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How to Stop Cheating in Enterprise and Business Architecture Certification

I was inspired by an article by John Goyette regarding college students cheating with AI. This article parallels his brilliant thoughts applied to Enterprise Architecture and Business Architecture Certification. I have seen the same issue with Enterprise Architecture and Business Architecture certification, well before Artificial Intelligence (AI), and even more now. When I ask someone who has been “multiple-guess exam” certified to provide an Architecture Model or Implementation Model, or walk through an Enterprise Architecture methodology on a whiteboard, I never know what to expect. Few excel, others stare at me, but one thing is certain: in these live settings, the real result of these “certifications” is quite apparent. That’s far more than can be said for much of today’s certification landscape.

Since the release of OpenAI’s ChatGPT, certification, especially in fields like Enterprise Architecture and Business Architecture, has been upended even more. The traditional exam-based assessment tools that have defined certification from some certification bodies, particularly those that migrated online during the pandemic, are now even more vulnerable.

Cheating has been and is now more rampant. Believing that you can become an Enterprise Architecture or Business Architect by taking a one-time multiple-choice exam has always been laughable. Candidates turn to generative AI tools to answer exam questions required for certification. Industry surveys and anecdotal evidence suggest that a significant percentage of candidates have used AI to assist with certification exams, with some even submitting AI-generated responses as their own.

We are still in the early days of AI, but the future for certification looks uncertain if we do not stop the exam-based certification approaches, with or without AI. Early research and the experience of trainers suggest what many know intuitively: AI can boost candidates’ short-term exam performance, but it undermines long-term understanding and the ability to actually develop an Enterprise Architecture or Business Architecture.

A candidate who passes an exam-based certification exam hasn't truly mastered the frameworks, methodologies, or analytical thinking required of a practitioner-focused certified architect – someone who can actually develop an Architecture. Such candidates not only fail to retain knowledge but also miss out on developing the critical and creative thinking skills essential for real-world enterprise architecture or business architecture work. Using exams and AI often erodes genuine learning.

In reality, AI-assisted cheating often crosses ethical lines. The current incentive structure in certification programs can reward shortcuts and rarely penalize dishonesty. This undermines the integrity of the credential and, ultimately, the profession itself.

Despite all of this, most candidates do not want a certification system built on cheating. Many would welcome stricter controls and clearer guidelines to ensure that certification remains meaningful and respected.

What Can Be Done?

Detecting exam-based cheating or AI-assisted cheating is difficult. Certification bodies and proctors will always be a step behind the latest technological manipulations. Even advanced plagiarism and AI-detection tools are imperfect - false positives can unfairly penalize honest candidates, while sophisticated AI-generated content can slip through undetected.

It's time to step back from over-reliance on technology and return to assessment methods that genuinely measure knowledge and skill. Here's how:

1. Require In-Person, Practical Assessments

Move away from online or other forms of exams and open-book take-home assignments.

Use in-person workshops and live case study presentations as a means of demonstrating competency.

2. Design Certification Tasks to Demonstrate Skills

Require candidates to submit drafts, logs, or reflections on their process, not just final answers.

Use unique, context-specific case studies that are difficult for AI to solve generically.

Incorporate group work where appropriate.

3. Clarify and Enforce Ethical Standards

Clearly define what constitutes exam cheating and AI-assisted cheating in certification policies.

Communicate the consequences and rationale for upholding integrity.

Foster a culture of professionalism and ethical responsibility, especially by the certifying bodies.

4. Leverage Technology Wisely

Use AI-detection tools as part of a broader strategy, not as the only line of defense.

Teach candidates about responsible AI use in the workplace, distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate uses.

5. Restore the Value of Dialogue and Mentorship

Integrate more interactive elements into certification, such as workshops, group discussions, and mentorship programs.

Encourage ongoing learning and reflective practice, not just one-time exam performance.

6. Invest in Certification Quality

Advocate for smaller cohorts and more personalized assessment, even if it means higher costs or more effort.

Certification bodies should prioritize quality and integrity over scale and convenience.

Conclusion

AI has exposed vulnerabilities in the current certification model based on exams more than ever, for Enterprise and Business Architecture. The solution is not to ban technology outright, but to restore rigor, integrity, and genuine skill-building to the certification process. By prioritizing in-person, process-driven, and conversational assessment, certification programs can ensure that credentials remain meaningful and that certified professionals are truly prepared to lead in the real world.

Real professionals deserve a real certification.

By embracing proven assessment practices and adapting thoughtfully to new challenges, the EA and BA certification community can meet the AI era with confidence and integrity.

The question is, those certification bodies that rely on the exam-based approach to certification, will they be forced to change their approach? The only way for this to happen is for the “receiving” community to stand up and say enough is enough. We need to build a Profession in Business Architecture and Enterprise Architecture. One-time exams will not make this happen.