How Are Instructional Designers Managing Their Learning Projects?

A Proposed Qualitative Inquiry

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Abstract

* Although the need for project management education and experience is reiterated in the literature and in cross-industry instructional designer job postings, it is unclear how instructional designers acquire and use project management skills/tools in their profession because project management is not a focus in many higher education programs intended to prepare instructional designers.

* The proposed phenomenological study aims to investigate the lived experiences of practicing instructional designers as project managers.

* Results will describe best practices, models, methods, tools, and technologies that instructional designers use in acquiring project management knowledge and ultimately in managing their learning design projects.

Background

* The ability to effectively manage projects to completion and consult with stakeholders such as sponsors, subject matter experts, and learners in order to keep learning design projects moving forward to completion is a vital part of an instructional designer's role (York & Ertmer, 2011).

* Williams van Rooij (2013) reported that the ability to plan and manage educational/training projects is listed among the International Board of Standards for Training, Performance, and Instruction's (IBSTI) advanced competencies for experienced instructional designers.

* With project management being reiterated as a critical success factor in the literature and in practice and not being a significant part of instructional design-related education, it makes sense to find out how instructional designers are acquiring and using project management skills and tools.

Context

* It is suspected that many instructional designers feel ill-prepared to successfully manage learning or training projects – especially those new to their professional instructional design roles (e.g., recent graduates/hires or individuals who have recently been promoted or transitioned to the instructional design role).

* The proposed study will investigate how professional instructional designers in academia and industry learned to manage projects, how they are managing projects (e.g., what processes, methods, and tools they are using), how they feel about their preparation for and practicing of project management, how these factors relate, and what pertinent recommendations they have for their peers.

Problem Statement

What?

* Research is limited on the experiences of professional instructional designers regarding how they acquire project management skills, manage learning design projects, and their perspectives on doing so.

* With higher education instructional design-related curricula generally not including courses in project management , it is unknown how or if they are acquiring these skills on a consistent basis (Williams van Rooij , 2011).

How, Where, and When?

* There is a disconnect between what instructional designers are expected to know about managing projects in the field and how they are being prepared to do so in higher education.

* Instructional designers are plausibly not being positioned to be as successful in the project management aspect of their role as they could be, which can lead to failed projects – regardless of how successful the designs are.

Problem Statement

Why?

* Project management is often not sufficiently covered in higher education programs focused on preparing instructional designers.

* Examples:

  * Williams van Rooij (2011) reported that there are 765 educational technology graduate programs in the U.S. focused on preparing students for careers in instructional design. Yet, higher education instructional design curricula generally do not include formal courses in project management.

  * In order to address the reiterated gap, Pan (2012) offered an integrated view of how marrying project management, instructional systems design (ISD), and ISD education would better prepare instructional designers for practice.

  * This gap between preparation and practice is reiterated in the literature (Klein & Jun, 2014; MacLean & Scott, 2011; Tracey and Boling, 2014; Williams van Rooij, 2013; York and Ertmer, 2011).

Goal

* To describe the lived experiences of practicing instructional designers as project managers, confirm factors that influence how instructional designers manage projects, and identify factors that influence how they feel about managing their projects and their preparation to do so.

* By gaining a better understanding of how instructional designers are managing their projects, recommendations for preparing instructional designers to work in industry will be offered.

* Achievement of the goal will be measured by the offering of recommendations for the preparation and practice of instructional design project management, based on the experiences reiterated by the study participants.

Research Questions

There are two overarching research questions:

* How are instructional designers managing their projects?
* How do instructional designers feel about their experiences managing projects? (Which includes how they feel about their preparation, experiences, and the methods, models, and tools they use.)

Sub-questions include:

* What are the responsibilities of instructional designers as managers of projects?
* How are instructional designers being prepared to manage their projects?
* What common challenges do instructional designers face when managing learning design projects?
* What models, methods, tools, and technologies do instructional designers use to manage their projects? How do instructional designers feel about using these resources and their associated outcomes?
* What recommendations, best practices, or examples can instructional designers offer to help their peers successfully manage learning design projects?

Themes from the Literature Review

The literature review focused on three key areas: instructional design competencies, project management and instructional design, and project management methodologies.

The literature review:

* Substantiated the importance of project management in the field of instructional design.
* Defined the competencies required to serve as an instructional designer (from both project management and design perspectives).
* Described the methods and models that are being used to manage projects (both in instructional design and in other industries).
* Reiterated a gap in the literature regarding how instructional design and project management converge.
* Underscored the fact that no other known study has captured the voices of instructional designers and translated their shared experiences in managing projects into actionable recommendations.

Proposed Research Method

Research Approach

* The proposed study will utilize a transcendental phenomenological approach. Transcendental phenomenology is a study of the appearance of things, or phenomena, as they appear to us in our consciousness (Moustakas, 1994).
* The phenomenon of focus is the instructional designers' lived experiences in managing their learning design projects. The general approach will consist of:
  * Epoché – consciously considering any possible presuppositions and planning how to avoid letting them impact perceptions; self-reflection during the research process
  * Ethical identification and obtaining of consent from participants
  * Data collection, conducting a series of interviews – exploration of the phenomenon with a diverse sample of instructional designers and describing what is gathered
  * Data analysis and synthesis – the identification of significant statements , clusters of meaning, and synthesis
  * Description of the phenomenon – A written description of the essence of the instructional designers' lived experiences in managing their learning design projects and the resulting recommendations

Proposed Research Method

Research Design

Describe the lived experiences of instructional designers in managing projects and identify factors that influence how they manage projects and how they feel about managing projects. The following illustrates the proposed research design:
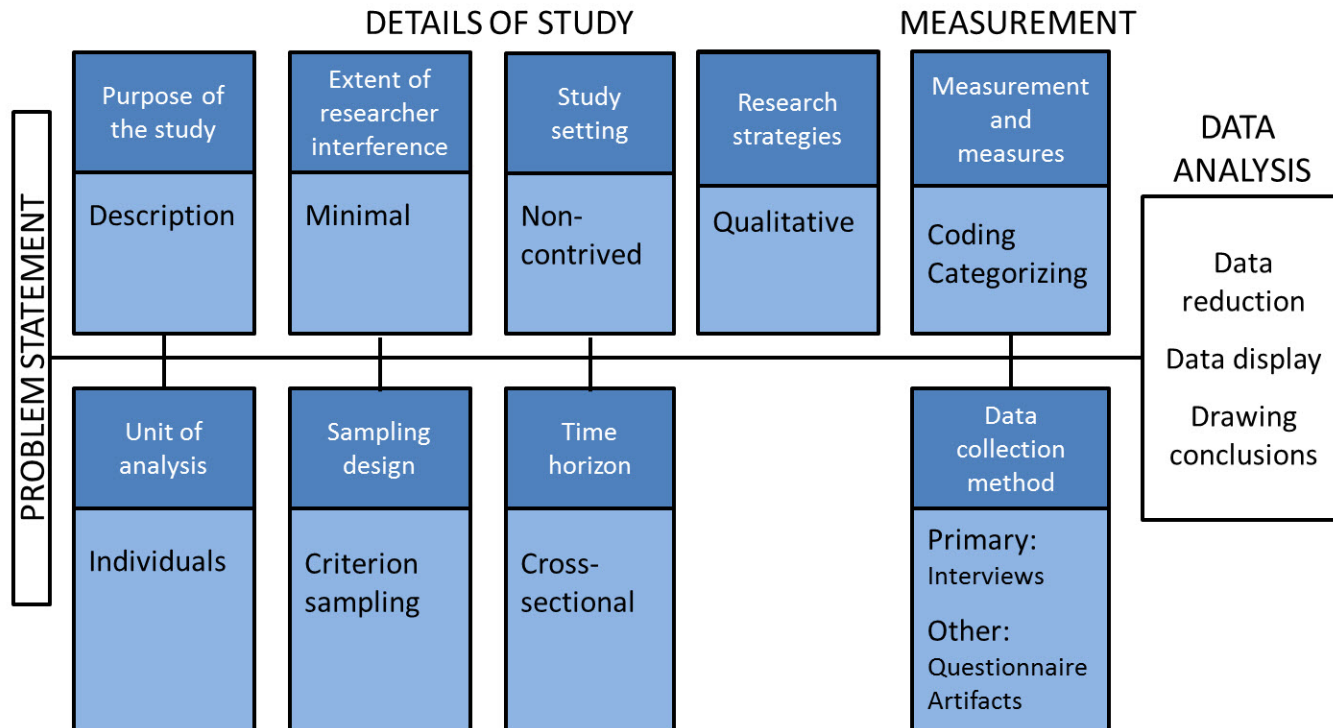
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