

# Pragmatic Enterprise Architecture: An Intuitive Perspective

## Background

Federal agencies are large, complex and ever evolving entities that constantly have to account for new or evolving mission requirements, emerging threats and emerging technology capabilities creating challenges for IT departments. Further complicating things are frameworks and models with mandatory reporting requirements that may or may not bear any relationship to the essential understanding a particular mission initiative requires.

Against a backdrop of a perceived failure to deliver tangible benefits commensurate with early promises, the emergence of disruptive technologies that seem to obviate the need for EA and a shift in the current Administration's focus to other IT management disciplines, large government-wide and agency-wide EA initiatives have been de-emphasized or significantly scaled back. So is there still a real, value adding role for EA to play in today's Federal environment?

## A Pragmatic Approach to EA

With its enterprise-wide focus on the inter-relationship of business process, data, application functionality and technology, EA provides a robust capability for such complex requirements; however, for an EA to be actionable in support of mission requirements and useful to a broader set of stakeholders, there needs to be a greater focus on creating mission value, enhanced agility to accommodate unanticipated stakeholders and requirements, and better interoperability with other architectures and architecture efforts. Therefore, our approach emphasizes solutions-level architectures appropriate to guide downstream systems engineering efforts rather than enterprise reporting requirements.



The good news is that many EA resources (tools, model, methodologies and best practices) have already been established for Federal agencies by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Department of Defense. The bad news is that "mandatory" use and reporting requirements are imposed on Federal agencies that have little to do with mission requirements.

The trick is to take a pragmatic "function over form" approach that leverages the useful and applicable elements of these resources without getting caught up in the non-value adding mandatory parts. Mandatory reporting requirements and formats should be a by-product of EA efforts, not the focus.

## Elements of pragmatic approach

A pragmatic approach shifts the focus from adherence to EA standards, models, methodologies and tools to enabling better business and technology decisions by delivering solutions and services address mission strategic business needs.

Elements of pragmatic approach include:

- **Focus on delivering to agency stakeholders.** Value-added, actionable EA means focusing on mission value and outcomes; so develop a thorough understanding of mission strategy and operating model — and the business and IT capabilities necessary to support them. With the right focus, mandatory compliance and reporting will require be a by-product of your effort.

- **Understand scope.** EA is typically practiced at three levels within an organization and across several domains:
  - *Enterprise-level* initiatives address broad mission requirement
  - *Segment-level* initiatives support specific subsets of mission requirements
  - *Project-level* initiatives help achieve mission requirements by delivering specific capabilities.
  - *Domains*—focus on a different element of an architecture—business process, data, application functionality, and technology.

EA initiatives should be geared to the scope of the effort they are supporting but always with a focus on enabling effective mission delivery.

- **Be practical.** Focus on easy-to-achieve objectives around noteworthy customer pain points, and proactively communicate real examples of early success. Architecture standards and governance models should be practical and tailored to fit your unique situation. Avoid copying a framework and blindly following it.
- **Be sensitive to agency culture.** An agency’s culture has perhaps the largest impact on EA adoption and maturity. An effective assessment will focus extra attention on organizational

awareness, acceptance, adoption, and competencies. Tailor your EA approach to accommodate the realities of your agency’s culture. The goal is to make EA part of your organization’s basic operating model, not just a compliance check mark.

- **Don’t overlook people.** EA capabilities vary widely from one agency to the next and may or may not be sufficient to support mission requirements. That’s why it’s important to honestly assess the maturity of your existing EA capabilities. Having people with the right mission knowledge and expertise is essential to success, particularly in light of the current talent shortage. External consultants can be leveraged to address shortcomings.
- **Leverage private industry best practices.** Because federal agency mission drivers, requirements and constraints are unique, existing Federal EA guidance may not be sufficient; don’t overlook the benefit from lessons learned, tools, models and methodologies successfully deployed in the private sector.

## Conclusion

In order to get beyond the disillusionment of unrealized promises from previous efforts and recognize the productivity benefits EA can provide, agency EA efforts need to renew their focus on mission outcomes and leverage relevant existing EA tools and guidance to identify and execute “simple solutions” to complex and evolving business requirements.

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