Two Worlds of Enterprise Architecture

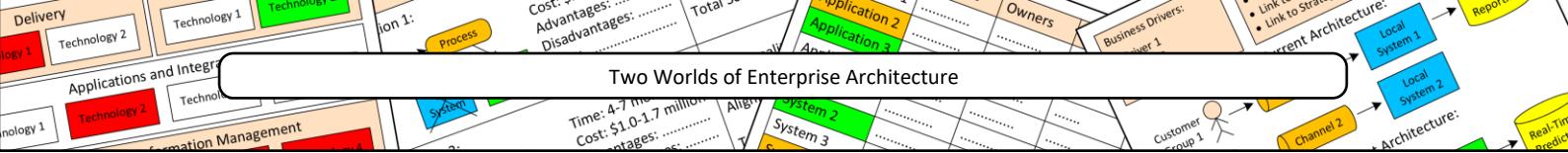Svyatoslav Kotusev (kotusev@kotusev.com)

Introduction

At the present moment the entire discipline of enterprise architecture (EA) is essentially based on EA frameworks. However, as I reported previously, EA frameworks are only management fads unrelated to successful EA practices[1, 2, 3], while successful EA practices look very different from the prescriptions of EA frameworks[4]. This curious situation suggests that the notion of EA simultaneously exists in two parallel worlds: imaginary and real. The imaginary world of EA encompasses all EA frameworks, all famous EA gurus and most available EA publications, while the real world of EA remains largely unexplored. The existence of two different worlds of EA should be clearly recognized and explicitly acknowledged since this fact is extremely important for both EA theory and practice.

Imaginary World of Enterprise Architecture

The imaginary world of EA was initially "created" in the end of the 1960s with the publication of the BSP methodology by IBM and later evolved into the current set of widely known EA frameworks including Zachman, TOGAF and FEAF[3, 5]. The imaginary world of EA developed a very sophisticated "ecosystem" including highly cited EA literature describing proven EA best practices, popular industry certifications provided by recognized consultancies and even highly acclaimed gurus and prophets. Moreover, the imaginary world of EA is in some sense complete, i.e. it provides an end-to-end description of EA practice and gives exact answers to the most essential EA-related questions. For instance, popular EA frameworks[6, 7, 8, 9] explain how exactly EA should be structured, which exactly documents should be created to describe EA, which exactly processes should be followed to develop EA and how exactly EA practices should mature in organizations. In other words, EA in the imaginary world looks as an established, well-understood and mature discipline.

However, the single problem with the imaginary world of EA is that all its recommended "best practices" exist only in imagination, but not in reality. For instance, my analysis of more than thirty organizations practicing EA shows that none of these organizations uses recommended matrices to structure EA, creates recommended documents to describe EA, follows recommended processes to develop EA or evolves according to recommended EA maturity models. Moreover, all available EA research since the end of the 1980s had consistently demonstrated the impracticality of recommended "best practices"[3]. The closer scrutiny of the "ecosystem" of the imaginary world of EA reveals that well-known EA gurus turn out to be more entertainers than providers of useful advice, EA practitioners who study EA frameworks never implement them, framework trainings and certifications are typically considered either as a necessary evil or merely as badges to improve CVs and even consultants selling their services under the brands of popular EA frameworks actually do something else instead after the contracts are signed. Therefore, essentially everything in the imaginary world of EA has no relationship to real EA practices, except that some EA documents are indeed developed and used.
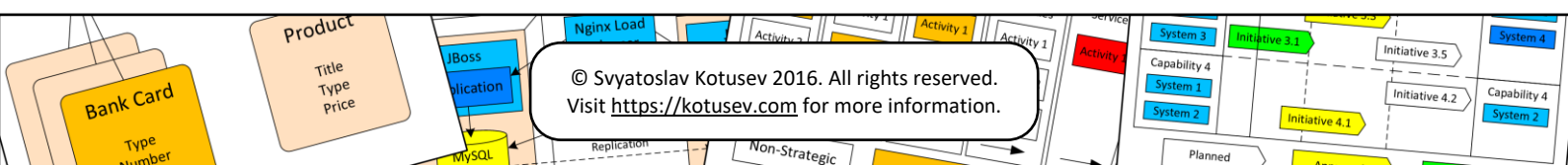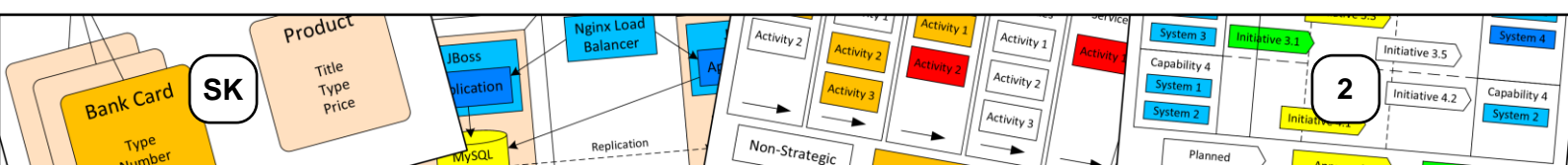
Creation of the Imaginary World

The entire imaginary world of EA was (1) initially spawned by extremely intensive hype maintained by vendors of early EA methodologies and (2) later enriched with numerous utterly speculative publications authored by a broader circle of EA "experts" further mystifying EA. Essentially the "demiurges" of this world are well-known consulting companies (most notably IBM) and individual gurus (most notably John Zachman, former IBM marketing specialist) who profited from selling EA and, unsurprisingly, aggressively promoted it. By means of powerful marketing all pre-EA and EA methodologies from BSP to TOGAF have been positioned by their vendors as de facto industry standards, even though any successful examples of their practical implementation can hardly be found[3]. Their promotional efforts were successful enough to convince the IT community that recommended pre-EA and EA methodologies reflected real best practices in information systems planning, even though all the evidence consistently supported the opposite conclusion[3]. The ultimate victory of EA promoters was the initiation of the Federal Enterprise Architecture (FEA) program guided by the "best practices" embodied in EA frameworks, which subsequently failed and largely wasted one billion dollars of taxpayers' money but brought more than 300 million dollars of profit to IBM[3, 10]. Taking into account that IBM has been previously accused in unethical business practices, for instance in facilitating the Holocaust[11], it is even unclear whether (or to what extent) early EA approaches promoted by IBM and its alumni can be considered as a genuine attempt to resolve the problem of business and IT alignment or merely as an attempt to sell whatever can be successfully sold.

Later the hype around EA initiated by the vendors of early EA methodologies was enthusiastically supported by a wider circle of EA "thought leaders", who produced an impressive amount of additional speculative publications enriching the imaginary world of EA with even more details. For instance, the widely known and highly cited EA publications by Schekkerman[12] and Sessions[13] provide classical examples of perfect speculations around EA frameworks. Both these publications do not appeal to any empirical evidence on the use of EA frameworks in real organizations at all, but instead merely proclaim the importance of EA frameworks and then speculate on their theoretical advantages, disadvantages, strengths, weaknesses, limitations and applicability and, thereby, contribute to the construction of the imaginary world of EA. At the same time, evidence-based EA publications discussing actual experience with EA in real organizations either do not mention EA frameworks at all[14] or characterize them as "theoretical and impossible to implement"[15, page 15] vividly demonstrating the striking contrast between the imaginary and real worlds of EA.

Essentially, the entire imaginary world of EA with all its frameworks, certifications and gurus is arbitrary, artificial and fictitious in nature since it is based only on excessive marketing hype and irresponsible speculations, but not on real empirically substantiated best practices. EA frameworks with their cells, step-wise processes and heaps of documents reflect imaginary best practices in the imaginary world of EA invented by consultancies and gurus. They are purely artificial products of this imaginary world having neither theoretical nor practical justifications in the real world. The very existence of popular EA frameworks advocating imaginary best practices unrelated to the real world is definitely a curious phenomenon that can be explained only by marketing-related reasons.

Assumptions of the Imaginary World

The fundamental underlying idea of the imaginary world of EA is that a team of architects should develop a comprehensive EA describing the desired ideal future state of an entire organization which will then help improve business and IT alignment. This general idea
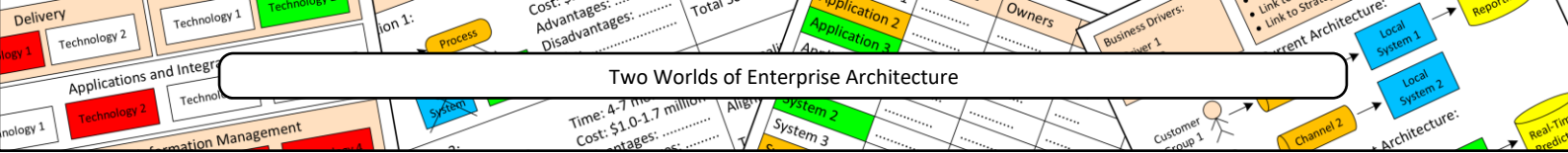
naturally implies that the most significant question in the imaginary world of EA is how to structure, describe and develop EA properly. Unsurprisingly, popular EA frameworks[6, 7, 8] and books[16, 17, 18] in the imaginary world of EA focus mostly on this question and describe in detail how EA should be structured, which documents should be created to describe EA, which modeling techniques should be used to draw EA diagrams and which processes should be followed to develop EA.

This general idea of developing a comprehensive EA for improving business and IT alignment is based on at least two important assumptions which may hold only in the imaginary world, but not in the real world. Firstly, a relatively obvious assumption of this general idea is that a complete EA describing the ideal state of an entire organization can be developed with reasonable efforts. However, all the research since the end of the 1980s consistently demonstrated that developing a recommended comprehensive EA for entire organizations is essentially unachievable in practice due to exorbitant required efforts and dynamic organizational environment[19, 20, 21].

Secondly, a far less obvious assumption of this general idea is that a complete EA after being developed will naturally facilitate decision-making, guide the implementation of the required information systems and thereby improve business and IT alignment. However, the experience of multiple companies shows that even if a more or less comprehensive EA has been developed it typically ends up as "shelfware" and does not improve business and IT alignment. "In the last 10 years, the prevailing belief was that if one built the architecture, the owners and operators would come. History has shown, however, that few organizations actually "operationalized" the architecture—and the owners and operators did not come"[22, page 2]. "Architectures, like fondue sets and sandwich makers, are rarely used. We occasionally dig them out and wonder why we ever spent the money on them. [Our] experience resonates with that of many other large corporations: architectures have emerged as erudite, elegant abstractions of the world, but they gain no momentum, unable to find traction in a world they profess to model"[23, pages 1-2]. In fact, while popular EA frameworks of the imaginary world minutely describe how exactly to structure, describe and develop EA, none of these frameworks explains how exactly EA should be used after being developed, as if the mere existence of well-planned EA benefits organizations. EA literature of the imaginary world often talks about benefits of "having" EA, as if the actual usage of EA is obvious, trivial or unimportant. Essentially, in the imaginary world of EA the aimless development of EA is typically positioned as an end onto itself.

Therefore, the entire imaginary world of EA stands upon the flawed idea that if you develop a comprehensive EA properly describing your organization then benefits of "having" this EA will automatically follow. Since this idea does not work in the real world, "best practices" of the imaginary world embodied in popular EA frameworks are fundamentally unable to deliver anything except the heaps of expensive but useless documents.

Beneficiaries of the Imaginary World

The existence of the imaginary world of EA has different consequences for different participants of the EA market. Obvious beneficiaries of the imaginary world of EA are its creators, i.e. consulting companies and gurus, while evident losers of the imaginary world of EA are the clients of consultancies willing to practice EA. This "imbalance" is caused by the fact that the criteria of success for EA engagements are fundamentally different for consultancies and their clients. In particular, consultancies get paid for developing EA in the short term, while their clients can benefit only from using EA in the long term, which means that consultancies are naturally interested only in selling myriads of EA documents, but
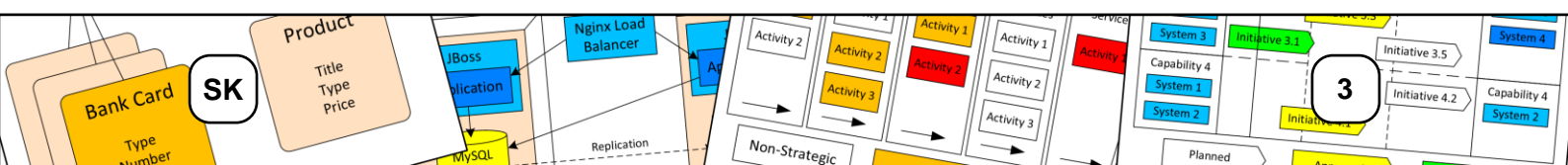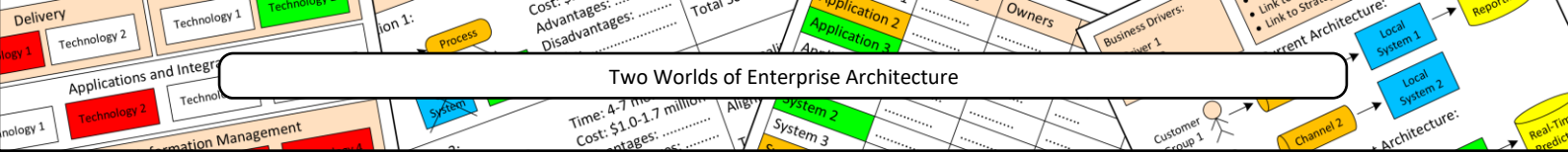
essentially indifferent to the ultimate fate of these documents, whether they will be shelved or not.

This asymmetry of interests seemingly was actively used by consultancies in the early days of EA. For instance, by the end of 2004 IBM earned more than 300 million dollars for developing EA for the Department of Defense (DOD) as part of the FEA program[3, 24], but only after 10 years in 2015 it was explicitly acknowledged in DOD that the resultant EA turned out "generally not effective in achieving its intended outcomes and that its usefulness in achieving benefits […] was limited"[25, page 16]. Consultants come, develop EA, get their money and go to the next client, while organizations are left alone to enjoy their EA without any real guidance on how to use it. "A five-year IT strategy can be generated by an EA team in 3-6 months, perhaps. What happens then? Do the EA's start to test their EA by monitoring its adoption by various projects? In our experience, they do not"[26, page 21]. Moreover, the resultant EA is fundamentally unverifiable since its quality can hardly be tested with any reasonable means, which makes consultants essentially unaccountable for the outcomes of their work. Thereby, the imaginary world of EA implements the consultants' dream of earning money simply for producing expensive and unverifiable documents without taking any real responsibility. "I kept pushing the person [in charge of the project], "What did we get, what did we get, what did we get?" And ultimately it ended up being this book [EA]"[27, page 1].

Interestingly, both the aforementioned assumptions of the imaginary world of EA embodied in EA frameworks are beneficial for EA consultancies since they essentially help consultants lure out the money from their clients. The first assumption that the ideal state of an entire organization can be described in EA helps justify significant investments required to develop EA, which directly constitute the consultants' income. The second assumption that the very existence of compete EA automatically benefits organizations helps conceal the unpleasant fact that the resultant expensive EA probably will be eventually shelved. Unsurprisingly, as a result of these tricks the word "architecture" became a bad word in many organizations[28].

However, presently the situation has seemingly changed since it became universally recognized that merely developing heaps of EA documents does not bring any promised benefits. Surprisingly, despite that the general idea of developing heaps of EA documents recommended by popular EA frameworks was widely acknowledged as impractical, EA frameworks themselves were not acknowledged as impractical, but instead were merely reinterpreted by their vendors to convey a dramatically different meaning. While EA frameworks were initially positioned as directly actionable "best practices", now they have been repositioned to "best practices" that need to be "properly adapted" to specific organizations, which for all practical purposes means that something else needs to be done instead of these "best practices"[2]. Even the meaning of the word "framework" was easily reinterpreted from its original meaning (taxonomy for organizing EA documents[7]) to a new meaning which now helps continue selling EA frameworks (adaptable toolkits for practicing EA)[2].

Paradoxically, the very same old EA frameworks that previously under the title of "best practices" recommended developing heaps of useless EA documents and thereby wasted impressive amounts of money[3] now easily retained the title of "best practices" simply by reinterpreting their meaning, *even without changing their original texts*[2]. Indeed, the set of popular EA frameworks and their prescriptions did not change at all for the last 10-15 years, but what has dramatically changed is the interpretation of these prescriptions. Previously the prescriptions of EA frameworks were interpreted literally, i.e. "cells" really meant cells and "steps" really meant steps, but now all EA gurus argue that EA frameworks cannot be understood literally, i.e. "cells" do not mean cells and "steps" do not mean steps anymore. In
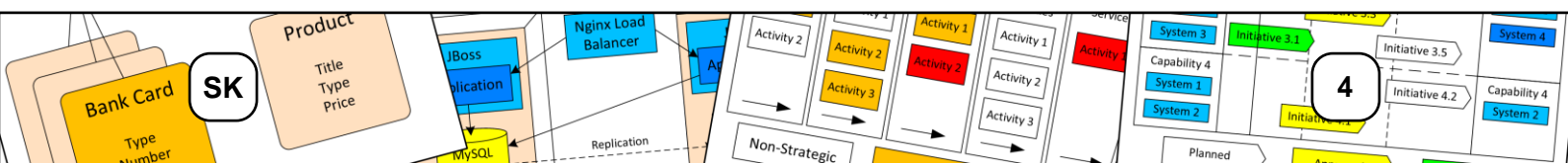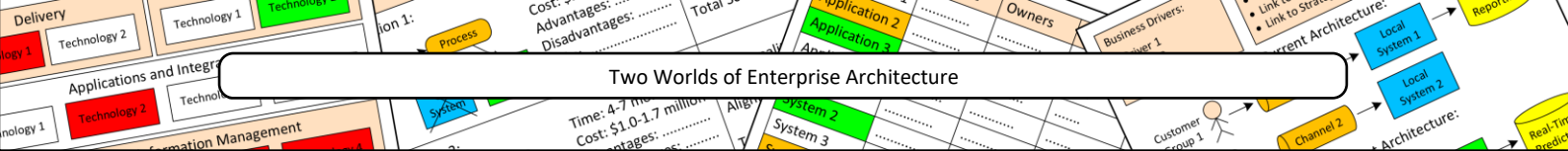
other words, now using the Zachman Framework "properly" does not imply filling the recommended cells and using TOGAF "properly" does not mean following ADM steps. Essentially, EA frameworks do not mean anything in particular anymore, but still somehow represent some unclear EA "best practices".

This nonsensical situation with arbitrary, varying and elusive interpretations of the same timeless texts with EA "best practices" is again very beneficial to numerous EA consultancies and gurus who capitalize on this obscurity. While during the early days of EA consultants empowered by EA frameworks were able to earn money simply by producing heaps of useless documents recommended by these EA frameworks, now consultants are able to earn money by organizing trainings in EA frameworks, issuing certificates in EA frameworks, selling framework-certified EA tools and explaining how exactly EA frameworks should be interpreted, understood and tailored "properly". Therefore, in some sense EA frameworks indeed represent best practices – consultants' best practices of making money on selling useless paperwork to deceived clients or on interpreting cryptic texts to newbie architects when all these activities do not bring any real value to anyone except consultants.

Unsurprisingly, EA consultancies and gurus are not eager to spread any real information on EA frameworks as well as on EA practice in general in order not to demystify the imaginary world of EA. The imaginary world of EA is arguably maintained deliberately since it helps numerous EA consultants make easy money in the "muddy waters" of EA frameworks. EA consultancies are naturally interested in preserving the precious imaginary world of EA intact as long as possible. The imaginary world of EA provides an ideally comfortable lucrative environment for various "fathers", "international experts", "thought leaders", "recognized trainers", "certified consultants" and other witchdoctors where they can invent any non-existent "best practices", arbitrarily reinterpret the meaning of the same ancient texts, cheat their clients as long as they wish and how they wish with impunity.

Therefore, the entire imaginary world of EA is owned and maintained by consultancies and gurus. The imaginary world of EA provided and still provides effective money-making mechanisms for its creators. All the elements of its "ecosystem", including EA frameworks, trainings and certifications, are nothing more than instruments for earning incomes. Previously consultants profited from developing heaps of useless documents recommended by EA frameworks, now consultants profit from adapting and reinterpreting the very same EA frameworks. The imaginary world of EA is a world of skillfully promoted management fads maintained by numerous consultants profiting from the existence of these fads.

Inhabitants of the Imaginary World

Interestingly, the imaginary world of EA provides a detailed, end-to-end, consistent and logically complete description of EA practice, even though this description is absolutely unrealistic. As it was mentioned before, popular EA frameworks minutely describe how exactly to structure, describe, develop and mature EA presenting a comprehensive picture of the entire EA discipline. While for people involved in EA practices in real organizations the inadequacy of this picture is evident, some people generally do not see any gaps between the imaginary and real worlds of EA and these people are EA academics.

Ironically, many EA academics seemingly live completely inside the imaginary world of EA that exists only on paper and do not even guess that the real world is dramatically different from the artificial constructions provided by EA frameworks. For instance, in the feedback on the earlier version of my study of EA artifacts[29] an anonymous reviewer commented that "frameworks such as TOGAF provide very detailed instructions for their users in terms of methodology and [artifacts]. I do not see the value of redefining these". Interestingly, by
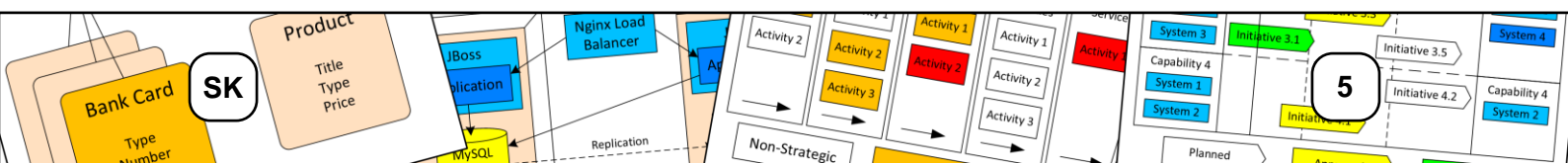
some incomprehensible reasons many EA academics prefer to trust marketing materials more than real research. For instance, the marketing statements of The Open Group that TOGAF is "a proven [EA] methodology and framework" as well as "the most prominent and reliable [EA] standard in the world"[30] are seemingly widely believed in the academic world, while the real EA research by MIT[14] (one of the most prestigious universities in the world), which is based on a solid empirical base and clearly shows that successful EA practices have nothing in common with TOGAF, is simply ignored and not taken into consideration. Moreover, many academics are seemingly convinced in the usefulness of EA frameworks even more than the authors of these frameworks. For instance, in one of the feedbacks an anonymous reviewer argued that "most frameworks are derived by practitioners based on their experience", although even the "father" of EA, marketing specialist John Zachman, in his original paper argued that the framework is based only on the potential conceptual equivalency between architectural representations of "any complex engineering product, including an information system"[7, page 281] and later admitted that "nobody that we know of yet" have ever implemented the whole framework[31, page 2].

Many EA academics inhabiting the imaginary world of EA seemingly feel so comfortable living inside this imaginary world that they even do not need the real world at all to do their research, publish scientific articles, get promotions and become professors. For instance, EA scholars have rigorously compared popular EA frameworks from all possible viewpoints and thoroughly analyzed TOGAF from the perspective of all possible scientific theories, but the only thing they forgot to do is to check whether these frameworks really represent true EA best practices and whether any of these frameworks have ever been successfully implemented anywhere in any real sense. Unfortunately, EA academics who are expected to be the main source of trustworthy information on EA seemingly will be the last to understand what is going on in the real world of EA.

On the other hand, the inability of academic researchers to deal with management fads is widely known and acknowledged. For instance, although previous management fads like business process reengineering (BPR) or total quality management (TQM) attracted significant academic interest, academic scholars neither refuted these fads at their inception nor even questioned their effectiveness, but rather treated them as "self-evidently correct, somehow above the need for empirical proof"[32, page 13] until the faddish nature of these management practices became self-evident to everyone and they naturally faded away. The similar ironic situation is currently observed in the EA discipline since EA frameworks are generally considered by EA academics as intrinsically useful without any scientific verification. The fundamental importance of EA frameworks for the EA discipline is merely taken for granted by the EA research community without any justifications. For instance, there are nearly a thousand of academic EA publications and all these publications do not provide even a single demonstration of how exactly any EA framework can be successfully implemented in practice, however, the very practical utility of EA frameworks with the rare exceptions[15, 33] is never questioned. Paradoxically, academic scholars tend to protect management fads instead of refuting them.

Unlike EA consultants and gurus, who deliberately promote EA frameworks to capitalize on them, many EA academics seemingly blissfully speculate on EA frameworks unconsciously converting them into established scientific theories and thereby legitimizing harmful management fads. At the same time, this scientific legitimization of EA frameworks perpetuates the imaginable world of EA making it irrefutable, "scientifically proven", self-sustainable and completely independent from the real world of EA.
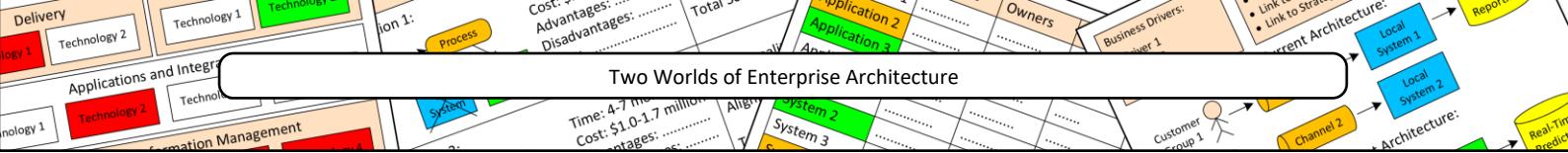
Real World of Enterprise Architecture

Since the imaginary world of EA exists only in imagination, any encounters with real EA practices in real organizations will quickly demonstrate that artificial taxonomies, step-wise processes and other "best practices" of the imaginary world can hardly be applicable in the real world of EA. While EA academics may never encounter the real world of EA throughout their entire careers, EA practitioners are doomed to face it during their daily work in organizations.

In the real world of EA omniscient gurus will readily assure framework-certified EA practitioners that frameworks they studied certainly represent proven best practices, but these best practices just need to be "applied properly", which essentially means that EA practitioners should do something else and learn how to practice EA from somebody else. Unsurprisingly, it is widely acknowledged among EA practitioners that the only way to study EA is to start working in an organization that already practices EA and then learn true EA best practices from more experienced architects. Essentially EA practitioners have to explore the real world of EA alone in an idiosyncratic manner based on their own experience in organizations.

What is our current systematic knowledge about the real world of EA? Unlike the minutely described imaginary world of EA, the real world of EA is largely unexplored. While the imaginary world of EA emerged from fictitious "best practices" invented by consultants and gurus, the real world of EA emerged from real time-proven best practices of numerous experienced architects, but these best practices are still unsystematic and poorly understood. However, some critical differences between the imaginary and real worlds of EA can already be described. For instance, real-world EA practices can be hardly described as formal step-wise processes similar to TOGAF ADM. In real-world EA practices all EA documents are developed in a pragmatic manner for specific purposes, stakeholders and use cases, not to comprehensively describe organizations, document desired future states in detail or fill all cells as recommended by EA frameworks. Moreover, different EA documents in the real world of EA have different producers, consumers and lifecycles making typical phrases of the imaginary world "develop EA" and "use EA" largely meaningless since nobody in the real world produces or uses the entire EA.

One of the evident best practices of the real world of EA is using business capability models (BCMs) for prioritizing and focusing IT investments on the most important business areas, however, BCMs are not even mentioned in any EA frameworks of the imaginary world. While in the imaginary world of EA different frameworks are critically important and have significant advantages and disadvantages, in the real world of EA they are simply irrelevant to successful EA practices. Unlike the imaginary world, in the real world of EA there are no clear standard sets of processes, activities or documents constituting successful EA practices, real-world EA practices are highly idiosyncratic and organization-specific. Essentially the only observable overlap between the imaginary and real worlds of EA is that in the both worlds some EA documents are developed and used.

Since most available EA publications are based on EA frameworks and therefore belong to the imaginary world of EA, comprehensive studies of the real world of EA are very scarce and can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Arguably, the top three empirically-substantiated sources describing EA practices of the real world of EA are the books "Enterprise Architecture as Strategy"[14], "Strategic Enterprise Architecture Management"[34] and "Managed Evolution"[35]. Although these books provide insightful analyses and realistically describe many important aspects of real EA practices, arguably none of these books offers a clear conceptual model explaining what EA is and how EA works in general. "One Minute

Enterprise Architecture"[4] provides my own attempt to present a simple empirically-substantiated model conceptually explaining the notion of EA on one page.

Enterprise Architecture Schizophrenia

The simultaneous existence of two parallel worlds of EA, imaginary and real, suggests that the EA discipline is suffering from some form of schizophrenia. Moreover, since various manifestations of the inconsistency between promoted and real EA best practices have been reported for a prolonged period of time at least since 1993[36], this schizophrenic split into imaginary and real worlds of EA is not a temporary acute delirium, but rather a chronic progressing illness.

What is even worse, this illness seems to be incurable. For instance, even though numerous empirical evidence demonstrating the inadequacy of the "best practices" embodied in EA frameworks is publicly available[3], this evidence is generally unnoticed among the growing heaps of non-empirical publications speculating on EA frameworks. Scarce realistic EA publications are drowning in a sticky quicksand of endless speculations. The imaginary world of EA dissolves the real world of EA. Therefore, the EA discipline is seemingly unable to progress normally and cure itself from the evident schizophrenia.

However, in my opinion the necessary psychological treatment for the EA discipline can be reasonably simple. As a first step, the very existence of two inconsistent worlds of EA, imaginary and real, should be very clearly acknowledged in order to split the reality from fiction. Even though the both worlds of EA recommend developing and using some EA documents, it is critically important to understand that these worlds are largely unrelated to each other and essentially belong to different literature genres. For instance, "The First Men in the Moon" by H. G. Wells is unrelated to real aerospace engineering, even though both of them describe space flights. Folklore stories of elves, gnomes and goblins are unrelated to real history, even though both of them describe some events in the past. In a similar manner EA frameworks are unrelated to real successful EA practices, even though both of them imply developing and using some EA documents to facilitate information systems planning. Like mythical elves and goblins, EA frameworks never existed in the world of real EA best practices. Since real EA best practices and EA frameworks belong to fundamentally different genres (science and fiction correspondingly) any existing overlaps between them are arguably accidental rather than natural.

In order to ascertain the fictitious nature of popular EA frameworks the EA research community should admit that (1) EA frameworks have no documented examples of successful practical implementation, (2) EA frameworks were invented and promoted by consultancies and gurus, (3) EA frameworks cannot be traced back to anyone's real best practices, (4) all success stories of EA frameworks are based only on anecdotal examples provided by their vendors and (5) the declared need to adapt frameworks is only a natural trick intended to conceal the fact that EA frameworks cannot be implemented in any real sense. The wide recognition and acknowledgement of these facts will inevitably lead to the conclusion that EA frameworks are merely artificial constructions no more real than elves or goblins and, therefore, are fundamentally redundant for the EA discipline.

After the existence of two inconsistent worlds of EA is acknowledged and the difference between them is clearly understood, members of the EA community should take proper attitude towards the both worlds. EA practitioners should focus on (or continue) learning real EA best practices from more experienced architects, from other organizations successfully practicing EA, from scarce real-world EA publications as well as from their own EA experiences. When looking at EA frameworks of the imaginary world, EA practitioners
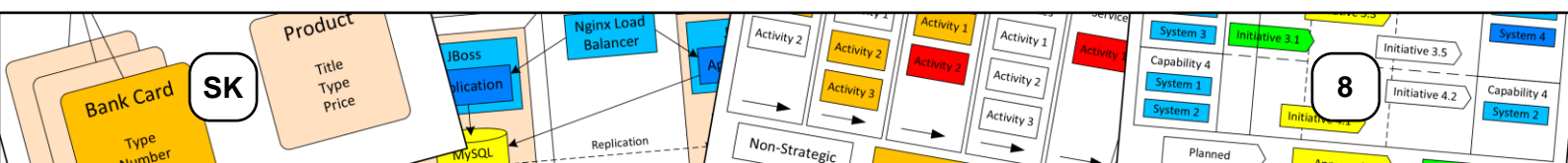
should very clearly understand that EA frameworks do not represent and never represented real EA best practices and, therefore, should be treated skeptically with caution. While studying EA frameworks might be beneficial for finding occasional useful ideas accidentally mentioned in frameworks or even necessary for improving CVs by getting framework-certified, EA practitioners should not try to implement EA frameworks in their organizations or align their EA practices to frameworks. EA practitioners should also forget often-heard phrases like "our EA practice is immature because we did not implement the whole framework" since nobody ever implemented any framework anywhere in any real sense. Implementing EA frameworks should not be considered as a desired goal.

EA academics should finally open their eyes, acknowledge that EA frameworks is merely yet another successfully sold management fad and completely ignore their existence since EA frameworks are unrelated to successful real-world EA practices and exist only in marketing presentations. Instead of studying EA frameworks, EA scholars should start doing frameworks-free EA research by studying real-world EA practices in organizations. Unlike the minutely described imaginary world of EA, the real world of EA is largely unexplored. Essentially all aspects of real EA practices are poorly studied, including EA documents, EA-related processes, organization of EA functions, maturity of EA practices, etc. Therefore, academic EA researchers have plenty of work to do in the real world of EA.

On the other hand, the imaginary world of EA created entirely by endless speculations on EA frameworks should definitely become a very interesting object of studies for scholars of marketing and management fads. While other management fads like BPR or TQM simply come and go, EA frameworks created an entire self-sustainable and even self-developing imaginary world which exists for almost three decades independently from the real world and is not going to go. Moreover, the imaginary world of EA is very sophisticated and in some sense complete. It has its own fictitious history, "fathers", best practices, definitive literature, certifications and other elements of "ecosystem". Although the phenomenon of management fads is far from new and widely studied, the phenomenon of self-sustainable, self-developing and independent "parallel worlds" created by management fads is arguably unique and opens up a new page in the history of management fads.

The comparison of the imaginary and real worlds of EA discussed in this article is summarized in Table 1.

Aspect	Imaginary world of EA	Real world of EA
Definitive sources	TOGAF[8], Zachman[7] and FEAF[6]	Enterprise Architecture as Strategy[14], Strategic Enterprise Architecture Management[34] and Managed Evolution[35]
Status	Complete, minutely described and well-understood	Largely unexplored
Origin	Invented artificially by consultants	Emerged gradually from industry
Essence	Skillfully promoted management fads unrelated to successful EA practices with a long history of expensive failures[3]	Real time-proven best practices
Key concepts	Frameworks, cells and step-wise processes	Arguably, no widely accepted concepts
Assumption	If you develop a comprehensive EA then benefits will automatically follow	The mere existence of EA does not bring any benefits
Focus	Focus on structuring, describing, modeling and developing EA properly	Focus on using EA documents for improving communication
Results	Expensive heaps of useless documents	Improved business and IT alignment
Beneficiaries	EA consultants and gurus, who were previously selling useless heaps of documents justified by EA frameworks and now selling trainings, certifications and new reinterpretations of the same EA frameworks	EA practitioners and organizations
Supporters	Consultants deliberately promoting EA frameworks and blissfully speculating EA academics	EA researchers analyzing real empirical evidence from successful EA practices
Metaphor	Science fiction	Science
Advice for practitioners	Study EA frameworks with caution, do not try to implement them	Learn real EA best practices from experienced architects, successful organizations, real-world EA publications and practical experience
Advice for academics	Acknowledge that EA frameworks is a management fad, ignore them in EA research but study them as a unique type of fad	Study all aspects of real EA practices in a frameworks-free manner

Table 1. Comparison of the Imaginary and Real Worlds of EA

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