

# “Architect” Should Be a Role, Not a Position

 [javacodegeeks.com/2017/06/architect-role-not-position.html](https://javacodegeeks.com/2017/06/architect-role-not-position.html)

What happens when a senior developer becomes...more senior? It often happens that they get promoted to “architect”. Sometimes an architect doesn’t have to have been a developer, if they see “the bigger picture”. In the end, there’s often a person that holds the position of “architect”; a person who makes decisions about the architecture of the system or systems being developed. In bigger companies there are “architect councils”, where the designated architects of each team gather and decide wise things...

But I think it’s a bad idea to have a position of “architect”. Architect is a position in construction – and it makes sense there, as you can’t change and tweak the architecture mid-project. But software architecture is flexible and should not be defined strictly upfront. And development and architecture are so intertwined, it doesn’t make much sense to have someone who “says what’s to be done” and others who “do it”. It creates all sorts of problems, mainly coming from the fact that the architect often doesn’t fully imagine how the implementation will play out. If the architect hasn’t written code for a long time, they tend to disregard “implementation details” and go for just the abstraction. However, [abstractions leak](#) all the time, and it’s rarely a workable solution to just think of the abstraction without the particular implementation.

That’s my first claim – you cannot be a good architect without knowing exactly how to write the whole code underneath. And no, too often it’s not “simple coding”. And if you have been an architect for years, and so you haven’t written code in years, you are almost certainly not a good architect.

Yes, okay, YOU in particular may be a good architect. Maybe in your particular company it makes sense to have someone sitting in an ivory tower of abstractions and mandate how the peons have to integrate this and implement that. But even in that case, there’s a better approach.

The architect should be a role. Every senior team member can and should take the role of an architect. It doesn’t have to be one person per team. In fact, it’s better to have more. To discuss architecture in meetings similar to the [feature design meetings](#), with the clear idea that it will be you who is going to implement the whole thing. Any overdesign (of which architects are often guilty) will have to be justified in front of yourself – “do I want to write all this boilerplate stuff, or is there a simple and more elegant way”.

The position is “software engineer”. The role can be “scrum master”, “architect”, “continuous integration officer”, etc. If the company needs an “architects’ council” to decide “bigger picture” integrations between systems, the developers can nominate someone to attend these meetings – possibly the most knowledgeable.

I know what the architects are thinking now – that there are high-level concerns that developers either don’t understand or shouldn’t be bothered with. Wrong. If your developers don’t understand the higher level architectural concerns, you have a problem that would manifest itself sooner or later. And yes, they should be bothered with the bigger picture, because in order to fit the code that you are writing into the bigger picture, you should be pretty familiar with it.

There’s another aspect, and that’s team member attitudes and interaction dynamics. If someone gets “promoted” to an “architect”, without being a particularly good or respected developer, that may damage the team morale. On the other hand, one promoted to “architect” can become too self-confident and push design decisions just because they think so, and despite good arguments against them.

So, ideally (and that’s my second claim) – get rid of the architect position. Make sure your senior team members are engaged in architectural discussions and decision making – they will be more motivated that way, and they will have a more clear picture of what their development efforts should achieve. And most importantly – the architectural decisions won’t be detached from the day-to-day development “real world”, nor will they be unnecessarily

complicated.

Reference: [“Architect” Should Be a Role, Not a Position](#) from our [JCG partner](#) Bozhidar Bozhanov at the [Bozho’s tech blog](#) blog.

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