

Comparing the SEI's Views and Beyond Approach for Documenting Software Architectures with ANSI-IEEE 1471-2000

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Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Abstract.....	ix
1 Introduction	1
2 The Views and Beyond Approach to Software Architecture Documentation.....	3
2.1 A Multi-View Approach.....	3
2.2 Different Kinds of Views.....	3
2.3 Styles	4
2.4 Choosing the Views	4
2.5 A Template for Views and Information Beyond Views.....	5
3 1471 (IEEE Recommended Practice for Architectural Description of Software-Intensive Systems)	9
4 Comparison	12
4.1 Comparing Definitions	12
4.2 Satisfying the Requirements of 1471 with V&B	12
4.3 Discussion	13
References.....	15

List of Figures

Figure 1: The Template for a View.....	6
Figure 2: The Template for Documentation Beyond Views.....	8
Figure 3: Excerpt from Conceptual Framework of 1471.....	10

List of Tables

Table 1:	1471 Requirements Satisfied by the V&B Approach	13
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Abstract

Architecture documentation has emerged as an important architecture-related practice. In 2002, researchers at the Carnegie Mellon[®] Software Engineering Institute completed *Documenting Software Architectures: Views and Beyond* (V&B), an approach that holds that documenting a software architecture is a matter of choosing a set of relevant views of the architecture, documenting each of those views, and then documenting information that applies to more than one view or to the set of views as a whole. Details of the approach include a method for choosing the most relevant views, standard templates for documenting views and the information beyond them, and definitions of the templates' content. At about the same time, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) was developing a recommended best practice for describing architectures for software-intensive systems—ANSI/IEEE Std. 1471-2000. Like V&B, that standard takes a multi-view approach to the task of architecture documentation, and it establishes a conceptual framework for architectural description and defines the content of an architectural description.

This technical note summarizes the two approaches and shows how a software architecture document prepared using the V&B approach can be made compliant with Std. 1471-2000.

1 Introduction

A software architecture for a program or computing system consists of the structure or structures of that system, which comprise elements, the externally visible properties of those elements, and the relationships among them [Bass 03]. The quality attributes of a software system, such as performance, modifiability, and security, are bound up in its software architecture. A system with the wrong architecture will be a failure.

A software architecture also determines the blueprint for the project developing the software. Teams are formed around architectural elements, which are the units of implementation, unit testing, integration, configuration management, documentation, and a host of other activities.

Unlike code, architecture is a design artifact largely intended for use and analysis by humans. Hence, representing it in a readable, accessible fashion for its stakeholders becomes an issue of importance. Architecture gives the marching orders to implementers, telling them what pieces to build and how those pieces should behave and interact with each other. It also determines the project structure for managers, who use it to plan, schedule, and budget. It gives the first glimpse of the system to maintainers who must change the architecture and new team members who must become familiar with it.

Therefore, architecture documentation has emerged as an important architecture-related practice. In 2002, researchers at the Carnegie Mellon[®] Software Engineering Institute (SEI) completed *Documenting Software Architectures: Views and Beyond* [Clements 03], which puts forth a documentation philosophy as well as a detailed approach. The philosophy is embodied in the title: “views and beyond.” The V&B approach, as it is known, holds that documenting a software architecture is a matter of choosing a set of relevant views of the architecture, documenting each of those views, and then documenting information that applies to more than one view or to the set of views as a whole. The last step ties the views together and makes them become a holistic and integrated representation of the architecture, as opposed to disjoint snapshots taken from different angles. The detailed approach includes a method to choose the most relevant views, standard templates for documenting a view and documenting the information beyond views, and definitions of the templates’ content.

While the V&B approach was being solidified, a new recommended best practice was being formed by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). The IEEE Architecture Planning Group (APG) was formed in August 1995 and chartered by the IEEE Software Engineering Standards Committee (SESC) to set a direction for incorporating

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architectural thinking into IEEE standards. The result of the APG's deliberations was to recommend an IEEE activity with these goals:

- to define useful terms, principles, and guidelines for the consistent application of architectural precepts to systems throughout their life cycle
- to elaborate architectural precepts and their anticipated benefits for software products, systems, and aggregated systems ("systems of systems")
- to provide a framework for the collection and consideration of architectural attributes and related information for use in IEEE standards
- to provide a useful roadmap for the incorporation of architectural precepts in the generation, revision, and application of IEEE standards

In April 1996, the SESC created the Architecture Working Group (AWG) to implement those recommendations, which have since been adopted by the American National Standards Institute [ANSI] as well as IEEE and which eventually became ANSI/IEEE Std. 1471-2000 [IEEE 00]. That standard, henceforth referred to as 1471, is a recommended practice that addresses the activities of the creation, analysis, and sustainment of architectures of software-intensive systems and the recording of such architectures in terms of architectural descriptions. The standard establishes a conceptual framework for architectural description and defines the content of an architectural description.

Interest in 1471 is growing and will likely continue to grow. Although it is impossible to tell how many projects invoke it, it is mandated for use in the Future Combat Systems (FCS) project, a U.S. Army command-and-control system that is expected to comprise over 30 million lines of code and (therefore) whose software architecture is of supreme importance.

How does the V&B approach to architecture documentation relate to the 1471 approach to architecture description? This technical note summarizes the two approaches and shows how a software architecture document prepared using the former can be made compliant with the latter.

Section 2 summarizes the V&B approach. Section 3 gives an overview of 1471. Section 4 compares the two and shows how preparing an architecture document using the V&B approach can result in a product that is 1471 compliant.

2 The Views and Beyond Approach to Software Architecture Documentation

2.1 A Multi-View Approach

Modern software architecture practice embraces the concept of architectural *views*. A *view* is a representation of a set of system elements and the relations associated with them. Views are representations of the many system structures present simultaneously in software systems. Modern systems are too complex to be grasped all at once. Instead, we restrict our attention at any one moment to one (or a small number) of the software system's structures, which we represent as views.

Some authors prescribe a fixed set of views with which to engineer and communicate an architecture; for example, the Rational Unified Process (RUP), which is based on Kruchten's 4+1 view approach to software [Kruchten 95] and the Siemens Four Views model [Hofmeister 00]. A recent trend, however, is to recognize that architects should produce whatever views are useful for the system at hand, and the V&B approach adopts that policy. This trend leads to the fundamental philosophy of the V&B approach stated earlier: *Documenting an architecture is a matter of documenting the relevant views and then adding documentation that applies to more than one view.*

2.2 Different Kinds of Views

There is an almost unlimited supply of views to choose from. To lend some order to an otherwise chaotic collection of possible views, it's helpful to think about views in groups, according to the kind of information they convey:

1. Module views describe how the system is to be structured as a set of code units.
2. Component-and-connector (C&C) views describe how the system is to be structured as a set of interacting runtime elements.
3. Allocation views describe how the system relates to non-software structures in its environment.

A particular view of a system may fall squarely into one of these categories or combine information from more than one category.

2.3 Styles

A view is a representation of a structure that is present in a software system. One might show the hierarchical decomposition of the system's functionality into modules or how the system is arranged into layers; another might show how the system accomplishes work through communicating processes or the interaction of clients and servers. Still another might show how software elements are deployed onto hardware processing and communication nodes.

An architect chooses the structures to work with and designs them to achieve particular quality attributes using architectural *styles*.¹ A *style* is a specialization of element types (e.g., “client,” “layer”) and relationship types (e.g., “is part of,” “request-reply connection,” “is allowed to use”), along with any restrictions (e.g., “clients interact with servers but not each other” or “all the software comprises layers arranged in a stack such that each layer can only use software in the next lower layer”).

Styles are documented in a style guide that defines each style by defining the element types and relationship types indigenous to the style, along with any semantic restrictions on their use. It lists what design problems the style is and is not good at addressing. The guide also discusses any notations or analytical approaches available to the architect using that style and refers to any related styles.

2.4 Choosing the Views

The V&B approach to choosing the views to document is a simple three-step procedure based on the structures that are inherently present in the software and on the stakeholders and the concerns they have that would motivate documenting the corresponding view. The steps are described below.

Step 1: Produce a Candidate View List

Begin by building a stakeholder/view table for your project. Enumerate the stakeholders for your project's software architecture documentation down the rows. Be as comprehensive as you can. For the columns, enumerate the views that apply to your system. Some views (e.g., decomposition, uses, and work assignment) apply to every system, while others (e.g., pipe-and-filter, layered) only apply to systems designed according to the corresponding styles.

Once you have the rows and columns defined, fill in each cell to describe how much information the stakeholder requires from the view: none, overview only, or detailed. We

¹ A *style* is similar to an architectural design pattern—that is, a design pattern whose scope is architectural. Patterns represent known, recurring design solutions. They are prepackaged sets of design decisions, each with its own vocabulary and each having known effects on software quality attributes. Patterns are published in the literature; perhaps the best-known catalog of architectural patterns is the two-volume set *Pattern-Oriented Software Architecture* [Buschmann 96, Schmidt 00]. Architectural patterns restrict their attention to particular element and relation types, and impose topological and behavioral restrictions on how the elements are arranged.

encourage architects to hold a workshop with stakeholders or their representatives to begin a dialogue about what information they will need from the documentation.

The candidate view list consists of those views in which some stakeholder has a vested interest.

Step 2: Combine Views

The candidate view list from Step 1 is likely to yield an impractical number of views. Step 2 winnows the list to a manageable size.

First, look for views in the table that require only overview depth or that serve very few stakeholders. See if the stakeholders could be equally well served by another view that has a stronger constituency.

Next, look for views that are good candidates to become combined views. A combined view shows information native to two or more separate views. A rule of thumb is that if there is a strong correspondence between the elements in two views, they are good candidates to be combined.

Step 3: Prioritize

After Step 2, you should have the minimum set of views needed to serve your stakeholder community. At this point, you need to decide what to do first. For example, some stakeholders' interests supersede others. The project manager of a company you are partnering with often demands attention and information early and often, and you may want to cater to his/her needs first.

2.5 A Template for Views and Information Beyond Views

No matter the view, the documentation for it is placed into a standard organization or template comprising seven parts:

1. **A primary presentation** shows the elements and relationships among them that populate the portion of the view shown in this view packet. The primary presentation should contain the information you wish to convey about the system (in the vocabulary of that view) first. The primary presentation is usually graphical. If so, it must be accompanied by a key that explains or points to an explanation of the notation.
2. **An element catalog** details the elements (and their properties, including interfaces) depicted in the primary presentation. In addition, if elements or relations relevant to this view packet were omitted from the primary presentation, the catalog is where they are introduced and explained.
3. **A context diagram** shows how the system (or portion of the system) depicted in the primary presentation relates to its environment.
4. **A variability guide** shows how to exercise any variation points that are part of the architecture shown in this view packet.

each view in the package, the roadmap gives a description of the view's element types, relation types, and property types. The roadmap also gives a description of the view's purpose. The information can be presented by listing the stakeholders who are likely to find the view of interest and by listing a series of questions that can be answered by examining the view. The roadmap follows with a section describing how various stakeholders might access the package to help address their concerns. This section might include short scenarios such as "a maintainer wishes to know the units of software that are likely to be changed by a proposed modification."

2. **View template.** A view template is the standard organization for a view. Its purpose is to help a reader navigate quickly to a section of interest. It helps a writer organize the information and establish criteria for knowing how much work is left to do.
3. **System overview.** A system overview is a short prose description of what the system's function is, who its users are, and any important background or constraints. The purpose is to provide readers with a consistent mental model of the system and its purpose.
4. **Mapping between views.** This shows the correspondence between individual elements in different views. Helping a reader or other consumer of the documentation understand the relationship between views will help that reader gain a powerful insight into how the architecture works as a unified conceptual whole.
5. **Directory.** The directory is simply an index of all the elements, relations, and properties that appear in any of the views, along with a pointer to where each one is defined and used.
6. **Project glossary and acronym list.** The glossary and acronym list define terms unique to the system that have special meaning. These lists, if they exist as part of the overall system or project documentation, might be given as pointers in the architecture package.
7. **Cross-view rationale.** This section documents the reasoning behind decisions that apply to more than one view. Prime candidates for cross-view rationale include documentation of background or organizational constraints that led to decisions of system-wide import.

Figure 2 illustrates the seven pieces of cross-view or "beyond view" documentation.

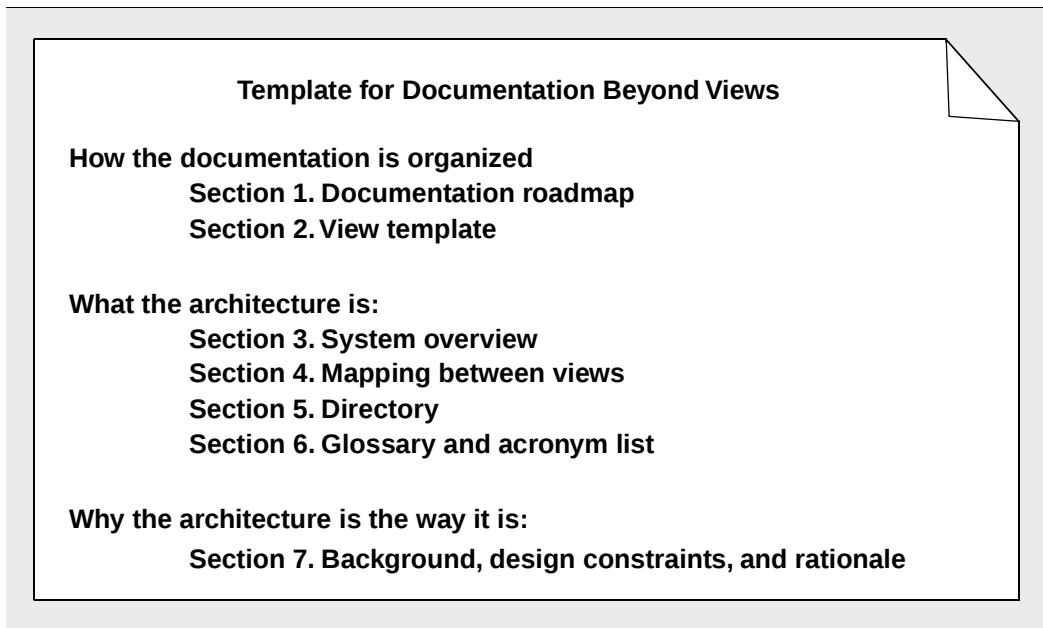


Figure 2: The Template for Documentation Beyond Views

3 1471 (IEEE Recommended Practice for Architectural Description of Software-Intensive Systems)

1471 draws on experience from industry, academia, and other standards bodies. The recommendations of 1471 center on two key ideas: (1) a conceptual framework for architectural description and (2) a statement of what information must be found in any 1471-compliant architectural description. The conceptual framework described in the standard ties together such concepts as system, architectural description, and view.

Figure 3 summarizes a portion of this framework in UML. In 1471, views have a central role in documenting software architecture. In the standard, each view is “a representation of a whole system from the perspective of a related set of concerns.” The architectural description of a system includes one or more views. In this framework, a view conforms to a *viewpoint*. A *viewpoint* is “a pattern or template from which to develop individual views by establishing the purposes and audience for a view and the techniques for its creation and analysis” [IEEE 00]. In 1471, the emphasis is on what drives the perspective of a view or a viewpoint. Viewpoints are defined with specific stakeholder concerns in mind, and the definition of a viewpoint includes a description of any associated analysis techniques.

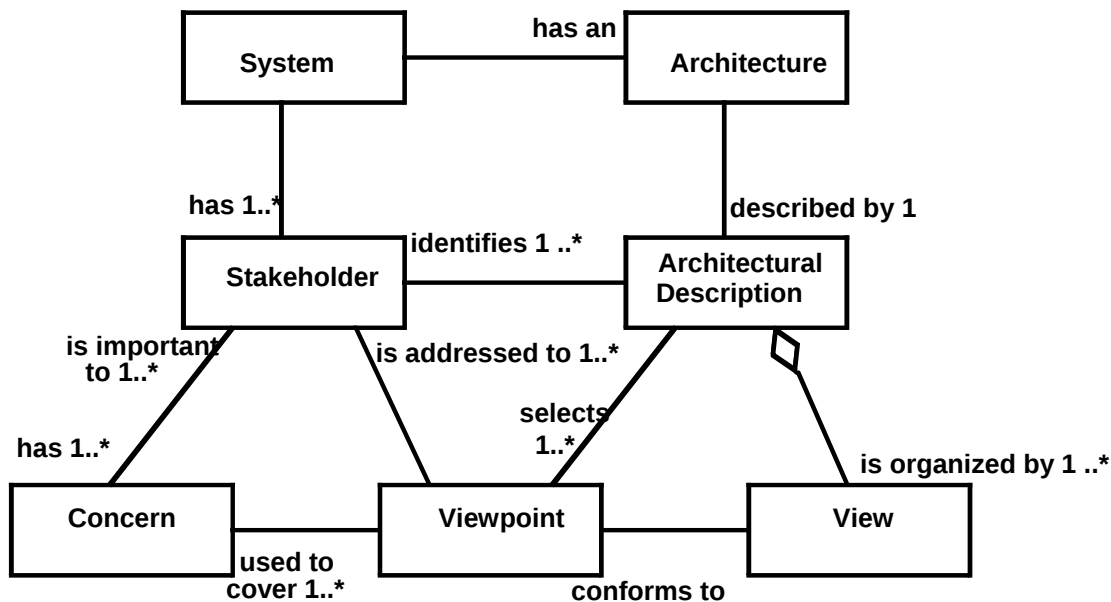


Figure 3: Excerpt from Conceptual Framework of 1471²

In addition to the conceptual framework, 1471 includes a statement of what information must be in any compliant architectural description. These “shalls” include the following:

1. **identification and overview information.** This information includes the date of issue and status, identification of the issuing organization, a revision history, a summary and scope statement, the context of the system, a glossary, and a set of references.
8. **stakeholders and their concerns.** The architecture description is required to include the stakeholders for whom the description is produced and who the architecture is intended to satisfy. It is also required to state “...the concerns considered by the architect in formulating the architectural concept for the system.” At a minimum, the description is required to address users, acquirers, developers, and maintainers.
9. **viewpoints.** An architecture description is required to identify and define the viewpoints that form the views contained therein. Each viewpoint is described by its name, the stakeholders and concerns it addresses, any language and modeling techniques to be used in constructing a view based on it, any analytical methods to be used in reasoning about the quality attributes of the system described in a view, and a rationale for selecting it.
10. **views.** Each view must contain an identifier or other introductory information, a representation of the system (conforming to the viewpoint), and configuration information.

² Each box represents a concept, and each line represents an association between two concepts. Each association has two roles—one in each direction—although both are not always depicted. The role from A to B is depicted closest to B. Multiplicity is optional in this diagram; where identified, it follows the UML convention, whereby 1 means one and 1..* means one or more. Stakeholders play a key role; views conform to viewpoints that address stakeholders and their concerns.

11. **consistency among views.** Although the standard is somewhat vague on this point, the architecture description needs indicate that the views are consistent with each other. In addition, the description is required to include a record of any known inconsistencies among the system's views.
12. **rationale.** The description must include the rationale for the architectural concepts selected, preferably accompanied by evidence of the alternatives considered and the rationale for the choices made.

4 Comparison

4.1 Comparing Definitions

We begin the comparison of V&B and 1471 by noting that 1471 defines architecture as the fundamental organization of a system embodied in its components, their relationships to each other and to the environment, and the principles guiding its design and evolution, where

- *Fundamental organization* means the essential, unifying concepts and principles.
- *System* may refer to an application, system, platform, system of systems, enterprise, product line, and so on.
- *Environment* is developmental, operational, programmatic, or any other relevant context of the system.

Although there are significant differences between that definition and the one underlying V&B that was cited at the opening of this technical note, these differences do not represent fundamental differences in philosophy. Both definitions emphasize structure. The V&B definition goes further by explicitly recognizing multiple structures. The 1471 definition goes further by including the environment and principles that spawned the structure(s) and does not restrict its scope to software. The V&B definition uses the neutral term *element* and eschewed *component*, which in some contexts refers explicitly to units of runtime interaction (as opposed to development-time building).

4.2 Satisfying the Requirements of 1471 with V&B

Next, we list the requirements imposed by 1471 and explain how each one is satisfied by the V&B approach.

Table 1: 1471 Requirements Satisfied by the V&B Approach

General Requirement Imposed by 1471	How the Requirement Is Achieved in the V&B Approach
Identification and overview information. This information includes a summary, a context, a glossary, references, and a change history.	Several items in this category amount to good bookkeeping. Context is addressed in the context diagrams; the other items are prescribed in the templates described earlier.
Stakeholders and concerns. The standard lists minimum examples that must be addressed for both stakeholders and concerns.	The documentation roadmap called for in the “beyond views” template captures information about stakeholders and their concerns—specifically, how they will use the documentation package. Make sure to include users, acquirers, developers, and maintainers.
Viewpoints. For each viewpoint, the following must be specified: • stakeholders addressed by the viewpoint • concerns addressed by the viewpoint • language, modeling techniques, or analytical techniques to be used • rationale for selection of the viewpoint Any additional information such as completeness and correctness checks, evaluation criteria, heuristics, or guidelines may be included.	Viewpoints correspond most closely to architectural styles. A style is defined by the elements, relations, and properties that should be used in documenting a system built using that style. By extension, a viewpoint definition can be provided by a style guide. A style guide defines the elements, relationships, and restrictions inherent in the style, and contains a section noting what it’s for and not for (which should help users in deciding what concerns will be addressed), as well as a section on notations and analysis techniques useful for working with that style.
Views. Each view includes a representation of the system in accordance with the requirements of its viewpoint.	The view template defines the information that should be documented for a view.
Consistency information. This information includes a record of all the inconsistencies among views, preferably accompanied by an analysis of the consistencies among them.	The “documentation beyond views” part of the package includes a mapping between views.
Rationale. The rationale for the architectural concepts selected and choices made, preferably accompanied by evidence of the alternatives that were considered.	Reserved spots for rationale are provided in the view template and in the template for documentation beyond views.

4.3 Discussion

We have seen that each requirement imposed by 1471 can be satisfied by the V&B approach by imposing only very small additional conditions including

- complying with 1471’s minimum stakeholder list
- adjusting the documentation boilerplate to include the required identification and overview information

- using style guides as the source of viewpoint definitions

In addition, the two approaches are conceptually compatible.

The approach implied by 1471 begins with stakeholders and their concerns. These concerns are listed explicitly, and then viewpoints are crafted that (together) satisfy the stakeholders and their concerns. Finally, the architecture is described using views based on those viewpoints. Thus with the 1471 approach, we have

stakeholders/concerns → viewpoints → views

(The arrows mean “lead to.”) The approach espoused by V&B begins by aiming to document those architectural structures that are actually present in the system, which come about as the manifestation of the architect’s selection of styles with which to design the system. Documenting a style as a view is done if the view has an important stakeholder/concern constituency. Thus with the V&B approach, we have

structures/styles → chosen to document based on stakeholders/concerns → views

Thus, both 1471 and V&B will produce an architecture document that consists of a set of views that satisfy the concerns of the architecture’s key stakeholders. Both approaches match a set of stakeholders/concerns to a set of vocabularies (viewpoints or viewtypes/styles) to select a set of views to document.

A more practical difference is that V&B provides more information and prescriptive guidance, especially

- a reasonable starting set of views/styles to choose from with guidance about what each is good for
- complete templates for an architecture document’s organization and contents

Finally, it is useful to discuss what V&B and 1471 have in common. First of all, both exemplify the current approach to software architecture that eschews a fixed prescribed set of views. Instead, both advocate building an architecture document out of those views that are most useful for the job at hand. This choice depends on the stakeholders to be served by the document and their concerns. Concerns include the achievement of specific quality attributes.

Second, both 1471 and V&B place stakeholders in a position of prominence in the architectural process. Unlike the classic (but naïve) idea that an architecture flows only from a requirements document, we now recognize that architecture is the result of the blending of a large number of forces and influences, many of which do not correspond to system functionality. It is the responsibility of the architect to understand these forces and influences and to track them down to their source—that is, to engage the stakeholders who hold them. Both V&B and 1471 recognize the point made at the opening of this technical note: Architecture design and documentation are activities in service of people.

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