

The Evolving Role of Information Professionals in Navigating Places, Spaces, and Nurturing New Discourses in the In-Between

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ABSTRACT

Information professionals are at the forefront of navigating the intricacies of shifting landscapes of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and Society 5.0, such as physical places, digital domains, and transitional zones in between, where boundaries blur and new discourses emerge. They are expected to extend their expertise into new domains and enrich their professional practice to better meet the evolving needs of their users. Third Space theory reported in Kuhlthau's work on guided inquiry and information literacy offers a framework, that creates an "in-between" space, which allows personal experience to merge with professional information and encounters to help information professionals expand beyond their traditional domain expertise. These spaces promote the bridging of theory and practice, the navigation of ethical boundaries, access to multi-perspective discourse, engagement in active listening, adjustment to evolving technologies, and facilitation of innovative methods. Creating in-between spaces that promote conversations, interaction, information flow, and access is critical to navigating the intricacies. This interactive panel will explore how information professionals may use Third Space as a framework to offer a new way of thinking and addressing complex societal challenges while prioritizing human values, needs, and well-being.

KEYWORDS

Academic/practitioner discourse, Active listening, Creativity, Information ethics, Third Space

INTRODUCTION

The work of information professionals is growing more diverse in today's quickly changing information world, particularly in navigating the complex domains of place, space, and the spaces in between where new discourses are being generated. The panel title alludes to "in-between" zones, which can be digital, physical, or conceptual areas where boundaries are blurred, and new connections are made. In these transformative environments, information professionals can thrive due to their interdisciplinary expertise, which can unite divergent ideas, close gaps, and open up new avenues for communication and comprehension. The suggestion of a Third Space in Carol Kuhlthau's work on guided inquiry and information literacy with her daughter, Leslie Maniotes, emphasizes the significance of merging real-life context (personal experiences) with educational content (theoretical knowledge) to foster higher-order thinking and innovation through a learning process (Kuhlthau, et al., 2015). Kuhlthau's interpretation of the Third Space has sparked research that extends beyond its initial pedagogical framework across diverse fields and domains (Hansen, et al., 2021). Cafes, pubs, parks, public libraries, and community centers are all potential Third Spaces that can function as informal meeting spaces to nurture a sense of community, encourage creativity, facilitate multi-perspective collaborations, and stimulate innovative solutions for complex problems (Hansen, et al., 2021; Muller & Druin, 2012). In light of this, the panel will explore how information professionals (academics and practitioners) may use Third Space, as a framework and a platform, to offer a new way of thinking about addressing complex societal challenges while prioritizing human values, needs, and well-being by delving into six themes that will lead the discussion. These themes will highlight the importance and need for establishing a space where new discourses can arise to connect information professionals' personal experiences, theoretical knowledge, and practical skills. This is especially relevant as we navigate the complexities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), Society 5.0, and other disruptive technologies. The following themes will be discussed.

Theme 1. Sketching a Picture of In-Between Spaces: Bridging Theory and Practice with Third Space. Anika Meyer

Third Space, also known as an in-between space, has been used in educational, linguistic, and information literacy, and more recently in information behavior (i.e., information sharing), participatory design, and human-computer interaction (HCI) (Hansen, et al., 2021). The discussion will explore the origin, characteristics, application, and potential of these "in-between" spaces (titled, Third Spaces) to support the blending of multiple complex discourses (academics and practitioners) to create new understandings, new knowledge, new identities, and new ways of thinking.

Theme 2. Crossing Ethical Boundaries in Third Spaces. Marlene Holmner

Information professionals face particular difficulties when navigating ethical boundaries in Third Spaces since these settings frequently combine different disciplines and points of view. Ethical considerations in Third Spaces demand a comprehensive understanding of data-driven behaviors to ensure that data is handled responsibly, transparently, and concerning individuals' rights (Mittelstadt & Floridi, 2016). The discussion will explore the use of Third Space as a discourse space to navigate and cross ethical boundaries in the realm of emerging technologies by providing a unique environment where mixed ethical perspectives can be discussed, negotiated, and reconciled.

Theme 3: Promoting Access to Multi-Perspective, Interdisciplinary, and Intergenerational Discourse. Abebe Rorissa

Information professionals play a critical role in the changing information landscape. They enable the confluence of many ideas and viewpoints by negotiating the complexity of place, space, and the spaces in between. This theme highlights the importance of establishing spaces where multi-perspective, interdisciplinary, and intergenerational discourses could take place to address complex issues (Sullivan, et al., 2024). The discussion will explore the potential of Third Space to foster an inclusive discourse space that brings together diverse viewpoints and expertise from various disciplines to create innovative solutions and develop new relationships, understanding, and knowledge of everyday situations, our workplace practices, and technologies (Hansen, et al., 2021; Mills & Speake, 2021).

Theme 4: Active Listening in Third Spaces: Bridging Diverse Discourses and Perspectives. Ina Fourie

In discussions on how to conduct discourse, we often focus on communication, verbal and body language, and cultural respect. How we collaborate in discussions and share ideas is important, but also how we listen and learn from others and how we use information and various forms of communication and discussion to grow to new ways of thinking and understanding (Anderson Sathe et al., 2022; Parks, 2019). Active and ethical listening can be important in cultivating a Third Space and needs to be further explored by information professionals. Suggestions will be offered based on work in disciplines such as education and health science (Peressini & Knuth, 1998).

Theme 5: Adapting to Emerging Technologies. Daniel Alemneh

This theme highlights the importance of information professionals embracing innovation to navigate information access and consumption change due to technological advancements. The discussion will emphasize the role of information professionals in facilitating discourse spaces where users can voice their opinions, thoughts, ideas, and expectations, as well as, gain access to information and resources, and learn and develop new insights on emerging technologies. Using Third Space as a platform to support interaction, collaboration, mutual learning, and developing an understanding of emerging technologies (e.g., artificial intelligence literacy) will be explored (Druga, et al., 2022; Godwin-Jones, 2023). Information professionals continue improving how people and communities interact with information and technology by embracing challenges and opportunities for innovation and promoting a better-informed, more connected society.

Theme 6: INFIDEOS: An Accessible, Welcoming, and Fun Third Space. Jenna Hartel

This theme shares how INFIDEOS, a YouTube channel of educational multimedia resources about Information Science (Hartel, 2022a, 2022b), can serve as a case study of three advantageous qualities in a digital Third Space to bridge theory, practice, and research. First, it is accessible through YouTube, a free, public, and familiar online platform that has strong appeal across generations. Second, it welcomes all kinds of learners, with content designed at an introductory level. Third, INFIDEOS is fun, because its videos feature music, beauty, and surprises. While the Fourth Industrial Revolution poses many challenges to society, it also offers creative opportunities.

PROPOSED FORMAT AND PANEL ORGANISATION

Experts who are negotiating the changing role of information professionals in the domains of place, space, and the spaces in between where new discourses emerge are gathered for the intended 90-minute panel. The panel will examine how information professionals use their knowledge to build bridges across different viewpoints, encouraging creativity and improving communication, based on the concept of Third Space.

Introduction. The moderator (**Anika Meyer**) will very briefly introduce the panel members and explain the format of the panel presentation. (3 minutes)

Theme 1. Sketching a picture of in-between spaces: bridging theory and practice with Third Space. **Anika Meyer** (7 minutes)

Theme 2. Crossing ethical boundaries in Third Spaces. **Marlene Holmner** (7 minutes)

Theme 3. Promoting access to multi-perspective, interdisciplinary, and intergenerational discourse. **Abebe Rorissa** (7 minutes)

Theme 4. Active listening in Third Spaces: bridging diverse discourses and perspectives. **Ina Fourie** (7 minutes)

Theme 5. Adapting to emerging technologies. **Daniel Alemneh** (7 minutes)

Theme 6. INFIDEOS: An accessible, welcoming, and fun Third Space. **Jenna Hartel** (7 minutes)

Breakout group for each theme. (25 minutes)

Feedback and discussion. Group leaders. (15 minutes)

Summary and conclusion. Moderator. (5 minutes)

ENGAGEMENT WITH THE AUDIENCE

After the presentations, the moderator and panelists will divide the audience into three sub-groups (one group per two themes), inviting them to share their ideas, and experiences with related research, relevant theories, and methodologies (25 minutes). Each group will nominate a person to give feedback. This feedback from the six groups will take an additional 15 minutes. The moderator will summarize audience input and briefly share it with the audience in a 5-minute summary discussion and via email.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

This panel aims to enhance participants' understanding of Third Spaces, ethical navigation in complex settings, and the promotion of inclusive discourses. Participants will learn about the importance of active listening, adaptation to emerging technologies, and creative approaches for facilitating conversations in these dynamic environments. The discussion will create an interactive environment where information professionals can think innovatively and share ideas about their roles in the conception, application, and leveraging of Third Spaces while exploring their value within their professional practices. Therefore, enabling them to navigate the complexities of place, space, and the in-between, and ensuring their continued relevance and impact in an information-rich society.

RELEVANCE

This panel aligns with the conference theme of "Putting People First, Responsibility, Reciprocity, and Care, in Information Research and Practices" by emphasizing the role of information professionals in ethical navigation, promoting inclusive discourses, and active listening in complex environments. It contributes to a deeper understanding of prioritizing human-centric values in information research and practices, fostering responsibility, reciprocity, and care.

PANEL MEMBERS AND MODERATORS

Anika Meyer is a Lecturer in the Department of Information Science, University of Pretoria where she is also enrolled for her doctoral studies, titled: Stakeholder Information Sharing: A Naturalistic Case Study of Software Development. Her research interests include information behavior, knowledge management, guided inquiry, Third Space, creative spaces, participatory design, and agile methodology.

Dr. Marlene Holmner is an Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Information Science at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. Marlene is active in ASIS&T, serving as officer in 2021-2023 and a Steering Committee member of the African Center of Excellence in Information Ethics (ACEIE). Marlene publishes primarily in the areas of information ethics, information communication for development, and ICT in education.

Dr. Abebe Rorissa is a Professor and Director of the School of Information Sciences; Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs at the College of Communication and Information, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, USA; and a Research Associate in the Department of Information Science at the University of Pretoria. His research concerns information organization and retrieval, the adoption, use, and impact of information and communication technologies, and human information behavior. He has held many leadership positions in the Association for Information Science & Technology (ASIS&T) and is the Past President.

Dr. Ina Fourie is a Full Professor, in the Department of Information Science, University of Pretoria, South Africa. She is a Steering Committee member of the African Centre of Excellence for Information Ethics (ACEIE). She is an experienced information behavior researcher specializing in cancer, palliative care, grief and bereavement. She is a former member of the ASIS&T Executive (2019-2023) and Chair-Elect of the iSchools Organization Board.

Dr. Daniel Alemneh is head of the Digital Curation Unit at the University of North Texas Libraries and teaches at the College of Information. He is also a Research Associate in the Department of Information Science, University of Pretoria. For the past twenty years, Dr. Alemneh has been actively involved in various professional activities, including serving on the ASIS&T and ICKM Boards of Directors.

Dr. Jenna Hartel is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto. She is a theorist, methodologist, and educator of Information Science. Her lifelong motivating question is: What is the nature of information in the pleasures of life? Her YouTube channel, INFIDEOS, contains more than 100 outrageously playful educational videos that celebrate the discoveries of Information Science.

GENERATIVE AI USE

We confirm that we did not use generative AI tools/services to author this submission.

AUTHOR ATTRIBUTION

First Author: conceptualization, project administration, writing - original draft, writing - review and editing; Second Author: conceptualization, writing - original draft, writing - review and editing; Third Author: writing - review and editing; Fourth Author: writing - review and editing; Fifth Author: writing - review and editing; Sixth Author: writing - review and editing

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