HOW TO SUCCEED WITH BUSINESS ARCHITECTURE

An Interview with Grant Ecker, Vice President of Global Enterprise Architecture at Walgreens Boots Alliance

From the podcast "Business Architecture Practice Leader Series (3 of 9)"

WHYNDE KUEHN: I am delighted to introduce Grant Ecker. Grant is currently the Vice President of Global Enterprise Architecture at Walgreens Boots Alliance and a long-time supporter of the business, architecture, community and discipline. Grant, welcome. Let's start with positioning. And so tell us, what is the value proposition of business architecture for your organization or what unique outcomes are you focused on delivering?

GRANT ECKER: Oh, I love that question. And such a pleasure to be here, Whynde, and thank you for your leadership in this important dimension of our architecture industry. I'll say that business architecture is really what helps us become a forward-looking architecture practice. Business architecture is the tip of the spear to create the platform strategy and roadmap, and to clarify business strategy. And from that, drive the outcomes around how we actually get to where we want to go, whether it's a view of the platform or strategy and roadmap, we can drive it into execution and define platform information outcomes, scoping and aligning technology and platform strategy, and then publishing that strategy and overseeing execution to make sure it aligns or the other way. When you're looking at it from the business lens, which is what I hope we choose as our dominant lens, it is clarifying that business strategy and those imperatives align to the capabilities that are going to be needed to achieve that outcome, to then assess the maturity within that lens. So the capability, maturity of any particular capability will be different, whether you measure it from a business lens, an execution lens of a particular scope. So really, for the scope that you're currently looking at, a specific strategy, a specific imperative.

What do you need in terms of, first the what, capabilities, and then what dimensions? People, process, information, technology. And to ask the questions of the people that are truly doing the delivery of that part of your business. How mature are we in those dimensions? And bring that back to leadership to determine to gather that future state with the voice of those closest to the execution of that capability, informing your view because you kind of move up in the altitude, you tend to move away from the reality of what the real experience Is when you create the roadmap and then align execution with that business strategy. So what's cool is that last bullet, align execution with that business strategy is the connection point between your IT

platform architecture strategy, where we've defined for each macro level capability, where we're trying to go now, looking at a specific business, a business stream, where are they trying to go and how can we be a force multiplier and get architecture to where the architecture of our organization, the landscape advancing at the same time we're achieving business outcomes. So, it's not a technology for technology sake, but it's a walk towards your technology future state with a business enablement lens along the way.

WHYNDE KUEHN: What do you think are the key factors that have made business architecture successful within your organization? How did you get buy-in and with whom?

GRANT ECKER: So it's a mixed story today. I think in the Boots organization we have just an absolute wonderful story around business architects being the first voice of IT and the three-year planning process with the business. And that came from years of work to build trust within IT, for them to allow us to fully engage with their business stakeholders and then to have the ability to speak in terms of the business within their own language, driving them to the outcomes they're seeking and showing a track record of being that conversion lens that helps them translate those ideal outcomes into what the technology, people, process and information tracks outside of it need to be. And that's really sort of the dream. I would take that outcome of an architecture - engagement and trust across the business - over the perfect methodology.

But then on the Walgreen side, we aren't there yet and we're actively working to invest to create that same success we see in the Boots business, in the Walgreens business. And for us, it's starting with a few key partners, a few key business imperatives that are transformational in nature, not just opening another store, but really changing our business model and trying to build partnerships with our IT colleagues and then create a facilitated conversation to help those business stakeholders evolve their vision with the expectation that as we do this time and time again, we'll slowly evolve to the point that we see in the Boots business.

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

GRANT ECKER: Honestly, the arriving. I claim, no success from the Boots team and these folks where were at this point of success on their own. I was genuinely shocked to learn the level of trust and the level of empowerment the business architects had in the UK as I joined this organization about seven months ago. It was absolutely enlightening and set the bar in terms of what's really possible for me and for us across the architecture practice. I'm not saying it's perfect. Again, there's some rough corners that maybe we've abused the capability model here and there, but to be able to stand with the business and be a true partner to them, and to have less of the big four consulting firms coming in to solve things and to be that partner. That's a dream, right? That is what excites me personally about being an architect, is to be that translation layer between business and IT. So every day I get closer to that Boots business and learn more about what they're doing and vision and dream of ideas that we can take into the Walgreen side, the more excited I get about what we're doing and why we're here.

WHYNDE KUEHN: Just one last question, what advice would you like to share with people out there who are maybe just starting their business architecture practices or growing a business architecture practice?

GRANT ECKER: My number one advice is...I'm going to have a few. One, you're not alone. There's groups like your Biz Arch Mastery platform and its affiliated coaching and programs. There's a lot of resources out there available to you. Don't think you have to invent this stuff on your own. In fact, if you do, you're probably going to paint yourself in a corner. So get the help of the community. You'll be amazed just how open and welcoming this community is and really reach out to those resources. Learn from the BIZBOK, engage your peers. Somebody with the same title as you in another business that doesn't compete. I promise if you reach out, you'll be amazed at what responses you'll get. So do that. And I also encourage you that scale is the answer, not perfection. So find ways to bring others along in the conversation. So true business architecture

success is when you bring a community of folks together aligned to business architecture, thought maybe the business analyst, the product owners and managers that the is right. Not everyone's going to be a business architect on day one. Show them tools, bring them through facilitated workshops that create journey maps to solve a problem, and throw a business canvas out there. Get people playing with this stuff and joining the conversation, because that's the force multiplier. When the community starts to use this as their language, then you'll see the implications of what you can do with this practice. Expand across your organization.

WHYNDE KUEHN: Grant, thank you so much for your leadership and for joining us today and sharing such wisdom, insights and inspiration with all of us. I just want to congratulate you and your team on all that you've achieved. And we wish you all the best.

GRANT ECKER: And likewise, thanks for your support and leadership in this industry. It's absolutely an honor to be a part of it.