The TOGAF Standard, 10th Edition: What's New?

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Introduction

A rather unexpected event surprising for many in the enterprise architecture (EA) community was the recent release of TOGAF version 10, now marketed as the TOGAF Standard, 10th Edition. The official whitepaper from The Open Group introducing the new release[1] barely explains exactly what has changed substantially in their EA framework, except for elucidating why its documentation was restructured. Instead, the whitepaper strongly accentuates that the TOGAF Standard embodies "best practice" (mentioned there 33 times) which is "proven" (15 times), "stable" (27 times), "enduring" (11 times) and even "universal" (24 times). In their announcement on the website[2], The Open Group leaders also say nothing specific about TOGAF's changes in substance, but only praise its new modular structure and also declare its allegiance to the now-hottest buzzwords "agile" and "digital transformation".

The release of TOGAF v10 has caused a certain agitation in the industry among journalists, trainers and consultants, who unanimously commended the updated version because it is "easier to use and implement"[3, page 1], "brings a stronger focus to agile environments and digital transformation"[4, page 1] and provides "more, better, and topical guidance on how to deliver the best enterprise architecture"[5, page 1]. But, putting these general statements about the virtues of the fresh release aside, what changes does the latest update of the famous EA framework introduce?

What Has Changed?

The first and obvious change in TOGAF v10 immediately noticed by everyone is the restructuring and extension of its content. Now, it consists of two major parts, TOGAF Fundamental Content and TOGAF Series Guides, and each of these parts, in turn, comprises a number of documents. Specifically, TOGAF Fundamental Content includes six separate volumes covering different aspects of an EA practice, whereas TOGAF Series Guides contains a couple of dozen smaller documents providing additional guidance in different areas. Instead of a single mammoth document, we now have a collection of multiple documents distributed together under the umbrella of TOGAF.

The second conspicuous change in TOGAF v10, which is much less discussed in mainstream publications, is the removal of arrowheads from the Architecture Development Method (ADM). As the introductory volume of TOGAF explains, the ADM no longer suggests that "the phases must be performed in any specific sequence"[6, page 18]. Hence, with the recent release, the familiar TOGAF emblem — the ADM cycle with yellow and orange circles — looks somewhat different.

At first glance, these changes look pretty impressive, if not revolutionary. However, they reflect only what is apparent from a cursory study of the updated materials, telling little about the essence of introduced modifications.
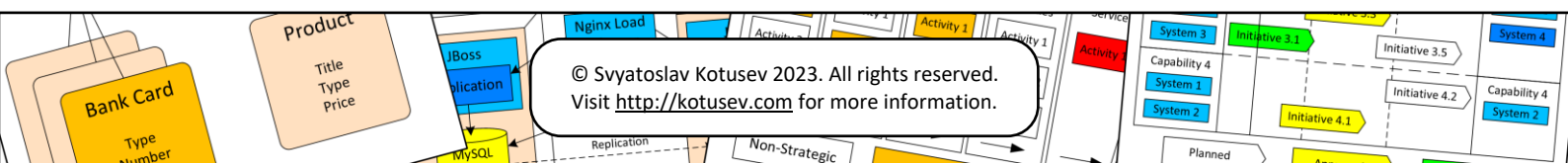
So, What Has Changed, Really?

A detailed examination of the TOGAF v10 contents (what a boring exercise) shows that no substantial changes have actually been introduced to the framework. Instead, it has been merely "diluted with water" and renovated rhetorically.

Old Materials Flavored with New Fads

Among all TOGAF v10 materials, genuinely new ones are rather difficult to find. On the one hand, the six volumes of TOGAF Fundamental Content have been produced simply by slicing the thick TOGAF v9.2 manual into six pieces with only minor amendments to its text, which do not alter its suggestions in any real sense. By and large, it is exactly the same old TOGAF. On the other hand, most of the documents included in TOGAF Series Guides are also not new and were already available somewhere on The Open Group website earlier, long before the release. Namely, of the 23 papers constituting it, at least 15 have been either "borrowed" from the TOGAF Library[7, 8] or retrieved from the previous versions of the TOGAF body[9, 10].

Of the eight new guides, five address the two trendiest but evidently faddish topics: digital and agile. Content-wise, those papers that revolve around the former topic arguably say next to nothing concrete except ascertaining that TOGAF is good for digital[11], while those ones that focus on the latter topic mostly apply the agile terminology (e.g. sprints) to the realm of enterprise architecture, as if it was a piece of software, and introduce some fancy acronyms, like minimum viable architecture (MVA)[12].

All in all, TOGAF v10 predominantly *reshuffles* the existing content, adding to it mainly some rhetorical novelties. Interestingly, no "classic" TOGAF elements are left out in its new version, even such mysterious concepts as enterprise continuum inscrutable to any human beings.

Arrows Are Erased, but Still There

The removal of arrowheads from the ADM represents a patently perfunctory, "quick and dirty" fix intended to "avoid the implication that the ADM is a waterfall model"[1, page 22] (what could be worse in the age of agile?). Because the six volumes of TOGAF Fundamental Content were essentially extracted from TOGAF v9.2 verbatim, the step-by-step logic of the planning approach imposed by all the previous versions of the framework is still present, explicitly or implicitly, everywhere throughout the text. Most importantly, the very description of the ADM with its successive phases has not changed at all. As a result, TOGAF now contains numerous contradicting statements, especially between its older Fundamental Content and newer Series Guides, as to whether the ADM actually describes a process and whether it defines a sequence of activities.

For instance, the first volume of TOGAF Fundamental Content (Introduction and Core Concepts) unequivocally asserts that the ADM "provides a tested and repeatable *process* for developing architectures"[6, page 16]. Its second volume (Architecture Development Method) also confirms that "the TOGAF ADM provides a generic *process* for carrying out architecture"[13, page 19] and "defines a recommended *sequence* for the various phases and steps involved in developing an architecture"[13, page 14], exactly in the same way as before. Although the arrowheads have been blotted out from the picture, they still permeate the whole text, as it was written originally many years ago.

However, these and similar claims are disavowed outright in multiple papers from TOGAF Series Guides: "The TOGAF ADM should *not* be understood as a processes model"[7, page 40], "The ADM is *not* a linear process model"[14, page 100], "ADM phases do *not* have to proceed in

sequence"[15, page 18] and "The ADM graphic [...] is *not* a representation of activity sequence"[7, page 40]. This pervasive muddle in the interpretation of what the ADM really is highlights the sheer absurdity of the act attempted by The Open Group: reposition a "heavyweight", designedly step-wise methodology that prescribes creating tens of artifacts and deliverables as agile-friendly by means of a few quick fixes.

The latest release, therefore, represents nothing more than window dressing. It does not change anything substantially, but only introduces a number of superficial "improvements" intended to send a message to the EA community that TOGAF is alive, well-aligned with current fashions, perfectly compatible with agile and can surely be used to drive digital transformation. "The fact that the TOGAF Standard is a living body of knowledge is one of its great advantages", noted Steve Nunn, the CEO and president of The Open Group[2, page 1].

More Symbolic Than Ever

In my earlier criticisms of TOGAF[16], I reported that TOGAF's factual recommendations (as well as those of its conceptual precursors, like TAFIM[17], and other popular EA frameworks[18]) have long been found inadequate by EA practitioners and rejected by the industry, while the use of TOGAF in organizations became purely nominal and symbolic, bearing virtually no resemblance to how their EA practices actually work in any aspect[19]. The latest update of TOGAF has only strengthened its standing as a symbol, rather than a tool or actionable guidance[20].

Even More Obscure Suggestions

Whereas the earlier versions of TOGAF at least provided relatively clear prescriptions as to what actions in what sequence should be taken as per the ADM (but that clearly did not work in practice), in the current version 10 with its denial of the sequential logic of the ADM it is no longer clear even what exactly is being suggested by the framework. In other words, TOGAF now contains even less substance than before and using it, thus, becomes even more equivalent to doing whatever you like.

Unlike its versions 8 and 9, which can be viewed as a sort of practical guidance and criticized as such, TOGAF v10 cannot even be regarded as a guidance that can be seriously discussed or subjected to meaningful analysis as it does not propose anything in particular. Previously, I used to joke that if all the arrows in the ADM cycle were reversed, then nothing would change because nobody follows them anyway. Now, when the arrows are absent altogether, there is nothing in TOGAF even to joke about.

Even Less Intelligible Text

Yes, the TOGAF's humongous text has been separated into multiple files and it is argued that this separation "makes adoption of stable best practice and emerging ideas easier"[1, page 6]. However, the overall volume of what is now considered to be TOGAF has, in fact, increased severalfold, making the task of comprehending its meaning even more daunting. While TOGAF v9.2 was a single document with "only" 532 pages, TOGAF v10 represents a loose collection of papers with a whopping size of 1779 pages in total, where TOGAF Fundamental Content alone occupies 550 pages. Would it be easy for you to read all that and make sense of it?

Furthermore, it is not only me who noticed that TOGAF's text is very poorly written, incoherent and hard to follow[21]. Some of its sections contain repeated sentences, if not entire paragraphs, copied and pasted in different locations; some fragments are simply

unintelligible. Due to numerous inconsistencies exacerbated by the recent fixes and rearrangements, it is arguably impossible to read it carefully. The text became even more arcane and impenetrable than before, its mindful reading poses considerable challenges and represents a severe mental exercise. Generally, TOGAF v10 in places creates an impression of a text that is not even intended to be attentively studied by anyone.

In summary, TOGAF v10 offers even fewer concrete suggestions in an even more diffused way than its predecessors. It takes nearly 18 hundred pages to say almost nothing specific. Now, TOGAF has become more symbolic than ever before. The structure of the TOGAF Standard, 10th Edition with the key conclusions of its critical analysis expounded above is shown in Figure 1.
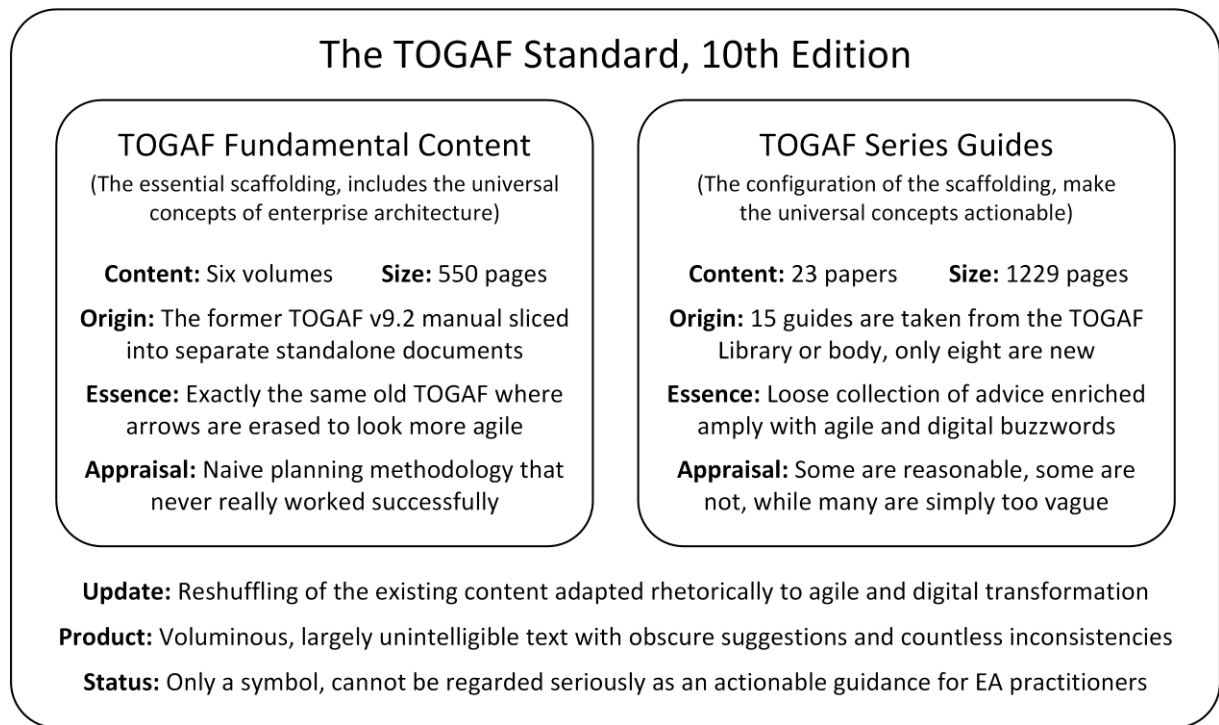
Figure 1. The TOGAF Standard, 10th Edition

What Is the Use of TOGAF Then?

It is not a big secret for most people aware of the practical realities of enterprise architecture that TOGAF barely resembles the planning practices that really work anywhere[22]. No architects with real-world experience in a sane mind will ever consider "sticking to TOGAF" in any non-symbolic sense. What the representatives of The Open Group insistently promote to the whole world as "proven", "stable" and "universal" "best practices"[1] actually has nothing to do with such practices; TOGAF's recommendations are arbitrary in relation to reality (though, it is difficult to judge whether The Open Group members believe in their own preposterous marketing statements).

In this light, it is obvious that TOGAF cannot be regarded as a valuable source of knowledge for EA practitioners, where one can expect to find something more significant than the definition of four EA domains and a few other basic notions. If this is so, then does TOGAF have any beneficial use for the community of practitioners whatsoever?

In fact, getting TOGAF-certified brings a number of benefits to IT specialists none of which, however, relates to the genuine knowledge and understanding of enterprise architecture. For example, it can signal to your boss your desire or intention to move into an architecture role,
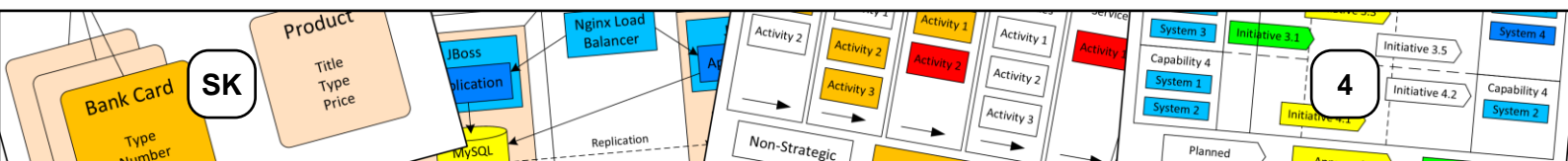
thereby boosting your career progress. It can also help you pass through HR filters searching for "TOGAF" in your CV or job application, possibly get a salary bonus. Or, maybe it can endow one with a psychological sense of comfort that some formal education was completed and nothing important is missing. But, in any case, these benefits are purely symbolic, they cannot turn one into a competent enterprise architect.

Fitness for Purpose

Instead of the practitioner community, the key beneficiaries of TOGAF are undoubtfully The Open Group itself and a ramified network of affiliated trainers, consultants and gurus making their living by interpreting it "properly" to newcomers in the EA discipline (it is no surprise that many of its materials are authored or co-authored by consultancies[1, 23, 24]). Accordingly, the primary target audience of The Open Group's promotional efforts is not seasoned EA practitioners, as they understand well from their own experience what works and what does not, but rather aspiring architects largely unable to sanity-check and validate the descriptions of so-called "proven best practices" against reality. This is seemingly especially so for aspiring EA practitioners from developing countries, where EA practices are not yet widespread, who cannot observe real enterprise architecture at work and whose only option is to succumb to the deceptive promises of The Open Group and purchase its "snake oil".

From the viewpoint of its real beneficiaries, the express vagueness of TOGAF, surprisingly, turns into a beneficial quality conducive to achieving their goals: selling more courses, trainings and certifications. Hundreds of pages of incomprehensible text obviously require more expositors than a concise and clearly formulated guidance. Put it simply, the murkier the text is, the more paid educational services will be demanded. For this reason, TOGAF with its ambiguous suggestions provides a particularly fertile ground for all sorts of "experts", who know what using TOGAF really means and how exactly it should be applied.

Some Conclusions

From the analysis of TOGAF v10 materials, two trends become evident, at least to me. First, TOGAF adapts rhetorically and tries to embrace today's top buzzwords "agile" and "digital transformation" in order to emphasize its relevance to the current industry discourse. Second, TOGAF quickly moves towards greater ambiguity by further blurring and obfuscating its already vague ideas to make any criticism of its recommendations impossible, for instance, from an agile point of view. Both these trends reinforce its purely symbolic status in the EA discipline as something actively discussed, but lacking any substance.

The TOGAF Standard, 10th Edition certainly adds nothing to the EA community in terms of an understanding of genuine EA best practices. However, the changes introduced in the standard, as well as the very fact of its update, are well-aligned with the interests of people standing behind it, allowing them to sell more certifications and accompanying "educational" services. One training provider, for example, claims that "TOGAF 10 represents the culmination of several years worth of expertise, discussion, and first-hand experience from companies and practitioners at the cutting edge of EA"[3, page 1], an alluring but misleading statement. For this reason, the trends of rhetorical adaptation and semantic obfuscation outlined above seem likely to persist in the future evolution of the framework. Only in this sense will TOGAF continue to stay a "living" standard.

Therefore, with the new release of the "proven" standard, nothing in the EA universe will change for the better: TOGAF trainers will keep earning their fees as usual, while newly certified TOGAF practitioners will keep asking the same hackneyed questions as before, like
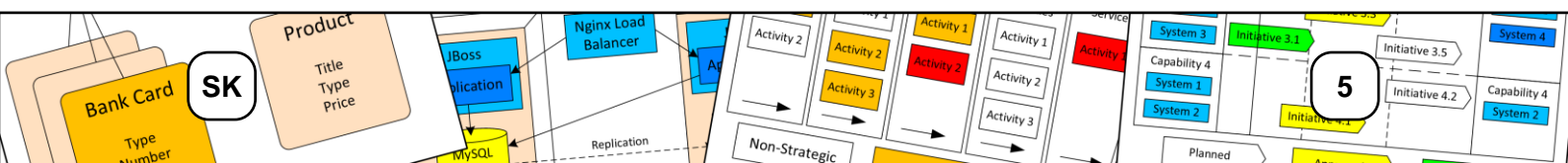
"How do I implement TOGAF in practice?", not realizing that implementing it actually means nothing more than putting a TOGAF-badge on your jacket and declaring adherence to the standard to your CIO. In this light, besides advertising its compatibility with agile, the removal of directive arrows from the ADM in TOGAF v10 conveys another powerful symbolic message to EA practitioners: get TOGAF-certified and then go wherever you like.

Post Scriptum

It is long obvious to me, and I believe to the community of EA practitioners at large, that TOGAF has turned into an empty symbol that does not deserve to be analyzed seriously and even paid attention to. From this standpoint, studying its updated materials, writing this article and reading it can be regarded, for the most part, as a waste of time.

However, insofar as someone still visits TOGAF-certification centers and considers TOGAF to be an "industry standard", as a professional researcher of EA practices, I felt obliged to comment on the new release of the famous EA framework notwithstanding the futility of this task. Hopefully, my efforts will increase the overall degree of sanity within the EA community and contribute to the further decline of this pernicious product that baffled so many minds, wasted so much money and partly discredited the very concept of enterprise architecture. **SK**

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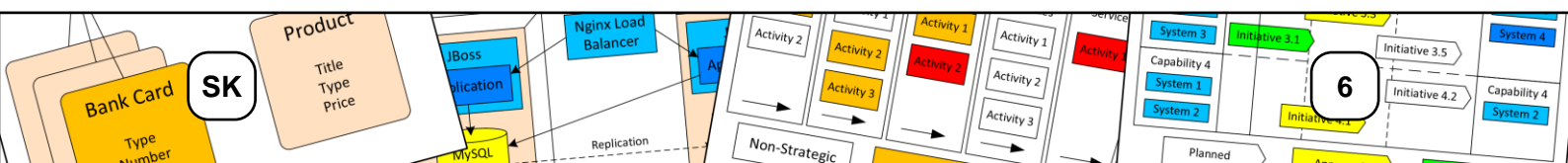
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