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International License.**Organizational Design of Academic Institutions: Changing Structure and Flows in a Mega Open University**

Akademik Kurumların Örgütsel Tasarımı: Mega Açık Üniversitede Değişen Örgüt Yapıları ve İş Akışları

Güzin Kıyık Kıcıır <sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup> Assis. Prof. Dr., Anadolu University, Management and Organization, Eskişehir, Türkiye**ABSTRACT**

Resources must be correctly positioned and brought together like the building blocks that make up a house in the structural designing of institutions, whether public or private. The concept of organizational design is responsible for the process of positioning organizational elements such as human resources and technical infrastructure in the foundation stages of organizations. It is important for institutions to find the optimal design for themselves as in this way resources owned could be used effectively and operational processes could run smoothly. A strong organizational design enhances the power of organizations to achieve their goals and to survive environmental problems. While creating the organizational model, it is necessary to take many internal and external conditions into consideration and no single truth or formula would be valid in all cases. This study aims to examine the organizational design of the Anadolu University Open Education system. Content analysis was carried out for analysis of interviews with the five administrators of the three faculties in this system and documents belonging to the institution. For the organizational model of the institution, a large network structure was found designed through bureaus, coordinating units and representative offices in the country and abroad. In this design model which maintains its centrality despite its scope, there are intertwined authority-responsibility flows between university management, faculty management and task-based unit heads. The diversity of the program, the breadth of the target audience, the richness of the course materials produced, and the successful exam organizations applied in a wide geography are considered among the efficiency indicators of this organizational structure.

**Keywords:** Organizational Design, Management of Academic Organizations, Management of Open and Distance Learning, Content Analysis.

**ÖZET**

Kamu ya da özel kurumların örgütsel tasarımında, kaynakların bir evi oluşturan yapı taşları gibi doğru konumlandırılması ve bir araya getirilmesi gereklidir. Örgütsel tasarım, kuruluşların insan kaynakları ve teknik altyapı gibi unsurlarının konumlandırılması sürecinden sorumludur. Kurumların kendilerine en uygun tasarımı bulmaları, kaynakların etkin kullanılması ve operasyonel süreçlerin sorunsuz ilerlemesi açısından önemlidir. Güçlü bir örgüt tasarımı, organizasyonların hedeflerine ulaşma ve çevresel sorunlardan kurtulma gücünü artırır. Organizasyon modelini oluştururken birçok iç ve dış koşulun dikkate alınması gerekmektedir. Tek bir formül her durumda geçerliliğe sahip değildir. Bu çalışmanın amacı Anadolu Üniversitesi Açıköğretim sisteminin örgütsel tasarımını incelemektir. Bu sistemdeki üç fakültenin beş yöneticisi ile yapılan görüşmelerin ve kuruma ait dokümanların incelenmesi için içerik analizi yapılmıştır. Kurumun organizasyon modeli için yurt içi ve yurt dışında bürolar, koordinasyon birimleri ve temsilcilikler aracılığıyla tasarlanmış geniş bir ağ yapısı tespit edilmiştir. Coğrafi kapsamının genişliğine rağmen merkeziliğini koruyan bu tasarım modelinde üniversite yönetimi, fakülte yönetimi ve göreve dayalı birim başkanları arasında iç içe geçmiş yetki-sorumluluk akışları bulunmaktadır. Öğrenme programlarının çeşitliliği, hedef kitlenin genişliği, üretilen ders materyallerinin zenginliği ve geniş bir coğrafyada uygulanan başarılı sınav organizasyonları bu örgüt tasarımının verimlilik göstergeleri arasında değerlendirilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Örgütsel Tasarım, Akademik Kurumların Yönetimi, Açık ve Uzaktan Öğrenmenin Yönetimi, İçerik Analizi.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Organizational design is a critical aspect of establishing the foundation of organizations, involving the strategic positioning of elements such as human resources and technical infrastructure. A well-crafted organizational design not only empowers organizations to achieve their objectives but also equips them to navigate challenges effectively. However, it's essential to recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all formula for organizational design, as it must consider various internal and external factors.

In the context of higher education institutions, a well-designed organizational structure aligns with and supports the central academic framework. Conversely, a poorly designed structure can hinder decision-making processes, leading to administrative inefficiencies, excessive paperwork, and eroding trust (Dill, 1996). Traditional universities often feature highly segmented structures, both administratively and academically, organized into faculties, departments, disciplines, programs, and research centers. These intricate arrangements reflect the influence of specialized professional knowledge and academic freedom (Christensen, 2011).

Moreover, higher education institutions possess unique characteristics. They exhibit a remarkable adaptability and resilience compared to conventional organizations, particularly in the public sector. Universities function as 'loosely coupled' systems (Weick, 1976), granting them the capacity to adapt to changing environments and external pressures. One significant external pressure has been the growing demand for higher education diplomas, driven by both public expectations and the democratization efforts of many nations in the latter half of the 20th century.

In response to this demand, many countries, particularly those with insufficient capacity in their higher education systems, established open universities based on the independent learner model. Over recent decades, diverse organizational design models for higher education have emerged worldwide, ranging from smaller national universities to mega universities exclusively serving distance learners (Daniel, 1996). These large-scale, distance learning-focused institutions have become pivotal components of both national and supranational economic and social development strategies, warranting an examination of their organizational designs and structures to ensure their continued relevance in global development endeavors.

The pursuit of democratization, which emphasizes universal access to education, intensified the pressure on states to expand educational opportunities (Hanna, 2003). Consequently, distance education evolved into an industrialized form of education characterized by mass distribution, standardization, and division of labor, reminiscent of large-scale organizations (Peters and Keegan, 1994). However, this mode of education has evolved further, embracing a personalized and customized approach to learning to cater to increasingly independent and sophisticated learners. Simultaneously, factors such as heightened competition and the rising costs of new technologies have accentuated the importance of organizational design and structuring in distance education.

In our specific case, the establishment of the open higher education system represented a transformative change, distinct from recent procedural changes seen in many universities worldwide as they responded to the pandemic by opening and designing distance open education faculties. The introduction of distance education in Turkish higher education dates back to the early 1980s, pioneered by what is now known as the Anadolu University Open Education System. Anadolu University, as a trailblazer in Turkish distance higher education, has accumulated over 40 years of experience and extended its reach to learners not only in Turkey but also worldwide.

Anadolu University Open Education Faculty was founded in 1982 with the explicit purpose of harnessing the authority granted by the Turkish State to offer distance higher education through correspondence. Initially, the faculty provided undergraduate programs in economics and business administration, rapidly attracting a substantial number of students. The sheer growth in student enrollment necessitated the formation of new academic resources. To address this demand, two additional open education faculties were established. The Faculties of Business and Economics, which were later integrated into the Anadolu University Open Education system, thus created a collective structure consisting of three faculties. (<https://www.anadolu.edu.tr/acikogretim/acikogretim-sistemi/tarihce>, 2024).

Over the following decade, the rapid evolution of information technology revolutionized distance education. In response to the evolving demands of quality assurance and accreditation processes, the organization implemented swift reforms, transitioning from the absolute grading system to a credit-based system and incorporating open-ended questions in assessment and evaluation practices.

It is noteworthy that studies investigating the contextual factors influencing the organizational design of higher education institutions, particularly through case studies, are scarce. The existing organizational design literature primarily centers on corporate enterprises, and when it concerns public organizations, it typically focuses on their performance or effectiveness, often neglecting the need for a deeper understanding of the contextual and subjective aspects of a distinct institution. Studies by Wang (2009), Mintzberg (1993) and Reimann (1980) can be given as examples of research in this field. This study aims to address this gap by providing qualitative insights into the organizational design of a distance higher education institution, thereby enhancing our comprehension of the perspectives and experiences of key figures involved in the organizational design process. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on organizational design processes, with a specific focus on higher education institutions, particularly those with a distance education mission.

## 2. ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN

Organizations are social units where individuals work together in a coordinated manner to achieve common goals (Robbins and Coulter, 2012: 6). The concept of organizational design refers to the process of structuring how organizations operate and entails a series of steps to achieve these objectives. The organizational design takes into account various factors, including sectoral characteristics, environmental conditions, the nature of work, employee qualifications, and management style, as these elements influence the formation of an organization's structure. Ülgen and Mirze (2010) view organizational design as a function closely tied to plans and strategies, intricately examining how to execute tasks by defining the structure and quality of relationships between core elements within institutions. Lawler and Worley (2011) focus on how institutional values are created through activity organization, work structuring, employee treatment, and guidance, aiming to integrate members' actions through division of labor for organizational purposes (Child, 1972).

While some studies emphasize the importance of selecting and implementing appropriate technology in the organizational design process (Liker et al., 1997), others stress the connection between an organization and its environment, arguing that design choices should adapt to environmental conditions (Miller, 1987). In this context, universities are recognized as professional organizations, relying on the self-control of professionals driven by internalized values and knowledge rather than direct control from superiors (Hardy et al., 1989). Negotiation, rather than hierarchy, is often the dominant coordination mechanism in university management (Hagerer and Hoppe, 2020).

However, in recent decades, universities have undergone a transformation, shifting from specialized professional organizations rooted in academic freedom and collegiality to entities resembling more conventional formal organizations (Ramirez, 2006). This transformation reflects globalization-driven standardization and rationalization processes, as well as the adoption of private-sector organizational models in the public sphere, which have diluted the influence of cultural traditions on university structure (Christensen, 2011). Public sector structural reorganization, aligned with global trends, has ushered competition and marketization into higher education. Consequently, higher education institutions are now primarily perceived as service providers rather than cultural or social entities (Hüther and Krücken, 2018: 135). These shifts have led to changes in organizational structures, such as increased administrative responsibilities for deans, including quality management and student services (Hagerer and Hoppe, 2019), transforming them into more managerial figures and less academic leaders.

The organizational design process is classified differently in various literature sources. Efil (1999: 112) outlines three steps: determining and grouping tasks, identifying and assigning personnel, and specifying location, technical equipment, and activity methods. Task grouping can take on three forms: traditional, modern, and post-modern (Ülgen and Mirze, 2010: 135). Traditional task division is typically based on functions, customers, products, geography, time, or processes, often combining elements of these criteria. In contrast, post-modern task segmentation encompasses project-based structures, network designs, and virtual organizations. In today's world, there is a growing demand for project-oriented work, leading to decentralized systems where each project manager possesses autonomy in decision-making (Hendrickson, 2000). Network organization design involves two or more organizations collaborating in a non-hierarchical, organic manner to produce goods or services (Eren, 2001). Virtual organizational structures connect institutions in different geographic locations through advanced technologies to deliver products or services, fostering collaboration among virtually connected organizations (Koçel, 1999: 340). The presence of hybrid organizations is acknowledged in modern task division, where both hierarchical and less formal horizontal structures coexist, referred to as matrix task division.

The next step in the organizational design process involves shaping the employee dimension. This encompasses integrating people into the system, defining their roles, hierarchical relationships, and communication networks. At both the employee and managerial levels, the delegation of suitable individuals to appropriate tasks significantly influences decision-making, task division, specialization, and autonomy processes. Public universities in Europe, in particular, exhibit distinct organizational design elements, such as greater autonomy compared to other public institutions, stemming from their specialized academic mission. Universities worldwide have become increasingly similar due to isomorphic tendencies (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) and standardization efforts like the Bologna Process.

It is important to emphasize that there is no one-size-fits-all organizational design applicable to every institution. Each organization may have unique internal or environmental conditions that shape its design process. Dill (1996) points out that the separation of academic work from administrative tasks is inevitable at universities due

to the specialized nature of research and knowledge creation, necessitating mechanisms for integrating tasks within higher education institutions. Moreover, the nature of organizational design is fluid, with no single formula applicable throughout an organization's life cycle. Designs suitable for uncertainty during the early stages of an organization's existence may not be efficient for later stages, and vice versa (Westerman, McFarlan and Iansiti, 2006), which raises questions about reform and change initiatives. In the context of universities, change is a recurring theme due to the modern state's role in planning and governing social services, technological sufficiency, human development, and advancement. An environmental perspective is essential to understand structural changes in universities, assessing whether policymakers mandate change, if change is self-initiated, or if broader economic, social, or political pressures trigger university reforms (Christensen, 2011). Given that university funding, especially in Europe, is predominantly public-oriented despite the increasing presence of private institutions, higher education organizations are more susceptible to external influences, particularly in a highly competitive environment with limited resources (Christensen, 2011).

While research on faculty administration and management structures is not uncommon, studies focusing on the contextual factors of organizational design in higher education institutions through case studies are limited. Much of the organizational design literature centers on corporate enterprises, and even when public organizations are examined, empirical data primarily assess organizational performance and effectiveness, often overlooking the need for a deeper understanding of contextual and subjective realities. The findings from this study can serve as a starting point for further qualitative research into the administration of higher education organizations striving to maintain their distinctiveness amid standardization efforts. However, it's essential to note that these results cannot be generalized to other contexts, and all analyses and interpretations are specific to the organization under study.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

Studies in organizational theory frequently tend to perceive organizations as hard and concrete structures which can be measured through nomothetic methods (Burrell and Morgan, 2019). For the purposes of this study, researchers stepped outside this realm of functionalist paradigm but instead, adopted an interpretive perspective to investigate the nature of an organizational design process, which is quite rare insofar as organizational design studies are concerned. Implementation of organizational design especially in an academic institution full of highly specialized and intellectual members requires shared understanding among those members regarding the implied presuppositions, values and assumptions underlying the design. The central purpose of this study is to investigate these shared understandings and experiences of faculty members in administrative positions about organizational design of the Anadolu University Open Education System.

#### 3.1. Design of the Study

As a qualitative case study, it aims to examine design as an organizational dynamic in the transformation of a distance education institution. Qualitative methods are ideally suitable for the purpose of describing and understanding educational organizations, and an effective way to do this is to collect detailed and descriptive data about the organization in question (Patton, 1990). From an interpretive perspective, organizations are seen as social constructs. There are a number of reasons why this study is designed as a case study. Case studies can be applied to single cases or multiple cases. Through single case studies, we are able to illuminate or draw attention to the presence of different situations and their effects in individual cases, which means qualitative validity is more significant for them than statistical validity. Another reason is the need for the 'depth' of data in such studies. To achieve depth in data collection, the establishment of good level of rapport and empathy is critical, which was possible in this particular study as both researchers are members of the faculty. Case study is preferred in examining phenomena when direct observation of the concept being studied and interviews with the persons involved in the phenomena are possible (Yin, 2009). The philosophical ground in an interpretive perspective leads to the assumption that the reality of workplaces is defined by the subjectivity of organizational members (Berger and Luckmann, 2008). It is significant in case studies to collect interview data that focuses directly on the case study topic. Insightful and perceived causal inferences and explanations made (Yin, 2009) by those who have been directly observing and experiencing organizational design is a strong source of evidence in this case study.

#### 3.2. Data Collection Instruments and the Process

To reach this subjectivity, interview is the main source of data as well as the analysis of institutional documents and the website. The researcher reduces data gathered as lengthy interviews which describe the shared experiences of several informants to a central meaning, or 'essence' of the experience (McCaslin and Scott,

2003). Thus, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, through which interview data are mediated (Merriam, 1998). In interpretive studies we are not interested in 'how much' or 'how often' (Merriam, 1998). On the contrary, it is essential to select a sample from which the most could be learned, which is called purposive sampling. It is critical then, to select information-rich cases for an in-depth study (Patton, 2002). Sample size for the interviews is not usually of significant value in qualitative studies since we are interested in the way language is used, and large variations of linguistic patterning can emerge from a small number of people (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). However, when selecting participants for a case study like this, it is critical that all of them must have full grasp of the case and the research topic, which means criterion-referenced sampling technique was used to select participants who are in a position to say something about the topic of interest because of their administrative positions and their experience in the organization. The interview questions were prepared based on Efil's (1999) triple design classification, Mintzberg (1980) and Caves's (1980) studies and were reviewed by two experts in the field of management.

The interviews were recorded with the consent given by the participants and transcribed for the purposes of data analysis. Certain measures were taken to ensure quality criteria mentioned in Yin (2009). Construct validity was ensured by using multiple sources of evidence and have key informants review the draft case study report before final composition. Data collection in this study achieves internal validity in that there is triangulation in the multiple sources from which data were acquired: interviews, institutional documents and the website. If themes are established when several sources of data are converged, then this process could be claimed to add to the validity of the study (Creswell, 2009). A very important way to enhance validity was the use of rich and thick descriptions while discussing the findings. Another technique to further the internal validity of the study was peer reviewing of both the interview protocol prepared by the researchers, and the data analysis process. Peer reviewing is critical because it requires other people than the researcher to ask questions about the study so that the accuracy of the account is enhanced (Creswell, 2009).

5 interviews were conducted over four months in the first half of 2022 as it was challenging to arrange an appointment in an undisturbed time period with interviewees who all held administrative positions in the system. Interviews were conducted in the interviewees' own offices in sessions that lasted 50 minutes the shortest and 125 minutes the longest. All interviewees had been holding their administrative positions for more than 5 years minimum and had been working in the organization as a faculty member for 10 to 20 years at the time of data collection.

### 3.3. Analysis

Data analysis is the researcher's process of systematically searching and arranging interview transcripts, field notes and other materials to increase one's understanding of those data and to present the discoveries to others (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). All documents and the transcripts of the semi-structured face-to-face interviews with senior managers from different faculties of the open education system were analyzed through content analysis. Two different field experts coded based on the determined themes and categories.

## 4. FINDINGS

In this study, which aims to analyze the organizational design model of Anadolu University Open Education system through an interpretive stance, the findings will be discussed under the themes of organizational design elements and the factors impacting the organizational model. All participants are over 40 years old. These are people who have worked in the organization for more than 15 years and have held senior management positions for at least five years. In terms of gender, three are men and two are women. It is possible to see demographic information about the participants in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Demographic Characteristics of Participants

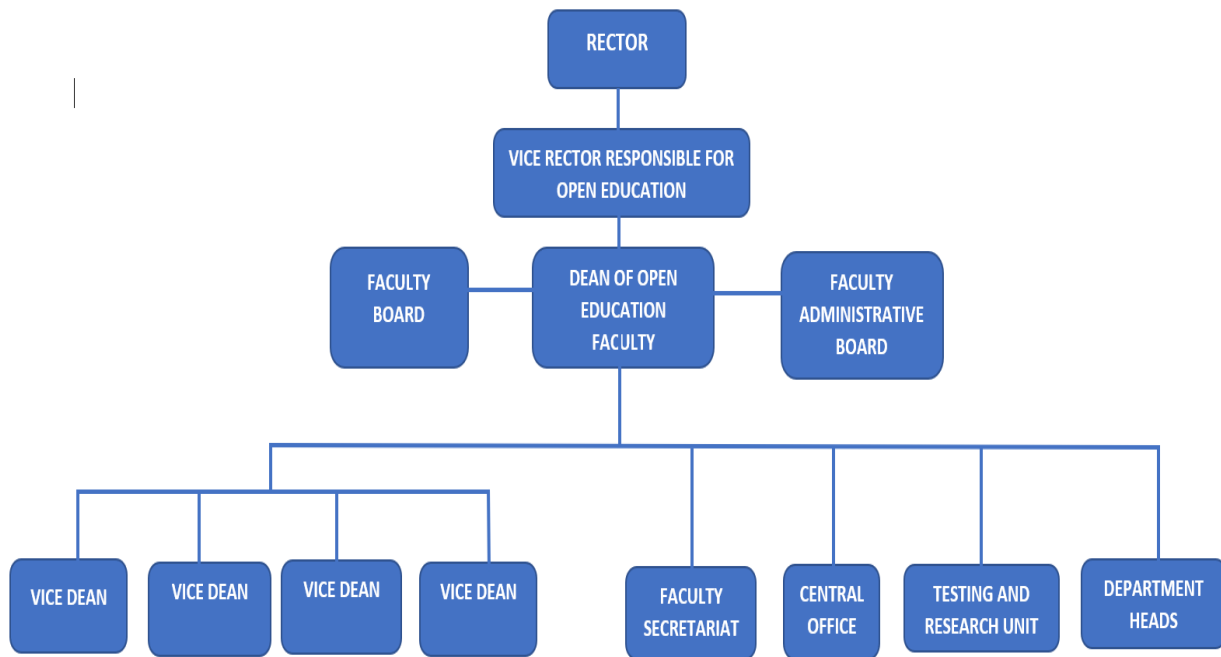
	Gender	Age	Senior Manager	Work Experience
Participant 1	Male	55	12	30
Participant 2	Male	54	10	26
Participant 3	Female	45	8	18
Participant 4	Female	52	14	25
Participant 5	Male	48	10	20

### 4.1. Elements of Organizational Design

Under the first theme the first category of codes were related to 'work' and 'workload'. The participants primarily expressed the excessiveness and complexity of the workload of Open Education Faculty; and they linked the workload with the complex nature of the system, which shows they see it as normal.

There are too many tasks in the Open Education system. Therefore, many different units are involved in the process. There is a system that is carried out with the cooperation of many complex units, such as the units where student registration is done, course materials are developed, support services are provided, offices described as regional centers, the central office, for example, the units where exams are prepared and printed materials are produced. (P5).

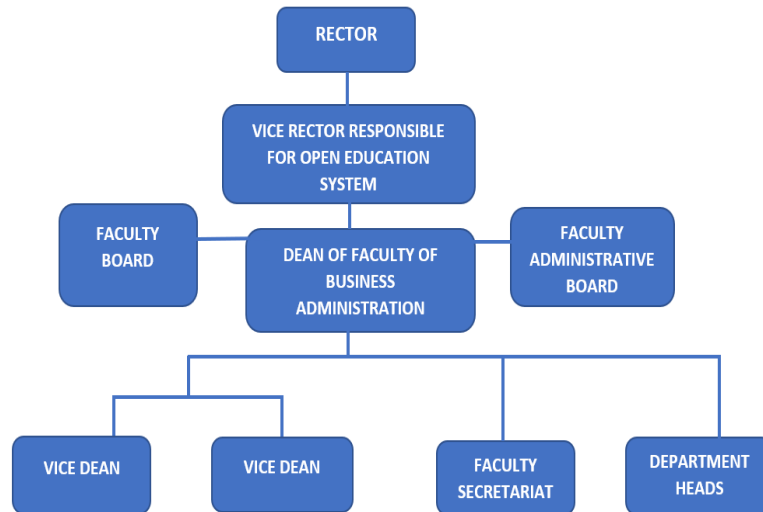
Participants underlined that organizational charts (Figures 1, 2 and 3) and handbooks are important documents that express the workflows in the open education system.



**Figure 1:** Open Education Faculty Organization Chart

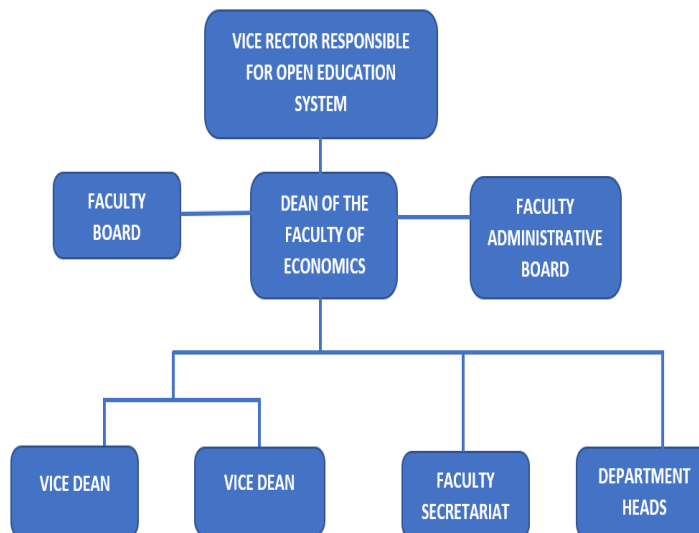
**Source:** <https://www.anadolu.edu.tr/akademik/aos-akademik/2/acikogretim-fakultesi/genel-bilgi>

Looking at the organizational chart showing the hierarchical flow of the open education faculty, it is seen that the vice-rector responsible for open education and the rector are directly affiliated. While it is noteworthy that the dean acts together with the faculty board and the faculty administrative board and is accepted at a similar level in the administrative flow, it has been observed that the operational workflows proceed under the responsibility of the relevant unit managers and vice deans. Each vice dean has his own area of authority and responsibility. Vice deans are responsible for many areas such as national and international collaborations, and the development of learning materials. While the faculty secretariat is responsible for bureaucratic and administrative affairs such as personnel, editorial affairs, supplies, purchasing, paperwork, maintenance and repair, the central office is responsible for domestic and international student transactions (support, registration, etc.) and the management of offices. While the responsibility of preparing and administering the exam falls under the jurisdiction of the test research unit, the follow-up of academic affairs is given to the department heads.



**Figure 2:** Faculty of Business Administration Organization Chart

When the organizational chart of the faculty of business is examined, it is seen that it is similar to the faculty of open education, but there are differences in some aspects. Being directly affiliated to the rector and the vice-rector responsible for the open education system, as well as the fact that the faculty board and the administrative board play an active role in the management together with the dean are among the common aspects. Faculty of Business is designed with two vice deans in the hierarchical flow due to the density of students, programs and academic staff and the relatively low workload. As for the execution of academic affairs, similarly, department heads are responsible.



**Figure 3:** Organization Chart of the Faculty of Economics

Looking at the organizational chart of the faculty of economics, it is seen that it is similar to the faculty of business in terms of the number of vice deans and the basic units they are affiliated with. The faculty secretariat and department heads are among the other administrative units responsible for administrative and academic affairs in the faculty of economics.

In the open education system of three faculties, there are some units included only under the open education faculty in the organizational charts, which are testing unit (TAB), central office, learning technologies R&D unit

(ÖTAG), and quality commission, but serve all three faculties. At the time of data collection, the hierarchical structure was made more flexible through organizing the interconnected functioning of each faculty within the system better. In this context, vice deans in business and economics faculties were assigned to common units and certain task areas were attached to them. Thus, the organic bond between faculties has been increased, and communication and relations have been strengthened. Since the relevant vice deans have their own faculties and they are responsible for these units with assignment, other vice deans are not seen in the actual organization chart of the open education faculty. One participant emphasized the impact of this change on the workload of vice deans.

Until last year, everything was run by the dean of the open education faculty and the vice deans. But now, some of the work has been distributed to the vice deans of the other two faculties. Activities such as program development, book publishing, distribution, statistics, personnel affairs remained in the open education faculty. Tasks related to offices, internship applications, public relations, quality were attached to other vice deans. Previously, he was advancing with four vice deans. Now four more came from economics and business, and it is run by eight vice deans. (P1).

Regarding the department heads who represent the academic affairs on the organizational chart, participants commented that it is unique and very different from that of a regular faculty. "There is an economic and administrative sciences department in the open education system, there is a tourism department, there is a health department. When there are similar departments in different faculties within a university, it becomes difficult to manage it. That's why the organizational structure of open education on a departmental basis is a bit messy right now." (P2). Participants emphasized the centralization in the hierarchy as well as the existence of a matrix structure. "Regarding the hierarchical structure in the open education system, the units affiliated to Open Education are very compact together. It is like the heart of the system is in Eskişehir." (P4). From this heart, both horizontal and vertical lines of hierarchy pass, which shows the matrix structuring in the open education system. In terms of division of tasks, participants emphasized the design including specialized units for specialized jobs such as test writing and e-learning material production and dissemination. The design and production of e-learning materials is seen as the most crucial of tasks both because it is the at the heart of the service and also because of the technical expertise it requires.

The second organizational design element that came out as a central finding is the human element. It was interesting to find out how participants emphasized the differentiation and ranking between academic and administrative personnel. "We have a human resources infrastructure consisting of academicians and a human resources infrastructure consisting of non-academicians." (P4). "There is a distinction between academic personnel and administrative personnel." (P5). "First of all, there is a teaching staff, academic staff. Then there is the administrative staff. As a third category, there is support staff helping academic and administrative staff." (P1). Despite the focus on the distinction, administrative staff was still reported to be of vital importance for the faculty. "Departments are not like faculties providing formal education. Academic units do not work like academic units. Administrative units are more prominent. Managers who are academicians work with administrative staff who are supportive of them." (P3). "The open education system generally runs through administrative personnel. There are academics just above the administrative staff. But these academics work like administrative staff" (P2). In terms of division of labor, one participant claimed that there needs to be better assignment of resources especially in productive teams such as learning technologies research and development unit, which depicts that this unit is a very critical in terms of the allocation of human resources. Regarding the qualifications of the human element, participants emphasized the issue of determining the required qualifications according to the task and title, although there are certain general criteria that need to be sought. "They need to be open to change. They need to believe that learning continues throughout life and they need to know how to take responsibility within a large organization." (P1). ".....there is a need for people with competence in a wide range of specialties in this system." (P5).

The most frequently repeated response regarding the methods used regarding communication and cooperation among employees was meetings, both face to face and online. "Communication is provided with the coordination and guidance of the unit managers. Coordination meetings are important in this sense.... Correspondence is maintained through both internal and external information systems." (P5). Other participants also reflected on the informal communication channels such as WhatsApp, especially in projects and special working groups. "Although holistic communication is not very integrated, it does exist. We have a technical internal system between bureaus. It is working. We can communicate very easily with information communication systems. In fact, systems are not absent, but they are not integrated and intelligent systems that talk to each other." (P4).



The last theme that forms the organizational design model is technology. Emphasizing the unit responsible for the system in technology, the participants gave common answers in this context. There are software developers in computer research center (BAUM), which is actually outside the faculty in terms of design, but their primary role is to support our faculty and its units such as ÖTAG, TAB and the Central Bureau. (P2).” The separateness in design is also reflected in the separateness of infrastructure. “BAUM manages the infrastructure of graduate programs and face-to-face programs. We use the e-campus for open education. They have no chance to communicate with each other. There is only a communal pool. Everyone in the world has switched to an integrated system, it must be an integrated system anyway. We need to switch to systems that self-collect data, draw conclusions from that data, turn it into action, or give feedback to managers for action.” (P1). “The technical infrastructure is redesigned and renewed with the components added to the system every day. For example, we had to conduct our testing online during the pandemic period. In response to this emerging situation, the system was able to respond immediately. In fact, the system technically has a strong potential and infrastructure. This infrastructure is mostly organized by BAUM.” (P3).

#### 4.2. Factors Impacting Organizational Design

The second dimension of the research question makes up the categories of size, age, environment and strategy, which impact the organizational design model. To start with, size is a uniquely essential component in the design of this institution because of the huge number of students around the world and the administrative offices serving them distributed across a large geography. “The organizational structure is different for us. There are many units connected to open education. Economics and business faculties also support this. Beyond that, there are too many stakeholders. For example, all other state universities support us, either in exams or in preparing materials for books, which reveals such a different and beautiful structure. So size doesn't become intimidating. It can continue to grow.” (P4). One participant emphasized the relationship between size and diminished significance of departments compared to a regular campus university faculty: “Departments in us are different from faculties that provide formal education. Academic units do not function like academic units because the number is too large and the structure is too large. Administrative units are more prominent.” (P1). Another commented that size could have been a disadvantage at the initial stage but now especially in terms of income it is preferable. “...I think there is no negative aspect of it anymore. Because it has brought years of experience and infrastructure. There is a trained staff...now, the system is bigger, it is a bigger advantage, especially in terms of income and service to students.”. Size is regarded as compelling by the participants, who focused on the increasing role of administrative design supporting the hugeness of the system. “Although greatness carries the risk of error, steps should be continued without fear of making mistakes.” (P2). Apart from the increased workload and risks because of size, some participants commented on other negative aspects of size such as stability. “Size naturally causes clumsiness in institutions. It makes decision making difficult. It is difficult to bring extra innovations, especially since operational processes are constantly busy. Because the numbers are big, the smallest change can cause big problems on the structure or the target audience.” (P5).

Another category whose effect on the organizational design of the open education system is examined is the age of the institution. Age is interpreted as experience by most of the participants.

Knowing how problems have been resolved in the past makes it easier to fix that problem... The past should never be forgotten. If there is institutional memory, if it is protected, solutions are produced for the problems encountered... It's not only about today, it's a cumulative thing. (P1)

The participants' contributions generally depicted that the Open Education system seems to have not lost much of its essence as it progressed over time. The system has improved by articulating experiences from problems but not changed drastically as one participant puts it: “we see that there are no radical changes in the form of management when we look at the history of the institution...If it were not successful, this model would not be taken as an example. Whatever is being done here continues to serve as a model for other institutions.” (P3)

Another crucial category is the environment. Laws, culture, economic conditions and technology, and competitors come out as the central environmental actors. “...They (environmental actors) all have their own dynamics. We have to think of all these as an instrument and make them sound very well. For example, the laws bind us.” (P4). The recent pandemic has been given as an example to how environmental factors have a huge impact. Data driven decision making was mentioned as a strategy to act quickly against unexpected environmental threats such as the pandemic. Although newly established competing faculties in other universities were mentioned as an environmental actor, they do not have a direct influence on the design because size and age constitute a huge competitive advantage over them.

As the last aspect of factors impacting organizational design, strategy needs to be discussed. While some participants emphasized the top-down approach adopted in strategy building and decision-making processes, some focused on the participative nature of strategic planning. “Research meetings are held; we are working with accreditation institutions, search meetings are held and so strategic goals are determined. Based on that, a hierarchical structure is created, and steps are taken to achieve that goal.” (P1). “This institution has a dynamic structure.... Maybe we can call it a learning organization.... This may be the reason why such a large institution can respond so instantly and flexibly, for example, as in the pandemic.” (P5).

## 5. DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The open education system is a faculty with distributed offices, representative organizations, provincial and exam coordinators around the country and the world. Eskişehir, the city where the campus base is located, is defined as the heart of the system, the central structure is established in the campus building, but the distributed design requires horizontal communication as well as vertical communication, which reveals a matrix structure in terms of the type of organization. Matrix structures strengthen flexibility and the ability to respond quickly to problems for large institutions, while also supporting the organic link between the three faculties within the system. Bengtsson et al. (2007) state that organizational design should be considered independently of concepts such as hierarchical structure and human. The open education system, which prefers a function-based division based on the activities in the organizational chart, frequently updates the hierarchical flow based on quality efforts and future strategic goals. Şimşek and Çelik (2014) comment that complexity slows down the functioning of institutions and states that thanks to simplicity, faster information and data flow can be obtained. Elements of traditional, modern and postmodern forms of structuring are seen together in the same institution in the matrix design, with the addition of first traces of virtual structuring. Strategic collaborations, protocols, joint investments have started to enforce the Open Education system to adopt a virtual organization model. In today’s competitive environment where learners are becoming more knowledgeable and sophisticated, and a greater diversity of organizations are emerging, careful organizational development in distance education is increasingly becoming critical (Hanna, 2003). In a world where personalized solutions and products are becoming increasingly widespread, an individual approach will have to be supported in products and services with the introduction of the virtual organization model (Buğdaycı, 1999).

Public organizations such as public universities need to ensure effective recruitment and selection practices to deliver quality teaching, research and other services, and maintain a system in which the employees are constantly improving. Not discriminating between academic, administrative and support personnel would be valuable in making more inclusive decisions for the institution and minimizing mistakes. Gulick (1936) argues that people are both decision makers and implementers in the organizational design. There is a need for a human-oriented approach to organizational design to realize change in organizations, to follow up processes, and to establish the right bond between work and people. The re-acceleration of employee activities whose frequency has decreased with the pandemic, is considered important in strengthening this bond.

The communication between employees was found to have a dual structure as it runs through both formal and informal channels, which are face-to-face and online meetings, as well as special and project-based working groups. E-mail and other IT-based systems used in official correspondence have a great contribution both in communicating with offices across the country and in transmitting job notifications, guidance and information to employees. An integration between information systems is reported to be essential for the interaction of human resources so that tasks are successfully achieved. Integration is only possible through technology. Continuous progress has been made throughout the history of the institution on technological infrastructure in a wide range from radio to educational television, from computer-based technologies to internet-based applications. Anadolu University open education system has constantly analyzed its environment, target audience and research in the field to meet new expectations by resorting to data driven decision making, participatory decision making through meetings, and pilot applications before major decisions. Online exams, new materials to be presented to learners, new modes of teacher-learner interaction and learner-learner interaction have been developed thanks to this approach. The key position of technology increases in an institution that appeals to large audiences such as the open education system. Bozkurt (2017) emphasizes that the distance education system, which is considered as an interdisciplinary field, will increase the variety of applications in the future, and for this, the integration of new technologies into distance education processes and the enrichment of learning content and processes is a never-ending process. Thus, while more flexible and accessible learning opportunities are created, lifelong learning processes can be strengthened. The introduction of a learner management system was found to be an example of the integration of a new technology. A new type of collaboration with the environment to implement this technology was adopted during this process, in which a

company and the university developed an agreement according to which the university provides online course content and the company provides the online web-based platforms for computer conferencing, course management, and content delivery. These platforms have been developed with many different features, and they relieve universities of significant development and implementation costs. (Hanna, 2003).

Size is a crucial organizational design determinant in our case due to geographical spread of student offices and exam organizations, which brings about the inevitable use of information communication technologies and a structural complexity in departments and programs. Findings revealed that size is understood as a natural advantage but also a factor to be increasing risk and agility at decision-making level. Dinçer (2007: 204) sees growth strategy as important for the survival and effectiveness of institutions. Similarly, Betz (2010) listed the two basic abilities that institutions must have to survive in the long run as growth and change. Despite the large size of the organization, the fact that it has a well-established system has made growth for open education not scary but normal. In their study about size in colleges, Cameron et al. (1987) found that the colleges may witness a period of shrinking in student numbers and revenues after a period of overexpansion, which was because, during the period of abundant resource, they had built too many new dormitories, hired too many new faculty members and initiated too many new degree programs based on unrealistic projections of future student demand. A slightly similar pattern has been witnessed in the last few years after the explosion created by the second university enrollments, which was not projected as a failure by the organization as it did not fit with the strategic prospects.

From the point of view of organizational ecology theory, Anadolu University Open Education System is not a newly established organization in terms of age or an organization in adolescence trying to establish its identity. Although the standards are set, the knowledge and skills of the employees are developed, and positive relations are established with other organizations and the organization has become a part of the power struggles, the institution cannot be considered as an organization during the aging period. According to Bruderl and Schussler (1990), organizations that reach the maturity of self-sufficiency do not experience aging problems and have a much higher chance of surviving because they can design the shocks coming from the environment and internal processes correctly. In this context, it is possible to define the system as an adult organization that maintains a dynamic structure. Although there are minor revisions in the organizational structure following the technological developments and the implementation of the laws, there have been no major changes on the organizational design of the system over the years. The design model, which matures over time, has high problem-solving skills, and sets an example for other institutions. The effects of age were generally interpreted positively by the participants. However, for the institution to maintain its success in the future, it must not lose its flexibility, develop an adaptability to change and maintain its visionary perspective.

States shape the functioning in organizational design of a distance higher education institution in many aspects such as the implementation of new entry regulations and quotas, new curricula, legal limitations, and quality control. Decisions made in a top-down manner by senior leaders may sometimes influence the hierarchical flow, the development areas of priority, operational processes, as well as leadership styles of junior managers, which could be considered as internal environmental factors. The organizational design model is also affected by the technological environment while following technological transformations, conducting cost analyses, determining investments, creating new in-house units, appointing new managers, and hiring qualified human resources. We live in a world full of uncertainties in terms of environmental conditions. As Alpkan (2000) states, while institutions do not have the power to influence the general environment, they are highly affected by the changes that occur there. It is crucial for the open education system to improve its skills to analyze environmental conditions well to avoid chaotic management. Many issues such as the changes in the entry requirements by the state, fluctuating exchange rates, the risk of recurrence of the pandemic, the development of metaverse and generative AI, and the increase of rival institutions and other competitive moves are among the environmental conditions that need to be dealt with according to the participants. Both policymakers and leaders of the organization are now facing an accountability phase (Hora, Bouwma-Gearhart and Park, 2017), which makes the use of data mining and analytics efforts in a way that would include the external environment more significant for the organization.

Institutional strategies of the organization are formed by university and faculty administrators on the axis of the issues determined by policy makers in higher education. All universities in the Turkish higher education system are traditionally formal parts of the central public administration in terms of finance or strategic planning, which means the level of formal autonomy is rather low, as is the case in many other public contexts around Europe (Paradeise, et al. 2009). Christensen (2011) argues that this is a global trend, and compared to history, there is relative deprivation of autonomy for strategy building for universities.

Changing power relations within the university are becoming more influential every day. According to Sims (1996), a high level of participation in the strategic decision-making process is seen as encouraging and considered as a developer on motivation, commitment, and creativity. Similarly, Morris (1968) mentioned the effect of joint decision making on strategies that reduces the workload and increases the opportunity to react quickly to changes in the environment of the institution. Kukalis (1989) stated that institutions that implement flexible strategies in complex environments can increase their performance in reaching strategic goals. The organization is considered as a dynamic and learning organization, which helps its flexibility. However, despite the organizational design being compatible with participatory strategy building, issues of autonomy and power relations within the university constitute a threat on strategy.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The paper elaborates on the organizational structure and dynamics of the Anadolu University Open Education System. Here are the key points:

**Centralized Structure with Network Integration:** Despite its large scope and wide network structure, the organization is described as maintaining a centralized structure. It has a dual structure that incorporates both vertical and horizontal hierarchies, formal and informal communication channels, operational functions, and academic activities which all interact with each other through organic ties.

**Matrix-Like Structure:** The organization is approaching a matrix-like structure because it has successfully patterned the hierarchical flow of authority and responsibility using both horizontal and vertical channels. This structure enhances its ability to respond quickly to changes in the environment.

**Task-Based Units:** Given its size, age, and environmental context, the open education system is organized into task-based units that span from technology support to learning materials development.

**Impact of Administrative Reforms:** Similar to research in the literature, administrative reforms in higher education in Turkey have resulted in a strengthening of internal hierarchy and a weakening of academic self-organization. While these reforms aimed to enhance decision-making speed and precision, they have also introduced more complex and differentiated tasks for deans, vice deans, and unit heads.

**Balance Between Adaptability and Academic Autonomy:** The open education system is recognized for its adaptability, which is based on past experiences and its ability to quickly adjust its organizational design to changing environmental conditions. However, this adaptability has come with an increased emphasis on management and a weakening of traditional academic professional autonomy.

In summary, the Anadolu University Open Education System is acknowledged for its centralized yet flexible organizational structure, which allows it to effectively respond to changing environmental conditions. However, this adaptability has implications for the balance between management and academic autonomy, reflecting broader trends in higher education administration and governance, such as traditional universities taking on the role of distance education or providing distance higher education students the campus experiences that traditional universities offer. Addressing organizational design only through one institution has the effect of limiting the study in terms of sampling and generalization. However, it is expected that this study will benefit the structuring process of open education institutions, the number of which is rapidly increasing in practice, and will be a source for new studies that deal with open education on a management basis.

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