

What is information architecture?

Information architecture is architecture from the information perspective. As all business processes, **whether or not they are automated**, manipulate information, information architecture **begins with business architecture** and continues through all aspects of implementation, including

- in-house or bespoke software development
- the adoption of packaged applications
- the distribution of business processes between one's own organization and its business partners

What is information?

Information is **data in business-process context**. Information may flow through business processes of any degree of complexity. At each step, different roles approach the information with different concerns and different requirements. What is the difference between an approved invoice and an unapproved invoice? Is it one element of content? Or is it the fact that one can be used to generate a payment and the other cannot?

What is an information model?

An information model is a repository of information assets: a set of definitions of information types ("classes"), their content, their behavior (including security), and the relationships (of containment, reference, and derivation) among them. In the ideal case, this adds up to a complete picture of everything that is known about the information: not just what it looks like, but **how it is used**. This can then be used to absorb the knowledge of business context, to generate artifacts to support any phase of the implementation process, and to round-trip changes that originate from any source or driver.

How do I create an information model?

The first thing to grasp is that **you already have information models** (plural). Every business process, automated or not, is based upon an implicit information model, even if its physical representation is a paper form. Likewise, every automation system is based upon an information model, even if the only inspectable evidence of the model's existence is a database schema, or an interface specification, or source code.

The optimal number of information models is one, that is **yours** (*i.e.*, that you govern) – even where it is based upon relevant external standard models. Opaque (implicit, incomplete, undocumented) information models do not convey the benefits described above, and the more of them you have, the more friction arises among them. The game is to capture the opaque models and harmonize them into your own, governed model. (In practice, this must generally be done opportunistically.)

What are the benefits of information architecture?

- Better human-capital management (less reliance upon software vendor professional services)
- Simplified business-process improvement
- Less, cheaper, **and higher-confidence** software maintenance
- Easier **and higher-confidence** business-process outsourcing