

Alternative Technologies

Enterprise Integrity: Collaborative Integration Vol. 1, No. 2

Why do those new to the EAI market find it so incoherent? Of course EAI projects address complex technical problems and can potentially use many products, technologies (data-centric, middleware-centric, process-centric, model-driven), languages (Java, HTML), architectures (point-to-point, hub, bus), standards (COM, CORBA, EJB, OIM, XML, OAG), etc. However, these conditions do not explain the confused state of the industry. The EAI problem has been with us and been under attack for decades. So why haven't we made more progress? Well, mostly because we've collaborated very little on the integration problem!

When we examine the definitions of enterprise (application) integration given by the press, analysts, systems integrators, consultants, and enterprise integration software vendors, it is rare to find compatibility, let alone agreement. The same applies to most EAI terminology. Asked to define the primary approaches to enterprise integration, most of I.T. does not yet have an answer. Prospective customers are often uncertain as to which technologies to use and how to use them: there is no accepted reference model for EAI that tells us how the various technologies and applicable standards fit together or, at least, ways in which they interrelate. Seeking an explanation of the essential methodological steps, no answers are to be found.

Perhaps most disturbing of all, few can explain the business forces behind enterprise integration or how business goals impact the integration strategy (that is, which integration tasks to address first). We need to understand the enterprise integration business drivers before we can address all the really important EAI tasks: explaining to business managers the importance of EAI projects, identifying relevant EAI business benefits, deliverables and performance metrics, and aligning EAI product and service capabilities to the market need.

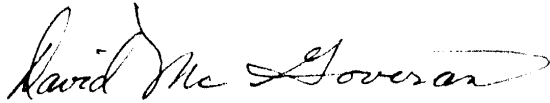
Reducing complexity, improving value acquisition, and reducing cost is a normal part of technology market evolution, but it is the very essence of EAI. As a software market develops, the use of custom solutions naturally decreases due to several factors. First, a few approaches and products typically become dominant, with a subsequent shakeout characterized by acquisitions, mergers, and failures. Second, terminology tends to become more stable. Third, as a combination of *de jure* (official) and *de facto* standards develop, expenditures shift from in-house services and one-off custom software development to professional services and standard software. The maturity of the enterprise integration market depends on achieving the oft-sought goal of interoperability, perhaps at a high level of abstraction.

The EAI market is unique for several reasons, leading to several predictions. First, completely packaged EAI solutions are extremely unlikely. As long as businesses are defined by unique combinations of business functions (however implemented, manually or automated), and as long as there is business and technological innovation, custom integration efforts will be

necessary. Even when the enterprise integration market is mature, it will most likely have a heavy custom services component. We can expect expenditure on standard enterprise integration software and custom services to become more balanced. Second, the EAI market has the odd character of being both old and new, making market sizing difficult. Third, although filled with competitors, the very concept of EAI demands collaboration. This will lead to new levels of partnering, as well as the usual mergers and acquisitions among EAI vendors. Fourth, while a complete solution to the problems I've mentioned (such as establishing standards) will be slow in coming, we will obtain tremendous value from even modest collaborative efforts.

As evidence of these last predictions, over fifty companies (users, vendors, integrators, etc.) have announced their intent to collaborate via the Enterprise Integration Council (www.eicouncil.org). The goal of the EIC is to address the problems discussed here (and others). Unlike traditional efforts which attempt to promote a particular solution, the EIC will establish a coherent framework within which to understand EAI alternatives and business value. Conceived in mid-February, the EIC has grown rapidly and delivered on its first project. As EIC Chairman, I'm admittedly a little biased as to the potential value of membership. But, really, what better way to solve enterprise integration problems than through collaboration? Join the EIC and contribute your knowledge and experience. Check it out!

Here's to collaborative integration efforts... and the integrity of *your* enterprise!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Mc Govern". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.