5 Mistakes to Avoid in Enterprise Architecture

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When done right, EA has the power to drive major business change. Don't jeopardize your efforts by making these common mistakes.

Introduction

Like many others, your organization is probably feeling the pressure to work smarter, increasing efficiencies, output, and synergies while decreasing expenses and risk. As you embark on change projects to make these objectives a reality, Enterprise Architecture (EA) can help you do so with confidence.

Whether you're looking for ways to optimize existing assets or undergoing brand-new digital transformation initiatives, EA empowers you to gain control over your business like never before—but many organizations struggle to reach this point. In fact, Gartner reports that 72% of organizations are either starting, restarting or renewing their Enterprise Architecture efforts—so what's causing this disconnect?

To answer this question, we asked enterprise architects about their biggest sources of trouble when executing change projects. Regardless of their organizations' maturity or tech savviness, the most common types of critical mistakes relate to:

1. **Aligning Enterprise Architecture initiatives with business goals**

2. **Securing quality data**

3. **Organization-wide communication**

4. **Keeping Enterprise Architecture data organized**

5. **Building an Enterprise Architecture program that's adaptable and enduring**

Keep reading to learn what these mistakes look like in practice. With an understanding of what not to do in EA, you can avoid common but avoidable missteps and design a framework for change that drives meaningful, enduring impact.

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32.8% of respondents said that while working with EA, the biggest mistake that they learned from was related to....

Not Aligning Enterprise Architecture Initiatives With Business Goals

MISTAKE #1

Not Aligning Enterprise Architecture Initiatives With Business Goals

EA efforts need to map to overarching business objectives to drive enduring value.

With digital transformation becoming something of a buzzword, organizations may get swept up in change projects without first defining how those projects offer clear and measurable value to their business. Rather than focusing on solving specific, timely problems, IT teams fixate on modeling processes, information, and systems—essentially dedicating their time and energy to justifying the existence of the projects more than the solutions they offer.

By approaching EA in this way, not only will you be overcomplicating processes with unnecessary changes or investing in technologies that don't address employees' pressing needs, but it will also be more difficult to secure organizational support for projects if there's no true reasoning for them.

EA efforts should map to defined, company-specific objectives. Before investing in new technologies, consider what your organization is trying to achieve right now. Is its primary goal to:

✔ Achieve strategic transformation?

✔ Manage mergers and acquisitions?

✔ Plan and execute cloud migration?

✔ Ensure IT investments deliver on their cost?

✔ Improve security and compliance?

✔ Reduce risk?

✔ Cut costs?

Think of Enterprise Architecture like a lens for assessing how a business operates through its IT infrastructure. Which technologies can you adopt or adjust to propel you toward your business goals? By confidently articulating the end goal, you're equipped with the guiding criteria that will make the task of analyzing investments much more straightforward.

To align EA efforts with business goals, you need to consult your organization's leaders and stakeholders. Beyond being informative, leaders' participation increases the likelihood of success for EA efforts. As the financiers of IT investments, these individuals hold the power to control the scope of EA initiatives, and so their investment makes it easier to influence strategic technology decisions.

In short, to receive support, your focus should be on solving business problems, not the modeling processes, information, and systems to facilitate getting those answers.

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Change only happens if the organization buys into it. Great data models sitting alone in 'the ivory tower' make no difference in the execution of the business.
– Ardoq user

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18.2%

of respondents said that while working with EA, the biggest mistake that they learned from was related to....

Working With Low-Quality Data

MISTAKE #2
Working With Low-Quality Data

Without a contextualized, up-to-date understanding of the business ecosystem you're working within, you can't accurately predict the organizational impact of change.

Once goals are established for change projects—like reducing a bottleneck in a particular workflow—it can be easy to zero in on only that workflow when planning out the project. IT teams conduct a limited initial data intake, neglecting to understand how that workflow impacts other business variables (e.g. roles in other departments). Worse, they might also not check back on whether any factors in that workflow have changed throughout the project. This shortsightedness can create unintended consequences for the Enterprise Architecture project because it was constructed in an unstable environment.

No matter the size of an organization, there's a myriad of interconnected systems, processes, products, and people that need to be taken into consideration for EA to work. Instead of acting on gut feelings about which variables to change to arrive at your goal, opt for a data-driven approach to avoid overlooking any key organizational influencers. An Enterprise Architecture platform can capture all this information and transform it into predictive roadmaps that show how changing variables will play out in a variety of scenarios.

With a robust picture of your company's current state, it's easier to accurately identify the specific areas of business that should be adjusted to reach business objectives. Having a more detailed overview also enables you to create KPIs so that you can track progress towards your goal through smaller milestones.

More so than having enough data, you want to ensure you also have accurate data. This means you should look for an EA platform that not only collects organizational information when you start a change project, but that can update that information as needed. While many Enterprise Architecture tools successfully perform an initial modeling of the enterprise, that information becomes outdated as variables fluctuate. Next-generation EA platforms like Ardoq trump legacy EA software in this regard by updating key variables in real-time, which ensures you're not basing business models and then making decisions on observations that are no longer accurate.

Cementing your data-collection process now also paves the way for future EA efforts. With a dynamic platform, data stores are scalable over time, so instead of starting from scratch on the next change project, you can reference what's existing to accelerate the project's completion.

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The board level and executives need to be behind an EA practice, and data is so important driving this.
– Ardoq user

25.5%

of respondents said that while working with EA, the biggest mistake that they learned from was related to....

Failing to Communicate Across the Organization

MISTAKE #3

Failing to Communicate Across the Organization

The people of your organization are essential components in both the planning and execution of change projects—so don't forget to include them.

Once they have executive buy-in on Enterprise Architecture initiatives, it's common for IT teams to drive the rest of the project, but not involving the right people within the organization—or even waiting too long to involve them—can lead to gaps in business models that undermine other areas of business, from wasted spend to outright compliance issues.

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We need to engage people where they are not where we want them to be. It is on us to have a strategy that explains the business value we deliver and present it in a way that resonates with the audience - There is no one size fits all approach.

**- Viktor Kogan, Director Business Architecture, OMERS**

Plus, if EA is conducted by an ivory tower of IT professionals instead of being an organization-wide endeavor, you might overlook those more personal—and very influential—insights that don't appear in a datasheet, like why employees prefer one system over another to get work done. As a result, you'll invest in generalized solutions that employees may not find value in, or scale back on tools that some find critical for business continuity. Getting direct input from teams across the organization results in stronger, more informative data, which translates to more strategic Enterprise Architecture planning.
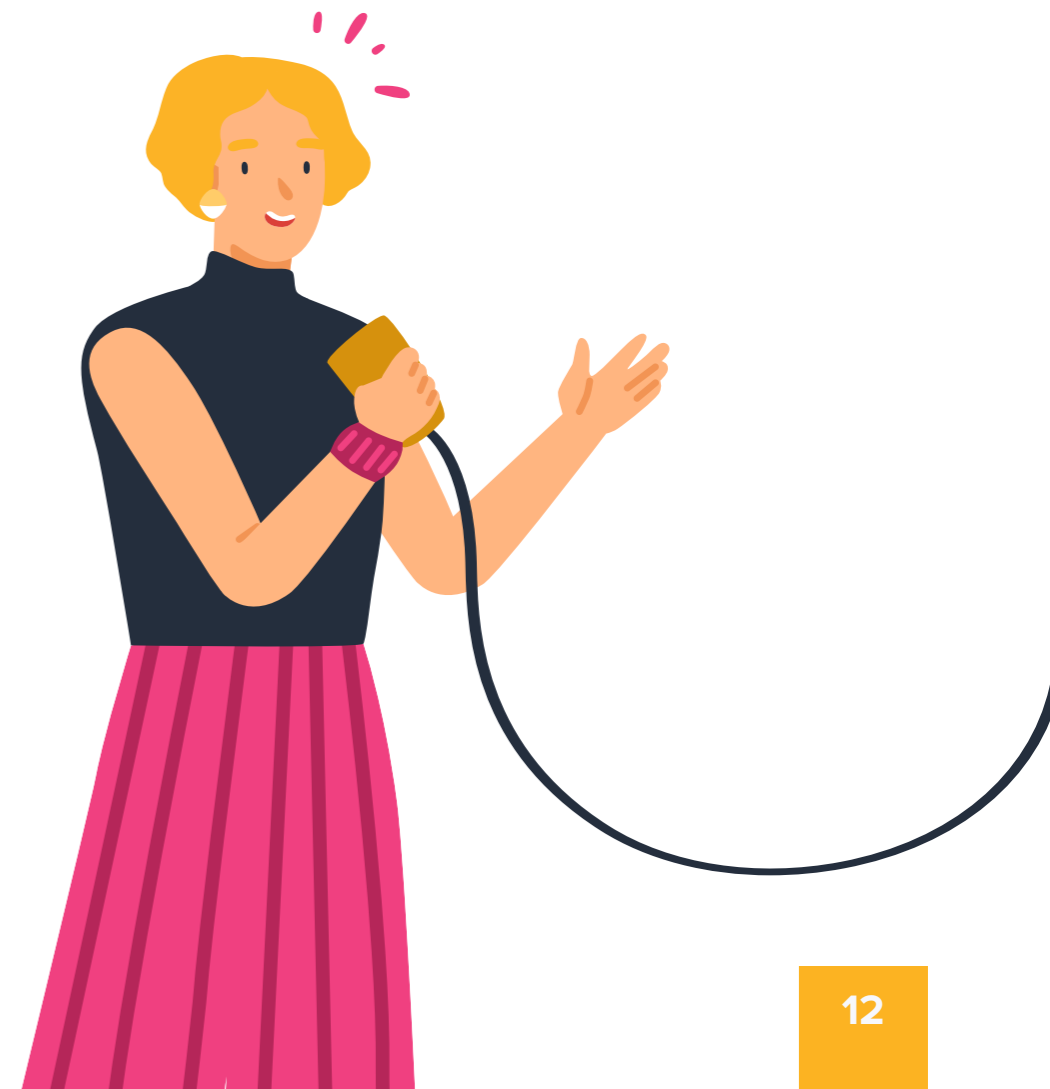
Using a platform like [Ardoq](#) that grants democratic access to employees—and by encouraging them to use it regularly—you secure far more representative data, which empowers you to devise targeted strategies for change. Plus, you'll have less work to do chasing down employee insights.

The communication shouldn't stop there. EA has the power to facilitate organization-wide change, but change management on that scale can be challenging to control. To make sure projects are rolled out effectively, you need to inform employees across ranks and departments of what to expect, and form coalitions of individuals experienced in whatever area the change is occurring within to monitor that change's impact. With an ongoing dialogue about the success—or lack thereof—of a project's implementation, you secure live updates that enable you to course correct if needed.

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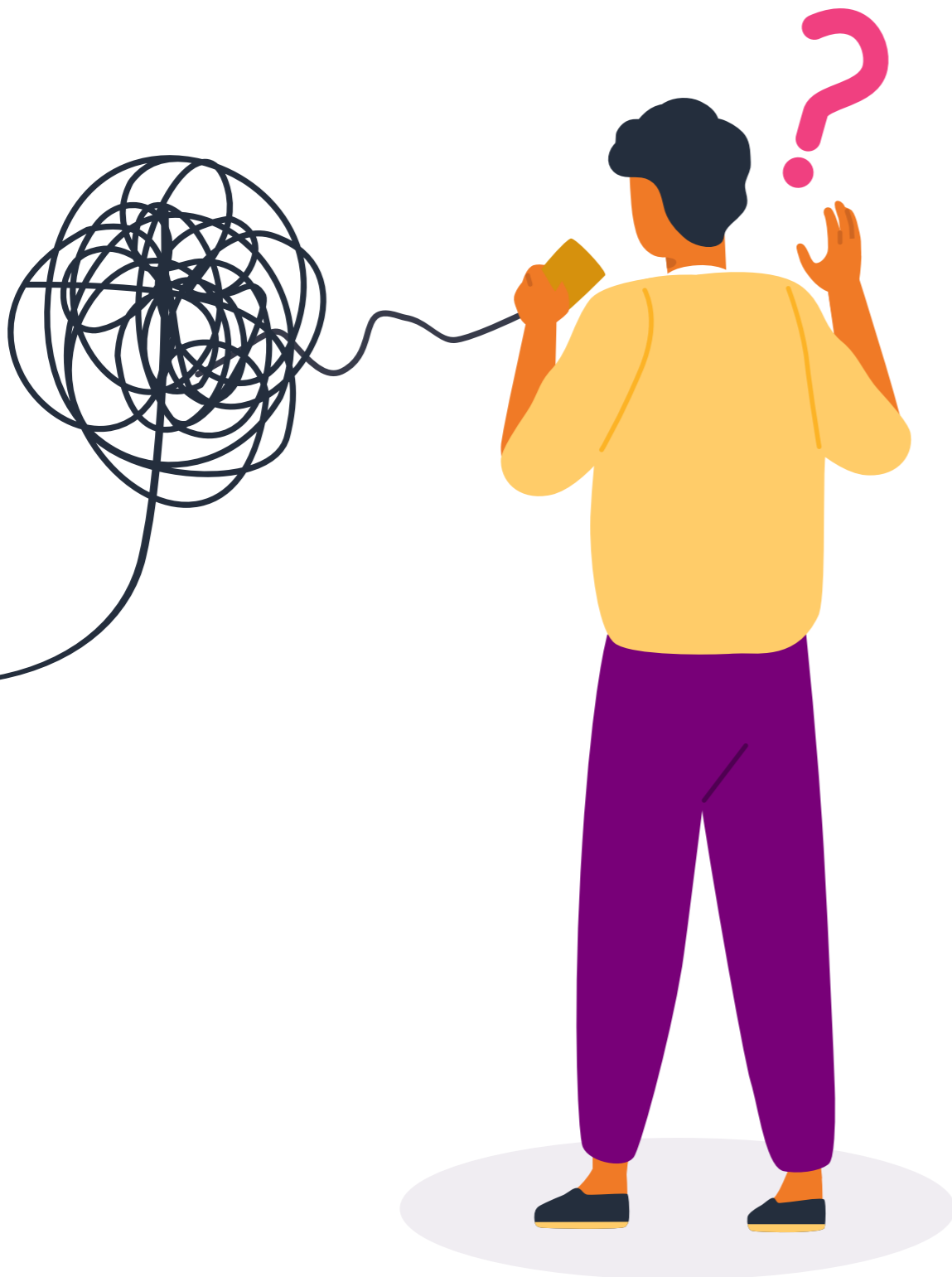
9.1%

of respondents said that while working with EA, the biggest mistake that they learned from was related to....

Working With Unorganized Data

MISTAKE #4

Working With Unorganized Data

How your organizational data is presented influences how you analyze and communicate it, so don't sabotage yourself through mismanagement.

While it's true that you don't need to collect every single data point within your organization for EA to succeed, your information does need to be holistic in accurately represent the organization. This means that it will likely still be high in volume, and if you don't have a way to analyze it cohesively then you'll have difficulties pulling any actionable insights from it. Disorganized data creates a massive hurdle to understanding, leveraging, and communication. Effective organization is there critical.

Even if you've upgraded your Enterprise Architecture practice past pen-and-paper models, if you don't have a hub for aggregating and comparing all these details—from the tools in your tech stack, to their capabilities and the people using them—you risk discounting or misinterpreting pieces of it.

By leveraging a digital-forward platform with a streamlined interface, you're more likely to recognize important insights about:

✔ Underperforming technologies

✔ Processes that are wasting time and/or spend

✔ Areas for quick returns

✔ Underutilized tools and employees

✔ Overlapping capabilities

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As an EA you need to be an expert on the big picture, as well as facilitate teams, curate data, and present relevant information.

- Christer Berglund, Chief Enterprise Architect, If Insurance.

In addition to keeping Enterprise Architecture data organized as you collect and analyze it, having a platform that can also present EA progress to business leaders and stakeholders is helpful for securing buy-in for projects, as these individuals will want to see business performance metrics that validate the proposed changes. If you're not able to articulate the value in a project, you'll struggle to rally support for it.

Ardoq equips you with performance dashboards that can share information to the tools that colleagues are already using. And with data that represents employees' input reflected in these reports, you'll also have evidence of organizational demand that'll further help you make your case for IT investments to stakeholders.

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10.9%

of respondents said that while working with EA, the biggest mistake that they learned from was related to....

Relying On Enterprise Architecture Values That Are Too Rigid

MISTAKE #5

Relying on Enterprise Architecture Values That Are Too Rigid

Business goals change over time, so your EA program needs to as well.

When it comes to EA, "correct" doesn't always equal "useful." IT teams, in the hopes of successfully pulling off EA, often make the mistake of focusing too much on conforming to a standard of how they think a project should progress and being extremely precise in their modeling. This results in highly complex models of the organization that, while "correct," are not usable because they don't leave room for natural fluctuations of the business environment.

Change isn't always linear, so if your Enterprise Architecture program can't be adjusted to account for fluctuating variables, then you'll either move ahead with inaccurate solutions or waste significant time and spend starting over with the process.

Especially as your organization grows, do you have a system in place that can scale to factor in increased dependencies and data? Likewise, if an employee leaves, are you able to recover from the impact of their absence, from the projects they owned to the applications they managed?

To be agile during changing circumstances, from internal reorganization to economic surprises, you need a dynamic Enterprise Architecture platform that allows you to add and remove variables over time. You also must be able to run multiple models simultaneously to account for a variety of future scenarios, instead of only the one you most expect to occur. The more scenarios you can model, the more strategic your business decisions become, as you'll be able to perform a more thorough impact analysis and sidestep scenarios that result in risk.

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"Don't use Architecture frameworks for communication with general management."
- CJJ van Walsum, Member of the Healthcare Architecture Board, UMCG

A Framework for Change, a Foundation for Connection

EA boasts big promises when it comes to achieving digital transformation, but pulling it off is easier said than done without proper planning. Change for the mere sake of it does little to move an organization forward. Worse, it can waste time and other precious resources that in turn stunt other growth opportunities and leave employees without the support they hoped for in their roles.

To position your Enterprise Architecture program for success, be sure to:

✓ Start with a clear objective for change, mapping your efforts to larger business goals to ensure EA drives relevant, contextualized value

✓ Engage the entire organization, from stakeholders and members of the C-Suite to employees across departments and seniority, for holistic insights to guide areas for improvement

✓ Prioritize ongoing, quality data collection and presentation to keep plans on track and up to date and be able to communicate progress to colleagues

✓ Leverage Enterprise Architecture tools that facilitate collaboration and empower flexibility and agility during times of change

Engage these best practices with a dynamic EA platform like Ardoq and you'll be able to avoid common roadblocks and capture a nuanced and honest understanding of your organization—including the people and programs that keep it moving forward. This will allow you to tell a more insightful story of how your efforts are contributing to overarching business goals.

Learn more of Ardoq's recommended techniques for achieving business objectives—and how to effectively leverage Enterprise Architecture tools while executing them.

Methodology

The survey was conducted among Ardoq customers, between February 4th and February 13th 2021. A total of 107 respondents answered the survey questions.

The respondents are located in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, and the US.

The respondents work within the Accounting, Banking, Computer Software, Construction, Consumer Goods, Dairy, Environmental Service, Events Services, Facilities Service, Financial Service, Financial Services, Food & Beverages, Government Administration, Higher Education, Hospital & Health Care, Information Technology & Services, Insurance International Trade & Development, Machinery, Management Consulting, Media Production, Non-Profit Organization Management, Oil & Energy, Real Estate, Renewables & Environment, Research, Retail, Sports, Telecommunications, Venture Capital & Private Equity, Wholesale industries.

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Discover how organizations are overcoming Enterprise Architecture mistakes and instead achieving enduring organizational value.

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