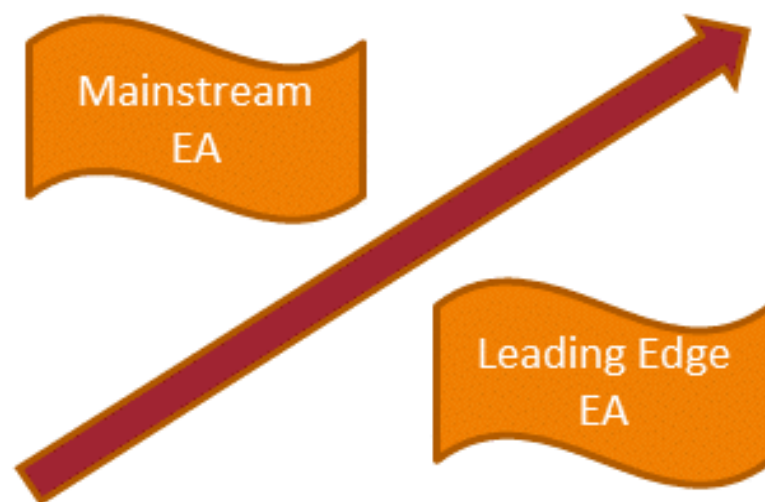


Towards Next Practice Enterprise Architecture



Richard Veryard

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This book is for sale at <http://leanpub.com/NextPracticeEA>

This version was published on 2020-05-17



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Preface

Purpose of book

This book stems from a growing frustration with what I call “mainstream” enterprise architecture (EA).

- Is mainstream EA perhaps losing momentum and influence?
- Does EA have a problem of scope and perspective?
- Or is there a lack of relevance to practical business problems?

So what’s the alternative? Can emerging approaches to EA help to re-establish practical business relevance?

There are many ideas within Systems Thinking (ST) that could be relevant. So among other things, I shall be looking at possible cross-fertilization between EA and ST.

- What practical lessons can EA learn from ST, and what are the opportunities and challenges for collaboration between the two disciplines?
- What practical benefits can a systems thinking perspective bring to enterprise architecture?
- Which of the tools and techniques of systems practice can usefully be added to the enterprise architecture toolbox?
- How can enterprise architects, systems thinkers and others work together in multi-disciplinary teams?

This book doesn’t claim to provide a full set of answers to these questions, but represents a preliminary exploration of what a solution might look like. My hope is to encourage other EA thinkers and practitioners to go beyond fancy diagrams and rhetoric and to work together to develop a properly grounded approach.

Structure of book

In the first part of the book, I shall provide a broad-brush sketch of EA and ST as they are commonly described and practised. I shall compare and contrast them in theory and practice. Within both EA and ST we can identify several rival schools, and it is common to find representatives of different schools battling on the Internet.

In part two, I shall use each one to view and critique the other, as well as seeing both of them as examples of general practices.

In the third and final part, I shall explore some ways in which the two practices might be combined, and look forward to a “next practice” enterprise architecture, which will overcome the limitations of the current “best practice” enterprise architecture.

Shoulders of giants

The only reason I am able to do any of this work is that others have gone before me. I don't claim to be any smarter than them.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the members of the EAST group and countless Internet contacts for discussion, disagreement and dissent.

Particular thanks to Adrian Apthorp, Carl Bate, Sally Bean, Graham Berrisford, Chris Bird, Philip Boxer, John Dobson, Nick Gall, Tom Graves, Nigel Green, Patrick Hoverstadt, Mesbah Khan, Svyatoslav Kotusev, Ian Macdonald, James McGovern, Mike Martin, Chris Partridge, Nikos Salingaros, Roger Sessions, David Sprott, Aidan Ward, and Lawrence Wilkes.

Some of the material in this book has been published elsewhere, including the CDBI Journal, Human Systems Management, Information and Software Technology, the Journal of Applied Systems Analysis, and the Microsoft Architecture Journal. A list of previous publications is included in an appendix.

Version Notes

Parts of this incomplete draft version are still in note form, circulated for friendly comments and suggestions.

April 2015. In this version, I have cleaned up (and hopefully clarified) the introductory material. I have also incorporated some material from my presentations at the EAST group (June 2013), the Open Group (Oct 2013) and the EA Forum (Nov 2014).

February 2019. Some long overdue clarifications. Some of the initiatives that were current when I first wrote about them are now in the past, so I've changed the tenses and removed details that no longer seem relevant.

May 2019. Responding to some useful comments from Svyatoslav Kotusev.

Links

Blog: Richard Veryard on Architecture

<http://rvsoapbox.blogspot.com>

Presentations

<http://www.slideshare.net/RichardVeryard>

Introduction

An encounter between Enterprise Architecture (EA) and System Thinking (ST)

There is a growing interest among enterprise architects in systems thinking. There are several possible reasons for this interest.

- A general concern about theoretical and practical shortcomings in EA.
- The idea that systems thinking provides some theoretical underpinning for enterprise architecture and systems architecture.
- The idea that systems thinking is somehow complementary to enterprise architecture, and that there is some kind of synergy available from putting together concepts, techniques and practices from the two disciplines.
- The idea that systems thinking and enterprise architecture are essentially doing the same things (modelling, abstraction, joined-up thinking, big picture, enterprise-as-system, etc etc)
- The idea that systems thinking and enterprise architecture are rivals for our affections, and their respective champions are trying to show that one is more conceptually coherent, more broadly based, more solidly grounded, and even perhaps more useful, than the other.

EA is also flirting with other kinds of Thinking, such as Design Thinking, and for similar reasons.

Satiable curiosity

In his Just So Stories, Rudyard Kipling wrote the following verse.

*I keep six honest serving-men (They taught me all I knew); Their names are What and Why
and When And How and Where and Who.*

Many people quote this verse, and most of them probably assume that Kipling endorses this approach. But I think it is pretty clear from the context of the poem that “I” is not supposed to be Kipling himself but the Elephant’s Child, an annoying creature, who goes around constantly asking What-Why-When-How-Where-Who questions. He gets obsessed by one such question (What does the Crocodile have for dinner?) and set off on a quest to find the answer, nearly gets killed in the process, and returns with a quite unexpected benefit: this is [How The Elephant Got His Trunk](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Elephant%27s_Child)¹. If the Elephant’s Child actually learns anything valuable from the experience, this is largely thanks to the intervention of the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake who (apart from saving his life) asks grounded questions like “Try this” and “Don’t you think” and “How do you feel”, and points out the advantages of the new situation.

One of the most influential followers of Kipling is John Zachman, developer of the Zachman Framework and one of the “fathers” of Enterprise Architecture (EA). The Zachman framework has six columns,

¹http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Elephant%27s_Child

based on the Elephant's Child framework. Zachman himself believes that Kipling was merely reporting established wisdom, and claims the six questions date back thousands of years.

"Humanity for the last 7,000 years has been able to work with what, how, who, where, when, and why."

Critics such as [Graeme Simsion²](#) have pointed out that these six monosyllabic questions are grounded in the English language, and point out that other languages would have a different number of basic questions. (For example, a French Zachman might have included Combien, How Much?) However, thanks to Zachman, there are many people in the EA world who model themselves on the Elephant's Child.

Meanwhile, some of those in the ST world have a more humanistic background, and they might prefer to model themselves on the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake. As a metaphor for the encounter between EA and ST, therefore, I propose to consider the encounter between the Elephant's Child and the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake. The Elephant's Child got a trunk, while the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake slithered away with nothing. Is that fair?

Sage Kings (and Queens)

The ancient Chinese philosopher Mozi (Mo Tzu) identified three criteria for judging a theory.

1. Origin - reference to the sage kings of antiquity
2. Validity - reference to the evidence ("the eyes and ears of the people")
3. Applicability - whether it brings benefit to the enterprise and the people

Mozi called this his "three-prong method".

In discussions about enterprise architecture, there is a great deal of argument from authority - which we can regard as an appeal to the sage kings.

Here are some of the sage kings of EA and ST - mostly from the 1980s. (Some of them are still active, but not always doing what they were known for then.) See how many of them you can recognize.



Why should 21st century enterprise architects care what the sage kings of methodological antiquity thought about enterprise systems? Firstly because the sage kings have given us a huge legacy of principles and practices, much of which are still in use today. Secondly because some of the assumptions made by the sage kings may now look obsolescent, not just because of technology change but because of emerging ideas of complex systems organization and management, and we need to critically review and refresh our principles and practices to ensure we are not still bound by these assumptions. And thirdly because there may be some principles and practices that have fallen into disuse and deserve to be revived.

²<http://tdan.com/whats-wrong-with-the-zachman-framework/5279>

And how much difference is there between today's enterprise architecture frameworks and the structured enterprise methodologies of the 1980s? And how confident are we that we have kept the good bits and discarded the bad bits?