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HOW TO SUCCEED WITH BUSINESS ARCHITECTURE



An Interview with Coen de Bruijn, Portfolio Director Data & Analytics EMEA at Nike¹

From the podcast "Business Architecture Practice Leader Series (2 of 9)"

WHYNDE KUEHN: Now, it is my pleasure to introduce Coen de Bruijn, who recently joined Nike as the Program Director for Data and Analytics EMEA. Before that, he was the Head of Business Architecture for several years at ABN AMRO. So, could you tell us, how do you position the value of business architecture and what unique outcomes are you focused on delivering?

COEN DE BRUIJN: Yeah, if I look at the value proposition of business architecture, I would actually summarize it is connecting the dots in complex environments. It's unraveling that complexity, giving insight in that complexity. Architecture would give insight into specific questions or maybe even vague questions that people have. So that's how I would summarize the value proposition of business architecture.

WHYNDE KUEHN: What do you think are the key factors that have made business architecture successful and how did you gain by it and with whom?

COEN DE BRUIJN: Well, business architecture isn't something that by default, everybody who looks at it says, okay, this is immediately sticking. So you need to make sure that you really listen to your stakeholders and whoever you're interacting with. I've compared business architecture in the past with a Swiss knife. Right. So there are all these different tools that you can use to give that insight, to connect the dots, to unravel complexity. However, you need to really listen to what that stakeholder at that moment in time is really worrying about or wants to know in order to know what part of the Swiss knife you have to pull out and start working with. So and in order to do that, you have to have your story straight, not the complete story in one. Go and tell that story to everybody and be very enthusiastic, be very enthusiastic, but be really specific about the thing that at that point in time makes the most sense and brings the most value. That's sort of the thing that I think works best. And then, of course, make sure that it is brought in terms and in ways that your stakeholder understands. No technical terms, no difficult words. Make it work for you and your environment.

¹ Please note that much of Coen's insights were drawn from his experience at ABN AMRO, where he was the Head of Business Architecture for several years prior to joining Nike.



WHYNDE KUEHN: I'm curious, what has surprised you the most about the business architecture journey?

COEN DE BRUIJN: How it is received by people. If you provide an insight and if you are able to connect with the people and make sure that people understand their complex environment better and they are able to make better decisions out of it, the things that you can accomplish after that, the moments that people say, okay, now from now on, I'm going to involve you more and more. So the more you show, the more it was where people came to us in the beginning. It was really getting on the table after that was maybe sometimes even trying to make sure you choose the right people because it was so many tables you were invited to. So that that that really surprised me. It is really a powerful tool and people saw this as such. So that really surprised me. And to what extent the advice that we were giving was so much better as we were than we were doing before we were ever using architecture.

WHYNDE KUEHN: I love it! And finally, what advice would you like to share with people out there who are starting and growing business architecture practices within their organizations?

COEN DE BRUIJN: I think there are a couple. I think, first off, it is about people, the key asset to the success. Make sure that the diverse group of people that works on business architecture, sometimes not even formally, you might have enthusiastic people that are out there, sort of an extended army embracing the business architecture methods without even knowing that they are doing business architecture. So that's one thing. That might be process managers, that might be consultants, that might be business analysts. All these kind of people are trying to understand how to move an organization forward and to answer difficult questions. So make a diverse group of people, a coalition of the willing that actually moves, such as things like business architecture forward. I guess the second thing is, as I said, listen, listen, listen, make sure that you understand your organization. And that is also enabling you to mold the thing that you do with business architecture to what works for you. Business, architecture, beautiful reference models are great as a body of knowledge gives you a tremendous amount of information, but what you can do with that information, what works for you and use it in your environment, in your organization. And that really, really key. And I would say, third, adopt along the way. Don't take too much to one thing. Try, try, try and then move on, learn from your mistakes and move on from there and allow yourself also to make some of the mistakes, because trust me, you will make some and learn from them and move on.

WHYNDE KUEHN: Coen, thank you so much for your wisdom and inspiration, we are celebrating all that you've achieved and we wish you all the best.

COEN DE BRUIJN: Thank you so much and thanks for having me. Good to speak with you again.