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 slow down the conversation, by only adding noise to it.

Cataxonomy (bad)

Colour	green
Max. octopi load	6
Certified nuts-free	yes
Ejector seats	0
Meerkat-friendly	yes*
Date of assembly	18th
Power	275 hp

Taxonomy (good)

Colour	green
Power	275 hp
Torque	315 lb-ft
Transmission	7-speed
Mileage	18 mpg
Trim	Big Bend
Infotainment	Sync 4

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 problematic words need replacement at all;
  if yes break them down, replace them with generic alternative,
  or define them locally

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