

24 Nov 2015

Please be more explicit



I have finally come around to defining what in my humble opinion is why I always seem to run into a problem trying to explain my point of view to others.

The only conclusion that I can come to is that perhaps I see the world of [‘information’](#) in a completely different light to just about everyone else. To me the most important reason revolves around the definition and usage of [‘words’](#).

To begin with, what is the definition of the word [‘explicit’](#)? As can be seen from the search engine I used, there were 217 million returned references to this word. This means that it would take someone multiple lifetimes to fully understand the word ‘explicit’. To simplify matters I will just concentrate on 1 definition which will include [‘synonyms’](#) and [‘antonyms’](#).

To me being ‘explicit’ means: “Precisely and clearly expressed or readily observable; leaving nothing to implication” or “In accordance with fact or the primary meaning of a term”. The synonym of ‘explicit’ is ‘expressed’ and the antonym is ‘implicit’.

The problem with the word ‘implicit’ is that it has 2 definitions and they seem to contradict each other. The first definition states “Implied though not directly expressed; inherent in the nature of something” and the second “Being without doubt or reserve”. So which one is correct? Because the word ‘implicit’ is an adjective and according to grammar is a word that ‘qualifies’ a ‘noun’, I will have to find the noun that it qualifies.

The ‘noun’ I found is the word ‘implication’ (which was used in the first definition of the word ‘explicit’) and ‘implication’ (in my humble opinion) has a very ‘explicit’ definition, namely “Something that is inferred (deduced or entailed or implied)” and ‘implied’ depends on belief, guesswork, reasoning/logic.

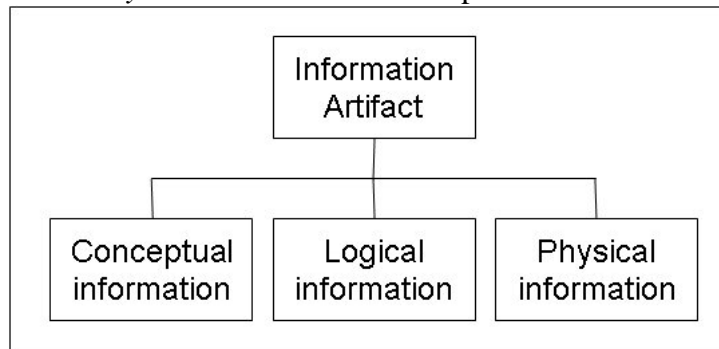
To be ‘explicit’ about the word ‘implicit’ will therefore lead one to conclude there has to be some form of ‘agreement’ between people as to which definition makes the most sense to them.

My final test (as to whether an idea is ‘explicit’ or not) is to examine whether the idea has a ‘taxonomy/structure’, ‘ontology/meaning/definition’ and ‘heuristics /rules/logic/reasoning’.

Having written this, let me be more ‘explicit’ as to why I believe ‘information’ is an ‘artifact’ (“a man-made object taken as a whole”) and not (as some people express it) ‘processed knowledge’.

Information as an artifact

Taxonomy: 'Information' can be expressed in a structure as follows:



Ontology:

By definition 'information' is

- Knowledge acquired through study or experience or instruction
- A message received and understood
- A collection of facts from which conclusions may be drawn

Other definitions

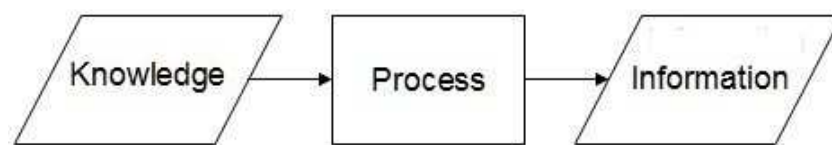
- Conceptual – “an idea or thought”
- Logical – “reasoned and reasonable judgment”
- Physical – “having substance or material existence; perceptible to the senses”

Heuristics: An 'information' artifact can only be one of the following (mutually exclusive):

- Conceptual
- Logical
- Physical

Information as processed knowledge

Taxonomy: The structure of the above sentence is as follows:



Ontology: By definitions

- See ontology of information as an artifact
- Process – “perform mathematical and logical operations on (data) according to programmed instructions in order to obtain the required information”
- Knowledge – “the psychological result of perception, learning, and reasoning”

Heuristics:

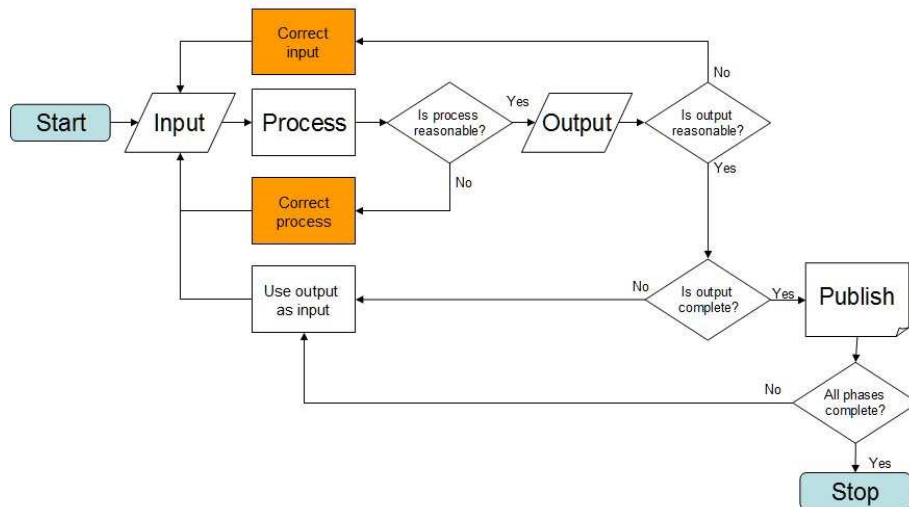
The rules to transform information into knowledge follows the form of input>process>output – ipo

So which is right (or more right)?

Using the definition of 'explicitness', the artifact solution is less ambiguous than the ipo one. There is far less likely to go wrong using the artifact approach than the ipo.

In the artifact solution, there are no 'shades of grey' (the piece of information is conceptual, logical or physical, no ifs or buts).

In the ipo solution the input is far too nebulous (you have to process the piece of information first to see if it is indeed knowledge and if it is not then what – you have probably wasted a lot of valuable time trying to sort 'the wheat from the chaff'). The following diagram shows the 'pit falls' of the ipo solution (note the 4 infinite loops):



Have I been explicit enough for you?

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