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The Future is Connection:
Collaboration, Creativity and Compassion in a Digital Society

The Strategic 3P Model: A framework for teaching excellence at scale in the AI era

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This conceptual paper proposes the Strategic 3P Model as a diagnostic and design framework for teaching excellence at scale in AI-mediated higher education. The model extends the classical Presage–Process–Product (3P) framework beyond the classroom by repositioning presage as institutional architecture organised across three coordinated dimensions: macro (strategic leadership and governance); meso (learning design mediation and translation infrastructures); and, micro (faculty pedagogical and teaching practice). This paper argues that the persistent gap between strategic ambition and pedagogical reality is not principally a problem of technology adoption, faculty readiness, or structural alignment. It is an interpretive coordination problem grounded in competing institutional logics that the use of generative AI intensifies rather than creates. Informed by a recent mixed-methods study conducted by the authors, the paper identifies how competing logics held by leaders, instructional designers, and faculty regarding the purpose of teaching, the role of AI, and the meaning of teaching excellence can be aligned to enable teaching excellence at scale.

Keywords: Strategic 3P Model, teaching excellence at scale, generative AI, institutional architecture, learning design, conceptual paper

Introduction

Higher education has invested significantly in technology-enhanced learning as a pathway to teaching excellence at scale. Yet across the sector, coherent pedagogical transformation remains uneven, locally fragmented, and difficult to sustain (Fullan, 2016; Kezar, 2018). We argue that this unevenness is, at root, an interpretive coordination problem, and that addressing it requires a framework capable of analysing how divergent interpretations of learning design, teaching excellence, and AI strategy are aligned across institutional levels.

We introduce the Strategic 3P Model, an extension of Prosser and Trigwell's (1997) 3P model (Presage–Process–Product) that repositions presage as institutional architecture rather than as the immediate classroom environment or students' characteristics. The model operates across three analytical dimensions including macro (strategic governance and leadership), meso (learning design mediation and translation infrastructures), and micro (faculty pedagogical practice). In AI-mediated environments, these levels can no longer be treated as separable. The conditions of teaching are increasingly shaped by institutional policies, AI infrastructures, and governance arrangements that faculty themselves help reconfigure at the point of teaching (Babaee, n.d.-b, n.d.-c).

This paper advances three claims. First, scaling teaching excellence in the AI era requires interpretive coordination across institutional levels, not merely structural alignment. Second, the macro and meso dimensions function as an infrastructure that protects and enables the relational, human-to-human work of teaching at the micro level. Third, in this reading, the focus is not principally on the use of AI but on aligning the institutional conditions through which human pedagogy is sustained and practiced at scale. The Strategic 3P Model connects two traditions including the original 3P model explaining teaching variation, and institutional change literature explaining reform stalls. It redefines presage as designed, multi-level architecture and identifies interpretive coordination not structural alignment or technology adoption as the mechanism for scaling (see Figure 1).

Approach and ethics statement

This is a conceptual paper with analytical claims. The Strategic 3P Model was developed abductively through iterative movement between theoretical literature on the 3P model and institutional change, a recent mixed-methods study of teaching excellence in AI-mediated higher education, and model refinement against disconfirming cases. Empirical findings show institutional environment does not directly predict practice, while AI-supported assessment design predicts outcomes. The model is offered as a diagnostic framework to be judged by analytical purchase and subsequent empirical testing.

The empirical studies from which this paper draws were approved by the University of California, Los Angeles Institutional Review Board (IRB#24-5799). Participation was voluntary, all participants gave informed consent, and data were de-identified before analysis. This conceptual paper reports no new primary data collection and involves no human participants.

From classroom 3P to a strategic 3P framework

The 3P model has been influential in explaining how contextual conditions shape teachers' approaches and student learning (Prosser & Trigwell, 1997; Trigwell & Prosser, 2004). However, its analytic scope has remained largely classroom bound. Presage is typically theorised as faculty perceptions of the immediate teaching environment, with limited attention to how those perceptions are institutionally constructed (Kandiko & Blackmore, 2012). In digitally mediated environments, this limitation becomes consequential. Teaching conditions are increasingly shaped by institutional AI policies, digital infrastructures, assessment regimes, and governance decisions that operate above and across individual courses.

Research on educational change emphasises that innovation rarely scales through policy alone, and alignment between leadership, organisational structures, and faculty agency is required (Fullan, 2016; Kezar, 2018). Yet this literature has rarely been integrated with pedagogical theory. The result is a theoretical gap, and scholarship has explained why teaching changes locally, and why institutional reform stalls, but has not connected these levels in AI-mediated contexts. The Strategic 3P Model addresses this gap by specifying the architecture through which macro vision and micro practice become mutually legible. The meso layer acts as a translation engine that links the macro and micro dimensions.

The Strategic 3P Model extends presage beyond the classroom into a three-level institutional architecture. Each level is defined by its function in coordinating teaching excellence, the actors who carry it, and the form of authority it exercises. Presage is no longer understood as the immediate classroom context or individual teacher perception, but as an engineered institutional architecture including three levels. Macro (strategic governance and leadership), meso (learning design mediation and coordination infrastructures), and micro (faculty context and disciplinary conditions). Process includes translation and coordination mechanisms linking institutional intent to practice. Product is reframed from individual outcomes to coordinated institutional outcomes including scalable quality and human-centred pedagogy in AI-mediated environments. In this formulation, teaching excellence emerges not as an individual achievement but as the product of aligned institutional conditions, mediated processes, and enacted practice across levels.

Positioning the model within current AI-in-higher-education scholarship clarifies what it adds. Systematic reviews of the field consistently find that research concentrates on tools, adoption, and student-facing applications, with educators and institutional conditions largely absent from the analysis and with weak connection to pedagogical theory (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Critical readings of the same literature show that AI tends to be discursively constructed either as an inevitability to be accommodated or as a threat to be contained, with little attention to the organisational work that determines what AI actually becomes within a given institution (Bearman et al., 2023; Selwyn, 2019). Policy has developed along a parallel track. International guidance now specifies principles of human agency, transparency, and human oversight for generative AI in education (Miao & Holmes, 2023), and sector regulators have argued for assessment reform that changes the evidentiary basis of achievement rather than policing tool use (Lodge et al., 2023). What neither body of work specifies is the institutional architecture through which such principles are translated into discipline-specific pedagogical practice at scale. The Strategic 3P Model addresses precisely this translation problem, and in doing so it gives theoretical standing to the third space professionals (Whitchurch,

2008) who perform the translation but appear in neither the pedagogical nor the governance literature as actors with coordinative authority.

Macro: The strategic logic of leaders

At the macro level, institutional architecture is expressed through strategic governance, leadership vision and mission, AI policy positioning, and resource allocation. This level is focused on a strategic logic, an instrumental and outcome-oriented orientation in which teaching excellence is evaluated through performance, scalability, and employability outcomes (Babaee, n.d.-c). Within research-intensive, shared-governance universities, leadership influence operates through alignment, persuasion, and signalling rather than mandate, because pedagogical autonomy is institutionally protected (Cameron, 2012; Kezar, 2018).

Positive Leadership (PL) provides the cultural foundation for this level. Grounded in strengths-based and trust-oriented leadership scholarship (Cameron, 2012; Cherkowski et al., 2020), PL cultivates climates that support experimentation, collegiality, and sustained engagement with innovation. In AI-mediated contexts, PL reframes generative AI not as a compliance burden but as a shared academic endeavour. Yet macro-level vision alone does not predict pedagogical practice by faculty. Strategic ambition becomes consequential only when translated through the meso layer (Babaee, n.d.-c).

PL is not an additional concept layered onto the model. It is the mechanism that makes macro-level coordination possible under conditions of distributed authority. Because the Strategic 3P Model locates the coordination problem in competing institutional logics rather than in structural misalignment, the macro level cannot resolve it by mandate. Logics are interpretive commitments, and they shift through legitimation rather than compliance (Thornton et al., 2012). PL specifies how that legitimation work is performed. It signals which interpretations of teaching excellence are institutionally valued, it underwrites the psychological safety that experimentation with generative AI requires when the pedagogical consequences are still unsettled, and it confers status on the translation work of the meso layer, without which learning designers' mediate strategy that they have no authority to interpret. Where Positive Leadership is absent, faculty read AI initiatives as compliance demands and the meso layer transmits strategy rather than negotiating its meaning; the model then predicts precisely the fragmentation observed across the sector.

Meso: Learning design mediation

The meso dimension comprises the translation and coordination infrastructures that connect strategy with practice through learning design. These include learning design units, assessment frameworks, cross-sectional alignment mechanisms, and organisational learning systems (Babaee, n.d.-b). Learning designers serve as critical mediating infrastructure. They interpret strategic priorities and translate them into discipline-specific pedagogical decisions, including course design, quality assurance standards, and assessment strategies, aimed at enhancing the attractiveness, uniqueness and pedagogical value of teaching and learning environments through AI and other educational technologies (e.g., podcasts, vodcasts, digital storytelling). Empirical findings show that institutional environment does not directly predict practice, while AI-supported assessment design predicts outcomes (Babaee, n.d.-a). This locates the analytic weight on the meso layer, where coordination succeeds or fails.

The meso layer also carries a distinctive form of authority. Unlike macro authority, which is positional, meso authority is relational. It is exercised through co-design, translation, and the negotiation of pedagogical meaning across faculty. This relational authority is precisely what governance structures often fail to recognise. The Strategic 3P Model argues that strengthening meso infrastructures, through learning designer representation on curriculum governance committees, co-authorship of AI guidelines, and protected liaison roles, is the central design problem of teaching excellence at scale.

Micro: Pedagogical practice by faculty

The micro level is the site of pedagogical practice, where faculty translate institutional intent and disciplinary norms into teaching practice. Within the original 3P model, this level corresponds to teachers' approaches to teaching and to the deep or surface approaches to learning that those approaches encourage in students (Trigwell & Prosser, 2004). In AI-mediated contexts, the micro level remains the focus of relational learning. However, its conditions are no longer locally bounded. Students deploy AI at the point of learning, often in ways that are invisible to instructional designers and unanticipated by institutional policy. Faculty redesign

assessments, sequence tasks, and renegotiate authorship in real time, frequently without institutional guidance (Babaee, n.d.-c).

Concrete instances are now commonplace. In a large first-year unit, a faculty member replaces a take-home essay with a staged task in which students submit an AI-generated draft alongside an annotated critique of its reasoning and sourcing, making evaluative judgement rather than text production the object of assessment. In another, tutorial preparation is redesigned around AI-generated case variants so that no two student groups analyse identical material and comparison of reasoning becomes the assessable work. In a third, authorship conventions are renegotiated with student's mid-semester, specifying which forms of AI assistance must be declared and which are treated as ordinary tool use. Each of these is a de facto institutional decision about academic integrity, assessment validity, and disciplinary standards, taken at the point of teaching and typically without meso-level design support or macro-level sanction. The model treats such decisions not as local workarounds but as evidence that coordinative authority has moved.

Together, the three dimensions constitute the architecture through which teaching excellence is coordinated. Crucially, the model is not a hierarchy. Influence flows in both directions. Macro vision shapes meso infrastructure and micro practice, while micro practice provides the evidentiary basis through which macro strategy must be refined.

Coordination across the macro, meso, and micro dimensions

Teaching practice in higher education requires a shift in how the relationship between institutional architecture and human teaching is theorised. Conventional accounts position AI as either an instrument to be governed or a disruption to be managed. Both framings miss the structural point. AI redistributes coordinative authority across actors in an institution (Babaee, n.d.-c). It disrupts the sequential logic through which strategy was previously translated into practice, and it introduces a contested epistemic object whose institutional meaning is unsettled (Thornton et al., 2012).

A worked example clarifies the claim. Consider an institution introducing generative AI into assessment. Under the sequential logic that the 3P model and most governance frameworks assume, leaders would set policy, learning designers would operationalise it in course templates and standards, and faculty would enact it in units. What occurs instead is closer to simultaneous and competing determination. Students establish de facto norms of use within weeks, far faster than any policy cycle can respond. Faculty react by redesigning assessment unit by unit, each decision setting a local precedent about what counts as legitimate assistance. Learning designers, fielding those decisions across many units, become the only actors holding a cross-institutional view of what is actually happening, and begin issuing informal guidance that precedes and often shapes formal policy. By the time an academic board ratifies a position, it is frequently codifying practice that has already stabilised beneath it. Authority over the meaning of academic integrity has, in effect, been redistributed. The macro level retains formal authority but loses temporal primacy, the meso level acquires epistemic authority it is rarely granted formally, and the micro level exercises interpretive authority it did not seek. This is why the model treats coordination, rather than governance, as the analytic problem.

In this redistributed coordination environment, the macro and meso levels are not administrative layers. They are the infrastructure that enables human-to-human teaching at the micro level to remain pedagogically meaningful. Leadership vision and direction create the legitimacy for relational teaching to be valued institutionally. Instructional design mediation creates the time, expertise, and design support that protect deep pedagogical engagement. Assessment frameworks that privilege reasoning over answer production protect the cognitive depth of student learning. Two practical implications follow. For assessment policy, the shift is from tool-prohibition rules, which are unenforceable and position students adversarially, to the specification of what evidence of learning must be observable including process artefacts, staged submission, and interactive or oral verification become design defaults for high-stakes tasks rather than exceptions requiring justification (Lodge et al., 2023). For curriculum governance, it follows that AI-related assessment decisions should be reviewed at program rather than unit level, since coherence of the student experience is a program property that unit-level autonomy cannot deliver, and that learning designers should hold standing membership on the committees where those decisions are ratified rather than advisory access to them.

This reading is not a technical question of constraining AI. It is an institutional design question. How do macro and meso architectures protect the relational, interpretive, and developmental dimensions of teaching as AI-mediated pedagogical processes become embedded in everyday practice? The Strategic 3P Model proposes interpretive coordination across the three levels as the mechanism. It requires structured forums in which leaders, learning designers, and faculty negotiate the meaning of teaching excellence rather than assume a shared understanding. It requires governance authority for the meso dimension. It requires recognition that the human-centred dimension of learning design is not produced at the micro level alone but sustained by the institutional architecture that surrounds it. Human connection in AI-mediated environments is therefore an institutional, not individual, achievement. Figure 1 represents this architecture, showing the three dimensions, the mediating position of the meso layer, and the bidirectional flows through which interpretive coordination is achieved.

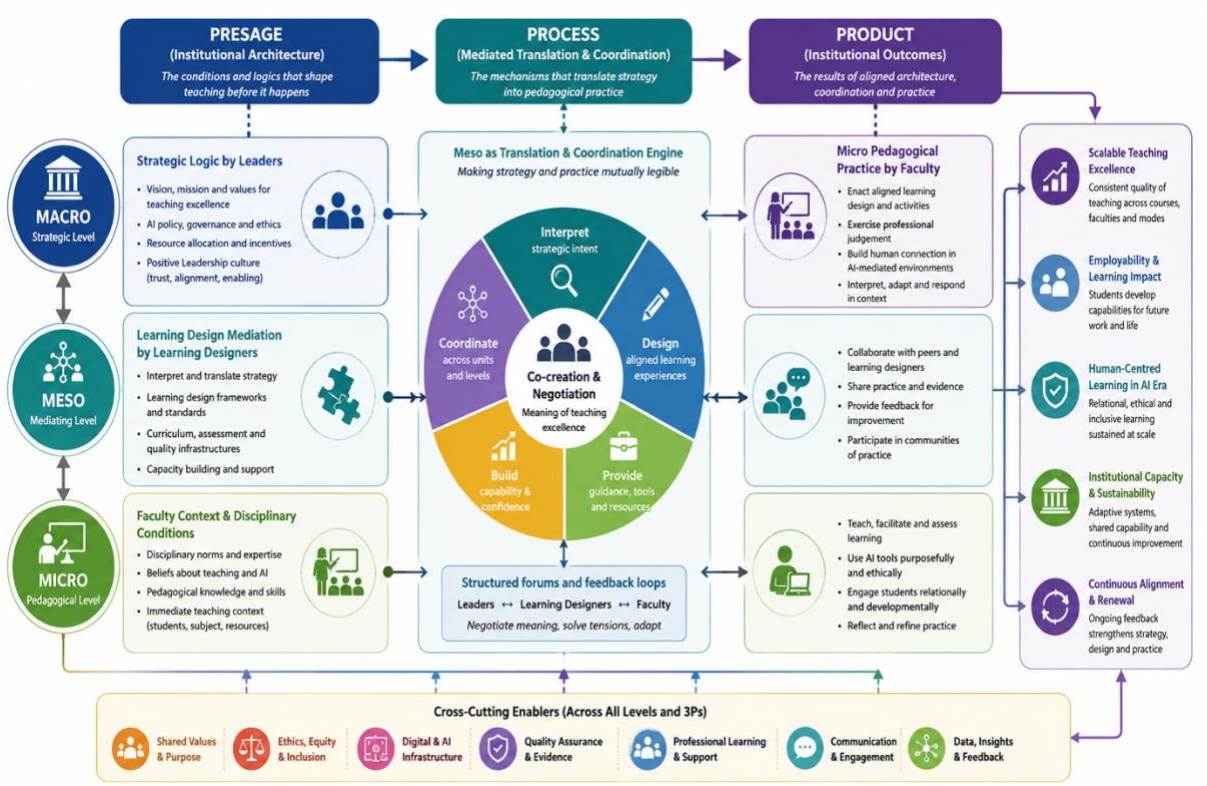


Figure 1. The Strategic 3P Model for teaching excellence at scale

Implications and conclusion

For higher education leaders, the Strategic 3P Model offers a diagnostic tool. Where coordination falters, the question is not whether technology has been adopted but whether interpretive alignment across macro, meso, and micro levels has been deliberately designed. For instructional designers, the model formalises their meso-level coordinative authority and the relational expertise that translation work requires. For faculty, it positions the practical logic of classroom enactment as a legitimate institutional voice rather than an implementation challenge.

For theory, relocating presage to institutional architecture makes teaching conditions an object of design and supplies approaches-to-teaching research a level where institutional logics become observable. For policy, it implies that AI governance instruments should be evaluated not only on the soundness of their principles but on their translatability: a policy that cannot be rendered into discipline-specific design decisions by the meso layer has no mechanism of effect, however well drafted. For practice, it identifies three tractable interventions: standing meso-level representation on curriculum and academic governance committees, structured cross-level forums in which the meaning of teaching excellence is negotiated rather than assumed, and assessment frameworks that make student reasoning visible.

Three lines of future research follow. First, empirical work should test whether meso-layer strength predicts coherent AI-mediated teaching practice across an institution. Second, comparative case studies across institutional types, particularly between research-intensive shared-governance universities and more managerially coordinated institutions, are required to establish the boundary conditions of the model, since the mechanisms it specifies assume institutionally protected pedagogical autonomy. Third, longitudinal designs are needed to determine whether interpretive coordination, once established, is durable or whether it requires continuous maintenance as AI capabilities and student practices shift. The authors are currently developing a multi-institutional study addressing the first of these questions in real-world institutional settings.

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