



October 31 – November 2, 2016
Renaissance Boston Waterfront Hotel

Tuesday - Featured Talks

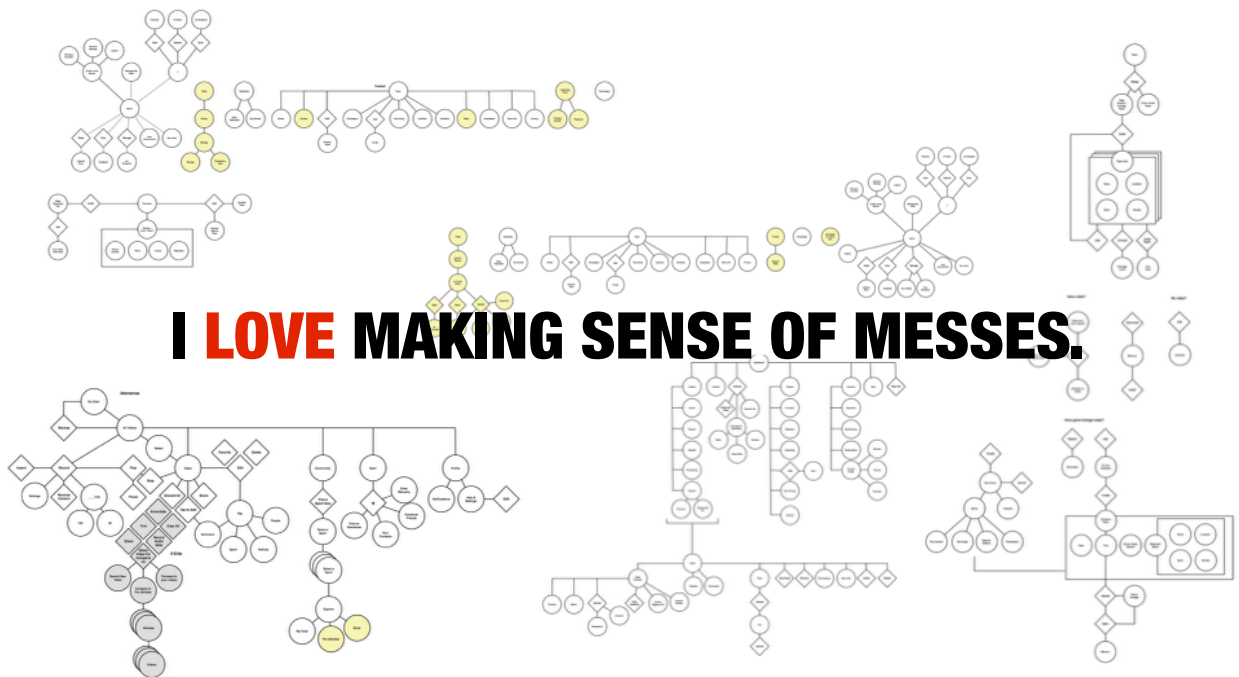
How to Make Sense of Any Mess

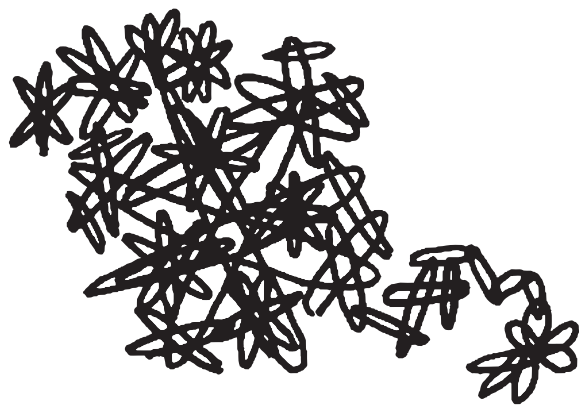
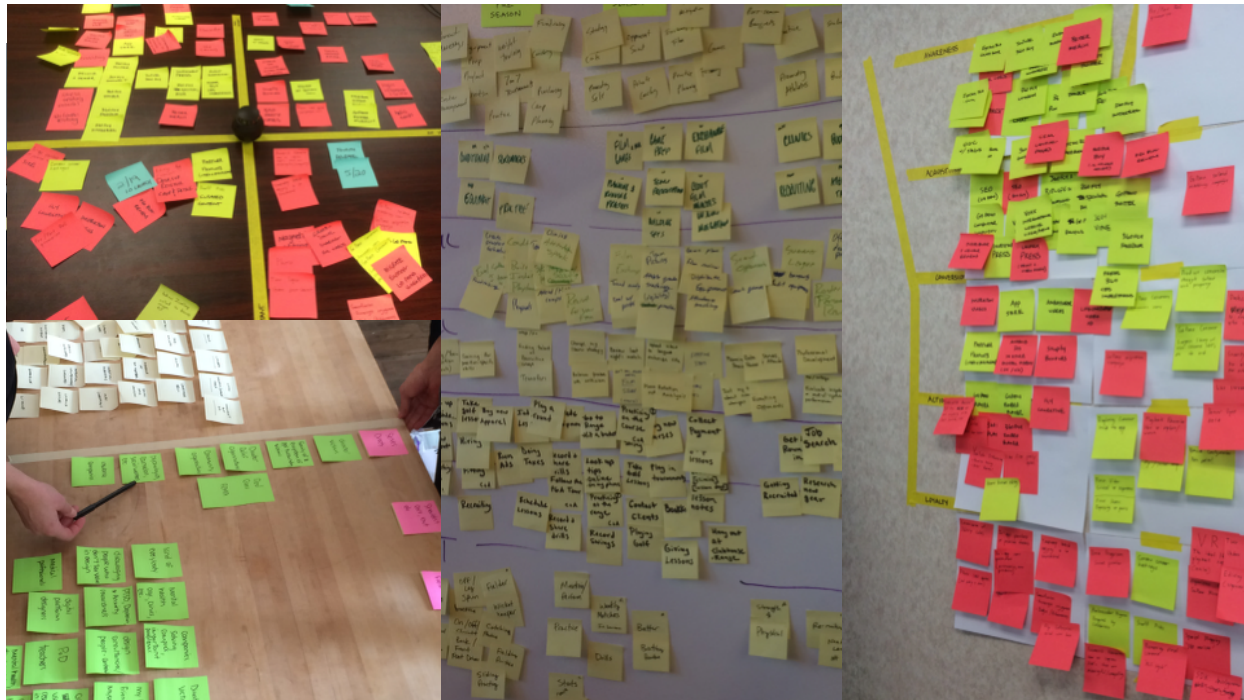
Abby Covert

Identify the Mess
State Your Intent
Face Reality
Choose a Direction
Measure the Distance
Play with Structure
Prepare to Adjust

HOW TO MAKE SENSE OF ANY MESS

Abby Covert



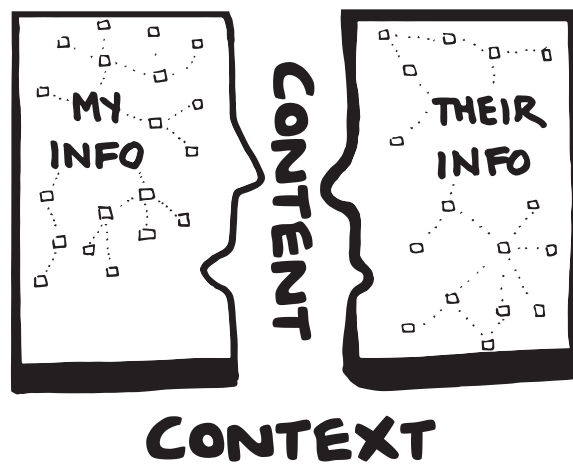


Thinking about
INFORMATION
as material is hard



Information can be
made from the lack
of physical material

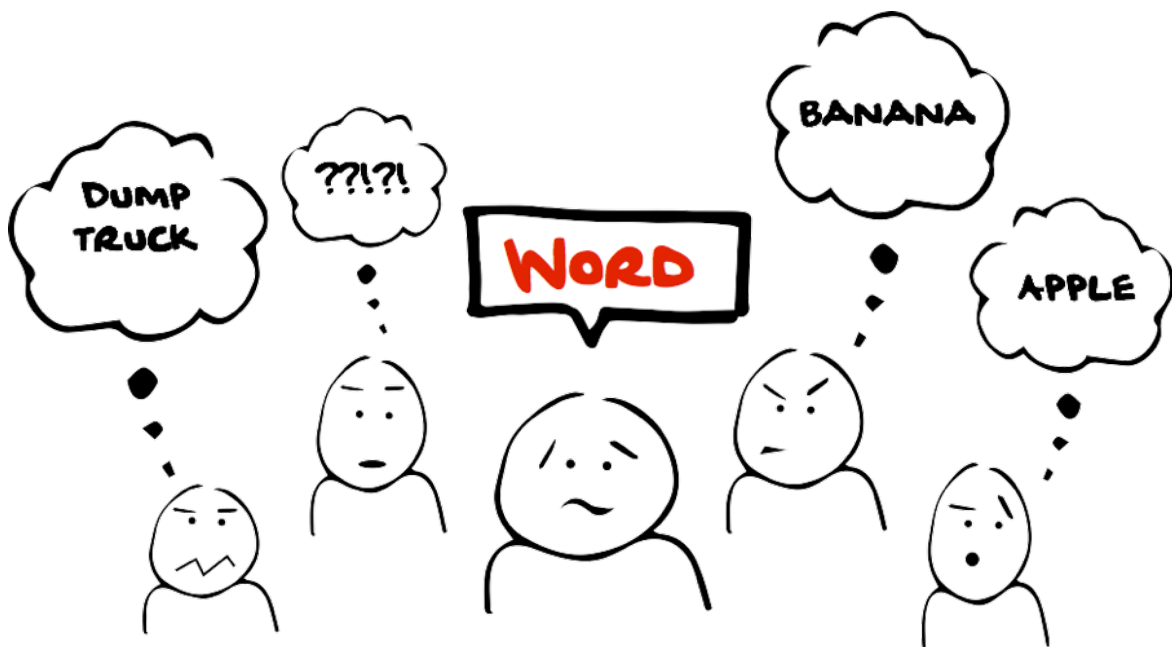
Information $\neq$ Content

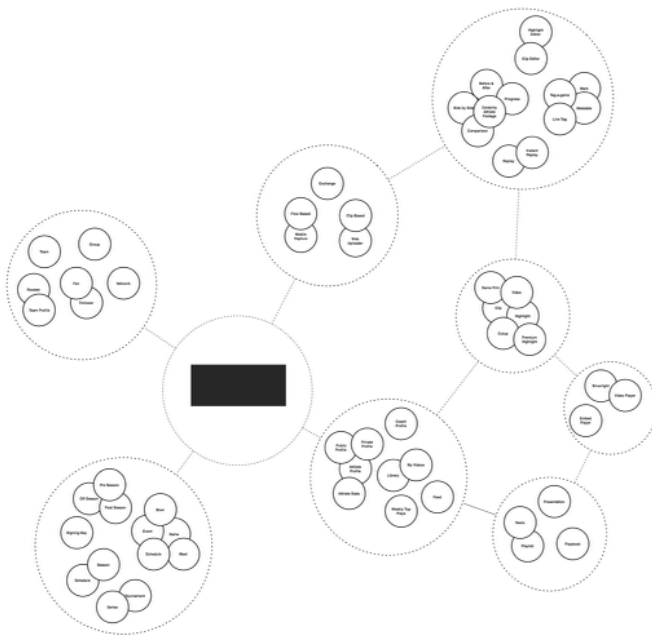


Information architecture
is how we arrange the parts to be
understandable as a whole.

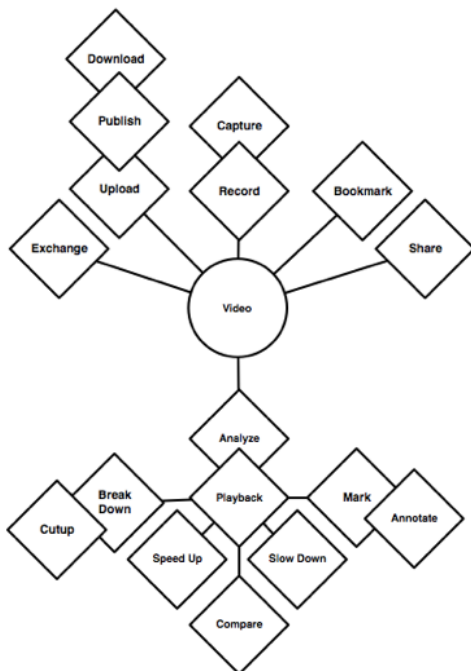
5 LESSONS
TO MAKE SENSE OF ANY MESS

#1 LANGUAGE MATTERS



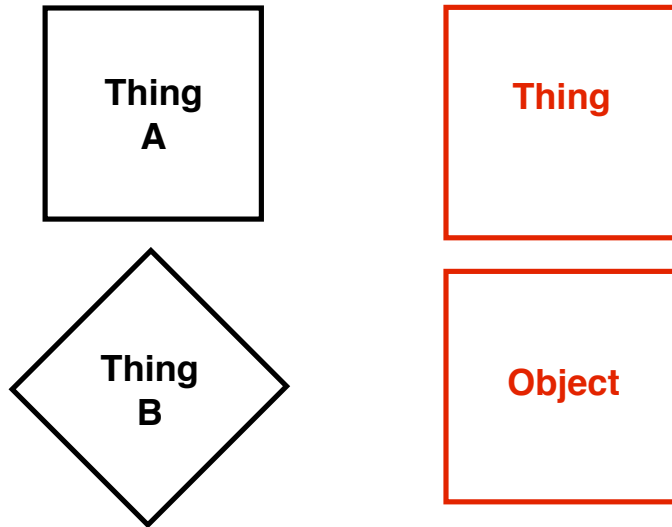


How many
duplicative nouns
does your team
deal with?



How many
duplicative verbs
are related to
those nouns?

Model Change vs. **Label Change**



One label per noun or verb
is not always the best way to go

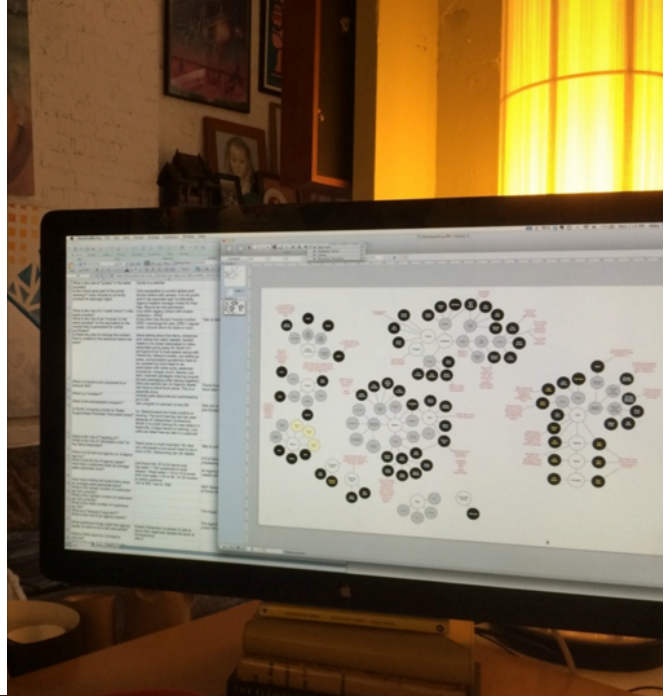
The goal is not simplifying
The goal is to know what you mean
when you say what you say.

Indexed lexicon.	
This is the controlled vocabulary for this book. It's not exhaustive; it focuses on ontological decisions that went into my writing. For more information, visit: abbythela.com/lexicon	
Ambiguous (adj.): 69, 100, 129-133	Open to interpretation.
Architect (v.): 15, 16, 20, 23, 55	To determine the structure of something.
Baseline (n.): 108, 115, 117-120, 143, 160	A measurement of something before making changes.
Block Diagram (n.): 66, 76	A diagram depicting how objects and their attributes interrelate to create a concept.
Broad (adj.): 137, 144, 145	Provides many choices at once.
Channel (n.): 53, 54, 73, 78, 87, 143, 160	Anything that carries or transfers information.
Choreograph (v.): 86	To determine the sequence of steps and movements users can take.
Classification (n.): 126, 128, 129, 130, 132, 134, 135, 144	The process of sorting things with similar qualities or characteristics. <i>See also: Classify (v.)</i>

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Controlled
vocabularies
are the greatest
thing since sliced
bread or pockets.

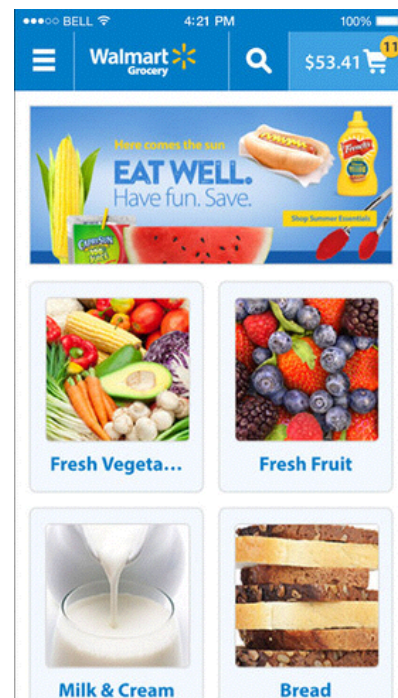
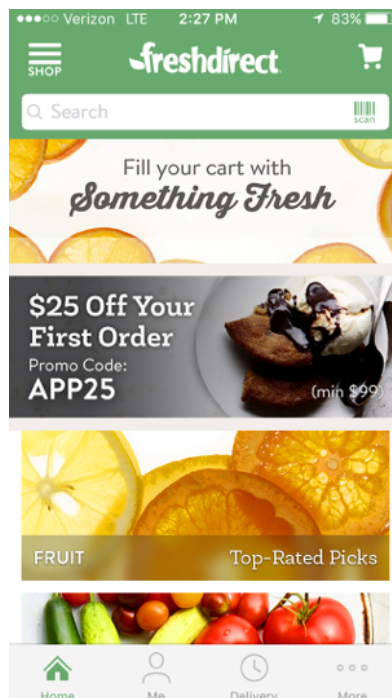
Experiences
are made of language.

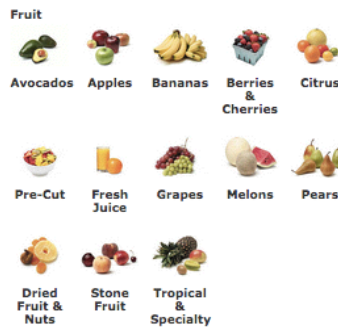


**Talk about the language in
your organization.**

#2 THERE IS NO RIGHT WAY

In most contexts,
taxonomy is a tool
of rhetoric not an
exact science.



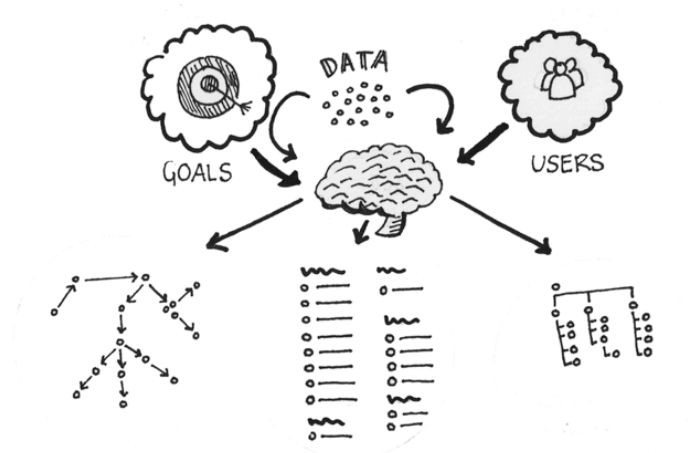


If Fresh Direct classified produce scientifically, no one would be able to find anything.

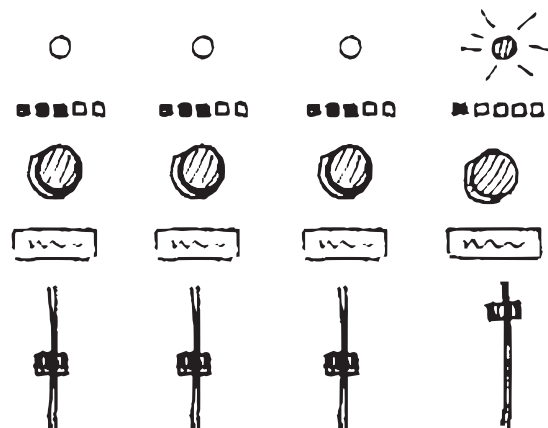
**The way you choose to organize your produce
says something about you.**



There is no one right way to organize something.



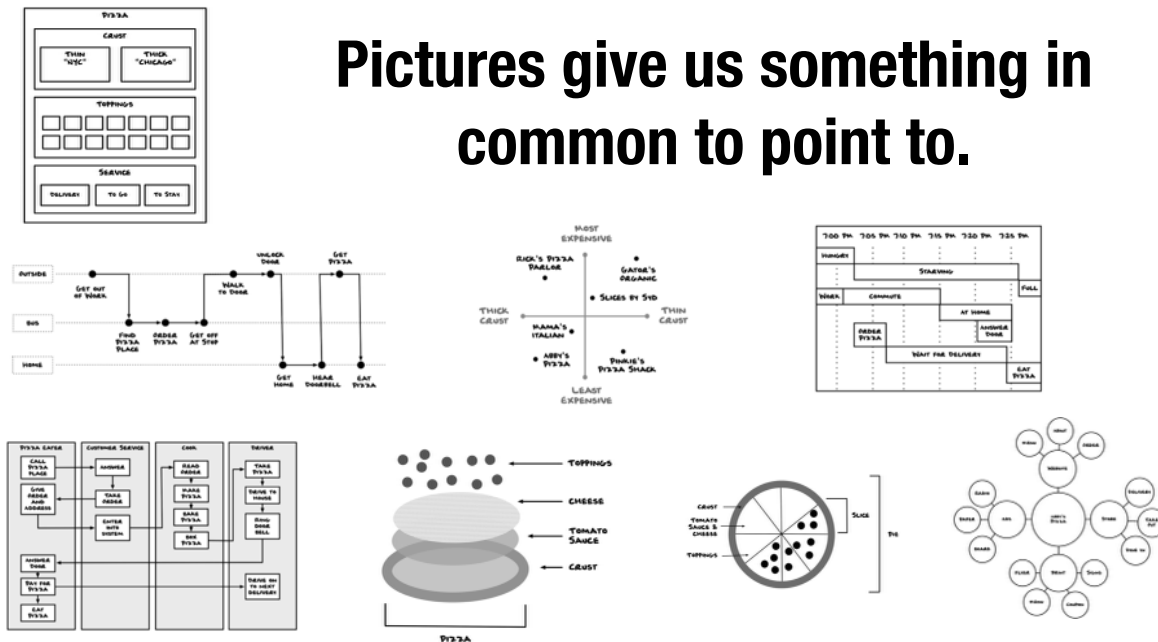
The only thing that matters is reaching your goals.



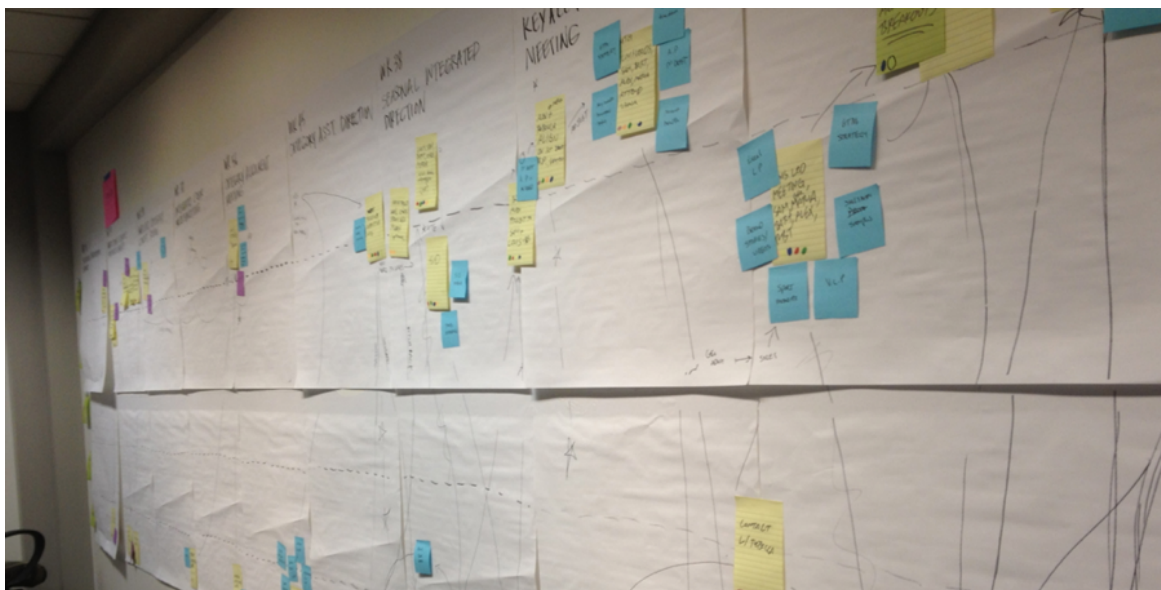
**Show an alternative way of
organizing something.**

#3 WE NEED PICTURES

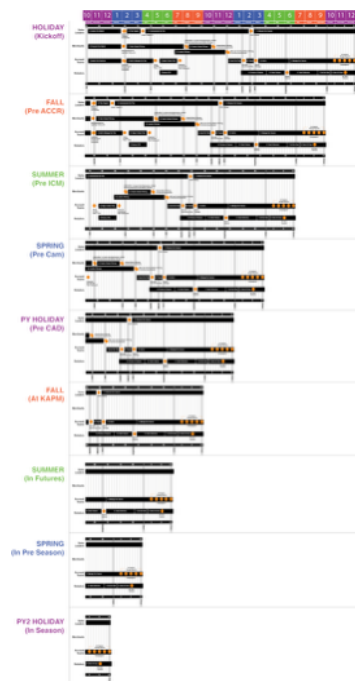
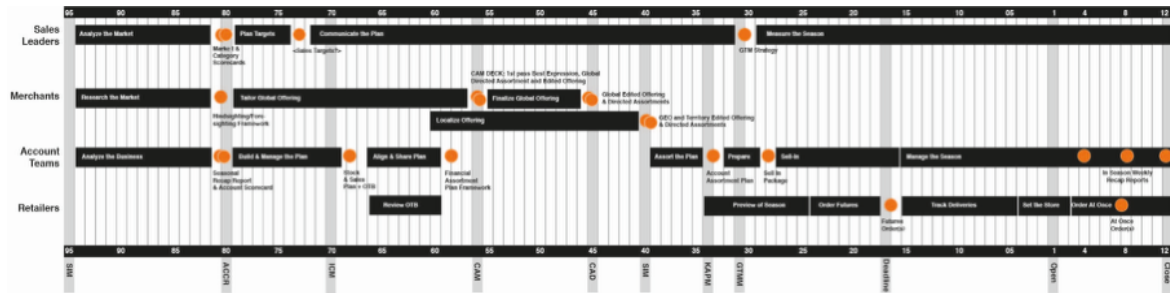
Pictures give us something in common to point to.



Take the time and space needed to collect and iterate.

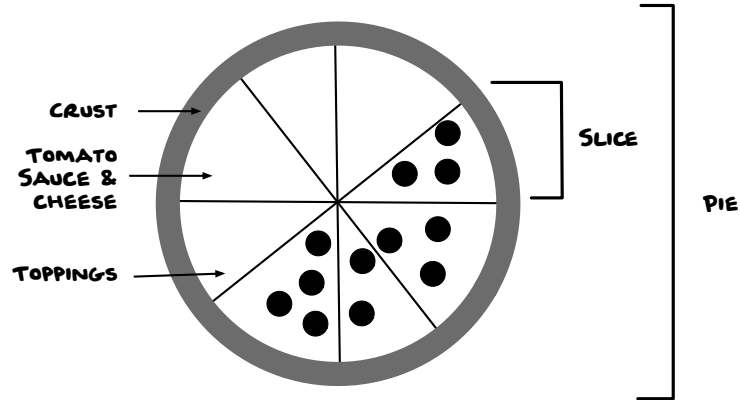


Visualize something hard to explain

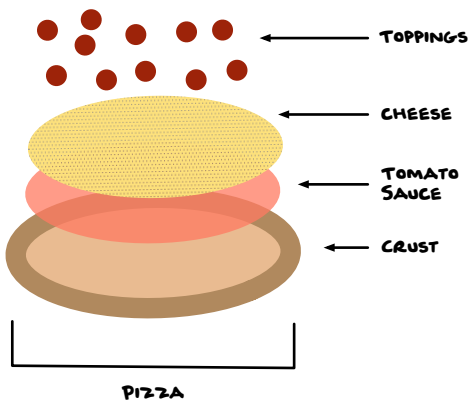


Inspire Realistic, Not Simplistic Thinking

Be Careful of Reductionism

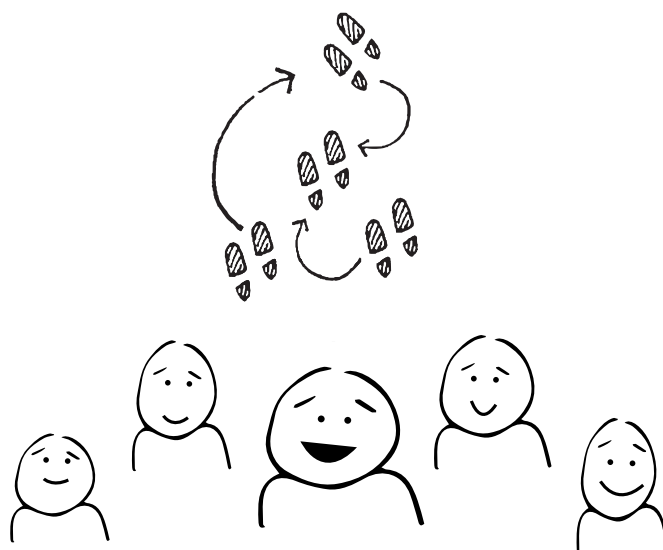


Show the process, not just results



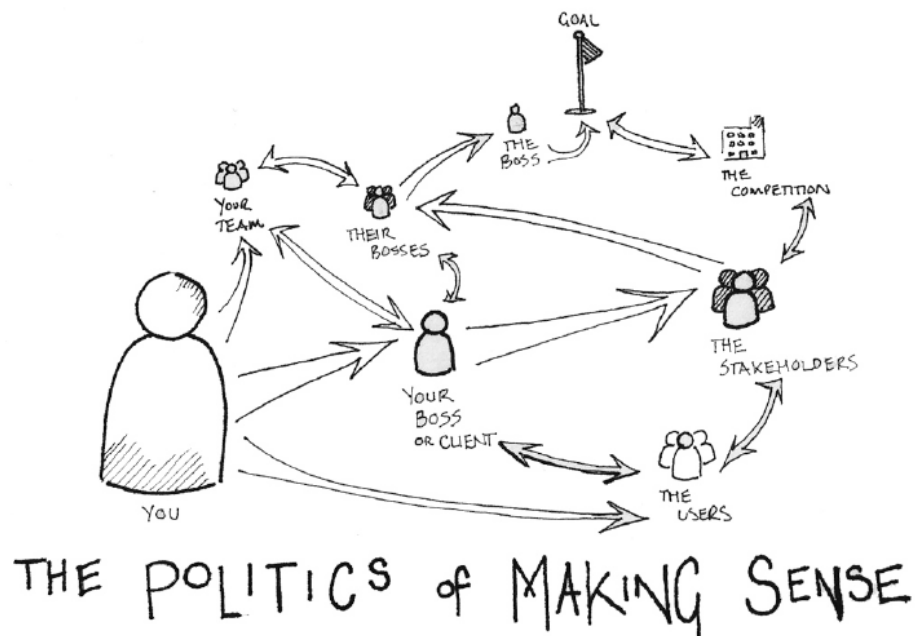
ACKNOWLEDGE
COMPLEXITY

With agreement comes momentum.



**Make a picture of the
monster in everyone's head.**

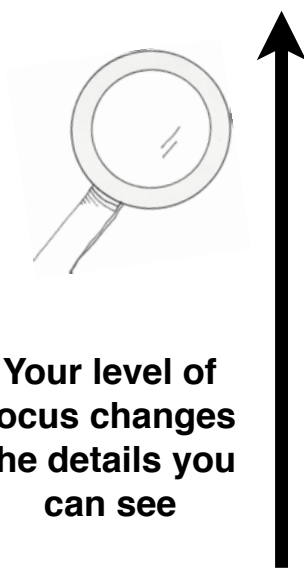
#4 IA IS COLLABORATIVE



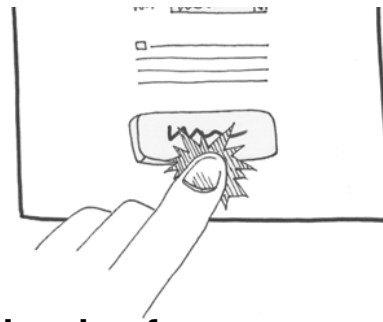
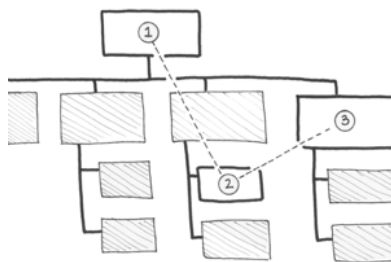
“Taxonomy is described sometimes as a science and sometimes as an art, but really it’s a battleground.”

Bill Bryson, A Short History of Nearly Everything

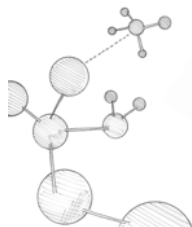
**Your level of
focus changes
the details you
can see**



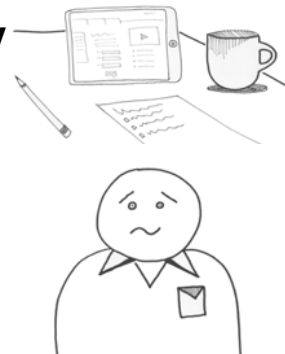
- **Ecosystem:** A complex collection of systems and structures.
- **System:** A set of interacting structures.
- **Structure:** A configuration of objects and/or interfaces.
- **Journey:** An act of traveling within or between locations.
- **Location:** A particular place or position.
- **Interface:** a point where interaction occurs between user and object.
- **Interaction:** the way in which things affect one another.
- **Object:** A material thing that can be seen and touched.



**These levels of
place are deeply
“intertwined”**



***HT Ted Nelson**



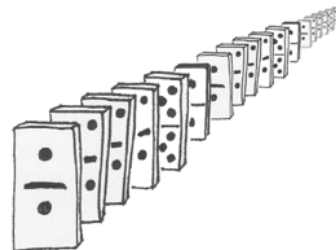


**"TO MAKE AN APPLE
PIE FROM SCRATCH, YOU
MUST FIRST INVENT THE
UNIVERSE"**

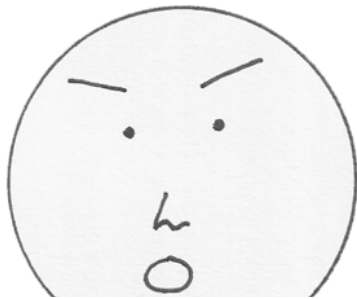
- CARL SAGAN

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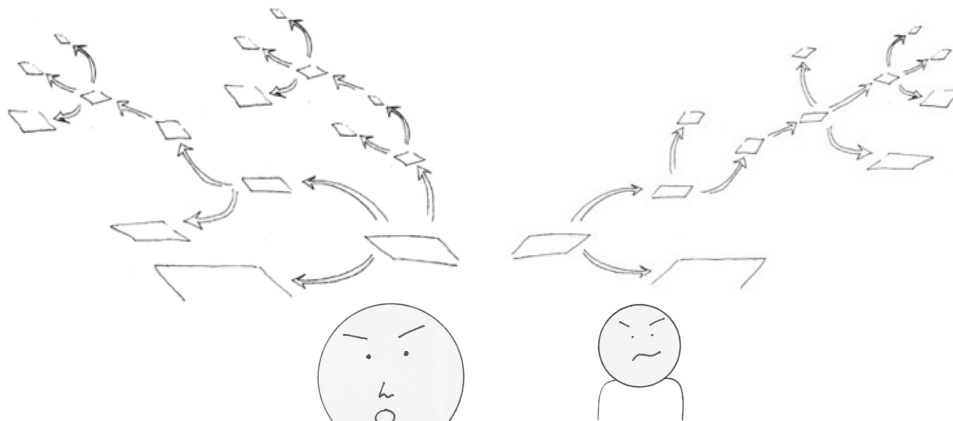
**Change at one level
has implications at
other levels**

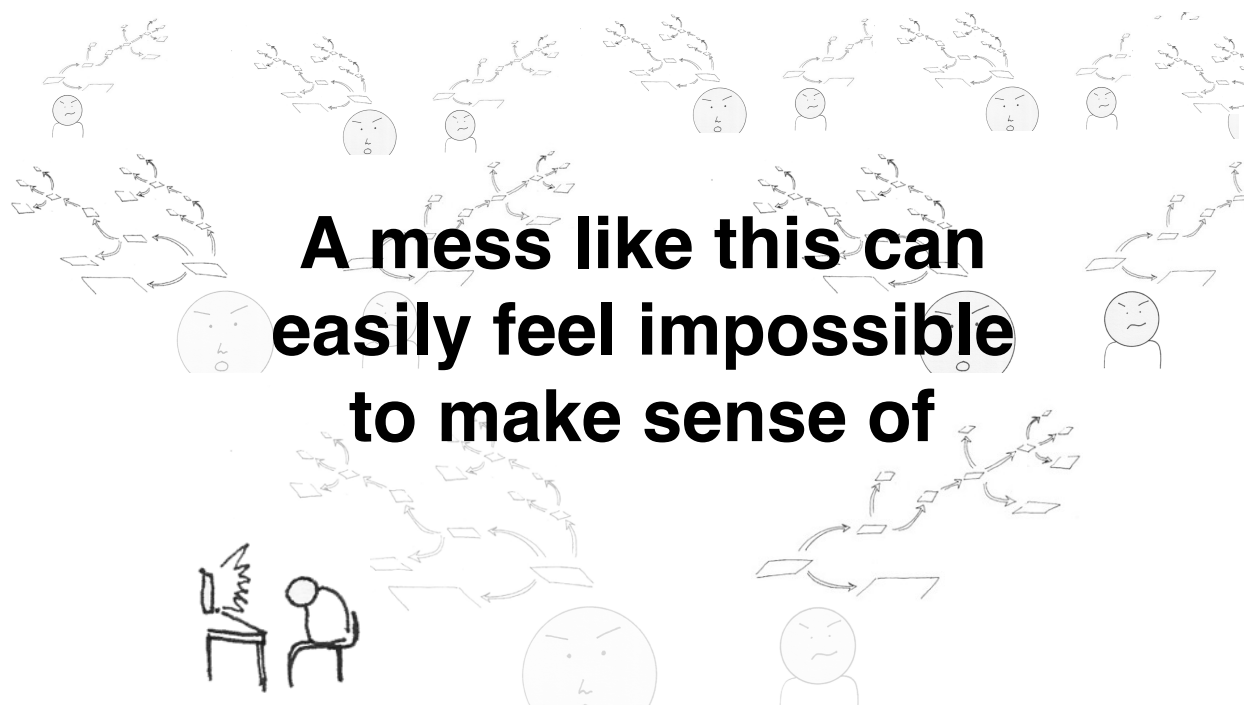
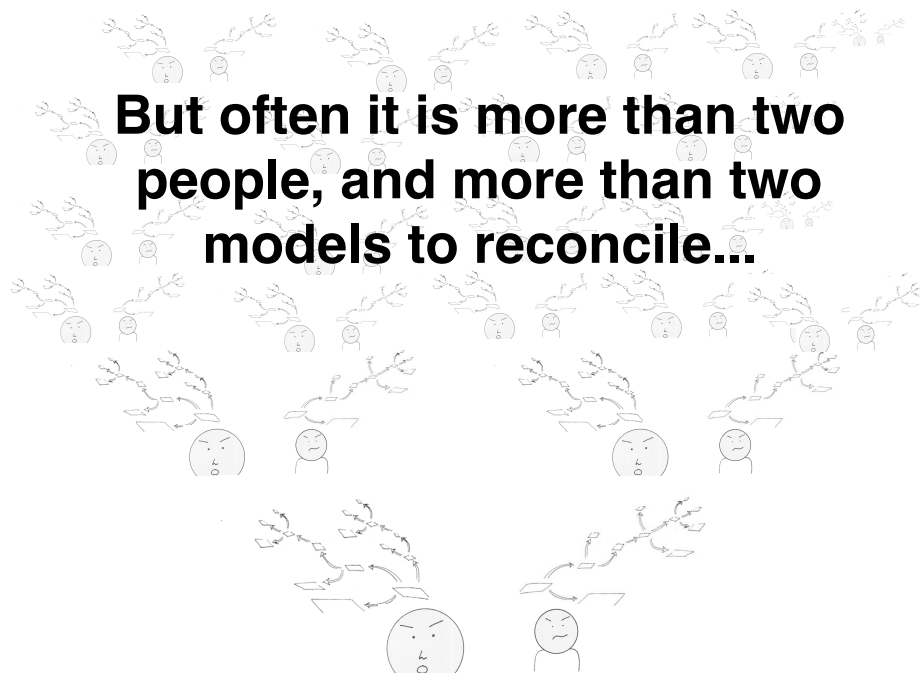


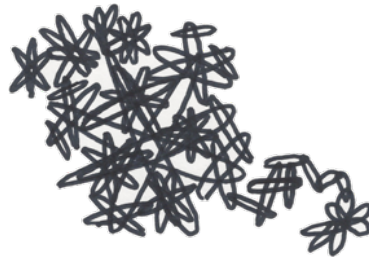
Everyone has an opinion
and it can be frustrating to
really talk things out



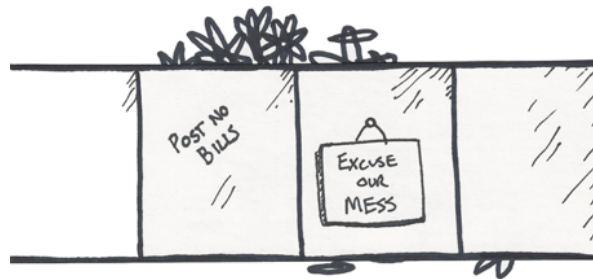
Frustration develops when
people have different
mental models







**Many people get
overwhelmed at this point**



**They think of ways to hide
the mess...**



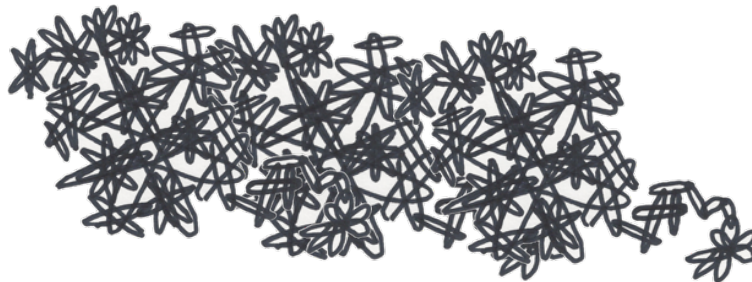
**Or they think of ways to
pretty up the mess...**



...the mess is still a mess.

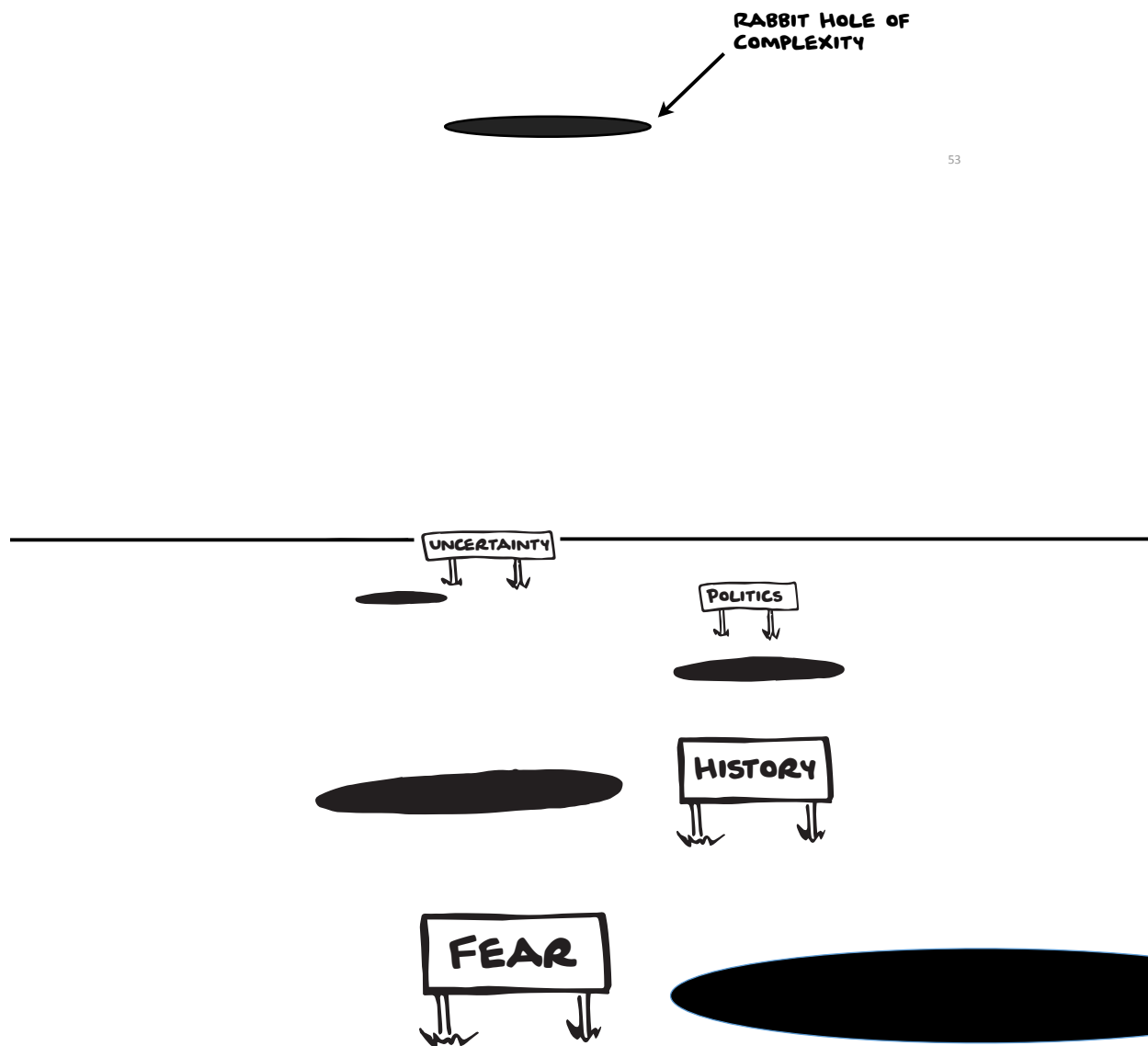


...but they have bought time.



Until the mess grows
(as all messes do when given time)

COMPLEXITY CAN GET IN THE WAY OF TRUE UNDERSTANDING



Some Enemies that lurk in Complexity

- **Familiarity:** Being too close to the problem can make you forget to remember what it is like to NOT understand
- **Looking good vs. being good:** Tricking yourself into thinking something is good because it is good looking
- **“Uh, Huh”:** Not admitting ignorance when faced with it
- **Unnecessary Exactitude:** Including more detail than is helpful
- **Rainbow Worship:** Believing that more color or colorful flowery language is always better
- **Edifitis:** Belief that a better, shinier “such and such” could and will fix the problem
- **Not asking Why:** Simple as that. Always ask why.
- **How before What:** Thinking to specifically about solutions before the problem is defined

List adapted from Richard Saul Wurman's Information Anxiety 2

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**Set aside your opinions to
facilitate IA decisions
collaboratively**

#5 IA ALWAYS EXISTS

Everything has IA



IA Can Grow Organically



“Hey, Nice IA”

- Said No One Ever

Map out your current IA to make sure it is working for (not against) you

To start making sense of your mess:

- **Talk about the language used in your organization**
- **Show an alternative way of organizing something**
- **Make a picture of the monster in everyone's head**
- **Facilitate IA decisions collaboratively**
- **Map out your current IA**



IA is not just for information architects.
IA is practiced by everybody.

Thanks!

**HOW
TO
MAKE
SENSE
OF ANY
MESS**

Abby Covert

**I wrote a book about
information
architecture for
everybody!**

<http://abbytheia.com/makesense/>



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About UIE

User Interface Engineering is a leading think tank, specializing in website and product usability. Jared M. Spool founded the company back in 1988 and has built User Interface Engineering into the largest research organization of its kind. With our in-depth research findings based on user observation, we empower development teams to create usable web sites that increase customer satisfaction and loyalty.

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