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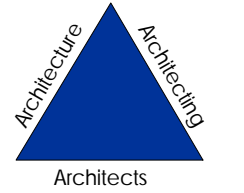
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Architecture

Architecting

Architects

Organizational Politics
Architect Competency Elaboration

Organizational politics is essential to the effectiveness of an architect. Architectures have many and diverse stakeholders. Often they are used across organizational boundaries, by other projects, divisions, and even other companies. To gain and maintain the sponsorship of management and the enthusiastic support of other key influencers, you need to do a good deal of influencing yourself.

You really need to understand both the business and personal objectives of key players, and get them personally committed to the success of the architecture. This means listening, networking, articulating and selling a vision, and doing all this continuously over the life of the project.

The people doing this well are articulate and confident. They are resilient and driven, and they are sensitive to where the real power is and how it flows. They look for and see the organization behind the organization, and they use this insight to build and maintain support for their projects.

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Competency: Organizational Politics

Background

Our view of organizational politics, just like the politics of nations and states, is too often sullied by manipulative, power-grubbing behavior of a few individuals. The best of politics is, however, about working to achieve consensus, to effectively align people through integration of interests, and persuasion and influence rather than authority or dominance. It is about decision making by representatives, with bottom-up delegation from the many to a trusted few. It is about caring passionately enough about an outcome to work at overcoming objections and resistance--not by any means at all, but with personal integrity and insight into the hopes, values, and concerns, that all play a role in making or obstructing progress.

For the architect, this often means defending the technical integrity of a system, while acknowledging the organizational factors that have a necessary bearing on the nature of the solution. Architectures have many and diverse stakeholders. Often they are used across organizational boundaries, by other projects, divisions, and even other companies. To gain and maintain the sponsorship of management and the enthusiastic support of other key influencers, you will need to do a good deal of influencing yourself.

You really need to understand both the business and personal objectives of key players, and get them personally committed to the success of the architecture. This means listening, networking, articulating and selling a vision, and doing all this continuously over the life of the project.

The people doing this well are extremely articulate and confident. They are resilient and driven, and they are sensitive to where the real power is and how it flows. They look for and see the organization behind the organization, and they use this insight to build and maintain support for their projects.

What You Know: **Organizational Webs of Influence**

Understands the networks of influence in the organization. Identifies what various stakeholders concerns and values are, and thinks about these in relation to effectively achieving the desired outcomes of the architecture.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Recognizes the need to get buy-in and support for decisions that impact others.	Understands that formal and informal processes are necessary to getting results. Understands the concerns and values of stakeholders. Is aware of, and responds appropriately to, political situations and issues.	Understands that politics, not technology, establishes the limits on what can be achieved. Knows that the best engineering solutions are not necessarily the best political solutions, and that engineering excellence and organizational needs have to be balanced. Knows who to influence, how best to do so, and when. Understands the agendas and concerns of the different teams he/she works with.	Understands the political process in the organization. Has a model of the organizational networks of influence across the business. Knows who the key players are, and what they care about, personally and with respect to the business. Understands the organization's culture and core values, and senses what it takes to align projects and groups despite their differences. Recognizes where power is focused and how it flows in the organization (e.g., who really makes what kinds of decisions).

What You Do: Influence Without Authority

Influence others to achieve architectural outcomes, getting things done in the organization even though the architect seldom has direct authority over the people who contribute most to the success or failure of the architecture.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Establishes good working relationships with his/her team members, manager and architect. Keeps relevant people informed of his/her actions, decisions and progress.	Proactively builds a network of relationships among people inside and outside the architecture team. Provides timely information on progress and issues affecting key stakeholder concerns. Effectively communicates the value of the architecture to different groups of stakeholders.	Listens and networks, building relationships and gaining insight into the political web of the organization. Works well across teams, helping to identify common concerns and achieving support for working towards broader goals. Uses influence to get things done without formal authority. Actively and effectively "sells" the architecture to multiple groups, creating enthusiasm and overcoming resistance. Coaches others on how to do this.	Influences business leaders at the highest level in the organization. Builds a strategic network of partnerships and relationships with inside and outside groups. Builds coalitions to work on shared desired outcomes. Effectively persuades and influences across various organizational groups to achieve corporate goals. Takes and retakes the "pulse" of the critical influencers who can impact the success of the architecture. Weaves together and balances diverse agendas, making tradeoffs among technical and social/organizational concerns and needs. Handles politically charged situations adeptly and smoothly. Coaches others on achieving organizational effectiveness and dealing with political situations.

What You Are: Politically Astute

Influence without formal authority requires a very positive, passionate attitude; flexibility and openness to ideas and organizational forces, but integrity of purpose and sound ethics; good interpersonal skills and the ability to communicate to a variety of audiences, to persuade and influence, align and motivate.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Sees what needs to be done and does it without being told.	Displays drive, energy and initiative. Is good at technical communication. Has strong writing skills.	Cares deeply about the architecture vision. Insightful into people dynamics. Intuitively grasps practical implications, and shows good judgment. Has a good sense of timing. Has strong interpersonal skills, and is able to gain support and get things done. Is comfortable and skillful working with diverse stakeholder groups.	Sees a bigger outcome for the organization, and is passionate about it. Is a role model, upholding high standards of personal and technical integrity. Perceptive and shrewd, with a good sense of what, practically, can be achieved. Sagacious. Wise in the conduct of organizational affairs. Good at communicating in a variety of mediums to various audiences. Effective and comfortable working with high-level management.

Heuristics
- Don't ever stop talking about the system. (Rechtin, 1991)
- There's no such thing as immaculate communication. (Rechtin, 1991)
- If the politics don't fly, the system never will. (Maier and Rechtin, 2000)

Self-Assessment Questions
Do I communicate well and influence effectively? What can I do to be better at organizational politics?

What You Know: Organizational Webs of Influence
- Do I prefer to concentrate on the technical problem, and have a strong distaste for organizational politics?
- Do I see organizational politics as manipulation or a powerful way to integrate values and achieve goals?
- Do I try to understand the roles and relationships that are important to the various key organizational networks in my company?

- Do I try to understand what each stakeholder values and needs, and what they are most concerned about?

What You Do: Influence without Authority
- Do I have strong distaste for "selling"? Do I think "selling the architecture" should be someone else's job, or do I actively "sell" the architecture? Do I enjoy doing so? Am I good at it?
- Do I see the architecture as a purely technical problem, or do I see that organizational needs have to be balanced with technical concerns.
- Do I seek to understand stakeholder concerns so that I can be more effective in building support and influencing action to achieve architecture goals.
- Do I think that "management should just tell them to use the architecture" or do I work to integrate stakeholder concerns and values into the vision and the architecture?
- Do I communicate the architecture to each stakeholder in terms they care about?

What You Are: Politically Astute
- Do I care about the architectural vision, or is this just a job to me?
- Do I understand what is practical, and what is not, for the organization?
- Am I effective in getting things to happen outside my direct realm of responsibility?
- Do others see me as confident?
- Do others think that I communicate well? Do I communicate better with some groups than others? Do I communicate more effectively in some mediums than others?
- Do I have an "elevator pitch" for our architecture? Do I use every opportunity to align diverse stakeholders with the architecture vision and strategy?

Learning on the Job

Specific techniques:
- "Do Volunteer Work." Volunteer for a task force looking into cross-organizational issues, or for projects that involve multiple groups, and for "extra-curricula" activities such as charity work, sports and other such activities that your organization is actively involved in. Use these opportunities to create relationships and get to know the needs and concerns of other groups, and especially of key individuals in other groups. Relationships create personal conduits for information and influence, but they have to built between individuals first.
- "Mimic Madison." James Madison was an astute politician in politics, and we can learn a lot that is directly relevant to business politics from him, and other business leaders and political figures. For example, Madison arrived early at the Constitutional Convention so that he could greet and get to know delegates as they arrived. He took exhaustive notes on what everyone had to say, as well as his analysis of what they thinking and how their perspectives were shifting. Identify lessons like these and practice them, while you find your own techniques for listening and influencing to bring about alignment among individuals and groups.
- "Find the Pulse." Develop and maintain a network of relationships with individuals who are "plugged in" to the business, the market and technologies. Analyze your network as you would your architecture, thinking about what information you need to be successful (technically, and in making the politics of the system fly) and who you need to influence directly and indirectly, and how best to do so.
- "Practice Communication." Use every opportunity to present to higher levels of management and focus on honing your ability to convey a message to this audience in a way that is compelling to them. Never stop communicating about your architecture.
- Get "360° feedback." Ask architects you report to (even if this "reporting" relationship is only informal), and architects or technical leads that report to you, as well as your manager, extended team members and other stakeholders for feedback on your communication skills and your effectiveness in dealing with and playing a role in the political web of the organization.

Training

General guidelines
- Attend conferences or seminars targeted at business leaders in your industry.
- Attend management training classes, especially those targeted at fast-track acceleration of talented managers.

Specific suggestions
- Bredemeyer Consulting's *Architectural Leadership and Other Skills* workshop has a module on Organizational Politics. See http://www.bredemeyer.com/role_of_architect_workshop_overview.htm.
- Power & Systems, *Power and Leadership Conference*, also known as *The Power Lab*, is based on the work of Barry Oshry, http://www.powerandsystems.com/power_and_leadership.htm
- Wharton Business School Executive Education Program, *Building Relationships that Work*, http://aresty-direct.wharton.upenn.edu/execed/course.cfm?Program=BRW

Recommended Reading

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