

CHAPTER FOUR
METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The provision of effective higher education is limited by the availability of appropriate resources. In affluent countries problems of the delivery of higher education are essentially managerial. Developing countries attempt to address their higher education needs through traditional (European) autonomous universities where, however, appropriate resources are either deficient or almost non-existent. The implication is that in such countries, higher education needs will not be met unless there is a considerable sharing of the resources which *are* available. One major question which arises, then, is "What is the most efficient and effective way of sharing scarce resources in the delivery of higher education?"

This is the conceptual framework within which the research was conducted. The conceptual framework is illustrated diagrammatically on page 95.

In keeping with this conceptual framework, research tools were designed to address the following questions:

1. DEFINITION – WORKING TOGETHER –
 - two or more institutions
 - which institutions?
 - two or more operatives
 - who in the institutions?
2. WHY ENGAGE IN IT? –
 - motivation
 - objectives
3. WHO WOULD BE INVOLVED?
4. HOW IS IT CONDUCTED? –
 - models
 - process
5. ARE THERE ANY UNDERPINNING THEORIES?
6. WHAT WOULD BE THE OUTCOMES? –
 - anticipated
 - unprecedented
 - success/failure
7. WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR SUCCESS?
 - preconditions/context
 - administrative implications
 - academic implications
 - interpersonal relations

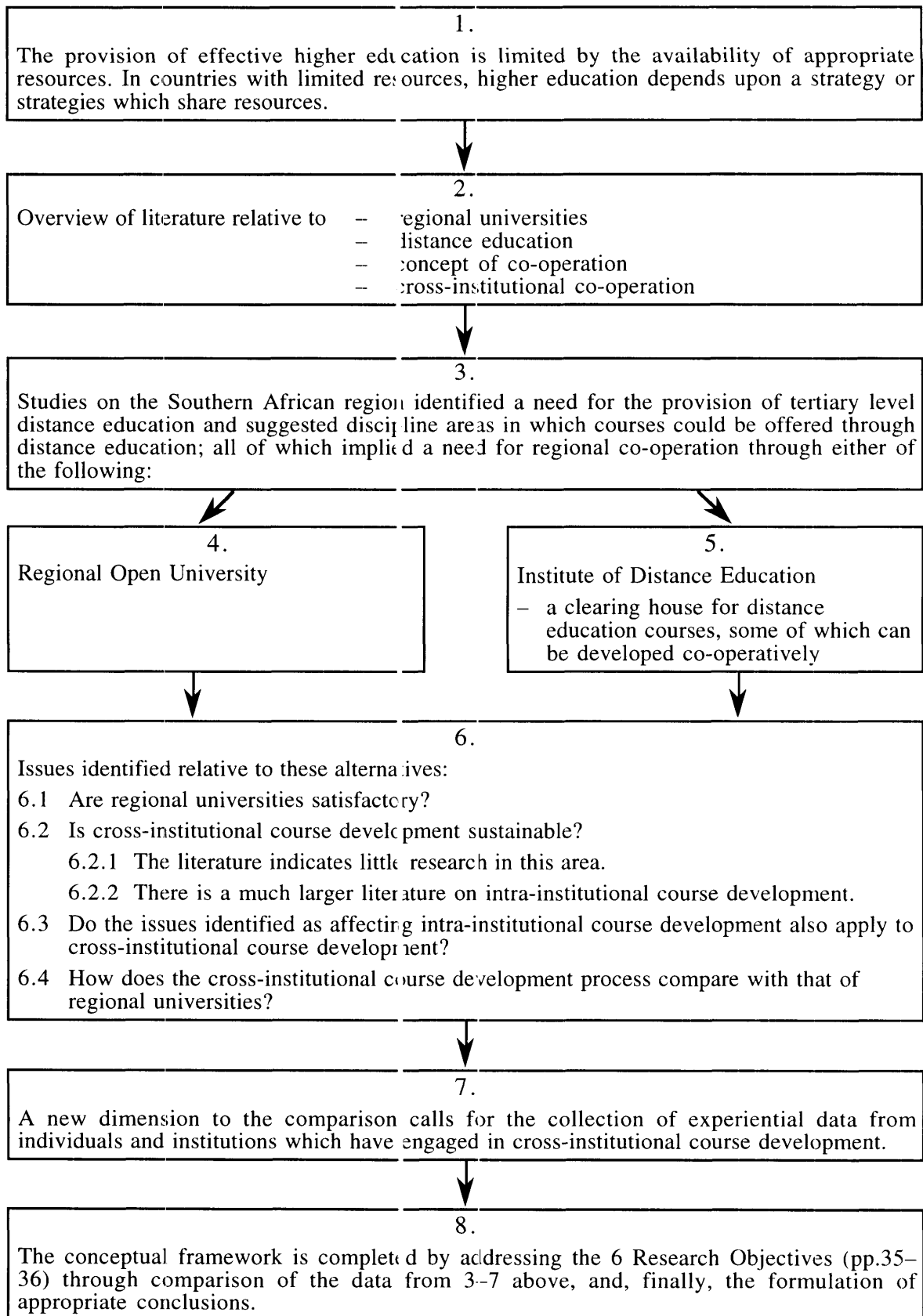


Figure 5: Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODS

Educational research employs a number of methods which, however, do not fall into any generally accepted scheme of classification (Verma and Beard, 1981:53; Best, 1975:14; Van Dalen, 1962:187), because attempts at classifying the methods have been done from different perspectives (Verma and Beard, 1981:35). Best (1975:15) even adds that classification of research methods is important only in as far as it assists in the analysis of the research process, thereby conveying meaning to the process.

Educational research is multi-disciplinary and complex (Keeves, 1988:5) and as such it does not have a specific paradigm (Husen, 1988:17). Thus the scientific/positivist and humanistic/interpretive paradigms should be considered as complementary (Keeves, 1988:4) and they should be used in such a manner as to harness the most valuable features of each (Cohen and Manion, 1985:43). Besides, as Good (1959:170) observes, what is important is not the superiority or inferiority of any one method over others, but whether the method or combination of methods can provide answers to the research problem. Verma and Beard (1981:59) even note the need for flexibility in approach to data collection, to the extent that if none of the existing data collection tools will suffice, then the researcher should consider modifying them or constructing new ones.

From the range of methods available to the educational researcher, choice of the most appropriate method/s, or construction of new ones will be informed by the nature of the research problem (Baldrige, 1975:55; Strauss and Corbin, 1990:15). Other factors that warrant preliminary consideration are the resources (especially time and money) that are available to the researcher. The latter constitute what Cohen and Manion (1985:272) refer to as the context of the research. One other factor that has a bearing on the research method is the focal population. The following sections of this Chapter will attempt to show the relevance of the fore-going account to this particular research.

EFFECT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

An analysis of the factors that influence the success or failure of cross-institutional co-operation involving two or more higher education institutions in the development of distance education course materials,

demands that the relevant data be obtained from people and institutions that have, at some time, been involved in such an enterprise. These would be:

1. Institutions that have engaged in, or are currently engaged in this kind of venture. This gives the study an element of the multi-case study or case survey aggregation (Guba and Lincoln, 1981:247), the main advantage of which is the integration and comparison of diverse studies of the same phenomenon. This allows development of new concepts from a wider array than would be possible with one case study;
2. Staff in those institutions who took part in the co-operative venture as administrators, team leaders or academics. As Crane in Spencer (1988:32) observed:-

Only practitioners can give insight. From them only can we get the testimony of how they perceive and interpret what is going on around them and how the fragile web of relationship is being spun or rent from moment to moment ... the testimony of those within the arena about what it means to them;
3. Documents detailing the planning and operation of the venture. Guba and Lincoln (1981:233-234) refer to content analysis of documents as an unobtrusive or non-reactive technique which becomes useful where interaction with subjects might affect their behaviour or perspective. They also see content analysis of documents as a useful additional technique even where there is interaction with the subject. Thus documents can be used as a primary or a secondary source of information;
4. Observation of the cross-institutional course development process in operation. This would enable observation of behaviour as it was occurring, in its natural setting (Cohen and Manion, 1980:103) and would (Borg and Gall, 1989:391) enable the researcher to gain greater insight into the phenomenon under investigation than would be the case with any other technique;
5. Anybody else who, through involvement in other co-operative projects or observation of these and/or any others, is in a position to proffer an informed opinion.

The question then became how to identify the relevant institutions and individuals.

IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Step 1 Literature Search

A search through the current literature was the imperative starting point. An extensive literature research, starting with the CD Rom databases – ERIC and ABI Inform, and then following up on the CD Rom citations by reading through those articles that bore a promise of providing information that could be useful to the study, and those appearing in the bibliographies of articles and books that the researcher referred to, revealed that while co-operation in general has been widely practised, researched and documented, there were very few instances of cross-institutional co-operation in the development of distance education courses.

The search revealed only two **joint authorship** projects involving three Australian institutions, as well as the names of the authors of the publications relating to these projects, as potential sources of relevant data. One of the projects was by Deakin University and the University of South Australia and involved the development of their Master of Distance Education course. The other project was by Deakin University and the University of Queensland and it involved the development of their Case Study Methods course.

The literature also made reference to the Australian **Women's Studies Major** as another form of inter-institutional co-operation in course development that had been successfully implemented by three universities namely Deakin University, Murdoch University and the University of Queensland.

Also emerging from the literature was the Australian Commonwealth Government (white paper) policy recommendation (Dawkins, 1988) regarding rationalisation of external studies, according to which some of the major distance education providers would be designated as Distance Education Centres (DECs); *i.e* principal providers and others as specialist providers, with a recommendation for co-operation in course development between DECs and specialist providers.

It was, however, becoming apparent that this topic – cross-institutional co-operation in the development of distance education courses – is not widely represented in the literature. The paucity of printed materials on the subject was endorsed by the literature review and by discussions with people who have been active in the field. While continuing with the search for relevant literature, the researcher also gathered any information on course teams. This was on the assumption that cross-institutional co-operation in course development would employ cross-institutional course teams and that these teams would be an extension of intra-institutional course development teams. While the literature search was being conducted, the researcher was also discussing her research topic with relevant staff of the University of New England with a view to refining the topic and soliciting suggestions for likely sources of relevant information.

Step 2 Correspondence and Discussions

The researcher corresponded with the seven distance education centres (DECs) at the University of Central Queensland, the University of Southern Queensland, Charles Sturt University, Monash University, Deakin University, Murdoch University and the University of South Australia (a personal visit had been made to the University of New England DEC) and with other higher education institutions in Australia that appeared in the 1993 Directory of External Studies. The correspondence enquired whether the DECs and other institutions were or had been involved in cross-institutional co-operation in course development and who the participants were or had been. From the responses, it was revealed that a number of institutions do engage in various kinds of co-operation involving courses, either with other education institutions or with the private sector. For example, the University of Central Queensland has co-operated with the New South Wales Department of Community Services in a youth worker training course and with the Queensland Electricity Commission in a boiler technology course. The University of Tasmania has co-operated with the Tasmania State Emergency Services for an Emergency Management course. Macquarie University has co-operated with the Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia Limited for the Diploma of Superannuation Management courses.

There emerged only two more projects involving four institutions (three Australian and one British) where the institutions concerned were co-operating in joint authorship of courses for mutual use. One of the projects

was between Murdoch University and Curtin University for the development of the Aboriginal Studies course. The other was between Northern Territory University and Middlesex University in the United Kingdom for the development of their Educational Management course. This confirmed the researcher's suspicion that this kind of co-operation is not widely practised in Australia.

Discussions with professionals in the field revealed one more project with the potential for inter-institutional co-operation in course development. This was the **Open Learning Association of Australia (OLA)**. They also added a few more names to the list of potential consultants. This endorsed the small number of incidents of cross-institutional co-operation in course development, and the paucity of literature on the subject.

The enquiries directed at external studies providers also included the issue of employment of course teams in those institutions. Here again it became apparent that the course team concept is not widely practised by academics in Australian universities. Where it is practised, it is on a "loose arrangement", meaning the academic responsible for teaching the course can consult other academics, course designers, etc. as and when the need arises. Thus most of the information pertaining to course teams was gleaned from publications of the UK Open University course teams.

There may be good reasons as to why Australian higher distance education providers do not make use of course teams, but that is not a concern of this research. The issue is merely mentioned here because it affects the size of the potential research population.

Thus data collection commenced in the six institutions mentioned in the Australian literature, the correspondence and personal consultancies as having engaged in joint authorship of courses. These were Deakin University, the University of South Australia, the University of Queensland, Curtin University, Murdoch University and Northern Territory University. Investigation of the joint authorship model of cross-institutional course development commenced with eleven potential consultants (some of those mentioned in the publications were not available for various reasons). The expectation was that the initial eleven would refer the researcher to a more extensive number of interested and/or experienced personnel.

Data collection progressed to include the other models. All co-ordinators of the courses that have been jointly developed/are jointly taught by universities on behalf of OLA were contacted regarding their willingness to co-operate in the research. Following is the list of universities and the courses that they *co-operatively* offer on behalf of OLA.

Table 2: OLA Courses

INSTITUTIONS	COURSES
Monash & Central Queensland	Chemistry (CHM 11 & 12)
Monash & Murdoch	Learning Arts & Social Sciences (SSK12)
Deakin & Monash	History/Politics (Aus 13 & 14)
Deakin & Griffith	Women's Studies 1A (Gen 13)
Griffith & Deakin	Women's Studies 1B (Gen 14)
Murdoch	Modern Feminist Thought (Gen 21 & 22)
UNE & University of Sydney	Australian Literature (LCS 13)
Monash & Charles Sturt	Cultural Studies (LCS 21)
Monash & Macquarie	Music & Popular Culture (MUS 12)
Monash, La Trobe & UNE	Philosophy (PHL 11, 12, 21, 22, 31)
University of South Australia & Deakin	Religious Studies (REL 11 & 12)
Deakin & University of South Australia	Religious Studies (REL 21)
Griffith & Macquarie	Modern Standard Chinese (CHN 11, 12, 21 & 22)
University of South Australia & University of Adelaide	Macroeconomics 1 (ECO 12)
University of South Australia & University of Adelaide	Microeconomics (ECO 21 & 22)

(Source: compiled from OLA course information booklets)

Invitations to participate in the research were also made to the Heads of DECs and specialist providers who had indicated they had been involved in the principal/specialist co-operation in course development in response to the 1988 Australian Commonwealth Government policy recommendation for rationalisation of resources and co-ordination of external studies provision. Because the Women's Studies Major is also taught by the three co-operating institutions on behalf of OLA, it was investigated in that context – as an OLA course.

All projects studied and participants will, in subsequent chapters, be referred to by codes. The coding is explained in the next Chapter.

In all cases, it was expected that the initial contacts would lead the researcher to other people who were/had been involved in the projects.

The focal population, that is the population that can best provide answers to questions vested in the research problem, was thus arrived at in a manner resembling both *purposive* and *snowball sampling* (Cohen and Manion, 1985:101). It was purposive in that potential consultants were, in a manner, hand-picked on the basis of their involvement in cross-institutional course development. The snowball sampling derived from the assumption that the first group approached would lead the researcher onto others and these, in turn, would identify others and so on. Thus the size of the focal population would depend on the number of institutions and the number of practitioners in each institution who are/were known to be involved, were in a position to offer an informed opinion, and were available at the time of the research.

Because the focal population is limited to a particular group of people, it might be large or small. Where it was large, then the researcher would have the option of studying a representative sample. Where it was small then there would be no need for sampling. As to the question of minimum acceptable sample or population size, Cohen and Manion (1985:101) do suggest 30, but even they acknowledge that *there is no clear cut prescription for the optimal sample size*.

Preliminary enquiries amongst Australian institutions suggested that the number of academics previously or currently involved in cross-institutional course development was very small. The question of validity, therefore, constituted a challenge to determine the most appropriate methodology.

It is worth noting, at this point, that the expected snowball effect was so minimal that the final research population remained small (a total of 36 from all projects). There are three probable reasons for this. The first, as already mentioned, is that there are very few incidents of this kind of co-operation in Australian higher education institutions. The second is that, apparently, where this kind of co-operation is practised, very small course teams are involved – two to three people in most cases. A third reason could be that out of the three groups of people namely administrators, team leaders and academics, mentioned earlier as likely to take part in this kind of venture, the greatest involvement seems to lie with academics; administrators only taking part in the initial planning stages and leaving the course team to be virtually

autonomous. Last, but not least, some of the people who had been involved in these projects were, for various reasons, not available for the research.

From a theoretical/hypothetical model constructed on the basis of the literature pertaining mostly to intra-institutional course teams, the researcher began with the expectation that the research population would comprise three sets of people; viz. academic course developers, team leaders and institutional administrators or course co-ordinators. Each of these groups might have a different perspective of the cross-institutional course development process. Thus three sets of interview protocol were designed, one for each group. In practice, however, the assumption proved invalid. There was very little involvement by administrators *per se*. The size of the course teams and the mode of operation was such that in most cases, there was no need to structure the team into leaders and other members, so that in the end the study centred around academics. Where course teams were structured, team leaders were also academics whose leadership role was mostly co-ordination. Again, given a different set of circumstances or a different manner of operation, other participants such as funding agencies and/or co-ordinating bodies might have come into play. But this was not so.

Superficially it would appear that these constitute too small a population on which to draw conclusions, but it must be noted that it remains the total population that can provide original, first hand information about the actual process from those directly involved. Besides, since there is no clear prescription for the *right* sample size (Cohen and Manion, 1985:101) then this should not be considered a weakness in the method.

Discussions with professionals in the field of distance education and further literature search also revealed instances where universities and Colleges of Advanced Education did co-operate in the development of distance education courses prior to 1988. To date, attempts to get in touch with the contact persons named in the directory, or to locate subsequent publications of a current directory of such co-operative ventures, have proved futile. Perhaps this has something to do with the change from the binary to the unitary system of education in Australia in 1988.

It was, at this point, becoming clear that because of the small size of the focal population that could provide the kind of information required, the data that

might be collected would not lend itself to statistical analysis and that other types of research methods would have to be considered.

CHOICE OF RESEARCH METHOD

Having eliminated quantifiable data collection methods as inappropriate, what other options does the researcher have? Thus far certain factors had emerged which guided, if not determined, the decision regarding choice of method/s, adaptation of existing methods, or the formulation of new ones. The factors which seemed to have the most significance for data collection were:

1. Information could only come from a particular group of people;
2. The method ought to be such that it would allow additional data to be built into that already collected, since the researcher was expecting a snowball effect;
3. The research questions would be open-ended so that there would be room to accommodate any issues of importance that the consultants might raise which the researcher had not anticipated or which the literature review had not addressed;
4. The research questions were such that the information would reveal the *status quo* – those factors that have proved influential to date, with a view to suggesting or establishing direction for the handling of programmes of this kind in the future.

Thus the researcher would begin with a tentative research design that would be refined as the research progressed and as more data became available.

Hence the method should be *qualitative, phenomenological* with an *ethogenic emphasis* and inclined towards the *interpretive* paradigm. This is a study of a particular phenomenon – cross-institutional co-operation in course development. The validity of the data will not rely on quantity and their statistical significance, but on the quality of the information as provided by people who have experienced the phenomenon. A recognition of the human element in explaining and facilitating an understanding of the subjective and experiential world in which humans live and interact among themselves and with other objects, (few of which can be explained in terms of numbers and statistical significance), is a feature of qualitative research (Burns, 1990:8-9; Sherman and Webb, 1988:7; Walker and Evers, 1988:29-30; Strauss and Corbin,

1990:17). The researcher would be the data collection instrument and analysis tool as well.

All of this called for qualitative research. In view of these and the other factors stated previously, the researcher could begin with a tentative research design that could be modified as the research progressed which, according to Borg and Gall (1989:386) is also a feature of qualitative research. The potential opportunity to modify the research design as the research progresses and to add additional data whenever analysis shows gaps in the information (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:30), are also characteristic of qualitative research.

The reliance on data provided by people who have been involved in cross-institutional course development recognizes the ability of these people to understand what they are doing to be able to monitor their actions, to reflect on the actions and give them meaning and to be able to give a meaningful account of their experiences to others. This, plus an assumption that researchers also know what they want or are doing, are what give the study an ethogenic paradigm (Davies, 1991:25-26).

WHICH DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES?

The major determinant still seemed to be that the required information would be available only from a particular group of people, or from documentation pertaining to the kind of activity that was being investigated. Three ways of collecting information from people would be to observe such people at work, or to have them respond to questionnaires and, ideally, to follow up those questionnaires with face-to-face interviews.

Observing cross-institutional course teams at work would have been the researcher's preferred mode of data collection and one that might have revealed a lot more than either interviews or questionnaires. However, at the time this research began, only one of the joint authorship projects was on-going. The others had already been completed which necessitated studying them retrospectively. The on-going project involved two institutions spatially separated by some vast masses of land and sea. Practically, it was impossible to observe that process. Consequently, the most appropriate approach under the circumstances was the use of both questionnaires and interviews.

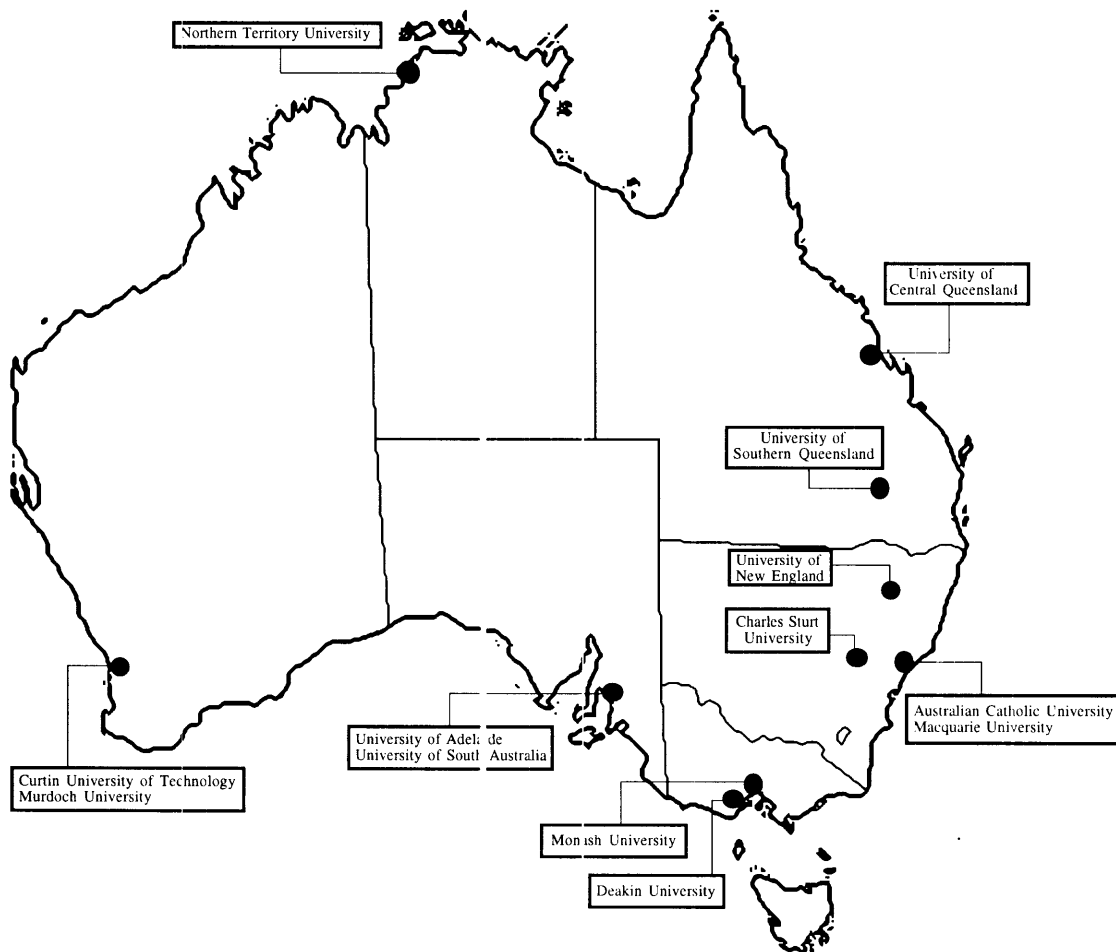
Of the two, the *interview* assumed first preference. The researcher holds the same view as Baldrige (1975:53) and Keeves (1988:25) that if you want to know what people think, what they feel or what they want, the best thing to do is to ask them [and how better to get a clear picture than in a face-to-face situation!]. Good (1959:168) endorsed the value of interviews when he observed, with regard to descriptive survey investigations, that there are occasions when it is necessary to rely on verbal data. Of course, asking can be done in writing, on the telephone or face-to-face. However, face-to-face interviews have added advantages such as their potential for deducing shades of meaning from body language, tone and incidental comments – and they allow for on-the-spot clarification.

It was determined that the *interviews* be *focused* and *semi-structured*. They were focused mostly on those particular groups of people who have been or are involved in cross-institutional co-operation in course development. Additionally, the interview questions had to be based on issues which the literature review had identified as being significant. A series of questions was framed which would form a framework upon which those issues could be introduced and freely discussed.

The interviews derived their semi-structured nature from the use of an interview protocol (**Appendix 1**) which, while it contained a set of questions that were similar for all, allowed the researcher to probe for more information, phrase questions differently, add more questions or omit some as the need arose. Details of the basis for each will be provided in the next chapter that deals with analysis of results.

In recognition of its potential to yield more reliable information as a result of the anonymity of respondents (Cohen and Manion, 1989:319) and being more economic in terms of time and money (Hillway, 1969:32) than the interview, and despite its disadvantages both in its potential for respondents to misunderstand the questions (Cohen and Manion, 1989) and its normally low response rate, the *questionnaire* (**Appendix 2**) was used to supplement the interview where:

1. Potential respondents were not available for interview. The vast geographical distances separating the institutions under study from one another – and from the researcher – as well as the limited financial resources available for the task, made subsequent visits impossible.



**Figure 6: Map of the Australian Higher Education Institutions
From Which Data was Collected)**

2. Other potential consultants were identified subsequent to the initial data collection process and at locations where travel expenses ruled out the chances of a personal visit.

It might be mentioned here that one of the informants to whom a questionnaire was sent was the academic at Middlesex University in the United Kingdom, who was working with an academic colleague from the Northern Territory University on the development of an Educational Management course.

Documentation would be in the form of reports, journal articles, books and others. As mentioned earlier, there is a paucity of literature pertaining to cross-institutional co-operation in course development in Australia. It would appear that out of the five joint authorship projects identified, the literature revealed publications pertaining to only two – the joint authorship project between Deakin University and the University of South Australia and that between Deakin University and the University of Queensland, the former of which has been quite extensively documented. The paucity of literature on cross-institutional co-operation in course development was endorsed by Calvert, Evans and King (1993:37) and the ACDP Working Party with regard to co-operative activities in Colleges of Advanced Education (1988). Studying the available documents identified the initial group of institutions and potential consultants upon whom this study was initiated. It also identified some of the concepts that might be important for the study.

LIMITATIONS OF THE METHOD

Suitable though the method and research techniques are to the nature of the problem and the context of the research, they are not devoid of problems.

The subjective nature of this kind of research can be limiting. Borg and Gall (1989:379) attribute the subjectivity to heavy reliance on the researcher's skills of observation and interpretation, which requires training and experience on the part of the researcher.

The current study is the researcher's first encounter with qualitative research, having been, as part of her previous studies and six years' employment at an agricultural research station, involved with quantitative research, especially of the experimental type. The time available to the researcher (3 years of funded candidature) limited the amount of time which could be devoted to special training on this process.

However, the researcher has had extensive experience with the development of distance education materials in the twelve years from 1981 to 1992 that she was involved with developing (writing and editing) of print self-instructional materials for the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre. In the same period, she has interacted with course developers from various institutions and has had wide access to literature on course development and qualitative research, all of which have proved useful in the conduct of this research.

Mention has already been made of the restrictions placed on the research method by limited financial resources. Similarly, the choice of the triangulation method had to take availability of funds, especially for travel, into consideration.

Reliability and validity (Anderson, 1990:126) of data collected using qualitative research methods can also be limiting. The section on Triangulation of Data details the manner in which the issue of validity was addressed.

IMPLEMENTATION

The collection of data through interviews and questionnaires commenced in 1994 and proceeded through to the beginning of 1996 as responses identified more potential sources of information.

Interviews were conducted in March-April, 1994. The interviews were conducted *in situ*, which means that the researcher paid a visit to each of the interviewees, in their respective institutions so that the interviews could be conducted in surroundings with which the participants were familiar and where they could, therefore, be comfortable and relaxed. This involved travel from Armidale in New South Wales, to Geelong in Victoria, Adelaide in South Australia, Perth in Western Australia. From Perth, to Rockhampton in Queensland (where the interviews did not eventuate as planned), and Darwin in Northern Territory – in excess of 16 000 km of travel.

In all, thirteen people were interviewed in this period – four at Deakin University (Victoria), three at the University of South Australia, two at Curtin University (Western Australia), one at Murdoch University (Western Australia) and three at the Northern Territory University. The interviews lasted 30-45 minutes and were hand recorded. Particulars of the informants are contained in **Appendix 3**, which is confidential and may be available to the examiners only. The interview protocol had been sent to the informants prior to the actual visit.

Because of the distances involved in travelling and the inherent costs, questionnaires were sent to potential participants who were not available at the time of interviews and those identified subsequent to the trip referred to above.

Requests for participation in the research were made to all co-ordinators of the OLA courses. Of the 22 co-ordinators, 16 promised to co-operate in the research, but only seven returned the questionnaires. It must be mentioned here that co-operative development of OLA courses is effected in two different ways. Where new courses (i.e those not available in any of the participating institutions) are being developed, an academic from one institution will work with an instructional designer from another institution and they may even co-opt other people with relevant skills. The questionnaire would apply in such situations. In yet other cases, course units from different institutions are used to build up a programme or major. In such cases the development of the units *per se* is done individually from separate universities, so that the co-ordination of the course pertains to the delivery not development, of the course. Therefore the questionnaire would not be appropriate in such cases.

Out of a total of 18 potential respondents from the principal/specialist provider arrangement, 8 indicated their willingness to participate and questionnaires were sent to these, one at Charles Sturt University and the rest at the Australian Catholic University. Seven out of 8 returned the completed questionnaires. The eighth claimed he had no useful information to share. Some of the original eighteen wrote back and explained why they could not respond to the questionnaire, although they were able to offer other useful information.

A total of 28 questionnaires were sent out to different institutions. For the reasons already mentioned, only 16 of these were returned. Six of the returned questionnaires were from the Australian Catholic University, four from Griffith University, two from Monash University and one from each of the University of South Australia, Murdoch University, the University of Central Queensland and Middlesex University (UK).

TRIANGULATION OF DATA

Because of the subjective nature of qualitative research, the validity of the data obtained through this research method can be its major weakness. One of the ways of validating such data and which, according to Macpherson (1987:17), is the greatest aid to validation, is through triangulation. This means studying the phenomenon from more than one viewpoint, which should help verify the data and thereby give the researcher greater confidence about the findings.

The researcher used *respondent validation* (Cohen and Manion, 1989:278) as the triangulation method. This means that the researcher made a summary of the responses to each interview or questionnaire, sent each to the respondents involved for a confirming or modifying response and then recorded their reactions to the summary. This method of looped-feedback gives the respondents the opportunity to reflect on their original responses and either confirm, reject or adapt them as the case may be. It thus gives the researcher greater confidence that the analysis of the data is a true record of the informants' responses to the research questions.

As can be expected the response rate was not 100%. However, all of those that were returned were accepted as a correct record. With only one was there a request for qualification or clarification of a point.

As this is a multi-case study, similarities in practices, experiences and views from different projects regarding a particular issue can also be considered as indications of validity. Using more than one case to study one phenomenon should provide a check or a confirmation of the data obtained from any of the projects, or it should dispute the data obtained from any one project. This can be a form of triangulation, especially if the context in which the projects are conducted is similar. Similarly, a match between consultant responses and ideas expressed in the literature can be considered a form of data triangulation.

(See Research Model at Table 3 on page 112).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has dealt with how the data was collected and why it was collected that way. The nature of the problem being investigated was such that it influenced the character and size of the focal population. The choice of research techniques was affected not only by the nature of the problem but also by the fact that, because most of the projects were studied in retrospect, it was impossible to observe them in action – other logistical factors prevented observation of the on-going ones. The chapter has given an overview of what the data was intended for and referred to the interview protocol without explaining the basis of the questions, or the specific issues implied by each question.

Table 3: The Research Model

	Objective	Strategy/ies
Step 1	Refinement of research topic and identification of research problem	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Literature search 2. Informal discussions with practitioners
Step 2	Identification of relevant sources of data	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Literature (publications) 2. Enquiries – DEC and other distance education providers
Step 3	Design of research tools	Interview protocol and questionnaire based on issues identified as relevant from the literature
Step 4	Data collection	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Questionnaire distributed to consultants in advance 2. Interview of consultants identified in Step 2 and others suggested by those 3. Questionnaires sent to those who were not available for interviews
Step 5	Analysis of data	Continuous process of coding/categorisation
Step 6	Triangulation of data	Respondent validation – summaries of individual responses sent to consultants for validation

Details of the data are the subject of the next chapter which deals with analysis of results. Chapter Five will explain the issues that were addressed by each question, the responses to each and the relationship between/among the questions, as well as the researcher's observations and comments. It will end with the picture that emerges from the analysis of the results, thereby heralding the subject of Chapter Six – Discussion of the Results.

CHAPTER FIVE
PROCESSED RESPONSES

PROCESSED RESPONSES

INTRODUCTION

The introductory chapter stated the purpose of the research as being an analysis of the factors that influence the success or failure of cross-institutional co-operation in the development of distance education course materials.

The literature review dealt with co-operation between education providers, particularly in relation to cross-institutional course development, with the view of satisfying an identified need. From this review, a conceptual framework for investigating this process emerged, an appropriate methodology, which rested heavily upon a questionnaire and planned interview protocol was determined, and a process framework for analysing the collected data was planned.

As already indicated in the preceding chapters, the literature on course development pertains mostly to intra-institutional processes and course teams. There is a significant deficiency in the literature dealing with *preponderantly* inter- or cross-institutional course development programmes, processes, teams and team behaviour. This means that when inter-institutional course teams form, the literature provides them with little or no precedents upon which to base their planning processes or procedures. It would appear that each new inter-institutional course development team is compelled to literally re-invent the wheel. Because of this deficiency, an inference is made here that cross-institutional course teams usually comprise an extension of the intra-institutional course teams. If this inference is correct, the implications are that the operations and any inherent processes, behaviour and problems experienced by the teams would also be an extension of those typifying life inside intra-institutional course development teams. This, of course, should be endorsed or disproved by the research.

Interviews, Questionnaires and Projects

The interview protocol (Appendix 1) consisted of ten basic questions which, together with supplementary questions arising as a consequence of interview questions, were designed to elicit the raw data.

The questionnaire (Appendix 2) was a detailed version of the interview protocol, consisting of the basic as well as supplementary questions in order to enhance clarity and avoid any misunderstanding of the intent of the questions.

The analysis of the raw data from interviews and questionnaires is the objective of this chapter.

The interviews and questionnaires investigated participant responses to actual cross-institutional course development projects. There were four joint authorship projects and they involved five Australian and one UK university; four of the fourteen OLA projects (including Women's Studies) involved two institutions, and two principal/specialist provider projects involved three institutions. Details of the joint authorship and the principal/specialist projects have been provided in the preceding chapter. The four OLA projects investigated were the Cultural Studies Course developed by Monash and Charles Sturt Universities, Music and Popular Culture Course developed by Monash and Macquarie Universities, Modern Standard Chinese developed by Griffith and Macquarie Universities and Women's Studies Units developed by Griffith and Deakin Universities.

Coding for Confidentiality

In order to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of informants/respondents, they and the projects in which they were involved have been coded so that in the text they are referred to only by the codes. The explanation of the codes (i.e. the true identity of informants) will be provided separately, in a sealed envelope, for the examiners' information.

Project codes are combinations of letters of the alphabet (Appendix 4). Interviewees are referred to as such and also given numbers e.g. Interviewee 1. Questionnaire respondents are referred to as Respondents and also given numbers e.g. Respondent 1. Other informants (referred to as such in the confidential Appendix 3) are referred to as Informant 1, Informant 2, etc.

Two other projects that will be referred to in the analysis are "NI" between the Northern Territory University and an Indonesian institution, and "OI" between the Open Learning Agency (Canada) and the British Columbia Open Learning Institute (Canada). These two involve joint programme

development, where a programme of one institution builds on or is complementary to the one offered by the other institution, as is the case with the Australian Women's Studies Major.

Progressive and Evolutionary Analysis

Analysis of the data began at the end of the first day of interviews. Having begun with ideas based mostly on recorded experiences of intra-institutional course development teams, the researcher eagerly anticipated discovering the extent to which experiences with cross-institutional course development teams matched those of intra-institutional course development teams – a comparison which led to the identification of emerging concepts, to grouping and re-grouping these concepts as data collection progressed and more information was gathered, allowing more and progressive comparisons to be made.

That qualitative data analysis is a continuous process which, for most of the time is done concurrently with data collection, instead of being a distinctive stage that follows the collection stage, is supported by researchers such as Burgess (1984), Becker in Burgess (1984), Delamont (1992), Lofland and Lofland (1984), Hammersley and Atkinson (1983).

As more people were interviewed, completed questionnaires studied and as different projects were examined, additional categories were made or original categories were redefined in the light of emerging data. This became an on-going process which did not conclude until the end of the data collection process.

Thus, in addition to the record of responses, or substantive field notes as Burgess (1982:192) refers to them, it also became necessary to keep a memo of analytical field notes (Burgess, 1982:193) wherein lay the preliminary analysis. It was also essential to keep a record of emerging themes and ideas concerning the research design as the data collection process continued and as the researcher continued to reflect on the study.

For ease of compilation, the following summary of responses features the ten questions of the interview protocol. As the questionnaire was but a detailed version of the interview questions, the analysis involved fitting responses to

the questionnaire into appropriate sections of the basic questions making up the interview protocol.

SUMMARIES OF RESPONSES

Question 1

What was the size of the operation (number of institutions and course team members)?

This question embodied two issues, one of which was the size of the operation in terms of the number of institutions involved and the size of the course team. The other was the level of co-operation; that is whether it is/was bilateral, trilateral or multilateral.

In most cases studied, the co-operation was a bilateral arrangement involving two institutions and a small number of course team members ranging from 2 (one from each institution) to 10 (5 from each institution) members.

The basis of the question was (1) the possibility of the size of the operation, that is the number of institutions, influencing the ease of operation, and (2) geographical distances between co-operating institutions affecting the ease of communication and hence success. The size of the course team can also be expected to influence the success or failure of the operation. Small course teams (2-3 people) are likely to be much more efficient than large course teams (5 or more people). Large teams imply more people with more ideas and hence a protracted process of decision making which could prolong the initial stages of the course development process and, subsequently, the total time it takes to develop the course, with the possibility of abandonment and failure.

Large course teams could also necessitate some form of structuring of the team relative to specialized skills, especially the need for a team leader for control and co-ordination within the team and between the team and co-operating institutions.

With the exception of one project (DS)¹ where the original plan was to have a multilateral and multinational co-operation [which, however, aborted], there seems to have been no attempt in the other projects studied to involve more

than two institutions. This may not have been a conscious decision made, perhaps, on the basis of the effect of size upon the ease of management and success but it could, all the same, have had a positive effect on the success of the project.

Question 2

On what criteria were the institutions chosen and the course team members selected?

Three issues emerged from Question 2 namely, the origin of the project, the choice of participating institutions and the selection criteria for course team members. The origin refers to who initiated the project and why they initiated it. Answers to the "who" should indicate whether the project originated from the institutional or from the academic level. The "why" part of the question should address the need, motivation or purpose as well as whether the need was perceived at the academic or institutional level or whether it was in response to internal or external pressure. The basis for the question was as follows:

Co-operation requires a *"raison d'être"*. There must be a need, a purpose or some other form of motivation for the initiation and successful implementation of a co-operative venture. The question thus aimed to establish the motivation for each of the projects studied.

The level of origin (that is whether it is academic or institutional) could influence the operation in that the academic level might not feel sympathetic to the initiative unless they perceived the need, understood the educational philosophy behind it or even if it was perceived by the upper echelons, the academic level is likely to prefer to be consulted and involved in the formulation of the plans. Otherwise they might not feel committed or bound to co-operate if the decision had been handed down without prior consultation or involvement.

Operatives at the institutional level might not feel compelled to support a venture undertaken at the academic level unless they also perceived the need, or sympathised with the course.

Co-operation would require commitment by operatives at both levels and the operational level would require the full support of the institutional operatives.

Co-operation would involve the use of, or access to, institutional facilities for which the operational team would require the endorsement by the institutional level. This might not be forthcoming if the institutional level did not also perceive the need.

Choice of participating institutions could be expected to take into consideration issues such as compatibility of the institutions where compatibility refers to matters such as educational philosophies, level of courses and levels of students.

Selection of team members is important in that the calibre of team members (qualifications, experience and group skills) would affect not only the end product but also the operation itself. Members' credibility might help win each other's trust and respect, both of which are necessary for smooth operation. Possession of group skills would enable them to handle conflicts in such a manner that they would not disrupt the operation.

In all the joint authorship projects, the project originated because two academics, one from each of two institutions, were friends and had worked together before. They discovered, through conversation, that they each needed to develop or revise a similar course for a similar level and they then decided to work together on the development of the course.

While the co-operative development of OLA courses is a requirement of OLA, involvement in the project rests upon the interest (voluntary) of the academic/instructional designer. Some of the participants engaged in the venture because of their interest in such co-operative ventures. Others did it for the love of the teaching subject. Though not indicated in any of the responses, participants could also have participated in order to generate funds for other academic pursuits. The Women's Studies Major also originated at the academic level, with the academics realising the need for such a Major and the inability of the institutions to develop one independently. Even with the principal/specialist provider arrangement, the need for a course is initially felt at the academic level.

The remainder of the team members were co-opted into the team and these are people who were already on the job as course developers and/or who had a knowledge of the subject (DS)², or were contracted for their knowledge of the subject (CM)³, or they were co-opted for their expertise in instructional design (DQ)⁴.

Thus in all except the OLA projects, the need for the co-operation and therefore the decision to co-operate was realised at the academic level not at the management level. Could this have a bearing on the success or lack of it of the co-operation?

In all the joint authorship projects, the decision seems to have been neither in response to external pressure (government pressure to rationalise), nor from an institutional consideration of the effect of co-operation on resources. Cost-reduction does not seem to have been an issue. Granted in one project (DS)⁵, the possibility of attracting government funding was considered but only as an advantage that could ensue from the co-operation and not as the reason behind the co-operation.

What could then have motivated the originators of the projects to co-operate? Could it have been the prospect of minimising the work load or the reduction of the course development time? What is the policy of the institutions on cross-institutional co-operation in course development?

Factors that seem to have been considered are the possibility of the improvement in the quality of materials (DS, NM & OLA)⁶ and obviating the possibility of competition for a limited market (DS)⁷.

Efficient utilisation of resources was one of the considerations in the Women's Studies Major. The principal/specialist provider arrangements were in response to external pressure (government policy recommendation) for rationalisation of resources. For those academics and instructional designers participating in the OLA projects and for those institutions providing instructional design for the principal/specialist provider arrangements, the prospect of acquiring of funds is also a consideration.

Question 3

How successful was the project?

The purpose of question three was to determine the degree of success or failure of the project under study, where success could be measured in terms of timely completion of the development process, team members' satisfaction with the end product, and smoothness of the operation. The projects were to be rated in terms of "highly successful", "successful" and "unsuccessful".

Success would have to be explained in terms of what it took to attain the success. Similarly those aspects that led to failure or conflicts would have to be highlighted; all of which contribute to the theme of the thesis.

All projects were rated very successful. Completion was on schedule.

The success was apparently due mostly to:-

- equal distribution of work and contribution to resources in the joint authorship projects, and clarity regarding responsibilities and benefits in others,
- rapport between/among the people involved,
- autonomy of course team,
- commitment manifested by working longer hours than normal in order to meet deadlines.

Any problems that were encountered in the process should be revealed in response to question 4.

Question 4

How did the team operate?

The issues addressed here were:-

- Division of labour
- Contribution to resources
- Site of operation
- Communication

- Problems/conflicts
- Problem solution/conflict resolution.

Assuming that other requirements for successful operation such as establishment of common need, selection of the most highly qualified team and provision of adequate resources were satisfied, the mode of operation of the course team would be the next most important determinant of success or failure. Question four addressed itself to all those factors of operation as listed above that are likely to lead to success or failure as well as to how the negative aspects could be handled in order to achieve success.

Responses indicated that:

1. agreements were in most cases followed by an initial meeting to formulate operational guidelines for the co-operation. Thereafter team members worked from their respective institutions, with occasional face-to-face meetings but mostly making use of other forms of communication. Only in one project (DQ)⁸ did the academics involved get together at one location for an intensive 3-5 days in which they worked on the structure and the core content of the course;
2. in the joint authorship projects, work was divided equally between institutions which also shared production costs. In the other projects, the distribution of responsibilities was determined by the strengths of the institutions (i.e. what they had to offer); e.g. particular course units in the case of the Women's Studies Major and academic or instructional skills in the OLA and principal/specialist provider arrangements;
3. there was no transfer of funds between institutions; neither was there a special fund for the projects; except for one project which was government funded (N)⁹, institutions funded their share of the operations from funds already available for course development;
4. conflict, mostly institutional, arose from differences in cultures (different viewpoints). In most cases these were resolved through discussions and a willingness to accommodate each other's point of view. Only in one case (DS)¹⁰ did the team leader have to take over when consensus could not be reached;

5. communications were carried out through meetings, telephone, teleconferences, fax and e-mail; the institutions using whichever means was available to them and proved efficient. Though in most instances communication was by electronic means, some of the responses indicate that it would have been easier to operate from a common site, if only their other responsibilities did not require their presence at their home institutions.

The researcher's observations were that team leadership or management structure is only indicated in the case of relatively large course teams – 8 or more members.

Efficient and well managed communication systems are indicated as essential in all cases. Electronic means of communication seem essential where geographic locations are far apart, or where other commitments make it imperative for participants to stay in their home institutions during the course development process.

Where the co-operation involves developing courses for mutual use and such that the co-operation pertains to course development alone and not teaching, institutions are at liberty to adapt parts of the core of the course to suit their contexts. This seems to have the potential to reduce the possibility of conflicts arising out of differences in ideological perspectives.

Interpersonal relations seem to play a very important role in the prevention of conflicts or the attainment of consensus. "Friendship" seems to be the key word in all joint authorship projects. In all cases the origin was out of friendship. There were also indications that it might not work where the people concerned are not friends, or that it could be done even without institutional agreement as long as the academics concerned are friends. However, rapport, not friendship would seem to be a concept that would be more generally applicable where institutional policies support the venture. This still raises the question "Other than in specific cases such as OLA and the Women's Studies Major, is cross-institutional co-operation in course development generally supported by policies in higher education institutions?"

Where institutional ethos is conducive to co-operation, one co-operative venture can lead to other forms of co-operation that spin off from the original (indicated in the DS project)¹¹.

Institutional agreement obtains in all cases but with differing degrees of formality.

Formal agreement may not be necessary where co-operation is based on friendship but, as Moran and Mugridge(1993) observe, co-operation based on personal relationships may be endangered if one of the parties leaves the institution.

Initial face-to-face meetings are indicated in most cases for:-

- initiation of project
- reaching agreements on structure, content and working principles.

Question 5

With the benefit of hindsight, which of the operational aspects could have been improved or avoided?

Question 5 served to highlight those aspects of the operation that proved problematic and which could then be addressed or improved for the benefit of subsequent projects of this nature. It is therefore an extension of the issues addressed in question four.

Though not mentioned in participant responses, related literature indicates that some aspects of the DS¹² project encountered problems arising from differences in institutional cultures and institutional pride which, in retrospect, could have been avoided through employment of contract writers or independent instructional designers as arbitrators. From the interview responses, the NI project¹³ experienced problems with differences in national cultures and inequalities in economic capacities.

In most projects the co-operation ran so smoothly that none of the operational aspects were considered as warranting improvement. Only in a couple of instances did the responses to interviews indicate the following:

1. the desirability of continuing with the same complement of staff that has been inducted into the prevailing atmosphere of co-operation;
2. new staff members should be inducted into the prevailing atmosphere of co-operation (a related publication notes that when employing new staff members, professional "lore rangers" should be avoided in preference for people who enjoy working with others. The same publication suggests that to overcome conflicts arising out of institutional cultures and academic chauvinism, it might help to employ contract writers to develop the course or an independent course designer to act as arbitrator);
3. instead of course designers being co-opted subsequent to agreements on course structure and content, it might be best to involve them from the very beginning.

Is the apparent lack, or minimal amount, of conflict obtaining in most cases an effect of

1. friendship/rapport?
2. the small size of the team making discussions manageable and agreements easy to reach? Or is it
3. the ability or willingness to accommodate each other's ideological beliefs? Or is it due to
4. the provision in some projects for individuals to adjust the co-operatively developed core to suit the interests of their institutions? Or is it
5. a combination of the above factors?

Is the willingness to accommodate to each other's culture an effect of good interpersonal relations, or was it perceived as a necessity to ensure progress?

Question 6

What, would you say, are the characteristics of an effective cross-institutional course team?

The characteristics of the course team, dealt with in question six, some or all of which would have been used as selection criteria for team members (in

response to question two) would play a very important role towards the success of the operation. The right course team credentials would establish the credibility of individuals and the team collectively as having the ability to effect success. The characteristics would determine, to some extent, the nature of the interpersonal relations which, in turn, would make up for smooth operation. Such factors of interpersonal relations as mutual trust and respect are likely to be affected by the calibre of team members and they are some of the factors that can help hold the team together.

Responses indicated that the following eight characteristics are deemed essential for an effective cross-institutional course team:-

1. common goals and interest;
2. sufficient commitment to outcomes for students to override purely academic and administrative interests
3. rapport
4. qualifications (expertise and experience)
5. cultural empathy
6. group skills
7. autonomy
8. similar institutional contexts (level of course, level of students, economic atmosphere, similar constraints/restraints)

The researcher made the following observations:-

1. While the above characteristics are not prioritised, they seem to be interdependent.
2. Rapport is used here to include mutual understanding and respect, similar ideological perspectives, mutual trust, lack of concerns with personal ego and institutional rivalries.
3. Qualifications include the ability to perform at a very high level, together with skills in mediated forms of communication (formal qualifications seem to be taken for granted since everybody involved is already on the job because they qualify to be there).

4. Group skills include the ability to work with people, having an agreed process of communicating, strong leadership, flexibility, and lack of defensiveness.
5. There is no indication, however, that any of the people were selected for their group skills. It is their responses that point to the necessity for group skills.
6. Though autonomy is not strongly indicated in response to question 6, it is indicated as desirable in response to other related questions such as question 9 which considers the factors that enhance the success of co-operative course development ventures. It is also implied in the observation that this kind of co-operation can succeed even if it is not supported by institutional management, as long as it does not involve the exchange of resources.

Question 7

Were the financial and other resources adequate?

Resources (finance, time, staff and equipment) addressed in question seven, are necessary for carrying out any kind of work. Their inadequacy in individual institutions may form the basis of cross-institutional co-operation. Their adequacy as a result of co-operation would enhance success. Similarly, their inadequacy even in the face of co-operation would still hinder success.

Responses showed funds and other resources were considered adequate in most cases. Where funds were inadequate, participants still did the best they could and the projects were successful.

The projects made use of financial and other resources that were already available in the institutions for course development.

There was no transfer of funds between institutions.

In only one project was there special government funding for the project(NI)¹⁴.

Question 8

In your opinion, what are the benefits of this kind of co-operation?

Question eight is about the benefits of cross-institutional co-operation. Perceived benefits could serve as a source of motivation for co-operation. The benefits may be perceived at either the institutional or the academic level. The important thing is for whoever perceives the benefits to spell them out clearly to the other participants. Similarly if the benefits are perceived by one/some institutions these should communicate them clearly to the partners. Only when the benefits are perceived as mutual can they form the basis of successful co-operation. Incidental or unprecedented benefits of co-operation can serve as motivation for continuation of the project or for subsequent, spin-off co-operative ventures.

The following were mentioned as the benefits of cross-institutional co-operation in course development:

1. improvement in the quality of materials;
2. broadening of access;
3. cost-reduction;
4. improvement of professionalism;
5. strengthening of ties (institutional and personal);
6. spin-offs in the form of other co-operative ventures;
7. no impingement on academic freedom;
8. good publicity;
9. preclusion of the possibility of competition from other institutions due to the combined strength of the co-operating institutions;
10. potential to attract government support;
11. overcomes isolation;
12. overcomes cultural differences;
13. produces a larger teaching and supervision group.

The benefits expressed may be classified into two categories viz.

- perceived benefits (those on whose expectations the venture was built)
- actual benefits (those realised from the co-operation)

Perceived Benefits

For some of the projects there was an expressed realisation of the potential improvement in the quality of materials from the sharing of ideas and the critiquing of each other's work, which are elements of co-operative team work. Here again not everybody agrees. Where the co-operation involves development of the content alone and not the teaching, individuals are at liberty to adapt the core to suit their interests and the interests of their institutions, so that the end product may still reflect one person's slant or ideologies.

The benefits perceived in one project(DS)¹⁵ were:

- Co-operation would eliminate the possibility of competition for a limited market;
- The institutions recognised the possibility of attracting government funding, this being an era in which the Australian Federal Government was advocating rationalisation of resources;
- The two institutions realised the lack of economic viability in going it alone.

The perceived benefit of the Women's Studies Major was the Major that was to result from the co-operation.

The benefit, perceived by the government, from the principal/specialist arrangements was the rationalisation of resources.

Actual Benefits

With the exception of the principal/specialist provider arrangements, the expected benefits were realised. In addition, the following were also realised:

A strengthening of relationships that existed prior to the project and which were, in all cases but one, responsible for the birth of the project. In one project (DS)¹⁶ these relations extended beyond personal to institutional, since the co-operation does not end with the development of the course but extends into the teaching. The two institutions have built an atmosphere of co-operation, rapport and friendship into which even new staff members become inducted.

Where a relationship did not exist prior to the project then the project serves to establish contacts.

In the same project(DS)¹⁷, there were "spin-offs" in the form of other co-operative ventures, such as joint research and publication, as well as co-operation with other institutions. Other benefits realised in the same project were:

- It yielded good publicity for the course; the combined strength of the two institutions precluded the possibility of competition from other institutions;
- It overcame isolation;
- It produced a larger teaching and supervision group;
- It overcame cultural differences (overcoming cultural differences may be necessary where co-operation extends into the teaching but this may not necessarily be so where it involves only the development of the core content).

An interesting observation is that, except for one response to the contrary, cross-institutional co-operation in course development is not seen as impinging on academic freedom. The voluntary nature of the co-operation in the majority of cases, especially in the joint authorship projects, is considered more an expression of academic freedom than an impingement. Would the situation have been reversed if the decision had been handed down by the institutional management?

However, not everybody agrees that there are benefits to inter-institutional co-operation in course development. Some of the participants in the contractual forms of cross-institutional co-operation in course development consider it an unnecessary political manoeuvre that academic institutions could do without. As Respondent 6¹⁸ put it, it is "a politically correct but academically silly way of doing things". He does not see any benefits, at all, in cross-institutional projects.

Another area where there is disagreement pertains to the staff development effect of cross-institutional course development. For example, two of the participants, while not disagreeing with point 5 i.e improvement of professionalism, qualify the point by suggesting that there may be an element of professional improvement for those who have not been exposed to such

ventures before, but where professionalism is already established, then there is no such benefit. Yet other participants disagree with the notion of any improvement in professionalism, without qualification.

Question 9

What are the factors that are likely to enhance/hinder this kind of co-operation?

Question nine summarises all the other questions. It was intended to elicit any other issues that might have been omitted from the other questions.

Almost all the factors mentioned in response to Question 9 have the potential to enhance or hinder the success of cross-institutional co-operation in course development, either by their presence or absence or according to the manner in which they are handled.

The factors are grouped as follows -

1. Interpersonal relations, including
 - sense of community
 - rapport/friendship
 - mutual respect
 - lack of rivalry
 - lack of concerns with ego

2. Commitment and Support
 - individual
 - institutional
 - long-term

3. Administration and Policies
 - agreement at institutional level
 - agreement at academic level
 - clear lines of operation
 - institutional policies
 - institutional administration systems
 - project co-ordination
 - project autonomy

4. Need
 - perceived
 - common

5. Similar contexts – similar levels of course
 - similar levels of students
 - compatible economic strengths
 - common goals
 - common ideological beliefs and interests

6. Communication – effective and efficient infrastructure
 - effective management
 - electronic where institutions are far apart

7. Resources
 - 7.1 Funding – adequate
 - from participating institutions or funding body
 - especially in initial stages
 - 7.2 Time – more a deterrent than an incentive

8. Attitudes – individual
 - institutional
 - to courses
 - to students

9. Perceived benefits

Not surprisingly, a common need seems to be the primary factor for success.

Interpersonal relations are also indicated as a very strong factor in favour of success. It would seem that where rapport prevails it is easy to contain factors such as rivalry, ego, cultural differences and to maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. One participant endorses the importance of interpersonal relations by observing that co-operative projects would be highly successful if convenors were able to hand pick the other participants (i.e choose their partners).

Commitment to the success of the venture is necessary at both the individual and institutional levels and it needs to be long-term (for the duration of the project at least). There should at least be one person at each institution with long-term commitment to the success of the venture. Whether or not the one person should be at the institutional level or the academic level is uncertain

in the face of issues such as academic freedom and possible response/attitude to decisions handed down by management.

Institutional agreement is noted as necessary in all cases but there is no consensus as to whether it should be formal or informal.

In most instances, indications are that the co-operating institutions should have similar ideological beliefs. But here again there is no consensus. Other views are that what is necessary is the ability to accommodate each other's cultures and to handle the differences with care and understanding.

The co-operative venture should not be seen as a threat to institutional interests.

Effective and well managed communication systems also emerge as another strong pointer for success.

Time is indicated as a deterrent because co-operation in course development is time consuming. Suggestions are that there should be a time allowance for such projects. There should be provision for staff participating in co-operative projects to be relieved of their other responsibilities.

Institutions' proprietary attitudes towards courses and students, plus funding systems, discourage co-operation

Following agreements and the laying down of rules and procedures for the co-operation, the course teams need to enjoy a certain amount of autonomy.

Question 10

Can you suggest ways in which cross-institutional co-operation in course development could be made more attractive?

Question ten solicits opinions from the informants as to what it might take to make cross-institutional co-operation in the development of distance education courses more attractive. Following are the suggestions.

1. The benefits should be clearly defined so that institutions and individuals can see them. To quote Respondent 10¹⁹ " there must be positive outcomes for all – potential benefits should be stressed".
2. Co-operation in course development should be seen as having positive effects on teaching and learning, it should not be considered merely in terms of cost-cutting.
3. Institutions should focus on building good working relationships rather than contractual arrangements or a focus on institutional self-interest.
4. Institutional cultures should encourage team work.
5. Incentives such as funding should be provided in order to attract more institutions.
6. There is need for an initial impetus to keep the co-operation going.
7. There is need for an awareness that it requires time.
8. There should be incentives for individuals in the form of time allowance and rewards for involvement. Provision of time allowance, of course implies provision of teaching relief (there are a few instances where staff received time allowance to enable them to engage in cross-institutional course development).

Respondent 6²⁰, however, feels very strongly that cross-institutional co-operative projects should be scrapped, not encouraged. To use his own words

I don't believe in cross-institutional projects. I think this a politically correct but silly way of doing things ... I think the best thing is to scrap them, unless they are absolutely necessary, and let individual academics get on with the job without government and other interference.

Another interesting response was that made by Respondent 4²¹ who did not necessarily discourage engagement in cross-institutional projects, but thought it would be difficult to encourage them, given the prevailing circumstances: "It is an expensive and difficult process in the current funding and staffing

situation". He believes it requires more money and more staff to engage in such projects.

Each of the questions, with the exception of Nos. 3 and 9, thus addresses a specific element that could affect the success or failure of cross-institutional co-operation in course development. Questions 3 and 9, on the other hand, are all-embracing in that they address themselves to the entire issue – Question 3 in an indirect manner while Question 9 does so directly. Thus the picture that emerges from an analysis of the responses to these questions should be a good representation of the actual situation. That is, it should be a fairly good representation of the factors that influence the success or failure of cross-institutional co-operation in the development of distance education courses.

THE OVERALL PICTURE

The picture that emerges from the fore-going is that cross-institutional co-operation in the development of distance education course materials can and does work and is beneficial, though it cannot be said to be devoid of problems.

There are different models of inter-institutional co-operation in course development. Which model any pair (or more) of co-operating institutions choose to adopt would depend on their needs or preference.

However, models such as joint authorship and the complementary course model as exemplified by the Australian Women's Studies Major, are not widely practised in Australia, the researcher having identified only four joint authorship projects involving five Australian universities and one university outside Australia (one planned project involving two of the Australian universities and four overseas universities having failed to eventuate); about seven projects involving former CAEs (for which no published data are available); and only one complementary course project involving three universities.

There are more of the contractual type projects, some under OLA and others under the former principal/specialist provider arrangements.

The small number of incidences of joint authorship and complementary course projects raises a number of interesting questions as to "why" they are not widely practised. Is it because the other institutions do not perceive the

need for, or the benefits that are likely to accrue from, them? Is it because they are not provided for in institutional policies and ethos and therefore do not merit sufficient commitment and support at the institutional level? Is it because they are too complex and difficult to effect? Is it because academics cannot, under normal circumstances, be bothered to engage in co-operative ventures for purely academic benefits without a financial reward ; or is it that they are not willing to sacrifice personal time for the venture? The list could be extended.

All joint authorship projects studied were bilateral, national or international and made use of small course teams.

In all projects other than OLA, the initiative arose at the academic level, not at the institutional level. This raises the same questions as above regarding perception of need and benefits at institutional level, together with the presence or absence of institutional policies, which also ties in with perception of need.

Also interesting is the matter of institutional support. The researcher's observation is that once an institution has given the initiators the "go-ahead" it does not play any active role in the venture (except maybe to receive progress reports). This of course gives the co-operating academics a certain degree of autonomy, which is cited as a success factor, but it still poses the question of how much interest the institutional level has in the venture and whether they would support it if it encountered problems (which fortunately was not the case in the projects studied). Of course it could also be argued that the nature of the operation was such as to not warrant any active involvement by the institutional level.

In all projects there were institutional agreements but, unlike other projects, there were no formal contracts in the joint authorship projects. The desirability or undesirability of this matter will be discussed in the next chapter.

Except for one project (DS)²² in which government incentive for co-operation was taken into account, the joint authorship projects did not arise in response to external pressure for rationalisation of resources. If this is an indication that some Australian universities do not consider rationalisation of resources a good enough reason for joint authorship of courses, then there might be need

to consider other benefits of cross-institutional co-operation in distance education course development that would render the prospect attractive. Alternatively, if they acknowledge the benefits then they might opt for other models of inter-institutional co-operation in course development.

The Women's Studies Major, on the other hand, was clearly a response to the need to rationalise resources, as were the principal/specialist provider arrangements. The attraction resulting in the increasing involvement in OLA projects, however, could be the desire for participants to acquire funds for their institutions or for themselves.

All joint authorship projects operated on an equal partnership basis, that is equal contribution to resources and equal sharing of responsibilities. There was no transfer of funds or other resources and facilities. The equal partnership arrangement is an indication of economic compatibility which may have made agreements and operations easy and reduced the possibility of conflict that might have arisen from "who puts in how much and what do they gain in return". On the other hand, it is possible that where partners do not enjoy equal economic strength, then there is need for policies and formal agreements specifying the ratios of contributions and benefits as well as setting guidelines for the operation.

In the other projects the participants were clear as to their responsibilities and expected benefits.

Differences in institutional cultures are cited as one factor that could operate against success of co-operative ventures. This was not the case in the projects studied, even where cultures differed, because the co-operating parties were willing to accommodate to each other's cultures. In some cases co-operation involved the core content of the course, allowing academics to adapt the core to their own or their institutions idiosyncrasies. Could this be an indication that cultural differences may sometimes be used as an excuse against co-operation while in reality that need not be so?

One factor that appears to play a crucial role in effecting success or failure is "interpersonal relations". All of the joint authorship projects originated out of friendship between two academics. Rapport among team members has been unanimously cited as a factor that enhances success.

Effective and efficient communications infrastructure and management are also considered a basic requirement. Electronic means of communication were used in all cases, except one (CM)²³ that where the institutions involved were in the same city and where arranging face-to-face meetings was not a problem. The value of electronic communication networks cannot be denied as neither can their potential for other forms of co-operation such as adaptation of materials developed elsewhere, but this can only apply where such facilities exist and can be properly managed and maintained. But does this rule out the potential for co-operation in course development where electronic communication technologies are not yet widely or fully developed, or does it merely indicate the value of considering spatial distances between co-operating institutions, as well as the possible use of other communications media such (as teleconferences) as a supplement to face-to-face meetings?

The above and any other factors mentioned as having some influence, either positive or negative, upon cross-institutional co-operation in the development of distance education course materials, will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

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