Contexts

"For higher-order learning, a careful context analysis is critical for aiding the designer in recreating authentic elements of the performance context during instruction and enabling the learner to build optimal conceptual frameworks for learning and remembering." (Dick, Carey, & Carey, 2014, p. 99)

Context matters. There are two specific contexts that affect your instructional design decisions. First is the *performance environment*. This is where the skill or knowledge will be used in the 'real-world'. The second is the *training environment*. This is where the instructional will take place.

Performance Environment

The *performance environment* describes where the skills are knowledge are applied outside of the training context. In some cases, these can be the same or vary similar. For example, you teach swimming in water (a pool or a lake). Regardless of where the swimming actually occurs, the environments are similar but they are not necessarily the same. You may teach swimming in a pool but the learner may actually swim in open water.

> Ideally, you want your training environment to be as similar as possible to your performance environment.

Some reasons why it may not be possible to have performance environment and training environment the same:

- **Safety**. When teaching dangerous skills, it isn't necessarily safe for the learner (e.g. astronauts) or others (e.g. unsafe for patients for surgeons to practice skills).
- **Cost**. When there is a risk of equipment being damaged or a limited amount of equipment available, it may make more sense to do training in a simulated environment.
- **Distraction**. When the training requires undistracted attention and the performance context is full of distractions.

Things to example when looking at the performance environment:

- Needs of the organization.
- Physical aspects (e.g. is it quiet, is it noisy, are workspaces private/public)?
- Social aspects (e.g. does workers work alone or as a team)?
- Available tools (e.g. do the workers need/use specific tools in their work)?
- Processes (e.g. do the workers follow specific processes to achieve the task at hand)?
- Constraints (e.g. are there unchangeable aspects of the environment that need to be considered?)
- Other – anything else you can think of that might affect the design of instruction.

One of the most effective ways to gather performance environment information is to observe employees in their work. There you can see for yourself what tools are available to employees as well as the physical and social aspects of their

workplaces.

When documenting the performance environment, you want to write down anything that you think might help you design a more authentic learning experience.

Learning Environment

The learning environment is the location where the learning will take place. Using our swimming example from the last chapter, the learning environment is a swimming pool. But, what characteristics does that pool have? If your organization had multiple pools, what are the differences such that you have the information you need to choose the right one.

At this point in time, you do not want to choose your learning environment, rather you want to describe what the options are. That way, when you go to make a decision about learning environment you know your options.

Your learning environment should include:

- Who will be delivering instruction?
- Where can the instruction take place?
- Where are the learners & instructors located?
- What tools are available for teaching / learning?
- What costs are associated with the learning environment options?
- Are there any other constraints will impact your design?