TOGAF® Poster Series #55
An EA Ontology

Using an ontology is an important skill for the EA team. Our poster explains what an EA Ontology is, and how you can use it.

WHAT IS AN ONTOLOGY?
According to Wikipedia, it “is a formal naming and definition of the types, properties, and interrelationships of the entities that really or fundamentally exist for a particular domain of discourse.”

TOGAF REFERS TO AN ARCHITECTURE ONTOLOGY
As “defining the architectural terms and definitions that will be used in the organization in order to establish a common understanding of these terms.”

[Source: 46.3 Phase B: Business Architecture]

SO WHAT IS AN EA ONTOLOGY?
In any domain or subject area there are a set of things that are fundamental. They are the things that define and shape that domain. Whenever we start a new EA initiative one of the first steps is to work out what is within scope; for example, a project to develop an Integrated Channel Architecture might need to include Channels, Devices, Processes, Services, Applications, etc. Architecting is easier when these entities are formally defined so that everyone has a common understanding of these terms.

A project ontology formally defines things that are important in a particular project.

An EA Ontology is an ontology that formally defines the things that are important for Enterprise Architecture.

HOW DO WE CREATE AN ONTOLOGY?
There are several ways in which we might document an ontology.

1. Start by listing the things that are relevant to the current work. What is the noun or noun phrase by which each thing is known?
2. At some stage you may want to add a definition, examples, and synonyms.
3. Group similar things together, to form a hierarchy or related items. Arrange the most general things at the top of the hierarchy, with things that are part of, specializations, or examples lower down. For example, the things of interest might be Business, Product, Process, Event, Business Rule, and Mortgage Loan; Business might be the highest level, with Product, Process, Event and Business Rule at the next level, and Mortgage Loan as an example of a Product.
4. Think about the relationships between items in the ontology and produce a map, diagram, or metamodel that shows these relationships.

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