



You deserve an explanation:
Where software apps have failed,
and what you can do about it.
[Part 3 in a series.]

Tracy Allison Altman
Ugly Research
Nov 2009

What's the problem?

- Explaining is one of the most important things people do.
- Today's software designs don't explicitly handle explanations.
- People need better ways to find explanations hidden inside other information – and make sure their explanations are easily found.



What you can do.

1. Rethink software apps: Think of explanations as a distinct type of information.
2. Rethink communications. Focus on explaining.
3. Demand and design better software. Handle explanations as tangible objects.
4. Take the lead in your organization: Demonstrate the importance of 'explaining'.
5. Join ExplanationScience.org

Information vs. Explanation*

Software does a much better job with routine information than with explanations.

Information

- Facts.
- Emphasis on who, what, where, when.
- Supports action.

Explanation

- Describes facts, and their consequences.
- Emphasis on evidence showing how/why things are related.
- Links action with results.

*See [Part 1](#) of this presentation for more details.

What's in it for you?

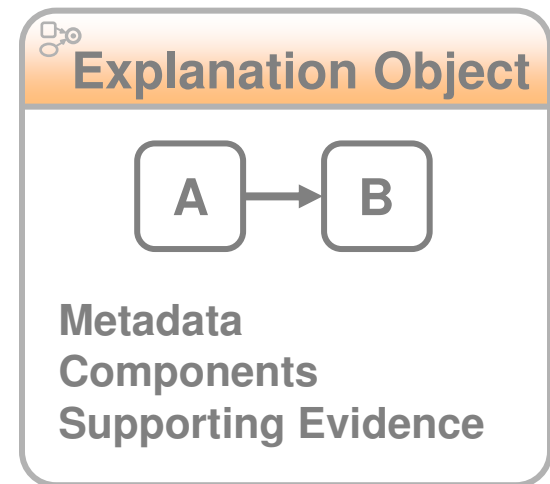
- Bring more attention to your ideas, findings, products, and services.
- Get faster, better answers.
- Develop better software & services:
 - Improve technology ROI.
 - Get better search results. Reduce overload.
- Develop more efficient business processes.
- Spread innovative ideas, expertise more quickly.



Rethinking software design.

Explanations are a distinct type of information.

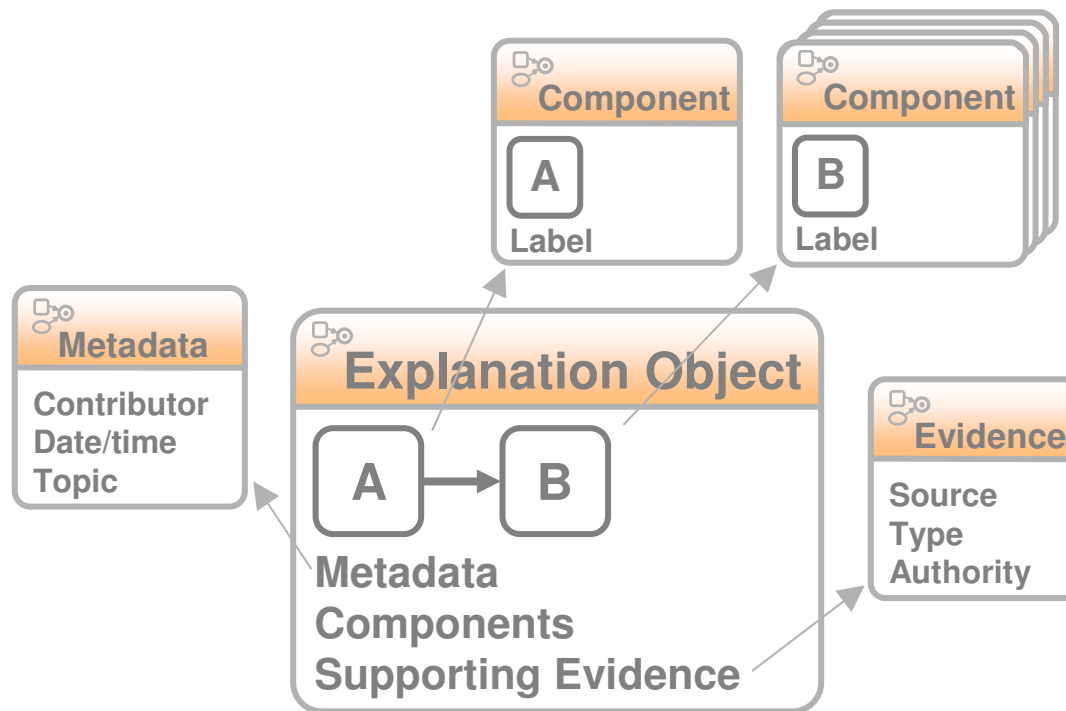
- Handle explanations as discrete objects.
- Apply important concepts to these objects:
 - Structured data, metadata.
 - Search and semantics.
 - Information architecture.
 - Presentation / web design.



Explanation Object Model.

Contributors create objects that:

- Show 2+ things that are related (A, B, ...)
- Provide evidence explaining how/why.



Example: Medical evidence.

Highlight valuable explanations & evidence contained within:

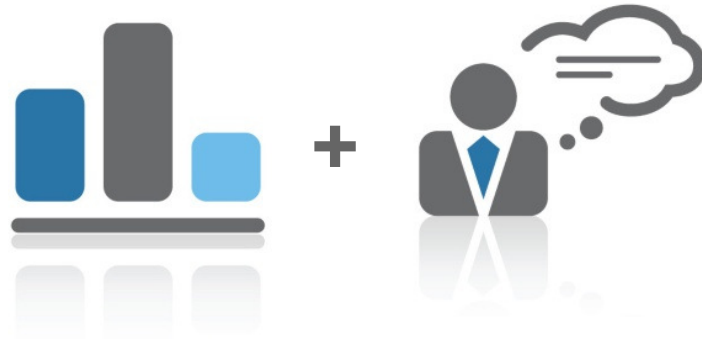
- Research findings, journal articles, Cochrane library, databases, etc.
- Conversations with patients.
- Online health publications.



Example: Performance dashboards.

Create interactive dashboards & scorecards.

- Connect performance data to people's explanations of what is happening.
- Example: “Why did we miss our Q3 numbers?”



Example: Tech marketing / CRM.

Highlight valuable explanations hidden inside web sites, conversations, documentation, etc.

- Deliver value propositions and describe product differentiators.
- Support complex products.
- Gather customer feedback.



More examples at UglyResearch.com/examples.html

Example: Enterprise 2.0

Get more ROI from Web 2.0 & Enterprise 2.0

- Build high-quality explanations into the process: Can't get there by filtering out low-quality stuff after-the-fact.*
- Use software that captures explanations directly. Improve people's contributions, and get better search results.



*W.E. Deming: "You can't inspect quality into the product."

Two more quick examples.

- Government 2.0/Public policy. Handling explanations as objects will add significant value to online discussions, policy documents, and Web 2.0 content.
- Social CRM & idea submission. Solicit ideas and explanations, but guide how people participate, rather than allowing free-form contributions. You'll get higher quality information.



What you can do.

1. Rethink software: Handle explanations as a distinct type of information.
2. Rethink communications. Focus on explaining.
3. Demand and design better software. Handle explanations as tangible objects.
4. Take the lead: Demonstrate the importance of 'explaining'.
5. Join ExplanationScience.org

ExplanationScience.org

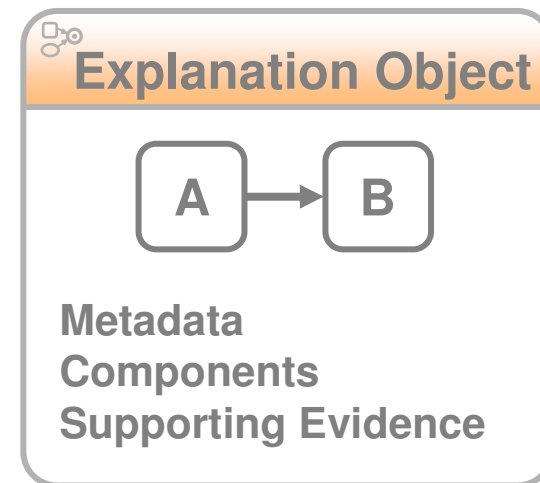
Join this new community.

- Pioneering the science of explaining:
 - What goes into a 'good' explanation?
 - What technologies are best for developing explanatory information? Which ones are best for presenting explanations?
- [@ExplanationSci](#) on Twitter
- For details: joinus@explanationscience.org

Who is Ugly Research?

Seminars and strategy/design consulting.

- Our **Tiny Soapbox** methodology separates good explanations from ordinary information.
- [@UglyResearch](https://twitter.com/UglyResearch) on Twitter
- Tracy Allison Altman can be contacted at tracy@uglyresearch.com



Previously in this series.

- [Part 1.](#) How to stop delivering information, and start delivering explanations. [26-Oct-09]
- [Part 2.](#) What's in it for you? Why emphasize explanations, not information? [2-Nov-09]