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Palantir's Real Secret Sauce – Ontologies

By Samuel Holcman. April 2026

Welcome back to **Real Talk with Sam Holcman**.

Today I want to do something unusual.

I want to say “thank you” to Palantir - yes, *that* Palantir - for finally saying aloud, in very public terms, what we at EACOE and BACOE have been saying, teaching and practicing for decades.

A recent article titled “Palantir’s Real Secret Sauce - Ontologies” lays it out very clearly.

It explains that for more than a decade, the data industry has obsessed over data quality, governance, lineage, catalogs, and ownership - all important topics - but missed the central point: clean, governed data is still inert unless the system understands what that data actually represents in the real world.

Not just rows and columns, but **things in the world – things of interest to the business** - people, accounts, vehicles, facilities, transactions – all requiring precise naming and definitions, and how they relate, what is allowed, what is forbidden, and how those things change over time.

In other words: schemas describe data; ontologies describe reality.

Palantir openly says they did not start as a dashboards company or an analytics company; they started as a **world-modeling company**.

While everyone else was racing to dump more data into lakes and clusters, Palantir asked the question EACOE and BACOE have been asking for over fifty years in enterprise architecture and business architecture:

What are the real entities in this domain, how should they be represented, and how do they relate?

They built their core around an **operational model of reality** - entities, relationships, constraints, state transitions - and they made that ontology the system, not just a thin layer on top.

So Palantir, sincerely: thank you for saying it plainly and loudly. Meaning precedes intelligence.

The Bridge to EA, BA, and AI

Now let us connect this to where you live: enterprise architecture, business architecture, and AI models.

The article points out that early big data systems “worked” because they were retrospective, batch-oriented, and human-in-the-loop - the meaning lived in people’s heads, not in the system.

That world is over. We are moving to **agentic systems** - systems that do not just analyze data, but take actions, call tools, trigger workflows, allocate resources, and make decisions at machine speed.

And the article is blunt: when you try to build these agentic systems without an ontology, you get hallucinated actions, what we more accurately, referred to as fabrications, misused tools, fuzzy safety boundaries, and coordination that collapses into what they brilliantly call “prompt spaghetti.”

Palantir’s answer is that their agents are constrained by the ontology - actions are only valid if they correspond to legitimate state transitions on real entities.

That is exactly the kind of disciplined, ontology-driven thinking that R.E.A.L. EACOE Enterprise Architecture and BACOE Business Architecture have required all along.

Father versus Son Framing

So, here is the question for you, the listener, and reader.

If Palantir is the “son” born in 2003 - a Millennial / Gen Z successful, powerful, highly visible child of this ontology-centric worldview - do you want to learn from the **child** who is using the ideas, or from the **father** who has been formalizing, teaching, and applying those ideas across industries for decades? Since EACOE and BACOE best practices are not published on the internet, and is not AI accessible, does the child know none, some, or all of the real best practices? Of course, if you ask a Millennial / Gen Z person this question – the answer is always yes!

Palantir is proving, in the AI and data arena, that ontology-driven design is not academic; it is the moat.

EACOE and BACOE are where you learn how to architect that moat for your entire enterprise and your business - not just inside one vendor’s platform.

If you are serious about AI models that do not hallucinate actions, about agentic systems that operate safely and coherently, about governance that is more than bureaucracy - you need the architectural discipline that comes from a true ontology-based EACOE Enterprise Architecture and BACOE Business Architecture practice.

The Call to Action

So, I will leave you with this:

Palantir has done the world a favor by saying clearly: systems need a shared, explicit model of reality, and governance without ontology is just bureaucracy without physics.

If that resonates with you, and you want to move beyond catchy AI demonstrations and into sustainable, ontology-driven enterprise and business design, then learn from the source.

Join us at EACOE and BACOE and learn, in a structured, practitioner-focused way, how to actually define those Ontologies - entities, relationships, constraints, and state transitions for *your* organization - and then use that foundation to build trustworthy AI, robust EA, and practical BA. This learning is not about passing a multiple choice exam – it is about actually developing ontologies.

Question - Do you want to hear it from the horse's mouth - the father - or from the child repeating some of what the father has been saying for years?

That choice is yours.

Thank you for listening or reading **Real Talk with Sam Holcman**. If you are ready to build the ontology-driven foundation your AI initiatives desperately need, please reach out to us at www.EACOE.org, or www.BACOE.org, for a no-fee discussion. It will be my pleasure to speak with you and let us get to work.

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Samuel B Holcman

Biography

SAMUEL B. (Sam) HOLCMAN is the Chairman of the Architectures Center Of Excellence, the Managing Director of the Enterprise Architecture Center Of Excellence (EACOE), and the Business Architecture Center Of Excellence (BACOE), and the President of the Zachman Institute for Framework Advancement (ZIFA). He is considered the practitioners practitioner in Enterprise Architecture and Business Architecture, and the leading implementer and world-wide educator and trainer in Enterprise Architecture and Business Architecture methodologies and techniques.

The Architecture Center Of Excellence (ACOE) provide its clients with innovative, yet practical solutions to a range of business and systems related challenges and activities. He was the Vice President of Modelware, Methodologies, and BPE (Business Process Engineering) for a major software company. Prior to this experience, Mr. Holcman was the Founder and President of Computer and Engineering Consultants, Ltd. His interests include consulting and research on topics such as enabling business strategies, enterprise architecture, business architecture, business process engineering, intellectual capital management, organization development, system methodologies and life cycles, corporate business modeling, and accelerated analysis techniques. Mr. Holcman conceptualized and constructed a unique look at system development methodologies, which resulted in the highly regarded ForeSight ™ methodology and methodology management product.

He has developed a strategic planning process that is used by many Fortune 500 companies and is the co-developer of the widely used accelerated analysis (JAD-like) technique known as Rapid Analysis. He has also developed an innovative approach to Business Process Re-Engineering known as Business Process Visualization ™ and Organization Network Analysis ™. These techniques are being used to Unlock the Hidden Assets in your Organization ℠.

In association with Mr. John Zachman, he formed The Zachman Institute for Framework Advancement (ZIFA), to explore, explain, and share the concepts of enterprise architecture. Sam has also focused on understanding the value and management of Intellectual Capital to enterprises. He has developed the Intellectual Capital Maturity Model ™ to provide guidance on how effectively organizations are managing their Intellectual Capital, and steps they can take to more effectively manage this capital, and the Enterprise Architecture Maturity Model, and the Business Architecture Maturity Model, to provide guidance to organizations seeking to improve their understanding and implementation of Enterprise Architecture and Business Architecture concepts. He has developed and published works on Cooperatively Optimized Relationships (COR), which is the next generation of understandings in the field of Customer Relationship Management (CRM). To better understand an organizations “DNA”, Sam led the development of The Enterprise Framework ™ and The Business Architecture Framework ™. Both have received worldwide acclaim for their understandability, and usability, while maintaining theoretical purityHe published the book titled “*Reaching the Pinnacle – a Methodology of Business Understanding, Technology Planning, and Change*” and “*Enterprise Architecture – A Pragmatic Guide of Practitioners and Stakeholders”*. Thes books bring a method to the marketing madness that surrounds Enterprise Architecture, and its straightforward and no-nonsense style sheds much light on a poorly understood topic. The book helps business executives and technology professionals through the process of building an Enterprise Architecture appropriate to their organization’sneeds. Mr. Holcman published the book titled “*Business Architecture, The enabler of Business Strategy”.* Holcman presents a no-nonsense, direct, and easy-to-follow approach to Business Architecture. This makes it particularly useful for those looking for actionable insights. The book is described as "a book of action, not surveys or choices – moving from theory to strategy enablement".

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This practical orientation can be valuable for new architects or professionals seeking to apply Business Architecture concepts in real-world scenarios. It provides a thorough treatment of Business Architecture, covering topics from establishing and maturing a Business Architecture practice to actually developing a human-consumable Business Architecture. The Business Architecture process presented is both theoretically sound and refined through actual practice. The methodologies have been tested and proven in real business environments. Holcman emphasizes that Business Architecture helps the business run better, rather than "architecture for architecture's sake". This aligns well with the needs of business professionals looking to improve their organizations. This book helps organizations move from Strategic Intent to a Business Strategy to Strategy Enablement. The book provides clear, understandable approaches, making it suitable for a wide audience, from business professionals, strategists, and new or practiced Business Architects. The book emphasizes the role of Business Architecture in strategy execution, which may be particularly relevant for those interested in aligning business strategies with technology enablement.

Sam hosts a podcast and webinar broadcast titled *Real Talk with Sam Holcman*. These broadcasts are about sorting through the internet-driven advice madness that exists in business today, and provide practice-based insights in business transformation, organizational transformation, enterprise architecture, business architecture, and technology transformation, based on real world practices.

Sam was with Ford Motor Company in data processing, finance, and engineering. He was Vice President of a robotics and factory automation firm. He was also a senior member of a technology delegation to the People's Republic of China, on the invitation of the Chinese and United States Government, and a member of a technology delegation to the Commonwealth of Independent States (Soviet Union).

Sam has a Bachelor's degree in Bioengineering and Master's degree in Electrical Engineering, and a Master's in Business Administration from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He has been elected to Eta Kappa Nu (electrical engineering honors society), and Tau Beta Pi (engineering honors society), and is a member of numerous societies and professional organizations, and is a frequent speaker at seminars around the world. He can be emailed at Sam@ArchitecturesCOE.org, or reached by telephone on (810) 231-0531.

Partial List of Advisory and Implementation-Related Clients Sam has consulted with.

