

## Standards vs Innovation

We hear that standards, process & formal governance can avoid inefficiency in organisations and avoid chaos. We also hear it can stifle creativity & slow down innovation in delivery and solutions.

In recent years I have experienced the mutual misunderstanding of camps on either side of this argument. It is not fence sitting when I say I can appreciate the motivations of both sides. But I do tend towards one side of the argument.

I accept that the process and formal governance approach has the right motivations. Many businesses struggle with complicated IT solutions which often don't play well together and work in an adhoc manner with business processes. Management don't feel in control so they adopt more standardisation and formal processes. Unfortunately the approach is often arbitrary, applied piecemeal and without an appreciation of all viewpoints. In my experience this can be a big drag on software development. Worse still it can also demoralise the development staff. If you want able and motivated people working for you then a practical approach should involve them.

Many modern companies have started out with an online presence from day one; sometimes called "digital natives". Their success means they have increasing influence. Their approaches to software development are being emulated by more traditional organisations in many fields. It looks like the momentum is with agile, devops, microservices and continuous delivery. To those of us finding it difficult to sell "agile", just a few years ago, this is quite a turnaround. My opinion is that many organisations and companies are disillusioned with their IT services and failed initiatives. They are hoping that applying some of the pixie dust from the "digital natives" will make them more agile and dynamic. I think "digital native" companies often enjoy a more aligned business and software environment. And that this

alignment - as much as different software, practices and techniques - works to their advantage. This is the nirvana Enterprise Architects dream of. Some established organisations appear to be going quite a distance to emulate the structure of the leaner online startups. And to get there they appear to be dropping some of the overarching formal processes and standards. I think this is to be lauded.

I come from an agile background where we aim for "an appropriate level of formalism". A guiding principle is to keep things as simple as they can be. But we recognise that standards and processes are useful and do not have to be heavy. We use roles, responsibilities, processes (e.g. project lifecycle) and recommended practices. Indeed The Internet, Web, many protocols, languages and tools that we use daily are subject to standards and governance. But the approach is usually pragmatic. A working implementation can trump an approved standard.

Standards, processes and formal governance apply to many businesses and organisations. They are used in many industries. As startups grow they too adopt these approaches. Oftentimes due to regulatory requirements and sometimes because that is seen as current business best practice. So, regardless, one should be prepared. Simplicity, transparency, good communication and quick turnaround can help mitigate any perceived drag. Getting input and buy in from those most affected by any changes is important. There is usually a need for balance between business or regulatory control, and dynamism. It is part of an architect's role to help find that balance.