

ToP Design Pattern	Setting the Context	June 2009
Name	Setting the Context ¹	
Overview	<p>This Design Pattern will result in preparing people to engage in a event. It provides a starting point for the entire group. It involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Describing the situation ▪ Clarifying the Outcome ▪ Stating why the outcome is important ▪ Suggesting how to proceed ▪ Sharing the Concrete Starting Point² ▪ Asking for consensus to move forward with the work 	
Metaphor	Gathering at the start of an adventure	
Graphic		
Level of thinking	This Design Pattern is primarily at the Objective Level	
Pattern of Collaboration	This is focused on clarifying.	
Role	<p>Setting the context helps the group start their work together and then stay together as the work proceeds. It provides a consistent reference point in answer to but limited to the following questions³:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why are we doing this work? ▪ Where will the results of the work fit into existing work or projects? ▪ What will be done with the results? 	
Best uses	This Design Pattern is best used at the beginning of any ToP process. The design pattern is designed to solve the problem of groups not know why they are about to complete a task or start or project. This method works well as the first part to any ToP related activity.	
Do not use	It would be inappropriate to omit this Design Pattern from the beginning of a ToP session.	
Group size	Any size group	

¹ The work in this Design Pattern is based in part upon the work of Priscilla H. Wilson et al from the book, **The Facilitative Way – Leadership That Makes a Difference**: 2003. See pages 66 - 70

² The work of B. Stanfield in his work, **The Art of Focused Conversation – 100 Ways to Access Group Wisdom in the Workplace**: 1997 provides insights on the importance of a Concrete Starting Point (CSP) in design of a conversation. J. Nelson in the book, **The Art of Focused Conversation for School: 2001** also emphasis the important of the CSP.

³ P. Wilson et al provide a list of completing reasons why the context is important. The list is a cross section of ideas from their work. Consult page 67.

Space needs	A space large enough for the whole group to meet. A seating arrangement that allows everyone to see the front of the room
Timeframe	15 minutes

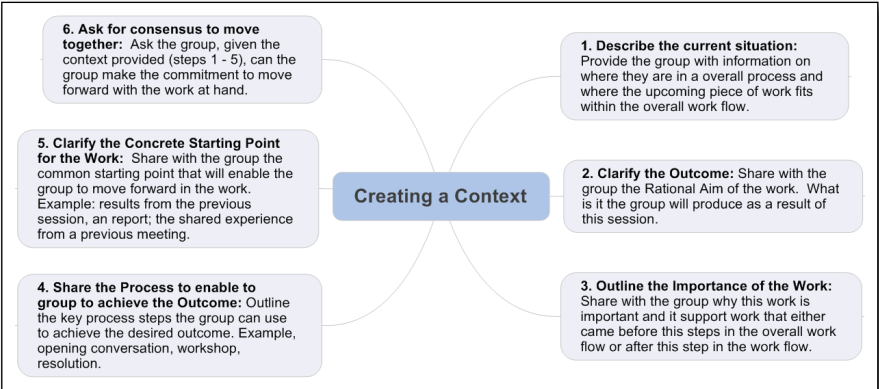
Objectives	
Rational Aim	Shared agreement to work together to achieve the rational aim using the outlined process.
Experiential Aim	The group will demonstrate their engagement by participating in the agreed up process.
Product	Consensus by the group to move forward with the identified work.

Script	
Context This is a session held with the full group at the beginning of a process. It is the sharing of information by the facilitator with the group on the work the group is about to start. The process consists of the following 6 key points ⁴ .	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe the current situation: Provide the group with information on where they are in a overall process and where the upcoming piece of work fits within the overall work flow. 2. Clarify the Outcome: Share with the group the Rational Aim of the work. What is it the group will produce as a result of this session. 3. Outline the Importance of the Work: Share with the group why this work is important and it support work that either came before this steps in the overall work flow or after this step in the work flow. 4. Share the Process to enable to group to achieve the Outcome: Outline the key process steps the group can use to achieve the desired outcome. Example, opening conversation, workshop, resolution. 5. Clarify the Concrete Starting Point for the Work: Share with the group the common starting point that will enable the group to move forward in the work. Example: results from the previous session, an report; the shared experience from a previous meeting. 6. Ask for consensus to move together⁵: Ask the group, given the context provided (steps 1 – 5), can the group make the commitment to move forward with the work at hand. 	
Groundrules	Consensus as a group to move forward is important at closing of the Context to ensure the group can engage in the identified task

Using this design pattern in a face to face environment	
Materials	A flip chart and markers to display the key points of the context

⁴ Wilson outlines the steps nicely in her book on Page 68 with five steps. Nelson and Stanfield highlight the importance of a Concrete Starting Point (CSP) which I've added as step 5. Wilson notes the order of the steps can be adapted to meet the needs of the group and item 2 and 3 could be in the form of a dialogue

⁵ In the books by Nelson and Stanfield, the term Invitation is used with the intent of asking people to engage in the process.

Preparation	Prepare the key points of the context on a flip chart to help the group “see” the context for the event.
Challenges	Avoid taking too long to complete this design and yet not enough time to allow the group to arrive a consensus to move forward.
Tips	The key in this design pattern is to move through the design in a logical order with purpose. It helps to have this material written out on a flip chart so the group can see it.
Modifications	
Using this design pattern in a virtual environment	
Virtual Tools	Mindmapping software - works well for visual reminders of the key points and for adding new points from the group VoIP - ensure the group hears from everyone on the consensus point to move forward - try polling.
Modifications	When using online technology, ensure everyone can see the screen that is being used. When using multiple screens for the main screen, turn off the other screens and run on a single screen situation.
Preparation	Provide any materials used for the concrete starting point in a pdf format to make it possible for people to open and see the materials. If the session is dynamic, display the material in a format that everyone can see.
Challenges	
Tips	Avoid power point at this stage. Try to use a web based program for the best possible display or a pdf file. Use a standard font that can be seen on all machines.
Example	<p>The following is a graphic example of a Mindjet Map for building a context. The questions identified above can be altered to make it situation specific.</p>  <p>The mind map is titled "Creating a Context" in a central blue box. Six light blue boxes branch out from the center, each containing a numbered step:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe the current situation: Provide the group with information on where they are in an overall process and where the upcoming piece of work fits within the overall work flow. 2. Clarify the Outcome: Share with the group the Rational Aim of the work. What is it the group will produce as a result of this session. 3. Outline the Importance of the Work: Share with the group why this work is important and it support work that either came before this step in the overall work flow or after this step in the work flow. 4. Share the Process to enable to group to achieve the Outcome: Outline the key process steps the group can use to achieve the desired outcome. Example, opening conversation, workshop, resolution. 5. Clarify the Concrete Starting Point for the Work: Share with the group the common starting point that will enable the group to move forward in the work. Example: results from the previous session, an report, the shared experience from a previous meeting. 6. Ask for consensus to move together: Ask the group, given the context provided (steps 1 - 5), can the group make the commitment to move forward with the work at hand.
	Figure 1- Mindmap using Mindjet for Windows

File Reference:

C:\Users\Jerry\Documents\wpdocs\ICAA_TrainingTools\ToP_ProcessMaps\DesignProcess_SettingTheContext_General_v01.doc