When to Execute:
Choosing the right time for transformation

More than anything else, Enterprise Architecture is a tool for enabling business transformation. There are many hundreds of guides and articles discussing the 'hows' of EA led transformation, as well as the 'whys', but just as important is the 'when'. Though we often like to stress that businesses need to be constantly evolving, this obviously does not mean that an organization should be throwing out their processes every month in favor of new ones. Transformation, particularly in the digital sphere, needs to be well timed to prevent disruption and maximize gains.

In this paper, we will examine the factors that affect enterprise transformation, and look at times when a cautious approach may be better.
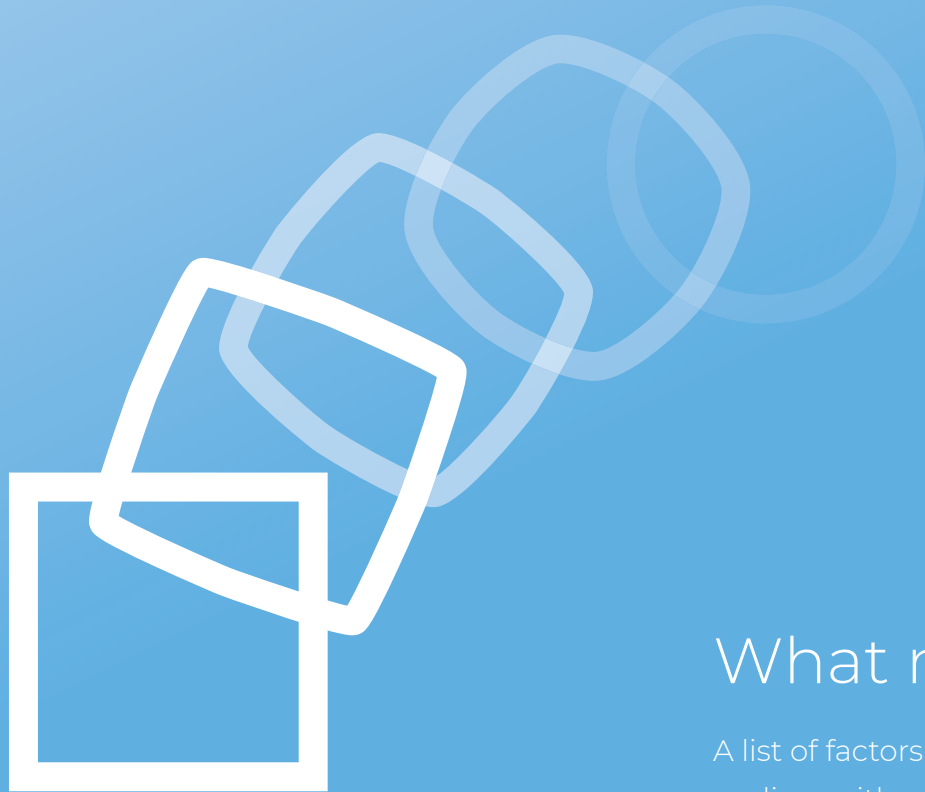
What necessitates transformation?

A list of factors that could lead to business change would potentially be never-ending, with so many differing possibilities based on industry, location, and staff preference. Nonetheless, there are a handful of major drivers of transformation in a business, common to every firm, that we can list:

Technological Advancement

By far the most obvious cause for enterprise architecture work, when technology advances organizations need to adapt or face being left behind. Enterprise Architecture is particularly focused on digital change, with endless examples from the 21st century given the impact of the internet. Though recent technological change has been driven by the internet and the proliferation of smartphones, there are countless areas for new technology to make an impact. Large disruptions and small improvements will continue to create the need for change across industries.

Legal Requirements

Many aspects of what a business does are mandated by law. In the modern economy, organizations not only need to comply with local laws, but often a host of different rules and restrictions for each region or country they operate in. A good recent example is the GDPR legislation for the European Union, which mandates certain data protection activities for firms operating within the EU. While some companies made changes across their entire operation, others chose a piecemeal approach, with different users having different data protection depending on their location.

Strategic Objectives

Many business strategies will require a large transformation of some kind. Entries into new markets, mergers and acquisitions, the launch of new products, or an alteration of the supply chain are just some of the strategic initiatives that will require digital or enterprise-wide transformation. At the same time, strategy does not have to mean a complete overhaul; if a firm's main aim is simply to "cut costs" then architects could play a big role in finding inefficiencies through business process analysis.

Staff Preference

This could arguably be considered under "Strategic Objectives", but it is worth considering on its own as well. Sometimes, a transformation will occur for no other reason than a new manager or executive having their own preference for how things should be. There doesn't need to be a strategic rationale to, for example, preferring a specific software vendor and deciding to make use of their software over an existing option.

Finding the right time

If any of the incidents from the above list occur, how do you then decide when to initiate a transformation? Not every technological change is going to be successful or worth it for your company. Laws can sometimes take time, and case law, to be understood. Strategies can change at the drop of a hat. An enterprise architecture initiative is not to be started lightly, particularly if it will entail a major impact on the firm. How should EA leaders plan the implementation of new projects?

Once again, there are hundreds of small, unique factors that could affect the timing of a transformation initiative, so we can only list a handful of broad, common steps to take:

Use Roadmaps

Though Enterprise Architecture is often used to implement strategic change, it is also a powerful tool for formulating strategy. In particular, the creation of business roadmaps can clearly lay out a timeline for implementation and expected results of any new project. If you know months or years in advance that you will be upgrading, there should be far fewer surprises.

Understand Business Capabilities

Another important function of enterprise architecture for strategy is business capability modeling. A clear understanding of the business at an abstract level will help to illustrate capability gaps, areas where the business cannot meet the requirements placed onto it. By knowing capability gaps ahead of any potential transformation, architects can move swiftly to support or alter those affected.
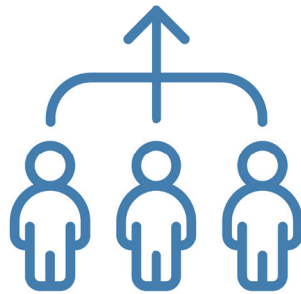
Get Stakeholder Buy-In

Perhaps the most important step of all is to have the buy-in of all stakeholders. The key distinction here is that it should be all stakeholders; everyone already knows that senior management will need to support any large scale change, but mid level management, regular employees, and even external stakeholders like suppliers could be just as relevant. Imagine a manufacturer moving to a new software system for tracking stock in a production line; the people that actually use this will be the low level workers. If they don't support the change, it is doomed to fail, no matter how superior a system it might be.

Perform Impact Analysis

Every business change will carry some element of risk. This is especially true for digital transformation, as the complexity of technology increases and systems become increasingly interlinked – just think of the stories of "flash crashes" occurring in the stock markets due to random, unknowable algorithm behavior. The organization must find a way to see what effect of any architectural change, before it actually takes place. This is where Business Impact Analysis comes in. An impact analysis is a powerful risk management tool and modern enterprise architecture tools can make their execution and dissemination simple.
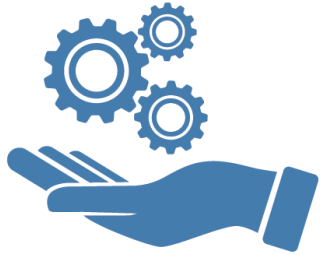
Support with Solution Architecture

Enterprise Architecture is a large field, with many sub-fields that take care of specific areas of a firm. A project or solution initiative is one such area covered by Solution Architecture, which is concerned with the detailed technical designs of a system for the purpose of guiding the implementation of a solution. Though Enterprise Architecture will have a key role to play in guiding digital transformation, the breadth of responsibilities an enterprise architect faces means many changes will not be prioritized. For these issues, supporting the core EA team with a number of solution architects will help to cover the pressures of EA, and ensure alignment of individual projects with the organization as a whole.

Summary

Perceptive readers will have noticed in the above list that, despite the title of this eBook, we have not actually mentioned a time frame at any point. Sadly, it is not possible to say "Wait 96 days after a new software tool is announced before implementing" or something along those lines. Rather, the right time to execute a transformation is after all of your preparation has been completed. Some aspects can be done on a continual basis, always being ready, such as business capability modeling. Indeed, an EA tool such as iServer365 is designed such that models and analyses can be produced whenever they are needed, thanks to the central repository maintaining a full strategic portfolio and all connections between parts of the business. For while having all preparatory steps is advisable to avoid disaster, the right time to execute is also as soon as possible.
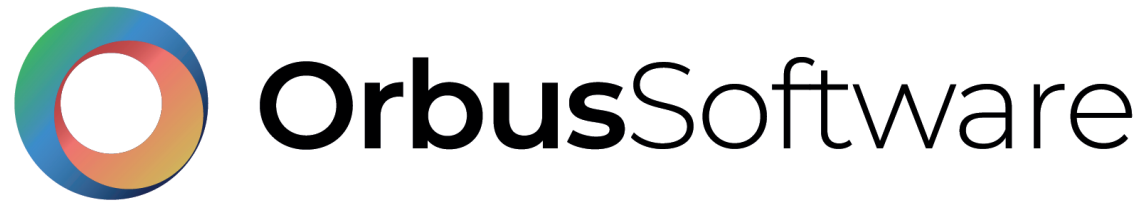
Orbus Software
Floor 4, 60 Buckingham Palace Road, SW1W 0RR
+44 (0) 20 3824 2907
enquiries@orbussoftware.com
www.orbussoftware.com