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Tanaia Parker

Founder & President of T. White Parker

Tanaia Parker is one of the most talented enterprise architects that I have seen come along in recent years. She is the Founder and President of T. White Parker, a strategy and management consulting firm specializing in "enterprise problem solving" and "strategic management". For over thirteen years, she has worked as a strategy consultant, enterprise architect, business advisor and IT professional to various levels of management within multibillion dollar companies, public sector organizations as well as emerging start-ups. Her breadth of experience has helped to create a unique perspective and approach to strategic planning, strategy development, management and execution. Tanaia has a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from The American University and an M.B.A. from The 'George Washington University. Tanaia is a member of the Association of Enterprise Architects and currently serves as President of the National Capital Area Chapter of the Association for Strategic Planning.

JEA: How did you become involved with enterprise architecture?

Parker: My initial involvement in EA was in 1998 during the telecommunications industry boom. I was working for a new telephone company that had already developed a portfolio of systems that was not optimal for the company. The VP of IT chartered an EA initiative to help our company get a hold on how we were going to leverage and/or re-engineer all of our silo'd systems to become more competitive in the marketplace and more effective operationally. I was assigned to lead the team .. yes, an IT Project Manager who had no clue what an EA was! I had to come up to speed on EA pretty fast and at the time there were not a lot of EA resources. I was grateful (instead of being embarrassed) when one of my EA consultants took me under his wing and assigned me some reading homework.. the "Cook book" of EA at the time .. Melissa Cook's "Building Enterprise Information Architecture: Reengineering Information Systems" and John Zachman's framework. After my assignments, I started to dig deeper on my own. After putting the pieces together, I decided that EA could truly be used to catapult an organization .. not only from a systems perspective (which is what we were looking to do) but also from a business perspective. I was hooked at that point and have been an EA disciple ever since.

JEA: One of your specialty areas is strategic planning, how does this relate to enterprise architecture?

Parker: First, let me say that I believe EA is truly about strategic planning and strategic management for an organization .. period. The key words here are "planning" and "management". Although IT is a huge consideration in the development of an EA program and EA artifacts, IT should only be viewed as the enabler of the business while the business itself should be operating from some sort of strategy (even if it's what we call a "loose" strategy).

The relationship between strategic planning and EA is natural when you separate an EA into its traditional piece parts .. Current State, Target State and Transition Plan. In this view, an organization can choose to present its strategic plan in the form of an expanded EA Target Architecture & Transition Plan. The goals of a

Target Architecture and Transition Plan are to describe the future state of an organization from various perspectives of an organization and provide a roadmap for getting there. This is absolutely the objective of a strategic plan!

In another view of the strategic plan and enterprise architecture relationship, the strategic plan presents the vision, mission, set of goals and objectives for an organization while the EA Transition Plan serves as the action plan for getting there. One of the most common pitfalls in strategic planning is execution. Most organizations dump loads of dollars into developing a well-informed, good looking strategic plan with no thought into how it will be executed. I continue to propose that a well - orchestrated EA program is the answer to the strategy execution dilemma.

JEA: What was your most enjoyable EA project and why?

Parker: My most enjoyable EA project was my first at the telecommunications company. EA was relatively new and there was much to learn, much to debate and everything to lose on this project. We had no EA tools .. only MS Office suite and a few modeling tools. Coming from an IT background, of course I thought everything had to be about IT. It was in having to make the EA program deliver business-related results that got me off of my IT high-horse and on the mission to ensure that the business drove IT decisions and not the other way around. This was a turning point in my career.

JEA: What was your least enjoyable EA project and what made it that way?

Parker: My least enjoyable project was for a client several years ago that chartered an EA effort for only compliance reasons with no intention to use the EA at all ... I was literally told to "do what you have to do to ensure we pass". After a couple of failed attempts to try to persuade the client that EA was a good thing and that we should really try to make a concerted effort to "do the right thing", I had to back off. At the time, the organization just had to be able to say that they had an EA .. not that they were using it or that the EA was even a good one. Of course, this organization passed with flying colors which reinforced their reluctance to get on board with a true EA program.

JEA: In your opinion, what is the greatest challenge to the practice and profession of EA today?

Parker: I believe the greatest challenge to the practice and profession of EA today is not having a well-defined value proposition. EA is still not tangible for many. The definition of EA and the value it delivers is truly "in the eye of the beholder". What do we as a profession know for sure as the EA value proposition? Every architect can give you an answer but it will probably be different and maybe not even connected. This makes EA a hard sell. I think we'll get there.

JEA: Do you see EA as a viable career path of business and technology professionals?

Parker: Absolutely! As the discipline continues to mature, I believe we will see EA becoming more tangible. We will also begin seeing areas of expertise within the EA discipline like what we've seen in the world of strategic management. For business professionals, it will become more and more about how to leverage EA to improve business results while technology professionals will enjoy working to design more solutions to support EA efforts as the initiatives themselves become more sophisticated.

JEA: What would you recommend to someone who is considering a career in EA?

Parker: Learn everything you possibly can about what is out there in EA .. the different viewpoints, challenges, the different tools, frameworks, etc .. Given what you have learned, develop your own view of EA and how it will deliver value to an organization. Look at how your view works (or doesn't) with the other views. Develop a niche and work the niche to deliver tremendous results to your customers.

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