Information Architecture, Taxonomy, and Ontology

INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE (IA)

IA borrows principles from both design and information science to optimize the structure and usability of shared information environments. These environments include information systems (such as office automation systems and knowledge management systems); interactive services (such as online commerce apps); and user experiences (such as websites and intranets). The two most important building blocks of IA are taxonomy and ontology.

TAXONOMY

Taxonomies are classification systems for arranging items into categories. Examples of taxonomies are the Dewey Decimal system for categorizing books in libraries, the Linnaean system for classifying plants and animals (class, order, genus, species), the disciplines of study at a university (Sciences, Physical Sciences, Chemistry), or the items in a grocery store (meat, produce, dairy, canned foods). Taxonomies are often, but not always, hierarchical.

ONTOLOGY

Ontology dictates meaning. Literally, it means, "the study of the names of things." An ontology is a framework that establishes the classes, relationships, properties, and constraints that define the objects in any given system. An ontology is more complex than a taxonomy, but it includes taxonomic relationships. For example, the categories in a database form a taxonomy. An ontology explains the meanings of those categories – and the items within them.

WHY INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE MATTERS:

Information architecture (IA) is all about organization. Better organization means that users can more quickly access the information they need.

IA Creates a Better User Experience

A "user" may be a CMS employee accessing an operational tool, or it may be a CMS beneficiary who needs information about their benefits. Well-planned IA means that we can do our jobs more efficiently and our customers can access their benefits more easily.

IA Expedites Personalization and Tailored Content

By integrating the language of a user into the language of an organization, IA enables content that targets individual users. It also increases searchability and Search Engine Optimization.

IA Maps the Customer Journey

Good architecture means that you can follow somebody's path through a system. When we understand how our users interact with our systems, we can improve those systems and plan for future upgrades.

IA Creates Bridges Between User and Content

IA also creates bridges between strategy and tactics, units and disciplines, platforms and channels, research and practice.

IA Paves the Way for Artificial Intelligence

When concepts are well-defined and their relationships to each other are clear, humans can make better sense of them, but so can algorithms. Various forms of AI, such as natural language processing and machine learning, depend on well-ordered, well-defined data. The more logic built into data structures, the better machines can understand and manipulate them.