
An Architectural Approach to Strategizing: Structure and Orientation for Developing the Business Motivation

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Abstract

It has been widely acknowledged that effective strategizing in today's competitive environment has become a challenging task and thus requires a deliberate approach. This has also driven calls for a greater cross-fertilization of the field with other disciplines. In particular, good practices from architecture management may be considered a promising means to provide strategists with a reasonable structure and orientation for developing the business motivation (including, e.g., goals, strategies, and principles). Against this background, this chapter illustrates the use of architectural thinking in strategy development. Based on a fictitious case study, it explains how the use of an architectural approach that provides a clear structure can help achieve higher consistency, effectiveness, completeness, and comprehensibility.

2.1 Introduction

In today's competitive business world, effective strategic management has become a challenging endeavor for strategists and executives. Many may actually find it scary to commit to a new strategy, being confronted with a future one can only guess at and making decisions that explicitly cut off possibilities and options (cf. Martin 2014). In addition, there are several issues that need to be reasonably coped with when a new strategic direction is due to be developed and successfully implemented. Among others, relevant questions in that context are:

- How are effective strategies identified?
- How can overall consistency of a set of strategies be ensured?

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- How can it be ensured that the main strategic issues are completely addressed?
- How can it be ensured that different strategy options can be identified (or, in other words, that specific options are not excluded upfront)?
- How can the main messages of a strategy be explained and motivated?
- How can needs for strategic changes be located?

To cope with these questions, a systematic approach to strategy making is inevitable. At the core of this is a thorough conceptualization of the business motivation (capturing the strategic direction and thus constituting the way of doing business; see Chap. 1) with

- well-defined concepts (e.g., goals, strategies, principles, etc.), and
- well-defined relationships between these concepts (e.g., strategy supports the achievement of a goal),

which can provide orientation to strategists and conceptually guide them through main strategic management tasks. In essence, a corresponding business motivation canvas (distinguishing business ends, means, and influencers; see Fig. 1.2 in Chap. 1) allows for injecting strategic management with an appropriate level of architectural thinking. It is not about escaping the fear of the unknown and the necessity to make hard choices, it is about using a structure that helps increase the odds of success (cf. Martin 2014).

To illustrate the use of architectural thinking in strategy making, this chapter draws on the fictitious case of an insurance company that has originally been developed and described to illustrate the use of ArchiMate, a common language for architecture modeling (The Open Group 2013). The following sections thus describe stages of the strategy development process of the fictitious insurer ArchiSurance. In this chapter, the original ArchiSurance example (cf. Jonkers et al. 2012) is extended by integrating own real-life experiences from different enterprises with respect to facets of strategy making (i.e., although this case extension is fictitious as well, it refers to incidents that have occurred equally or at least similarly in practice).

So let's assume that, once a new strategy had been deemed necessary, ArchiSurance set up a corresponding project called "Unite & Move On." A project team with members of all business divisions was defined, headed by the director of strategy and business development. Interviews and workshops were scheduled to gain the required senior management input for the strategic choices to be made.

ArchiSurance is the result of a merger of three previously independent insurance companies:

- Home & Away, specializing in homeowners' insurance and travel insurance
- PRO-FIT, specializing in car insurance

(continued)

- Legally Yours, specializing in legal expense insurance

It was formed to take advantage of numerous synergies between the three organizations, which now represent the main divisions of ArchiSurance. While the three pre-merger companies sold different insurance products, they shared several similarities in their business models. All three sold directly to consumers and small businesses, predominantly through the web, email, telephone, and postal mail channels. They were based in modern office complexes in major metropolitan areas. Each had strong reputations for integrity, service quality, and financial stability.

The lead investors of the three companies began merger talks after they noticed that lower-cost competitors were entering their markets, that there were new opportunities in high-growth regions, and that each company required significant new investments to remain competitive. They realized that only a larger enterprise could simultaneously control its costs, maintain its customer satisfaction, invest in new products and technologies, and successfully enter emerging markets.

ArchiSurance offers all the insurance products of the three pre-merger companies, and intends to frequently adjust its offerings in response to changing market conditions. Like its three predecessors, ArchiSurance predominantly sells its products directly to its customers.

2.2 Deliberate Classification of Strategic Constituents

In preparation of the scheduled interviews and workshops, the project team started off by conducting an initial SWOT analysis (i.e., identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), which was planned to provide an adequate context for discussion. The SWOT analysis assimilated the outcomes of several customer workshops that had previously been carried out to identify the most prevalent pains and expected gains of the customers [as per the “Value Proposition Canvas” depicted by Business Model Foundry (2013)]. Without too much further conceptual structure the team then basically went into these discussions.

As a result, right early in the project, the introduction of self-services for ArchiSurance’s customers was put on the table, following numerous mentions by senior management stakeholders from all divisions in the initial interviews and workshops in the course of the development of the new strategy. Self-services here include the possible change of personal data (e.g., address) and the generation of policy overviews, for example. However, whether this is an end in itself or whether it actually serves an overarching purpose like cost reduction or an increase in customer satisfaction should be carefully evaluated. As self-services are a topic that had been around for some time in all pre-merger companies, believed to be introduced in the near future, the stakeholders tended to treat it as a given target and

classified it as a goal, not considering the actual purpose behind it any more. The discussions thus went straight to some sort of solution. Alternatives were not really considered, but would have been difficult to come up with anyway, given that the actual goal behind it was unclear.

Once the project team realized that they missed to capture the actual goals and were not about to properly consider different strategic options to realize these goals, they slightly changed their approach and started up the next workshops with a brief conceptual introduction, including a thorough differentiation between business means and business ends. This high-level conceptualization of the business motivation, exemplified on a corresponding poster, became the basis for all remaining workshops. The interviewers kept asking “why?” in case means were mentioned before the underlying goal was specified. By doing this, the project team managed to classify needs and suggestions mentioned by the stakeholders in an appropriate way. The basis for this was their motivational framework with well-defined concepts, including a *differentiation between means and ends*.

2.3 Development of a Consistent and Modular System of Goals/Objectives

Once the stakeholder needs and concerns were captured, the project team grouped them systematically to derive overall goals. The team then set these goals in relation with one another, basically indicating whether a goal supports others or, in contrast, obviously conflicts with other goals and thus has a negative impact on their realization. For example, the team found out through its discussions that the goal “control costs,” at least for the first time, has a potential conflict with the goal “increase customer satisfaction,” as the latter likely required significant investments in technology that allowed faster process times, better data quality, and new service offerings. This conflict could then be made explicit to senior management for prioritization and decision making.

Another issue the team faced was that by aggregating the stakeholder needs and concerns in its goal definition process it initially arrived at a goal called “improve product portfolio manageability and consistency.” Obviously, this represents a very “rich” goal that may incorporate several target-related aspects (e.g., simplicity, costs, agility). The fact that the essence of the goal was not immediately visible—potentially hidden in any further descriptions once completely documented at a later point—made it difficult to systematically identify appropriate means in succeeding work sessions. However, once the core aspects of the goal were recalled and explained to each participant, numerous means could actually be identified that were meant to help realize that goal and effectively channel efforts towards it (OMG 2010). Exemplary principles were reuse, standardization, centralization, modularity, ease of use, and automation (cf. The Open Group 2011), whereas a reduction of the product portfolio, the simplification of product descriptions, and an increased offering of (cross-divisional) product combinations were identified as

potential strategies for goal achievement.¹ Now, at first glance, it did not really become clear to others that had not participated in the workshops why a certain means was assigned to the “rich” end and what the specific contribution of the means is respectively. The project team, in turn, concluded that this may be a general issue that would complicate communication and thus understanding of the set goals and the reasons for the corresponding means. Therefore, the *goal* was *split into its integral parts*: “reduce product complexity,” “increase product synergies,” “reduce portfolio administration costs,” and “increase time-to-market” (in terms of both new and changed products). Other identified goals were double-checked for sufficient *modularity* as well and then structured according to the dimensions of the “Balanced Scorecard” (Kaplan and Norton 2001).

In a next step, these overall goals—expressed in relatively broad terms—were broken down or, say, cascaded (cf. ISACA 2012) to specific, measurable objectives (meeting the SMART criteria, i.e., being specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bounded). These objectives were thus associated with precise targets. In consequence, the definition of objectives went hand in hand with the initial, high-level design of a target architecture at the business capability level. That is, based on the defined goals, relevant business capabilities received specific target values, e.g., in terms of costs, size, or delivery times. Other objectives were of a more general character (i.e., they applied to several capabilities at once), such as the improvement of ArchiSurance’s net promoter score (measuring customer satisfaction). This focus on outcomes allowed for the identification of appropriate strategic actions in the next step.

2.4 Development of a Comprehensive and Suitable Set of Strategies for Goal Achievement

The project team continued with the *identification of appropriate means* for realizing the defined goals and objectives. ArchiSurance’s overall *business model* in place provided the context for the discussion [in line with what Simon et al. (2014) outline; see below for further details with respect to the role of the business model in strategy development]. For example, the intended strategy of launching third-party administration services (e.g., claims settlement) to other insurers raised the question of consistency given the fact that business processes were to still be operated in a diversified way to some extent across ArchiSurance’s three main divisions while, on the other hand, third-party administration was likely

¹ Note that these strategies are formulated in a “gap-like” way to emphasize the new aspects. They may well be part of a “larger” (e.g., the overall product strategy) or more generic strategy (e.g., product leadership). They are not yet meant to represent strategic programs or even projects though (cf. Yelin 2005). In contrast, they should be considered less specific than an action plan (that includes decisions with respect to, for example, the “who” and “when”). In line with the strategy definition provided in Chap. 1, they represent the “conception preceding action” (Mintzberg 1987).

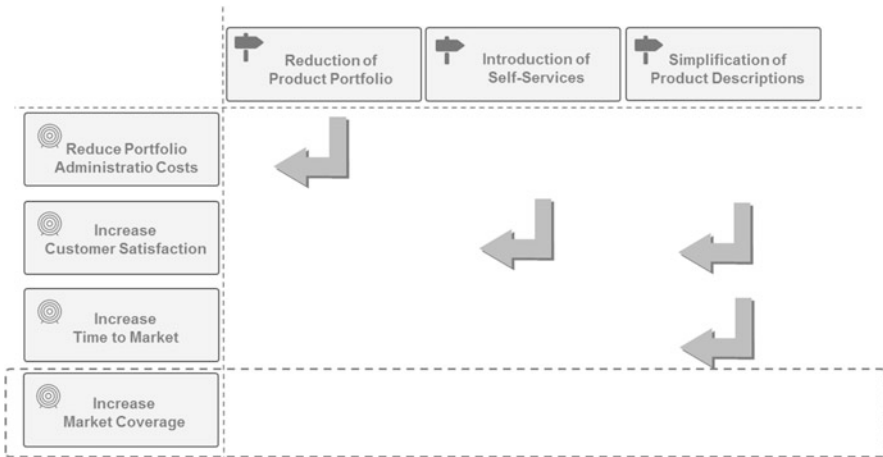


Fig. 2.1 Cross-reference map of goals and strategies

to require some degree of immediate standardization. As a result, a shared back-office for the three main divisions, which had originally been planned to be implemented at a later point of time, was added as another strategic move and even assigned with a high priority. With the shared back-office, working to higher capacity due to its new service offering, ArchiSurance was hoping to prevent mass redundancies. This alternative action had been ruled out considering that one of the main assets present in ArchiSurance’s business model was reputation.

Finally, an overview was created with the goals and objectives and the supporting strategies that had been identified (cf., e.g., Simon et al. 2014), thus providing *visual traceability* in terms of which courses of action were intended to deliver what outcomes and how these related back to the overall goals set out to achieve (see simplified representation in Fig. 2.1, with goals at the X-axis and strategies at the Y-axis). By doing this, it was made apparent that the goal “increase market coverage” was not addressed at all by the developed strategic options. Obviously, discussions had revolved around measures tackling the integration and consolidation challenges following the recent merger, while the pursued internationalization—one of the main original drivers behind the merger—did not find adequate consideration. In other words, the team was able to identify strategy white spots. These white spots were then eliminated and replaced by appropriate strategies. Here, the increase of cooperations in neighboring countries and the establishment of own sites in one low-cost country (as a pilot) were found an appropriate approach—at least as a first step of ArchiSurance’s internationalization. For this low-cost country, the team developed some sort of “blue ocean strategy” for health insurances with which to unlock new demand and thus create uncontested market space (cf. Kim and Mauborgne 2005). It came up with this specific strategy against the backdrop of what Wilson (2007) points out nicely: “Companies in every industry and around the world are pursuing blue ocean strategies and re-defining the

competitive landscape overnight. Companies left behind to fight it out in crowded red oceans can only look forward to decreasing.” So the strategy targeted the many young uninsured that could not afford the high premiums to be paid for health insurance. Therefore, they should be offered insurance with low annual premiums, but with limited coverage in terms of annual benefits. Additional coverage should be available on demand for a considerable surcharge premium.

On the other hand, the cross-reference overview of strategies and goals (Fig. 2.1) allowed for a final check of whether, after all, strategies may have entered the agenda that are not sufficiently grounded in the overall system of goals and objectives. Not only would this have meant that the motivation for such a strategy was unclear, and thus difficult to explain to ArchiSurance’s staff, but this would have also implied that strategies had been identified that are not really the “right” ones in terms of the desired ends as they do not serve any of the defined strategic purposes. Indeed, the project team found two strategic choices that were not related to any goal at all. Talks with the chief executive officer, who had brought these strategies onto the agenda, did not lead to their removal though. Despite the fact that they were not really rooted in the strategic goals, to which all leading stakeholders (including the chief executive officer) had agreed before, the chief executive officer insisted on their survival. At least did the discussion lead to the formulation of an additional goal; although it was some sort of artificial it made the motivation for the corresponding strategies explainable.

Together with main players of the steering committee of the “Unite & Move On” project, the project manager finally double checked all identified strategies (i.e., also those that were already assigned to a goal) in terms of their goal contribution. Although this only led to minor adjustments (in editorial terms), it had a positive impact on the commitment of the involved stakeholders and served well for the purpose of quality assurance. Afterwards, the strategic choices found approval in the steering committee and both goals/objectives and strategies were signed off in the executive board.

2.5 Identification of Needs for Strategic Change/Amendments

To be able to track whether the selected strategies are successfully implemented and finally completed and whether the determined goals are met, the project team moved on by developing appropriate metrics for measurement. Here, the deliberate classification of the strategic constituents (see above) helped ensure that successful strategy implementation was not to be equated with goal achievement and that *dedicated metrics* were thus developed *for both goals and strategies*. Along with the relationships between the formulated goals and strategies at hand this represented the basis for the implementation and application of a coherent measurement system, with which progress can be measured on a continual basis, reasons for lagging behind target can be located, and ineffective choices (e.g., strategy is implemented successfully, but there is no or only moderate impact on the related goal) can be detected.

In other words—or in COBIT terms (ISACA 2012)—the metrics for measuring the application of means then serve as “lead indicators,” while the metrics for measuring the achievement of goals and objectives are rather “lag indicators” in that context. Measuring the introduced number of self-services, for example, can help evaluate whether ArchiSurance progresses towards higher customer satisfaction and may thus initially indicate to be on the right track. Due to whatever reason, however, the choice for self-services may eventually not lead to increased customer satisfaction, which may be measured by the net promoter score as a “lag indicator.” Appropriate (potentially corrective) actions can then be taken immediately. The basis for this is the thorough *separation of means and ends* along with their expected cause-and-effect relationships explicitly documented.

2.6 Comprehensible Communication of Strategic Choices

In addition to the setup of a coherent measurement system, the project team was tasked with the preparation of communication measures and instruments. Here, the project team decided to create, among other things, a “one-pager” with the main elements of ArchiSurance’s new strategic positioning. Not only did it present ArchiSurance’s overall business motivation in terms of ends and corresponding means, but in a simplified way it did also outline the relationships between these strategic elements and could thus be used both to explain the existence of individual elements and to navigate through the motivation as a whole:

This picture (see simplified representation in Fig. 2.2) became an important instrument for the succeeding communication of ArchiSurance’s new strategic positioning. It allowed the communication to be delivered in form of a *consistent, understandable, and capturing story*: from drivers and constraints via goals and objectives to strategies. Even further, it actually represented the new overall ArchiSurance “story” itself, which explained its purpose, aspiration, and orientation, to which structures and people should align (cf. Graves 2012).

An important aspect in visualization and communication of this story, however, was the level of detail used for that purpose. To make people not only understand the story in general but also think about what the story means for oneself individually and how it can be adopted in the daily work, the elements that made up the story were not broken down into all their details. Deliberately, some room was left for self-interpretation. This was complemented by few overarching themes of the new story, one of which was “simplicity,” formulated to activate people and make them an active part of the story’s implementation. Special emphasis was put on the theme “simplicity,” for which it was clear that different associations and perceptions would exist. Due to its importance for the further coalescence of the “new” ArchiSurance, an active engagement of each individual was believed to play an essential role for successful strategy implementation.

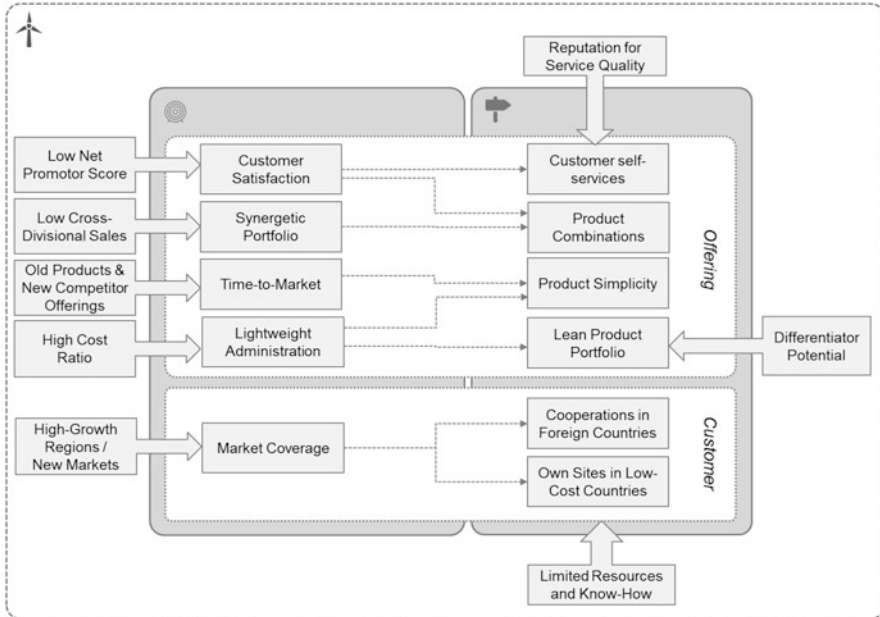


Fig. 2.2 Business motivation one-pager

2.7 Reflection and Discussion

Based on the ArchiSurance case, this chapter has depicted the use of good practices from architecture management in strategy making and thus illustrated how an architectural approach to developing the business motivation can help achieve higher consistency, effectiveness, completeness, and comprehensibility. A key to this is the understanding that the business motivation itself has some kind of architecture, and thus belongs to the overall enterprise architecture, not only for achieving transparency in terms of the elements by which the design of business operations and IT is motivated.

In summary, with a thorough conceptualization in a “motivation canvas,” such an architectural approach provides a structure that can help avoid conceptual flaws (such as mistaking strategies for goals), pre-limited thinking (such as promoting specific means without prior clarity about the goal to be achieved thereby and thus shutting out other valid options), the selection of presumably ineffective strategies, and severe errors in communication. In this structure, which is not meant to be of a too much formal character (cf. Simon et al. 2014; also see Chap. 15), the creativity required for strategy making (Mintzberg et al. 2005) can likely be initiated and leveraged effectively; at the same time, such a structure ensures deliberate and rational strategizing and avoids the pitfalls that are present when there is no one doing a proper job of joining the different dots in the motivation

sphere—someone that could be called a “strategy architect” (this is about the role, not the label; in other words, this does not mean that everyone who applies architectural thinking needs to be rebranded as an architect). Different strategic techniques (e.g., SWOT analysis, goal decomposition, ERRC grid) can thus be applied in a combined way and properly integrated using an overall model of the business motivation.

In addition to the practices depicted in the preceding sections, there may have been further opportunities though to apply architectural thinking and incorporate additional business architecture pieces that could have further supported ArchiSurance’s strategy development process:

1. It may have been reasonable to distinguish between different levels of strategies, such as *corporate and competitive strategies* (cf. Simon et al. 2014). While the corporate strategy basically determines with which products and/or services to operate in which markets (the “where-to-play” decision), the competitive strategy details how to operate in these markets and stand one’s ground against competitors by creating a compelling value proposition (the “how-to-win” decision) (cf. Martin 2014). A thorough differentiation of these concepts may have provided an even better structure for the identification of appropriate strategies. For example, based on the intended moves at the corporate strategic level (e.g., the launch of third-party administration services), one may have deliberately watched out for competitive strategies suitable to mitigate risks (i.e., assessed constraints) related to these strategic choices (which here is the entering of a new market).
2. Right at the start, the *business model*—with the structure it provides for some of the main objects of strategy statements—could have been analyzed in terms of any potential elements that may not have been fully realized yet or to which the organization—possibly already the pre-merger organizations—did not really live up (which is more than the implicit use for SWOT analysis and goal identification, for which it provided the boundaries). The business model’s scalability, time gaps between earning and spending, and several other design aspects could have been addressed as well. This identification of possible hot spots could have further informed the strategy development process and may have led to additional reasonable strategies.² As indicated, these different strategic options could have then been analyzed in terms of consistency and any impacts using the business model as well, as a framework that allows an integrated view of strategic actions, or, more precisely, their particular outcomes (i.e., including their relationships) (see Chap. 4 for

²Note that such deficiencies may not necessarily be addressed at the strategic level, but may also be possible to be resolved at the lower levels of the business architecture without a strategy defined for this purpose.

an example).³ As the senior management of ArchiSurance's three divisions tended to focus on their individual strategies in the initial workshops, without any concern for or maybe even to the detriment of other divisions, the necessity to deal with potentially conflicting strategies should not be a surprise. For larger enterprises, for which one may think of a portfolio of business models that is being run, this is of particular relevance. In fact, linking strategies entails not only resolving any conflicts, but rather creating synergies across different business units (e.g., at the activity or product/service levels). Ultimately, since the business model also provides some sort of uniform language to describe how the enterprise is going to work (in form of a single-page view) based on the decisions made in the strategy development process, it could have also been used to further support the communication of the strategic choices (cf. El Sawy and Pereira 2013).

3. The SWOT analysis could have gone into more detail to include a systematic *analysis of ArchiSurance's capabilities* and thus avoid creating strategies that are ill-connected to the actual opportunities, needs, and concerns that arise from current business execution (of which capabilities represent an abstraction). In fact, such an investigation may have allowed for visualizing hot spots within the capability landscape (e.g., capabilities with disproportionately high costs) that should be addressed by appropriate strategies (cf. Simon et al. 2014), thus serving as a proper baseline for strategizing (cf. Ulrich and Rosen 2011). Later, once strategic choices have been made and mapped onto the future business model, the designed target architecture at the business capability level should have also been properly detailed. Here, clear responsibilities for business capabilities are crucial to determine which capabilities may have to change and to then meet the corresponding target.

Beyond that, the project team may have also benefited from a closer involvement of someone usually acting at the operational level (e.g., solution architect), who may have brought in valuable practical experiences and thus helped the strategists to “work with their heads in the cloud but with their feet on the ground” in the strategy development process. Such an individual may have also supported the team in challenging and optimizing goal and strategy statements [and keep them simple according to Martin (2014)] and thereby increasing the level of understanding for “ordinary” employees; here, care should be taken that finding the final wording does not become science though (such that it hinders required progress). It is thus crucial to keep in mind that strategy is not about perfection (cf. Martin 2014).

Ultimately, for strategizing and business modeling the joint sessions with the senior management could have taken the form of “future workshops” [the original German term is “Zukunftswerkstatt,” coined by Jungk and Müllert (1981)]—a kind of moderated group work supposed to provide a forum in which the future can be

³ Based on that, one may have also come up with a first evaluation of possible effects/impacts on the lower-level architecture (e.g., processes) (cf. Radeke and Legner 2012; Simon et al. 2014).

shaped creatively, with alternative scenarios being considered. At the core of this technique is a fantasy phase, in which some sort of “perfect world” is assumed that avoids restricted thinking and encourages ideas to be expressed no matter of whether they are actually realistic. The evaluation is purposefully separated from the preceding phase of fantasizing.

That being said, the distinction between the concepts of deliberate (i.e., intentional) and emergent strategy (as responses to a number of unanticipated events) [as drawn by Mintzberg et al. (2005)], the latter of which questions the manager’s ability to predict the future and create appropriate plans accordingly, should not be misused to become an excuse for avoiding difficult strategic choices or even making no strategic choices at all until the future becomes sufficiently clear. As Martin (2014) points out, if the future is too unpredictable to make reasonable strategic choices, how would one believe that it will become significantly less so? In addition, how would one recognize the point when predictability has increased to a level that allows for making strategic choices?

Further, in relation to the role of architecture management in the strategizing process, there may still be people who do not want to “buy” the idea of using architectural thinking and practices therein as they do not see the required appetite among strategists and executives. Similar statements were made (among others) about the Internet before its rise to success though. To quote Zachman (1997), who, while referring to enterprise architecture, asserted that “in the 21st Century, it will be the determining factor, the factor that separates the winners from the losers, the successful and the failures, the acquiring from the acquired, the survivors from the others,” one should better not leave this unconsidered and wait until already being outdistanced.

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