

Why System Integrators are losing the plot in the coming era of Enterprise SOA

Most enterprises and organizations have a limited number of preferred suppliers in IT. Usually at least some of these are the traditional System Integrators, with a complete services portfolio enabling end to end service delivery to the customer.

From the perspective of Enterprise Architecture there is a growing distance between what the enterprise needs and what the System Integrator can deliver.

The changing needs of enterprises

In this era of growing fluidity in business processes and organizations there is a growing need for agility and flexibility, as well as an ever changing “mix and match” of resources to deliver products and services to their customers. This trend is one of the main drivers for the emergence of the service oriented architectural paradigm in both Business and IT.

As far as IT is concerned more and more enterprises are embarking on the road towards Enterprise level SOA. They are building a common platform for use across functional silos, across disciplines, across different technology bases.

Enterprise SOA: the Program and the Project

The result of this shift is that the definition of “the Project”, as the key delivery unit in IT is changing too. An Enterprise SOA is not built through any one project, it is a Program by definition. Creating such an Enterprise SOA is a multi-year, multi-project effort, established only through rigorous design and close continuous governance involving many different stakeholders all walking in rhythm. To call this road to Enterprise SOA ambitious is an understatement: it is the single most difficult thing that any enterprise can undertake in the area of IT and IT Governance.

Enter the System Integrator

Traditionally, enterprises have engaged system integrators to deliver and integrate applications, to execute implementation projects and ultimately to do managed operations of deployed applications. Usually, the service portfolio and internal organization of these system integrators reflects these traditional demands from enterprises, resulting in specific service portfolios, silos, divisions or business units for Consult, Build, Run/Outsource services. Some system integrators put a customer facing layer in front, but they will still be organized internally following this traditional model. In the old world, the disciplines and skills required to deliver these services would be so different, and a mixed demand so rare, that this organization made perfect sense.

Integration mash-up: the new world

In the era of Enterprise SOA this natural division of services and skills no longer applies. In this brave new world, there is on the one hand the Enterprise SOA

platform, organized in enterprise-wide layers or domains like User Enablement (portals and UI), Process Composition, Enterprise Information Management, Service provisioning, and Security and Identity. This platform needs to be specified, designed, implemented and run based on a by definition heterogeneous technology stack from different vendors. Then for each set of business requirements projects are defined that address, implement, deploy, use, and ultimately govern different layers/domains from this E-SOA stack.

Today there is not a single system integrator in the world with a service portfolio aimed squarely at this new Enterprise SOA based playing field.

What are customers asking?

The system integrators customers may not be very mature in the questions they are asking. They may still be stuck in the traditional way of asking services: implement this system, manage operations against these SLA's, deliver IT-consultants and developers based on a specific skills profile against a specified hourly rate.

But behind these questions what they are really asking is questions like this: help me in User Enablement, deliver comprehensive Enterprise Information Management, provide consistent Security and Identity Management, Design and Implement my E-SOA Governance and Enterprise Architecture process, Rationalize my legacy applications landscape based on SOA principles.

Value in the land of E-SOA

The world of IT is changing. Current System Integrators cannot have their cake and eat it too. The way they are organized, the way they go to market, the way they mix and match their skilled employees no longer match the real requirements posed by the transition to the Enterprise SOA paradigm. To provide lasting value, they will have to adapt their services portfolio and change the way they define their answer to customer requirements.

It will be interesting to see who will ultimately learn this lesson best.