Making Sense:

One of the Components of Achieving Holistic Management.

Can You Make Sense of the Enterprise

One of many reasons for why many enterprises experiences that organizational change projects fail and their respective leaders and managers only discovers that there are significant problems with the way the members of the enterprise activities.

The Sense Making Process

In the sense making process it is rather likely that the preferred departments of the enterprise would be the IT department since the IT department is properly that department that has a lot of contact with the rest of the enterprise, and the rest of the enterprise contacts and require that the IT department uncovers their needs to develop information systems that supports their business processes.

However in many enterprises a lot of the other departments have hostile feelings towards the IT department. This means that the IT department and its representatives will be viewed with skepticism, and the concept of sense making is therefore undermined.

In relation to the writings of Doucet et al (Doucet et al 2009) then the ideal situation would be when the enterprise when the Chief Operations Officer that is in charge of the sense making and Enterprise Architecture approach but usually it needs a maturation period where the knowledge and responsibility has been handed over from the Chief Information Officer. From this perspective then it is likely that Doucet et al argues for a paradigm shift within the enterprise. When addressing the view of the enterprise then the focus has to address the mechanistic and the organic perspective also. Is the enterprise a social system that functions like a machine that can be optimized or is a kind of organic entity that can be impacted through facilitation.

The thoughts that Doucet et al presents deals with how the enterprise will obtain a higher degree of assurance, alignment and agility when the enterprise goes through a process of uncovering and adapting the Enterprise Architecture program. When fully adapted then the enterprise will be able to reach out and re-design its enterprise. The only way to achieve this is by an enabling of sense making at all levels of the enterprise.

Karl Weick (Weick 2000, p. 244) works with a concept that deals with how the enterprise in one way or the other scans its environment and how this impacts how the enterprise creates an understanding for how the strategy process can be articulated.

In this perspective the focus of sense making is in an external context where there are three phases. 1) Scanning the environment, 2) Interpretation and 3) Learning. The learning phase is dealing with how the enterprise learns and that is done through practice. The interpretation deals with how the enterprise understands its environment and how it starts to acquire the model it needs to create an understanding of its environment and its options.

I am of the opinion that the scanning process can be used inside of the enterprise as well and especially the second step has to be investigated into detail by the chief architect and for that matter the coherency architect. If the enterprise doesn't take reality into consideration when it articulates the corporate strategy then it is very likely that the rest of the strategies that have been articulated aren't able to cope with the real life situations within the enterprise. When addressing this it is very important to understand that if the enterprise doesn't base their plans on their contextual reality then it the plans will at best give hope to the members of the enterprise.

When I talk of contextual reality then it is the combination of feelings, experiences, observations and not to forget hard fact. Hard facts are usually numbers and for that matter artifacts that can be understood in a narrow way by the individuals who have to relate to it and not forget how the social

system that receives the analysis sees the world e.g., it would be very likely if the receivers would reject the analysis if it contradicts their own behavioral pattern and for that matter world view.

An example could be that a chief architect delivers a plan for the enterprise that is based on the organic[1] view of the organization and the receivers have a view that is predominately mechanistic[2]. In someways can this situation be compared to the changes that happens in science when a particular community of scientists have been challenged a different community of scientists who has another view on how a particular problem (world view or paradigm) has to be applied. It takes a lot of energy and a lot of resources in change effort of seeing validating and accepting the other point of view.

It is therefore very likely that the chief architect or for that matter the coherency architect who has to address the problems in the enterprise through a change program that would have to engage in a dialogue on what the enterprise is, how management should be working, how the various elements of the enterprise should interact and not to forget how the members of the enterprise produce value for the enterprise. When speaking of value then I address how the individual member of the enterprise contributes to the goals that have been articulated by the strategy team (usually the executives of the enterprise).

In this dialogue the coherency architect would have to think of it as a process where the various stakeholders would have to adapt to the new views of the enterprise, management, approaches and not to forget one another. The process might not be able to produce the desired results right away but it is a dialogue or struggle that the coherency architect would have to take in order to force the executives of the enterprise to facilitate change.

The Resilient Organization

The difference between the conventional approach to change and ideas, and the resilient organization is that the resilient organization is an organizational system that identifies the exceptions in the operations, and acts pro-actively to correct the changes before exceptions escalates to the extend of a burning platform.

However the members of a resilient organization by themselves understand that they have to inform the other members of the enterprise about how or what is about to happen in the various sections of the enterprise, and the members of the enterprise have been trained to act to adapt to the environment that the organizations interact with. In the same time the members of the enterprise adapts to one another by informing one another on the conditions of the enterprise's work systems. It is the self-correcting attitude that the members of the enterprise show while they are working that enables them to make the enterprise resilient to the changes.

The members of the enterprise needs to be able to share information local, regional and for that matter on a global plan and for that the Enterprise Architecture program and repository be a great enabler.

With this in mind then the concept of holistic management will be dealt with in the next paragraph.

Holistic Management

Bernard and Doucet et al argues that the enterprise needs holistic management and through that they would be able to achieve competitive advantages when achieving holistic management. But what is holistic management? And is holistic management even achievable.

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1   As Hoogervorst articulated it in his book from 2009 (Enterprise Governance and Enterprise Engineering),
2   An older paradigm than the organic paradigm. The organization is seen as a kind of machine.

A holistic form of management is according to Hoogervorst achievable if the enterprise works with the organic way interpret and embody the actions of the enterprise.

Holistic Management deals that the enterprise can achieve some form of coherent and informed governance by applying Enterprise Architecture to uncover the entire enterprise and thereby its whole architecture.

Enterprise Architecture is a way to lay the foundation for Holistic Management. When speaking of Holistic Management the concept needs to be defined. The concept of Holistic Management is dealing with how the executives, managers, workers and other stakeholders (usually these are connected to the enterprise like banks, suppliers and increasingly advisors and consultants) gains an overview of how the various elements of the enterprise (and thereby its architecture) works. This overview can then be operationalized into a form governance where the various executives, managers and workers contribute to the decision process and by that the right actions can be taken for the right purposes.

When the foundation has been established then the focus has to be turned to trust and motivation among the various stakeholders to support and maintain the foundation for the Holistic Management. I am of the opinion that most enterprises are results of coincidence and as such the entire enterprise is somehow a product of randomly selected individuals, purposes, resources and work flow. Likewise are there many different reasons for why the enterprise has developed into what it is. By writing this I commit myself and my view on the enterprise holistic management through the eyes of the organismic approach to organizational management where the idea is that the enterprise isn't a machine but a form of organism that can eventually be cultured and evolved into something smarter and better.

This leads to some of the reflections on what Enterprise Architecture and Holistic Management.

Reflections

When working with Enterprise Architecture is dealing with how the enterprise can achieve alignment among the various elements of the enterprise e.g., between the business units (lines of business) and the their usage of information technology. However is it possible to achieve a form of holistic management for enterprises? Is it possible to achieve a form of enterprise governance that is able to impact practices of the enterprise on all levels in order to enable the executives to tune or grow the enterprise into a desired state? In my opinion it is possible to either tune or grow the enterprise but it isn't possible to achieve governance without friction in some form within the enterprise. But it is of great importance for the enterprise to undermine the barriers that in one way or the other limits the ability of the enterprise to adapt, innovate and align its various components in order to achieve competitive advantages.

The first step in achieving holistic management is through initiating a scanning process of the external environment as well as initiating a scanning of the internal environment. The scanning process can achieve some ideas on how the enterprise works. Given the information on how the environments that the enterprise operates with the executives can operationalize into better and more efficient decision making. In my opinion the scanning process is vital for achieving Holistic Management or something close too. Nonetheless Enterprise Architecture and for that matter Coherency Management is of great importance to enable Holistic Management and these programs needs to be taken seriously by the executives and middle management.

The resilient enterprise is in my opinion a result of an Enterprise Architecture program that goes beyond of the foundation architecture (going beyond the IT centric approach).

When Enterprise Architecture is applied in the right situation then it is possible that the enterprise

can advance towards a resilient organization; however Enterprise Architecture is only one of the factors that will enable a resilient organization, but Enterprise Architecture can both become an enabler and a driver towards.

Conclusion

Sense making is a process of which the stakeholders can gain knowledge on how the enterprise is doing compared to its customers, suppliers and competitors. This has to be taken into consideration of how the enterprise works and how the system needs to be adapted to achieve competitive advantages.

Enterprise Architecture is a combination of a toolset, method and process that can give the stakeholders an overview of the enterprise works. In the same way the enterprise is able to initiate the processes needed to undermine barriers for agility, innovation and adaptability and establishing the platforms that are needed to achieve a continuous tuning or growth of the enterprise.

The resilient organization is probably the most likely candidate for achieving the ability of Holistic Management and only organizational knowledge and culture can enable the organization to achieve the change and the platforms.

Bibliography

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