

VIEWPOINT

The Long View

Enterprise architecture plans are useless without clear, relevant information.

BY ANDREW N. BLUMENTHAL

Before agencies were required to adopt enterprise architecture planning, they lacked a defined, systematic approach for tying technology investments to performance, business and information requirements. They failed to link information technology resources to missions, instead often making decisions by instinct and intuition. Unfortunately, enterprise architecture has been focused more on creating information rather than on the value of that information.

When it works, enterprise architecture centers on its users—agency managers—with information that is relevant, easy to understand and readily available. It provides executives with the information they need, eliminates stovepipe applications and enables standardized, cost-effective solutions that do away with redundancy. It also promotes performance measurement and assures information confidentiality, availability and integrity.

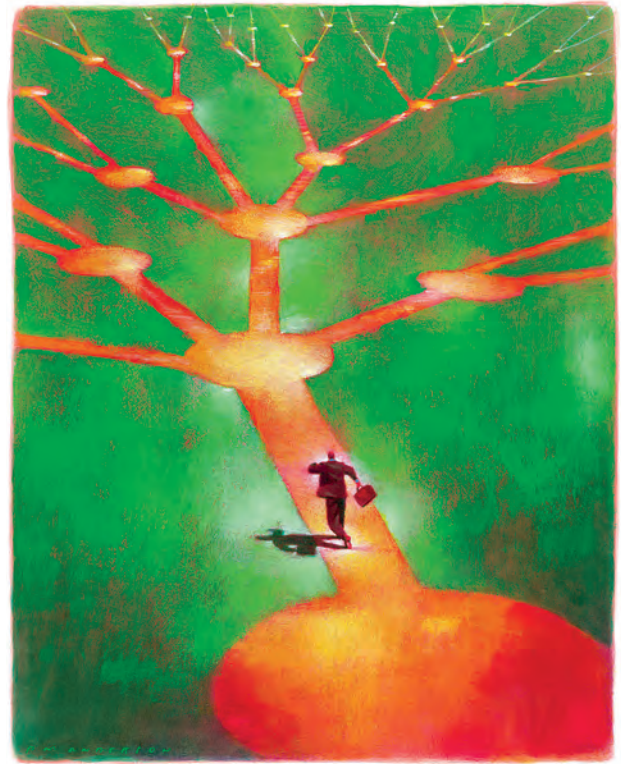
User-centric EA synthesizes the organization's key business and technical information to support better decision-making. It captures, analyzes and communicates information about performance measures, business processes, information requirements, application systems, technologies and IT security. The data is packaged in such a way that the user can understand not only the current state of agency information technology but also its future direction and the roadmap for getting there.

IT investment and portfolio management is another function that benefits from enterprise architecture. It ensures that critical investment dollars are allocated to priority mission and business needs, rather than to purchases based on gut feeling, bias or technology for technology's sake.

The problem is EA information often is unintelligible. The necessary data might be there, but the presentation is so poor that the decision-maker's ability to use it is impaired. If information is not understandable, accessible and easily navigable, then it quickly becomes "shelfware," meaning it sits on a shelf collecting dust. Of course, the result is unsatisfied stakeholders.

A key feature of user-centric EA is it presents information in a manner that allows users to drill down from the summary to more detailed views, through three tiers of information:

- **Profiles use visualization** to convey a great deal of data in a condensed format, usually a graphic or chart. As they say, a picture is worth a thousand words. For example, a profile might demonstrate how an agency's applications support its core mission functions.



- **Models illuminate relationships** between information, typically using graphics that show how processes work, how information flows in the organization, or how systems are connected to each other.

- **Inventories provide descriptive information**, usually in a spreadsheet or database format. For example, an application's inventory provides a comprehensive list of every major application in the agency together with descriptive information.

One way to ensure that managers can easily obtain needed information is to launch an EA knowledge center on the agency's intranet. An EA Web site also can facilitate a sound process for program and project managers initiating IT projects, acquiring products and establishing standards.

Ultimately, all agencies will incorporate enterprise architecture into their business strategies. But it requires getting out of the ivory tower and engaging the people in the trenches to understand organizational requirements and needs and to create information products that are useful and usable. It is up to an agency's enterprise architect to facilitate this communication.

Though enterprise architecture is typically a function of the chief information officer, its goal is not just better technology, but better decision-making across the organization. **GE**

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