



# Personas of the Information Architect

## Goal and method

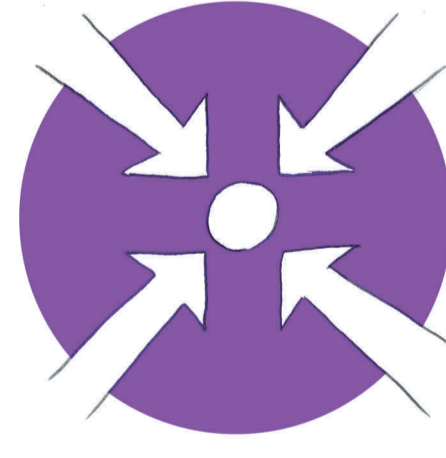
To clarify the different roles IAs find themselves in or create for themselves, a set of personas of Information Architects is presented. The segmentation and creation of these personas are based on different data sources: personal experiences, interviews, discussions on IA blogs & mailing lists, theoretical papers and a survey sent out among IAs.

## The results

Different persona descriptions with illustrations, and some tips for practitioners that recognize they operate in a specific role. The tips are practical advice on how to counteract possible drawbacks of the role.

For a list of literature used, the tips and more results from the survey that was completed by 103 UX professionals please visit <http://personasofia.karemaker.com>

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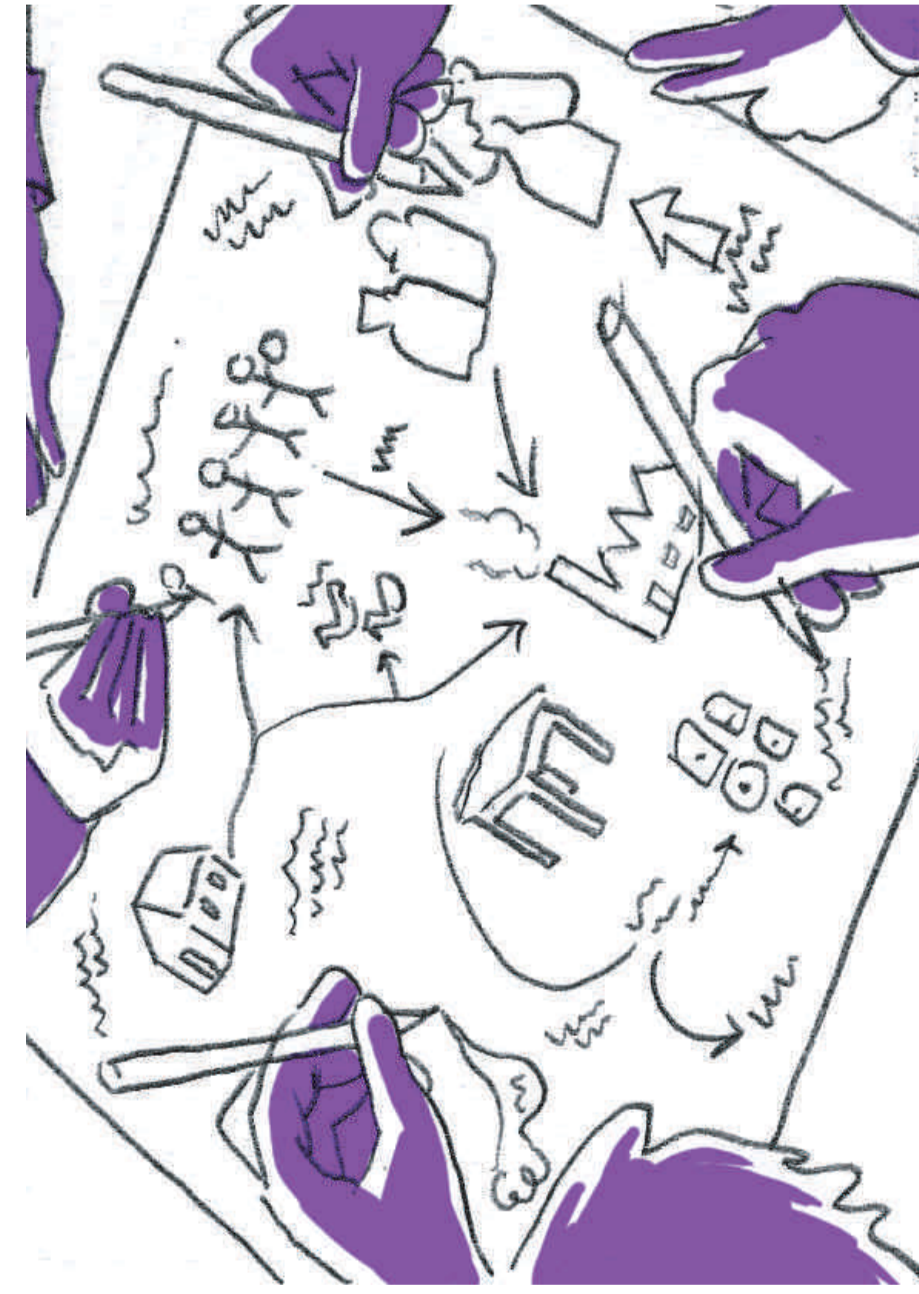


## The facilitator

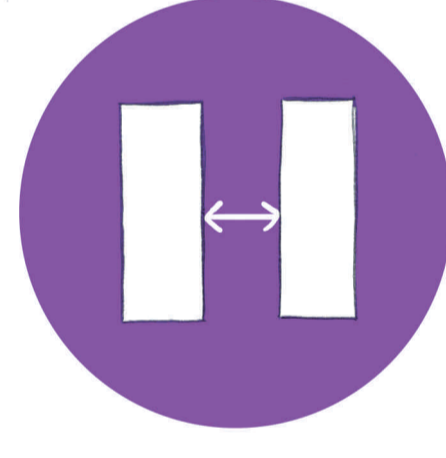
**"Create a shared understanding of the problem at hand, and work towards a solution from there"**

The felt need for change is the primary driver in a project. I am there to help uncover the problem and facilitate in finding a solution. Strategy and goals often emerge in the process and help to discuss directions but not many stakeholders are not nearly as interested in them as you would expect. Models are a way of getting people to talk about their reality. Insight in the world of the business and the users arrives from discussing the personal goals and activities of the different stakeholders. In these meetings real understanding takes place and commitment is generated. Documentation I send out is mainly used to involve management and control the project, but usually has very little impact on the work process or the end result. It is important I am present and meet with stakeholders regularly.

**Characteristics:** Social, Holistic, interpretive, Methodology can be structured but reality is socially constructed.  
**School of thought:** Interpretive, social relativism, humanism. Organisations can be organic or political, with different views and conflicting interests.



Don't confuse what the project team wants with what users want. If some users or stakeholders are not represented, turn to the role of advocate to express their interests



## The expert

**"Analyse the situation and come up with an efficient solution that supports the goals of the organisation and the users"**

Management is in charge and part of my job is coming up with the architecture for the solution that supports their goals. I really enjoy learning about the domain, first by reading through existing documentation, doing a content inventory and modeling the structure and processes of the organization. I interview users or other domain experts. Sometimes I let them do a card-sort. The time spent with domain experts and users helps to fill my knowledge gaps. In later stages, access to real users can be important for testing design choices and of course for ensuring the usability of the end product. I usually start design by creating high level concept maps or site maps. Documentation is an important part of any project and one of the ways in which information architecture is communicated.

**Characteristics:** Methodical, structured techniques, Situations can be objectified, reduce complexity by breaking down the problem into smaller parts.  
**School of thought:** Objectivism, functionalism, order. Organisations are set up so people can achieve a defined goal or purpose.



The map is not the territory; your models are abstractions that leave out information that does not fit with the intended use: Beware of your bias



## The designer

**"You can analyse the past, but you have to design for the future"**

New goals for the organisation require new ways of thinking. Having an outsider, fresh perspective helps me generate out-of-the box solutions. When I don't know the world of the users I try to gain insights by any means necessary; interviews, observations, questionnaires. I like to do role playing and write out scenarios early in the project to understand the users and their needs. I try not to overanalyze the situation. You could end up talking a long time getting nowhere. Storyboards, concept maps and prototypes are interesting tools for me. I like to make many different design options. The solution with a strong conceptual model or metaphor, implemented with rigour and style will work best for both users and the organisation.

**Characteristics:** Spontaneous, Keep it simple. Instinct & empathy are important, Ethnography.  
**School of thought:** Subjectivist but with order. Organisations are a team, there is a shared culture, norms and values.



Watch out for destructive creation: Especially for redesign projects you risk throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Maybe you need evolution, not revolution.

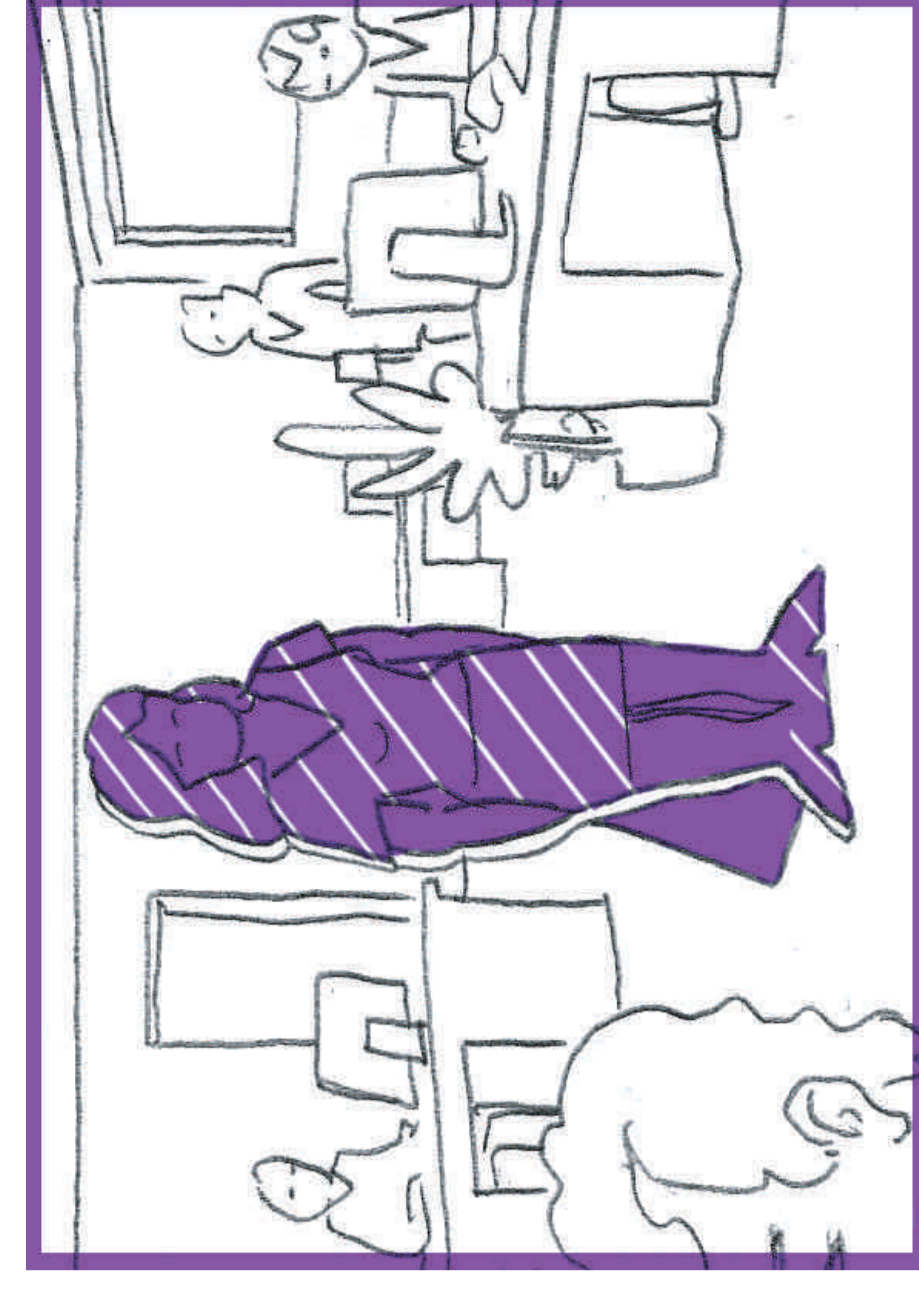


## The advocate

**"You should intentionally design relevant and fair systems"**

Design choices can be a political act. When users (or other people influenced by the system) are not benefitting I challenge the strategy. Organisations are political, conflicts of interest abound. Some managers for example are solely focused on short-term targets. They forget the needs of real users and the impact the system will have on the people within the organisation or on the brand image. At the end of the day I want to help people, and raise awareness of the user experience. I need to be headstrong and cunning, know when to be patient and when to intervene. Creating personas based on user research can be a helpful tool to raise awareness of the needs of real users and keep the project team focused.

**Characteristics:** Principles, evaluate often, competitive, user research  
**School of thought:** Radical structuralism; objectivism with a need to surpass existing social and organisational arrangements. Organisations are political, with coalitions forming and opposing interests.



When it is not possible to change the product or strategy, define goals for webmetrics and user testing to find out if your predictions play out. Do a before-benchmark if possible.

for more tips & literature visit <http://personasofia.karemaker.com>

tip!