This reflection focused on Erin Kenney`s talk about her experience in the private sector scheduled on October 13rd. The talk was one of three sections offered until that date that provided practical insights into what is really going on in business in terms of instructional design and performance development. These included but were not limited to learning, technology, and creation aspects of coming up with a product a client ask for. All of these were helpful to gain better insights into what will be waiting for us after graduation.

To begin with, it was interesting to note that Erin`s company is dealing with a lot of clients from quite different business sectors including markets, industries, solutions delivery centers, and governmental units. It seemed to me that at the heart of all this busy work was the company`s focus on change and talent management that seems to be needed by both governmental clients and private ones. Needless to say, as Erin also highlighted, improving the business performance of their clients through improving performance of workers was the basic strategy TIER1 implements. Furthermore, I think what is implied in the talent and change management phrase is totally in line with the iterative nature of the business sector. It also implies that the TIER1 has an outstanding philosophy of unearthing “talent” of their clients instead of leading them to learning some additional skills. I think this is also the reason why Erin said that they focus on the individuals and work with them individually in order to improve the performance of the overall company.

Another intriguing thing about this talk was the stages followed in performance improvement and their corresponding teams. The navigation stage where TIER1 starts to communicate with the client and build a long-term relationship seemed to me to be quite strategic and effective. The reason is the company starts to build a relationship with the client that goes beyond the mere company-client relationship and gains a long-term characteristic. This closely ties to what the company further does based on their modified version of “analysis, design, development, implementation, evaluation” instructional design model. It was clear that, in instructional design, you may need to deal with surprising factors that might show up (dependent on timeline, what a client asks for etc.) especially if you have many clients at the same time. Therefore, setting professional and long term relationships with the clients seems to be of utmost importance.

I think the point that the company uses its own modified version of the ADDIE model should be reflected on carefully since it shows how to connect academia with real-life business sector. The company uses its own model that depends on an existing academic model, which shows that academic work in the field of instructional design provides insights into practice of it. Still though, the company uses its own “modified” version implying that instructional design is such a dynamic field and job that you may need to come up with your own insights based on what is already available in the field. I felt that this was especially obvious in the work of learning and technology teams, which peaks for the creative team including graphic designers. All these raise interesting questions for research agenda. For instance, determinations of how such performance companies can and actually change already-existing instructional modes to fit what they do and what this would suggest for academia would be an interesting research to conduct. In the broadest sense, it seems that conducting research on what is really going on in actual practice of instructional design would contribute to academic or intellectual understanding of the field and how that understanding would further benefit the actual practice.

Finally, Erin mentioned the course she took during her MS in our program, which was really important and helpful for me. I took the idea of EDCI 528 Human Performance Improvement as an elective and I will put it on my graduate plan of study, for example. It was also encouraging to hear that it is generally the ones with a PhD degree who leads the decisions and strategies in the private sector. This was closely in line with the surprising fact that instructional design or performance improvement companies actually do conduct research to facilitate both their own performance and their products. All these also made me optimistic about what I would do if I choose a different career path other than academia.