How to Get from Strategy to Execution in IT Projects with Architectural Excellence

A practical guide to using the Structured Canvas approach from the IASA Business Technology Architecture Body of Knowledge

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Introduction

Many IT projects fail to deliver the expected value, quality, and outcomes due to a lack of alignment between the business strategy and the IT execution. How can IT architects bridge this gap and ensure that the IT solutions they design, and implement are aligned with the business goals, needs, and capabilities? One of the tools that can help IT architects achieve this alignment is the Structured Canvas approach, a framework that is part of the IASA Business Technology Architecture Body of Knowledge (BTABoK).

At WVE Business Technology Strategy, we have a team of certified and experienced IT architects who have successfully applied the Structured Canvas approach in various IT projects across different industries and domains. We have helped our clients to achieve business-IT alignment, value, and quality by using Structured Canvases as tools for analysis, design, communication, validation, and adaptation. In this article, we will share with you how we use Structured Canvases and how they can benefit your IT projects.

What is the Structured Canvas approach?

The Structured Canvas approach is comprised of best practice canvases from the industry that help IT architects capture, communicate, and validate the business context, drivers, and outcomes of an IT project. It consists of creating and using Structured Canvases, which are diagrams that contain various elements in the context of the canvas. The canvases can be categorized in the following aspects of business-IT alignment:

- **Business Strategy:** The vision, mission, goals, and objectives of the business.
- **Business Model:** The value proposition, customer segments, channels, revenue streams, and cost structure of the business.
- **Business Capabilities**: The core competencies, processes, and resources that enable the business to deliver value to its customers.
- **Business Requirements**: The functional and non-functional needs and expectations of the business stakeholders and customers.
- **Business Outcomes:** The measurable benefits and value that the business expects to achieve from the IT project.
- **IT Strategy:** The vision, mission, goals, and objectives of the IT system or function.

- **IT Capabilities:** The core competencies, processes, and resources that enable the IT function to deliver value to the business.
- **IT Requirements:** The functional and non-functional needs and expectations of the IT stakeholders and customers.
- **Solution Architecture:** Deliverables that outline the structure of the application, data, security, and infrastructure Architecture of the IT Solution.
- **IT Outcomes:** The measurable benefits and value that the IT function expects to achieve from the IT project.

The Structured Canvas approach helps IT architects to understand the business context and drivers of an IT project, and to align the IT strategy, capabilities, requirements, and outcomes with the business strategy, capabilities, requirements, and outcomes. By using Structured Canvases, IT architects can ensure that the IT solutions they design, and implement are relevant, feasible, viable, and desirable for the business.

How to Use the Structured Canvas Approach?

The Structured Canvas approach can be used in different stages of an IT project, from the initiation and planning to the execution and evaluation. Here are some steps that IT architects can follow to use the Structured Canvas approach effectively:

- **Identify the business and IT stakeholders and customers** of the IT project and involve them in the creation and validation of Structured Canvases.
- **Start with the business strategy, model, capabilities, requirements, and outcomes**, and use them as the basis for defining the IT strategy, capabilities, requirements, and outcomes.
- **Use Structured Canvases as communication and collaboration tools and** share them with the business and IT stakeholders and customers regularly.
- **Use Structured Canvases as validation and feedback tools** and solicit input and feedback from the business and IT stakeholders and customers frequently.
- **Use Structured Canvases as learning and adaptation** tools, and update them as the business and IT context, drivers, and outcomes change.

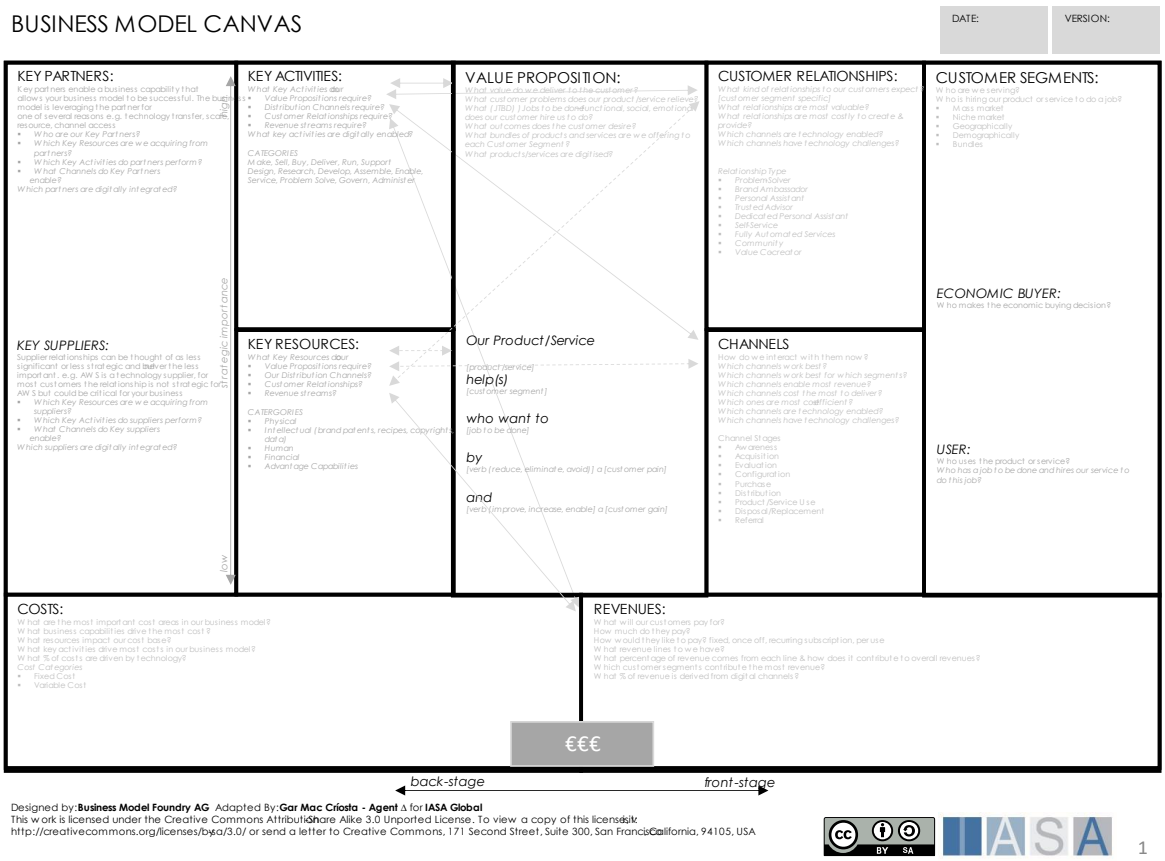
Structured Canvases are not static documents, but dynamic and iterative tools that can help IT architects to align the IT project with the business context and drivers, and to deliver value and quality to the business and IT stakeholders and customers. Let us review a couple of examples of Structured Canvas including the Benefit Dependency Network and Business Model:

Business Model Canvas

The Business Model Canvas (BNC) provides a business model on a page used for architecture and innovation. Generally, to use the canvas you want to start with customers and value proposition, then move on to the other areas. The Business Model Canvas is a powerful strategic tool that condenses your entire business model onto a single, visual sheet. It's not

just about architecture – it's about sparking innovation and ensuring all aspects of your business are aligned.

The canvas prioritizes your customers and their needs. By starting with your value proposition – the core benefit you offer – you can tailor your operations, resources, and finances to deliver exceptional value.



https://iasa-global.github.io/btabok/business_model_canvas.html

Area	Description	Links To
Key Partners (also Suppliers)	Who do we do business with that makes our value proposition successful?	Ecosystem Article
Key Activities	Key activities are the actions (verb/noun) that are critical to the effectiveness of the value proposition.	Business Capabilities Canvas (identifies critical capabilities)
Key Resources	Resources are the assets (like warehouses and distribution systems for Amazon) that directly impact the value model.	N/A

Area	Description	Links To
Value Proposition	Probably the most important area of the canvas. This is not a list of our products but the actual value we create for our customers. Good example was the iPod, "A seamless music experience"	N/A
Customer Relationships	Possibly the hardest of the areas, customer relationships are WHY our customers stay with our value proposition. For example, if a person has a large number of books on the Amazon Kindle they will likely not use another eReader	Customer Personas, Empathy Maps
Channels	The marketing, distribution and delivery of our products or services.	Customer Journey(s), Service Blueprint(s)
Customer Segments	The Customers and their groupings we are serving. The best use of these come from marketing customer segments and then a real customer.	Customer Persona(s)
Costs	The critical cost factors impacting the business model	Cost Risk Card
Revenues	The critical revenue factors impacting the business model	Benefits Realization Article, Benefits Card

Benefits Dependency Network

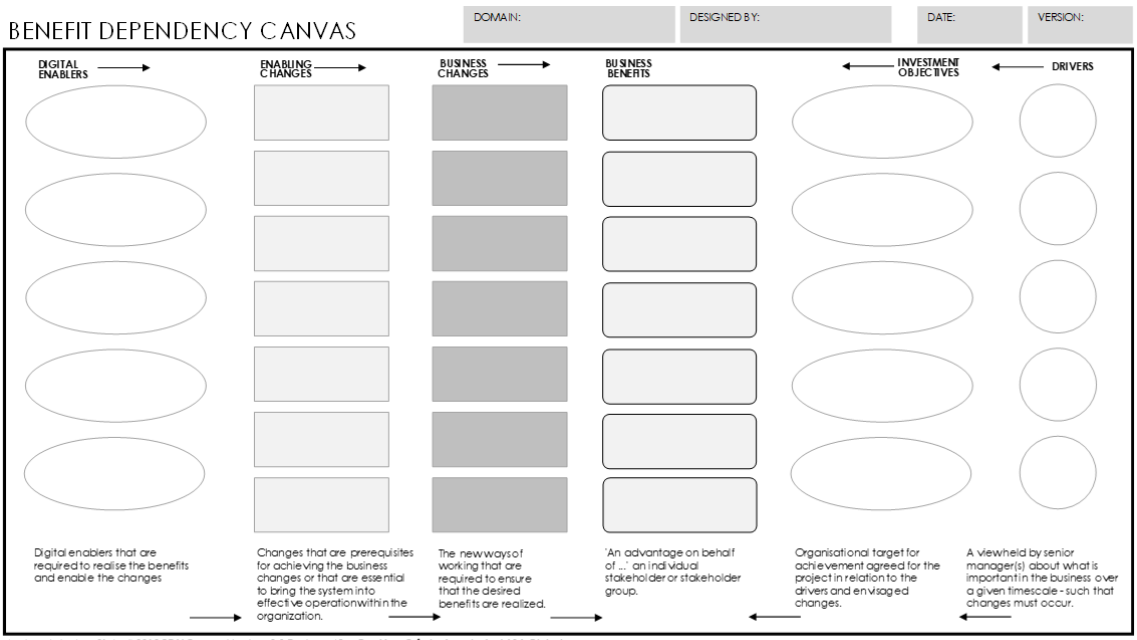
Benefits Dependency Network (BDN) is a strategic tool used primarily in project management and business change initiatives to map out the relationship between investments, the changes they bring, and the benefits that are expected to result from those changes. BDN visually illustrates how investments in projects or programs lead to business benefits through a series of intermediate steps, including changes in processes, behaviors, or capabilities.

History of Benefits Dependency Network and Cranfield's Involvement

The BDN was developed as part of a broader benefits management methodology that originated in the early 2000s. It was primarily driven by the work of researchers and academics at the **Cranfield School of Management** in the United Kingdom. Cranfield is known for its strong focus on applied research and has been a pioneer in developing tools and frameworks that link organizational strategies to tangible outcomes.

The concept of benefits management, including the BDN, emerged from the need to ensure that IT investments and large-scale change initiatives delivered their intended value. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, organizations, particularly in the public sector, faced increasing pressure to demonstrate the value and effectiveness of their projects, especially

in the context of IT investments. Traditional project management approaches often focus on delivering outputs (such as new systems or processes) rather than ensuring that those outputs are translated into real business benefits. The BDN was created to address this gap.



Let us review each one of these columns and what they mean:

1. **Business Drivers**: The underlying factors or conditions driving the need for change or investment. These could include market competition, regulatory requirements, technological advancements, or customer demands.
2. **Investment Objectives**: High-level goals that an organization seeks to achieve, often in response to the identified business drivers.
3. **Benefits**: Specific, measurable outcomes that the investment is expected to deliver, aligned with the investment objectives.
4. **Business Changes**: Modifications in processes, structures, or behaviors necessary to realize the benefits.
5. **Enabling Changes**: Specific initiatives, projects, or activities required to achieve business changes.
6. **IS/IT Enablers**: Technological solutions or information systems needed to support the enabling changes and business changes.

How WVE Business Technology Strategy Can Help You?

At WVE Business Technology Strategy, we have a team of certified and experienced IT architects who have mastered the Structured Canvas approach and applied it in various IT projects across different industries and domains. We have helped our clients to achieve business-IT alignment, value, and quality by using Structured Canvases as tools for analysis, design, communication, validation, and adaptation.

We can help you to use the Structured Canvas approach in your IT projects by providing the following services:

- **Consulting**: We can help you to create, review, and update Structured Canvases for your IT projects, and to align them with your business and IT strategies, capabilities, requirements, and outcomes.
- **Training**: We can train you and your team on how to use the Structured Canvas approach effectively, and to leverage the best practices and lessons learned from our experience and the IASA BTABoK.
- **Coaching**: We can coach you and your team on how to use Structured Canvases as tools for communication, collaboration, validation, and adaptation, and to solicit and incorporate feedback from your business and IT stakeholders and customers.
- **Implementation**: We can help you to design and oversee the implementation of IT solutions that are aligned with Structured Canvases, and to measure and evaluate the value and quality of the IT outcomes. We don't get involved in the hands-on implementation but will oversee and provide quality control on the solution.

By working with us, you can benefit from our expertise, experience, and excellence in using the Structured Canvas approach, and increase the success rate, value, and quality of your IT projects.

Structured Approach?

To get from strategy to execution in IT projects with architectural excellence, you can follow a structured approach that ensures alignment between strategic objectives and technical implementation. By following these steps, organizations can effectively translate their strategic objectives into executable IT projects while maintaining architectural excellence. This structured approach ensures that IT initiatives are aligned with business goals, executed efficiently, and deliver measurable value to the organization.

Step	Sub-steps	Purpose	Outcome
Define Strategic Objectives	- **Understand Business Goals:** Define business goals, objectives, vision, mission, and strategic priorities. - **Align IT Strategy:** Ensure IT strategy aligns with business strategy to support objectives like customer experience and efficiency.	Align IT strategy with business objectives.	Clear understanding of how IT can support

Step	Sub-steps	Purpose	Outcome
			business goals.
Develop a Robust IT Architecture	- **Enterprise Architecture (EA):** - Business Architecture: Define business processes and structures. - Information Architecture: Manage data flows. - Application Architecture: Cover software applications. - Technology Architecture: Include technical infrastructure. - **Reference Architectures:** Use industry-standard frameworks (e.g., IASA BTABoK).	Develop a comprehensive IT architecture that supports business goals.	A structured and aligned IT architecture ready for implementation.
Conduct Gap Analysis	- **Current State Assessment:** Assess existing IT architecture. - **Future State Vision:** Define the desired future state. - **Identify Gaps:** Conduct gap analysis and prioritize based on impact and feasibility.	Identify and prioritize gaps between current and desired states.	A clear understanding of what needs to change to achieve the desired IT architecture.
Develop a Roadmap	- **Strategic Roadmap:** - Phases and Milestones: Breakdown into manageable phases. - Timeline: Establish realistic timelines. - Dependencies: Identify dependencies. - **Project Portfolio:** Prioritize projects based on strategic alignment and value.	Outline steps required to move from current to future state, and plan projects accordingly.	A strategic and actionable roadmap with a prioritized project portfolio.
Design Solution Architecture	- **Solution Architecture:** Design modular, scalable, and flexible solutions for each project. - **Standards and Guidelines:** Establish standards for consistency. - **Technology Selection:** Choose technologies that align with principles and requirements.	Ensure each project aligns with the enterprise architecture.	Detailed solution architectures that are ready for implementation.
Implement Governance and Controls	- **Architecture Governance:** - Architecture Review Board (ARB): Review and approve designs. - Standards Compliance: Ensure adherence to standards.	Oversee the execution of IT projects to ensure alignment and quality.	Controlled and governed IT project execution.

Step	Sub-steps	Purpose	Outcome
	- **Project Governance:** Monitor project progress, manage risks, and ensure alignment.		
Execute Projects	- **Agile Methodologies:** Use agile practices for iterative development. - **Cross-Functional Teams:** Form teams with representatives from business, IT, and architecture. - **Change Management:** Implement processes to handle changes effectively.	Execute projects efficiently and adapt to changes.	Successfully executed IT projects that align with strategic objectives.
Monitor and evaluate	- **Performance Metrics:** Define KPIs to measure project success. - **Continuous Improvement:** Monitor outcomes and adjust. - **Lessons Learned:** Document insights for future improvements.	Measure and evaluate the success of IT projects and architecture.	Continuous improvement of IT architecture and project execution.
Foster a Culture of Excellence	- **Training and Development:** Enhance skills through training. - **Innovation:** Encourage experimentation within the architecture framework. - **Collaboration:** Foster collaboration between business and IT teams.	Promote excellence and collaboration within the IT and architecture teams.	A culture that supports continuous innovation, collaboration, and excellence in IT and architecture practices.

This table summarizes the structured approach to translating strategy into execution with a focus on architectural excellence.

Conclusion

The Structured Canvas approach is a framework that can help IT architects to get from strategy to execution in IT projects by applying architectural excellence. It can help IT architects to capture, communicate, and validate the business-IT alignment, and to design and implement IT solutions that are relevant, feasible, viable, and desirable for the business. By using Structured Canvases, IT architects can increase the success rate, value, and quality of their IT projects.

At WVE Business Technology Strategy, we have a team of certified and experienced IT architects who have successfully applied the Structured Canvas approach in various IT projects across different industries and domains. We can help you to use the Structured Canvas approach in your IT projects by providing consulting, training, coaching, and design

services. Contact us today to find out how we can help you achieve business-IT alignment, value, and quality with the Structured Canvas approach.