

Hello and welcome to this edition of the Strategic IT update. Today's topic is Blueprinting Information Architecture and Business Process Management. Based on my blog on "Blueprinting Information Architecture" one of the enterprise architects question was "Don't we need to define the detailed business process to identify potential service candidates"? My response to that is "No! We do not need to map the detailed business process for Blueprinting Information architecture".

First let's understand the role of data within an enterprise. It can be classified into three categories. Data - the source of the truth or actual transactions that occurred within an enterprise. Information - combination of data that provides some meaningful information to the business and finally Knowledge - that empowers the executives to make some critical business decision. One important point to note that the decision an executive makes is directly proportional to the quality of data.

According to a reports published a few years back there are 7 business processes required for any enterprise - 4 of them business unit specific such as Customer Acquisition, R&D, Quote to Cash and Customer support and three of them are common across the enterprise (or industry) - Finance, Human Resources and Information Technology. Understanding these core business processes at a high level are key to the blueprinting information architecture effort.

Now lets discuss the approach to Blueprinting the Information Architecture. The first task is to map the core end-to-end business processes at a high-level. The detailed drill down and service identification can be done later at the time of implementation of each of the business process. As part of this exercise it is important to identify the core business objects or enterprise data objects associated with these business processes - as well as classify them as Reference, Master or Analytics data.

To understand this better - let's take a case study for tracking of Customer Life cycle. In this case business was unable to track customer across the business silos to answer simple questions such as - "what purchases did the customer make last year?" or "how many leads were translated into orders form a particular campaign?" etc. The cause is typical the same for most large enterprise - multiple systems dealing with customer data, multiple points for creating and updating customer data, considerable amounts of manual customer data re-entry, duplication and disparity between various representations of same customer.

The industry best practice to resolve this is to implement the Customer Data Integration solution. The benefits of this are business getting an accurate view of their customers' activities, improved data quality resulting into better business decision and finally the ability to follow the customer through the lifecycle. As you may have noticed - the primary objective of the Blueprinting effort was to develop the overall customer model - and not define detailed end-to-end business process. Lets take an example of Customer Acquisition business process - their requirements is to provide the ability to manage multiple hierarchies. The customer model will be expanded during this implementation. This is true not just of the model but also for shared services. Whether they are custom applications providing an integrated view, or transaction systems ensuring that accurate data is entered at the source. For example, if a user enters "AT&T San Jose" - the application should correct it as the source to "AT&T". Reduce, if not eliminate the need for business to fix the data as an exception - an expensive proposition for business.

It is also very important to address the data governance process while blueprinting the information architecture. Even though - IT is responsible for developing and supporting the systems - Business own the data and is also responsible for its quality. One of the best practices is to create two teams. The Data Steering Committee is the leadership teams that meet periodically - every two weeks or monthly to prioritize the roadmap, define the business rules, policies associated with the data, prioritize the project roadmaps for data marts, data warehouse, business intelligence and so on. The data action team consists of the business and IT teams responsible for implementing projects agreed up by the Data Steering Committee.

I hope this helps in clarifying my thoughts on Blueprinting Information Architecture.

Well that is all that I have for now. Thanks for joining me for this edition of Strategic IT Update. This is Yogish Pai. See you next time.