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Professional development of distance education professionals (DEPs) at TSA: a profile of functions

J.F. van Koller
Institute for Staff Development, Technikon SA, Private Bag X6, Florida, 1710 South Africa
jvcoller@tsa.ac.za.

This article deals with the development of a profile of the functions and required competencies of Education, Training and Development (ETD) practitioners at distance education institutions. Based on literature and within the context of Technikon Southern Africa (TSA), it is argued that a clear distinction can be drawn between the profile of function of ETD practitioners at contact-based institutions and the profile of functions of ETD practitioners at distance education institutions. Firstly, the international and national ETD and distance education contexts are described for the purpose of benchmarking, and thereafter the TSA context is described and aligned to the benchmarks. Finally, a comparison is drawn between the proposed profile of ETD practitioners at a distance education institution and the profile of ETD practitioners at contact-based educational institutions.

Introduction

This article is the first of a three-part series aimed at describing the professional functions of Education, Training and Development (ETD) practitioners/professionals at distance education institutions within the context of the ETD profession. The situation of academic staff at the Technikon Southern Africa (TSA) was used as a case study.

Why the need for a profile of functions?

The following considerations, *inter alia*, served as some of the main factors that prompted the project to determine a broad profile of the functions and required competencies of Distance Education Professionals (DEPs) in general and of those at Technikon SA in particular:

- **The absence of a clear profile of functions for DEPs.** It was felt that the standard, traditional profile of ETD Practitioners did not sufficiently represent the different functions of DEPs because of the following reasons. Firstly, the functions of DEPs seem to stretch beyond those functions indicated within the standard ETD Practitioner profile. Second, despite some similarities, there seem to be distinct differences between the functions and required competencies of DEPs and ETD Practitioners at contact-based educational institutions (see Similarities and Differences for more detail).
- **The over-simplification/under-estimation of the nature of distance education competencies.** It seems as if, in general, ETD practitioners and other stakeholders who are not employed at dedicated distance education institutions, do not want to acknowledge the need for certain specific professional skills among ETD practitioners at distance education institutions. There was a need to compare the profile of DEPs as manifested at TSA with the standard ETD profile.
- **The need for a profile for staff development purposes.** It was felt that, in order to offer meaningful and effective staff development opportunities to DEPs at TSA, a clear profile of their professional functions and responsibilities had to be established. This factor could, perhaps, also be regarded as the major consideration that prompted the research project.

Aims and intended outcomes of the project

Overall aim

The overall aim of the project was to determine the main functions of DEPs at TSA in order to ensure that they were equipped with the required professional competencies to perform their functions effectively and to deliver a quality service.

The intended outcomes of the project were as follows:

- The establishment of a final list of main function areas and specific functions for all DEPs at TSA.
- A clear indication of the specific competencies required from DEPs at different job levels.

Specific aims of this article

The aims of this article were as follows:

- To substantiate the need for a clear profile of functions and required competencies of DEPs at TSA.
- To indicate that the eventual profile of functions and competencies of TSA DEPs, was based on national and international benchmarks.
- To indicate the main similarities and differences between the standard ETD practitioner profile and the profile of DEPs at TSA.

Definition of terms

The following terms, used consistently throughout the document, need specific defining:

- Distance Education Professionals (DEPs): The term refers to staff traditionally known as lecturers, but does not include all academic staff at TSA. It refers, for example, to those staff members at the main TSA campus who are the content experts, who design curricula and courseware, who design assessment activities and who offer formal programmes to registered learners. The term does not include tutors or tutor managers at the regional offices.
- Main function areas: This term refers to the main categories of functions that form part of the average or standard types of functions of DEPs. In other words, it refers to those function areas in which DEPs are generally expected to be involved, to a greater or lesser extent. They are called function areas because they consist of numerous specific functions that are related to a similar category (see discussion of each main function area in the second article).
- ETD practitioners: The term refers to academic staff at all education and training institutions and includes the following groups of staff members: Teachers at primary and secondary schools, lecturers at technical and teaching colleges and those at universities and technikons and trainers at various places of employment.
- Critical Performance Areas (CPAs): The term "CPA" differs from a main function area. It refers to a description of "the critical areas for the investment of time, energy, talent and other resources" (Technikon SA, 2000). CPAs are normally short and describe the "end-results, outputs and outcomes" of a job (Technikon SA, 2000). Main function areas, on the other hand, describe the types and categories of functions that staff members are expected to perform. Main function areas refer to the inputs from staff, while CPAs refer to the intended outcomes and outputs to be achieved.
- Programme Group: The concept refers to academic departments at TSA. A number of programme groups form a faculty. There are four faculties at TSA, and each of them consists of a number of programme groups.

Research methodology

The main research methodologies used in the project were as follows:

- Literature review. Mainly secondary sources were used. Literature that focuses on national and international contexts was consulted. Preference was given to the most recent sources. Three

categories of literature were consulted. These were the following: International literature (general); South African literature focusing on the new National Qualification Framework context; and Literature focusing on distance education.

- Document analysis. Various documents at TSA were consulted and studied to gain a clear understanding of existing practices at TSA. The following documents were consulted: Technikon SA Annual Strategic Report (1999); Critical Performance Area documents comprising approximately 15 pages each, from the following three Programme Groups: Applied Communication, Human Resource Management and Real Estate and Economics, in 1999; three internal TSA documents (Moore, 1997; Groenewald, 1999; Technikon SA, 2000).
- Consultation in the form of formal presentations and workshops with staff members from all programme groups. Two three-hour workshops were conducted in 1998 (one in May and one in August) which were attended by two or more representatives from each of the programme groups at TSA on both occasions. The second workshop served as a follow-up on the first and helped to refine the data and suggestions that resulted from the first one. TSA consists of the following programme groups: Accounting, Applied Communication, Applied Natural Sciences, Business Management, Correction Services Management, Engineering, Human Resource Management, Information Technology, Law, Marketing, Police Practice, Public Management and Development, Real Estate and Economics and Security Management. Formal presentations were made to the executive committees of the following faculties in the course of 1999 and 2000: Faculty of Applied Community Sciences, Faculty of Applied Natural Sciences and Engineering, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences and the Faculty of Public Safety and Criminal Justice. The purpose was to present the initial draft document to them and to obtain their feedback.
- A first draft document was prepared and forwarded to all relevant departments at TSA for scrutiny and feedback. Numerous comments (written and verbal) were received.
- The comments received from staff members were incorporated and a second draft document was prepared. TSA staff were granted a second opportunity to give feedback and comments.
- On receipt and incorporation of the feedback and comments on the second draft document, a third and final document was prepared. The document was tabled at the TSA Senate meeting in March 2001, where it was officially approved as a policy document for the regulation of the professional development of academic staff members at TSA.

Theoretical framework

The author of this article realised that TSA could not operate within a vacuum, since it forms part of the higher education sector in South Africa. Furthermore, it forms part of the distance education sector, both within and outside of South Africa.

On the basis of the above considerations, a literature review was done to provide a theoretical foundation or framework to place the research project within its wider educational context. Mulusa (1990: 115), for example, stated that any form of scientific inquiry requires a profound theoretical foundation in order to make such inquiry logical, valid and scientifically accountable.

The literature review aimed to determine the following:

- what the international context, in terms of the functions and competencies of ETD practitioners, entails;
- what the national context, in terms of functions and competencies of ETD practitioners, entails;
- what the distance education context, in terms of functions and competencies of ETD practitioners, entails.

The findings emanating from the literature review served as benchmarks for the determination of a profile of the functions and required competencies of Distance Education Professionals at TSA and laid the theoretical framework within which an analysis of the TSA context was carried out. The data gathered from the actual TSA context were compared and aligned to the benchmarks found in the literature.

Main findings of the project

The findings of the research project have been grouped under the following categories:

- International literature (general)
- South African literature focusing on the new Outcomes-based Education and Training approach
- Literature focusing on distance education

Findings emanating from international literature

The changing roles of ETD practitioners

Works from various international authors reveal increasing signs of changes in the roles of ETD practitioners. The following sources were consulted: Hughes, Hewson and Nightingale (1997:2-5), Zuber-Skerritt (1992:211) and Meister (1998:59). A combined list of changes that the above authors have identified in terms of the roles of ETD practitioners in general, follows:

- A shift from teacher-centred to leaner-centred forms of teaching/facilitation of learning.
- A shift in the "power base" between educator and learners, where learner needs determine the necessity of contact sessions and not the aims and objectives of the lecturer.
- A shift from academic teaching roles for the transmission of knowledge to learners, to greater involvement in research, learning needs analysis, curriculum design and evaluation.
- The shift from the teacher as primary source of knowledge to the teacher as merely a resource person with some expertise in content.
- The increasing need for a greater theoretical grounding in pedagogical/andragogical knowledge to enable ETD practitioners to manage and direct projects with the use of information technology.
- Skills in information technology are increasingly being regarded as essential core skills of ETD practitioners. Hughes *et al*. (1997: 4) for example, stated that skills such as word processing, the use of different computer software packages, programming, graphics, the use of audio and video, media selection, file conversion, among other things, fall within the areas which are in contention with inclusion in the core skill sets of teachers.
- Increasing time required for the development of resource-based and online forms of teaching.
- An increasing emphasis on aspects such as process design and the development of distance education materials.
- The performance of administrative duties is also increasingly becoming the responsibility of ETD practitioners. For example, Hughes *et al*. (1997:7) stated that central data entry and report generation in areas such as student administration are being devolved to faculties and schools at some universities in Australia. Subsequently some of the administrative work, which was previously carried out by administrative staff, is currently being taken over by academic staff.
- ETD practitioners will become managers of their own learning as well as the learning of learners.
- They will become managers of ever-changing curricula and will have to attempt to adapt to ever-changing conditions.
- They will become managers of their own departments/subjects
- They will become managers of institutional committees and boards.
- They will become managers of budgets for research, teaching programmes and conferences.

Although the above authors do not all list the same changes, it is evident that the roles of ETD practitioners are currently in a transitional phase. In many instances certain changes have already taken place. It is inevitable that TSA's DEPs will also be subject to such changes and

trends which will result in an expansion of their functions and required competencies.

Existing functions and required competencies of ETD Practitioners in higher education relevant for DEPs

The works of the following authors were consulted: Forest (1998:59-60); Entwistle (1998:73-74); Zuber-Skerritt (1992:215 - 220); Hughes *et al*. (1997:5-7); Yadav and Panda (1997:5-11); and Laurillard (1993: 85-94). Based on the above sources it appears that the following common functions of ETD practitioners in higher education can be identified:

- Research
- Reflective practice
- Use of instructional technology
- Teaching and the need for innovative forms of teaching
- Community involvement

The above provides an idea of some of the general or standard functions of ETD practitioners in higher education. Despite the phenomenon of changing roles of ETD practitioners, it seems that the above functions will remain in place for some time to come. It is therefore essential that ETD practitioners in higher education be proficient and competent in respect of the above functions. The functions of DEPs at TSA should therefore also include most or all of these functions.

Conclusion

It appears that the following main conclusions can be derived from the discussions under the last two points:

- The changes in the roles of ETD practitioners, which is seemingly becoming a growing trend globally, will also have an effect on the functions and required competencies of DEPs at TSA. They will have to become more involved in the management of processes and programmes and in the performance of more administrative functions, as alluded to in the discussion under Changing Roles. They will also need to become more competent in the use of technology for instructional purposes.
- Despite the trend of changing roles of ETD practitioners, there still seem to be certain common function areas of ETD practitioners at higher education institutions that will remain in place. Those functions should form part of the profile of functions of all ETD practitioners, including DEPs at TSA.

With the above conclusions in mind, the findings that emanated from selective South African literature will now be examined.

Findings emanating from South African literature which focuses on the new National Qualifications Framework (NQF) context in South Africa

The following selective sources, which relate to the new NQF context in South Africa, were consulted:

- Policy document on the Norms and Standards for Educators
- Unit standards for occupationally directed ETD Practitioners
- Proposed qualification and unit standards for ETD Practitioners in higher education

Policy document on the Norms and Standards for Educators

The policy document on the Norms and Standards for Educators (Department of Education, 2000), has identified the following roles for educators in general and further education:

- Learning mediator
- Interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials
- Leader, administrator and manager
- Scholar, researcher and lifelong learner
- Community, citizenship and pastoral role
- Assessor
- Learning area/subject/discipline/phase specialist

Although the focus of the policy document was more on educators in general and further education, the above delineation of roles will also be applicable to educators in higher and distance education. For this reason, the profile of functions of DEPs at TSA will also have to include some, if not all, of the above roles.

Unit Standards for occupationally-directed ETD practitioners

Another set of roles that are of relevance to the profile of DEPs at TSA are those reflected by the unit standards for occupationally directed ETD practitioners (SAQA, 2000), since TSA is also an occupationally directed ETD institution.

The list of unit standards gives a clear exposition of areas in which ETD practitioners in occupationally directed educational institutions should be competent. The unit standards identified for NQF level 6 only (with the exception of the first one) have been included in the list in Table 1, since they seem to be more appropriate for ETD practitioners at higher education institutions:

Table 1

Title of unit standard	NQF level
Guide and counsel learners and/or colleagues	5
Manage a quality assurance system	6
Engage in occupational development	6
Facilitate learning through selecting and integrating methodologies	6
Co-ordinate the design of a variety of learning materials	6
Manage multiple learning programmes	6
Plan a curriculum	6
Design, conduct and manage research	6
Evaluate learning systems	6

The above unit standards are of particular relevance to DEPs at TSA, since TSA is an occupationally based ETD institution. It will therefore be crucial for the profile of functions of DEPs to cover most, if not all, of the above areas represented by each of the above unit standards.

Proposed qualification and unit standards for ETD practitioners in higher education

A third example of appropriate functions and required competencies of ETD practitioners which are of particular relevance for the profile of functions of DEPs at TSA, are the qualification and unit standards for ETD practitioners in Higher Education proposed by the Standard Generating Body for Higher Education and Training (SAQA, 2001). The following main unit standards were proposed:

Core Unit Standards (100 credits):

- Analyse Higher Education and Training mission, context and legislation (5 credits).
- Mediate and facilitate learning in Higher Education (20 credits).
- Mentor and advise learners in Higher Education and Training (15 credits).
- Design, develop and implement assessment of learning in Higher Education and Training (20 credits).
- Interpret and design learning programmes and modules for Higher Education and Training (20 credits).
- Manage learning facilitation in Higher Education and Training (10 credits).
- Conduct action research into Higher Education and Training practice (10 credits).

Elective Unit Standards:

- Moderate Assessment (10 credits).
- Mange a Higher Education and Training learning programme (15 credits).
- Web-based learning (10 credits).
- Design and structure experiential learning in a workplace (10 credits).

- Supervise research in Higher Education and Training (10 credits). (SAQA, 2001).

Although the above qualification and unit standards have not yet been officially approved, they give an indication of the current thinking in terms of the competencies required from ETD practitioners at higher education institutions. Again, as mentioned under the first two points, the profile of functions of TSA DEPs should include most, if not all, the roles and functions represented by the above unit standards.

Conclusion

Based on scrutiny of the above sources, the following conclusions were reached: The profile of functions and competencies of DEPs at TSA should as far as possible be aligned to the following professional functions and required competencies:

- The roles reflected in the policy on the Norms and Standards for Educators;
- The functions represented by the unit standards for occupationally directed ETD Practitioners (on level 6);
- The competencies reflected by the unit standards for ETD Practitioners at higher education institutions.

However, where the functions referred to above do not sufficiently reflect the unique situation of DEPs, the profile of functions should also make provision for those unique functions or roles.

With the above conclusions and the earlier conclusions setting the basis for clear benchmarks, it is also crucial to take into account the specific guidelines that apply for ETD practitioners at distance education institutions.

Findings emanating from literature focusing on distance education contexts

Findings

Perhaps the most immediate benchmark, for the profile of functions and required competencies of DEPs at TSA, resides within the descriptions of functions and required competencies of ETD practitioners at dedicated distance education institutions.

The following sources were consulted: Cookson (1995:3-7); Thompson (1995:2-9); Mullick (1997:200-201); Manohar (1997:217); The Directorate: Distance Education, Media & Technological Services, Department of Education (1996:65); Lentell (1996:41); Rivis (1994:219-234) and Holmberg (1995:32; 46). Below is a list of the various function and knowledge areas that were identified by the above authors for ETD practitioners in distance education:

- The need for a sound knowledge of the distance education practice.
- Research projects (which will include, *inter alia*, reflective practice, contract research).
- Courseware/instructional design.
- Use of instructional technologies.
- A good understanding of the learning process and learning theories.
- Tutor supervision.
- Administrative functions.
- Curriculum design (which will include industry liaison).
- Teaching (which consists of guidance, dialogue and assessment). (NB: Assessment has been cited as an important function in the literature, but because of its traditional position as part of the teaching process, it is included under the term 'teaching'.)

The following areas seem to have received particular emphasis, since they were mentioned by two or more of the above authors:

- Teaching (Guidance/dialogue and assessment) (4 authors).
- Course/instructional design (3 authors).
- Research/reflective practice (3 authors).
- Use of instructional technology (3 authors).
- A good understanding of the distance education practice (2 authors).

The particular emphasis could imply that these areas are regarded as core functions and core areas of expertise for DEPs. It would therefore seem logical to assume that a profile of the functions of DEPs should, as a minimum, include the above five functions/areas of expertise.

Conclusion

In view of the findings, it would seem crucial for the profile of functions of DEPs at TSA to include, as a minimum, the five functions indicated as possible core functions under Findings.

At this stage it would be appropriate to summarise and synchronise the conclusions reached under the previous three points.

Summary and overall conclusions

In summarising the discussions under the findings from international, South African, and distance-education literature, and in identifying the core essence to be derived from each, the following conclusions were reached:

- It seems inevitable that all ETD practitioners will be affected by the phenomenon of changing roles currently occurring. TSA DEPs will therefore be no exception to the rule. They will also be required to expand their roles to include some of those listed under Changing roles.
- There appear to be certain similar areas of emphasis among the functions of ETD practitioners in both higher and distance education as indicated under Existing functions. For this reason the profile of functions of TSA DEPs should be aligned to those functions.
- It seems that the roles of ETD practitioners in higher education, including the roles of DEPs at TSA, will have to be aligned to the roles of educators indicated in the Policy on the Norms and Standards of Educators.
- It seems that particular competencies are required from ETD practitioners in occupationally based education institutions, as reflected by the unit standards listed in Table 1. Since TSA is an occupationally based education institution, the functions of TSA DEPs should be aligned to the functions represented by the unit standards listed.
- Finally, since TSA is a distance education institution, the functions of TSA DEPs also need to be aligned to the implicit core functions of ETD practitioners at Distance Education institutions, as indicated under Findings.

With the above findings and conclusions as benchmarks for the determination of the functions and required competencies of DEPs at TSA, the actual situation at TSA will now be examined.

Findings emanating from document analysis, consultation and workshops conducted at TSA

A careful analysis of the documents listed under Research methodology and the consultation process with TSA staff members yielded the information given below.

Findings emanating from individual documents

It emerged from the following internal TSA documents: TSA Annual Strategic Report, 1999; Moore, 1997:9-11; and Groenewald, 1999:6-10, that all the functions of DEPs at TSA should be based on the following key and fundamental approaches:

- Distance education
- Flexible learning
- Co-operative education

The above approaches provide the framework and parameters of all the functions and operations of staff at the institution. They also result in the following requirements, in addition to any other ETD requirements, from DEPs in the employment of TSA. They should have:

- skills appropriate for a distance education institution
- skills congruent with flexible learning
- skills congruent with co-operative education.

Findings emanating from CPA documents

The following data resulted from an analysis of CPA documents from

the programme groups, indicated under Research methodology, that the main function areas for DEPs at TSA were the following:

- Courseware design and development
- Tuition
- Community service

However, it emerged from the analysis that the above function areas did not in fact sufficiently reflect all the functions performed by DEPs at TSA, since they included various function areas that deserved separate representation. For example, the learner support and management/administrative functions of DEPs were acknowledged, but both were regarded as part of the tuition function area. Research was regarded as forming part of the courseware design and development function area.

The conclusion reached by the author, after an analysis of the above documents, was that the documents did not give an adequate or true reflection of the functions of DEPs at TSA, and therefore needed to be reviewed.

Findings emanating from the workshops and consultation sessions

The workshops and consultation sessions conducted with the programme groups listed under Research methodology resulted in the following findings:

- Participants at the two workshops in 1998 provided confirmation of the conclusion stated earlier, i.e. that the CPA documents do not provide a true reflection of the various functions performed by DEPs at TSA.
- The participants at the workshops helped to produce the following list of functions of DEPs at TSA:
  - Courseware design and development
  - Tuition
  - Research
  - Learner Support
  - Management/Administration
  - Community Service

Aligning of TSA findings with benchmarks

After the above processes (document analysis and workshops) had been finalised, the author compared the list of functions suggested by participants at the workshops with the benchmarks indicated from the literature. It became evident that the list of functions identified by participants during the workshops captured most of the functions indicated in the various benchmarks from the literature. However, it also became evident that there were two particular aspects that were not captured in the list. Those were the following function areas:

  - The use of (distance education) technology and media
  - The exploration of strategic initiatives

The use of educational technology was mentioned earlier. The exploration of strategic initiatives by TSA DEPs was a need identified at TSA during its strategic planning session in 2000 and was seen as related to the Community Service function area.

In view of the above, the author reached the following conclusions: The main function areas for DEPs at TSA should be as follows:

- Design/development of courseware/study material
- Tuition (which includes assessment)
- Use of technology and media
- Learner support
- Research
- Management/Administration
- Community service/Strategic Initiatives

The above main function areas should therefore be regarded as the profile of the professional ETD functions of DEPs at TSA. (A more detailed description of each of the above function areas will be provided in a later article.)

The rationale for the above list of main function areas was as follows:

- Most of the main function areas were reflected in the literature and therefore correlated with national and international benchmarks.
- The main function areas reflected TSA's nature as a distance flexible learning institution which attempts to provide flexible and appropriate learning opportunities to its learners.
- All three of the traditional CPAs for DEPs at TSA were covered in the above list.
- All main function areas reflected functions and responsibilities which TSA DEPs are already performing, or have to perform, urgently.
- In conclusion, all main function areas listed above had a direct link with the core business of TSA as a higher, technical, educational institution.

Despite the valid reasons provided above for the profile of functions for DEPs at TSA, the author regarded it necessary to compare the DEP profile with the standard profile for ETD practitioners in higher education. Such a comparison would either confirm or refute the argument made earlier in this article, i.e. that there are some distinct differences between the roles and functions of ETD practitioners at distance education institutions and those in contact-based institutions.

Comparison of DEP profile with that of general (contact-based) ETD practitioners

A comparison between the above profile of the functions of DEPs at TSA and the standard profile of ETD practitioners in higher education has shown that there are both similarities and differences between the two profiles. A description of the similarities and differences follows.

Similarities

Most of the similarities between distance education professionals and contact-based ETD practitioners have already been alluded to earlier. A summary of the main similarities between the two groups follows:

- Both groups of ETD practitioners have to engage, and be competent, in the core ETD functions, such as tuition/facilitation of learning, materials development, research and community service.
- Both groups will be affected by the phenomenon of changing roles currently emerging, as indicated earlier.
- Both groups have to be sufficiently knowledgeable and/or competent in most of the roles for educators as indicated in the Norms and Standards document.
- There seem to be distinct similarities between the functions of ETD practitioners in higher education and those in higher distance education as published in the unit standards of the Standards Generating Body for Higher Education and Training.
- There seem to be certain similar areas of emphasis among the functions of ETD Practitioners at contact-based higher education institutions and those at dedicated distance higher education institutions.

Differences

Despite distinct similarities between the functions of contact-based (general) ETD practitioners and DEPs, there seem to be explicit differences between the functions of the two groups as will emerge from analysis of the main function areas of DEPs at TSA (in a later article).

One of the differences seems to reside in what can be regarded as core competencies for ETD practitioners in general and core competencies of DEPs. The following are regarded as core competencies for DEPs at a higher education institution:

- Courseware design and development
- Tuition/facilitation of learning (with a special focus on assessment)
- Learner support
- Technology-based instruction
- Research

In comparison to these, the core or fundamental competencies of contact-based (general) ETD practitioners in higher education have traditionally been as follows:

- Tuition
- Research
- Administrative functions
- Community Service

(Smit, 1994:104; 105)

Other differences between the two groups of practitioners, are as follows:

- Differences in terms of the application of professional tuition skills, e.g. courseware as the main means of instruction in distance education, compared to actual contact lectures in contact-based education.
- Differences in terms of systems, e.g. a very integrated academic and administration system in distance education compared to a more separate or distinct academic and administrative system at contact-based institutions.
- Differences in terms of particular skills, e.g.:
  - DEPs need a special grasp of the concept and processes of distance education to be able to apply the various methods effectively for facilitation of learning, whereas the latter is not necessary for ETD practitioners at contact-based institutions.
  - DEPs need to be competent in the skills of facilitation of learning via distance education methods, in the absence of regular contact between them and their learners.
  - DEPs need to be sufficiently knowledgeable in the design of interactive courseware, which is a particular method used in distance education to facilitate learning, whereas this skill is not as crucial for contact-based ETD practitioners.
  - ETD practitioners at a flexible learning institution need to be competent in the use of resource-based learning and be able to apply a variety of teaching/learning resources, for example, courseware, audio and video recordings, tutoring, telephone guidance or tele-tutoring, online instruction, among others. Although ETD practitioners at residential institutions can also enhance the learning process of learners by using flexible resources, the use of such flexible resources is not yet regarded as critical for the instruction process, as is the case in distance education/flexible learning institutions.

Overall conclusion

In view of all the above findings of this research project, the author wishes to conclude with the following remarks:

- Based on literature and a comparison of the actual situation at a distance education institution such as Technikon SA, it seems evident that a profile of functions and competencies for DEPs can indeed be distinguished from that of ETD practitioners at contact-based educational institutions.
- There appear to be both similarities and differences in the profiles of contact-based (general) ETD practitioners and those at distance education institutions.
- As a result of the latter conclusion, there seems to be a need for special training/development of ETD practitioners at distance education institutions, in addition to the general training/development requirements for ETD practitioners.

A later article will deal with a specific description and analysis of the main and specific function areas of DEPs and the competencies required from them.

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