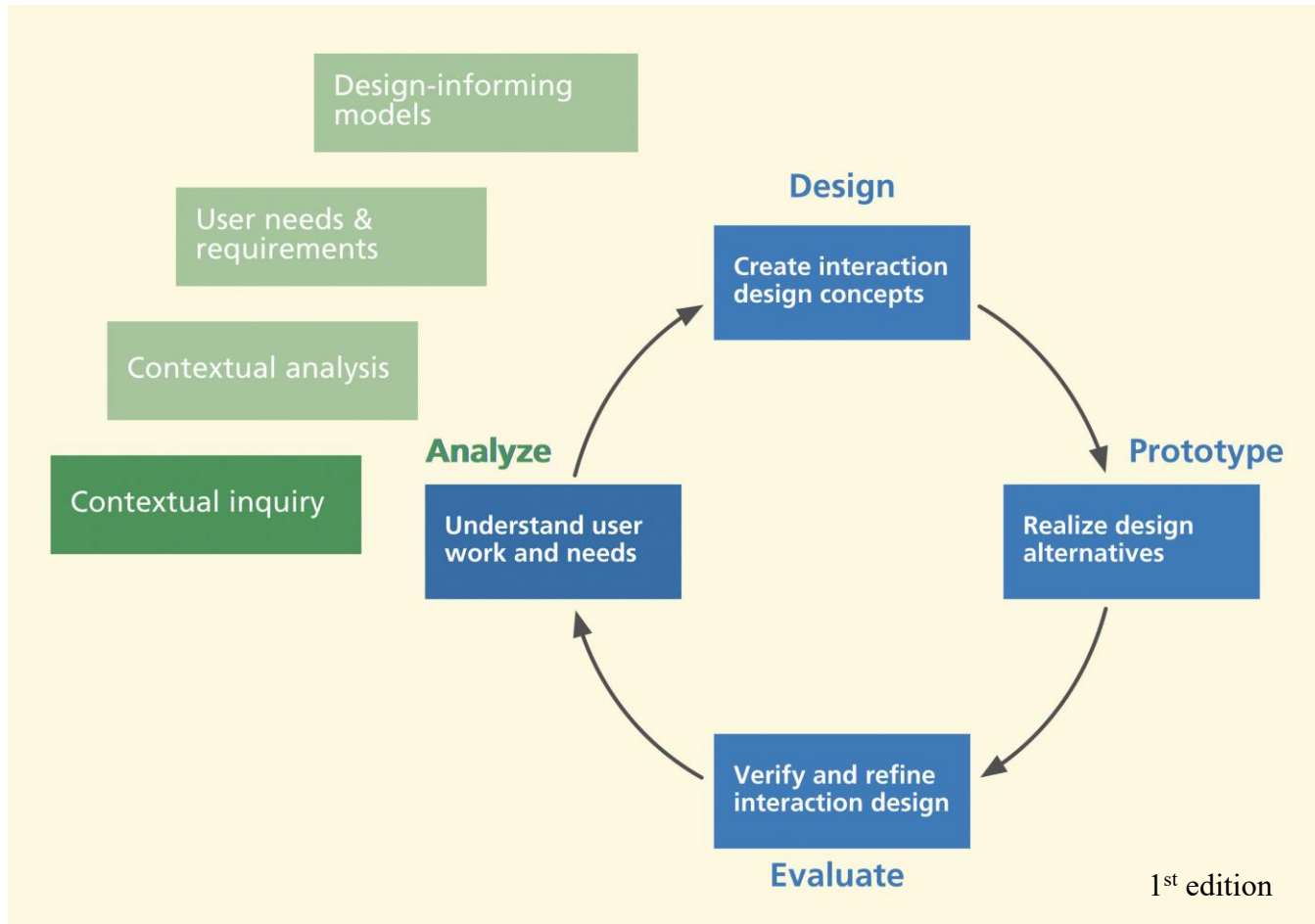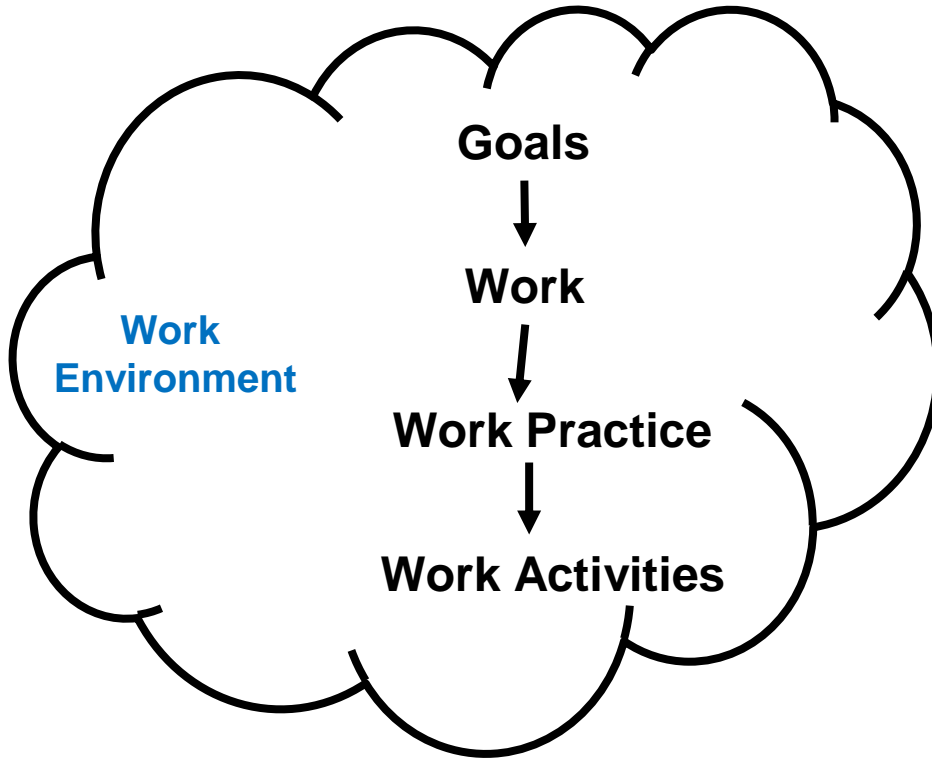# Contextual Inquiry

SWEN-444
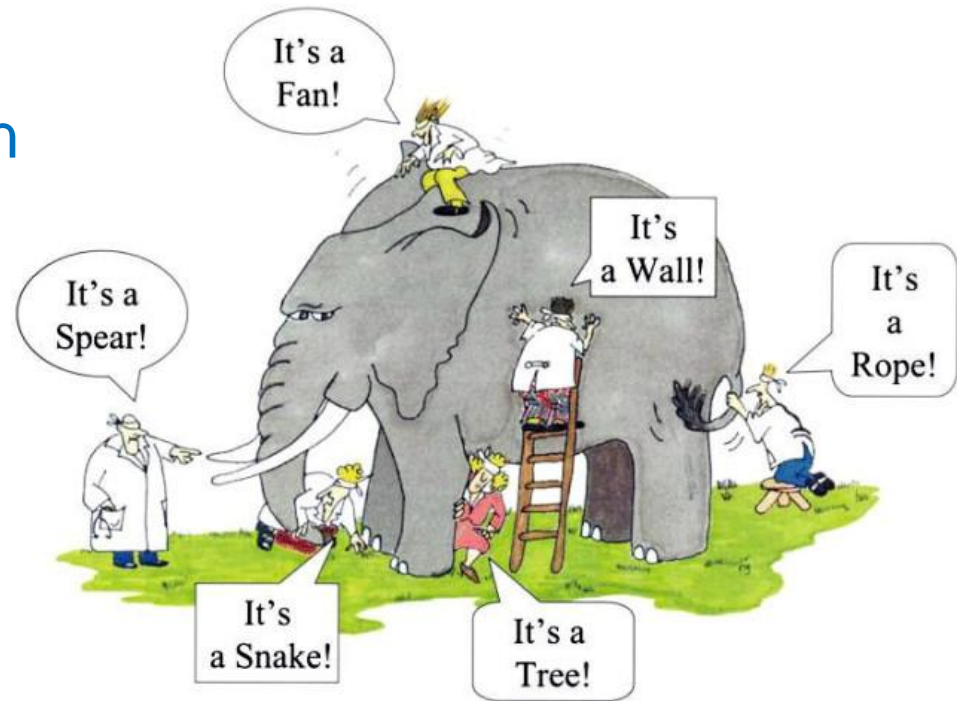
Terminology

Definitions

- **Context** - entire **context** of **work** and **work practice** in target **work environment**
- Goal: Understand customer's **work practice** – how work (play) gets done
- **Work activities** – what users do to accomplish goals in a work environment
  - **Sensory, cognitive**, and **physical** actions performed while carrying out work practice
  - **Not all activities** involve system or product usage
  - Example, using SIS to register for courses

Work Practice

- **Collection** of **work activities** performed to complete jobs
- Involves learned **skills** and **knowledge**, **decision making**, and **social interaction**
- **Work patterns** based on procedures, routines, protocols, regulations, traditional customs, ritual, and habit

Contextual Inquiry is the process of discovering what users cannot tell you.

Interview + Observation

The Flashlight, an Example of How Understanding Work Practice Paid off

"Snake light"

CI Preparation

- Do your homework – **learn** about the application **domain** and the **business**
  - Research – e.g., internal environment, market, technology, terminology, competition, current products/systems
- **Identify** stakeholders
  - Who does the work, approves the work, depends on the work, is an expert
  - Build relationships
- **Prepare** for interviews and observation
  - Validate the mission statement
  - Plan logistics – who, when, where

Tips for Interviews and Observation

- What questions do you want answered?
  - Utilize the **5W+H heuristic** – who, what, why, when, where + how
  - **Adapt** according to what you learn
  - **Goals** - what users **do**, how they **deal with problems** but also how do they "**feel**", what are their **personal goals**?
  - Identify work related **information**
  - Collect any helpful work related **artifacts**

Tips for Interviews and Observation

- **Sessions** …
  - Make the user feel at ease, explain the process
  - Don't lead the witness, have them tell "stories"
  - 1-2 hours max
  - Take **notes** (record)!!! Have an organizational scheme **("bins")** – e.g., user roles, work activity, work environment, social relationships, emotional expression, design ideas, …

- **Pitfalls** …
  - Hearing not listening
  - Side tracks
  - Your personal bias
  - Is the user speaking the truth?

"Principle: People are experts at what they do - but are unable to articulate their own work practice."

Think-pair-share

- Find one person from the people near you who is willing to share the contents of their backpack
- Have them go through the different objects and explain why they are there
- Ask questions to understand why the person needs each of these objects

Team Activity

- Devise an interview plan. What questions do you want to ask users about the system problem? Introduce your system concept as a starting point.
- How will you record/take notes during the interview? raw data notes on paper or a laptop.
- Practice by interviewing a student from another group, and then let him/her interview you
- Document the interview plan in the [Design Requirements template](#)
- Identify and contact 4 users