

GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF A DISTANCE EDUCATION INSTITUTION AT A RESIDENTIAL UNIVERSITY



Hester Klopper PhD
Department of Nursing
Rand Afrikaans University



Stephan Botha MA
Rand Afrikaans University

OPSOMMING

Die doel van hierdie navorsingstudie was tweeledig van aard. Eerstens, om die belewenis van onderwysstudente te verken en te beskryf wat studeer aan 'n afstandsonderrig instansie van 'n residensiële universiteit. Die navorsings-ontwerp is geselekteer om die oorkoepelende strategieë van verkenning en beskrywing te pas en kan omskryf word as 'n verkennende, beskrywende, kwalitatiewe en kontekstuele navorsings-ontwerp.

Hierdie doel is bereik deur data in te samel met naïewe sketse (Giorgi, 1985), waar 'n sentrale vraag gestel is. Totale populasie was 3994 studente en deelnemers is deur 'n doelgerigte steekproef geselekteer (2654 studente) waarvan 190 naïewe sketse ge-analiseer is volgens die agt stappe van Tesch (Creswell, 1994) tot data versadig was. Uit die data is vyf hoofkategorieë en sewentien subkategorieë geïdentifiseer, wat met literatuur gekontroleer is. Lincoln en Guba (1985) se model is deurgaans gebruik om vertrouenswaardigheid te verseker.

Die tweede doel met die studie was om riglyne vir meer effektiewe bestuur van 'n afstandsonderrig instansie verbonde aan 'n residensiële universiteit, te beskryf. Die resultate van die data uit die eerste fase van die navorsing en die literatuurkontrole is benut, waaruit riglyne deduktief en induktief geïnfereensieër is. 'n Oorkoepelende raamwerk van strategiese bestuur is benut, wat gefokus het op operasionele bestuur, inligtingsbestuur en menslike hulpbronbestuur. Die resultaat is elf riglyne wat beskryf is, waarvan 80% reeds volledig ondersoek is vir operasionalisering.

BACKGROUND AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

The aim of this research study was to describe guidelines for more effective management of a distance education institution at a residential university.

In the Draft White Paper on Education and Training in the Government Gazette (Volume 35, Notice 1030 of 1994), there is a strong message of a more streamlined and accessible education system. With this message, emphasis is placed on integration of education and training. Apart from integration, various values and principles are reflected in the document. Values and principles which apply explicitly to this study are mentioned below:

- * Education and training are **basic human rights**;
- * **Accessibility** for all individuals to lifelong education and training;
- * Addressing an **inequality perspective**;
- * Realisation of **democracy, equality** and **fairness** in education and training;
- * **Quality** education and training;
- * Development of **independent** and **critical** thinking.

Considering the above-mentioned values and principles, a faculty of a South African residential university met the challenge of contributing as far as possible to the development of education and training, utilizing the strategic management approach (Beitman & Zeithaml, 1993). Against the background of over-population and a shortage of qualified teachers, the initiative was taken to become involved in distance education. In the White

Paper on Education and Training, distance education is proffered as the most relevant option to address problems in education, and it is probably also an appropriate method which can embody the values and principles of the White Paper.

The Faculty is in its third year of involvement in distance education, especially of teachers. The profile of the education student is currently as follows (Klopper & Botha, 1995:19).

* **Education Department:**

82% are from the ranks of the previous Department of Education and Training.

* **Age:**

74,8% fall in the age group 26 - 40.

* **Experience:**

40,6% have 10+ years teaching experience.

* **Position:**

32,9% are on management level.
66,8% are ordinary teachers.

* **Qualification:**

71,0% possess only a three-year education diploma.

* **School:**

49,8% work at primary schools.
44,8% work at secondary schools.

* **Type of school:**

85,8% work at an academic school.

The following relevant information was also obtained:

* **Mailing service:**

34,7% experience problems with the delivery of mail.

* **Transport:**

32,2% experience problems with transport.

* **Telephone:**

22% do not readily have access to a telephone.

As it is important to the Faculty to deliver quality

service and to be client-directed, which implies effective management, a relevant research study was considered to describe guidelines for more effective management based on the experiences of education students who are involved in distance education at a residential university.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The questions that can be asked with reference to the aforementioned are:

* How do education students experience distance education at a residential university?

* What guidelines can be described for more effective management of a distance education institution at a residential university?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

* The exploration and description of the experience of education students at a distance education institution at a residential university.

* The description of guidelines for more effective management of a distance education institution at a residential university.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This was an **exploratory** (Mouton & Marais, 1990:43), **descriptive** (Burns & Grove) 1993:29; Mouton & Marais 1990:44), **qualitative** (Burns & Grove, 1993:28; Mouton & Marais, 1990:205) and **contextual** design (Mouton & Marais, 1990:121).

RESEARCH METHOD

To achieve the stated objectives, the research was conducted in two phases.

The objective of phase one was to explore and describe the experience of education students at a distance education institution at a residential university.

Data was gathered by means of naive sketches (Giorgi, 1985) with a central question: "How do you experience being a student of a distance education institution? Naive sketches were used by posing one question on a blank sheet of paper with enough space for students to describe their experiences in detail. Population consisted of all distance education students who wrote exams in October 1994. Total population was three thousand nine hundred and ninety four (3 994). A purposive sample (Burns & Grove, 1987:218-219) of two thousand six hundred and fifty four (2 654) students completed the naive sketches.

Guba's model of trustworthiness (in Lincoln & Guba, 1985:231 - 238) was utilised to ensure what is usually referred to as validity, reliability and objectivity (in Krefting, 1991:214 - 222). The four criteria for trustworthiness are truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. Truth value was ensured by using strategies of credibility, and applicability by applying strategies of transferability. Consistency was ensured by strategies of dependability, and neutrality by strategies of confirmability (Table 1).

TABLE 1: STRATEGIES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS

STRATEGY	CRITERIA	APPLICATION
Credibility	- Prolonged engagement	- Manager in distance education institution - Preparatory work - Literature control - Open-ended question for naive sketches
	- Triangulation	- Open-ended questions for naive sketches - Literature control - Tesch's method of data-analysis - Independent coder
	- Member checking	- Validation of data gathered in phase one
	- Peer examination	- Two researchers - Expert for coding
	- Authority of researcher	- Researchers have previous experience of qualitative research
Transferability	- Nominated sample	- Purposive sampling with distance education students
	- Comparison of sample	- Sample is a reflection of population of South Africa
	- Dense description	- Complete description of methodology
Dependability	- Dependability audit	- Validation of data gathered from phase one with respondents - Data analysis protocol - Independent coder
	- Dense description of research method	- As discussed
	- Triangulation	- Two researchers - Open-ended question - Results validated - Tesch's method of data-analysis - Literature control - Independent coder
Confirmability	- Confirmability audit	- Consensus discussion between researchers and independent coder
	- Triangulation	- As discussed

Tesch's (1990) method of data analysis was utilised to analyse the data (in Creswell, 1994:155). It comprises the following eight steps:

- Get a sense of the whole. Read through all the naive sketches carefully. Jot down some ideas as they come to mind.
- Select one document (one naive sketch) - the most interesting, the shortest, the one on top of the pile. Go through it, asking yourself: What is this about? Do not think about the "substance" of the information, but rather its underlying meaning. Write thoughts in the margin.
- When you have completed this task for several naive sketches, make a list of all topics. Combine similar topics. Arrange these in columns as major topics, unique topics and leftovers.
- Now take this list and go back to your data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. Try out this preliminary organising scheme to see whether new categories and codes emerge.
- Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories. Try to reduce your total list of categories by grouping topics that relate to each other. You can, perhaps, draw lines between your categories to show interrelationships.
- Make a final decision about the abbreviation for each category and alphabetise these codes.
- Assemble the data which belong to each category

and perform a preliminary analysis.
 ◦ If necessary, recode your existing data.

An independent coder also received a protocol of Tesch's method and analysed the data, whereafter consensus discussions took place.

Respondents were asked to validate the data that were gathered in order to ascertain whether identified categories were a true reflection of the experience of education students of a distance education institution. All results were then controlled with literature.

RESULTS OF PHASE ONE AND LITERATURE CONTROL

Two thousand six hundred and fifty four (N = 2 654) students completed the naive sketches. Of these 2 654, one thousand six hundred (1 600) were selected at random. These were read through to gain a feeling of the whole (Tesch: step 1). This process gave a clear indication of the main categories. From the 1 600 naive sketches, individual naive sketches were selected randomly and analysed utilising the eight steps of Tesch (Creswell, 1994). This process was followed until all the data were saturated (N = 190).

Results of phase one which clearly indicated the identified categories and the literature control is summarised in table 2.

TABLE 2: RESULTS OF PHASE ONE AND LITERATURE CONTROL

RESULTS OF PHASE ONE	LITERATURE CONTROL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LECTURERS ◆ TEACHING PRACTICE Students experienced the teaching practice of tutors as meaningful and effective due to the aspect that they practice what they preach ◆ PERSONEL Students had a positive personal experience of tutor's due to their <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - support - friendliness - understanding - helpfulness 	<p>Wolcott (1995)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reflective practitioner <p>Sponder (1990) Wellens (1986)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - interaction needed - communication is important

<p>* ◆ STUDENTS GENERAL EXPERIENCE Seven students had a negative experience due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - isolation - loneliness - vague expectations - difficult adaptation <p>All other students had a positive experience due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - broadening of knowledge - stimulation - pleasant experience - privilege - inspiration - insight generating - interesting 	<p>Croft (1990)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "in order to overcome isolation" <p>Thiagaraj (1978)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "the loneliness of the long-distance learner" <p>Kember (1995)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - need support due to isolation <p>Tresman, Thomas & Pindor (1988)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "loneliness of the longdistance learner" <p>Morgan (1993)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - improve self - for qualifications - relevant to my work - interest in subject
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RESULTS OF PHASE ONE	LITERATURE CONTROL
<p>◆ TEACHING PRACTICE Students experienced that their own teaching practice have improved due to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - improved tolerance - better ways of dealing with issues - better insight - knowledge put into practice <p>◆ MOTIVATION Students have generally experienced that their own motivation has improved due to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - better teaching practice - good results - more knowledge - changed attitudes 	<p>Schön (1983)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the practice of professionals is characterized increasingly by complexity, uncertainty, uniqueness and value conflicts <p>Wolcott (1955)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - practitioners must reflect on their practice <p>Wlodkowski (1986)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - adult learner motivation
<p>* ◆ UNIVERSITY STUDENT'S PERCEPTION Students had a positive perception of the university due to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fulfilling experience - reconstruction of society - opportunity-creating - caters for students - contributes to development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unique experience due to context
<p>* ◆ THIRD WORLD CONTEXT STUMBLING BLOCKS Students have experienced two major stumbling blocks in the Third World development context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - transport problems - far distance they have to travel 	<p>RDP (1994)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - education for all - public transport upgrading

RESULTS OF PHASE ONE	LITERATURE CONTROL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * SYSTEM EXAMINATIONS ◆ Centres Negative experiences due to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - venues are too far away from where students stay - positioning of exam centres were received late - transport problems to get to exam centre - some venues were disorganised first day of exam • Invigilators Students experienced invigilators as being friendly • Timetables Students' experiences were mostly negative due to the fact that they received the exam timetable late • Guidelines Students' experiences were negative due to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - guidelines which were received late - received no guidelines at all - guidelines were not always clear and comprehensible Positive experiences due to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - useful - focus on the exam - clarified expectations 	<p>Botha (1993)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - transport problems <p>Rowntree (1994)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - do all you can to make each assessment a learning experience <p>Thorpe (1994)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provide information about the effectiveness - tone friendly and sympathetic - comments/guidelines to encourage continued learning - praise achievement

RESULTS OF PHASE ONE	LITERATURE CONTROL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results Negative experiences were due to the fact that students waited long for their results ◆ POSTAL SERVICES Students' experiences were very negative and they were frustrated due to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - delays - mail not received - slow - mail received very late ◆ STUDY MATERIAL Students' experienced study material positive due to its being <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - well prepared - appropriateness - helpful - comprehensible - practical - logical - complete - interesting content ◆ FINANCE Students' experienced the finance department as very negatively due to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no statements - reminder letters to wrong student - no receipt or acknowledgement of moneys received 	<p>Botha (1993)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - postal problems <p>Botha (1993)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - postal problems <p>Morgan (1994)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - encourage deep approach to learning <p>Klopper (1994)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - deep-holistic lifelong learning - interactive <p>Rowntree (1994)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - self-instructional - interactive <p>Lockwood (1994)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - quality and effectiveness

RESULTS OF PHASE ONE	LITERATURE CONTROL
<p>◆ ASSIGNMENTS</p> <p>Positive experiences due to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - achievement of good results <p>Negative experiences due to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - limitation of only one assignment per module - inconsistency in mark allocation - no comments by lecturers received some assignments back only after exams were already written - no memoranda to correct assignments were received from lecturers - not always clear on what is expected in an assignment - no proper guidelines - no acknowledgement of receipt of assignments 	<p>Croft, M (1990)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "... course assignments are essential" <p>Rowntree (1994)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - must comment <p>Morgan (1993)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - dialogue in open and distance learning <p>Rowntree (1994)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - make word readable - promote active learning through activities
<p>◆ CORRESPONDENCE</p> <p>Positive experiences due to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - helpful - only contact with University <p>Negative experiences due to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - correspondence not received by post 	<p>Thorpe (1994)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - learner support - provide information
<p>◆ STUDENT CARDS</p> <p>Negative experiences due to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - late received - not received at all 	

RESULTS OF PHASE ONE	LITERATURE CONTROL
<p>◆ TELEPHONE SERVICE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - friendly personnel - staff polite <p>Negative experiences due to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - always engaged - wrong information - transfer from one department to another 	<p>Botha (1993)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 34% experienced problems with access to a telephone
<p>◆ CENTRALIZED MEETINGS</p> <p>Positive experiences because</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fruitful - helpful - practice-orientated - Saturdays which do not interfere with working hours <p>Negative experiences due to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - centralized at University - no feedback on meetings to students who could not attend - more sessions needed 	<p>Thorpe (1994)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tuition centres - counselling/guidance centres - accessible
<p>◆ ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL</p> <p>Experiences were positive due to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - helpfulness - accommodate students - flexibility 	<p>Parasuraman (1992)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - admin personnel important in quality service rendering

PHASE TWO

The objective of phase two was to describe guidelines for more effective management of a distance education institution at a residential university.

Results of the naive sketches and the literature control were used as data, from which the guidelines were inferred. All results (27 conclusion statements) of phase one and literature control were used (see table 2). A purposive sample (Burns & Grove, 1987:218 - 219) of all 27 conclusion statements of phase 1 and literature control were included. Lincoln & Guba (1985:231-289) was utilised (as discussed in table 1).

To utilise data from the results of phase one and the literature control, deductive and inductive logic were used: deductive logic to identify "what" guidelines were needed (the ontology) and inductive logic to describe the "how" (the teleology) of the guidelines.

When these guidelines were described, the primary focal point was a one-stop service to the student. This was accomplished by using the strategic management process as an overarching framework. The reason for using this framework is found in the definition thereof, as given by Pearce and Robinson (1991:3) where they state that strategic management is the set of decisions to achieve a company's objectives - in this case one-stop service to the student.

Within the framework of this process, as well as within the context of this paper, three management areas were identified as decisive to the success thereof. These areas, with a brief motivation, are as follows:

Operational Management

Broadly defined, operational management refers to the management of any activity in which inputs are transformed into outputs which may be either goods or services.

This is reinforced when we take into consideration what Bateman and Zeithaml (1993:569) add:

- * Operations ought to add value, those that do not are wasteful and should be eliminated.
- * Operations should be performed with the overriding objective of improving service to the customer

Against this background and within the context of this paper, the operationalisation of new strategies takes place within the context of a total operational management plan in which strategies are combined and operationalised for application.

Information Management

Duffy and Assad (1989:85) state that the use of information technology for competitive advantage has swiftly become of prime importance as more and more organisations have recognised the opportunities (and threats) that this presents. This also holds regarding the use of information technology for offering a better service to students. It is, therefore, a reality that all available information should be managed by utilizing relevant technologies. Within the context of this paper, it also fulfills a strong supporting function, apart from the innovative.

Human Resource Management

It is essential that personnel are trained and correctly applied for maximum output. This is stressed by Bateman and Zeithaml (1993:367) when they state that training and development activities are essential for organisations desiring an effective workforce. Megginson (1982:28) concludes that the parts of a unit, body or group (which) are interrelated, interacting and interdependent to such an extent that when one part is acted upon, the others are also affected. This is especially noted within the context of this paper, because only by abiding by all of the above can operationalisation and information management be successfully utilized.

GUIDELINES : RESULTS

The results of the guidelines will now be discussed in detail utilizing the aforementioned framework of strategic management.

Operational Management:

Effective operational management implies the following:

- Transportation models

By computerised linkage of the home addresses of students, central venues are established which meet criteria for: cost-effectiveness, time-saving, safety of students, existing transport routes and decentralised contact and support to students.

- Critical path method

Determining the shortest route from the beginning to the final goal in terms of the coordination of all internal role-players (academics and administrators), and all external role-players (outside contractors, students and invigilators) to ensure availability of venues for more effective service delivery.

- Decentralisation

Operational planning and implementation of a decentralisation strategy will, inter alia, consist of the formation of strategic operational networks, the creation of central support systems, the establishment of student study groups and networks and physical decentralisation of personnel to centrally identified centres.

- Networking

The creation of a network of personnel and supporting personnel, closely related to a decentralising strategy; within which cost-effectiveness can be realised, yet productive through liaison with media, student support and student groups and the integration in existing personnel networks which can provide services to students.

Information Management:

- Gis/Ilwis

Computerised linkage of concentrations of students, within the context of a map, to existing information for support and planning purposes as part of operational management. The information which can be utilised within a system such as interfaces which includes: postal codes, telephone area codes and census districts. Maps which indicate concentrations of students can then be drawn for specific areas.

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- Optical technology

Optical technology can be applied in full or in part, with a saving of manpower which implies streamlined registrations and examinations and assignments through mark sheets and globals.

- Integrated system

A single integrated computer system within which access can be obtained to all facets of service rendering will enhance the handling of enquiries which entails student finances, student academic queries and student administration. It will further lead to optimise services to administration personnel, finances, stock control and academic personnel.

- Telephone system

A modern telephone system that facilitate voice mail through a 24 hour answering of student enquiries and 24 hour provision of information to students. This will ensure the management of information to determine where are most calls dealt with, from where are most calls received, duration of calls and time when most calls are received?

Query data systems to establish a computerised student support by integration into the created network. Information on study material, memoranda and tests/ assignments can be provided by computer.

The last component that may contribute to effective service delivery is the integration into the satellite training system of Africa Growth Network (AGN) for training of decentralised students.

Human Resource Management:

More effective human resource management implies training and guidelines to directed personnel for better functioning within specific posts. Cross-sectional utilisation of personnel to apply of personnel in multi-functional areas. Specific attention will be given to the development of systems for effective human resource management.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it can be stated that through utilisation of students' experiences, a good perspective was gained to improve management as this provided the researcher with understanding and insight into the experience world of students.

Guidelines were described and of these guidelines at least 80% have already been investigated for implementation. The researchers believe that improvement of the practice is the final criterion for validity and the guidelines reflect this possibility.

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