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An organisational design frame to support teaching professionals in designing for online learning

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The use of online and blended learning in further education puts demands on teaching institutions to produce adjustments of existing designs and in some cases to develop new design. Engaging teaching staff in development of online learning is known to be challenging in the everyday life of busy teaching institutions. Furthermore, the provision of support for teaching staff who engage in online learning is crucial and far from a trivial matter. In this project, a user-oriented methodology for learning design called the CoED method has been tried as the main method in a development project (Ryberg et al. 2015). Learning design is defined as the methodology that enables teachers or designers to make more informed decisions in designing learning activities and interventions, which are pedagogically informed and make effective use of appropriate resources and technologies (e.g. Conole 2013). Development of the teaching and learning culture in higher education institutions take place in an organisational context which needs to be reflected in strategies and methods chosen. Organisational focus has several benefits for the parties concerned:

- Teaching staff get the support, incentives and guidance for the development work. The relevance of their choices and their effort becomes clear to them.
- Students get a clear picture of what to expect in terms of teaching and learning culture, and also of what is expected from them as active learners.
- Management’s claims for specific development in the teaching and learning practice can be legitimately put forward with reference to the strategies and policies.
Based on data and experiences from the project, we have formulated an organisational design frame to guide the future development of the teaching and learning culture. The design frame describes three levels of policy, resources and procedures in the organisation:

- The strategic level, which presents the design frame defined by the organisation and the goals connected to it
- The tactical level, which describes the organisational support for elearning design, capacity building, IT-support, managerial support and interest, etc.
- The operational level, which describes the teaching and learning philosophy and clearly outlines the freedom to act for the teaching professionals

The design frame should describe overall decisions and strategic goals (e.g. increased access for students, expansion of the teaching repertoire of the staff, development of high quality online learning, etc.). The tactical level should describe how the organisation is prepared to reach the goals in question, and the operational level describes procedures, tools, methods, etc. Based on specific examples from development projects in a university college, the paper will describe challenges encountered in developing existing teaching practices in a school of continuing education in the direction of greater use of IT in teaching and learning. Furthermore, the examples illustrate how the organisational design frame needs to be adapted to suit the specific projects undertaken. To aim for general capacity seems insufficient, or in other words, it becomes important to clarify the underlying pedagogical model and principles of the online learning aimed for.

