Cataxonomies

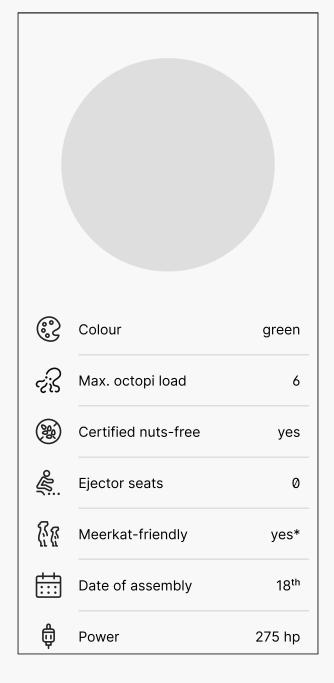
Definition

Cataxonomy: excessive labeling that ends up impairing communication.

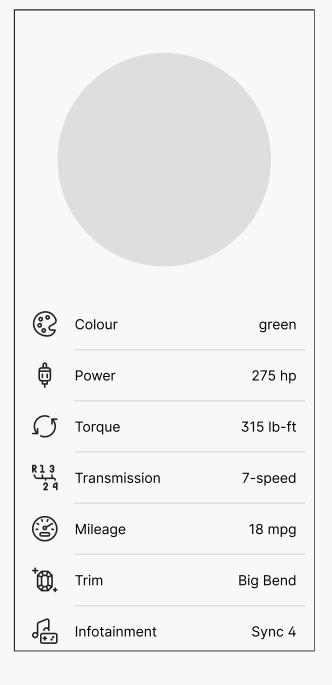
An accumulation of words that are technically true, but don't immediately drive action or decision.

Worse, their presence and vagueness add noise to the conversation, slowing it down for no upside.

Cataxonomy (bad)



Taxonomy (good)



Best Practices: Spotting

- Overly generic words that describe a concept rather than an attribute
- Overly domain-specific words
- Cool sounding words, and lot of them at once
- Single-use words disproportionately set to one value

Best Practices: Fixing

- Check for up-to-dateness, wholeness, concision and consistency
- Remove problematic words
- Evaluate whether they need replacement at all; if yes break them down, replace them with generic alternative and/or define them locally

Cataxonomies are often a symptom of a weak underlying conceptual model. Consider fixing the latter first.

Best Practices: Preventing

- Ensure a clear scope, goals and ideally perspective
- Curate and maintain continuously
- Consider formats that could handle better some or all of the content: flowcharts, figures, post-it boards, terminology, etc.