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• EDITORIAL & COMMENTARY

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## "Enterprise Architecture as a Blueprint for Success"

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In 1884, construction began on the Winchester Mystery House in San Jose, California. When construction was completed, the house consisted of 160 rooms and 24,000 square feet of living space. There was no blueprint for this construction project; therefore, it took the 147 builders 38 years to erect this house at a cost of \$5.5 million (equivalent to \$165 million today). Without a master plan, there was no orchestration of the innovative skill and talent used to construct this house. In the end, 13 stairways led to nowhere, 65 doorways opened to blank walls, 24 skylights were embedded in the floors, and one chimney rose the entire height of the house only to stop short of the roof by two feet. If you are ever in the neighborhood, this is one sight to see.

To effectively design and construct a building, a blueprint must be developed and maintained. A blueprint consists of a set of drawings that defines the various characteristics of the building. Each drawing is complementary of the others and provides a different view of the construction project. Therefore, the blueprint results in a framework, which allows architects, engineers, and construction personnel with divergent skill sets to "speak" a common language. This framework allows communication to become more efficient and creates an effective roadmap for transforming raw materials into a finished structure.

At a minimum, most businesses have a very complex set of information systems that they are attempting to utilize to run their organization. At best, they are attempting to gain a competitive advantage from these complex sets of information systems (IS). Many of these businesses are doing so without a blueprint. They are at risk of creating an information system version of the Winchester house. Some organizations have a blueprint for their Information Technology (IT), but struggle to get the most out of their IT while others are employing a blueprint known as Enterprise Architecture that is much more effective at tying the organization goals with the underlying IT.

The term Enterprise Architecture (EA) lacks a universally accepted definition. Until 1986, there was little consistency among the concepts and terminology regarding enterprise architectures. In response, John Zachman presented a conceptual framework for defining this term. This framework, a two-way matrix as presented in the IBM Systems Journal, consists of six views and six information sources. The six views represent the perspective of each participant included in the enterprise architecture development process. Each view is independent of the next. Therefore, the level of detail does not increase with each successive layer. Instead, it varies within each participant's architectural representation. Those six views are represented by these person-model combinations: Planner-Scope, Owner-Business Model, Designer-System Model, Contractor-Technology Model, Sub-Contractor-Detailed Representations, and the Employee-Functioning Enterprise. The six information sources are: Data, Processes/Function, Network, People, Time and Motivation.

An Enterprise Architecture (EA) permits the business, and support organizations to "speak" a common language. More importantly, it can help with the integration of an organization's operational and technological environments. The EA's descriptive models allow decision makers to understand the complexities around how the two environments operate today and how they should operate in the future. Just like a construction blueprint, an EA can provide a common language and roadmap that clarifies the interrelationships among enterprise operations and the underlying Information Technology infrastructure.

Developing and implementing an enterprise architecture has been identified as one of the top four Information Systems management issues every year since 1987. Research studies recognized there was no overarching framework guiding investments in information technology. As organizations with an Enterprise Architecture have focused on exploiting their enterprise architecture to integrate its IT investments with its business objectives, similar studies conducted on public agencies have proved to have different outcomes. Studies have identified developing an enterprise architecture as thirty-third in importance among top issues of public IS managers. Many private organizations have been willingly and actively working on their Enterprise architectures while most public organizations have been required to utilize one by law or management force. Where does your organization fall in this continuum? I encourage all top executives in their organizations to investigate Enterprise Architecture and find out for themselves how important it can be to their future as a blueprint for success.