AI Practice Tool for Action Mapping Conversations Case Study

PROBLEM

Not every instructional designer on the team had regular opportunities to participate in or lead needs analysis conversations with stakeholders. For newer instructional designers, this made it difficult to build confidence asking the right questions during discovery meetings. Even more experienced IDs sometimes had limited exposure to the front-end analysis phase, depending on their role or the projects they supported.

Because these conversations do not happen often enough for everyone to practice consistently, there was a gap in developing one of the most important consulting skills in instructional design: identifying the true business need before recommending a training solution. Team members needed a realistic way to practice asking performance-focused questions, uncovering business goals, and applying action mapping principles in a safe environment.

SOLUTION

To address this need, I created a scenario-based AI practice tool in ChatGPT that simulates a realistic stakeholder conversation. The experience allows instructional designers to practice needs analysis and action mapping conversations by asking questions, interpreting responses, and uncovering the business goal through dialogue.

Instead of reviewing a static checklist or reference guide, learners engage in a realistic back-and-forth interaction that mirrors the kinds of conversations they may encounter in real project work. This gives them an opportunity to rehearse how to guide a discussion, ask stronger follow-up questions, and avoid jumping too quickly to a training recommendation.

The tool was designed to support both newer instructional designers who are still building confidence and more experienced IDs who want additional practice facilitating early-stage discovery conversations. By creating a repeatable, low-risk practice experience, the tool helps strengthen skills that are essential to performance consulting but not always easy to develop on the job.

DESIGN PROCESS

I began by identifying the specific performance gap: instructional designers needed more opportunities to practice the questioning and analysis skills required in needs analysis meetings.

Since the goal was to build conversational skill rather than deliver information, I chose a scenario-based approach that would allow learners to practice responding in context.

Next, I defined the behaviors the tool should help users practice. These included identifying the business goal, distinguishing symptoms from root causes, clarifying desired performance, and determining whether training was the appropriate solution. From there, I mapped out the structure of the simulated conversation and considered what a realistic stakeholder would know, say, and reveal throughout the interaction.

I then built the experience in ChatGPT by creating a custom GPT designed to play the role of a stakeholder. I wrote and refined the prompt instructions to shape the tone, context, and flow of the conversation so that users would need to ask thoughtful questions to uncover the full picture. My goal was to make the interaction feel realistic enough to support authentic practice while still guiding learners toward action mapping habits.

After building the first version, I tested the tool by running sample conversations and reviewing how well the responses supported the intended learning experience. I revised the prompt to improve realism, consistency, and challenge level, making sure the stakeholder would not reveal key information too quickly or make the conversation overly easy. Through this iterative process, I refined the tool into a reusable practice experience that instructional designers could return to whenever they wanted to strengthen their needs analysis skills.

TOOLS USED

- ChatGPT
- Custom GPT design

OUTCOME

This project created a practical way for instructional designers to rehearse a high-value skill that is often difficult to practice consistently in live work. By simulating stakeholder conversations, the tool gives learners a more realistic way to build confidence and improve their questioning strategy before participating in actual discovery meetings.

It also demonstrates how AI can be used as a learning experience tool, not just a content-generation tool. Rather than using AI to produce information, I used it to design a practice environment that supports skill development through reflection, decision-making, and dialogue.

REFLECTION

This project reinforced the importance of designing for application, not just knowledge. Needs analysis is not a skill people build by memorizing a list of questions; it improves through

practice, judgment, and real-time decision-making. Creating this tool pushed me to think carefully about how to simulate authentic stakeholder behavior and how to design an experience that encouraged deeper questioning rather than surface-level responses.

It also helped me explore how generative AI can support learning in meaningful ways when it is grounded in a clear performance need and paired with an intentional instructional strategy.