

# SOA Follows Strategy

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"Structure follows strategy." Business historian Alfred Chandler's thesis comprises the answer to the question of why Service-Oriented Architectures (SOAs) are being built and why now. In the increasingly global competitive environment, the pace of business change is unprecedented. New products and services, increasingly comprehensive yet more and more targeted, need to be rolled out to the market in ever shorter cycles. Cheaper, faster, better is no longer enough, but companies need to change and develop continually. The challenge is to adapt the operations to the changing circumstances with existing resources. Agility becomes the focal point of competitiveness.

Reallocation of resources is not easy, however. Fitting the information systems to the business requirements is an eternal problem. Both ends need adjustment: business processes need to be adapted to the logic of underlying applications and it is hard to integrate package solutions to business flows. Once the process has been implemented, changing it is very difficult. Traditional integration solutions (EAI) figuratively cast the applications in concrete. Today's business calls for process agility that cannot be achieved with traditional business applications or integration solutions.

Service-Oriented Architecture is based on the tenet that two new levels are added on top of the existing IT infrastructure: the service layer that canonizes the organization's information and operational model to which the data and functionality in information systems are mapped; and the process layer that orchestrates the process logic over these services.

Is it not redundant then, one could ask; does building new levels on top of already complex IT environment not suffocate the last hope of achieving agility? This danger certainly exists, if the technical stack is merely appended with new systems without architectural considerations, but implemented in the right way, SOA makes business change essentially more agile.

The service abstraction insulates business changes from IT development and thereby synchronizes the business and the IT; the standard interface visible to the process is segregated from the technical implementation of the service. Business requirements are mapped to new or changed business processes, in which the services are reorchestrated. New services are built on demand by integrating information systems and possibly by implementing the required functionality in agile software projects.

Many companies have indeed started to build such architectures. More often than not, the endeavor has been driven bottom-up by IT: applications have been integrated together, automating larger functional wholes. The most successful enterprises, however, are constructing their architecture business-driven: top-down and outside-in. They also define and implement a SOA governance model: a set of principles, mechanisms and policies to establish decision rights at all levels of the enterprise.