

Public Abstract

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THE DESIGN PRACTITIONER - RESEARCHER GAP

Societies are evolving into a global community by means of new and ever changing technology. Designers, more often than not, are required to make decisions that impact the way people live and, once made and put in to place, the clients or users are left to live with the consequences for years to come. Designers "practitioners and researchers" agree EBR (Environment-Behavior Research) can provide them with the means to be competitive and also lead to increased status of the profession as evidenced based versus just an art form.

To date, a significant number of studies have been conducted and results published about the use and the importance of EBR by the design practitioner. While architects show a desire for behavioral research information and have a great interest in designing for people "showing an awareness of the potential impact of EBR on their work" they rarely use it. As Lawson (1980) pointed out, the social sciences are primarily descriptive, while design is necessarily prescriptive, resulting in a mismatch between the strategies used by the two professions.

If designers are to retain their competitive advantage in this community, the need to accommodate and change is its first challenge. It is imperative that architects, designers, researchers and educators collaborate on the best way to handle the communication of and translations of EBR and begin to implement strategies towards this end. The progression of this topic "from identifying a need for EBR in design to acknowledging the need to bridge the application gap" has gained new urgency.

The goal of this thesis is to confirm there is a continuing application gap by identifying current attitudes of design practitioners to the usefulness of EBR, preferred forms of communication of EBR, and reasons for lack of use of EBR. To achieve this goal, a survey instrument was developed and distributed to practicing architects whose demographics closely mimicked those from a previous study by Schmidt (1984).

Responses were recorded, confirmed, transformed in to statistically significant sets then analyzed and compared to like data sets from two previous studies on the application gap "Schmidt (1984) and Merrill (1973).

The study findings provide insight in to the perceptions held by practitioners about EBR "specifically its usefulness, preferred forms of communication, and why they may not use EBR. These findings, when compared to two previous studies by Schmidt (1984) and Merrill (1973), and supported by findings from Karpan (2005), show little change in attitude of design practitioners towards EBR "they believe EBR useful but rarely use it. The implication of the results from the current study suggests further study needs to occur before this application gap can be bridged. Suggestions on how to bridge the application gap are included in this study and range from support of suggestions from Schmidt, Merrill, and Karpan as well as proposing new considerations.