A question of evolution: Are IT Architects equipped for the next generation?

(Original creator: bolarotibi)

Guest contributor, Bola Rotibi from analyst firm Creative Intellect Consulting

IT is changing and disruption is at its heart. Is it a time of "survival of the fittest"? Are IT Architects equipped for enabling disruptive innovation that will drive the next generation? On 25th to 26th April 2013 the UK Chapter of the International Association of Software Architects (IASA UK) hosted its first UK Software Architect Summit. It was a two day conference packed with a broad range of sessions from leading industry and market practitioners with a single goal: To help Software Architects and their peers within the IT architect spectrum to equip themselves to be "fit enough" for survival. After all the famous phrase of "survival of the fittest", coined by the philosopher Henry Spence as a synonym for Darwin's "natural selection" was actually used by Darwin as a metaphor for "better adapted for immediate, local environment". It is in the vein of the latter that the Summit looked to understand how the IT Architect fraternity must equip themselves to better adapt for disruptive innovation. NOTE: It is perhaps worth mentioning for clarity and qualification, the role of the IT architect does not necessarily sit "above" that of the core software application developer as such i.e. their relationship with one another should be symbiotic and dynamic. But in truth, many IT architects will have come from a foundation in programming code as their mainstay. So as a pedigree and rite of passage to effective architectural competency, the effective developer may progress to becoming an architect if they so wish. So what's life currently like for an IT architect?

A day in the life of your typical enterprise software architect

For many IT architects, no two days are rarely alike, making it hard to quantify a typical day for an architect. Yes there are the common tasks that any IT architect will undertake. Also, like many other office based jobs, there will be the familiar gathering around the water cooler or the coffee machine where gossip, intrigues and useful tips will be swapped. However, it has long been established that being an IT architect involves wearing many different hats. The roll requires such a multifaceted set of skills that one wanders why we do not hear more often the phrase "Is there a software or IT architect in the house?" when someone or something is showing signs of difficulty. For sure, there has been many an occasion when I myself have wanted to shout out this very phrase especially when, in the course of interacting with the wider world, I have happened upon a misguided business strategy or a failing software application, infrastructure or business process. Interviewing a few enterprise architects out in the field I identified seven roles that an architect performs over the course of a year, all of which play a part in their day to day schedule. Digging deeper, I found one role characteristic and management aspiration that is on the face of it politically incorrect. It is a characteristic or capability that, if looked from a purely objective standpoint, hints of a level control that could potentially cater for enabling disruptive innovation. So rather than outline a typical day, I feel the reader is better served by my outlining of the typical tasks an IT architect undertakes, which I will do in my next blog post. Only then might it be obvious where that "rogue" characteristic comes into its own.