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Horizon Architecture:
Architecture Study Insights

Contents

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Executive summary

Enterprise architecture (EA) is no longer a technical discipline. It is a leadership imperative for growth, resilience, and operational excellence. Over the last 18 months, we have seen a surge in conversations around Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) (see Deloitte research on top AI tech investments) and how utilizing GenAI across organizational functions can not only help simplify and enhance the technology landscape but also drive faster value realization with business functions. Recent Deloitte research reinforces this momentum: While AI is already delivering measurable efficiency and productivity gains, **only about 34%** of organizations report truly reimagining their business through AI, highlighting that transformative impact depends not only on adoption but on architecture, system design, and orchestration across the entire technology stack (see The State of AI in the Enterprise – 2026 AI report). Business leaders are huddling with technology leaders to not just leverage GenAI for usage across the board; they are also leaning on tech leaders on how to harness and improve the entire technology landscape and calibrate the underlying infrastructure for the future. Cloud transformation programs are pivoting from migration to optimization, and platform consolidation is accelerating as organizations recognize that fragmented technology decisions can create significant cost, complexity, and risk. This pressure is already visible in infrastructure demand: Deloitte research indicates that **AI-driven workloads are expected to increase computing demand by more than 20%** across on-premise, cloud, and edge environments over the next 12 months, forcing organizations to accelerate infrastructure and hosting decisions (see Deloitte research on the growing demand for AI computing). In this environment, organizations that lack strong, enterprise-level architecture leadership are likely structurally unprepared to scale innovation, manage risk, or sustain delivery speed.

To understand how organizations are responding to this challenge, Deloitte surveyed more than 250 CIOs, CTOs, chief architects, and senior technology leaders across Consumer; Energy, Resources & Industrials; Financial Services; Life Sciences & Health Care; and Technology, Media & Telecommunications (TMT) industries in the United States. The study explores how EA is positioned today, where it is delivering value, and where execution gaps persist as EA's responsibilities expand into data governance, AI architecture, and business architecture.

The findings point to a clear inflection. EA influence is rising across architecture layers—particularly applications, information, and infrastructure—**yet only 35%** of respondents rate architecture governance as very effective, and one in four EA functions does not measure its impact at all. Taken together, these findings point to several structural realities for enterprise leaders. EA is increasingly becoming a leadership capability rather than a technical function; expanding mandates across business architecture, data, AI, and technical debt require clearer ownership and authority; governance models must evolve to operate within product-centric delivery environments; architecture priorities must reflect industry context rather than generic maturity benchmarks; and ultimately, the credibility of architecture functions is determined by their ability to demonstrate measurable business outcomes.

While most surveyed organizations recognize the strategic importance of EA, many remain structurally constrained by operating models, governance mechanisms, and measurement approaches that limit consistent decision-making influence and scalable outcomes. High-performing organizations differentiate themselves by positioning **EA as a strategic partner** early in planning, embedding governance into delivery rather than enforcing it after the fact, and measuring success in business terms such as speed to market, risk reduction, and investment alignment. For CIOs and enterprise leaders, the message is clear: Strengthening EA is no longer an architectural hygiene exercise. It is a leadership decision with direct implications for growth, resilience, and AI risk.

What high-performing EA functions do differently

Organizations with the most effective EA functions exhibit four consistent behaviors that distinguish them from peers. These behaviors were synthesized from survey signals where organizations reported stronger EA influence in enterprise decisions, more effective governance, and clearer measurement of architecture impact.

High-performing EA organizations tend to exhibit four consistent behaviors:

1. **Engage architecture early in strategy and investment decisions:** EA influence is strongest when architecture participates upstream in planning discussions. While more than 70% of respondents report EA influence in applications architecture and 75% in infrastructure decisions, only 36% report architecture topics being regularly discussed at the C-suite or board level. Organizations that involve EA earlier in strategic planning are better able to shape investment trade-offs and avoid fragmented technology decisions.

2. **Establish clear decision rights and governance mechanisms:** Architecture governance remains a widely recognized but uneven capability. Only 35% of respondents rate architecture governance as "very effective," while most describe it as only partly effective. Organizations reporting stronger EA outcomes typically define decision ownership clearly and operate governance models that guide delivery without slowing it.

3. **Clarify ownership across architecture domains, including data and AI**: As architecture mandates expand into business architecture, data, and AI, organizations are redefining architecture roles and responsibilities. The survey shows AI architect roles are expected to grow from 30% today to 58% in the next two years, highlighting the need for clearer ownership across emerging architecture domains.

4. **Articulate EA value in business terms:** The ability to demonstrate architecture impact remains a key differentiator. Twenty-five percent of organizations report that they do not measure EA impact at all, and more than half rely primarily on operational metrics rather than business outcomes. High-performing EA functions translate architecture impact into business terms such as speed to market, cost optimization, and risk reduction, strengthening executive confidence and sustained sponsorship.

Why enterprise architecture has re-entered the C-suite agenda

EA is gaining renewed executive attention not because technology is more complex but because the cost of fragmented decisions has risen. AI adoption, platform consolidation, and cloud optimization now demand enterprise-level trade-offs that cannot be resolved within individual teams or domains. In this environment, architecture is increasingly used as a leadership mechanism to align investments, manage risk, and sustain delivery speed at scale.

What this means for enterprise leaders

The study highlights that EA remains a critical but underutilized capability for many organizations. For enterprise leaders, this translates into a clear inflection point: Organizations that modernize their EA operating models, clarify ownership of emerging technologies, and shift from reactive control to proactive enablement are materially better positioned to manage complexity, scale AI safely, and sustain digital value. Strengthening EA is therefore not an architectural exercise; it is a strategic leadership decision.

EA teams are increasingly shaping AI and business architectures

- The survey made clear that EA roles are expanding into AI and business architecture, with the AI architect role expected to double from **30%** today to **58%** in the next two years
- **50%** are already reporting that EAs are strongly influencing business architecture

In the US, the remit of EA teams is steadily increasing...

- Over **60%** say that EA teams have significant input and decision-making influence on **information architecture**
- Similarly, **70%+** on **applications architecture**, and **75%+** on **technology infrastructure/ technology choices**

...but there is need for better EA & architecture operating models...

- 45% say EA teams are too small, highlighting the need to be **laser focused** on topics that EA teams can significantly add value to
- Awareness of harnessing the broader architecture function with EA as the catalyst
- There is also a need for **reskilling** in business strategy (45%) and data/ AI (40%)

Significant need to strengthen architecture guardrails & governance

- Technology stakeholders are increasingly seeking **better architecture governance** mechanisms, processes, metrics, and tools
- Only 35% rated the current architecture governance as "very effective," leaving a clear gap/need for EA functions to fill and deliver.

Adoption of core/adjacent architecture tools is increasing

- ~40% use office productivity tools for EA. The rest are using some sort of EA tool.
- 68% of respondents **plan to adopt new EA tools** within the next two years
- Greater focus on **making tangible impact** through EA tools than was discernible before

Opportunity to better define, measure, & communicate EA's value

- **25% of EA functions do not measure impact**
- **55% rely on some operational metrics**
- **20% measure some business outcomes**
- Limiting EA's ability to articulate value to IT and business leaders

Figure 1. Enterprise architecture challenges intensity table

Overview of the survey

The intent of this study is not to present percentages in isolation. More than the individual data points, the survey surfaces a set of **clear inferences** about how EA is evolving, where execution is falling short, and what differentiates organizations that are translating architecture into measurable business impact. Those inferences and their implications for technology leaders are explored in the sections that follow.

Key focus areas of the architecture study

1. **EA vision, scope, and strategic influence:** How EA is positioned within the organization and its influence on enterprise-level business and technology decisions.

2. **Architecture governance and decision rights:** The effectiveness of guardrails, enforcement, and decision ownership in supporting speed, alignment, and risk management.

3. **EA operating model, talent, and skills:** Team structures, capacity constraints, and emerging skill needs, particularly in business architecture, data, and AI.

4. **Architecture methodologies, tools, and ways of working:** Adoption of frameworks and tools, and integration with agile, product, and platform-centric delivery models.

5. **Architecture assets and reuse:** Availability and use of roadmaps, standards, patterns, reference architectures, and guardrails.

6. **Maturity across architecture layers:** Progress across business, application, information/data, technology/cloud, and security architecture layers.

7. **Measurement of EA value and outcomes:** How organizations measure EA impact, from operational metrics to outcome-based business measures.

Early results point to several consistent patterns. Only 35% of respondents rate current architecture governance as very effective, while 25% report that their EA function does not measure impact at all. At the same time, the remit of EA is expanding rapidly: AI architect roles are expected to nearly double over the next two years (from 30% to 58%), and more than 68% of organizations plan to adopt new EA tooling to improve decision support and value realization.

C-suite themes from the architecture study

1. **Architecture is becoming a strategic lever, but not yet a leadership habit:** Survey results show that EA is increasingly shaping core technology decisions. More than 70% of respondents indicate EA has significant input into applications architecture, and 75% into technology infrastructure choices. However, only 36% report that technology strategy and architecture topics are regularly discussed at the C-suite or board level. This gap limits architecture's ability to influence capital allocation and strategic trade-offs early, where the greatest value is created.

2. **Governance is critical and widely underperforming:** Leaders overwhelmingly recognize the importance of architecture guardrails, yet only 35% rate current architecture governance as very effective, while 62% describe it as only partly effective. Respondents cite weak enforcement, misalignment with strategy, and skills gaps as key drivers leaving organizations exposed to execution risk and the accumulation of technical debt.

3. **AI has moved from experimentation to enterprise design:** AI is no longer a peripheral initiative. The survey shows that 51% of organizations already have AI/machine learning (ML) or GenAI initiatives in flight, with another 50%+ expecting expansion over the next one to two years. Reflecting this shift, the prevalence of AI-focused architecture roles is expected to nearly double from 30% today to 58% in the next two years signaling a move from pilots to enterprise-scale design responsibility.

4. **Architecture teams are stretched, focus matters more than size:** As architecture mandates expand, 45% of respondents indicate that EA teams are too small to meet current demand. Rather than scaling headcount uniformly, high-performing organizations report concentrating architecture effort on areas where it materially improves outcomes such as modernization prioritization, investment decisions, and risk reduction while deprioritizing low-impact activities.

5. **Tooling is catching up:** While approximately 40% of respondents still rely primarily on office productivity tools for EA today, 68% plan to adopt new EA tooling within the next two years. The survey makes clear, however, that tools alone do not differentiate performance. Organizations reporting higher impact use architecture tools to support decision-making, dependency analysis, and portfolio trade-offs rather than documentation for its own sake.

6. **Value measurement is a missing link to executive confidence:** The ability to measure and communicate the **impact of the EA function** remains a critical gap. Survey responses indicate that 25% of organizations do not measure EA impact at all, while more than half rely primarily on operational metrics rather than business outcomes. Where the contribution of EA to enterprise priorities such as growth, cost optimization, risk reduction, or technology investment alignment is not clearly measured and communicated, sustained executive confidence and sponsorship become difficult to maintain.

Architecture is no longer about controlling technology. It is about enabling better, faster, and safer business decisions. Organizations that recognize this are more likely to pull ahead.

What do these priorities signal about executive expectations?

Collectively, these priorities signal a shift in how executives evaluate EA. Rather than viewing EA as a technical assurance function, leaders increasingly expect it to clarify trade-offs, accelerate delivery, and reduce long-term risk. Architecture credibility is now judged less by adherence to standards and more by its ability to inform decisions that materially affect cost, resilience, and growth.

Enterprise architecture challenges by industry

EA challenges are not uniform. While several pressures cut across industries, the intensity and focus of those challenges vary materially based on regulatory environments, operating models, and technology landscapes.

Industry-specific challenge profiles

The table below highlights the relative priority of key EA challenges by industry. Triangle indicates areas requiring immediate enterprise-level attention; square reflects important constraints limiting scale or speed; circle denotes emerging or contextual pressures.

Key observations include:

- **Legacy modernization and data and AI enablement** dominate regulated and asset-intensive industries such as **Financial Services** (FS), **Life Sciences & Health Care** (LSHC), **Energy**, **Resources & Industrials** (ER&I), and **Government & Public Services**. In these environments, architecture leaders are increasingly evaluating hybrid deployment models including air-gapped or private infrastructure environments to address strict data sovereignty, privacy, and security requirements as AI workloads scale.
- Deloitte's point of view, taking into account the survey observations and related AI infrastructure research, is that scaling AI capabilities may require hybrid infrastructure patterns that distribute workloads across public cloud, private infrastructure, and edge environments based on performance, cost, security, and latency requirements (see Deloitte research on AI infrastructure demand and computing strategies). **Speed, platform scalability, and integration complexity** are most acute in Consumer and TMT organizations operating in highly competitive, product-driven markets.
- **Governance effectiveness** emerges as a persistent pressure across nearly all industries, reinforcing the difficulty of balancing autonomy and control in modern delivery environments.

Together, these patterns reinforce that EA responses must be tailored by industry context, rather than driven by generic maturity models.

Legend

▲ **Top priority:** Requires immediate, enterprise-level attention

■ **Important:** Actively constraining progress or scaling

○ **Emerging/contextual:** Relevant, but not a primary pressure

Architecture challenge area	FS	LSHC	Consumer	ER&I	Government & Public Services	TMT
Legacy and core modernization	▲	■	■	▲	▲	■
Data and AI enablement	▲	▲	■	■	■	▲
Architecture governance	▲	■	■	■	▲	■
Delivery speed vs. architectural control	■	■	▲	■	■	▲
Platform and integration	■	▲	▲	■	■	▲
Regulatory and risk pressure	▲	▲	▲	▲	○	■

The intensity of EA challenges varies materially by industry, reinforcing the need for context-specific architecture strategies rather than generic maturity benchmarks

How should CIOs read this table?

Importantly, these signals vary by industry context. Sectors facing heavier regulatory, asset, or platform complexity naturally experience higher urgency in specific areas. As a result, the table is intended to help leaders focus architecture effort where it matters most, rather than pursuing broad, one-size-fits-all remediation.

What this means: These shared challenges suggest systemic operating-model and leadership issues rather than isolated execution failures.

Cross-industry challenge comparison

Across industries, five challenges consistently surface:

1. Under-resourced EA teams
2. Limited ability to measure and communicate EA value
3. Architecture governance that is only partly effective
4. Insufficient EA influence at the C-suite or board level
5. Weak linkage between strategy and architecture execution

This consistency suggests that many of today's EA challenges are structural rather than industry-specific. Operating models, governance mechanisms, and measurement practices have not evolved at the same pace as expanding architecture mandates, leading to similar constraints across organizations.

Emerging vs. persistent challenges

While some EA challenges have persisted over time, others are intensifying as organizations adopt new technologies and operating models faster than their architecture capabilities can evolve. Many of the structural constraints highlighted below such as legacy complexity, governance gaps, and fragmented architecture ownership have been discussed previously in Deloitte's earlier horizon architecture research, reinforcing that these are long-standing architecture operating-model challenges rather than newly emerging issues. (See Deloitte's Horizon architecture: The hidden superpower for adapting to change and winning in the market series.)

Emerging challenges

While many architecture pressures are familiar, several are intensifying as new technologies scale faster than architecture capabilities can evolve:

- **AI governance and data integrity risks:** As AI initiatives move from pilots to enterprise deployment already underway in more than half of surveyed organizations, architectures must now manage new risks around data provenance, model explainability, and lifecycle accountability. These challenges extend traditional data governance into new operational domains such as model monitoring and AI control frameworks.
- **AI-driven infrastructure and architecture complexity:** The rapid growth of AI workloads is forcing new decisions around compute placement, hybrid infrastructure, and data architecture. As organizations scale GenAI and advanced analytics, architectural choices increasingly determine performance, cost, and governance outcomes.
- **Platform ecosystem complexity:** As organizations adopt composable architectures and third-party services, dependency risk and integration complexity increase. What previously appeared as isolated integration challenges now manifest as ecosystem-wide architecture governance requirements.
- **Architecture influence across business design:** Architecture responsibilities are expanding into business architecture and strategic planning, with EA involvement in business architecture already reported by roughly half of surveyed organizations and expected to grow further.

Persistent challenges

Several challenges continue to surface across organizations because they are structural and cumulative rather than technology-specific:

- **Legacy complexity:** Decades of incremental investment and customization have produced deeply interdependent systems. Even as cloud adoption accelerates, nearly half of respondents report active modernization or migration programs still underway, indicating the long tail of legacy complexity.
- **Skills and capacity constraints:** The Horizon Architecture: Architecture Study findings suggest that skills and capacity constraints remain a significant pressure point. In the survey, 45% of respondents reported that EA teams are too small to meet current demand. The survey also identified business strategy and data/AI as priority upskilling areas for EA teams, cited by 45% and 40% of respondents, respectively.
- **Governance effectiveness gaps:** The Horizon Architecture: Architecture Study indicates that architecture governance remains uneven: Only 35% of respondents rate architecture governance as "very effective," while most describe it as only partly effective. The survey also points to weak enforcement and limited alignment with strategy as areas for improvement, suggesting that many organizations are still working to align delivery autonomy with enterprise-level guardrails.
- **Fragmented technical debt remediation:** The same survey also shows that technical debt management remains an area of opportunity for many EA functions. Only 27% of respondents say EA manages technical debt effectively today, while 44% expect this capability to improve over the next one to two years.

What these challenges reveal

The patterns across persistent and emerging challenges point to a deeper issue: Many EA functions are operating with capabilities that have not evolved at the same pace as technology adoption, AI expansion, and modern delivery models. Understanding these maturity gaps is critical to explaining why the same pressures continue to surface across organizations.

Enterprise architecture capability maturity: Why challenges persist

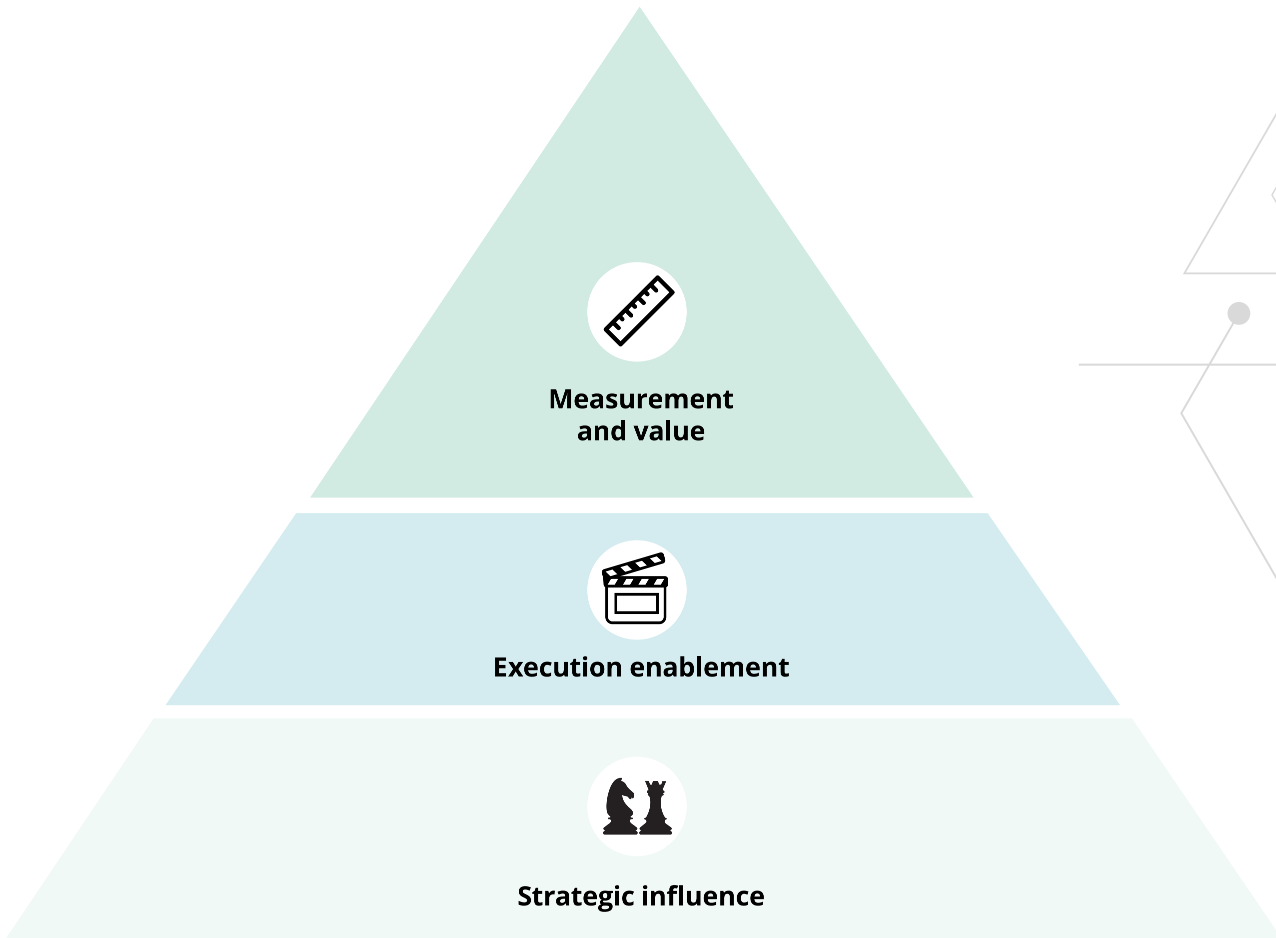

Figure 2. Enterprise architecture maturity challenges pyramid

The challenges identified in the survey are not the result of isolated execution failures. They persist because EA capabilities have not evolved at the same pace as delivery models, technology scope, and executive expectations. This reflects a broader pattern in enterprise technology environments: Organizations operate as interconnected systems where decisions about data maturity, AI adoption, technical debt, and capability building compound over time, shaping long-term performance in ways that are often difficult to detect when viewed as isolated initiatives (see Deloitte research on technology decision compounding and enterprise performance).

Strategic influence on maturity

1. **Limited executive airtime and advisory posture:** Despite rising expectations, EA still operates primarily in an advisory capacity in many organizations. Only a minority report regular C-suite or board-level engagement on architecture topics. This limits EA's ability to shape strategy early, where architectural decisions have the greatest leverage. Without sustained executive sponsorship, architecture influence remains episodic and reactive.

2. **Governance perceived as partly effective:** Most respondents describe architecture governance as only partly effective, citing weak alignment with strategy and inconsistent enforcement. This is not a tooling problem; it reflects unclear decision rights and insufficient authority. Until governance is explicitly linked to enterprise outcomes, such as cost, risk and resilience, it will continue to be bypassed in the name of speed.

Execution enablement maturity

1. **Under-resourced teams and skills gaps:** The Horizon Architecture: Architecture Study points to clear capacity and skills constraints. Nearly half of respondents indicate that EA teams are too small to meet current demand, while business strategy and data/AI rank among the top upskilling priorities for architecture leaders. Deloitte's view is that these constraints should not be addressed through headcount alone. As EA teams take on broader responsibilities across modernization, platforms, data, and AI, their capacity becomes more constrained. Leading organizations focus that capacity on the decisions with the greatest enterprise impact. These include modernization sequencing, platform choices, AI guardrails, investment trade-offs, and technical debt reduction. Lower-impact activities should be simplified, automated, or deprioritized so architecture teams can concentrate on areas that improve speed, cost, risk, resilience, and growth.

2. **Operating model transition is still incomplete:** EA involvement in agile and product delivery remains largely informal today, with many organizations expecting a shift toward embedded roles in the next one to two years. Until that transition is complete and architects are given explicit decision rights within value streams, standards and patterns will remain optional in practice.

3. **Fragmented tooling limits leverage:** While adoption of dedicated EA platforms is accelerating, many teams still rely on office productivity tools. This fragments architecture data and limits automation, impact analysis, and reuse. Tooling maturity matters most where it enables decision-making, not documentation.

Measurement and value maturity

1. **Weak linkage between architecture and business outcomes:** One in four EA functions does not measure impact at all, and most rely on operational metrics rather than business outcomes. Where architecture value is not articulated in clear terms: such as speed to market, cost optimization, and risk reduction; executive confidence and sustained investment remain fragile

2. **Limited emphasis on target states and roadmaps:** Many organizations report extensive use of standards and patterns, but fewer maintain clear enterprise target states and roadmaps. This weakens the connection between governance and execution and reduces confidence that architectural decisions are driving toward a coherent future state.

Strategic architecture themes shaping 2025–2026

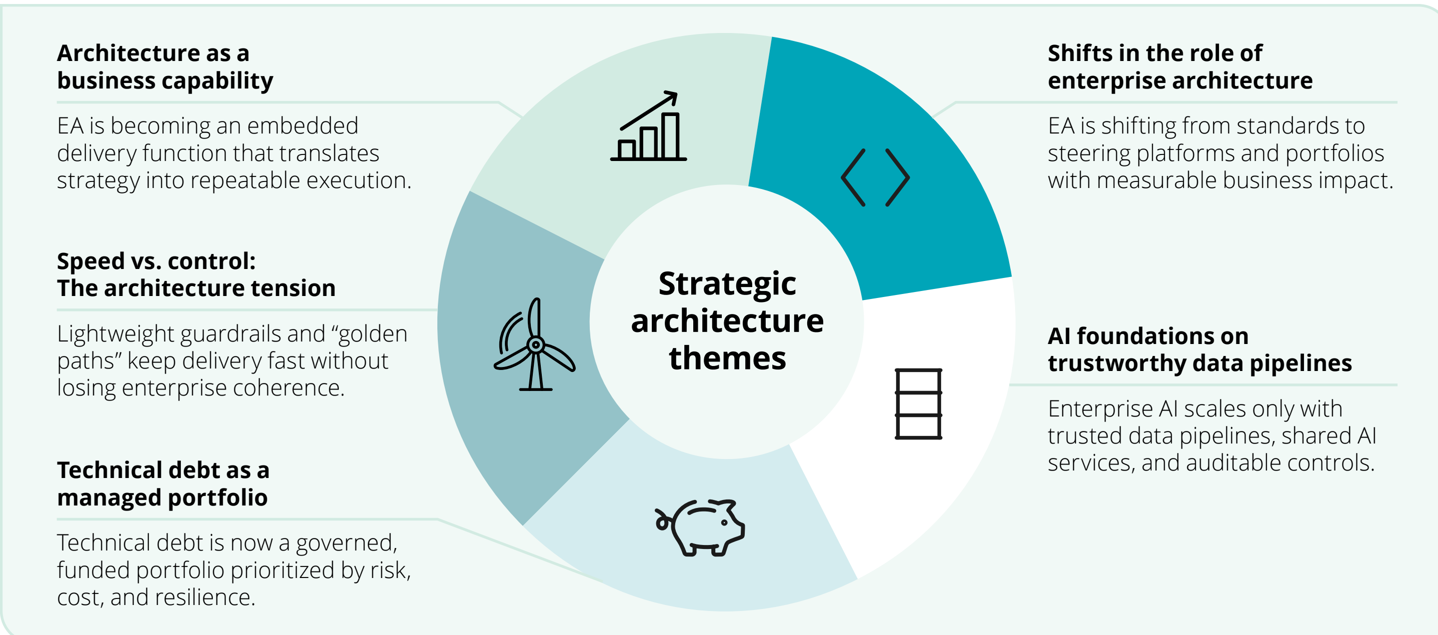

Figure 3. Strategic architecture themes

As organizations respond to these maturity gaps, a set of strategic architecture themes is emerging. These themes signal a fundamental shift in how EA operates and how it is expected to create value.

Shifts in the role of enterprise architecture

EA is being recast from a centralized standards function into an embedded steward of platforms, portfolios, and enterprise decisions. Decision rights are moving closer to delivery, while accountability for coherence, resilience, and reuse remains across the enterprise.

Architecture as a business capability

High-performing organizations operate EA as a business capability that translates strategy into repeatable delivery. Architects sit within value streams with formal authority over platforms and suites. Architecture choices are expressed in cost, risk, and time-to-market terms, allowing leaders to manage technology as an investment portfolio rather than a collection of projects.

Speed vs. control: The architecture tension

The tension between speed and control is no longer resolved through after-the-fact governance. Instead, organizations are embedding lightweight guardrails, standardized platforms, and "golden paths" directly into delivery workflows. Policy-as-code, version cadence, and reusable patterns allow teams to move quickly without eroding enterprise coherence.

AI foundations on trustworthy data pipelines

AI is moving from experiments to a sustained delivery motion, riding on hardened data domains, lineage, and quality service level agreements (SLAs). EA coordinates shared AI services (feature/vector stores, model registries, evaluation harnesses) and aligns access and risk controls, so models and analytics ship repeatably across products with auditable, business-grade outcomes. As AI workloads scale, the "data center of gravity" increasingly becomes an architectural decision where frequently accessed data resides and directly affects model performance, cost, and governance. EA must therefore establish clear patterns for how data and AI workloads are distributed across public cloud, private cloud, and on-premise environments (see Deloitte research on the growing demand for AI computing).

Technical debt as a managed portfolio

Technical debt is shifting from episodic remediation to a governed portfolio linked to modernization and consolidation programs. Leading organizations sequence remediation alongside product roadmaps, funding debt reduction based on risk, running cost, and resilience impact.

Leading practices to next practices: What high performers are adopting

As organizations reset for the remainder of 2026, high performers are moving beyond incremental “leading practices” toward deliberate next practices that make architecture the engine of portfolio clarity and execution. What follows outlines four pivotal shifts that span how decisions are made, where architects sit, how platforms are stewarded, and how data, AI, and services are industrialized. The subsections below unpack each shift, tracing implications from strategy through delivery.

From documentation to decision-grade EA platforms

Leading organizations elevate EA from documentation to decisioning, standardizing platforms that run impact analysis, expose dependencies, and express choices in business terms. Portfolios are steered by comparable trade-offs, not opinions, making investment and sequence explicit. Decision-grade platforms replace static office files with a living system of record, bringing quantified impact and traceable standards directly into the decision.

From advisory reviews to embedded architects in value streams

Leading organizations are embedding architects where choices are made inside product teams with clear decision rights and lightweight guardrails. Architecture happens in-flow, shrinking latency and rework while keeping autonomy intact. A near-term rebalance from informal/advisory roles toward architects embedded within agile/value-stream teams align decision speed with accountability.

From best-of-breed sprawl to best-of-suite platforms (platform stewardship)

Leaders converge on suites as the default, enforcing version cadence and integration patterns to narrow variance across products. They run explicit decommission backlogs alongside modernization, turning cleanup into a managed, value-releasing program. Platform stewardship treats the transition from tool proliferation to disciplined convergence as a continuous source of value.

From opportunistic data/AI and services to industrialized paths

Leading organizations treat information architecture and service design as operational disciplines: SLA-backed data contracts, reference implementations, and versioned application programming interfaces (APIs) and event standards. Repeatable controls turn analytics/AI and microservices into safe, scalable defaults across products. Targeted integration of AI agents/copilots in architecture workflows anchored to standardized contracts, versioning policies, and “golden path” controls become a de facto standard.

Deloitte point of view: The quiet shift in how enterprises are governed

EA remains a significant but underleveraged engine for enterprise change. The Horizon Architecture: Architecture Study points to three related constraints: limited strategic influence, uneven governance effectiveness, and immature value measurement. Taken together, these survey signals suggest that these conditions can increase execution friction by slowing decisions, creating rework, and weakening the link between architecture choices and business outcomes. At the same time, peers are shifting to embedded architecture roles, upgrading toolchains, and formalizing AI architecture. This signals that the competitive bar is moving. The takeaway is clear: Architecture performance now maps directly to growth velocity, cost-to-serve, resilience, and AI risk control. This section explains how leadership should read those signals through business, organization, and industry lenses.

Business lens: Architecture is the cost-of-change engine

- The survey signals that many firms still treat EA as a back-office craft. It should be read as a leading indicator of cost, speed, and risk.
- When EA is not in the strategy room, the enterprise pays a hidden "change tax" in duplicated platforms, slow product cycles, and brittle controls.
- Treat architecture as a management system for outcomes: growth velocity, cost-to-serve, resilience, and AI risk. If those outcomes are not visible on one page, the company is financing technology without a steering wheel.

Organization lens: The operating model is the constraint

- The data shows EA often sits in an advisory posture while delivery runs on product and agile rhythms. This indicates a structural mismatch.
- Maturity rises when architects are accountable in value streams, not only in committees. "Partly effective governance" should be read as unclear decision rights and weak enforcement signals.
- Talent mix matters. The next curve requires business-savvy architects and AI-literate designers. If team design and incentives do not reflect that, progress will stall no matter what the tools.

Industry lens: The bar is moving with AI, platforms, and regulation

- AI is the catalyst that exposes EA's earliest weak spots in data governance, decision rights, lineage, and control traceability. As organizations scale AI workloads, architectural choices about where data "lives" become increasingly consequential. The location of frequently accessed data across public cloud, private infrastructure, or on-prem environments directly influences AI performance, cost, and governance control, making data gravity an intentional architecture decision rather than an operational by-product (see Deloitte research on the growing demand for AI computing).
- Peers are consolidating platforms, upgrading EA toolchains, and standing up AI-architecture roles. Treat this as a competitive clock, not an IT trend.
- Value is lost in the gap between pattern catalogs and truly governed target states, as AI raises the standard for auditable lineage across data, models, prompts, and controls.
- When the EA toolchain and AI guardrails fall behind, the earliest signals are slower launches, higher run costs, and compliance or audit friction, long before revenue is affected.
- Expectations have reset as boards, customers, and regulators now demand traceable, accountable AI-enabled decisions.

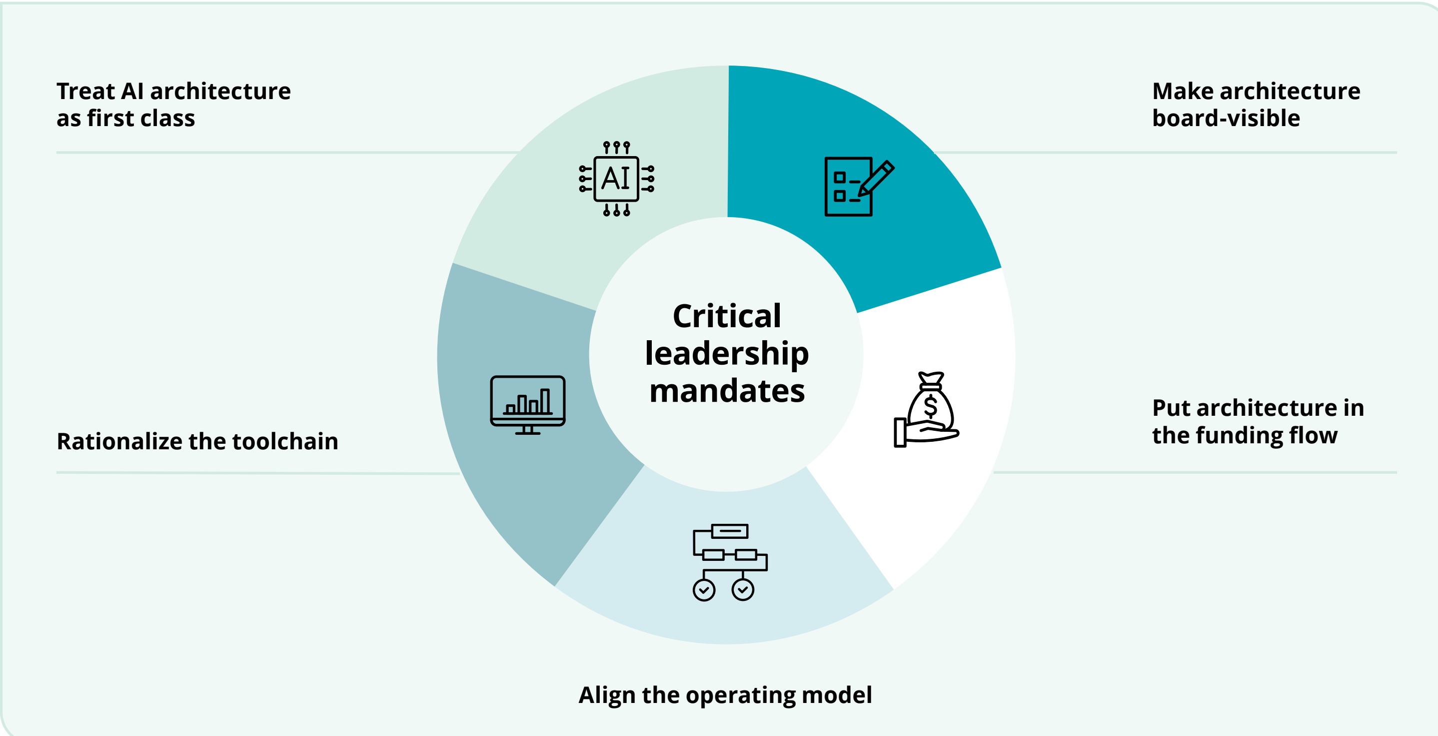

Figure 4. Five leadership mandates

What does this mean?

- **Make architecture board-visible** as a control system for growth, cost, resilience, and AI risk, supported by a concise outcome scorecard.
- **Put architecture in the funding flow**, requiring credible target states, roadmaps, and measurable outcomes for major investments.
- **Align the operating model**, embedding architects in product and platform teams with clear, enforceable decision rights.
- **Rationalize the tool chain**, establishing trusted systems of record for applications, integrations, risks, and roadmaps.
- **Treat AI architecture as first class**, with defined roles, standards, and controls including clear patterns for data placement and AI infrastructure across public cloud, private, and on-prem environments.

The conclusion is clear

EA is no longer a technical discipline. It is a leadership capability that shapes how organizations grow, adapt, and compete. As AI adoption accelerates, platform ecosystems expand, and technology decisions carry increasing financial and operational consequences, architecture has become the mechanism through which enterprises align technology investments with strategic outcomes. Organizations that elevate EA into a board-visible management system embedding architects in value streams, institutionalizing governance within delivery, and establishing clear patterns for AI and data architecture should be better positioned to make deliberate trade-offs across speed, cost, risk, and innovation. Those that do not will likely continue to accumulate fragmented investments, rising complexity, and constrained scalability. In the next era of enterprise technology, architecture is not about producing better diagrams; it's about enabling better decisions at scale.

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