Leading Architects

Becoming a change leader in IT

There's no shortage of great ideas and innovative solutions in IT. But why do many of them never get seen?

Business Challenges

- Getting great ideas and IT solutions heard and seen by leadership teams
- Helping IT architects become effective leaders within their organization

With a 20+ year career as an IT architect, lead architect, and consultant architect, Edwin van Gorp is an experienced IT professional.

One thing he has seen constantly in his career is ideas—brilliant ideas and solutions to solve complex technological problems in businesses and organizations.

Unfortunately, many of those ideas got lost. Why?

To explain this, Edwin describes the broader role of the IT architect. "It's a bit like when you build a house or a building," he says. "The architect will inspire the customer with an artist's impression of the house, then translate the artist's impression into a design that a constructor can build.

"In IT, it's exactly the same," he continues. "IT architects inspire the senior stakeholders. Those leaders and stakeholders have specific needs, and the IT architect is translating them so the IT

Company Profile

Leading Architects is a consultancy that helps IT architects develop the skills they need to work with organizational leaders and drive successful technological change.

It was founded by Edwin van Gorp, a former IT consultant and chief architect, in 2020 in the Netherlands. His mission now is to help IT architects become 'change leaders' in the IT sector.

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development teams can build the best systems. This is the role of the IT architect."

Within an organization, these architects have an opportunity to lead. "Architects are expected to take a leading role," he says, "but often cannot. They're well educated in technical skills, they have technical backgrounds and a lot of domain knowledge—for example, if they work in a bank, they know how banking works. If they work in oil, they know how the oil industry works. This is what I call domain knowledge," explains Edwin.

"However, they also need to guide people and lead teams," he adds, "and this is where they often struggle—bringing the story to the people, influencing them, dealing with conflict, and so on."

The lack of specific training programs for architects to develop their personal and leadership skills meant there was a gap in the Netherlands market.

"Most architect programs focus on technical skills, domain expertise, and the tools they can use," says Edwin. "This is what I call architecture craftsmanship. It covers how you make your designs, but not how you work with people. And when I worked as a consultant, I found that I didn't make a difference with my technical skills. I made a difference with my people skills."

And this is what inspired the Leading Architects program.

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Edwin van Gorp,
Founder and Trainer,
Leading Architects,
Netherlands

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Solution

"In my view, every architect can make an impact and take on a 'leading the change' role," says Edwin. "But when architects have to talk to lots of different people and stakeholders, they often end up playing a role or a version of themselves and this means they risk losing their authenticity. This is especially true when talking with senior stakeholders."

The drive to help lead architects be themselves in a leadership environment became the foundation for his Leading the Change program.

Knowing yourself

Edwin wanted a 'YOU' component for the program—to explore who you (the participant) are as a person, and what are your talents and preferences.

"I did some research on different assessments and found that MBTI was the best fit. It talks about preferences, and I think talent comes from preferences. I didn't know much about MBTI before doing my research, but because I wanted the YOU part of the program—the self-awareness part—I decided on the MBTI assessment and became a practitioner."

Leading the Change is built on three core elements:

1. You
2. Your story
3. Your people/audience

Those elements are used in three different stages (Build, Grow, Lead) to help architects find their authentic selves, learn how to influence, and become the change leaders their organization needs.

Solution

- Design a growth program specifically for IT architects
- Use self-awareness as the foundation for development
- Build skills to help people lead, influence, and make an impact

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"If I step into an organization and don't know anybody, how do I become visible? How do I make myself known in such a way that I can be trusted to guide the organization? I might identify my audience and stakeholders first. But, really, the first thing to do is to identify myself. What's my story to tell? And this is why self-assessment is the first step."

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Being prepared

Learning the skills to communicate and influence at the highest levels is one aspect of being a lead architect. Handling stress is another because, at this level, stress is inevitable.

"Because I have the same IT experience as the people I want to help, I know what it's like. I have been there," says Edwin. "Overload, stress...I see a lot of architects and they have a lot of stress. Workload is one part of it, but a lot of stress comes from how to deal with challenging stakeholders and teams. The architects are seen as experts and they might think that they have to know everything, especially when they are growing in their lead architect role. It can create some kind of imposter syndrome."

For this reason, stress and resilience is built into the Leading Architects program (also using the MBTI assessment). This prepares clients for the reality of being a successful lead architect.

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Results

When reflecting on what participants find most useful in the program, especially regarding the MBTI assessment, the Leading Architects founder has a clear answer.

"Self-awareness is the big one," says Edwin. "Learning about strengths, preferences, talents, and pitfalls, I think this is the most powerful part. The MBTI offers a very safe set up, it's positive. Some architects are very negative when asked to do the assessment because they think it puts them in a box.

"But when I start explaining that it's not about right and wrong, or highlighting what a person lacks, people often come round. A lot of organizations focus on weaknesses and trying to develop those, but why not turn it around and focus on strengths and positives instead? It's powerful. I use it through the whole program, both Step I™ and Step II™.

"I find that Step II™ is a nice tool to find the 'hooks' and interesting topics to discuss in the individual coaching session. It shows the nuances and you can have a deeper conversation. Topics like, 'you don't like conflict' or 'you don't want to be on stage'…is this because of personality profile, or is it insecurity?"

He notes that for the more experienced people on his programs, discovering why they feel so much stress is often a big learning point. They find that they're stretching themselves all day long in a particular character.

"So, instead of continuing to do that," he adds, "we can use self-awareness to help them find the authentic 'them'. Discussions with senior architects can often revolve around stress and how to be more authentic."

Results

- Increased confidence through finding authentic self
- Improved influencing skills by understanding others better
- Better stress management through knowing the personal causes of stress

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Recognizing strengths

The enthusiasm of the facilitator and trainer is also key to a program's success. Edwin's own journey into self-awareness confirms his belief that this is the right thing for him to do.

"The MBTI helped me, for sure," he says, "the empathic part, the Thinking/Feeling area, especially. For me it was a confirmation that I'm a Feeling guy. I worked for many years in very technical places and the MBTI showing this Feeling side of my personality was very insightful for me. I wasn't aware of it before but it's one of my qualities. It also confirmed that I'm on the right track by moving into coaching and training architects."

Summarizing his reasons for doing what he does, he says:

"I am an architect myself. I made this program for architects. People have beautiful ideas but don't know how to promote those ideas to the organization and I know I can help them do that. I want to help them make an impact."

What people say about Leading the Change*

" In his program, Edwin offers practical day-to-day tips as well as the means to take a closer look at yourself. This is a great combination, because it means that practical and fundamental aspects for maximum impact alternate."
Guido Helder

" The program focuses on the power of the individual. Be prepared to learn more about yourself and understand how to use your abilities to you achieve your desired goals."
Wai-Ling Chiu

" The Leading Architects program was a starting point to put personal leadership into practice. Edwin has tailored his programme for people who want to exert more influence in an authentic way."
Baharak Bakhatiara

Source: Leading Architects

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