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The Flavours of Business Architecture

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implement new practices to enhance corporate strategy in many different industries, countries and cultures. He can be reached at roger.burlton@processrenewal.com.

Business Architecture Is Not One Thing

There is significant disagreement in the marketplace about what Business Architecture should be. This debate persists because organizations face very different strategic pressures, operating models, and transformation goals. As a result, there is no single "correct" form of Business Architecture. What matters is using an approach that is fit for purpose, based on the organization's specific use case and value proposition.

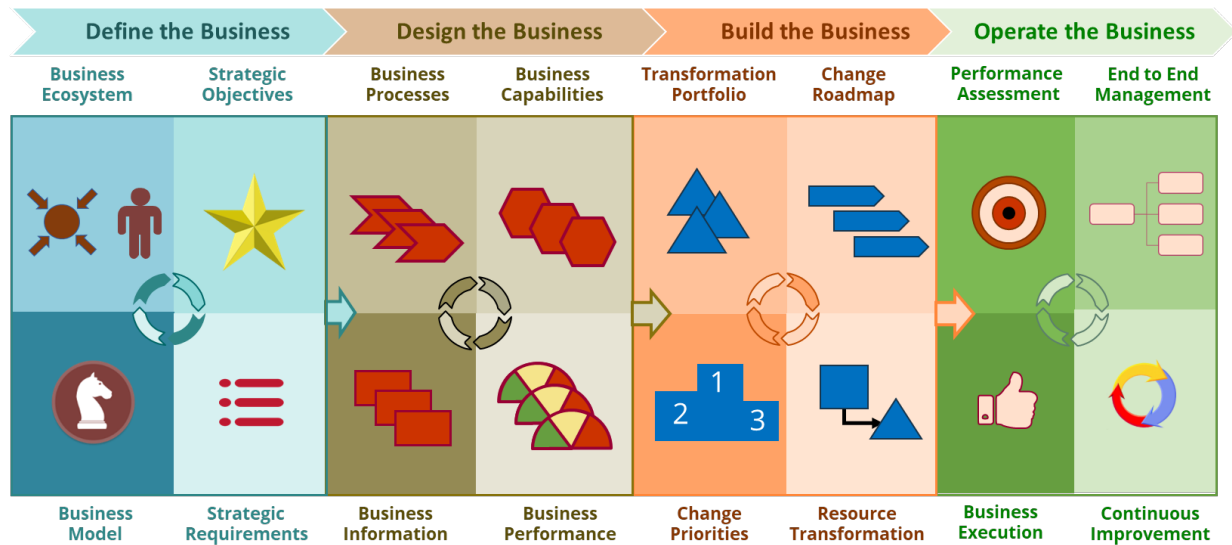
Business Architecture should therefore be viewed as a flexible framework rather than a rigid method. Different organizations, and even the same organization at different times, will emphasize different architectural domains and levels of detail depending on what problems they are trying to solve.

Major Business Architecture Use Cases

Several common patterns can be observed in practice. These represent alternative ways Business Architecture is used and there is a typical maturity growth as one moves from one to the next..

The following diagram is the overall generic framework we at Process Renewal Group start with as described in my latest book 'Business Architecture: Collecting, Connecting and Correcting the Dots'. It is universal but not a thoughtless recipe - It always 'depends'. You have to adapt and make it right for you.

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Depending on specific needs and intentions, a particular subset of these component domains (dots) will be more useful than others. In some cases, we may drop some domains (sectors) at least for a while. In many cases, it will mean choosing the depth to which a particular domain needs to be addressed. – shallow or deep, since it is rare that everything needs to be exhaustive at any point in time. After all, the architecture is simply a means to an end and not to be sought as its own purpose. You will always need intention, context and an accepted scope of inclusion / exclusion. This first question has to be figured out based on what challenges you are facing.

1. Business as Usual

Where Business Architecture is absent, decisions are made in silos. This typically leads to duplicated solutions, poor coordination, and wasted investment. Performance and change efforts become fragmented and unsustainable. This is often a starting point for organizations with low Business Architecture maturity and aspirations to do better.

2. IT Delivery Focused – Optimizing IT Investments

This approach uses Business Architecture primarily to guide technology planning and delivery. It helps identify needed IT capabilities, prioritize applications, and shape roadmaps. While valuable, it risks overemphasizing technical solutions and underrepresenting process, data, and organizational impacts unless managed carefully.

3. Business Strategy Realization – Delivering Intentional Change

Here, Business Architecture links strategy directly through to execution. Strategic goals (“the North Star”) are translated into processes and capabilities prioritized for transformation. This ensures that investments are aligned with business outcomes and that change programs focus on what matters most to customers and stakeholders.

A related variant focuses on specific transformation programs, such as mergers, regulatory compliance, digitalization, or new product lines. In these cases, Business Architecture provides a coherent baseline that connects objectives, scope, and design choices, reducing the risk of unintended consequences.

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4. Operational Management and Governance – Sustaining Performance

At this level, Business Architecture supports continuous operational performance management. It connects strategy, processes, capabilities, and measurement systems into an integrated operating model. This enables cross-functional governance, consistent decision-making, and structured improvement planning along with an improvement mindset.

5. Performance-Managed “Business Digital Twin” Orientation

The most advanced organizations treat Business Architecture models as the foundation for real-time monitoring and simulation of business performance. Just as physical product lifecycles use digital twins for monitoring and control, organizations can increasingly model and manage information-based operations. This requires maturity in all prior levels and remains an aspirational capability for most firms.

The Role of Models and Hybrid Approaches

Higher levels of Business Architecture maturity depend on strong foundational models that connect strategy, processes, data, and capabilities. These models support communication, prioritization, governance, and learning.

In practice, organizations often combine multiple approaches. Some areas may focus on IT delivery, while others emphasize strategic execution or operational performance. This is normal. The key is to be explicit about purpose: what decisions must be supported, what outcomes are expected, and which architectural elements are required.

Conclusion

Business Architecture is not a single discipline with one standard form. It is a set of adaptable practices that can support different business objectives — from IT optimization to strategy execution, governance, and digital performance management. Success depends on selecting the right architectural focus for the organization’s current challenges and using it as a means to achieve measurable business results and mature, not as an end in itself.