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History of HCI: Position Statement

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## **1. Introduction**

Two interweaving stories are portrayed here: a professional quest to ensure that the systems developed are grounded in real-world needs of people, and an academia/industry quest to develop methods and tools for designing systems with which people could interact.

The professional quest is rooted in seeking to understand the needs of human beings and the context in which these needs are expressed. Additionally, how the human interaction with computers changes those dynamic yet subtle interrelationships that give rise to new needs, experiences and contextual changes.

The following stories trace nearly three decades of this interwoven quest to design computer systems with which humans could interact and engage with efficiency and meaning.

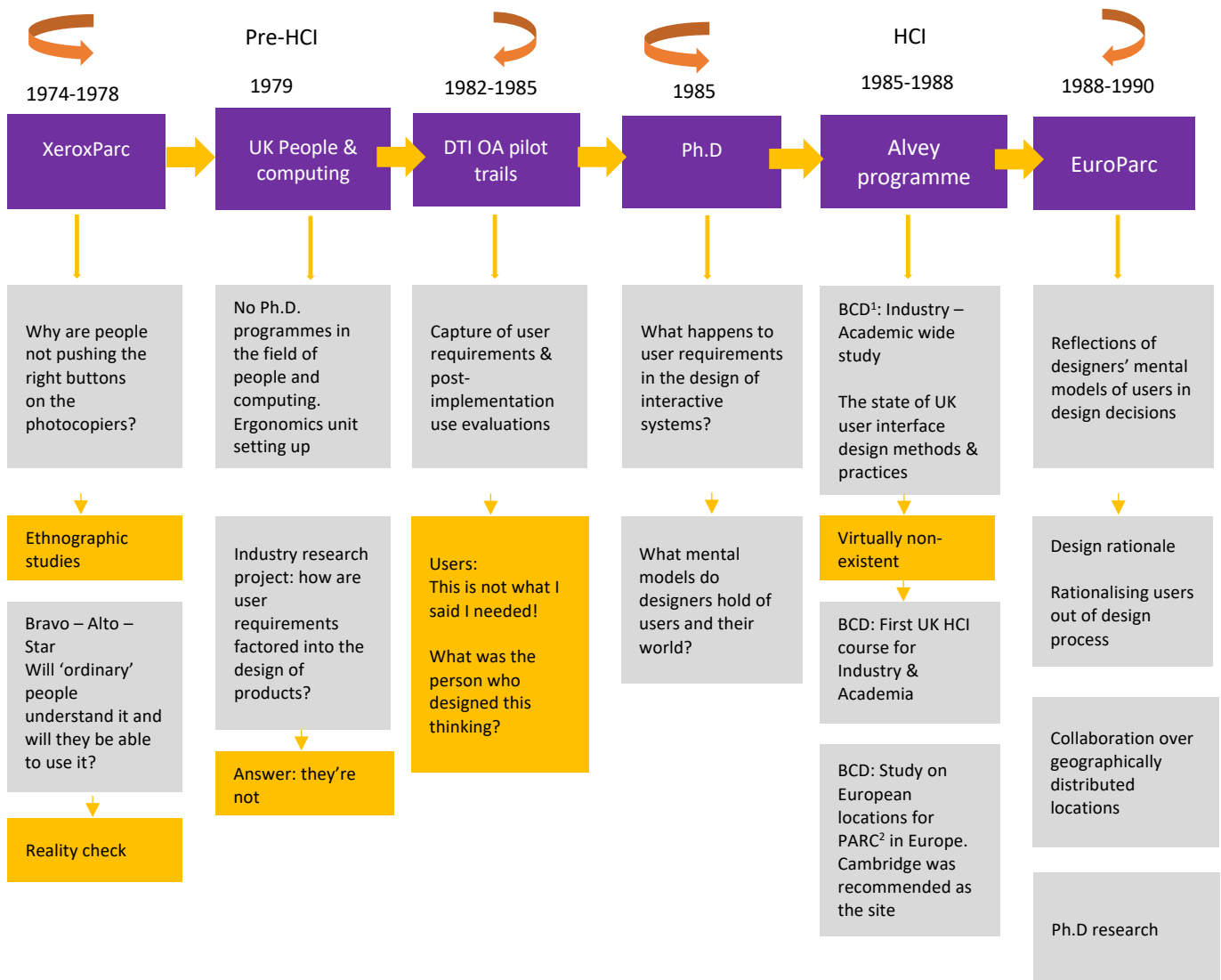
The timelines to which these stories are attached reflect the period of the professional quest and not necessarily the entire time period of the field.

## **2. First Two Decades: People and Interactive Systems**

Although there were variations on the theme of designing interactive systems for people approached from different perspectives and disciplines, it was nevertheless a predominant theme running throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

The following timeline marks key points in the author's professional quest over this period. Stories annotate these markers to illustrate the period or to depict a key event at that particular point in time.

**Figure 1: Markers in the quest to design computers for people**



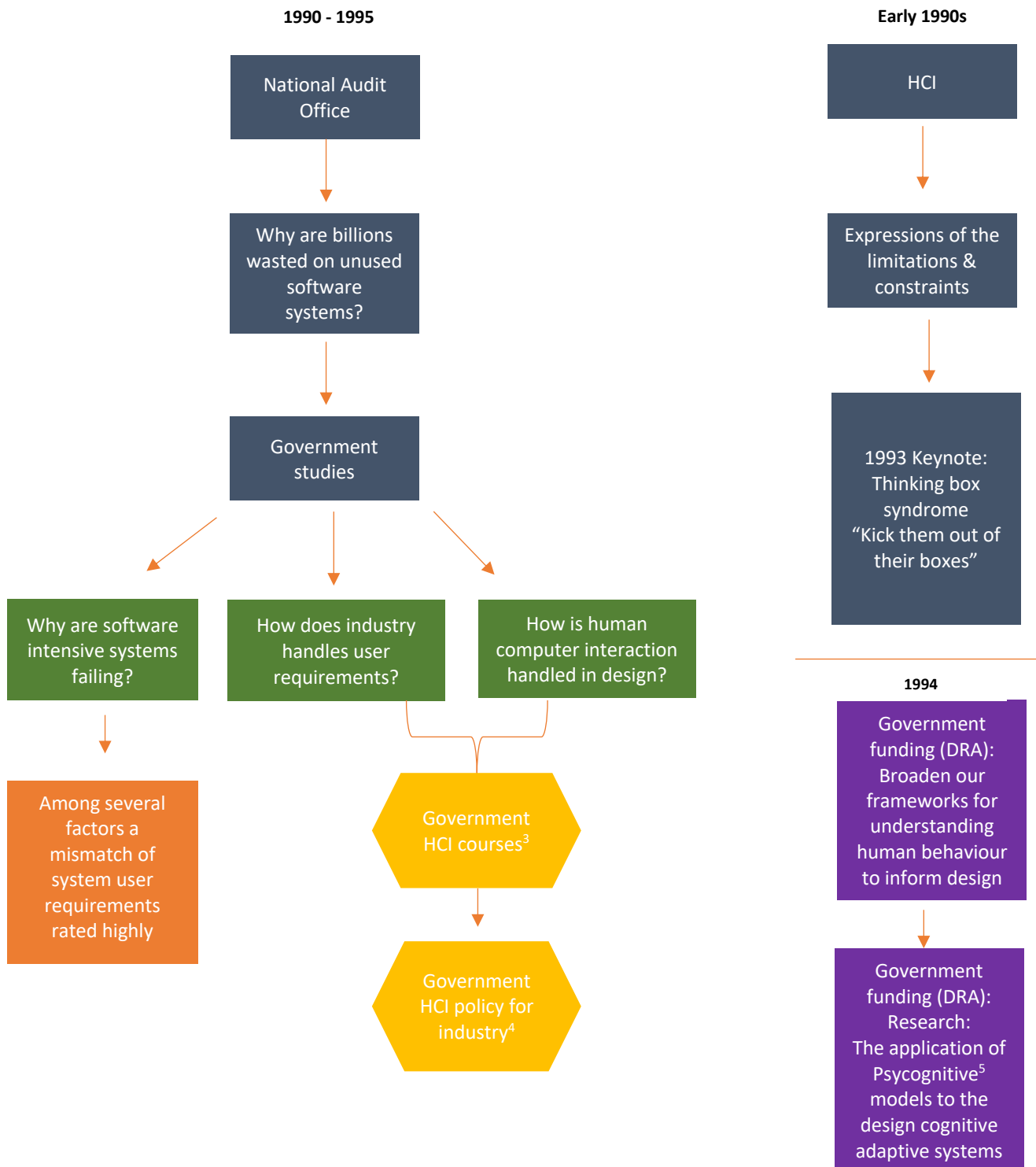
### 3. 1990s: The Period of Disconnect

The 1990s were characterised by disconnects. The UK Government was plagued by defunct software-intensive systems lining the vaults of Whitehall, while misrepresentations of users' needs continued to characterise the systems developed by industry.

Meanwhile, the field of HCI was forging ahead, making great strides in developing theories, methods and task/behavioural models divorced from the reality of real-world system development. Poor industry system specification could not be saved by formal HCI methods.

<sup>1</sup> BCD: Beta Chi Design, an HCI-specialist company founded in 1986 by Professor William Newman and Dr Karmen Guevara  
<sup>2</sup> PARC: Palo Alto Research Centre

A further disconnect began to emerge during this period. Our understanding of human beings and how they operate in their world became even more elusive within the HCI constraints of computer science, cognitive sciences and human factors engineering. The following diagrams highlight some important markers during this period.



<sup>3</sup> Delivered with Professor Jenny Preece

<sup>4</sup> Developed with Professor Jenny Preece

<sup>5</sup> Psychognition, a methodological approach developed by the author