

Elevating Organizational Leadership Through Thoughtful Instructional Design: A Case for Instructional Design Integration, Not Segregation.

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ADDIE

Instructional Design

Organizational Leadership

Training Design

What is the process for, and the impact of, teaching instructional design (training design) to organizational leaders? Organizational Leadership and Instructional Design are often seen as two separate, distinct entities. However, organizational leadership and instructional design often intersect and/or have a necessary interplay. While organizational leaders focus on strategic direction, development, and overall success of an organization, instructional designers focus on the highly intentional, intricate crafting of learning experiences (and other practices) that are part of, and often critical to, achieving organizational direction, development, and success. This article outlines how the instructional design process was used to analyze, design, develop, implement, and evaluate a course called Training Interventions - an instructional systems design course that would become part of the core curriculum for an undergraduate Organizational Leadership Program. The title of the article has double meaning - meant to reflect both the course's

purpose (developing strategic, thoughtful leaders through the learning of instructional design process) and the process used to create it (the application of instructional design process to designing and developing a course that teaches instructional design process). In addition to the process of designing the course, the outcomes and potential implications of teaching leaders (from different fields) systematic, thoughtful instructional design processes and principles is discussed. More specifically, the article concludes with a discussion on the implications of integrating instructional design into other curriculums, as opposed to its more traditional segregation.

Article Contents

This article is broken down into three main parts, followed by a conclusion.

Part I: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation (ADDIE)

- How instructional design process (ID) guided the design and development of the course

Part II: Reflections

- Reflections and Updates After Two Cohorts

Part III: Elevating Organizational Leadership Through Thoughtful Instructional Design

- Implications of Integrating (not Segregating) Instructional Design in Leadership Curriculum

This article is not a research article. While the processes and principles are rooted in instructional design research and practices, this article is written from the perspective of the reflective practitioner - who has both formally studied instructional design and continuously learns about and practices the application of instructional design practices and principles.

Part I: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation (ADDIE)

ADDIE, an acronym that represents a standard set of stages inherent in most current course design models, has been used across a wide range of disciplines and has been applied in diverse ways, across a broad scope of projects (Cheung, 2016; Handrianto et al, 2021; Instructional Design Central, n.d.; Kurt, 2018;). Although often depicted as linear or sequential, the five stages of ADDIE are understood to be iterative, with each stage informing the other and subject to individual interpretations

(Molenda, 2015). For this article, the stages are presented in order. However, in practice, the design of this course was highly iterative, with multiple feedback loops informing revisions of other stages.

Background and Challenge

In the Fall of 2023, I was asked to design, develop, and teach a course called Training Interventions, a new course that would be a required course in a new Organizational Leadership (OL) program. The OL curriculum would consist of 41 hours of general education courses, 54 hours of core (major) courses, and 25 hours of elective courses. These courses would cover a variety of topics, strategically chosen, meant to build foundational knowledge and skills in the key areas that affect an organization. These would include courses in management, leadership, human resources, finance, legal, ethics, performance improvement, training intervention design, evaluation, conflict resolution, and more.

Of the 54 hours of core (major) courses, three of these courses would be instructional systems design courses (ISD). The three ISD courses would be ISD 340: Analysis, Assessment, and Evaluation, ISD 450: Human Performance Technology, and ISD 320: Training Interventions. The only order requirement for the ISD courses was that ISD 340 had to be taken prior to ISD 450. Training Interventions could be taken when offered and according to student need.

The focus of the Training Interventions course would be to provide students with experience in designing and developing training interventions in various organizational contexts - as opposed to other types of interventions.

While a course by the same name had existed at the university years before, it had been for a different program and had little-to-no remaining materials. In addition, while the course would be a core, required course for Organizational Leadership students, the course would also grow to be open to students from other programs.

Therefore, the project challenge was to create, from scratch, a brand new course that would teach a variety of students how to systematically design training.

Analysis

For this course, several things were analyzed:

- Instructional goal (course goal)
- Instructional content
- Learners
- Context(s)
 - Learning context (the context in which the student would be learning)
 - Performance context (the context in which students would eventually use what they learned).

Instructional Goal

The following Course Description was provided: This course will provide students with experience in designing and developing facilitator-lead training interventions focused on improving performance in various contexts. Students will interact with a client in a professional manner and create a professional training session incorporating motivational strategies, instructional delivery methods, and appropriate assessment measures from initial contact needs assessment to final session evaluations (University of South Alabama, 2023).

While the course description provided an overarching goal, it left a broad interpretation, and thus a wide range of possibilities for designing the course. Therefore, the course description would need to be broken down to its individual components and

converted into clear, properly formatted, performance objectives.

Instructional Content

Analysis of instructional content yielded little results. A course by the same name had existed many years before but had been part of a discontinued undergraduate instructional design program. The prior course shell was shared; however, little-to-no existing materials remained. In addition, there was no required, pre-selected textbook and no pre-determined learning objectives.

Learners

There was no opportunity to specifically analyze detailed characteristics of the future learners. However, discussion with the program chair indicated that students would come from a wide variety of backgrounds, would have varying levels of professional experience, and would have varying contexts in which they would ultimately use this course and their respective degrees. The course would be required for students in the undergraduate Organizational Leadership program; however, it was indicated that students from other programs would also be able to take the course in the future.

Based on this information and level of course, it would be assumed that the majority of students would have no prior knowledge of systematic problem analysis, instructional design, or related topics.

Context(s)

Learning Context. The course would need to be fully online, offered asynchronously, and would span eight weeks. The eight weeks would include one week of a scheduled break, Fall or Spring Break, depending on the semester offered. In short, the course needed to be experienced as an independent, yet guided and supported, learning experience.

Performance Context. Due to the variety of students who would be in the course, there would be no specific performance context to guide the design, only the assumed goal of using what was learned in the course to achieve the goal of improving performance, through a training intervention, in an organizational setting.

Design: From Analysis to Design

Instructional Goal: Choosing a Framework

To achieve the course goal, as indicated in the course description, the initial step was to determine, if possible, a framework that could help provide an underlying structure for the course.

ADDIE. The instructional design field has numerous models, frameworks, and approaches from which learning professionals pull from to do their work. However, this course, as noted, would need to be created for non-instructional design professionals - offering diverse students an introductory experience in the world of systematically designing training. Based on what was discovered during analysis, it was determined that the ADDIE framework, the same framework used to guide the design of this course, would also provide an ideal, foundational framework for the students to learn throughout the course. ADDIE (analyze, design, develop, implement, and evaluate) would offer a straightforward set of steps from which to customize for their individual uses and audiences.

ADDIE Plus a Training Proposal. In addition to the ADDIE framework, it was decided that students would benefit from, and thus be required to, write a professional proposal for their training interventions. By having students simultaneously address the components of a professional proposal, while designing their training, this would further help them organize and articulate their findings. It would help them demonstrate, in a professional manner, their ability to use data to inform decisions about how to improve performance.

The intentional choice of these two, parallel frameworks provided the following benefits:

- Provided an effective learning path and ideal sequence for achieving the course goal
- Introduced an introductory model to non-instructional design professionals
- Provided an anchor from which to incorporate additional concepts that would fit within each major phase of ADDIE and/or component of a proposal (ex: motivational strategies)
- Created a visible, reinforcing framework.
 - Using the five stages of ADDIE to frame the course, which included purposefully naming each week's module after the five main stages, would create a reinforcing effect since students would see the five stages repeatedly as they worked through each week's specific stage.
- Creation of two professional, real-world products: a strategically designed training intervention plan and a professional training proposal for that intervention.
 - Students would subsequently be able to use these products for future employment and/or opportunities within their existing organizations.

Alignment

Table 1 demonstrates the alignment between the course's frameworks: the course description (goal), the ADDIE model stages, and the components of a professional training proposal. The first column outlines the components of the course, extracted from the course description. Column two outlines the stages (components) of the ADDIE model. Column three outlines the typical components of a training proposal. The table shows how corresponding components of each framework align to achieve the stated goal of the course.

Table 1

Course Frameworks Alignment Table

Components			
Framework	Course Description Components	ADDIE Components	Training Proposal Components
	Training intervention (proposal)	Professionalism	Executive Summary
	Professional interaction	Analyze	Background and needs assessment
	Needs assessment		
	Professional training session	Design	Training program objectives
	Motivational strategies	Design	Training program design and content
	Instructional delivery methods	Development	
	Assessment measures		
	Instructional delivery Methods	Implementation	Training schedule and logistics
		Implementation	Project budget and resources

Session evaluations	Evaluation	Evaluation and metrics
Conclusion and call to action		

Course Objectives and Instructional Content

From these three frameworks, course description, ADDIE, and the components of a training proposal, the following overall course objectives were determined:

Upon completion of the course, the student will be able to:

1. Explain the role of training and training interventions in organizations
2. Define and describe the ADDIE approach to training design and development
3. List, define, and describe the components of a training proposal
4. Using the ADDIE approach, design and develop a professional, facilitator-led training plan and proposal for improving performance in an identified organizational context.
 - The plan and proposal will incorporate key aspects of training design (clearly stated training goal, clear and properly formatted objectives, appropriate assessment measures, relevant training content, motivational strategies, optimal delivery methods, and evaluations) and will be based on an initial assessment of need(s).
5. Explain why an organizational leader should understand training and training interventions
6. Explain the benefits of using a structured approach to improve performance in the organizational context
7. Explain why ADDIE or an ISD approach is an optimal framework for addressing organizational performance problems

From these overall course objectives, unit-specific (weekly) objectives, derived from and mapped back to these overall course objectives, were created to anchor and direct weekly content. These weekly objectives, through intentionally chosen learning outcome levels, were used to guide learning content, practice/application activities, engagement strategies, and weekly assignments. Weekly assignments were strategically designed to build toward the final assignment.

Development

Custom Content

As opposed to requiring students to purchase and review multiple resources (books, sites, etc), custom PDF documents/lectures were created. Content was carefully selected, custom curated, well-organized, and included only relevant information. This was intentional and meant to help students focus exclusively on limited, specifically and intentionally chosen, key information - such as instructional design process (ADDIE) and related concepts.

In addition, course materials were created using intentionally chosen document templates with a consistent color palette, font, and visuals to provide a unique and personal learning experience throughout the course.

Further, there was the intentional use of task consistency. Specifically, within each weekly module, students were asked to perform four consistent tasks: review the week's content, complete a quiz, participate in discussion, and complete an assignment. Each one of these items had an intentional purpose and required them to dive deeper into one or more elements of their training plans and proposal. This consistency would also allow students to anticipate weekly tasks and to maximize their time management.

Finally, while creating the course materials, deliberate effort went into honoring and aligning with Mayer's multimedia principles (Bruning, et al., 2011; Digital Learning Institute, n.d.).

These included:

- Use of signaling through arrows, bold fonts, and strategic use of colors to align concepts (signaling principle)
- Purposefully placing images near its related texts (spatial and temporal contiguity principles)
- Careful selection of specific content and concepts for each week, broken down into manageable segments (segmenting principle)
- Including an advanced organizer, detailed recap, in the beginning of each week to connect previous learning with new material to be learned (pre-training principle)
- Intentional use of both training specific and conversational language and consistent efforts to have them link what they were learning with their own goals of becoming organizational leaders (personalization principle)
- Finding opportunities to include the instructor's (my) personal voice, through personalized videos and using voice or video feedback (voice principle)

Implementation

In addition to the learning strategies noted above, the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework was utilized, with multiple opportunities for engaging cognitive, social, and instructor presence included throughout. These opportunities included, but were not limited to, exploration and application of each stage of ADDIE, multiple activities that required meaningful engagement with other students in the course, an intentional use of voice or video feedback on assignments for more personalization and instructor presence, and multiple opportunities to meet with the instructor. Use of the CoI framework facilitates online community building, which has been shown to increase quality of learning, engagement, and motivation (Flock, 2020).

To help the students pace themselves and to stay focused on fully immersing in the specific phase of the ID process, modules would be set to open up one week at a time. Also, key items, such as discussions, were made where students had to post first before seeing others' comments. This allowed for original thinking and to allow the instructor, myself, to have an opportunity to see where concepts needed clarification. This also allowed students to develop and articulate their own unique perspective.

Evaluation(s)

Course Evaluations would occur in the following forms:

- Informal evaluation through direct student feedback
- Observation of students' ability to engage with content and achieve the performance goals (objectives)
- Improvement in students' ability to apply concepts over time, as evidenced by tracking their progress on assignments (and other coursework)
- Students' ability to connect concepts and processes learned to personal and professional goals
- Student questions and comments during optional Zoom meetings
- Formal, end-of-semester evaluations conducted by the university

Additional Strategies Utilized and Rationale

- To create ownership of learning, students would be required to determine their own training topics (projects), in their own chosen organizations. Research by Khatter et al. (2024) noted that these types of student-centered teaching practices "substantially improved student involvement with the learning process" (p. 291).

- To keep students focused on the instructional design process first and applying it to the designing of their training interventions, the professional proposal assignment would be introduced in week seven. This was intended to help avoid overwhelming the students with trying to learn two frameworks simultaneously and based on the instructor's knowledge that the elements of designing the training would be the building blocks/foundation of the professional proposal assignment.
- To facilitate transfer of learning and promote reflection on projective (future) identities, students would be asked to explicitly articulate their desired identities and goals as leaders (Shen et al., 2024).
- To help students situate this course in relation to the other two instructional design courses required in the OL program, there was the intentional act of linking (noting) where this course fell in the sequence.
 - Since there would be three required instructional design courses in the program, with each one emphasizing different areas of the process, it felt important to explicitly point out where each course fell in the process of training and performance improvement. This would also serve to better understand why this course placed more emphasis on designing a training than more depth on performance analysis and evaluation (the focus of the other two courses).
- The course site was deliberately designed to provide clarity on expectations and clear navigation. Special steps were taken to remove any confusing directions and to provide the students with a clear learning path through the course site. This required, in some ways, a deviation from course templates that were customary for the university. It was felt that some of the template features included distracting items that could take students away from the intentional path that was created for them. Therefore, adjustments were made when possible.

Part II: Reflections and Updates After Two Cohorts

Reflections

While there have been numerous lessons learned (reflections) after two cohorts, the following represents major reflections.

Course frameworks

The choice of course frameworks, ADDIE plus a professional proposal, proved to be a good choice. The ADDIE framework, as intended, provided an easy-to-understand set of five main stages. The proposal, although not introduced as an assignment until week seven, aligned with and made use of the work already done throughout the course, while adding the additional skill of proposing their systematically designed training. In short, the two frameworks were complimentary.

In addition, as initially indicated, students outside the Organizational Leadership program joined the course. This provided an opportunity to evaluate the design of the course, including course frameworks, with a broader audience. Fortunately, this possibility had already been considered in the original course design. As designed, students were given the opportunity to select the performance problem they would like to address through training, which allowed me to help guide them in their unique context, while keeping true to the process of instructional/training design - which is field agnostic.

Video and Examples

Students in the course indicated, both through direct request, or in evaluations, that including more videos and examples was extremely helpful for understanding course concepts.

Asynchronous vs Real-Time

Although developed to be fully online and with robust resources, students' responses and subsequent clarity and performance were positively impacted with individualized, real-time attention (via Zoom or phone). This implies the need to include and

encourage more real-time interactions with students, even in fully asynchronous courses.

Diverse Student Types & Versatility of Training Design Process

Although the course is required for Organizational Leadership majors, as originally indicated, enrollment has drawn a wide range of undergraduates from different disciplines and life stages. In the two cohorts thus far, student types have ranged from traditional-age students, including athletes aspiring to become professional players, coaches, or managers - to mid-career professionals seeking advancement in corporate, healthcare, or educational leadership. For example, one student had over 25 years of leadership experience, another was a small business owner in the beauty industry, and one was a later-in-life, local politician and entrepreneur returning to finish a degree. This diversity of backgrounds created a unique environment for discussing training design and its versatile application in varied organizational contexts.

Student Efforts in Relation to Type

There was a noticeable difference, across both cohorts, in effort, comprehension, and performance (quality of work) between different student types. While a legitimate, well-designed study would be needed to study further, there were numerous observational findings.

Those students who had more professional experience, were currently or had previously been in leadership roles, and/or who were actively in pursuit of leadership roles performed better in all aspects of the course and learning experience. They asked more questions, sought and used feedback, attended optional Zoom class meetings, elaborated on concepts, and provided higher quality assignment submissions. Students with little-to-no professional experience, or students who enrolled in the course for other reasons, demonstrated significantly less effort and had poorer outcomes in the course - despite being provided with extensive, highly personalized feedback, assignment templates, and optional Zoom or phone meetings.

Updates

Quality Enhancement

The university began a campus-wide initiative, which included a quality enhancement plan that focuses on helping students connect their experiences in and out of the classroom. This includes designing courses in a way that includes, and makes explicit, skills that are considered valuable in the workplace (University of South Alabama, 2025).

After the initial implementation of the course, I attended a 4-day workshop (mini-course) and also participated in a faculty learning community related to this initiative. Revisions made to the course after attending included:

- A Career-Focused Course Mission Statement that made explicit to students what skills they will practice and a “big-picture” question that helps them think about the course and how the skills will help them in their careers.
- Career-Focused Learning Objectives for the course that described what students would be able to do after the course.
- Use of a “Transparent Assignment Framework” that explicitly outlined the purpose, task, and criteria for an assignment.
- Reflection activities (while not an addition, the existing use of reflection was noted to be in alignment with the initiative and was noted in the design).
- Links to career development resources provided by the university, provided at key points throughout; especially the introduction to the concept of eportfolios, which helps students articulate how their program and experiences relate to their readiness for their next steps in their career. Portfolios also help students demonstrate the skills learned and work completed. This course provides students with two portfolio-worthy deliverables: a training design blueprint and professional proposal that are ideal for inclusion in portfolios/eportfolios.

Part III: Elevating Organizational Leadership Through Thoughtful Instructional Design

Implications of Integrating Instructional Design into Leadership Curriculum

Leaders sit in unique positions: they must influence people across the organization, identify problems, determine solutions, and ensure alignment between learning initiatives and strategic goals. They are tasked with problem-solving, ethical decision-making, adapting to change, analyzing and addressing performance issues, building culture, engaging diverse teams, and planning for both the short- and long-term future of the organization (Boyles, 2024).

In each of these areas, training and development plays a critical role. High-quality training improves employee performance, enhances business outcomes, fosters innovation, aids in succession planning, boosts recruitment and retention, and helps reduce risks such as injuries (Association for Talent Development, n.d.). For leaders, the awareness of the critical role that training and development plays in an organization's success means the need to also identify, empower, and collaborate with experts, such as instructional designers, who can design and develop this training - and with excellence.

In prior research on collaborations, it was found that the involvement of leadership in the process of course design collaborations was key for a multitude of reasons (Rhodes, 2024). Similar to these findings, this course shows how integration of instructional design and leadership has many positive implications. It helps move away from treating leadership and learning as separate silos. It helps leaders see, and thus approach training and development as, integral to organizational performance. It helps leaders gain a deeper understanding of the complexity and necessity of high-quality design. It helps leaders strengthen their ability to discern between surface-level and meaningful training and to develop a greater appreciation for the professionals whose work strengthens the organization. It shows how instructional design (and thus instructional designers) can be recognized as valuable and necessary partners in problem-solving and in achieving strategic organizational goals.

Conclusion

Training Interventions is a course currently offered both as a core course for an undergraduate OL program and as an elective for students in other programs. The two tangible outcomes of this course are: a training intervention, designed using systematic instructional design processes and principles, and a professional training proposal.

The custom design and development of Training Interventions was outlined in this article and demonstrates how a systematic instructional design process (ADDIE) was used in multiple ways: to create the course, as a foundational instructional design framework taught in the course, and as a valuable skill that elevates leadership collaboration and practice.

Evaluations from two cohorts, obtained through direct student feedback, observed student performance, and end-of-course evaluations, yielded largely positive responses and were used to further refine the course.

Beyond the design features, this article highlights the benefits of extending instructional design's reach beyond its more traditional segregated history and shows how integration of instructional design theories, principles, frameworks, and models into leadership curriculum elevates leadership in multiple ways. Leaders are increasingly called to address complex challenges that often require learning solutions. Exposing them to, and equipping them with, foundational instructional design knowledge not only enables them to better discern training needs, but also encourages them to seek collaborative partnerships with

learning professionals (such as instructional designers) and helps them see systematically designed training as a powerful lever for organizational growth. The integration of instructional design principles into leadership curriculum fosters more thoughtful, evidence-based approaches to organizational development and elevates both leadership and learning in the process.

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