

Seeking Candidates for Your Business Architecture Team? Consider these Essential Traits

By William Ulrich

As organizations seek to staff their business architecture team, how can management spot the best candidates, including those individuals already in their workforce? This article details the essential traits organizations should consider when identifying candidates for their business architecture teams.

Before discussing the inherent traits in what it takes to serve in the role of business architect, it is important to note that a wide variety of business professionals should have a working knowledge of the discipline as it pertains to their scope of influence. For example, planning teams should be able to leverage business architecture to help inform business objectives and preliminary scope assessments, while design teams should be able to leverage business architecture to target specific products, stakeholders, value propositions, and outcomes.

Based on having trained and mentored hundreds of business professionals over the years in the business architecture discipline, the process of screening candidates should include matching those candidates to the following set of essential traits.

1. **Holistic Thinker**: Business architects must be able to separate the forest from the trees in order to examine vast business ecosystems and deliver value across the strategy execution spectrum. It is easy to become overwhelmed by scope and complexity, but the business architect should be able to invoke core principles and skills to visualize challenges and solutions across business unit silos.
2. **High Business IQ**: It takes much less time to learn business architecture principles than it does to understand the cross-functional workings of a given organization and related industry. Business architects need to understand their business ecosystem as well as who to engage for more clarity and detail. Of particular relevance is having an understanding of how the organization works as a whole as opposed to narrow expertise in one or two areas.
3. **Comfort with Ambiguity**: Business architects are rarely handed the scope or context of a given business issue or challenge. Yet they must decipher the underlying challenge, perform root cause analysis, expose business impacts, and provide input to strategy execution and deployment. The business architect leverages the business architecture to turn vague challenges into clear objectives and recommended strategy execution options.
4. **Principle-Driven**: Business architecture is descriptive, not prescriptive, having no step-by-step rule book. Individuals that adhere to business architecture principles or “agreed upon truths” will thrive in their role. Principles, which guide the articulation and use of business architecture across a variety of business scenarios, ensure the delivery of business value in a highly coordinated, streamlined fashion.

5. Ability to Simplify Complexity: Business ecosystems are complex. The business architect must be able to apply principles of the trade to aggregate complex views, simplify them for a given audience, and deliver insights required to address various business challenges. Simplifying complexity also means knowing one's audience and framing the right perspective for that audience, while having the supporting detail to back up one's findings and recommendations.
6. Having the Courage of One's Convictions: Business architects bring a unique perspective to the table and, as a result, will have these perspectives and principles challenged on a regular basis. Over the decades, "point" disciplines have created a situation where every problem became a nail and every solution became a hammer. Business architecture, on the other hand, provides a multifaceted toolbox to addressing a variety of business scenarios. Business architects must maintain the courage of their convictions in order to persevere through the business-as-usual headwinds they will encounter as business architecture's role expands.
7. Influencer: Business architects communicate and collaborate with business professionals at every level, yet have limited authority to dictate decisions or directions. Business architects must, therefore, have the ability to influence by telling stories, sharing analogies, and helping decisionmakers and collaborators visualize the challenges at hand and proposed solutions.
8. Commitment to Rigor: Business architects must be committed to the rigors of the discipline. For example, creating capabilities that are not object-based or value streams that lack value-delineated stage-gates will result in a business architecture that is good for high-level dialog and little else. A lack of rigor will stymie efforts to scale and leverage business architecture for downstream design work, event modeling, requirements articulation, program scoping, and IT architecture definition.
9. Articulate: Expressing and communicating value propositions, business objectives, capability and information definitions, stakeholder and value stream descriptions, and other business perspectives require a strong command of language and vocabulary. The articulate business architect is the successful business architect.
10. Egoless: Business architecture makes other disciplines more effective, meaning the business architect succeeds when the organization succeeds. As a result, the business architect must often step back from the spotlight, allowing other business professionals to claim credit.

These 10 traits play an important role when maturing a team and a practice. It is common to find that an organization's best business architecture candidates are already in its workforce. Identifying those individuals and teaching them the discipline will allow organizations to secure business architecture benefits more quickly at less cost. Let these 10 essential traits of the business architect serve as a guide to maturing your team, and your practice will excel.

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