then passing TOGAF or the BCS qualification should be a required qualification.

Industry view

In terms of industry recognition, possessing industry standard qualifications gives you a place in a larger community. There are often social activities and online groups that you can join and participate in. When you look at an architects profile online, there are few keywords that indicate evidence of qualifications and experience. TOGAF, Zachman, BCS and ISEB are the key words I typically look for to determine if a candidate is not only affiliated with, but claims accreditation with one of these bodies. This marks them as a professional architect.

Types of Qualification

There are two recognised industry qualifications for architects, one is based on the TOGAF framework the other being a British Computer Society accredited qualification in Enterprise and Solution Architecture. Obviously there are many books discussing architecture and architecture processes, and even other frameworks such as Zachman, but none of them contain courseware, exams and accreditation processes.

TOGAF

TOGAF is very much a framework. By this I mean it is not a guide as to how to be an architect, it will not tell you how to do the day job, but rather describes an approach. It's a standard methodology and process to enable you to take up an out of the box toolkit. It should, however not be applied in this format. Success with TOGAF is very much a case of assessing the framework, trying the elements out in your organisation and seeing what works for you and does not. If you try and wholesale adopt TOGAF as your architecture practice's methodology you will rather quickly find yourself hitting issues with delivering anything.

BCS, Enterprise and Solution Architecture

The BCS, previously ISEB, course is a tough one. Its an intensive course, covering a lot of content. My advice with this one is that it is not a

purist architecture course. You'll need to be aware of ITIL, PRINCE2, Six Sigma and a slew of coding and development technologies. It doesn't require you to have in-depth knowledge on those subjects, but rather to understand what they are, how they work, and how they interplay with architecture. My recommendation is that you have to be a practicing architect, with a few years experience in a tough environment to pass this one.

Further reading

I can heavily recommend a book titled 'Enterprise architecture as Strategy', it's a great read and covers a lot of useful information. Rather than being a theoretical architecture book, I've found myself actually referring back to it at times during my day to day role. [Enterprise Architecture as Strategy](#)

Lastly, as I've mentioned above, there is a significant architecture framework, the Zachman framework that is very good to be familiar with. You can read more about Zachman [here](#) .