



# CONQUERING THE BUSINESS ARCHITECTURE SUMMIT

## Lessons from the Mountain for Establishing a Business Architecture Practice

— By Whynde Kuehn, Founder, SZE Consulting Inc. | March 2018

**E**stablishing a business architecture practice is a journey of passion, persistence and reward. Inspired by over a decade and a half of helping organizations to mature their practices—combined with personal mountaineering experiences—I will share a vision of what is possible and some wisdom on how to get there, using mountain as metaphor. There are many parallels between the two, especially because business architecture practitioners and leaders are by far some of the most determined and passionate people I've met on the planet.

### THE BUSINESS ARCHITECTURE JOURNEY

With an infinite set of options for how we can spend our time and career, choosing a journey that is worthy of us matters. The business architecture journey is one of those. It is important, however, to have a vision what is possible—what the top of that mountain looks like—to provide some direction and inspiration to get there. Organizations may take different routes to the summit, but they generally go through a common set of milestones which are briefly described here.

#### The Trek to Base Camp



Reaching business architecture Base Camp is an achievement in itself to celebrate. When you reach Base Camp, you will have a solid understanding of business architecture among your business architecture leaders and practitioners, a defined value proposition and vision for the discipline within your organization, some level of formal commitment to proceed, and a team established (even if it's just a team of one). Some business architecture teams will have also spent time “proving” the value of business architecture to their organizations during this stage in order to get the buy-in to proceed.

# CONQUERING THE BUSINESS ARCHITECTURE SUMMIT

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The trek to base camp can be deceiving though, because while it may have required significant time and effort just to get here, now the real climb begins.

## Business Architecture – Camp 1



Business architecture Camp 1 is all about putting the foundation in place so that business architecture is positioned correctly, can scale across the organization, and be used to solve increasingly complex challenges. When you reach Camp 1, you will have some structure and formality around each aspect of business architecture at an enterprise level (not just for one business unit or focus area) including:

- **Knowledgebase** – Core business architecture domains (capabilities, value streams, organization and information) have been defined, cross-mapped and captured within a business architecture knowledgebase. Some mapping of the extended business architecture domains and cross-mapping to other disciplines may be beginning. Foundational business architecture standards, practices and governance are established and adhered to.
- **Usage** – Business architecture is used in an increasing number of business scenarios to provide business value.
- **Team** – The business architect role has been formally defined and business architects are named, appropriately skilled, and allocated to priorities which align with the business architecture value proposition.
- **Practice** – The business architecture function has been established with the appropriate executive sponsorship and is actively being advanced (through deliberate practice measurement and planning), socialized, and integrated with other teams across the strategy execution life cycle.

## Business Architecture – Camp 2



Making it to Camp 2 is serious altitude and something to be proud of. When you reach business architecture Camp 2, all aspects of your practice (knowledgebase, usage, team and practice) will be scaling and maturing further to meet the needs of the organization. For example, the business architecture knowledgebase expands and becomes an even more valuable resource, and business architects develop an even deeper and broader set of skills. In Camp 2, you will also shift your focus more to the widespread usage of business architecture for a variety of business scenarios, especially since less energy is needed to socialize and establish the business architecture practice at this point.

# CONQUERING THE BUSINESS ARCHITECTURE SUMMIT

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## Business Architecture – Camp 3



Many organizations have a breakthrough when they take the leap and use business architecture on their first large-scale cross-business unit change initiative, such as an enterprise-wide business transformation. In this case, business architecture (and IT architecture) facilitates cross-business unit translation of the entire scope of business direction into a comprehensive architectural vision and strategic roadmap, which can then be executed through multiple coordinated initiatives over time to deliver solutions. This provides a tangible example demonstrating what real cross-business unit collaboration and top-down design and planning looks like—versus the bottom-up, project-focused, siloed approach that is frequently taken. Light bulbs go on and a new vision for what is possible begins to form in people’s minds. After this milestone, business architecture can really take off. This is the moment you’ve been waiting for and this is why you invested time early on to establish a strong foundation.

## Business Architecture – Camp 4



Building on the success from Camp 3, when you reach business architecture Camp 4, your business architecture team will become involved in an increasing number of large-scale change initiatives. If it wasn’t positioned there already, business architecture will rightfully take its place as a bridge between strategy and execution—upstream from initiatives. Executives may even declare that the organization is now architecture-driven. You will see an enterprise mindset for strategy execution emerge and the culture of your organization begin to shift.

## The Business Architecture Summit



When you conquer the business architecture summit and are standing at the top, that means business architecture is fully embedded into your organization. It’s not treated as an isolated discipline, but will become “just the way you do business.” Business architecture will be leveraged to drive strategy translation into solutions, business transformations, innovation, planning, decision-making, performance improvement, simplification, and business and IT alignment. Business architecture will be fully integrated with related functions, disciplines and processes across the entire strategy execution life cycle. Business architects will be highly skilled and become trusted advisors to executives, business and IT. In fact, business architecture may even become a competitive advantage for your organization since it can execute strategies and adapt to change quicker and more effectively than other organizations.

# THE BUSINESS ARCHITECTURE SUMMIT



**THE BUSINESS ARCHITECTURE SUMMIT**  
Business Architecture Practice Fully Embedded into Organization



**CAMP 4**  
Organization Becomes Architecture-Driven;  
Culture Begins to Shift



**CAMP 3**  
Business Architecture Leveraged on First  
Large-Scale Change Initiative(s)



**CAMP 2**  
Business Architecture in Widespread Use;  
All Aspects of Discipline Scaling and Maturing



**CAMP 1**  
Core Foundation of Business Architecture  
Knowledgebase, Usage, Team and Practice in Place



**BASE CAMP**  
Business Architecture Practice Established



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# CONQUERING THE BUSINESS ARCHITECTURE SUMMIT

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## A Note on Business Architecture Maturity

While the intention here was to share a conceptual vision of a mature business architecture practice and the stages it goes through, these do parallel the formal Business Architecture Maturity Model (BAMM)<sup>™</sup> in the BIZBOK<sup>®</sup> Guide. Base Camp is roughly equivalent to level 2 with some aspects of level 3. Camps 1 and 2 are roughly equivalent to level 3. Camps 3 and 4 are roughly equivalent to level 4, and The Business Architecture Summit is roughly equivalent to level 5.

## LESSONS FROM THE MOUNTAIN FOR ESTABLISHING A BUSINESS ARCHITECTURE PRACTICE

Mountains (physical or metaphorical ones) teach us about life, adversity and conquering big goals. Here are a few pieces of wisdom they have taught me over the years about the personal side of this journey, and it is an honor to be able to share them with you.

### 1. Climbing a mountain takes time. It is a journey. Love it.

Yes, mountain climbing requires physical and mental strength. But it requires patience, persistence and passion—and mountaineers would say there's a little bit of luck too. There is only one way to get to the top and it is *One. Step. At. A. Time.* Those steps add up to days and camps at higher elevations until one day you are standing on the top. This requires tremendous patience, not giving up, and falling in love not only with where you are going, but with the journey itself—whatever it decides to bring. Achieving a really big goal is just a series of small goals, and climbing a mountain is just a series of steps.

Just like gazing up at the top of a mountain, conceiving the journey required to establish a business architecture practice can be intimidating. Yes, some business architecture know-how is necessary, but the same three qualities are essential: patience, persistence and passion—and maybe a little bit of luck. While there are ways to accelerate the journey, it still will take time, especially in a large organization. Our organizations can only change so fast because this is not about blueprints—it's about people, a new mindset, and new ways of executing business direction which may be different from how we've been operating for decades.

Have patience, don't give up, and learn to love your vision and the journey. Know that every step, every person and every win brings you closer to your summit. Guaranteed.

## 2. You need to know what mountain you are climbing, but you don't need to see it all to make progress.

As you ascend a mountain, the summit is not always visible. It may take some time trekking or climbing before the true summit even comes into view. Or, you might be close to the summit, but due to conditions—beyond your control—you still can't see it, even as you are climbing towards it. In addition, climbers may experience what appears to be the pinnacle, but when approaching it, you discover the true summit lies some distance beyond. Mountaineers have a name for this phenomenon: *false summit*. False summits can deflate a climber's hope and sense of accomplishment.

We want to know everything. Now. It is our human nature. However, chances are that business architecture and the vision of what it can do resonated with and inspired you for good reasons. You chose to embark on this business architecture *journey*—knowing that it would not be easy—because you are a person that wants to make a difference in your organization and continue to evolve as a professional.

Trust your experienced climbers (fellow business architecture practitioners) and the chosen route. Know that there will be setbacks and that gains may be hard won. Have faith that you've chosen the right mountain to climb in the first place, and that the path to the business architecture summit will continue to unfold as you take the journey. Just keep stepping.

## 3. Know that the journey is going to be uncomfortable sometimes. Keep climbing anyway.

Mountain climbing can be really uncomfortable—hard climbing days, heavy packs, harsh weather, altitude sickness, even just the lack of a shower, clean clothes or a clean dish can get to you after awhile. However, there is this phenomenon that happens: when you are on a mountain you dream of all the comforts of home and society, but as soon as you are off the mountain and enjoying all of that comfort, then you're dreaming about getting back to the mountain! I think this is the human spirit at its best, which architects embody. We can't help ourselves from doing the things we think will make our organizations better, regardless how challenging they may be.

What can bring comfort though is to adjust our expectations and assume that the path will not be perfect and effortless and look forward to tackling whatever challenges come our way. There will be people that do not see our vision for business architecture. There will be challenges like not having enough funding to grow our teams despite what we are expected to deliver. There will be competing priorities. People will make decisions we may not agree with. However, if this was easy, would it even be worth taking the journey?

# CONQUERING THE BUSINESS ARCHITECTURE SUMMIT

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Embrace the uncomfortable. Know that you will see views along the way that few others will—that's one of the treasures of climbing. The business architecture journey will test you, change you, and in the end enable both your organization and you personally to reach new heights. Greatness and growth do not come from being comfortable.

## 4. Sometimes you have to go backwards to go forwards.

On a big mountain expedition, one finds themselves frequently going in both directions during the ascent. As mountaineers say, "Climb High (Carry High), Sleep Low." While descending seems like a counterintuitive thing to do during a climb, it is actually a brilliant strategy for purposes of acclimatization, scouting out conditions, and moving heavy gear in smaller loads.

I think we often use forward progress as a gauge for success, but sometimes going what could be perceived as "backwards" or "staying in place" for awhile is what is needed. Business architecture leaders and advocates may leave us for new opportunities. Mature business architecture practices can backslide sometimes. These are just normal challenges. Changing mindsets and behavior in large organizations takes time and constant attention.

Remember that you are still on the journey, which includes necessary ups and downs. Have faith that overall you're still going up—and again, just keep stepping.

## 5. The people you journey with are everything.

On a mountain, the importance of a team becomes really apparent. On long expeditions, you will spend weeks (or months) together, share intimate moments, solve challenges, and triumph together. Your climbing partners will cheer you on, help you through hard times, and even share their last few precious M&Ms with you. Depending on the mountain, you may even be roped up together, traveling over crevasses or ascending a challenging peak on short pitches. You actually put your lives in each other's hands. Things like competence, communication and coordination quickly move from buzzwords to essentials for success and survival. The strength of the entire team and how well it functions together is a determining factor in whether or not you will reach the summit.

It can be easy to lose sight of the power of a team in a corporate setting, but the architects, leaders and advocates you work with are your people. You are on a business architecture journey together to change your organization and you will become bonded through the experience as you trust each other, solve problems together, and triumph together. You will likely embark on other journeys after this one as well.

# CONQUERING THE BUSINESS ARCHITECTURE SUMMIT

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Embody the spirit, seriousness and strength of a climbing team as your own, and take care of your team members like your life depended on it. There will be nothing more rewarding than reaching the summit together.

## 6. Keep on climbing.

While the promise of the summit anchors and inspires the journey, it is worth noting that comparatively speaking, very little time is spent there. I spent 0.12% of my entire last climb on the top. In addition, the summit is promised to no one—and it might be due to conditions beyond your control that prevent you from even attempting it. Regardless of the outcome, the journey is always worth taking.

When you reach the business architecture summit for your organization, gather your team and celebrate. This is a significant and rare achievement. There will of course still be much work ahead because in some ways this is just the beginning. With architectural thinking embedded into the fabric of your organization, you will be driving major strategic changes and solving challenges bigger than you ever dreamed of.

Become a Sherpa for someone else to help them conquer their business architecture summit. We are a small community and your experiences and wisdom will go a long way to help others. And then, set your sights on your next mountain—whether it is a new challenge within your organization or helping to establish a business architecture practice elsewhere—and keep on climbing.

**To all the business architecture leaders and practitioners who have had the vision, courage and conviction to establish business architecture within their organizations and as a global discipline... and to those who are just beginning their business architecture journeys now—here's to you. Together we have the opportunity of a lifetime to make a meaningful difference to our organizations, societies and world. Keep climbing.**



# CONQUERING THE BUSINESS ARCHITECTURE SUMMIT

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Whynde Kuehn is Founder and Principal of [S2E Consulting Inc.](#), a consulting firm dedicated to accelerating successful business transformations, with a focus on *Fortune 500* companies. She is a long-time business architecture practitioner, educator and industry thought leader. She is a former practice leader and has developed business architecture for some of the largest business transformations in the world. Whynde also has extensive experience helping clients to build their own business architecture practices. Whynde is a Co-Founder, Board Member and Editorial Board Chair of the Business Architecture Guild.<sup>®</sup> Passionate about using business as a force for good and systematic change, she also founded [Metanoia Global Inc.](#), which helps social entrepreneurs to start, scale and sustain successful businesses.

Whynde Kuehn is an avid and accomplished mountaineer. On January 28th, 2018, she reached the summit of Aconcagua in Argentina (22,841 feet | 6,960 meters), the highest mountain in the world outside of the Himalayas. She did so with Business Architecture Guild<sup>®</sup> business architecture spirit!



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