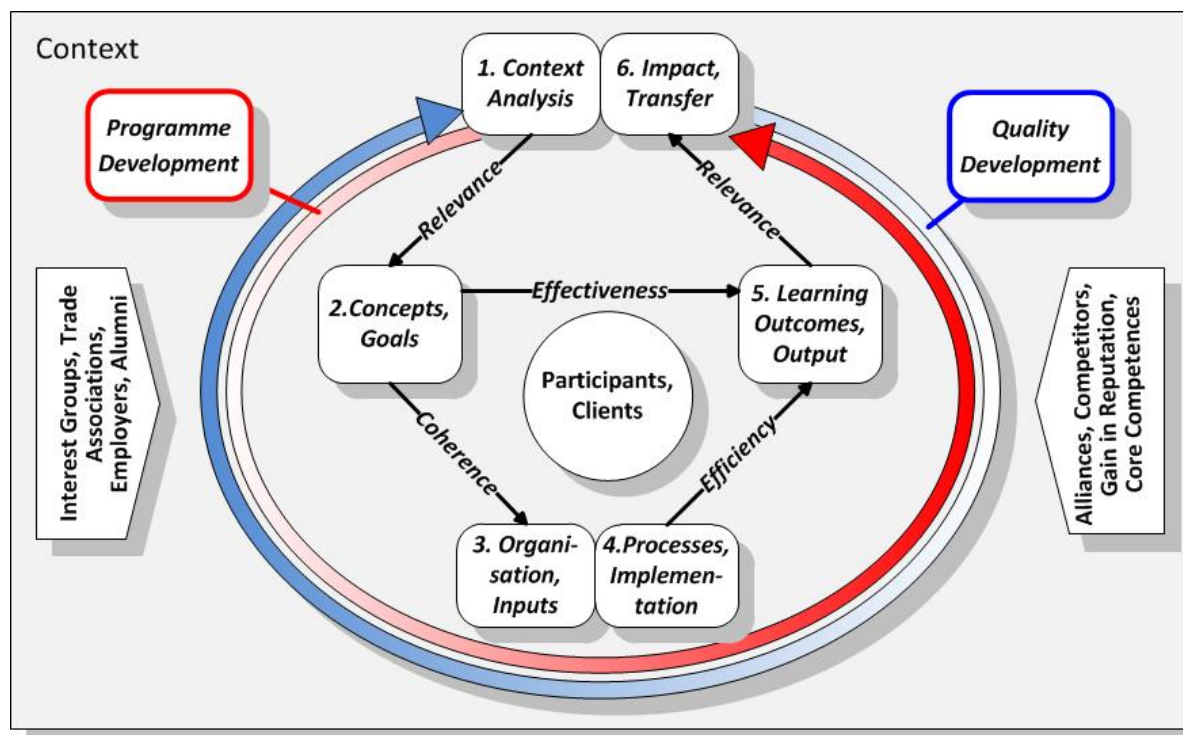




Would you like to develop a CEE course or programme? Then think in circles!

Tips from **Daniel Kuenzle**, Centre for Continuing Education, ETH Zurich (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology), kuenzle@zfw.ethz.ch

The Swiss universities have developed a model which can be very helpful in the development, implementation and quality assurance of continuing education courses and programmes. The model described in this Knowledge Share Moment involves a set of recommendations with the message: **Think in circles!**



Imagine two circles. The first circle (red), the “Programme Development” process, begins at (1) the top and passes counter-clockwise through points (2) to (6) until it closes again at the top at (1). This circle describes the factors which must be taken into account during course development and implementation, and concentrates on the effects to be ultimately generated by learning outcomes.

The second and perhaps more important circle (blue), the “Quality Development” process, also starts at the top, but at point (6); it proceeds clockwise through the same five points (5) to (1) before closing again at the starting point above. This circle shows what to do, depending on the situation, to develop and ensure the quality of the course or programme. The issue here is thus less to determine the ef-

fects to be generated via specific learning outcomes, but which learning outcomes are required to achieve the desired effects.

A) Programme Development (counter-clockwise)

The Programme Development circle starts at (1) with a context analysis: What are the requirements of target groups and employers? What are the labour market conditions? What are the university's core competencies? What is the social and economic framework? Point (2) addresses concept and goals: What are the needs of the participants? How should the training goals and the curriculum be formulated? How does the business plan look? Point (3), "Organisation, Inputs", asks: What resources are available for the programme? How is the course structured? What disciplinarily and pedagogically competent faculty are available? Point (4), "Processes, Implementation": How and where will the course be implemented? How does administration work? What didactic means will be deployed? What about performance assessments? (5) "Learning Outcomes, Output": Have the teaching and learning objectives been reached? Are participants satisfied with the course and with the learning they have achieved? Is the cost/performance ratio accurate? (6) "Impact, Transfer": Is the course recognised in the business world? Will it have a positive influence on participants' careers? Will the company profit from the course? (1) "Context Analysis": How will the labour market be affected by the continuing education programme? How will it affect the requirements of firms and target groups? etc.

B) Quality Development (clockwise)

The Quality Development process begins at point (6) and ends at (1). The four "quality dimensions" (5) to (2) can be directly influenced by universities, and course implementation, faculty quality, usability of course materials etc. can be evaluated simply, for example via participant surveys. These quality dimensions are the focus of many classical quality development and accreditation models and can be measured relatively easily. Here input-oriented approaches underscore the concept and organisation dimensions; process-oriented approaches the implementation dimension; and the rather less common outcome-oriented approaches the learning outcomes dimension.

These dimensions are not in fact sufficient for university continuing education. To a greater extent than in Bachelor's or Master's degree programmes, university continuing education stakeholders (participants, alumni, employers, professional associations) judge programme quality according to its effects on productivity, return on investment, career, personality development and prestige. The quality of continuing education must therefore be oriented towards effects, even though these manifest outside the university environment and are often only indirectly measurable.

Analysis of context (1) and evaluation of effects (6) are methodologically challenging and can only be evaluated in retrospect. They can be strongly influenced by external factors. However, surveys of alumni and advanced participants have proved suitable in analysing effects, even if personal transfer and career effects depend on economic cycles and, with no comparison to control groups, cannot always be objectified.

Surveys of employers, professional associations and other external interest groups are generally less successful. To gather their expertise and make projections of future trends it is recommendable to directly involve important exponents of these groups in programme development and implementation over the long term, e.g. as faculty, evaluators, examination experts, advisors or cooperation partners.