

Mentoring - Growing Your Architecture Practice

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Abstract

An enterprise architecture practice is only as good as the people in it. Establishing a small group of talented practicing architects is only the first step. To scale a team upwards requires a repeatable approach to recruiting, mentoring, and managing people in the architecture discipline. It is even more crucial as Enterprise Architecture moves into a specialized field of its own apart from its software engineering roots – with a distinct career path and business focus.

Systems Flow will share the successes we have enjoyed – and challenges we have faced – in our own recruitment and mentoring process, which has been honed through iterative trial and error over many years.

Presentation Overview

Background

- About Systems Flow
- The Architect Role and Target Capabilities
- Our Recruiting Process

Mentoring

- Why do we do it?
- What is the goal?
- Mentoring contract/responsibilities
- Lessons Learned

About Systems Flow

- Boutique IT professional services & training company
- Focused on enabling activities around software development, enterprise and solution architecture, business analysis, quality assurance, and solution implementation leadership
- Use visual modeling for better enterprise and solution architecture, and delivery is our specialty

The Architect Role

“Officially”:

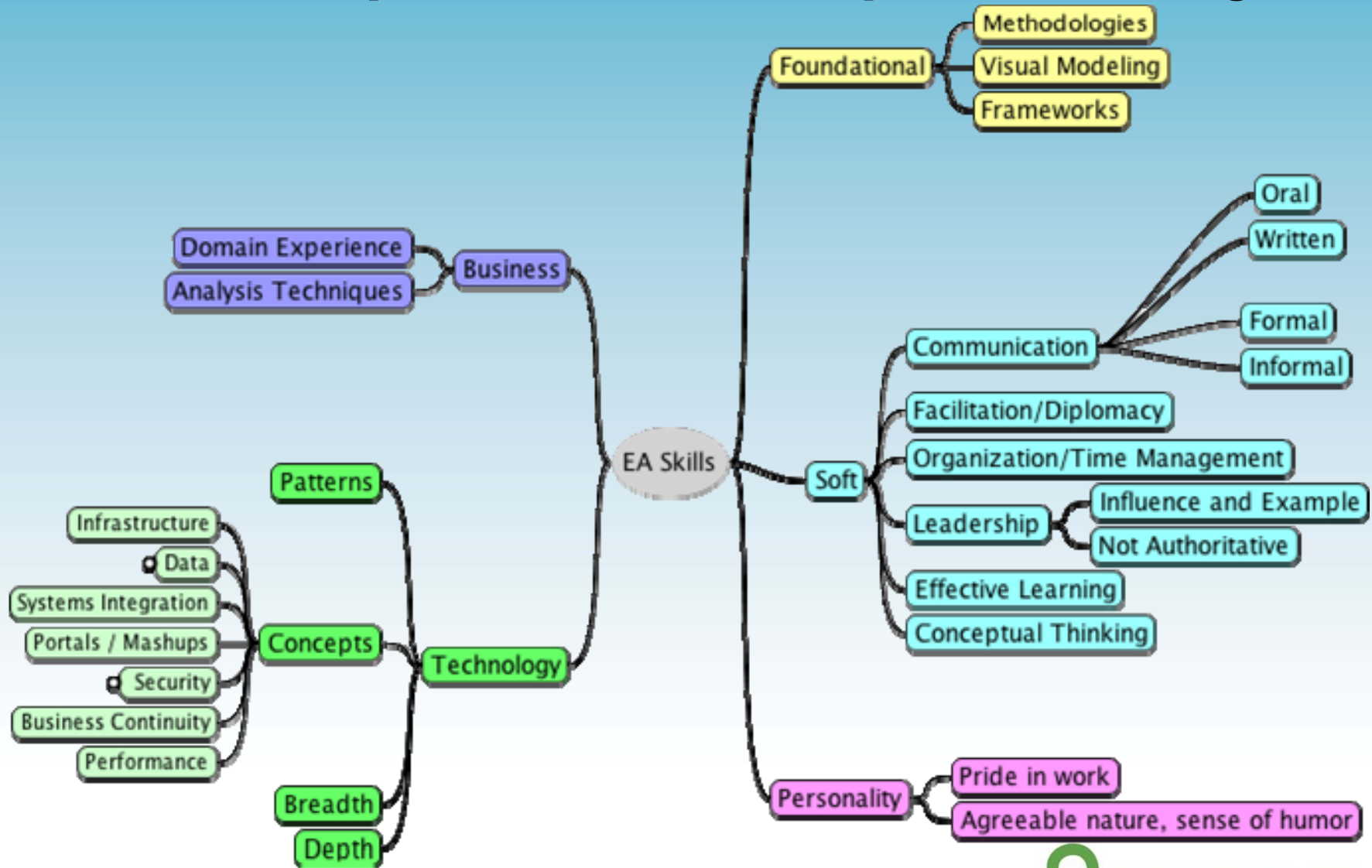
The role of the architect is to address [stakeholders’] concerns, by identifying and refining the requirements that the stakeholders have, developing views of the architecture that show how the concerns and the requirements are going to be addressed, and by showing the trade-offs that are going to be made in reconciling the potentially conflicting concerns of different stakeholders. ¹

Perhaps most simply and importantly:

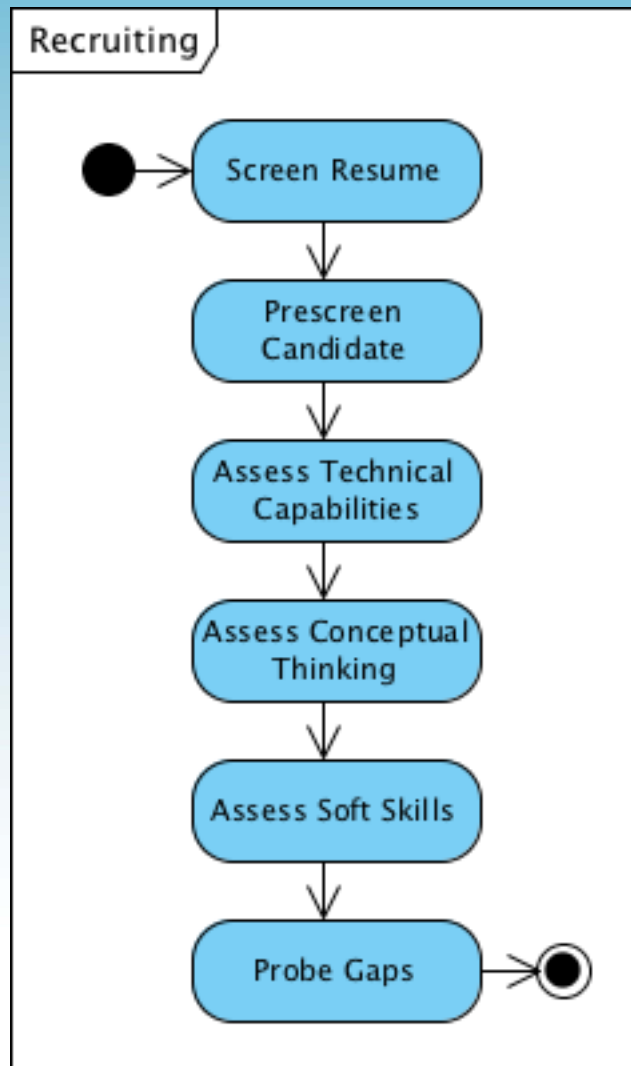
The architect continuously fosters the sharing of customer, architecture, and technical information between organizations. ²

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1. [TOGAF 9 Personal PDF Edition](#) (p. 7)
 2. [TOGAF Online](#), Architecture Skills Framework (Chapter 52).

Our Enterprise Architect Capabilities Target



Our Recruiting Model

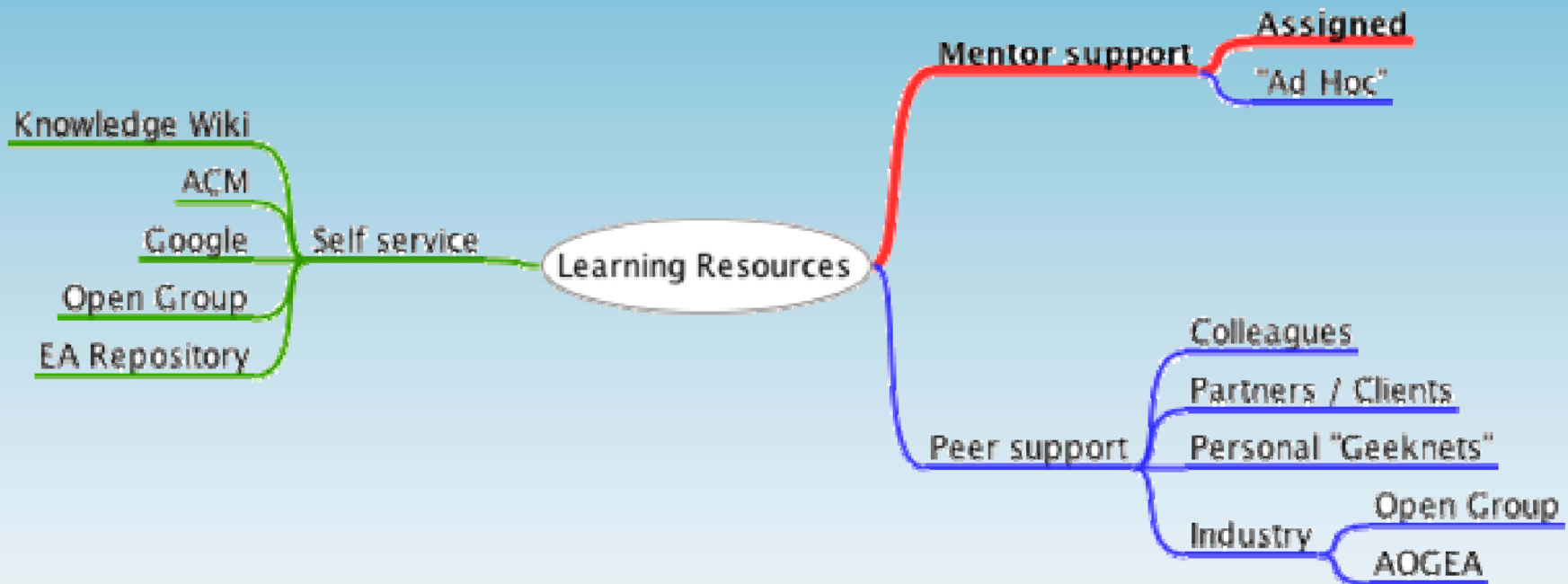


- Serial process passes any perceived gaps to latter stage for probing
- Delivery and organizational skills are tested by process
- Prescreen for quick assessment of soft skills (100% non technical)
- Technical capabilities are itemized and assessed in experience-centric interview
- Conceptual thinking assessed via a diagramming exercise
- Potential match confirmed or refuted at each step against capabilities target
- Post-hire mentoring needs to address:
 - Our capabilities target
 - Our methodology

Why do we do mentor?

- To ensure consistency of delivery – clients get consistent results regardless of who is engaged
- To accelerate the on-boarding process by distributing training responsibilities
- To provide those mentored with guided, hands-on learning to address:
 - Gaps in capabilities
 - Mastery of our approach
- To improve the capabilities of both mentor and mentored
- To grow our depth of experience from within

Employee Learning Opportunities

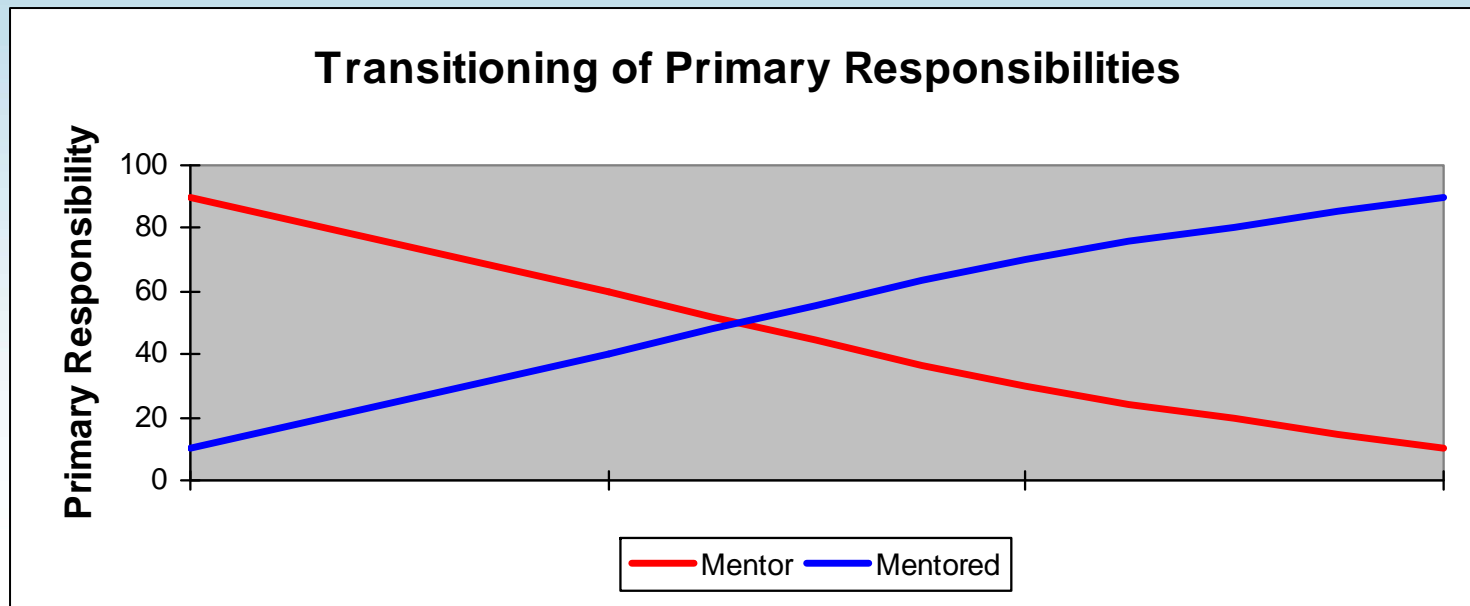


Employee Learning Responsibility is the responsibility of team individuals and mentors.

- ✓ Core job responsibility
- ✓ Ties to annual assessment goals
- ✓ Driver for professional growth

Mentoring Goals

For Client	<input type="checkbox"/> Successful Delivery – first and foremost!
For Mentored	<input type="checkbox"/> Development of new skills, improvement of existing skills <input type="checkbox"/> Safe path from supporting to leading role
For Mentor	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased expertise nurturing team members <input type="checkbox"/> Improved breadth and depth of subject-matter expertise as a result of teaching



Mentoring Contract

The Mentor

1. Provides ongoing, thorough, and concise feedback
2. Instructs in company and client processes
3. Directs Mentored to useful knowledge resources as helpful
4. Assesses Mentored on ongoing basis, including readiness to take on lead role
5. Responds in a timely fashion to questions from Mentored

The Mentored

1. Aggressively pursues mastery of the Systems Flow approach
2. Ensures all feedback is understood and acted upon by articulating feedback in writing and tracking all actions
3. Masters Systems Flow approach “as is” before suggesting any changes
4. Reviews all client communications with Mentor prior to delivery

Mentoring Responsibilities

Mentor

- Make time for mentoring
 - Regular meetings
 - On demand
- Guide using self service where possible
- Require deliverable-based approach
- Provide clear, actionable feedback
- Provide formula, not just answer

Mentored

- Use self service when possible
- Self assess using checklist tools
- Align priority of issue with aggressiveness of mentor utilization
- Model mentor communication like client communication
- Echo back guidance to confirm understanding
- Execute on all feedback

Lessons Learned

- Mentors need mentoring too!
- Must have a pre-defined mentoring process/contract so that those mentored don't feel personally attacked when feedback is given.
“Process needs to be communicated top-down.”
- Be frank and specific – you owe it to the mentored (and the client); be patient but firm, and escalate as needed.
- What works for one person being mentored doesn't always work for another.
- Have mentors meet regularly to share successes and challenges.
- Remember the goal - don't need to mold someone to fit perfectly, but DO need them to be productive and consistent in their delivery.
- It's a learning process both for the mentor and the mentored, and we're all at different points on the curve.

Quick Guidance Sheet

Successful delivery requires setting appropriate expectations, then meeting or exceeding them. Remember that any time you are not 100% sure your client shares your expectations, you and Systems Flow are at risk of failing.

Question	Answer
To whom do I pose a tech, business, etc. question?	In order: your mentor , the mentoring team, your colleagues, client architecture peers, client project stakeholders.
How should I contact my mentor?	Based on priority of required response: during regular checkpoint, by email, by IM, by phone/SMS, by stalking.
When should I self-assess my work against quality checklist?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Before publishing to ANYONE, including your mentor.
When should my deliverables be reviewed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you have any questions• Prior to initial release to any client stakeholder• Prior to an major updates
What type of deliverables get a review?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formal architecture documents• Sensitive emails• Meeting recaps

Quick Guidance Sheet (cont.)

Question	Answer
What form should my casual stakeholder interactions take?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prefer face-to-face to phone• Prefer phone to email• Use IM judiciously and sparingly
How do I deal with difficult people?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen• Be neutral• Focus on facts
How should I write meeting minutes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Salient points only (decisions, actions)• Follow published standard• Submit to mentor ASAP after meeting concludes; publish ASAP
How do I know whether to catch a ball or let it drop?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confirm scope of your work <i>up front</i>• Know when it's safer/better to inform responsible party• “Over-communicate” when stepping up to own new task or deliverable

QUESTIONS?

About Systems Flow

Systems Flow, Inc. provides professional IT management and consulting services focused on design, leadership, and execution of enterprise/solution architectures and SDLC practices.

Our hallmarks include strong client-facing skills, hands-on business experience, broad best-practices experience, deep technical knowledge, and visual modeling expertise. Collectively, our team has decades of “know how” that we bring to bear on client engagements. We hire individuals who can move between business analysis, technical architecture, and project management. They are very difficult to find and worth the effort.

Our “Difference”

- We bring value to our clients by leveraging the people they already have, the assets they already own, and the knowledge they already possess.
- We mentor clients during our engagements in order to promote the transfer of these skills and help them take root.
- We pride ourselves on the practical application of our strategic thinking – not just on providing “thought leadership” but delivering real results.
- We challenge ourselves to deliver extreme value at incremental cost.
- We are passionate about what we do, and *how* we do it.
- We are constantly improving and optimizing our delivery process.
- We have a high-achieving, positive, and fun corporate culture.

About the Authors

Dan Hughes (daniel.hughes@sysflow.com) is a principal consultant at Systems Flow, Inc., where he leads the technology services practice. He has 20 years of software engineering experience spanning a broad range of technologies and techniques. Startup to enterprise, he has launched, managed, and executed all aspects of both product and enterprise life cycle, delivering complex, enterprise-scale architectures for clients in the public and private sector, in industries ranging from banking and insurance to international development. Dan holds a Bachelor of Science in Computer and Systems Engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

Ben Sommer (ben.sommer@sysflow.com) is a senior consultant at Systems Flow, Inc. and is currently engaged at a large, international financial institution as an enterprise architect providing strategic architectural guidance and project-specific support across the bank's technology portfolio. His career has spanned network engineering, systems administration, and software development - running the gamut from tools to automate network and systems tasks, to web-based CRM applications, to Identity Management and Provisioning systems, to real-time music synthesis applications. His industry experience includes education, education finance, interactive marketing and banking. Ben is a trained composer and musician.

Jim Hosey (james.hosey@sysflow.com) is a senior consultant at Systems Flow, Inc. and is currently engaged at a large, international financial institution as an enterprise architect providing strategic architectural guidance and project-specific support across the bank's technology portfolio. Over his 20-year career, Jim has managed and executed all phases of the software life cycle and has delivered a wide range of technology solutions for both commercial resale and internal use in domains that include banking, insurance, warehousing & distribution, marketing, communications, and management training & development. Having worked with organizations of all sizes, Jim can tailor his approach to the specific driving forces within each type of environment.