

Enterprise Coherence Governance with GEA

A 15 Year Co-evolution of Practice and Theory (Extended Abstract)

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This extended abstract is based on our work as reported in [PWB21].

The environment in which modern day enterprises⁴ need to operate, changes constantly. As a consequence, enterprises need to transform almost continuously to keep up with these changes. Such enterprise transformations are likely to touch upon a rich mix of aspects of the enterprise, such as human resourcing, finance, reporting structures, etc. As a consequence, enterprise transformations typically involve many stakeholders [PWAK18] who (should) influence the direction and/or speed of the transformation.

To make enterprise transformations feasible and manageable, they are typically managed as a portfolio of transformation programs and projects. Such a portfolio, together with ‘spontaneous’ (bottom-up) changes, all need to be mutually *coordinated* while also maintaining alignment to the enterprise’s strategy. A lack of such a coordination will likely lead to ‘local optimizations’ favoring short term and/or local interests over the overall interests of the enterprise. The latter ultimately leads to a degradation of the enterprise’s *coherence* [PWAK18], i.e. *the extent to which all relevant aspects of an enterprise are interconnected, such that these connections facilitate an enterprise in achieving its management’s desired results* [SRW21].

Traditionally, project management and program management are put forward as being responsible for such coordination tasks. However, these approaches focus primarily on the management of typical project parameters such as budgets, resource use, deadlines, etc. When being too focused on such project parameters, one runs the risk of conducting only local and or partial improvements at the level of specific projects [PWAK18]. Regretfully, however, this risk often materializes more often than not. As a result, enterprises often fail to actually realize the *desired* transformation.

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⁴ Including commercial companies, government agencies, etc.

Enterprise architecture has been positioned as a *means* to enable such coordination and associated governance of enterprise coherence [PWAK18]. At the same time, however, one has to observe how most existing enterprise architecture approaches, such as TOGAF [The09] and ArchiMate [IJLP09], follow a rather ‘engineering oriented’ style towards enterprise transformation. This engineering oriented style is typically embodied in an underlying architecture/design framework (typically involving of several columns and/or rows) in terms of which one is expected to architect/design the enterprise.

To coordinate change, and ultimately ensure enterprise coherence, stakeholder interests, formal and informal power structures within enterprises and its context, should be taken as a starting point [PWAK18]. Where the more traditional engineering-style approaches involve a set of pre-determined aspects of an enterprise that should be aligned, the notion of *enterprise coherence* aims to go beyond this by focusing on “*the extent to which all relevant aspects of an enterprise are interconnected*” [PWAK18, SRW21], where the set of *relevant aspects* is highly organisation specific.

In 2006, these insights triggered the Dutch consultancy firm Ordina to initiate a multi-client research program to develop an enterprise architecture method that would indeed focus on *enterprise coherence* and the need to more explicitly govern this coherence during enterprise transformations. By 2007 this resulted in the formal establishment of a multi-party research and development program⁵. This program has resulted in the development (and ongoing evolution) of the GEA method.

In this presentation, we will (1) reflect on the development of GEA as a co-evolution between theory and practice, while also (2) presenting the core of (the current version of) GEA and illustrating this in terms of a real-world (social housing) case, as well as (3) discuss several lessons learned in applying GEA across different organizations.

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