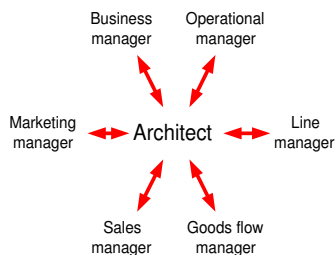


The Tense Relation between Architect and Manager

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Abstract

Most system architects don't feel at home in management teams or meetings. The other way around managers often see architects as a mixed blessing and don't perceive them as peer manager. The relation of the architect with the manager is full of tension.

This intermezzo reflects on the underlying causes of this tension, in the hope to enable a better relationship. An improved relationship is important for a company, because manager and architect are quite complementary, both are required for success.

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1 Introduction

The relation between managers and systems architects somehow tends to be somewhat difficult. This is not desired, since we position the systems architects as part of the leadership of an organization.

In this intermezzo we look at managers and architects in a generalized way. Generalizations are always risky; the purpose of this generalization is to better understand the inherent tensions between architects and managers. No “real” architect nor manager will exactly look like the generalization in this intermezzo.

2 What is a Manager?

A manager is someone who manages everything needed to get a task executed. The manager has the responsibility for the task. The responsibility comes with the required authority to do the task. Every Process in the simplified business decomposition in ?? and ?? generally has a manager associated with the process who is responsible for the execution of that process. Often these tasks are further decomposed with managers associated with every subtask.

Systems architects frequently encounter the managers shown in Figure 1.

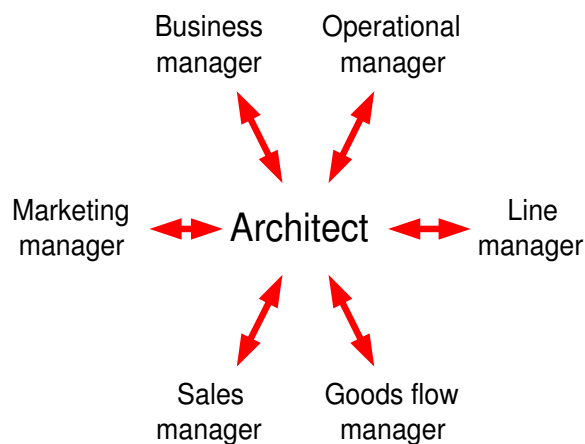


Figure 1: Managers frequently interacting with architects

3 Comparison of Architect and Manager

Figure 2 shows a comparison between architects and managers for 6 different aspects: *responsibility*, *view on solutions*, *view on changes*, *personal characteristics*, *leadership values*, and *personal ambition*.

<i>responsibilities</i>	<i>architect</i>	<i>manager</i>
scope	wide	limited
formal weight	low	high

<i>view on solutions</i>	<i>architect</i>	<i>manager</i>
design	elegant	if it works it is OK
application	perfect fit	no complaints
future proof	important	task dependent

<i>view on changes</i>	<i>architect</i>	<i>manager</i>
viewpoint	changes needed: + stakeholders + time + problem analysis	changes introduce: - problems - uncertainties - new changes
attitude	fact of life	avoid changes

<i>personal characteristics</i>	<i>architect</i>	<i>manager</i>
	independent critical curious	conformance demanding control minded

<i>leadership values</i>	<i>architect</i>	<i>manager</i>
	based on knowledge vision	based on KPI's title creates expectations task driven

<i>personal ambition</i>	<i>architect</i>	<i>manager</i>
	best solutions	highest hierarchical level

Figure 2: Comparison of caricature of architect and manager

3.1 Responsibility

Managers have a well defined responsibility, related to their function. In most organizations managers also are empowered accordingly. The scope of responsibility is limited, the total responsibility is divided over many managers.

The responsibility of the architect is much more fuzzy, see ???. For every aspect the architect is working on there is some manager who has the formal responsibility for that specific subject. The architect has limited formal power. At the other hand architects have a lot of informal influence.

3.2 View on Solutions

The view on solutions is quite different. The architect partially trusts his or her intuition, looking for the notion of an elegant solution. The word elegant can cover many aspects, such as: balanced, simple, beautiful. As representative of the stakeholders the architect will guard the fitness for use, is it the “right” solution? At the same time the architect will place the solution in a time perspective, is the solution “future proof”?

Most managers stay close to their task and responsibility. A solution that matches the specification is by definition good. If there are no complaints, then there is no problem.

3.3 View on Changes

Architects (ought to) spend a significant part of their time in the turbulent outside world, inhabited with demanding customers in changing markets with aggressive inventive competitors, and innovative suppliers. At the same time architects are active in the company across many internal boundaries, enabling architects to detect, analyze and to help solving many internal problems. Architects are continuously confronted with situations where change is required. The internal and the external world are highly dynamic, causing need for change everywhere. Architects see changes as a fact of life.

Managers tend to take an opposite view on the need for change caused by the limited scope and the heavy weight of the responsibility of their task results. Managers have experienced that changes always introduce problems, involve uncertainties, and trigger more changes. The resulting behavior is to avoid changes/footnote Keep aware that we discuss caricatures of architects and managers. In practice there are many (bad) architects behaving very conservative..

3.4 Personal Characteristics

Managers are control minded, managers like to be in control of the task being performed; that is exactly their job. Managers demand conformance as a means to be in control. The people working at a task have to conform to the way the manager wants to perform the task.

Architects have an entirely different personality. Architects need independence and curiosity to be able to act as representative of the stakeholders. At the same time architects need to be critical, is this the best way to do address the task?

3.5 Leadership Values

Many organizations still think in hierarchical terms. Hence the manager is seen as the person who sets the direction. However, it is questionable if managers do have the appropriate knowledge and vision to determine the direction.

Architects have a broad perspective and know how, while (good) architects also have vision. This is a natural combination to provide true leadership.

Some architects are handicapped by an introvert personality making it difficult to “sell” the vision and to take the leaders position. It will be clear that team-work of manager and architect will work wonders in such a case.

3.6 Personal Ambition

The personal ambition of managers and architects are opposite as well. Many managers are driven by normal career incentives: higher position, power, status

and more money. Architects seem to be driven by the case at hand, they want to achieve the “best” solution.

This difference in ambition makes the architect difficult to control, because architects are rather insensitive for the normal incentives, such as promotions and salary raises.

4 How to improve the relationship

The starting point for any solution is the recognition of the problem. This intermezzo is primarily provided to create awareness of the problem that there is tension between architects and managers. No silver bullets are given here as solution.

A quite promising direction to address this problem is modern management techniques, see Figure 3 for a list of suggestions.

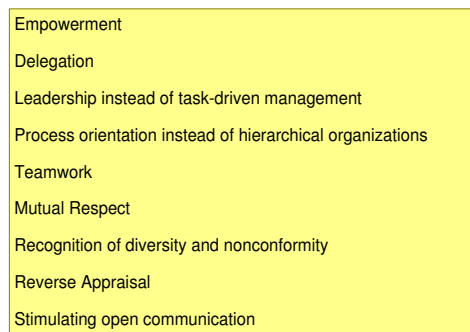


Figure 3: List of modern management techniques that can be used to improve the relation between managers and architects

The architect plays a vital role in bootstrapping these management techniques. In many techniques the architect plays the role of catalyst due to the combination of personal characteristics such as independence and know how. If the architect hides in technological solutions, then the architect does not trigger the required change.

We can also work at both sides to improve this relationship. Architects can be stuck in the solution world with little attention for all non technical aspects that determine the architecture. A vital step is that architects learn to communicate better what the impact of technical choices is on the less technical business aspects. Once architects are able to communicate more clearly with managers, then their recognition and influence will increase. See the next chapter for a further elaboration.

Many managers do not know what to expect from architects. It helps managers if they do understand the role of the architects better, so that they can ask the right questions and provide coaching. This book can be used in courses directed to management teams to help them to understand the architecting role.

5 Acknowledgments

Jürgen Müller attended me on the fact that telling only the negative (The relationship is tense) is not good enough. An architect should always look for the constructive way out. I therefore added section ???. Wil Hoogenstraaten also commented that the described relationship is well recognizable, but how to escape from this situation?

Louis Rubinfeld pointed out the importance of communication, which resulted in adding "stimulating open communication" as improvement means.

References

- [1] Gerrit Muller. The system architecture homepage. <http://www.gaudisite.nl/index.html>, 1999.

History

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- small textual improvements

Version: 1.4, date: June 9, 2010 changed by: Gerrit Muller

- changed all tables into one figure
- made list into figure
- small textual improvements

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- added "stimulating open communication" as improvement means

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- changed list of managers into diagram

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- Section added: "What is a manager, which managers are addresses here?"
- Section added: "How to improve the relationship?"
- Section Acknowledgements added

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- Created, no changelog yet