

Top 10 Characteristics for Evaluating an Enterprise Architect Certification Program

As the field of Enterprise Architecture (EA) grows and the number of practitioners also increases, the need to distinguish Enterprise Architecture from other professions is greater than ever. Additionally, the need for proper EA training and certification is ever increasing.

Because of these needs, it is not surprising that even in a young field such as Enterprise Architecture, the number of certification programs to choose from is growing. Type in “Enterprise Architect Certification” in any search engine and see the vast number of results.

With many Enterprise Architect Certification programs to choose from, picking the right one can be a difficult task. With no set of worldwide recognized standards for EA certification yet available, how do you know you are picking the right one? Which Certification programs will give you the best measures of an architect’s capabilities?

We have developed a checklist based upon questions commonly asked by those seeking Enterprise Architect Certification. This checklist will enable you to evaluate each Certification program, aid in your selection process, and ensure the EA Certification program you choose delivers the most practical, effective measure of enterprise architect maturity and capabilities possible.

Top 10 Characteristics for Evaluating an Enterprise Architect Certification Program

Top 10 Enterprise Architect Certification Program Characteristics Checklist

1. You Can Actually Develop an Effective Enterprise Architecture After You Finish the Certification Program

This is the number one criteria for any Enterprise Architect Certification program. A good certification program does not leave its attendees feeling lost once the program is over and they are certified. A certified Enterprise Architect should be fully capable, confident and have a good understanding on how to conduct an architecture project immediately after they finish the program. The program should provide them with a toolset (manuals, project plans, templates, etc.) to begin architecture projects. A complete Enterprise Architecture Certification program would include:

- An Enterprise Architecture Process
- An Enterprise Architecture Classification, Taxonomy, and Framework
- An Enterprise Architecture Work Breakdown Structure and Methodology
- An Enterprise Architect Maturity Model
- An Organization Change Model, Process, Methodology and Work Breakdown Structure
- A Set of Business Understanding Components
- A Set of Technology Understanding Components
- An Understanding of Enterprise Architecture Models
- An Understanding of Enterprise Solution Models
- Components geared toward “short term value”, that can be built upon to provide “long term value”
- Templates and tools to provide immediate practitioner guidance
- Criteria to allow practitioners to be recognized for growing competencies, as their experience grows, based on actual Enterprise Architecture enablement activities
- Classroom presentation and workshop materials

2. Theoretical Soundness

Every discipline, whether it is mathematics, chemistry, or social work, has a theoretical background. Additionally, theory is the basis for ideas, techniques, and knowledge methodologies are based upon. As a result, certified Enterprise Architects must study the theory behind the methodologies being taught. Of course, theory is not enough for any practitioner. Therefore, without a sound understanding of what Enterprise Architecture is and how to move from theory to practice, the true value of EA work will not be achieved. Methodologies taught in EA certification programs should have a traceable theoretical soundness.

Top 10 Characteristics for Evaluating an Enterprise Architect Certification Program

Top 10 Enterprise Architect Certification Program Characteristics Checklist (continued)

3. Defined Body of Knowledge - Method

In order to advance the EA profession, a body of knowledge must be defined and the methods taught in the certification program must use this as a reference point. If a defined body of knowledge is utilized, EA results will be consistent and can be verified against this to ensure success. Of course, this body of knowledge will grow over time, and the certification program's theoretical and practicing knowledge base will need to be updated, as new understandings are discovered, practiced, and verified.

4. Practitioner-Based

The Certifying organization should be comprised of practitioners - Enterprise Architects who have actually practiced and continue to practice Enterprise Architecture. The instructor(s) and advisory Board of Directors should be Enterprise Architects themselves, practicing the same body of knowledge and methodologies taught in the certification program. The practicing Enterprise Architects understandings will be balanced with the need for theoretical soundness, and will maintain that understanding.

5. Demonstrate Competency

The certification program should not just be a series of lectures. Furthermore, the attendees should not just take a test or be interviewed by experts to show competency. The curriculum *should* encourage attendees to practice the theories, and methodologies being taught, and present opportunities for analysis of demonstrated work in a Workshop environment. There is nothing like having to actually do something in front of others to focus your attention! Enterprise Architecture is founded on communicating with a wide array of people in business and IT roles, amongst many other characteristics, and Enterprise Architecture skills need to be demonstrated. For advanced certification, demonstration of additional enterprise architecture work products is necessary to illustrate proficiency. This competency also needs to be "re-certified" on a period basis, as is the practice with most professions and professional organizations.

6. Instructors

Instructors must be practitioners of Enterprise Architecture themselves, well versed in both the theory and practice of Enterprise Architecture. When they are not teaching, they should be practicing the same body of knowledge being taught in the certification program. A good instructor needs to balance their time in the classroom with time doing actual Enterprise Architecture activities within their enterprise or client enterprises. They are then able to provide a positive learning experience, create an open forum for knowledge sharing, and are able to share personal project experiences with the attendees. Preferably, instructors have at least 10 years of experience practicing Enterprise Architecture, and at least 25 client/enterprise engagements.

Top 10 Characteristics for Evaluating an Enterprise Architect Certification Program

Top 10 Enterprise Architect Certification Program Characteristics Checklist (continued)

7. Client Case Studies

The EA certification instructors must be able to offer real examples from real organizations. Attendees want to hear about successful EA projects and pitfalls, not just theoretical examples. Actual stories, quotes, models, and even pictures, not only enhance the learning process but also prove to attendees that the defined body of knowledge they will be utilizing actually works.

8. Initiative Formation

Enterprise Architecture does not end with a series of models. If the Enterprise Architecture activities end with a series of models, then what you have is a series of models. The Enterprise Architecture methodology taught at the certification program should enable the Enterprise Architect to provide their business or client with an answer to the all too-familiar question “what am I supposed to do Monday morning?!!” Simply handing the client a leather-bound “book” with one thousand pages of text, or a series of models, will not allow them to move forward. Appropriately certified Enterprise Architects will be able to deliver a prioritized business aligned roadmap – a set of actions or initiatives - to proceed from the architecture descriptors.

9. Renewal of Certification

Most professional certifications are limited in time. A person’s certification means nothing if they last time they practiced in the field was years ago. Similar to other professions, Enterprise Architecture certification should be consistent with this concept. Additionally, as the Certified Enterprise Architect completes architecture projects and demonstrates continued practice in the field, their hard work and accomplishments should be recognized through different levels of certification. Advanced certifications, based on the number of actual successful Enterprise Architecture engagements, is one measure of meeting advanced certification requirements.

10. Vendor Neutral

The certifying organization should not accept funding or support from outside sources such as software or service vendors. While software or service vendors are encouraged to attend certification programs and are welcome, this neutrality is necessary to ensure all Enterprise Architects are practicing from the same body of knowledge without bias or outside influence. Professions outside of Enterprise Architecture have maintained this requirement successfully.

This article was prepared by Dana Holcman, an EACOE Certified Senior Enterprise Architect. She can be reached at Dana.Holcman@PinnacleBusGrp.com.