

Principles, Policies, Procedures, Standards.

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Architectural frameworks, e.g. FEAF, DoDAF, TOGAF, always include "regulatory stuff". Categories of this regulatory stuff go by different names, but these four are pretty standard. However, I am not satisfied with the definitions of these terms that I have come across. So this is my attempt at defining them.

Before I start, I want to suggest that our job is not to use the best ordinary language (dictionary) definitions we can find. Instead, our definitions should be of four categories of things that we want to distinguish, and to which we have applied these terms. We have, of course, chosen the ordinary language terms closest to the concepts we want to formulate. But our job is not to clarify those words. Our job is to define the concepts we want to use, as clearly as we can. Our job is to define the categories, not their labels.

This can best be achieved if our our definitions are structural, not referential. They should be defined in terms of one another (deSaussurian synchronic structural semantics). We should not be thinking "Now what are principles, policies, etc, really?" or "What do people really mean when they talk about principles, policies, etc?" As though there is something "out there" which we can't quite bring into focus. That would be a referential semantics approach, and seeing what I believe are a number of attempts at it, I think that approach is not helpful.

So here's my first cut.

Principles specify the ideals our enterprise chooses to realize. There are principles for how to do something (process), and principles for what to make (product).

Principles are rules that apply come what may.

The value of following principles is intrinsic; considerations of efficiency, effectiveness, ease of use, or anything else, can never override the applicability of a principle. (Only a conflict with another principle can do that, e.g. “Thou shalt not kill”, and an apparent conflict, in specific situations, with the principle “Defend the innocent from terrorists”.)

Policies specify what to do (process) or to make (product) to maximize the realization of principles.

Policies are rules that govern the relationship between a party and one or more other parties (organizations or persons). (Insurance policies, hiring and firing policies, etc.)

(I need to reconcile these two strands of the concept I am struggling to clarify.)

Procedures specify how to carry out policies. They are standard methods or processes that implement policies. (“Always create documents based on the corresponding standard template”, “When a claim arrives, first identify the provider and the patient. Next Finally, pay the provider and notify the patient of any balance due.”)

Standards measure both products and processes against their respective governing procedures (and, therefore, policies).

Standards include rules that measure the fit of an artifact to its requirements. (“This document lacks a management summary section”, “This part is .033mm too short”.)

But not all standards are expressible as metrics.

(to be continued.)