A Partner is Good to Have, but Difficult to Be

Dave Dikel – dave.dikel@acentia.com
David Kane – david.kane@santeon.com
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Dave Dikel
● Senior Information Technology Specialist with InSysCo, A Maximus Federal Company

David Kane
● Senior Agile Coach at Santeon

Co-authors of the book, Software Architecture: Organizational Principles and Patterns
Have you ever...
...are symptoms of a lack of partnering
“We insist that key people take a workshop on partnering first.”

Ron Grace
Program Manager for HP’s internal software reuse initiative (1993)
Partnering Definition

“Partnering is the extent to which architecture stakeholders maintain clear, cooperative roles and maximize the value they deliver and receive”

Make the stakeholders partners

Software Architecture: Organizational Principles and Patterns – Dikel, Kane and Wilson
Why Partnering Matters

- Architects can’t do it alone
- Improves understanding and coordination within and across IT and business
- Sharpens anticipation of surprises
- Makes work more rewarding
Partnering is Hard Work
Do you wonder where architecture meetings are going?

- Key decision makers and their trusted experts attended the first meeting
- Important partners are always represented but turnover is high
- Important concepts, processes and supporting facts are often revisited from meeting to meeting
Simple engineering courtesy

- Do your homework
- Size the meeting to get results and benefit participants
- Do everything possible to make best use of people’s time
- Document results
Pitfalls of too much focus on meeting results

- Prop up attendance through action items
- Over prepare for meetings
- Over optimistically present accomplishments
- Inflexible rules
Things didn’t work out exactly as planned?

- Feature you were counting on was left out of a release at the last minute
- Coordination meetings are filled with surprises
- “One line of code per meeting”
No Surprises

- Insist that project teams collaborate before presenting a solution
- Discourage surprises at meetings
- Assign cross-team roles
- View scope management with overall service delivery
Pitfalls of No Surprises

Too much high-level emphasis can
● Discourage reporting of critical issues and risks
● Increase formality and stress

Too much team-level emphasis can
● Lose team focus
● Drain team resources
Why are there so many people in architecture meetings?

- Too many people invited in the first place
- Fear of being surprised or left out
- Propagated invitations

Consequences

- Long and ineffective meetings
- Poor architecture decisions
Identify and Engage Partners

Seek a deep understanding of partners’ products and operations

- Identify value delivery chain
- Determine critical partners
- Spend time understanding their world

- What does the architecture deliver to them?
- What do they contribute to the value chain?
Tips for Understanding the Value Chain

- Who decision makers ask when they need to make a change?
- What does the data say?
  - How does it flow?
  - What is used?
- Earn the trust of partners who will need to live with what gets delivered
- Do not assume you understand how a long-standing organization or system works
Outcomes from Better Partner Identification and Engagement

- Stay connected with those who are most important to success
- Number of partners is reduced
- Partners uncover interdependencies
- Partners uncover unsupported assumptions
Partner Identification and Engagement Pitfalls

- Death by analysis
- Conflicting Partner Expectations
- Chevronitis
Limits to Gate-Driven Architecture

- Drives focus on compliance not engagement
- Businesses have their own measures for success
- Misalignment detected too late
- Can be hard to enforce
- Many organizations are streamlining their gate models

How else can you ensure architecture stakeholders are cooperative, responsive?
Build Reciprocity with Stakeholders

- Encourage a fair and proactive exchange of value among partners
- Review both formal and informal agreements to ensure fair exchange
- Encourage informal networking
- Budget time to respond to requests from other stakeholders
Service is the Foundation

- Service here is an attitude in action, not a technical term
- Gifted architects “see” how their products will help everyone concerned and strive to make it so
- The drive to serve can mean the difference between
  - Producing designs that resonate with customers and get used
  - Adapting the architecture to unforeseen changes
Benefits of Reciprocity

● You know who to call to begin to unravel complex “unsolvable” problems
● Problems can be resolved at a lower level of organization and formality
● People answer the phone when you call
● Personal interactions are more rewarding
Reciprocity Pitfalls

- Team members make commitments to peers that increase the scope of their work products
- Stakeholders can learn to rely too much on the architect
- Architects can agree to deliver requirements that are out of scope or in conflict with one another
Peer-to-Peer Relationships are the Core of Partnering

- Who are the critical stakeholders?
- What do they need?
- What will make architecture compelling to them?
- How do we build trusting/effective relationships with them?
- Are we passionate about serving them?