

# RESEARCH & PRACTICE IN INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE: REVISITING 16-YEAR-OLD NAPKIN SKETCHES

What is the relationship between  
academic research and industry  
practice in IA?

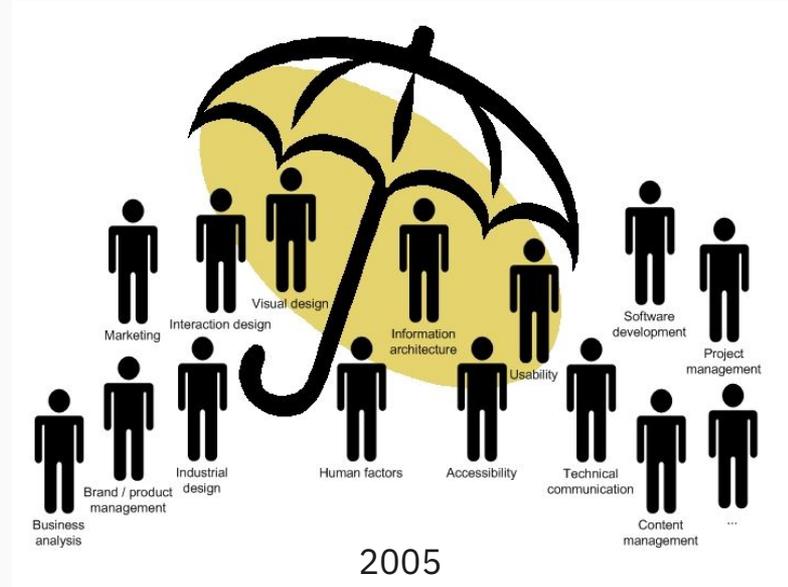
<https://columbus.worldiaday.org>



**WORLD IA DAY 2026**  
LOCAL CONNECTIONS. GLOBAL IMPACT.  
COLUMBUS, OHIO



## Keith Instone





# Information Architecture

for the World Wide Web

O'REILLY™

Louis Rosenfeld & Peter Morville

1999

## About the 3 Types of Breadcrumbs

The term “breadcrumb” is used for several different concepts – causing confusion during design discussions

- Location Breadcrumb – “You are here”, static
- Path Breadcrumb – how you got here, dynamic
- Attribute Breadcrumb – meta-information

2002

# Reframing Information Architecture

1st Academics and Practitioners Roundtable

2013 Information Architecture Summit in Chicago, Illinois, USA

April 3, 2013 – Presentations and Discussion

[iaroundtable.org](http://iaroundtable.org)



Happy World IA  
Day!

# 1 DAY. 14 CITIES.

World IA Day 2012 is about bringing the Information Architecture community together. We're fostering links within local communities and on a global scale. We're sharing information, ideas and research. And we're doing it through unconventional, exciting and engaging IA events this February.

The first ever World IA Day focuses on Designing Structures for Understanding. On February 11, 2012, we're hosting WIAD events in 14 cities across all corners of the globe. Learn from world-class IA minds, network, showcase new ideas and attend events tailored specifically to your community. We hope you'll join us at an event near you this February!

**LOCAL CONNECTIONS. GLOBAL IMPACT. WORLD IA DAY 2012**



**VIEW EVENT KEYNOTES >**

# Locations



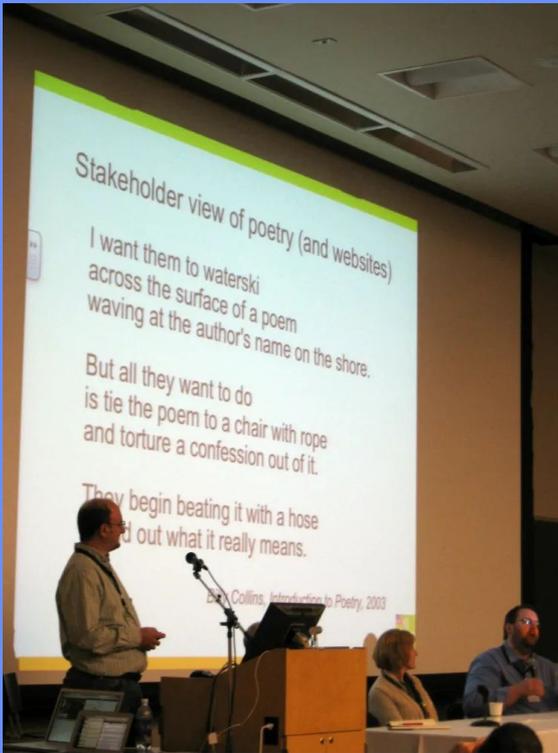
## Why Ann Arbor?

In the late 1990s, Ann Arbor, Michigan was the epicenter of IA theory and practice. In 1998, two graduates of what was then called the School of Information and Library Studies were awarded “computer book of the year” for what was to become the ubiquitous “Polar Bear Book.” Louis Rosenfeld and Peter Morville built the world’s first information architecture consulting practice in Ann Arbor, and it is fitting that one of the 14 World IA Day locations is being staged at their alma mater in what’s now known as the University of Michigan School of Information.

Understanding Users | [MORE](#)

- **Paris, France** | Coordinator: [Sylvie Daumal](#) | [MORE](#)
- **Malmö, Sweden** | Coordinator: [Goran Hagert](#) | [MORE](#)
- **Johannesburg, South Africa** | Coordinator: [Jason Hobbs](#) | [MORE](#)
- **Tokyo, Japan** | Coordinator: [Atsushi Hasegawa](#) | [MORE](#)
- **Ann Arbor, MI, USA** | Coordinator: [Dan Klyn & Keith Instone](#) | Understanding the History, Present and Future of IA | [MORE](#)

**World Information Architecture Day, 2012  
University of Michigan**



**World Information Architecture Day, 2013  
University of Michigan**



Academia | Industry  
Research | Practice



**Practitioner**  
(Designer,  
Information  
Architect, ...)

It feels like I am making it up as I go along. How do I gain knowledge, confidence and credibility?

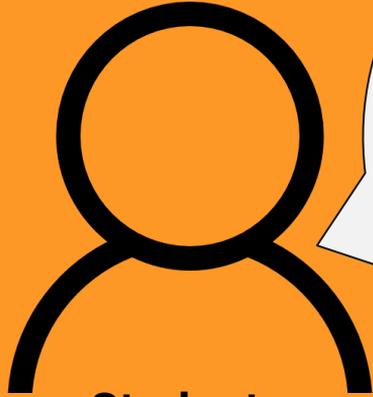
I want my research to have an impact on the world. How do I get people to apply it?



**Researcher**  
(Faculty)

This is fun! Working in industry will be just like class, right?

This is hard to teach! How do I keep up? How well am I preparing students for jobs in industry?



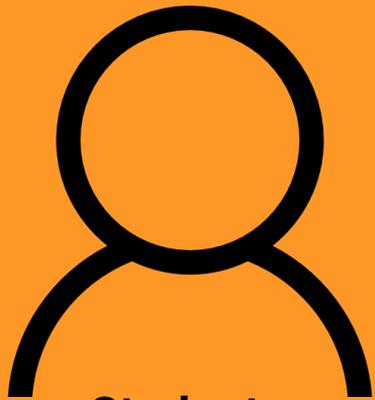
**Student**



**Teacher**  
(Faculty)



**Practitioner**  
(Designer, User  
Researcher, ...)



**Student**

**I  
N  
D  
U  
S  
T  
R  
Y**



**A  
C  
A  
D  
E  
M  
I  
A**



**Researcher**  
(Faculty)



**Teacher**  
(Faculty)

**HCI research culture**

Publish for researchers  
Expanding field  
Status within academia

**Research culture**

"Publish or perish"  
Answers narrow questions  
Open sharing  
Experimentation

**Communication**

Little shared language  
Speed-of-operation differences  
Finding (time for) each other  
Fragmented professional organizations  
Mapping "answers" to "questions"

**Knowledge**

No shared knowledge base  
Hard to organize research for practical use  
Multi-/inter-disciplinary

**Education**

Position of UX within academia  
Amateur professionals  
Competing with business for training

**UX practice culture**

No time for research  
Rapidly evolving practice  
Status within corporations

**Corporate culture**

"Produce or perish"  
Wants broad answers  
Strategic advantage  
Fear of failure



# Research and Practice in Information Architecture



What is the relationship between (scientific, academic) research and (industry) practice in information architecture?

That was a question Andrea Resmini and I asked at the 11th annual IA Summit (2010) in a “back of a napkin” collective-thinking exercise.

Sixteen years later: where are we? Have we addressed all the gaps, or have they gotten wider? Is AI making things better or worse for IA?

We will review the old napkins and discuss what they might mean for us in today’s world.

<https://asistdl.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/bult.2010.1720360607>



# THIS ONE GOES TO ELEVEN

THE BEST CONVERSATIONS HAPPEN IN THE HALL

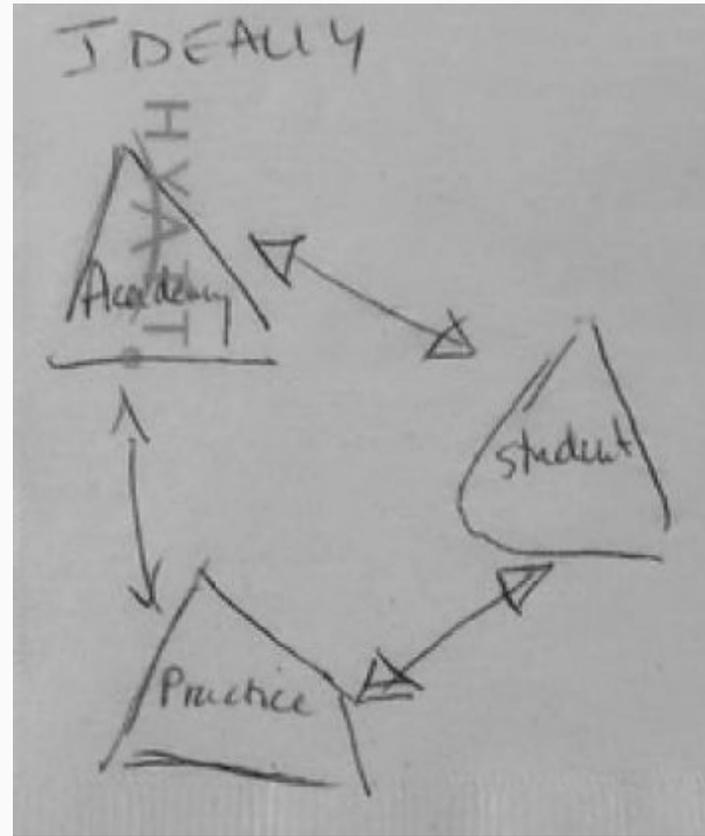


Discipline	Profession	Practice	Job	Role	Skill
Field of Study  Research Agenda  Accreditation of Universities	Career  Associations  Certification of Individuals	Community of Practice  Best Practices  Meetups	Occupation (SOC)  HR/FTE  “Specialist”	Project Management  Deliverables  “Generalist”	Universally Useful (for work & life)  Tool Focused (often)
PhD in IA	World Information Architecture Association (not IAI)	World Information Architecture Day	15-1299.08 Computer Systems Eng/Architects 15-1255.00 Web and Digital Interface Designers	Site Map & Wireframe Maker	How to Make Sense of Any Mess (the book)

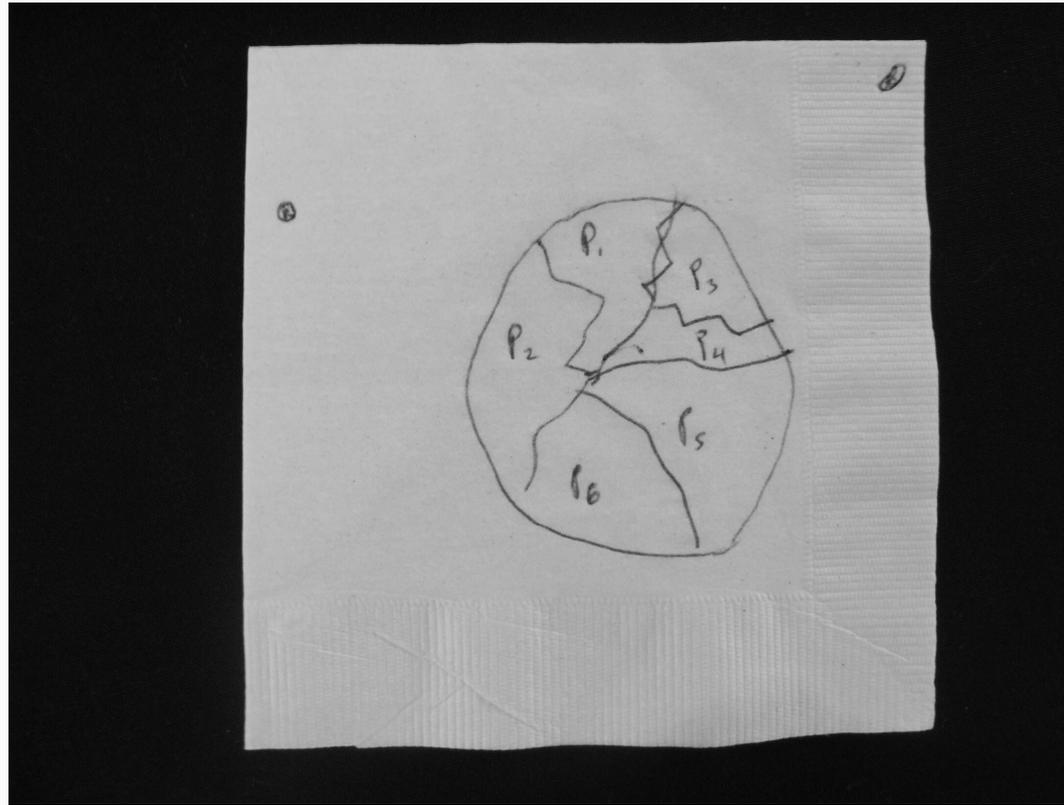
# Themes in 2010



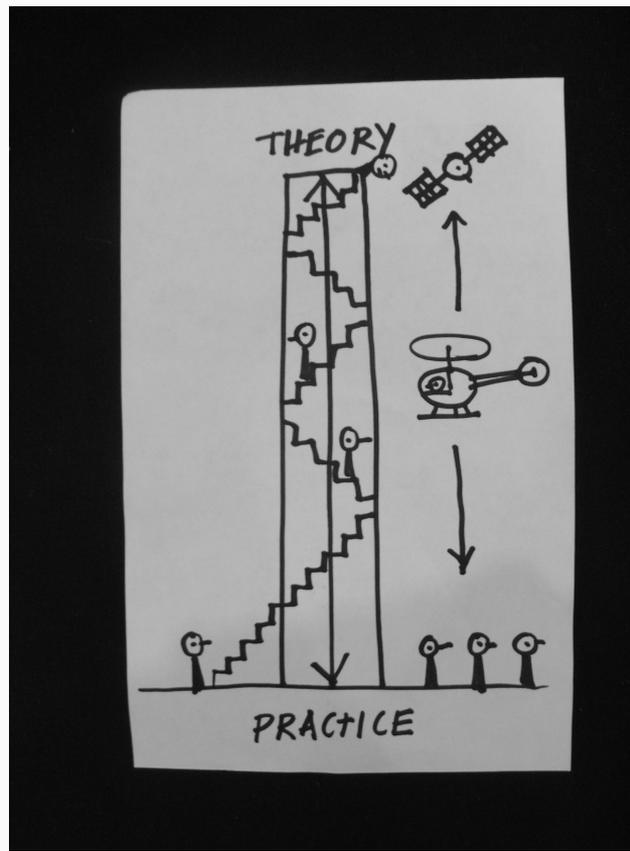
- > Research and practice in IA are fractured; Academia & Industry have big gaps
  - This gap is not unique: many disciplines face this challenge
  - A huge amount of attention is given to IA practice only
- > What is “research”?
  - There is a need for an IA research agenda
  - Or, the opposite: there is no such thing as IA research by itself
  - Many people confuse “project research” (contextual) with “scientific research” (e.g., hypothesis testing)
- > Making sense of the research and applying it is very difficult
  - IA research needs to be aggregated across disciplines to really be effective for practitioners
  - Transferring knowledge is possible, but not common. What’s the business model for “translators”?



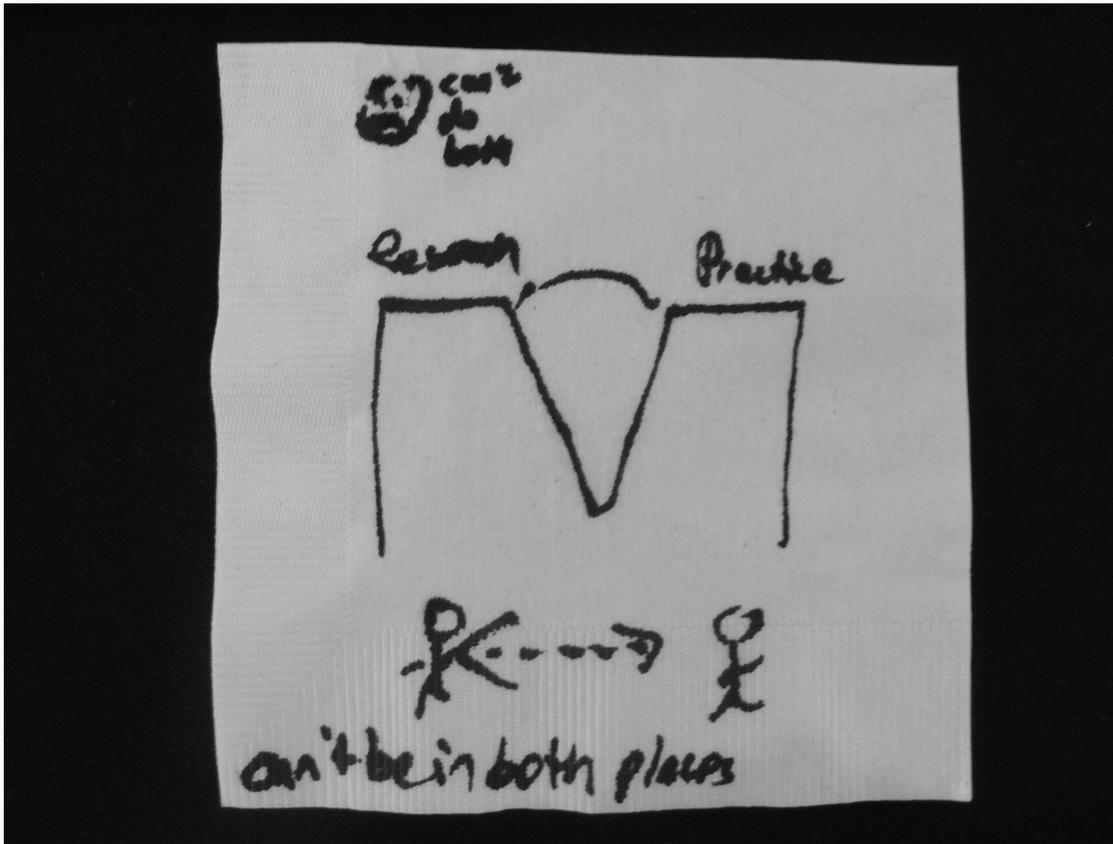
# Relationship between Academics, Students & Practitioners



# Relationship between Research and Practice



## Relationship between Theory & Practice

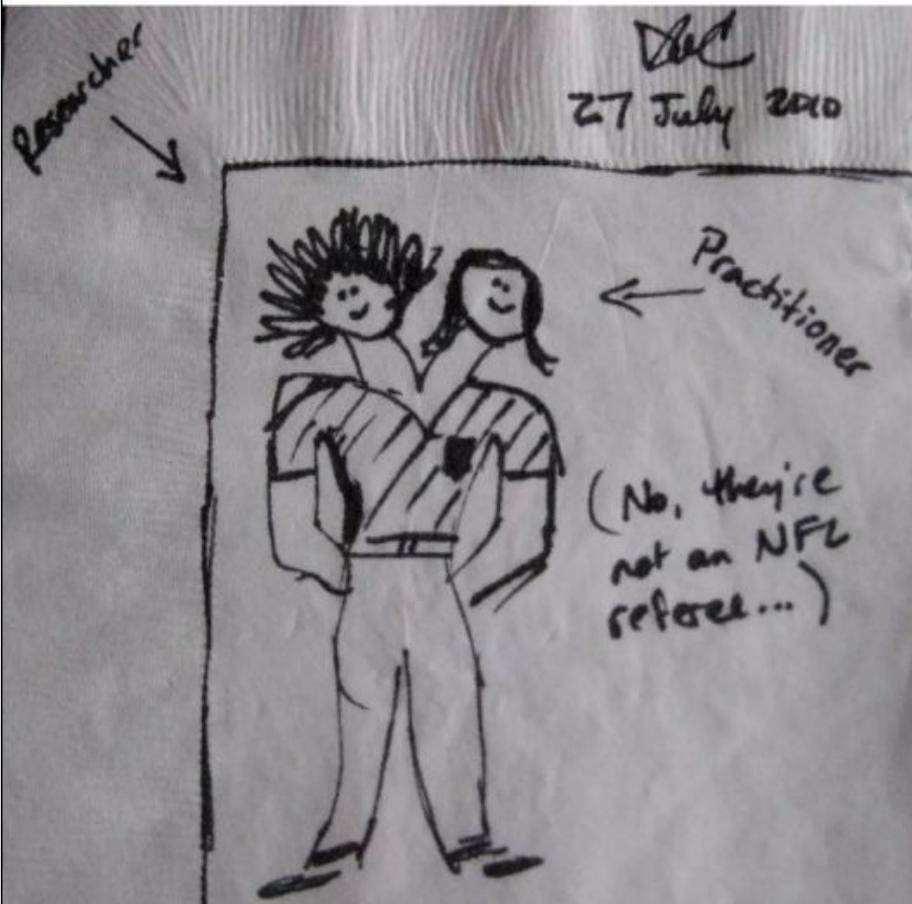


“Can’t do both”, “Can’t be in both places”



## Danielle Cooley (a practitioner)

34



To contrast with this,  
Mark Ackerman (U of M  
SI) drew:

"one head, two bodies"  
(researcher body, teacher  
body)

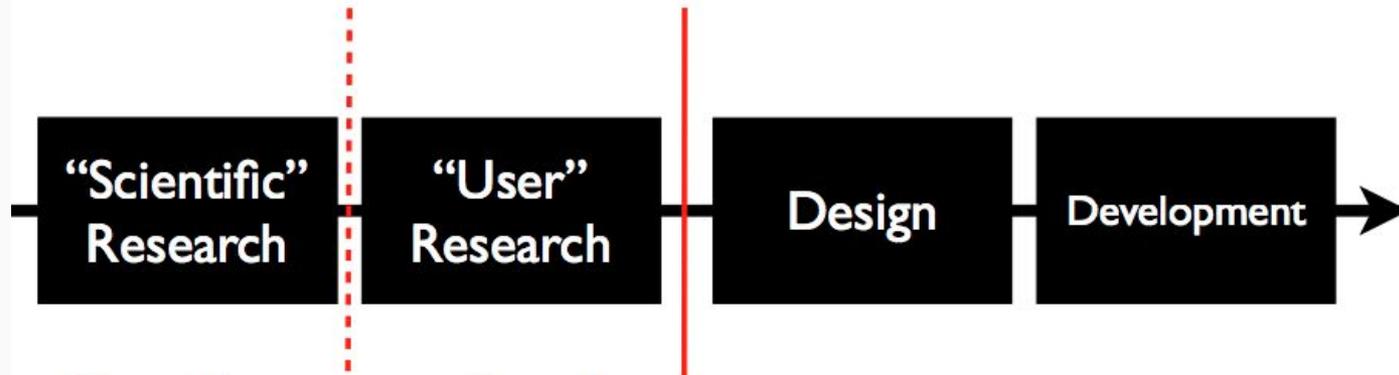
2010  
UX Research-Practice  
Roundtable  
Ypsilanti, MI

# WTF is “research” anyway?

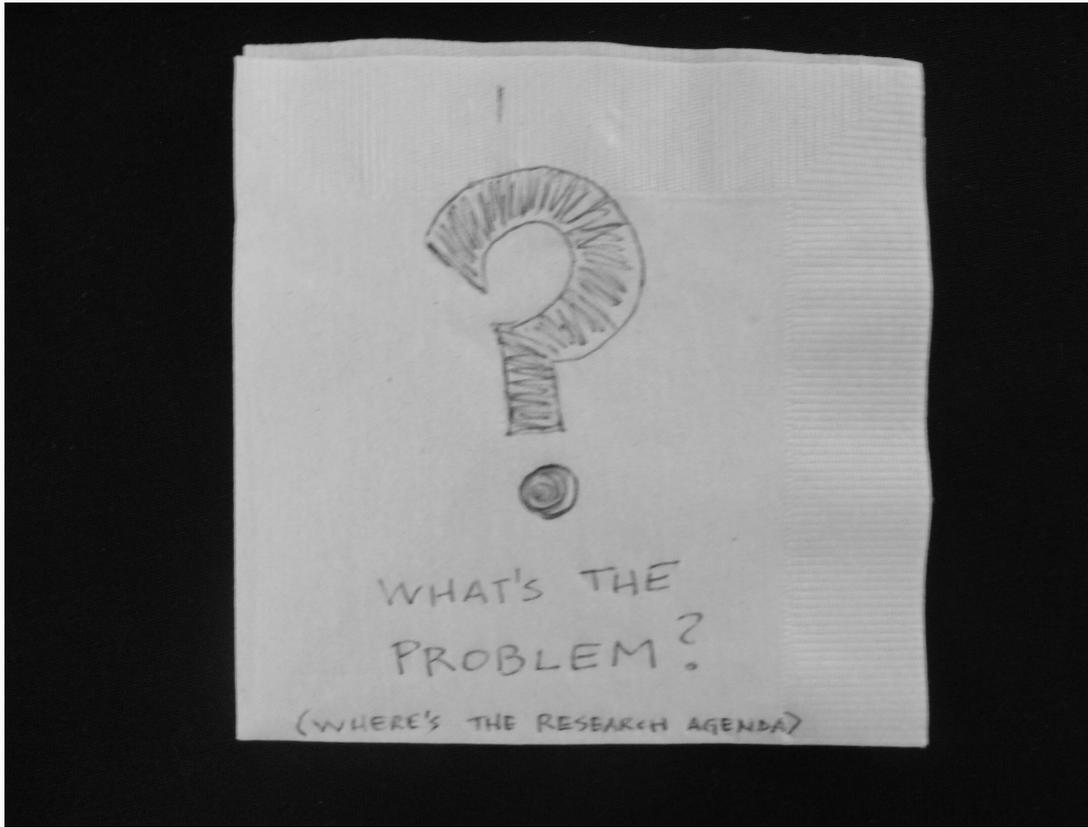


Research

Practice



Similar methods  
Different goals

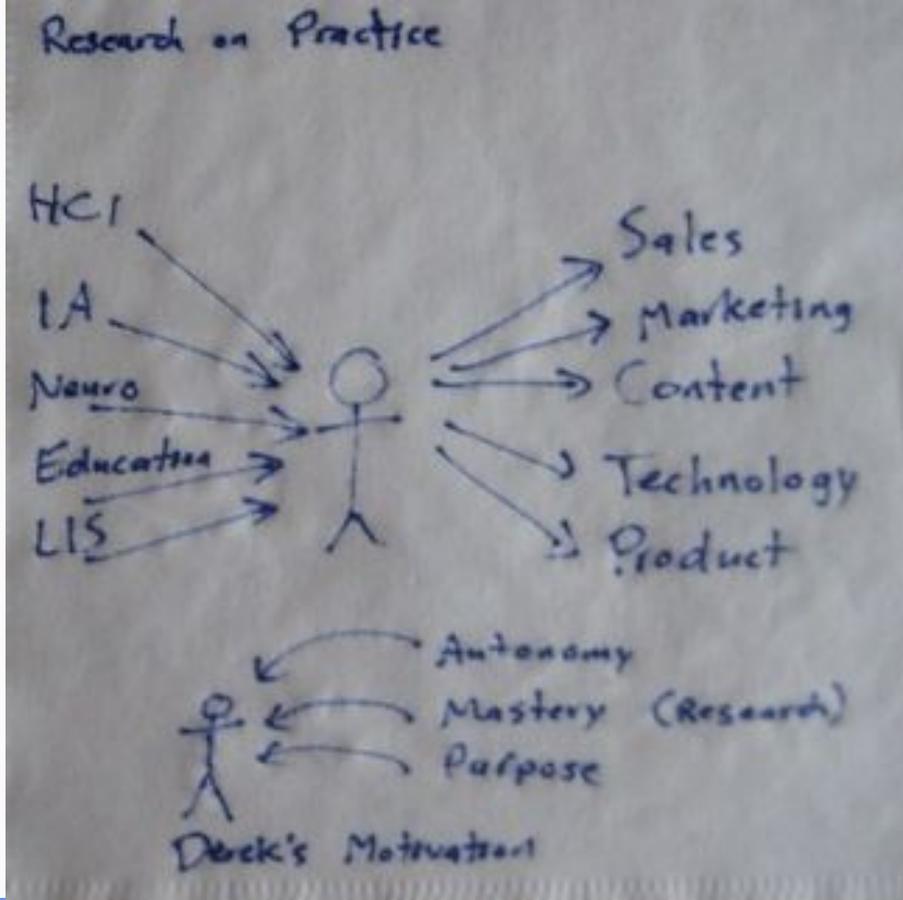


“Where’s the [IA] research agenda?”





2010  
UX Research-Practice  
Roundtable  
Ypsilanti, MI

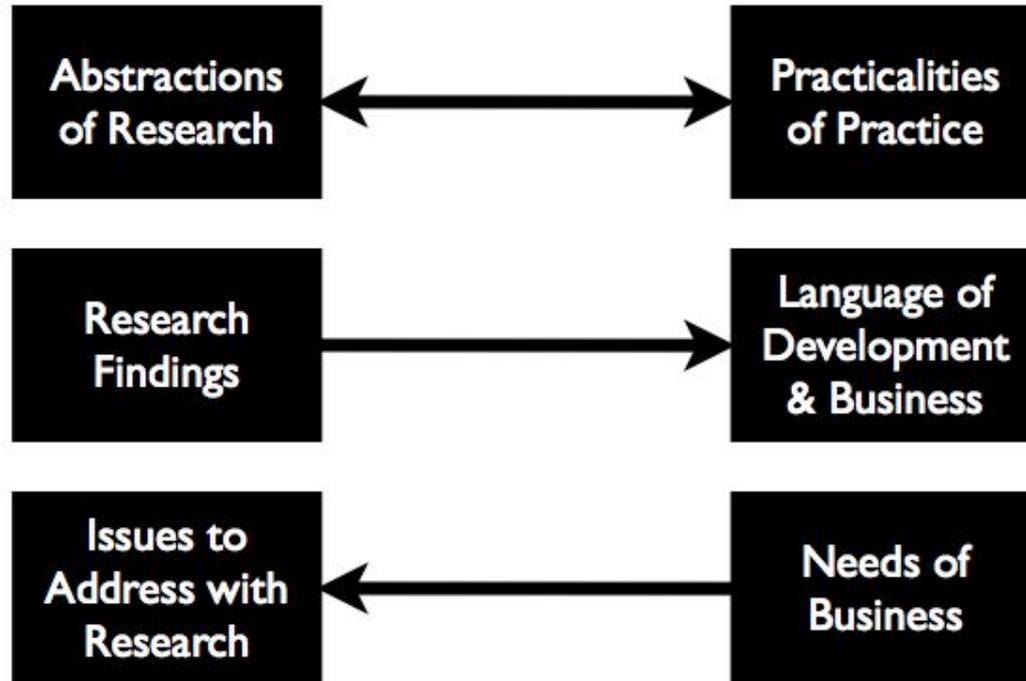


Many disciplines (in), Many practices (out)

# Don Norman's Translators (e.g., medical)



“Stop pretending that researchers and practitioners speak the same language”



# Themes for 2026?



- > Research and practice in IA are fractured; Academia & Industry have big gaps
  - This gap is not unique: many disciplines face this challenge
  - A huge amount of attention is given to IA practice only
- > What is “research”?
  - There is a need for an IA research agenda
  - Or, the opposite: there is no such thing as IA research by itself
  - Many people confuse “project research” (contextual) with “scientific research” (e.g., hypothesis testing)
- > Making sense of the research and applying it is very difficult
  - IA research needs to be aggregated across disciplines to really be effective for practitioners
  - Transferring knowledge is possible, but not common. What’s the business model for “translators”?



- Where are we?
- Have we addressed all the gaps? Gotten wider?
- Is AI making things better or worse for IA?



If you want to catch up,  
further it...

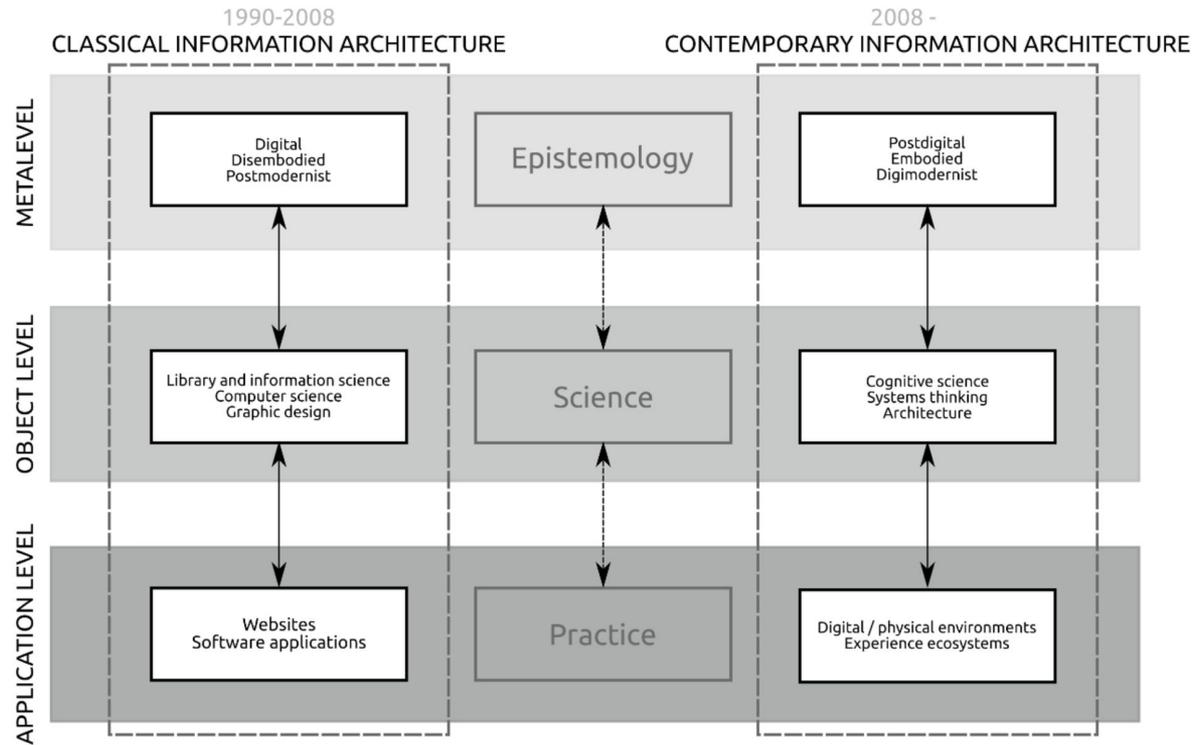


Fig. 1. Application of the M3 to classical and contemporary information architecture (Resmini 2021)

Read Andrea Resmini (several times)

# Reframing Information Archi

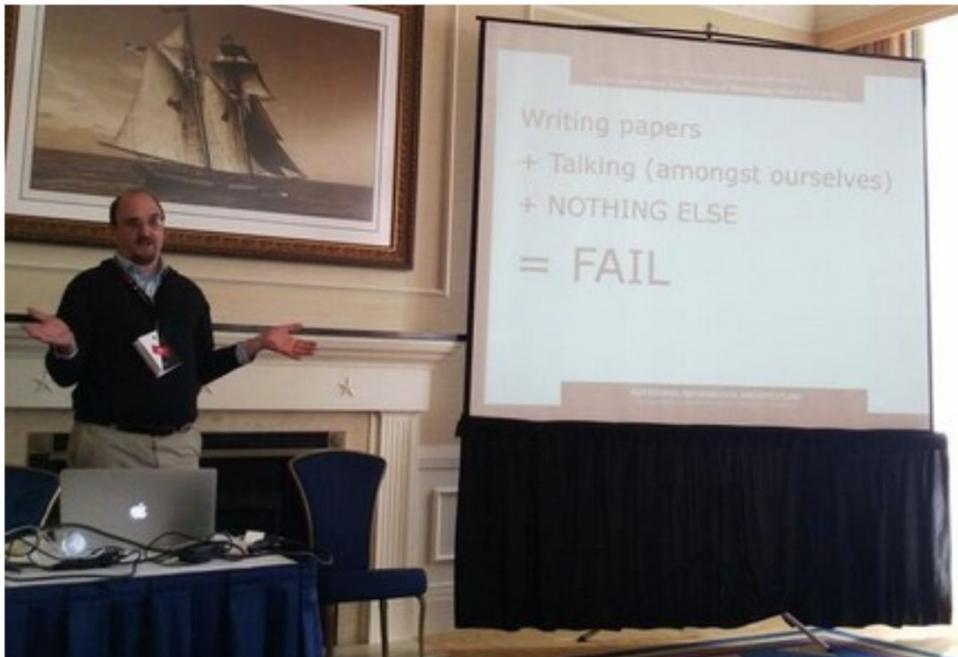
## 1st Academics and Practitioners Roundtable

2013 Information Architecture Summit in Chicago, Illinois, USA

April 3, 2013 – Presentations and Discussion

[2025 UX Education](#)[2021 The Value of IA](#)[2020 Values in IA](#)[2019 Diversity & Inclusion](#)[2018 Ethics](#)[2017 Mapping the Domain](#)[2016 Masterworks](#)[2015 Language of Critique](#)[2014 Teaching](#)[2013 Reframing](#)

## OVERVIEW



## 2014 Reframing Roundtable

Writing papers

+ Talking (amongst ourselves)

+ NOTHING ELSE

= FAIL

- Design strategists
- Design educators
- HCI researchers
- Library science educators
- iSchools



dan klyn @danklyn · Apr 3

#yep #reframeIA /cc @keithinstone pic.twitter.com/QD

↩ Reply ↻ Retweet ★ Favorite

Human-Computer Interaction Series

Andrea Resmini  
Sarah A. Rice  
Bernadette Irizarry *Editors*

# Advances in Information Architecture

The Academics / Practitioners  
Roundtable 2014-2019

 Springer

- Reflects the outcomes of the annual Academics & Practitioners [IA Roundtable](#) 2014-19
- Looks at the discipline's development
- Attempts to bridge academic and practitioner knowledge
- Discusses the move from Classical to Contemporary information architecture
- [Interview with me](#) (free)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Overview

This three part book looks at information architectures impact for research and practice

### PROLOGUES

- Excerpts & articles to catch us up to present day IA

### ARCHITECTURES

- Illustrates IA practice and research of today

### FUTURES

- Showcases IA contributions to future information landscapes



# Final Questions? Comments?

- ???