A Framework for Institutional Design for e-Learning Promotion: A case of the University of South Pacific

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ABSTRACT

This is a report of the workshop conducted at the University of South Pacific in Fiji, by the authors of this paper, in which an institutional framework was proposed for promoting e-Learning by a university-wide center for distance and flexible learning. The authors were invited by a government supported project for information and communication technology implementation by Japan International Corporation Agency, as our second visit to the target institution. The aim was to strengthen the capacities of staff working at the distance and flexible center. The authors conducted a series of interviews to groups of staff serving different functions, from management, student support, senior designers of instructional materials, educational technologists, and production assistants. A series of workshops were then designed and conducted based on the interview results, with a help of e-Learning platform. The workshops were aimed at both staff of the center and faculty members of various colleges, to discuss future visions and action plans to promote e-Learning in that institute. A framework for institutional promotion was proposed to direct future activities of the center by incorporating all the results from the interviews and workshops. The rationales and visions are explained as to how the center should structure its activities to serve as the pivot organization within the university to better serve the leadership function for promoting for better educational provision by the systematic utilization of e-Learning infrastructure.

Keywords: workshop design, institutional strategies, e-Learning, university, Fiji

INTRODUCTION

This is a report of the workshop conducted at the University of South Pacific (USP) located in Suva, Fiji, by the authors of this paper, in which an institutional framework was proposed for promoting e-Learning by a university-wide Center for Flexible and Distance Learning (CFDL). The authors were invited as short-term (two weeks) experts to a Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA)'s technical cooperation project: Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Human Development and Human Security (http://www.jica.go.jp/fiji/english/activities/ technical06.html).

It was our second visit to the target institution. The aim of our first visit was the same as the current one; to design and deliver workshops based on a need analysis through interviews and observations. Based on the analysis of the needs, we conducted workshops on motivational analysis, instructional strategies, multimedia application, standardization of material development process, and forms for communication with faculty (course writers). It was founded in a follow-up study conducted six months after the visit that the workshop had a continuing effect in standardizing the developmental process (Nemoto, Hazelman, & Suzuki, 2007), which led to the second invitation this time.

The goal of our activities was to strengthen the capacities of staff working at CFDL. Our basic function to serve was the same, although ICT environment had been dramatically changed with broadband internet and the campus-full of facilities. Although the ODA project was mainly focused on the provision of better ICT infrastructure, in order to fully utilize the more advanced infrastructure, there was perceived need to develop capacity of the CFDL staff. It was our emphasis to make them able to recognize possible ways to enhance learning environment, from the pedagogical point of view, as well as their organizational functions to better serve for the entire institution.

NEED ASSESSMENT BY INTERVIEWS

Upon our visit, the authors first conducted a series of interviews to groups of staff serving different functions within CFDL. The interviewed group included management, student support, senior designers of instructional materials, educational technologists, and production assistants. As findings were evolved from the interviews, necessary documents were identified and reviewed accordingly. The reviewed documents included online courses on Moodle, online workshop created by CFDL for faculty, and other related paper resources. Faculty interviews were also conducted to see how the CFDL was perceived by different colleges within USP.

Table 1 shows a summary of finings from the interviews. It was found out that although Moodle was chosen as the campus-wide LMS, and the key target has been set to 50% increase in number/percentage of courses to be implemented by 2012, there has not adequate strategic additional resource allocations done by the university management. It was found that re-structuring and training of the existing staffs of CFDL, rather than hiring new one with such capacities, was the most needed. The staff was busy, but was willing to take the challenges of acquiring the new knowledge and skills necessary to serve different functions within CFDL. Therefore, workshop for skill training seemed to be the most probably solution, for which they should become capable of defining, designing, and implementing necessary online workshops, both internally and for the faculty members, as the key functionality of CFDL.

It was also noticed that the management of CFDL was not sufficient with vacancies in top positions. It is the top management of CFDL that should be able to propose new functionalities of CFDL to the university top, so that they would be given more roles and resources and act as the central leading function for the accomplishment of KPIs. It was decided to discuss big picture issues of how CFDL can position itself for the advancement of e-learning within USP.

Table 1. Key Findings from the Interviews

Groups	Current Functions, Wishes and Worries, and Needs
Instructional Designers	− New expectations of CFDL and changes required from strategic plan − Feeling uncertainty as to how much learning outcomes are assured by students − Confusion by various types of delivering method combination − Feeling the course blue print are not used appropriately − Feeling that the blue print format doesn't fit into current situation (Moodle) − Want and set online design model (both process and strategies) − Want templates for Moodle , Urge to fill the gap between DFL and F2F
Educational Technologists	− Over loaded tasks (each ET has to deal with over 60 courses) − personal dependent approaches to design and development / disunity − Time limitation, Dissatisfaction of job position , Value differences among ETs − Technology focused (They eager to develop their own skill to step up their carrier)
Production Assistants	− Uncertainness of the job role in CFDL − Feeing that their skills and knowledge are not fully utilized in CFDL − Confusion as new members in CFDL
Multimedia Production Assistants	− Willing to change their job role − Want to know the new roles and the direction of CFDL − Not delivered new job activities
Learning Assistants	− Anxiety to their unsecured position − Work under each faculty at different places, but work collaboratelly among LAs − Practices based on their own knowledge and research
Faculty	− New requirement and expectation by Strategic plan − Interested in improvement of their own courses with Moodle − Variety of learning environment where students faces − Want to know how to use new technology (OER, ebook and so on) and Moodle

THE WORKSHOP

A series of workshops were then designed and conducted based on the interview results. Moodle was used as the e-Learning platform to assist the workshop, since it was the Learning Management System (LMS) that USP decided to use as a common e-learning platform. The purpose of making the workshop as a course on Moodle was to show a better way to utilize the LMS platform when conducting a workshop, as well as to keep the record of the workshop itself for future references.

The workshops were aimed at both staff of the center and faculty members of various colleges, to discuss future visions and action plans to promote e-Learning in that institute. Based on the need analysis of the interviews, the JICA-USP Capacity Building Workshop focused on the following 4 things for CFDL staff (See Figure 1):

1. Find and share good examples of active learning using Moodle.
2. Expand the Course Design and Development Process to accommodate Moodle in online and blended formats.
3. Propose the minimum specification for the future production of print, online, and blended courses.
4. Draft a checklist for designing and conducting workshops for professional development.

Also introduced in the Faculty Workshop included the followings:

1. How to improve activities in your courses (in reference to item 1 above). --(F1)
2. How to align activities to assessment and objectives/learning outcomes for uploading to e-Portfolio. --(F2)
3. How to develop capacities of teaching staff to teach online effectively. --(F3)
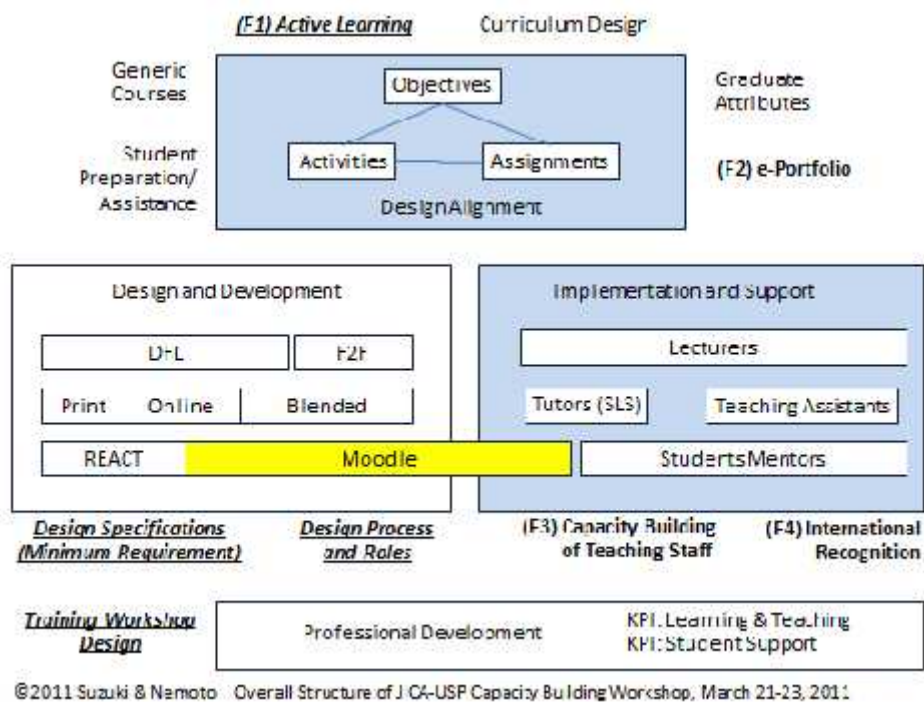4. How to get international recognition of student support at USP. --(F4)

Figure 1. Overall structure of the Workshop

THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

A framework for institutional promotion was proposed as shown in Figure 2. It was to direct future activities of the center by incorporating all the results from the interviews and workshops. The rationales and visions are explained as to how the center should structure its activities to serve as the pivot organization within the university to better serve the leadership function for promoting for better educational provision by the systematic utilization of e-Learning infrastructure. This framework was introduced and explained in the open lecture on the final day of our visit.
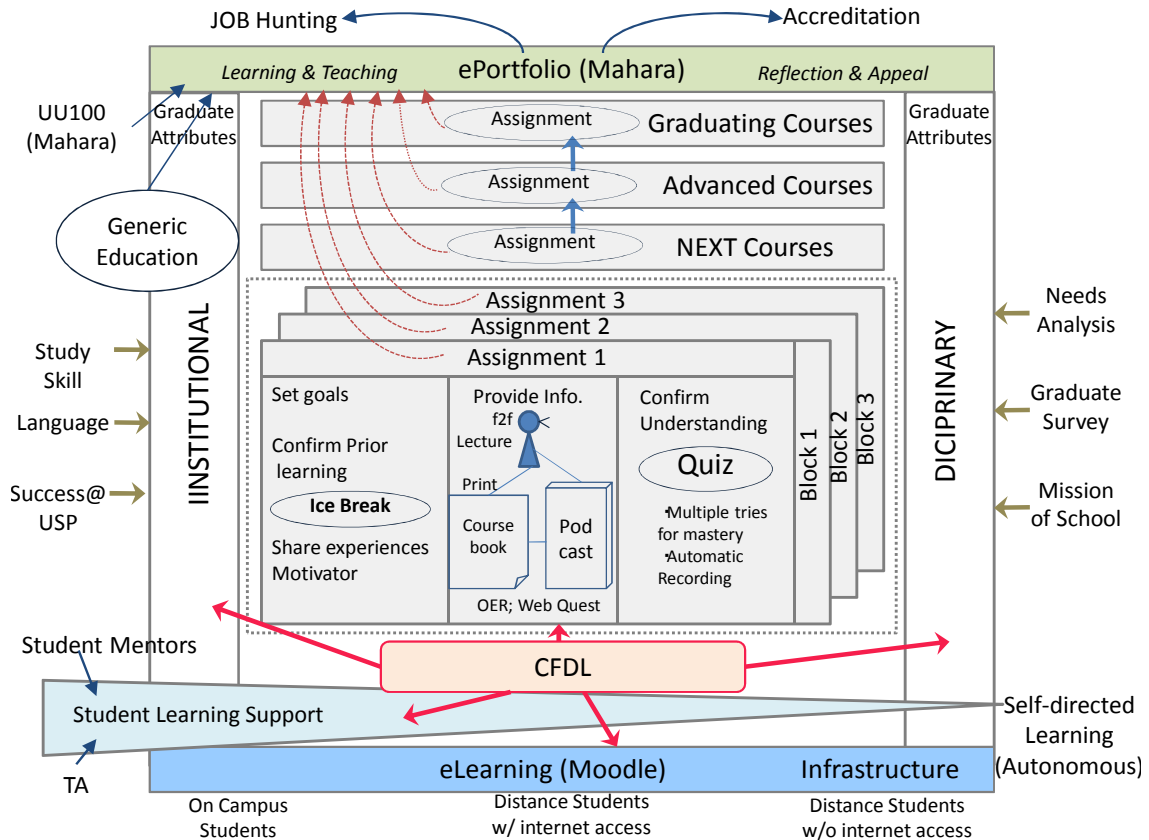

Figure 2. Proposed Framework: Striving for USP Standards Design Elements and CFDL

CONCLUSIONS

This paper described the workshop conducted at the USP, based on need analysis, and the proposed institutional framework for promoting e-Learning by the university-wide center. It is expected that the workshop was successful in showing the skills needed for advancing e-learning within the university, and that the framework will be used as guiding post for the center to take a leading role in promoting e-learning for the sake of all stakeholders, including the current and future students.

REFERENCES

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