

A Distance Learning Model as a form of Individualised Training for Optimising Training in a Department of Defence

Abstract

In a transforming society where the emphasis is on realizing the potential of the individual and accrediting all competencies against a National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) is also in a state of change. The diverse human resources demand training in order to effectively protect South Africa and its inhabitants. Competency development is needed by both the permanent component and the Part-time Force. This training requirement and the shrinking budget compel the Defence Force to apply cost-effective human resource development strategies. Distance learning especially with its new interactive nature, can be a viable strategy.

The creation of interactive learning materials that enhance learning form an effective didactical learning transfer system. Of the various media technologies presently utilized in the macro-distance learning environment, computer-based training and on-line training can be applied in the Defence Force. Printed materials form the basis and can be supplemented with interactive television broadcasts - which were overwhelmingly positively accepted by Defence Force members during a pilot presentation - to improve the interaction between the instructor and learner and between learners.

The distance learning model focuses on the specific situation of an organization such as a Department of Defence, which is responsible for the development of its own human resources. This model serves as main guideline for the development of a distance learning system. It emphasizes the basic components in the distance learning situation, namely the learner, the instructor and the learning content that have to be seen within the specific environment in which they operate. Special attention is given to the support base that may include mentors, instructional designers, administrators, animators, graphic artist learning material authors, to name a few, for both the learner and the instructor. The essential role of the policymaking component is highlighted, since a distance learning system can only be applied successfully if there is promulgated policy to empower the distance learning system. Development and implementation guidelines for a distance learning system in a Department of Defence have to provide for a development program for distance learning instructors and possibly study guidelines for the learners, where they were used to mainly classical training.

Colonel (Dr) Annémarie van der Walt
Head Research and Development
South African National Defence Force College for Educational Technology (SANDF COLET)